

War of the Tweets:

An Analysis of American and Russian Information Operations on Twitter
following the August, 2013 Sarin Gas Massacre in Syria

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by

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Dedication

To my father Dr. Philip R. Staal, the inspiration of this thesis, my wife Kristina for all the ongoing support and encouragement, and my husky, Magnus, for keeping my feet warm during all the late hours.

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Abstract

In the past decade, real-time information and communications technologies (ICT) such as Twitter have created a new cyberspatial capability for state and non-state actors to compete for information dominance by conducting what can be called, borrowing from military parlance, *Information Operations* (IO) campaigns. Because of the recent focus on insurgency and terrorist groups in countries like Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, media attention on the role of social media as a weapon of warfare has largely remained focused on non-state actors. However, a renewed hegemonic Russian presence in Georgia, Crimea, Ukraine, Syria, and elsewhere on the global stage invites us to consider how *state* actors are now using ICT to gain influence through social media. Using the Russian-American war of words over the 21 August 2013 Sarin gas attack on Ghouta, Syria as a case study, and employing quantitative social network analysis and qualitative target audience analysis of some four million tweets over a four-week period, this thesis demonstrates how Russia succeeded in using Twitter as an effective IO weapon against the U.S.. It concludes that although there are some inherent limitations of the use of Twitter as an ICT IO tool, if properly planned for and deployed, its real-time messaging capability makes it a potent weapon for state actors wanting to project soft power in a modern world increasingly susceptible to the forces of online influence and persuasion.

Table of Contents

Dedication	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Abstract.....	iv
List of Tables	vi
List of Figures.....	vi
<i>Introduction: Social Media as Soft Power in the 21st Century</i>	1
Chapter 1: <i>Syrian Geopolitics, Information Operations, and Twitter</i>	8
<i>1.1 Syrian Geopolitics.....</i>	<i>9</i>
1.1.1 Syrian Geopolitical Alliances	9
1.1.2 U.S. Geopolitical Interests	10
1.1.3 Russian Geopolitical Interests.....	11
1.1.4 Syrian Civil War	12
<i>1.2 Information Operations</i>	<i>17</i>
1.2.1 Target Audiences	21
1.2.2 Target Audience Analysis.....	23
1.2.3 Putin New York Times TA Example.....	23
<i>1.3 Twitter.....</i>	<i>26</i>
<i>1.4 Conclusion</i>	<i>30</i>
Chapter 2: <i>Interdisciplinary Methodology for Twitter Wars</i>	31
<i>2.1 Social Network Analysis</i>	<i>31</i>
<i>2.2 Dataset.....</i>	<i>37</i>
<i>2.3 Messaging and Narrative Identification</i>	<i>43</i>
2.3.1 Wording Analysis	44
2.3.2 Cyber-Communities as the Message.....	46
<i>2.4 Methodology Conclusion</i>	<i>47</i>
Chapter 3: <i>Quantitative Analysis</i>	48
<i>3.1 SNA – Network Dataset</i>	<i>48</i>
<i>3.2 SNA – InDegree Scores.....</i>	<i>48</i>
<i>3.3 Cyber-Community Structure & Term Counts</i>	<i>51</i>
3.3.1 Summary of Key Cyber-Communities	59
<i>3.4 Conclusion</i>	<i>62</i>
Chapter 4 - <i>Qualitative Analysis.....</i>	63
<i>4.1 U.S. and Russian Disagreements</i>	<i>63</i>

4.1.1 Disagreement 1 – Legality	63
4.1.2 Disagreement 2 – Potential International Intervention	65
4.1.3 Disagreement 3 - Culpability	67
4.2 <i>U.S. and Russian IO on Twitter</i>	69
4.2.1 American IO on Twitter.....	69
4.2.2 Russian IO on Twitter.....	81
4.3 <i>Qualitative Conclusion</i>	95
Chapter 5 - Conclusion	97
5.1 <i>Twitter as an IO tool and the August 2013 attack</i>	97
5.2 <i>Twitter as an IO tool of soft war</i>	99
5.3 <i>Soft power and ICT/Social Media beyond Twitter</i>	100
Bibliography	102
Appendix A – U.S. and Russian Foreign Policy Positions	118
Appendix B – Gephi Overview	131

List of Tables

TABLE 1 - TWITTER DATA FIELDS OF INTEREST IN SYSOMOS DATASET	39
TABLE 2 - NOTEWORTHY U.S., RUSSIAN, AND SYRIAN USERS ORDERED BY INDEGREE	49
TABLE 3 - CYBER-COMMUNITIES WITH NOTABLE U.S. AND RUSSIAN TWITTER USERS AS MEMBERS	51
TABLE 4 - 2013 TIMELINE AND SUMMARY OF OFFICIAL U.S. AND RUSSIAN POLITICAL STANCES	118

List of Figures

FIGURE 1 - <i>NEW YORK TIMES</i> AUDIENCE ON THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM	24
FIGURE 2 - NUMBER OF TWEETS PER DAY THROUGHOUT TWITTER'S HISTORY	27
FIGURE 3 - EXAMPLE TWITTER SOCIAL NETWORK GRAPH.....	33
FIGURE 4 - EXAMPLE TWITTER NETWORK GRAPH WITH COLOUR-CODED COMMUNITIES	36

FIGURE 5 - RUN DEGREE METRICS	37
FIGURE 6 - NUMBER OF TWEETS WITH #SYRIA OR #СИРИЯ AUGUST AND SEPTEMBER 2013	38
FIGURE 7 - SYSOMOS DATAFIELDS IN TABLE 1 AS SEEN ON TWITTER.COM/WHITEHOUSE.....	40
FIGURE 8 - TOP TEN LANGUAGES BY VOLUME	42
FIGURE 9 - PERCENTAGE TWEETS BY COUNTRY	43
FIGURE 10 - TWITTER MENTIONS CYBER COMMUNITY GRAPH COLOR CODED...	59
FIGURE 11 - MENTIONS OF 'KUCINICH' BY DAY	77
FIGURE 12 - MENTIONS OF 'TERROR' BY DAY	79
FIGURE 13 - @RT_COM TWITTER HOME PAGE.....	87
FIGURE 14 - GEPHI DATA IMPORT	131
FIGURE 15 - RUN THE COMMUNITY DETECTION ALGORITHM	131
FIGURE 16 - EXPORTING NUMBERED COMMUNITY DATA.....	132

Introduction: Social Media as Soft Power in the 21st Century

Moscow has realized that in the age of the Internet and 24-hour news cycles, there are safer ways of [silencing critics]...Russian media and public affairs specialists...rank alongside spies and assassins as weapons of the state. Glossy foreign-language media outlets, serried ranks of paid Internet trolls and hackers and mysteriously well-funded political fringe groups do the Kremlin's bidding.

- Mark Galeotti, *New York Times*¹

We now live in a transformative Information Age, where Information Communication Technologies (ICT) have moved beyond the role of making information about science, technology, social activity, political conflict, or the cultures and peoples behind them all available to becoming *the de facto* toolset for influencing opinion and, increasingly, will and action. Those of us living in technologically-advanced Western nations may find it tempting to see ourselves as the apex of this transformation, given that we have seen an unprecedented rate of change since the late-20th century, with the arrival of desktop computers and the subsequent penetration of the public internet into all aspects of our lives. Today, however, that penetration continues to rise exponentially in the developing world, too, and developing countries hold a greater share of the Internet Economy. As internet usage grows, so does the ability of those who use it to engage in virtual influence both at home and abroad.²

People are increasingly using ICT to gather information, engage in social interaction, and develop a sense of identity in an interconnected, globalized world. As ICT spreads, some scholars suggest, "the intersection of people's values, beliefs, and customs with the virtual domain will drive cultural trends and identity

¹ Galeotti, Mark. "Op-Ed; Who Needs Assassins When You've Got Hackers?" *New York Times*, 22 Jan. 2016. Web, 10 Feb. 2016.

² Pauline Kusiak. "Culture, Identity, and Information Technology in the 21st Century: Implications for U.S. National Security". U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, pp.6-11 (Aug. 2012).

dynamics . . . for the foreseeable future.”³ Social media has facilitated person-to-person information sharing and interaction in ways that were not possible with simple websites, discussion forums, and traditional information mediums like TV, print, and radio. This has brought into reality the concept of a “Global Village” proposed by Marshall McLuhan, or the concept of a “flat world” conceived by Thomas L. Friedman, and has given birth to “Web 2.0”, a term coined by Tim O’Reilly to account for the user-generated, interoperable, and *collaborative* changes that modern technology now affords.⁴

One of the important aspects of social media for this thesis is that it has facilitated the globalization of propaganda,⁵ too, and that such influence efforts have become an ad hoc communal activity (compared to a centralized top-down activity).⁶ This has brought about a virtual information environment where individuals are exposed to influence and propaganda campaigns by both local and foreign governments, non-governmental groups, individuals, and loose communities of like-minded individuals. Social media has provided platforms for individuals and groups with similar agendas to spontaneously create informal communities of interest and interact in important ways, and to influence each other along the way.

Generally, social media has empowered relationship-building and facilitated the dissemination of information and knowledge, all of which are potential avenues for positive influence. Consider the spontaneous transnational social organization that emerged during the Arab Spring uprising, where protesters disseminated information on upcoming protests to turn social media into, in the military domain of Information Operations, a “force multiplier”: something that increases, often exponentially, the effectiveness of a group undertaking an action and that thus radically enhances the likelihood of a preferred outcome.⁷ A force multiplier could be something as complex as a complete weapons system or as simple as a piece of actionable intelligence. During the Arab Spring, Twitter and other social media

³ Ibid. pp.3.

⁴ Ari-Matti Auvinen. “Social Media – The New Power of Political Influence.” *Suomen Toivo Think Tank*, Centre for European Studies. Web, 20 Oct. 2015, pp. 4.

⁵ Ravi Gupta, Hugh Brooks, *Using Social Media for Global Security*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc. (2013) pp 3.

⁶ Auvinen, Ibid. pp. 6.

⁷ Catherine A. Theohary, “CRS Insights Information Warfare: The Role of Social Media in Conflict” *CRS Insights*. (March 2015), pp. 1.

tools became force multipliers by “radically enhancing networking and organizing capabilities”⁸ in ways that traditional word of mouth or telephone communications, or even the use of conventional media avenues, could never achieve.

While advancements in ICT certainly reveal countless benefits for humanity, they also have profound implications for national security and statehood. Such implications include both direct and indirect threats to current Western democratic-capitalist societies, for the Information Age is providing adversaries--al Qaeda and ISIL are but two prominent examples in recent years to have utilized ICT for recruiting and propaganda, for instance--a vast and difficult-to-defend-against asymmetric information warfare capability in their battle to destabilize what is perceived to be Western hegemony.⁹ As Max Manwaring of the Strategic Studies Institute rightly notes, “whether we [the U.S.] like it or not, whether we want it or not, and whether we are prepared for it or not . . . the West [is] engaged in a number of . . . asymmetric wars,”¹⁰ wars that often include measures that target public opinion and state leadership.¹¹ These information wars may seem on the surface to share qualities of the concept of “soft power,”¹² but they are not soft at all. They use coercion, fear, and intimidation and are overtly employed to “directly attack the minds of enemy populations, policymakers, and decision makers to destroy their political will.”¹³ Today, ICT facilitates not only the spread of positive and progressive social justice but fear and discontent. It can be used to spread information and disinformation, propaganda and counter-propaganda, and to engender social agitation and outright violence. ICT can be a tool for peace, but as

⁸ “Force Multiplier” *Cambridge Dictionaries Online*. Web, 25 Oct. 2015.

⁹ The manipulation of mass media by General Aideed of Somalia against the much more powerful US was an early example of the power of IO. Armistead, Leigh. *Information Operations: Warfare and the Hard Reality of Soft Power*. Washington, D.C: Brassey's, 2004. Print.

¹⁰ Max Manwaring. "Venezuela as an Exporter of 4th Generation Warfare Instability". U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, pp.1. (Dec. 2012).

¹¹ *Ibid.* pp.9.

¹² The term *soft power*, first coined by Joseph Nye, is frequently used to describe ‘the ability of a country to persuade others to do what it wants without force or coercion’. Nye claimed that for states to be successful they need both hard and soft power – the ability to coerce with military power, and to shape long-term attitudes and preferences without military power. See Joseph S. Nye Jr. “Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics.” *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2004 issue. Web, Feb. 21, 2016.

¹³ *Ibid.* pp. 31.

is the case with many technologies, it can also be used as a weapon: here, utilizing not bullets or bombs but arsenals of language, imagery, and symbolism collectively designed to manufacture and sustain dissent in target populations with, in some cases, the ultimate ambition to facilitate complete state failure.¹⁴

As shown by the 2011 Blackberry Riots¹⁵ in England and by the Arab Spring, ICT can facilitate the coordination of spontaneous domestic instability and can lead to the disintegration of social structure. In worst-case scenarios, the use of tools like Twitter facilitating instability, can leave countries in political disarray and prolonged economic crises, as has been the case in Syria, to which I will return more fully below. Indeed, not only can ICT provide state and non-state actors a low-cost asymmetric capability to deliver propaganda but, according to some critics--consider the 2003 false claims of WMDs in Iraq and the ensuing loss of trust in Western leadership and mass media--it has also made contemporary Western citizens more likely to turn to alternative news sources such as microblogs (including Twitter) and foreign international mass media.¹⁶ And while more information sources can provide a richer informational landscape and might seem to be reliable alternatives to what is often perceived as biased mainstream media,¹⁷ new ICT technologies provide more avenues for citizens to be potentially vulnerable to adversarial influences. As argued by Manwaring, this "4th Generation Warfare . . . is an evolved form of insurgency rooted in the fundamental precept that superior will, when properly employed, can defeat greater military and economic power."¹⁸ Those opposed to perceived Western hegemony are investing richly in this "4th Generation Warfare" of informational influence, with the hope that it will serve as a key to weakening the West without ever having to confront superior Western military forces.

¹⁴ Ibid. pp. 19.

¹⁵ *The Economist*, "The BlackBerry riots: Rioters used BlackBerrys against the police; can police use them against rioters?". *The Economist*. Web, Aug. 2011. The term Blackberry riots was commonly used to refer to the London riots in 2011, as Blackberry mobile phones were a predominant technology used by the rioters.

¹⁶ Megan Boler, S. Nemorin. "Dissent, Truthiness, and Skepticism in the Global Media Landscape: Twenty-First Century Propaganda in Times of War". *The Oxford Handbook of Propaganda Studies*, Eds. J. Auerbach, R. Castronovo, pp.392 (Dec 2013).

¹⁷ Ibid. pp. 392.

¹⁸ Manwaring, pp. 31.

Unlike other social networking sites like Facebook, LinkedIn or Google Plus, which are more frequently used for relatively circumscribed personal or professional ties, Twitter is frequently used to reach broad global audiences: and to do so in real-time. And since it has predominantly been conceptualized as a bottom-up, grass-roots tool for communication and social change there has, only recently, been a focus among media studies scholars on how the world's most powerful nations have, are, or might yet deploy an ICT like Twitter as part of a calculated information warfare arsenal, even though it is clear that Twitter has played, and continues to play, a key role in recent conflicts.

That it tracks rich, real-time sociological interactions makes it an excellent source of raw data for research purposes, and the Russian-American war of words that emerged over the August 2013 chemical weapons incident provides an excellent scholarly case study of the potential for Twitter as a “soft war” (or what is also sometimes referred to as “non-kinetic”) weapon specifically employed for the purposes of information warfare.¹⁹ Today, Russian-American antagonism manifests not only in the diplomatic arena--or, arguably, indirectly on the battlefield in Syria--but also through robust and persistent information warfare efforts being conducted through not only conventional mass media but, increasingly, through social media, including Twitter. In what follows, I will reveal that competing U.S. - Russian Twitter campaigns after the Syrian chemical weapons incident demonstrate how Twitter's real-time informational exchange capability can be used effectively as an IO tool in the “virtual” or cyberspatial Area Of Operations (AO), to borrow another conventional military concept.

This latest chapter in a long history of information warfare between Russia and its forebears and the U.S. began, arguably, on 21 August 2013 with the large-scale Sarin gas attack on civilians in the Syrian suburb of Ghouta, near Damascus. This thesis will use existing ICT research methodologies to interrogate the propaganda war that arose because of this incident. Both Russian and American governments used Twitter to try to convince domestic and international audiences of the legitimacy of their respective positions on Syria after August 21st, evidenced by a sizeable spike in Twitter traffic for four weeks following the event. Analyzing some four million tweets over this four-week period, I will explore the real-time unfolding of the IO battle between Russia and the U.S..

¹⁹ It should be cautioned that despite Twitter data being useful for research, there are many challenges with public Twitter data. Twitter users can remain anonymous or use automated bots to tweet using many accounts; multiple people can use a single Twitter account; and accounts can also be hacked. User biographies and location data cannot be verified easily, and it should be assumed there are various types of users looking to purposely falsify this data.

This thesis is best situated in an interdisciplinary academic research context involving both Information Operations influence activities, and the analyses of Twitter as part of the broader social networking phenomenon of the early 21st C. Literature on IO influence activities consists of military research and more broadly includes marketing strategies, and political campaigning. Resources for this thesis focused on how to create propaganda, analyze and counter propaganda, identify target audiences,^{20,21} and understand future trends in online culture²²⁻²³ within a strategic military context. It provides a foundation for understanding propaganda and ICTs in the context of national security, but IO scholars and practitioners worldwide have only recently started to analyze state IO activities specifically conducted through Twitter,²⁴ and so there is, effectively, little existing literature directly addressing the topic under investigation. Therefore, the thesis will unfold as follows:

Chapter 1, *Syrian Geopolitics, Information Operations, and Twitter*, positions the Sarin gas attack of August 21st 2013 within the broader historical and geopolitical context of Russian and American interests in the region, the Arab Spring uprising, and the Syrian Civil War. It will then expand on the two core aspects of the thesis: first, the military concept of Information Operations, which borrows from the discourse of marketing such notions as Target Audiences and Target Audience Analysis; second, Twitter itself. Throughout, I will perform a review of existing literature; I remind readers that by virtue both of its interdisciplinary nature and of the size constraints of a Master's project, such a review must remain somewhat focused.

In Chapter 2, I provide an overview of the quantitative and qualitative tools and methodology used to engage with, measure, and eventually analyze Twitter data specifically, focusing on the social network analysis methodologies that will

²⁰ Department of the Army, "FM3-05.301 Psychological Operations, Tactics, Techniques and Procedures" pp.5-1 - 5.24, 2003.

²¹ Steve Tatham. "U.S. Governmental Information Operations and Strategic Communications: A Discredited Tool or User Failure? Implications for Future Conflict". U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute (Dec. 2013).

²² Manwaring, Ibid.

²³ Kusiak, Ibid.

²⁴ Pierre Jolicoeur, A. Seaboyer. "140 Character Defence and Security in the Cyber Age: The Case of the IDF-Hamas Twitter War". Royal Military College of Canada, Jan 2014.

be central to identifying arguments and narratives within and among tweets and tweet groupings.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of the quantitative tools used in the project and performs a quantitative analysis of the Twitter dataset. This involves obtaining and interpreting InDegree scores--scores that identify the relative importance of users in a network--and dissecting the Twitter dataset into cyber-communities. These cyber-communities, which represent groups of like-minded users (and hence Target Audiences), emerge along anticipated (geo)political fault lines and, specifically, are manifest in the frequencies of key terms and phrases.

Chapter 4 contains an in-depth qualitative analysis of the quantitative data in light of its geopolitical context as an IO weapon of words. Points of U.S. and Russian disagreement seen on Twitter will be discussed first, followed by an investigation of the broader domestic and international implications of the U.S. and Russian IO campaigns.

The findings will then be summarized in a Conclusion, in which I will conclude that U.S. and Russian geopolitical positions manifested on Twitter not only through official government activity, but also through the activity of non-governmental groups and like-minded individuals drawn together over this one, single topic of discussion and debate. Russian IO efforts on Twitter had a greater following than that of the Obama Administration; in particular, through the *Russia Today* news service, Russian IO efforts resonated strongly with U.S. far left-leaning, anti-war groups. This anti-war narrative was in-turn picked up by Republican groups looking to opportunistically criticize the Obama Administration. That Administration, lacking a comparative state-run IO branding platform like *Russia Today*, was observed to be passive in its IO efforts, relatively speaking. It failed to resonate with Republican groups that may have supported an interventionist narrative, as well as with its natural support base in the liberal humanitarian groups that support the moderate Syrian opposition having emerged out of the Arab Spring democratic movement. And it was, simply, slow to react. On the whole, the Russian IO effort resonated more than that of the Americans, and to that end can be declared more successful.

However, it is important from the onset to acknowledge a limitation of the study. "Measuring success"--knowing whether people changed their minds as a consequence of having been targeted with information-- is terribly problematic in the geopolitical realm of soft power, of which these Twitter Information Operations campaigns constitute a part. Here, as in any other information-competitive landscape, virtual or otherwise, there are simply too many additional (often nuanced, subtle, and transient) informational influences coming to bear on the formation of opinion to be able to pinpoint cause-and-effect with any absolute degree of certainty. Besides, opinion on social media, in particular, can be fleeting and difficult to identify as "genuine." Further, the spike in Twitter traffic following

the Sarin gas attack lasted only a few weeks; that alone makes its impact on long-term changes in perspective is impossible to isolate.

This one incident marks but a drop in a much larger pool of what has since become a protracted war of words, and later actions, over Syria, as the ongoing climate of crisis some three years after the fact attests. Still, in the final analysis, Twitter proved to be an effective, if limited, weapon in a propaganda battle to be counted among the thousands that have emerged since the two superpowers began their ideological struggle following World War II. In short, if governments follow the U.S. lead in the case study provided here and treat Twitter and social media IO as an afterthought, they risk falling behind not only conventional but asymmetric adversaries--again, ISIL comes to mind--who are today investing more and more energy in developing competent strategies for using social media as a weapon of modern warfare.

Chapter 1: *Syrian Geopolitics, Information Operations, and Twitter*

This chapter will situate the chemical weapons incident of August 21st, 2013 in the broader geopolitical and historical contexts of the region, including the Arab Spring uprising. It will then provide an overview of the military concept of Information Operations and explain why it is useful for my analysis of Twitter activity related to the Sarin gas incident. Finally, it offers an overview of Twitter itself to familiarize readers with its history, core technological characteristics, and the extent of its use as a means of communication in a global 21st C environment. Collectively, this contextual information provides a framework necessary for understanding the analysis of target audiences and cyber-communities that emerged in the quantitative Twitter data.

It seems long ago that there existed the promise of newfound allegiances following decades of a Cold War that saw the U.S.S.R. fighting to export Communism, and the West--a term I will use throughout to connote a group of nations bound together, if even only imaginatively at times, by a common European historical influence, liberal democracy, capitalism, an increasing emphasis on secularism, science, technology, and egalitarian social justice--going to great lengths to contain it. However, after two or so decades of relative calm following the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the Soviet Union with it, old antagonisms have resurfaced. As one author puts it, Russian president Vladimir Putin is using “anti-Americanism . . . [as] an ideology that Russia is trying to export to Europe, as it

once exported communism.”²⁵ To protect his monopoly on state power at home and as part of Russia’s desire to reemerge on the centre stage as a global superpower, Putin has engaged in a strategy to “[support] both far-left and far-right groups” in the West in order to “exacerbate divides [in the West] and create an echo-chamber of Kremlin support.”²⁶ As will be seen, these efforts to destabilize the West through fringe political groups manifested on Twitter, and with some success, following the Sarin gas attack. Syria, in other words, has provided Russia an opportunity to (re)leverage its weight on the international stage.

1.1 Syrian Geopolitics

To fully understand the geopolitically-motivated IO occurring on Twitter during the Syrian chemical weapons crisis of August 2013, it is important to first consider the broader context of Russian, American, and Syrian geopolitics; propaganda wars between Russia and the U.S. are not new and have been going on since the early days of the Cold War, of course, but the war of words over Syria is relatively new.

1.1.1 Syrian Geopolitical Alliances

During the early to mid-20th century, following a tumultuous period of decolonization, Syria aligned itself with anti-Israeli coalitions, which not only failed to destroy Israel but also resulted in the dissolution of Arab Nationalist alliances. Following Israel’s declaration of independence, Syria, at times allied with Egypt and Jordan, and with Soviet re-supplies, engaged in the Arab-Israeli War of 1948,²⁷ the 1967 Six Days War,²⁸ and the 1973 Arab-Israeli war.²⁹ The Sunni-Arab powers subsequently lost interest in the ongoing interstate conflict with Israel and today maintain a better relationship and some degree of cooperation. With its loss of these strategic alliances, Syria sought new alliances with Shi’ite Iran and

²⁵ “What Russia Wants: From Cold War to Hot War.” *The Economist*, 14 Feb. 2015. Web. 1 Mar. 2016.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ “Milestones: 1945-1952, The Arab-Israeli War of 1948”. *Milestones*. Office of the Historian U.S. Department of State. Web. 29 Jan. 2015.

²⁸ “Milestones: 1961-1968, The 1967 Arab-Israeli War”. *Milestones*. Office of the Historian U.S. Department of State. Web. 29 Jan. 2015.

²⁹ “Milestones: 1969-1976, The 1973 Arab-Israeli War”. *Milestones*. Office of the Historian U.S. Department of State. Web. 29 Jan. 2015.

Hezbollah, following the overthrow of the Iranian Shah. The al-Assad family, belonging to Syria's Shi'ite minority, undoubtedly saw this movement as a "natural" course of history.³⁰

1.1.2 U.S. Geopolitical Interests

U.S. geopolitical interests in the region have been motivated by four predominant goals roughly since World War II: protecting Israel; ensuring the continuing supply of oil to the world market; containing Soviet (later Russian) influence; and promoting Western values such as democratic capitalism and international liberalism.³¹ In Syria specifically, the current goals of the U.S. Administration are to deny the potential establishment of terrorist safe havens, provide support to moderate opposition elements that grew out of the Arab Spring violence, and to prevent war from spreading beyond Syria. Given events in Syria over the past few years, those goals have had only limited success: conflict spread to Iraq in 2013, with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) having gained territory in Iraqi regions bordering Syria. While ISIL attacks outside of Syria have not yet resulted in widespread sectarian violence, the fear is that a large-scale attack by ISIL against Shi'ite Lebanese or Iraqi populations could result in a dramatic increase in violence.³²

The spread of violence to Iraq has threatened an already-fragile Iraqi government, negatively impacted oil production, created additional humanitarian concerns and, for Iran, is a threat to the current Iranian-supported Shi'ite government in Baghdad. The situation in Syria is a challenge for all four U.S. interests mentioned. The Assad regime and Sunni terrorists are both a potential security threat to Israel; ISIL having gained a strong foothold in Syria has started to threaten the Iraqi supply of oil to the West; the Russians have a strong degree of paternalistic influence over the Assad regime; and both the Assad regime and ISIL

³⁰ Talal Nizameddin. "Squaring the Middle East Triangle in Lebanon: Russia and the Iran-Syria-Hezbollah Nexus". *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 86, No. 3 (Jul., 2008), pp. 482.

³¹ Fred Halliday. *The Middle East in International Relations: Power, Politics and Ideology*. Cambridge University Press (2007), pp. 142. Halliday did not mention containing Russian influence or promoting Western values; however, given Russia's continued presence in the region following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and given attempts to promote Western values during the Arab Spring and Iraq War, two additional goals are worth adding.

³² David S. Sorenson. "Dilemmas for U.S. Strategy: U.S. Options in Syria". *The U.S. Army War College Quarterly - Parameters*, (Autumn 2013), pp. 5.

are anathema to liberal democratic values and institutions. The U.S. has found common ground with the moderate Syrian opposition that emerged out of the Arab Spring movement and has backed it both rhetorically and with small arms supplies. Despite this support, the U.S. has “no stomach for further intervention in this region anytime soon,”³³ which Russia has taken as an opportunity to launch, a so far successful, military intervention on Assad’s behalf.³⁴ The current Syrian civil war is one of the most recent examples of a proxy U.S.-Russian war for influence, and it now includes the use of both hard and soft power tools.

1.1.3 Russian Geopolitical Interests

Recently, Russia has maintained the position that it would block any possible UN Chapter VII intervention in Syria’s current civil war and even block any sanctions against Assad’s Syria that would appear to be related to Western interference.³⁵ The motivation for the Russian geopolitical position has been the maintenance and establishment of strategic alliances with regional powers to undermine U.S. hegemony and block U.S. entry into regions near Russia.³⁶ Russian links to Syria are not new and dates back to Soviet support for anti-Israeli coalitions. For Russia, this strategy was born from the anxiety that a strong U.S., unimpeded from intervening in nearby regions, might have a direct impact on the integrity of the Russian Federation (especially if, in the minds of Russian leaders still thinking in terms of Soviet-era antagonism, it became the target of foreign U.S.-led military intervention). By strengthening alliances with anti-Western powers in the Near East, including Syria, Russia could confront Western, and specifically American, interests in the region indirectly, all with an eye to maintaining their own hegemony and, if possible, to expanding it to the larger Arab population.

Ultimately, Russia is not motivated by the religious or political underpinnings of Shi’ite radicalism in Syria but merely by its desire to increase power, influence, and access to regional resources, such as oil, for the protection of its own national interests. As will be shown, this self-serving Russian foreign

³³ Goodson, Dr. L. P. “Op-Ed: Syria and the Great Middle Eastern War.” *Strategic Studies Institute*, (July 2014). Web, 27 Feb. 2016.

³⁴ Roth, Andrew. “After four months, Russia’s campaign in Syria is proving successful for Moscow.” *The Washington Post*, (Feb. 2016). Web, 27 Feb. 2016.

³⁵ Roy Allison. “Russia and Syria: explaining alignment with a regime in crises”. *International Affairs*, Vol 89. No. 4 (2013) pp. 798.

³⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 477-478.

policy of aligning with groups antagonistic to U.S. power and influence extends into ICTs through a form of state-sponsored cognitive warfare. Russia not only supported pro-Assad Syrian groups on ICTs, but also successfully reached audiences seeking to counter perceived U.S. hegemony in the region.

1.1.4 Syrian Civil War

The Syrian civil war has become a nexus of opposing international geopolitical interests, foreign intervention, religious and ethnic conflict, popular movements, humanitarian crises, and an international breeding ground for Islamic terrorism. The complexity of the situation in Syria has made the civil war an intractable situation without simple solutions, and an increasingly dire humanitarian situation. According to the European Commission, the Syrian civil war triggered the “largest humanitarian crisis since World War II,”³⁷ and according to Amnesty International, “both government forces and non-state armed groups commit[ed] extensive war crimes and gross human rights abuses with impunity.”³⁸ The Sarin gas attack on civilians and opposition members in Ghouta on August 21st 2013 “sparked the most extensive international reaction of any incident in the Syrian Civil War.”³⁹ The August attack finally shocked the international community to a worsening situation that it could no longer ignore.

The civil war had its beginnings in March 2011 as pro-democracy protests, which were part of the Arab Spring movement. The Arab Spring started in December 2010 in Tunisia, toppling the Tunisian president; it then spread to Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain, Libya--with the rulers of Egypt, Yemen, and Libya ousted--and finally to Syria.⁴⁰ Assad’s efforts to crush the pro-democracy protests with force led to the formation of uncoordinated “rebel brigades” to battle government forces.⁴¹ In November 2012, at the urging of the West and regional allies, many of the

³⁷ Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection. “Syria Crises: Echo Factsheet.” *European Commission*, (Sept. 2015) pp. 1.

³⁸ “Amnesty International Report 2014/15: Syria.” *Amnesty International*. Web, 30 Oct. 2015.

³⁹ Goldsmith, Jett. “Chemical Crises: A Timeline of CW Attacks in Syria’s Civil War.” *Bellingcat*. Web, 29 Oct. 2015.

⁴⁰ “Timeline: The Major Events Of The Arab Spring.” *The Arab Spring: One Year Later*. Ed. Greg Myre. NPR, 2 Jan. 2012. Web, 27 Feb. 2016.

⁴¹ Lucy Rodgers, D. Gritten, J. Offer and P. Asare. “Syria: The Story of Conflict.” *BBC World News Middle East*, 9 Oct. 2015. Web, 1 Nov. 2015.

democratic inspired rebel brigades formed the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces in order to obtain increased international support.⁴² As the rebel forces gained momentum and seemed poised to take over Damascus, Russia and Iran stepped in to provide “political cover and financial and military support”.⁴³ Russia continued to provide arms supplies and blocked UN Security Council resolutions that would condemn the Assad regime for chemical weapons use and mass killings of civilians; Iran provided financial support and training for Syrian militias and enlisted foreign Shi’a volunteers willing to fight in Syria.⁴⁴ The Lebanese Hezbollah also sent fighters to assist the Assad regime following Iran’s urging.⁴⁵ The civil war that emerged from the Arab Spring had turned into a proxy war between the U.S. and the Russian-Shi’ite alliance.

With this support from external allies, the fighting between the Syrian government and the rebel forces reached a stalemate. As the civil war continued, it increasingly transformed into a sectarian war between Sunni and Shi’a enclaves, and as pro-democracy rebels stagnated, Sunni extremist groups, such as ISIL, gained control over large areas of the Syrian territory. The prospect of a political solution to the conflict was increasingly hindered by the fear of slaughter and mutual distrust held by each side. ISIL’s brutality had been matched by the memory of the slaughter of Sunni Arabs by Assad’s father, Hafiz, that ended Syria’s first civil war between 1976-1982.⁴⁶ These real sectarian fears created a situation where people were willing to go to great lengths to gain the upper hand. It should not come as a complete surprise in a country with chemical weapons stockpiles that chemical weapons were used when the very existence of sectarian groups, let alone Assad’s regime, was at stake.

As the civil war intensified, cases of the Assad regime using chemical weapons increased, and human rights groups documented a timeline of their use. On July 23, 2012, for the first time in history, the Syrian Foreign Ministry admitted

⁴² “National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces.” *Syria In Crisis*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Web, 1 Mar. 2016.

⁴³ Jenkins, Brian Michael. “The Dynamics of Syria's Civil War.” Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2014. <http://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE115>.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 7.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Pollack, Kenneth M. “Breaking the Stalemate: The Military Dynamics of the Syrian Civil War and Options for Limited U.S. Intervention.” *Middle East Memo, Brookings Institute*, No. 30 (Aug, 2013), pp. 3.

to having chemical weapons stockpiles, but it stated that they would only be used against “external aggression”.⁴⁷ The first alleged use of chemical weapons by the Syrian government was on December 23, 2012, only four months after President Obama articulated a “red-line” where the U.S. would consider responding militarily to the use or major mobilization of the chemical weapons.⁴⁸

And yet, from this point, the use of chemical weapons increased: on March 19, 2013, chemical weapons were reportedly used in Aleppo and Damascus, which the Syrian government blamed on opposition forces; on March 24, 2013, there were claims again of chemical attacks northeast of Damascus, reportedly from government rocket launchers; and on April 13, 2013, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) claimed the Syrian army dropped chemical bombs on Aleppo. In late April and early June 2013, the chemical attacks continued, while UN inspection teams were hindered by the Syrian government from investigating the chemical weapons use.⁴⁹ Both the U.S. and French governments were asserting by this point that the Syrian government was using Sarin gas, with the French government having taken a sample from Syria directly; finally, on August 21st, 2013, the first large-scale use of chemical weapons was used on rebel-controlled suburbs of Ghouta near Damascus, where government forces had been trying to remove rebel forces.⁵⁰ The human death toll was the highest seen throughout the Syrian civil war due to chemical weapons, with a U.S. government assessment stating that, “1,429 people were killed, including at least 426 children.”⁵¹ The brutal attack and massacre shocked the international community and put the soft war between Russia and the U.S. into high gear.

Prior to the August attack, the U.S. intelligence community, as part of the ongoing U.S.-Russia soft war, claimed the Assad regime was using Sarin gas on a small scale, but at the time, required more evidence.⁵² There were reported

⁴⁷ Kawashima, Yuta. “Timeline of Syrian Chemical Weapons Activity, 2012-2015.” *Arms Control Association, Fact Sheets & Briefs*, (Aug. 2014). Web, 2 Nov. 2015.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ "Government Assessment of the Syrian Government's Use of Chemical Weapons on August 21, 2013." *Briefing Room - Statements & Releases*. The White House, 30 Aug. 2013. Web. 1 Mar. 2016.

⁵² Ibid.

chemical attacks in December of 2012, and March and April of 2013.⁵³ The August attack, however, was on a much larger scale and violated the red line Obama had publicly set out nearly a year earlier without a doubt. Continued inaction by the international community at this point would have reinforced further and even larger-scale use of the chemical weapons, and it would have shown complacency toward UN Geneva Conventions on the use of chemical weapons. On the same day of the attack, the UN Security Council held an emergency meeting, resulting in a decision to seek greater clarity on the attack.⁵⁴ Despite the fact that the UN was only provided the mandate to determine if chemical weapons were used, not who was responsible, they were hindered once again by the Assad regime in their efforts to do so.

While the UN would not lay blame on any one party for the August 21st attack, Western countries were not so reserved. On August 30th, the White House released an unclassified summary of intelligence findings stating that, “The United States Government assesses with high confidence that the Syrian government carried out [the] chemical weapons attack”.⁵⁵ The British Joint Intelligence Committee also stated “it was ‘highly likely’ that the Syrian regime was responsible for the...attack”,⁵⁶ and according to the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Our intelligence confirms that the regime feared a wider attack from the opposition on Damascus at that moment...only the regime itself could have targeted positions that were so strategic for the opposition”.⁵⁷ According to German intelligence, an intercepted phone call between senior Hezbollah members and Iranian embassy officials admitted poison gas was used and claimed that “Assad lost his nerves and made a big mistake by ordering the chemical weapons attack.”⁵⁸ Western countries were unanimous in their condemnation of the Assad regime for

⁵³ Kawashima, Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Office of the Press Secretary. “Government Assessment of the Syrian Government’s Use of Chemical Weapons on August 21, 2013.” *The White House* (Aug. 2013). Web, Nov. 1 2015.

⁵⁶ Foreign Affairs Committee. “Annex 1: Syrian developments, August-September 2013: Timeline.” *UK Parliament*. Web, Nov. 1 2015.

⁵⁷ “Syria/Syrian chemical programme – National executive summary of declassified intelligence.” *French Ministry of Foreign Affairs* (Sept. 2013). Web, Nov. 1 2015.

⁵⁸ Gebauer, Matthias. “Gas Attack: Germany Offers Clue in Search for Truth in Syria.” *Spiegel Online International* (Sept. 2013). Web, Nov. 1 2015.

the chemical weapons attack, and were willing to publicly reveal intelligence and “intercepted phone calls” as proof.

As shown in Appendix A, the Russians, on the other hand, immediately claimed on August 21st that the armed opposition was responsible for the attack, and that the attack was a conspiracy intended to provide justification for Western military intervention to remove Assad from power. The immediate claims by Russia that it was a Western conspiracy served as a deflection of culpability, creating doubt that condemnation of the Assad regime was a foregone conclusion. Russia proceeded to block UN Security Council actions against the Assad regime, and it provided political cover for the duration of the crisis and civil war that continues to this day.

During the crisis, the Obama Administration, having previously set a red-line, reluctantly sought authorization from Congress for a limited military strike in Syria to deter further chemical weapons use and to enforce international norms. As will be shown, it was during this time that IO efforts fully began to try to gain attention and support for (or to oppose) limited military intervention. Finally, on September 9th, following a statement by U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry that military strikes could be averted if Assad relinquished his chemical weapons stockpiles, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov announced a Russian proposal where Syria would hand over the chemical weapons to international authorities for destruction. By September 14th an agreement was reached for Syria to allow for the accounting, inspection, control and elimination of their stockpile.⁵⁹

While the agreement successfully averted military strikes, and removed the most toxic chemical weapons from Assad’s control, the use of chlorine gas bombing took its place. On April 11, 2014 and throughout much of March 2015, chlorine gas was used to kill hundreds of opposition members and numerous civilians. The UN Human Rights Council confirmed chlorine gas was used on April 11, 2014, and the Human Rights Watch published a report condemning the Assad regime for using chlorine gas during the March 2015 attacks.⁶⁰

The removal of certain chemical weapons may have deprived the Assad regime of potent weapons to kill at scale, but it did not fundamentally alter the Syrian civil war. Just as some chemical weapons were being destroyed, ISIL started to gain considerable momentum in Syria and even advanced into Iraq. Assad’s forces and the opposition two years later remain in a military stalemate,

⁵⁹ Kawashima, Ibid.

⁶⁰ Goldsmith, Ibid.

with Russia's military intervention having provided some gains for Assad, but there remains little desire for a true political resolution.

1.2 Information Operations

With this deeper context of U.S. and Russian geopolitical motivations regarding Syria established, we can now turn our attention to how they manifested themselves on Twitter in this latest war of words between the two. To begin, in recent years, a growing body of marketing literature has emerged on how social media can be leveraged to influence what are called “conversions”: a term used in marketing to denote when advertising efforts have resulted in an action valuable to a business, such as a purchase for an online retailer or a donation for a charity.⁶¹ While framing social media influence discussions in terms of such a concept can be useful, this thesis will instead turn to the military concept of *Information Operations*, which is focused not on a business profit perspective but on understanding and leveraging perspectives regarding *conflict* as manifested during war. While the focus is on the perspective of conflict through the lens of IO, there are many parallels between IO and marketing, and IO has drawn from marketing practice heavily.⁶²

Russian and American competing propaganda efforts on Twitter exemplify the use of “social media . . . as a tool of information warfare—a weapon of words that influences the hearts and minds of a target audience,”⁶³ and so IO constitutes the military equivalent of, and indeed is its own form of, soft power. Conceptually, it provides a framework that adds to marketing discourses for analyzing the war of words *that* emerged over Syria, because it implies the *militarization* of social media in the service of statehood.

At its most basic, IO refers to the coordinated control and management of information, in its broadest possible context, to achieve military objectives. Implicit in this is that coordination is required to find the right balance between kinetic (physical, violent) and non-kinetic (non-physical, non-violent) enablers.

⁶¹ See “Conversion.” *Google AdWords Help*. Web, 21 October 2015.

⁶² IO practitioners have borrowed, and indeed can learn, many ideas from marketing. Such an example is target audience analysis, which would equate to “understanding the market” in the business world. See Chilton, Dan J. “Information Operations versus civilian marketing and advertising a comparative analysis to improve IO planning and strategy”. *Calhoun: The NPS Institutional Archive*, Monterey, March 2008, for further in-depth examples.

⁶³ Catherine A. Theohary, *Ibid.* pp. 1.

Controlling the totality of an “information environment” is the end aim, and this may or may not also involve controlling the physical environment. Thus, depending on strategic or operational objectives, IO may require the simultaneous coordination of such diverse military mechanisms as infantry, artillery, psychological operations, public affairs, electronic warfare, and various additional forms of deception, diversion, information, and misinformation.⁶⁴

Terminologically, IO is often regarded as a coordinating function rather than a tacit “job” or “outcome”: unlike, say, an infantry “operation” to capture a position or an artillery operation to destroy it. This has, and can, led to a confused understanding about who, exactly, is responsible for “conducting” IO in a military theatre of operations, but that is beyond the scope of this study.⁶⁵ My goal is to borrow from the core discourse of IO the notion of *information deliberately being manipulated and managed in a militarized context*: in this study, not on the battlefield but in conversations that circumscribe it, that served here to persuade target audiences of the legitimacy (or illegitimacy) of claims about who used chemical weapons and more broadly about potential military intervention in Syria.

There are multiple official definitions of IO used by militaries who utilize its doctrine. The U.S. Air Force (USAF) describes IO as “actions taken to affect adversary information and information systems while defending one's own information and information systems.”⁶⁶ Another is the “employment of capabilities to affect behaviours . . . or a change in the adversary decision cycle, which aligns with the commander's objectives.”⁶⁷ With various definitions and applications of IO, often differing by nation, obtaining a straightforward understanding of IO from an IO practitioner can lend clarity to the concept. I am going to quote at length here from my interview with Maj. Belyea, PhD, who had direct experience with Information Operations and influence activities in Afghanistan from 2009-2011, to demonstrate the complexity of the concept called IO:

“Technically speaking, and depending on which counterinsurgency doctrine in the Western world you consider, *influence activities (IA), information*

⁶⁴ Interview with Major Andrew Belyea, PhD, Chief Information Operations Officer, Canadian Task Force 3-09 Kandahar, Afghanistan, 2009-10, 5 Jan 2016.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Cyberspace and Information Operations Study Center. “What are Information Operations?” Air Force University. Web. 5 May 2015.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

operations (IO), psychological operations (PSYOPS), and Public Affairs (PA) exist as separate but related parts of the same whole. In many cases, the overarching umbrella is IA, with the others as subordinate parts. In some cases, including in Canadian doctrine, IO serves as the umbrella, and it subsumes PSYOPS, PA, and a host of other functions. Our own IO manual defines IO as others have, really: “actions taken in support of national objectives which influence decision makers by affecting other's information while exploiting and protecting one's own information.” Or something along that line.

Such “actions, in the military domain of IO, involve coordinating several “disciplines,” as I like to see them, or core functions. Here are most of them:

- Civil Affairs
- Information Security
- Public Affairs
- Counter Deception
- Physical Security
- Communications Security
- Deception
- Computer Security
- Physical Destruction
- Counter Intelligence
- Counter PSYOP
- Network Management
- Electronic Warfare
- Operations Security
- Psychological Operations
- Computer Network Attack

You can imagine the cat-herding that would have to go on to actually “integrate” these 16 functions, most of which are actual jobs performed by actual people with different military (and civilian in some cases) occupations. So, IO is complex and, to some, confusing. In yet more doctrinal obfuscation, sometimes IO and PSYOPS work in isolation, with IO focusing almost exclusively on the electromagnetic spectrum (attacking enemy internet sites, comms towers, and other *physical* means of information flow, while protecting one’s own), while PSYOPS works independently on the “human” persuasion front. In fact, the entirety of the Canadian IO manual that we were working from in 2009 in Kandahar had been written by a group called “J6 Communications” staff in 1998: people who look after purely *physical* information systems. It contains (or did, then) almost no *human* information aspects; its idea of “information,” in other words, did not include people or culture.

Your decision to use IO to frame the Russian-American war of words over Syria is different from how we would use it in a military context, but I think it is nevertheless incredibly useful. Twitter wars could be taken as an explicit example of both sides employing Psychological Operations, which wouldn't be necessarily untrue, but we actually use that capability in a military context at tactical, and occasionally operational, levels. Higher levels engage in Strategic Communications. PSYOPS would merely be seen as a potential enabler to achieve some part or parts of a higher STRATCOM plan.

What you're doing in using the IO discourse to describe this instance of information warfare, it seems to me, is more useful than calling what happened an instance of PSYOPS or of STRATCOM. Even "soft power" seems too broad a concept. Despite that you're not referring to it explicitly as an integration function and are treating it like an actual operation--a doing of something specific--it is acting that way, too, in a way. You're looking at Russia and the U.S. as engaging, through Twitter, in several *aspects* of IO to control an information environment. Twitter can be seen here as an instance of electronic warfare. In trying to persuade users, it uses principles of PSYOPS. It is part deception, part Public Affairs, and more. I can't think of a better concept than IO, used in this geopolitical context, to describe what was going on in cyberspace in your case study."⁶⁸

This excerpt from Belyea is valuable for providing readers a sense of the complex realm of IO beyond the geopolitical focus of this project. It also reveals why viewing the Russian-American Twitter war as an information "operation" is so useful. As I will reveal later, it seems unlikely, in the early months following the chemical weapons incident at any rate, that either the American or Russian governments mapped out complex strategic information warfare plans that they then deployed, monitored, and adjusted as required. Instead, both seemed to *react* to each other on an ongoing basis, at times perhaps completely unwittingly and without design, all the while using several aspects of what the military uses in its own, often much more bounded, domain of information operations. As often seems to happen on Twitter, first came the explosion of information, and then the sorting and figuring out how to turn that explosion into something with purpose. Today, three years after the fact, the IO war between Russia and the U.S. is likely much more coordinated and managed, as both sides have come to realize the potential that Twitter has to persuade target audiences.

⁶⁸ Belyea, Ibid.

1.2.1 Target Audiences

One of the central concepts in marketing, that militaries conducting IO have borrowed for their own influential purposes, is that of a Target Audience (TA). Target audiences can be described as a segment of the overall audience that is best suited to advancing primary goals. In the case of marketing products, a TA would be the segment of the population most likely to purchase the product, while in a military IO context, a TA would be the segment willing to be influenced and capable of advancing geopolitical interests in some manner. TAs are composed of a mixture of specific attributes, such as: age, gender, location, political world view, cultural and ethnic background, household income, and ICT platforms used. A recent U.S. Marine Core publication broadly defines TA as “an individual or group selected for influence”, and can either be a key decision maker or an individual or group that has an influence on a key decision maker.⁶⁹

The core value in the concept of TAs is that of tailored messaging. IO efforts that utilize TAs are more likely to be focused and gain traction, rather than run the risk of being overly broad and not resonate with any particular group. A few potential TAs for Russia and the U.S. during the chemical weapons crisis were:

- Russia – domestic Russian TA: citizens or groups within Russia. *The Putin government would want to convince this TA that the Russian position against UN or American intervention in Syria over the chemical weapons use was the most legitimate position because it would want them to believe that Putin’s foreign policy and involvement in Syria were necessary to protect Russians against foreign aggression.*
- Russia – international TA/Global TA: a broad TA that would have any kind of interest in Russia and Russian geopolitics.
- Russia – international TA/Middle Eastern TA: individuals and groups within the Middle East. *The Putin government would want to convince this TA that the Assad regime was not responsible for the chemical attack and that any military intervention would result in disaster. This TA could be further broken down into Shiite and Sunni TAs. Russia would want to convince the Shiite TA of its continued support and alliance, while it would want to convince Sunni Arabs that terrorist groups supported by their governments were to blame*

⁶⁹ “Information Operations Planner’s Handbook,” Marine Corps Information Operations Center, (June 2012). pp. 13.

for the chemical massacre. Putin would want to drive a wedge between Sunni Arabs and their governments.

- Russia – international TA/American conservative TA: conservative individuals and groups within the U.S. *The Putin government would want to convince this TA of the Russian position and have it believe that international liberalism has failed and that a return to American isolationism is the only way to avoid repeating the mistakes of Iraq.*
- Russia – international TA/American liberal TA: liberal individuals and groups within the U.S. *The Putin government would want to convince this TA of the Russian position in order to deny the Obama Administration as much of its support base as possible.*
- U.S. Administration – domestic U.S. TA: citizens and groups within the U.S. *The Obama Administration would be looking to convince this TA of its position about Syrian aggression, in order to have it believe that military intervention was required to uphold international humanitarian law.*
- U.S. Administration – international TA/Global liberal humanitarian TA: individuals and groups with a special interest in promoting and upholding international humanitarian law and reducing human suffering. *The Obama Administration would look to convince this TA of the American position in order to convince the TA that it would be the best way to limit human suffering in Syria and uphold international law.*
- U.S. Administration – international TA/Syrian opposition: individuals and groups composing the Syrian opposition. *The Obama Administration would be looking to convince this TA of its strong position against chemical weapons use by the Assad regime.*
- U.S. Administration – international TA/States: international states and their government officials. *The Obama Administration would be looking to convince this TA of its willingness to take action against states that use chemical weapons and to uphold the Geneva Conventions.*

These potential TA examples could be targeted independently, or there could exist overlap between them. A message could be crafted with a few TAs in mind, based on the desired effect of the messaging.

1.2.2 Target Audience Analysis

Target Audience Analysis (TAA) is a core aspect of IO, and an important element in making IO efforts (and counter propaganda) more effective. In the previous section possible TAs were identified, but to turn these high-level TAs into usable refined audiences, a complex process of TAA is required. TAA has been described as “aim[ing] to construct a robust profile of the audience and how it can be influenced by an appropriately conceived and deployed message campaign.”⁷⁰ For example, in the list above it can be seen that there are a myriad of possible TAs existing at various levels of granularity. Digging into the cultural, historical and other traits of these TAs would provide a much more detailed view of how to interact with them, and which TAs would be optimal.

The TAA preparation is even more important on Twitter given the short nature of tweets. This is a potential limiting factor for IO efforts, as audiences are often influenced by nuance in text and language. A deep analysis and understanding of a TA is therefore required to make a strong position in 140 characters, cutting down on all but the key opinions and motivations of the TA. Having links in the tweets that bring users to a full text is one method of avoiding this pitfall, but another is the power of the cyber-community. As will be discussed in greater detail, the cyber-communities that emerge on Twitter create the rhetorical power to persuade, and the greatest IO plans understand that TAs respond to the very idea of community.

1.2.3 Putin New York Times TA Example

This section will provide in greater detail an example of Russia selecting a TA to influence. Putin’s *New York Times* opinion editorial during the Syrian chemical weapons crisis shows how Russia openly sought to influence the Obama Administration by manipulating U.S. public opinion.⁷¹ By observing Russian IO, such as this article, we can start to deduce a few key points in their selected TA. One element we can observe is which specific side of the U.S. domestic political spectrum the Russians were targeting. The choice of *New York Times* to publish Putin’s editorial would not have been chosen at random or without thought on the part of Russian IO strategists. Generally, the media site used to market a product or political concept is chosen to reach a specific audience known to frequent the site.

⁷⁰ Steve Tatham. “Using Target Audience Analysis To Aid Strategic Level Decisionmaking” *The Letort Papers*, United States Army War College Press, (August 2015), pp. 23.

⁷¹ Vladimir V. Putin. “A Plea for Caution From Russia: What Putin Has to Say to Americans About Syria”. *New York Times*. Web. Sept. 20, 2014.

Figure 1 below shows the results of a study done by the *Pew Research Center for Journalism and Media* on the distribution of *New York Times* consumers on the U.S. political spectrum.



FIGURE 1 - *New York Times* Audience on the Political Spectrum⁷²

Figure 1 shows that roughly 65% of *New York Times* audiences have political values left-of-centre, with 40% of the audience falling into the “Consistently liberal” segment.⁷³ By choosing *New York Times* as a media channel, the Russians chose to target a left-of-centre political audience, knowing that Obama’s voting base resides there and presumably hoping that a portion of them would not vote for the Democratic Party in the future if they had cause to disapprove of Obama’s decisions regarding Syria and the Middle East more broadly. In addition to the left-leaning public in the U.S., and to the U.S. Administration, other possible TAs for this article could have been the international community at large and domestic Russian audiences as well.

⁷² “Where News Audiences Fit on the Political Spectrum: Consumers of the *New York Times*”. Pew Research Center for Journalism and Media. (Oct. 2014). Web. May 13, 2015.

⁷³ Ibid.

The Russians sought to reinforce war-weariness as a geopolitical leverage to avoid military strikes against Assad's military, and the *New York Times* opinion editorial was written to "speak directly to the American people". In this address to the U.S. public, Putin sought to reinforce the view that U.S. force was "ineffective and pointless", that U.S. efforts in Afghanistan, Libya and Iraq resulted in ongoing insecurity, and that "in the [U.S.], many [drew] an analogy between Iraq and Syria, and ask[ed] why their government would want to repeat recent mistakes."⁷⁴ This effort by the Russians constituted an example of proactive IO, as it sought "to influence...the decision making of adversaries and potential adversaries while protecting [their] own."⁷⁵ By portraying any U.S. military response as another Iraq-like war, the Russians hoped to further disrupt public backing for Obama's decision to intervene in Syria militarily. This line of Russian IO was also evident in the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' statement, "We need to use every day, hour and minute to bring the thought of the harmfulness of the forceful [U.S.] scenario to the public using trustworthy channels".⁷⁶ For the Russians, *New York Times* served as a trustworthy channel through which to amplify their leader's message to the left leaning U.S. TA. This would ultimately serve as a convenient influence on the Obama Administration's available choices of action, via the proxy of U.S. domestic public opinion. This example of the Russians choosing *New York Times* as a medium through which to reach a desired TA demonstrates how IO efforts seek to leverage the existing biases of the TA to promote geopolitical positions.

Reinforcing anti-war sentiment among a leftist TA could impose greater pressure on Obama to *not* act in Syria, with the added benefit of ostensibly enhancing Russian credibility. Putin's attempt to appeal to this TA by *sounding* anti-war and *sounding* liberal through his anti-war, liberal messaging in the *Times*, however, also exposed vulnerabilities to counter-propaganda messaging (which American IO efforts failed to exploit). Putin's anti-liberal domestic and bellicose international policies, such as the decision to annex Ukraine's Crimea or to arrest pro-gay individuals during the Sochi Olympics, for instance, are fundamentally at

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ U.S. Department of Defense. *Joint Publication 3-13 Information Operations*. (November 2012) pp4.

⁷⁶ MFA Statements and Speeches. "Comment by the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov to the mass media, summarising the results of the meeting with foreign ministers of the G20 countries and the UN/LAS Special Envoy to Syria Lakhdar Brahimi, on the sidelines of the summit in St Petersburg, 6 August 2013." *Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Official Site*. 6 Sept. 2013. Web. (Sept. 2014).

odds with any such purported liberal, anti-war posturing.⁷⁷ The *Times*, a year after publishing Putin's editorial, published another article on the Ukrainian crises, this time comparing Putin to Nazi propagandist Joseph Goebbels and describing his government as a kleptocracy.⁷⁸ This two-sided nature to Russia's politics here shows that Putin was savvy enough to opportunistically leverage a TAA of U.S. liberal opinions, counting on a short public attention span. As we will see, Russia employed similar tactics on Twitter as part of its IO efforts regarding Syria.

1.3 Twitter

To understand how IO is conducted on Twitter, it is important to first understand the Twitter platform. Twitter is a social platform that allows users to instantly share short messages globally. Started in 2006 as a small mobile text message broadcast platform, Twitter rose to prominence as it showed promise for capturing and spreading breaking news much more quickly and efficiently than major media outlets. Twitter was the first to break the photos of the 2009 Hudson river plane crash,⁷⁹ and thereafter it quickly became a "first source" of information on major news events of all varieties. The simplicity of Twitter, unlike Facebook and Blogs, made it accessible even in the most impoverished countries.⁸⁰ Twitter during the second quarter of 2015 boasted 304 million users.⁸¹ From politics and social crises to major sporting events and trivial Hollywood gossip--no less than the daily, individual sharing of the domestic and mundane--Twitter has arguably become *the* primary source of real-time information on a variety of topics for hundreds of millions worldwide. As shown in Figure 2, since Twitter's inception tweets have exploded in volume.

⁷⁷ Harvey Fierstein. "Russia's Anti-Gay Crackdown". *New York Times*. (Jul. 2013). Web. May 13, 2015.

⁷⁸ Thomas Friedman. "Czar Putin's Next Moves." *New York Times*. (Jan. 2015). Web, May 13, 2015.

⁷⁹ About Twitter. "Milestones". Twitter. Web, 24 Apr., 2015.

⁸⁰ Dhiraj Murthy, *Twitter: Social Communication in the Twitter Age*, Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2013, pp. 2.

⁸¹ "Twitter: number of monthly active users 2010-2015," Statista. Web, 17 October 2015, <http://www.statista.com/statistics/282087/number-of-monthly-active-twitter-users/>.

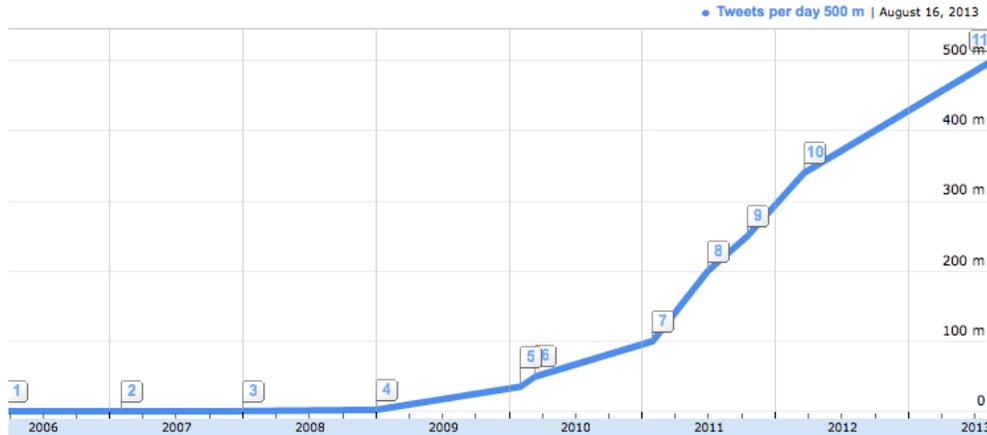


Figure 2 - Number of Tweets per Day Throughout Twitter's History⁸²

There are currently around 500 million tweets per day and around 200 billion tweets per year.⁸³ Public messages broadcast on Twitter are referred to as “tweets” and can contain a maximum of 140 text characters in virtually any language. Users can attach media, such as photographs, videos, and web links within their tweets. Twitter users can assign a topic to their tweets by using hashtags. According to Twitter, “the # symbol, called a hashtag, is used to mark keywords or topics...it was created...as a way to categorize messages”.⁸⁴ The hashtag symbol “#” is placed before a relevant keyword or phrase with no spaces, and it facilitates searching by topic.

The general public can view tweets, even if an individual doesn't have a Twitter account, but individuals without Twitter accounts can only read tweets and cannot interact with the platform in any other way. In addition to broadcasting tweets, Twitter enables users with accounts to interact in a variety of ways. The first is to “reply” to a tweet, which adds a comment to the tweet and can facilitate direct conversations between individuals or groups of users. A second form of interaction is to “retweet” a tweet. By retweeting a tweet, a user can share tweets broadcast by other users with their own followers.

⁸² “Twitter Usage Statistics,” Internet Live Stats. Web, 17 October 2015, <http://www.internetlivestats.com/twitter-statistics/>.

⁸³ Internet Live Stats, Ibid.

⁸⁴ Twitter Help Center. “Using Hashtags on Twitter”. Twitter. Web, 11 Nov. 2014.

When a user goes to their home screen, they will see the tweets of the other users they follow. Having a large number of followers means messages are being broadcast to many users, creating a large audience. A third form of interaction is to “favorite” a tweet, which "lets the author know you liked it".⁸⁵ While Twitter allows for private messaging between users, it is primarily designed to allow for quick broadcasting of messages and media to a large public audience, potentially reaching millions of global users.

The real-time, public broadcast nature of Twitter has made it an ideal influence and persuasion platform for businesses, governments, non-profit organizations, and media outlets. Realizing this, Twitter has introduced Twitter Ads, which aim to help "businesses across the globe use Twitter to generate awareness, connect with customers and drive sales".⁸⁶ They have also introduced products for governments and nonprofit organizations, such as Twitter Alerts, which provide "vital information to the public during fast-moving situations or emergencies".⁸⁷ They also provide featured best practices for journalists, newsrooms and TV networks to cover breaking news using Twitter.⁸⁸ Statistics show that public relations individuals are some of the most active on Twitter; according to recent statistics by the social media monitoring service Sysomos, there are 50 times the amount of public relations professionals following greater than 2,000 people compared to other Twitter users.⁸⁹ Twitter, then, has become a platform of choice for many to reach and gather information from a virtual public audience.

It is this same real-time, public broadcast nature of Twitter that makes it an effective IO tool. Propaganda can be disseminated to target audiences in real-time, often taking advantage of existing business advertising tactics. Through targeted ads, propaganda can be promoted to "a bigger, more targeted group of users so that you can place your best content in front of the audience that matters to you, at the right time".⁹⁰ Twitter can also help develop IO campaigns by "gather[ing] real-time

⁸⁵About Twitter. "The story of a Tweet". Twitter. Web. 11 Nov. 2014.

⁸⁶ Twitter Business. "Twitter Basics". Web, 11 Nov. 2014.

⁸⁷ Twitter Media. "Twitter Alerts". Web, 11 Nov. 2014.

⁸⁸ Twitter Media. "Twitter for News". Web, 11 Nov. 2014

⁸⁹ Sysomos Documents. "Inside Twitter: An In-Depth Look Inside the Twitter World". Sysomos Inc. (April 2014).

⁹⁰ Twitter Business. "Tweet Engagements". Web, 11 Nov. 2014

market intelligence, and [by] build[ing] relationships with customers, partners and influencers".⁹¹ The same capabilities provided by Twitter to businesses and civil organizations can be used for IO purposes.

In general U.S. Twitter users tend to be younger than 30 and lean towards the Democratic Party, which makes Twitter an ideal platform for Russia to target the left leaning U.S. TA.⁹² Twitter audiences, however, are also located around the globe and engage in Twitter commentary based on the topic at hand. Therefore the Twitter audience for a particular topic or event will depend on which communities find the topic engaging. As an example, conservative-leaning Twitter users have shown to be highly engaged on Twitter when criticizing Obama.⁹³ When discussing political topics, Twitter audiences have also shown to have predominantly negative views.⁹⁴ These demographic trends show that Twitter is not only an ideal platform for targeting left-leaning youth with a negative view of a specific topic, but it can also be an ideal platform for targeting other communities, such as political conservatives, when the topic is sufficiently interesting to the community.

Another important element of Twitter is that some Twitter users are more popular and active than others. According to Sysomos, "93.6% of users have less than 100 followers", "5% of Twitter users account for 75% of all activity", and "85.3% of all Twitter users post less than one update/day".⁹⁵ These figures show that a small percentage of Twitter users broadcast the majority of Tweets and maintain a large following. These influential users (that can range from celebrities and news media accounts to political pundits) can be vital in studying the dynamics of IO on Twitter.

Twitter also provides user statistics that help demonstrate how Twitter is used on an aggregate level. According to Twitter, 77% of accounts are outside of the U.S., and there are roughly 288 million monthly active users tweeting 500 million tweets per day.⁹⁶ This would imply that there are over 200 million active

⁹¹ About Twitter. "Twitter for business". Web, 11 Nov. 2014.

⁹² Amy Mitchel, P. Hitlin. "Twitter Reaction to Events Often at Odds with Overall Public Opinion". PEW Research Center, (Mar. 2014). Web, May 19, 2015.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Sysomos, Ibid.

⁹⁶ About Twitter. "Company", Ibid.

Twitter users outside of the U.S. and roughly 65 million within the U.S.. This large data set both inside and outside of the U.S. allows for the market intelligence and targeted advertising mentioned earlier. The real-time information nature of Twitter is also supported by the statistic that 80% of active Twitter users are on a mobile platform.⁹⁷ This mobile element, combined with the global user base, makes Twitter an ideal platform for reporting on events as they unfold, and has made Twitter a first source of information people turn to. For groups conducting or countering online IO campaigns, Twitter is an important platform for being the first to shape perceptions of events.

1.4 Conclusion

As this chapter has demonstrated, the broader geopolitical context of the Syrian civil war is required to understand the main elements of Russian and U.S. Twitter IO efforts. This was followed by an overview of the concept of IO, and how TAs can be used to refine IO efforts. Finally, it provided readers with an overview of the characteristics of the Twitter platform. These three sections are core, required elements to build an understanding of Twitter IO. This chapter sought to help readers understand key geopolitical drivers and how audiences can be grouped into TAs through a wide range of demographic attributes. This framework will prove useful in later chapters as quantitative methods are used to dissect cyber TAs from the dataset. The overview of Twitter's characteristics will also assist in understanding the types and quality of interactions available among cyber-communities. With this introductory material established, we can now turn our attention to methodology.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

Chapter 2: *Interdisciplinary Methodology for Twitter Wars*

This chapter will provide greater insight into the interdisciplinary methods applied in later chapters. First, it will draw quantitative and qualitative methodological insights from research discussing the social and technical nature of Twitter, covering a breadth of issues including community structure in Twitter social networks,⁹⁸ social influence, and Tweet features that lead to greater success.⁹⁹ From this, a social network analysis methodology will be provided, followed by a deeper overview of the Twitter dataset that emerged following the August 21st chemical weapons incident. The features of the dataset important to the analysis of Twitter IO will be discussed, followed by a brief overview of the identification of messaging and narrative efforts. Given the interdisciplinary nature of studying Twitter IO, this chapter is an important introduction to both the quantitative and qualitative methods used. Without the quantitative methods, it would be nearly impossible to approach the roughly four million tweets in the dataset, and without the qualitative methods, it would only be possible to observe general patterns in the data, and much of the important, nuanced IO elements of persuasion would be lost. With the interdisciplinary methodology laid out in this chapter, it will then be possible to start examining how the war of words between Russia and the U.S. played out on Twitter.

2.1 *Social Network Analysis*

Since the first tweet in 2006, Twitter has grown to generate very large amounts of data, currently with roughly 6,000 tweets per second and 200 billion tweets per year.¹⁰⁰ Since Twitter datasets are frequently too large to review manually, automated quantitative models must be used to discover meaningful patterns. Social Network Analysis (SNA) has become a standard tool for quantitatively understanding Twitter discussions. As described by the Pew Research Center, “Conversations on Twitter create networks with identifiable

⁹⁸ See Bibliography for Herdagdelen, Marc Smith, and Andreas Flache.

⁹⁹ Suzan Burton, A. Dadich, A. Soboleva. "Competing Voices: Marketing and Counter-Marketing Alcohol on Twitter". *Journal of Nonprofit & Public Sector Marketing*, Vol.25, pp. 186-209, 2013. p.193.

¹⁰⁰ “Twitter Usage Statistics,” Internet Live Stats. Web, 28 February 2016, <http://www.internetlivestats.com/twitter-statistics/>.

contours as people reply to and mention one another in their tweets”.¹⁰¹ As individuals choose with whom to interact on Twitter, they create connections among each other, which on a large scale creates Twitter social networks. Borrowing from the established mathematical techniques of graph theory designed to model and interpret networks, more influential Twitter users and affinity pools (also referred to as cyber-communities in this thesis) with common properties and interests emerge.¹⁰² SNA serves as an ideal framework to organize Twitter data since it allows us to explore patterns in connections among users. Understanding patterns in these relationships on a social platform like Twitter is critical to making sense of the Twitter activity related to the Syrian chemical weapons incident. Measuring and observing the structure of Twitter networks frames the data in a way that provides context for more in-depth qualitative investigations.

Prior to discussing the social network created by the Twitter reaction to the Syrian chemical weapons incident of August 2013, it will be useful to introduce some basic social network concepts for readers unfamiliar with them. In order to create a Twitter network, there are at minimum two required elements: Twitter users and connections binding the users together. In this study, the connections of interest are retweets, mentions, and replies, which are explained in more detail below. The Twitter data gathered for this thesis can be used to extract these relationships directly from the tweet content. To demonstrate, here are two sample tweets:

1. "RT @freesyria78: #Syria children killed in Ghota, east of #Damascus after Assad #CWMassacre @guardian @whitehouse @nytimes <http://t.co/...>"¹⁰³

Tweeted by @Yasser_Nasri

2. "RT @NSCPress In his #G20 press conference, the President announced that he will address the American people on #Syria from the White House on Tuesday."¹⁰⁴

Tweeted by @WhiteHouse

¹⁰¹ Marc A. Smith, L. Rainie, B. Shneiderman and I. Himelboim. “Mapping Twitter Topic Networks: From Polarized Crowds to Community Clusters”. Pew Research Center (Feb. 2014), pp. 2.

¹⁰² Centrality measures and community detection algorithms will be used.

¹⁰³ Twitter post, August 21, 2013, 4:44 a.m., http://twitter.com/yasser_nasri

¹⁰⁴ Twitter post, September 6, 2013, 11:59 a.m., <http://twitter.com/whitehouse>

In the first tweet, @Yasser_Nasri is retweeting @freesyria78's tweet, and in the second tweet, @WhiteHouse is retweeting @NSCPress's tweet.¹⁰⁵ A second type of connection is a "mention". Mentions indicate that a Twitter user has included the username of another user in their tweet. In this way they are "mentioning" another user, who they deem important to the conversation. The mentioned user will receive a notification that they were mentioned in a tweet. Mentions build more connections between users and are public for all users to view. The first tweet contains multiple mentions in addition to the retweeted user. These mentions are @guardian, @whitehouse, and @nytimes. Since "RT" is not an official feature of Twitter, we would verify that @freesyria78's original tweet exists in the dataset in order to add it to the network. Modelling these two tweets as a social network graph produces Figure 3 below.

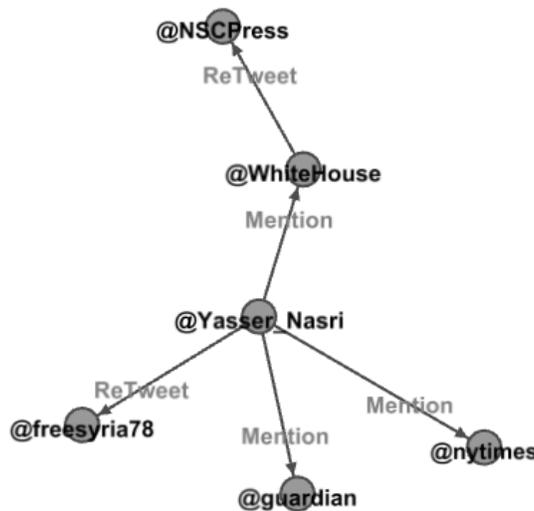


FIGURE 3 - Example Twitter Social Network Graph

As seen in Figure 3, Twitter users are modeled as circular nodes, while the mentions and retweets are modeled as directional arrows, with the author of the tweet on the end without the arrow. Mapping the network created by the two tweets in this way provides a means of quickly visualizing how Twitter users are connected to one another. We can quickly observe patterns in the network, too, such as one revealing that @Yasser_Nasri has a larger number of connections, and thus potentially plays a more central role in the discussion, than the @WhiteHouse.

¹⁰⁵ Help Center. "FAQs About Retweets (RT)". Twitter. Web. 14 Nov. 2014.

Building upon the example in Figure 3, I can introduce an additional SNA concept: *degree*. In a small Twitter network, degree refers to the number of connections a Twitter user has with other users. The user @Yasser_Nasri would have a degree of four (one retweet and three mentions), while @NSCPress would have a degree of one (it is retweeted once). Taking into consideration the arrow's direction breaks the degree into two parts: InDegree and OutDegree. The direction of @Yasser_Nasri's connections show that he has four arrows leading out from his circular node and no arrows pointing back in. In this case, his InDegree would be zero, and his OutDegree would be four. The InDegree for @NSCPress would be one and the OutDegree would be zero.

Degree metrics can provide a simple method for discovering which Twitter users are relatively more or less active in the social network graph. As far as a single quantitative metric is a measure of influence, a higher InDegree would indicate a greater likelihood of popularity and importance. A high InDegree, however, does not necessarily imply a high amount of influence. This metric must be evaluated in light of the qualitative aspects of the mentions, retweets and replies. Automated Twitter accounts retweeting tweets with little qualitative value, spam with popular hashtags, and the influence of the user outside of the Twitter platform are a few aspects that are not captured by the degree models of influence and importance.

There are a myriad of forces that influence, all of which cannot be captured in a single or even multiple quantitative SNA models. Influence occurs both on and off-line, and thus the analysis of influence efforts on Twitter are constrained by this reality. In addition, as will be discussed below, Twitter is not a representative sample of either the U.S. or global population. Some groups or ideologies might have a disproportionate representation on Twitter compared to the overall population. Yet analyzing Twitter is still a valuable undertaking because it can expose social and cultural trends with implications for society at large. Since there is little governance over what people can share on Twitter and with whom they can interact, it is an ideal platform for identifying trends in interest. Gaining attention on Twitter is an extremely competitive process. Twitter has users world wide covering almost any topic, making it a saturated platform. So despite InDegree's limits in explaining influence and importance, if a Twitter user has a high volume of retweets, mentions or replies (beyond what can be explained by random activity), chances are these interactions are occurring because people value what the Twitter user has to say. Thus, I use these SNA quantitative methods as a proxy for qualitative social behaviours.

A final SNA concept used in this thesis involves *cyber-community detection*. Community detection in the Twitter social network graph refers to the discovery of groups of Twitter users with high concentrations of connections

among each other and lower concentrations of connections with other users.¹⁰⁶ To provide a simple example, of how it works, add two additional tweets to Figure 3:

3. "#Syria @NYTimes @Guardian @BBCNews regime forces filmed firing a missile similar to those used on 21/08/13... <http://fb.me/6rgSGbXnr>"¹⁰⁷

Tweeted by @freesyria78

4. "@whitehouse: RT @NSCPress: Earlier today, POTUS spoke with @PMHarper about the situation in #Syria: (cont) <http://tl.gd/mivko7>"¹⁰⁸

Tweeted by @mgrossi1

By adding these two tweets, we have introduced new Twitter users into our simple graph (@BBCNews and @PMHarper), and multiple new connections among users. Tweet number three above has three mentions (@NYTimes, @Guardian, and @BBCNews). Tweet number four starts with "@whitehouse", which Twitter automatically interprets as a reply.¹⁰⁹ This is followed by one informal retweet (by including "RT") to @NSCPress, and one mention of @PMHarper. The resulting graph is shown in Figure 4 with colour coding indicating two Twitter network communities:

¹⁰⁶ Santo Fortunato. "Community detection in graphs". *Physics Reports*, Volume 486, Issue 3-5, (2010) p. 75-174, pp2.

¹⁰⁷ Twitter post, August 28, 2013, 7:04 p.m., <http://twitter.com/freesyria78>

¹⁰⁸ Twitter post, August 27, 2013, 1:48 p.m., <http://twitter.com/mgrossi1>

¹⁰⁹ Ev Williams. "How @replies work on Twitter (and how they might)". Twitter Blog, 12 May 2008.

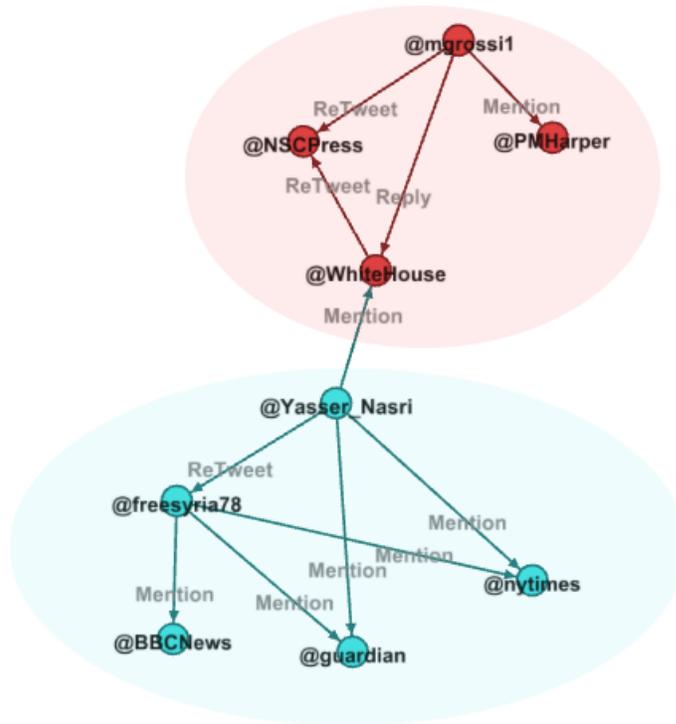


FIGURE 4 - Example Twitter network graph with colour-coded communities

Figure 4 provides us with a simplified illustration of how community detection algorithms work. The first important observation to make of Figure 4, compared to Figure 3, is that there are more connections and Twitter users. The second is that two groups emerge that mainly interact only with each other: the connection between @Yasser_Nasri and @WhiteHouse is the only connection between these two colour-coded groups. The blue group has six internal connections and the red group has four.

In the large Twitter dataset used in this study, the social network graph is too large and complex to manually map this kind of community structure. Therefore, to visualize and explore interactions within the dataset, the open source

network analysis and visualization software tool Gephi was used.¹¹⁰ Gephi includes a community detection algorithm that can be run on any network, and it implements the Louvain method for discovering communities in large networks, making it easy to colour code and visually differentiate between Twitter cyber-communities.¹¹¹ This method works by finding groups with dense internal connections, similar to that described in Figure 4 above. Gephi thus provides an easy to use graphical user interface for running complex SNA algorithms. The process of using Gephi for community detection is as simple as loading the data using the data importer. Once the algorithm completes, every Twitter user in the social network is placed into a numbered community. In addition to the community detection algorithm, Gephi also has a user interface for calculating the InDegree of each Twitter user in the social network. Similar to running the community detection algorithm, once the data is loaded, one simply has to run the degree calculation:

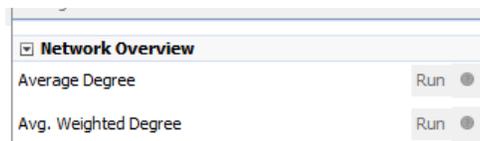


Figure 5 - Run Degree Metrics

As will be seen, the combination of community detection and the degree metric frame the data set in a way that serves as a starting point for facilitating further analysis. The community detection dissects the dataset, while the InDegree metric combined with word and hashtag counts help identify key affinity pools and Twitter users within them. Before discussing final steps in analytical method, it is important to discuss the Twitter dataset used in this thesis.

2.2 Dataset

To analyze competing U.S. and Russian Twitter campaigns following the Syrian chemical weapons incident, a Twitter dataset was obtained based on relevant hashtags and a specific date range. As described in the Twitter overview below, hashtags are used to assign topics to a tweet, and for Syrian topics, the hashtags

¹¹⁰ Gephi. “The Open Graph Viz Platform”. Web, 14 Nov. 2014. Other software tools capable of running the Louvain method for community detection would either require software development or require purchasing very expensive licenses for enterprise software. Gephi is an ideal tool for social scientists with mixed backgrounds in programming.

¹¹¹ See “Louvain method: Finding communities in large networks” Google groups. Web, 14 Nov. 2014, and “Modularity”. Gephi Wiki. Web, Nov. 2014.

"#Syria" and "#Сирия" are commonly used to tag tweets.¹¹² The use of chemical weapons on August 21, 2013 was a pivotal moment in the civil war, and a pivotal moment for Western governments, who for some time had claimed that the Assad regime was using chemical weapons.

As Figure 6 demonstrates, August 21st coincided with the beginning of a trending discussion about Syria. Using the Sysomos commercial social media monitoring tool, a dataset of 4,308,573 tweets containing the hashtags "#Syria" and "#Сирия", for the date range August 21st - September 18th 2014.

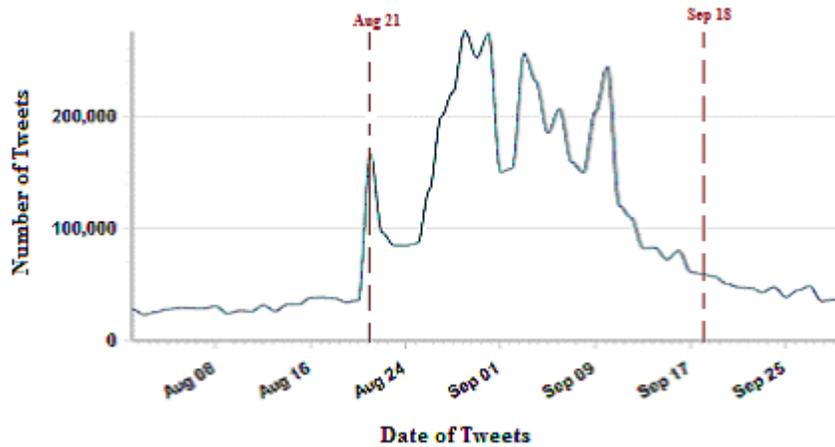


FIGURE 6 - Number of Tweets with #Syria or #Сирия August and September 2013¹¹³

¹¹² Alternate forms of the keywords "#Syria" and "#Сирия" were not used, such as "Syrian", "Сирии" or "сирии" due to the difficulty in obtaining the dataset, and also due to the very large dataset created by the two initial keywords.

¹¹³ "Twitter Popularity Search." Sysomos Media Analysis Platform (MAP). Sysomos Inc. Web. Jan 2014.

The date range was chosen based on the observed surge in discussion in Figure 6, and it is limited due to the practical constraints of obtaining large datasets.¹¹⁴ August 21st was chosen as a start-point as it contained the first tweets referring to the chemical weapons attack on that day. September 18th was chosen as an end-point because the surge in discussion returned roughly to the same levels as it was prior to August 21st. Conveniently, the four-week time range allows the dataset to be sliced into weekly chunks for analysis. Moreover, the American, Russian, and Syrian parties had reached an agreement by this point on how to move forward diplomatically.¹¹⁵

Tweets obtained from the Sysomos media monitoring tool are collated into data fields of interest:

TABLE 1 - Twitter data fields of interest in Sysomos dataset^{116 117}

	Data Field	Description
1	Content	This field contains the actual tweet content.
2	Date and Time	This field contains the date and time in EST of when the tweet was created.
3	AuthorId	This field has the screen name of the Twitter user who authored the tweet.
4	Author Name	A user-defined name, typically capped at 20 characters.
5	Bio	A user-defined description of their account.

¹¹⁴ Obtaining historical Twitter datasets can be very expensive and time consuming. Obtaining dataset required downloading and merging hundreds of downloads manually. While it would have been ideal to analyze data prior to the chemical weapons incident to look for change in opinions following the incident, the time required to obtain the data for a baseline was simply not feasible.

¹¹⁵ Gearan, Anne, and Scott Wilson. "U.S., Russia Reach Agreement on Seizure of Syrian Chemical Weapons Arsenal." *Middle East*. The Washington Post, 14 Sept. 2013. Web. 28 Feb. 2016.

¹¹⁶ Twitter Developers Documentation Overview. "Users". Twitter. Web, 16 Nov. 2014

¹¹⁷ "Country Codes". ISO. Web, 16 Nov. 2014

6	Location	A user-defined location. It is free text, so may not be a location.
7	AuthorUrl	"A URL provided by the user in association with their profile"
8	Language	"The BCP 47 code for the user's self-declared...language."
9	Country	A user-declared county for the account, based on ISO codes.



FIGURE 7 - Sysomos datafields in Table 1 as seen on Twitter.com/whitehouse¹¹⁸

Figure 7 shows the location of data fields as seen on a Twitter user's homepage: in this case @WhiteHouse. It is worth noting that the "location", "language", and "country" fields are self-declared by the Twitter user and therefore do not necessarily reflect the actual location or language of the individual creating the account. For example, in the dataset, the user @normalissa has claimed her location to be the "moon". The country and language fields can be left blank or chosen from a list of pre-determined countries and languages. The analytical method proposed in this thesis does not rely on the accuracy of these fields. Regardless, the majority of Twitter users would not have a reason to fabricate these fields, as it does not reveal highly personal information, and since a desire for credibility would also increase chances of users providing reliable information. The likelihood of accuracy is also buoyed by the fact that users can leave these fields blank if they do not wish to provide personal information. While these fields cannot be seen as perfectly accurate on a single user basis, on the scale of the whole

¹¹⁸ The White House "@WhiteHouse". Twitter. Web, 16 Nov. 2014

dataset, the fields provide simple insights into language and location trends, as seen in Figures 8 and 9. To analyze individual users conducting IO, either verification of the user's stated location for public known figures, or in-depth investigation is required if possible.

Using these data fields, it was possible to generate core statistics on the dataset. First, from the roughly four million tweets available, there were 869,707 users that authored a tweet. These tweets contained 41 different languages in the language field, and 1.9 percent of users left the language field blank when signing up for the service. As shown in Figure 8 below, 82.6 percent of all the users in the data set identified as English speakers; Arabic users were the next most numerous (despite my not using Arabic hashtags to collect the data). The high level of Arabic users is likely due to the Syrian topic and because many Arabic language users tagged their tweets with English hashtags, such as "#Syria". Russian language users only comprised 0.6 percent of the dataset.

The smaller percentage of Russian tweets can be expected, as according to Alexa.com statistics, Twitter is merely the 16th most visited site in Russia; comparatively, the Russian social networking site Vk.com ranks as the second most popular site in Russia.¹¹⁹ The very low percentage of Russian versus English users identified implies that Russian language influence on Twitter is minimal. For Russian users to obtain meaningful influence on Twitter, they would have to tweet in English in order to reach the majority English identified users. So, in order to appeal to and try to influence English language users, most Russian politicians and news agencies maintain English language Twitter accounts in addition to Russian language accounts.

¹¹⁹ "Top Sites in Russia". Alexa.com. Web, 28 Sept. 2014.

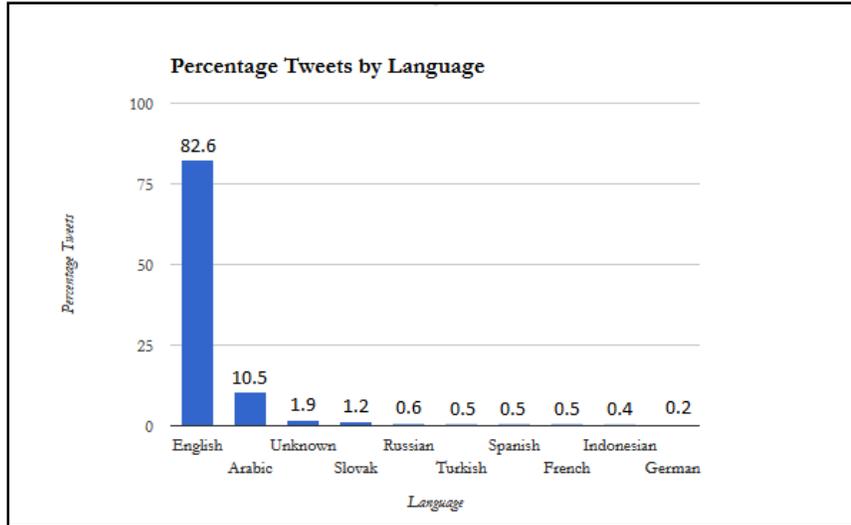


FIGURE 8 - Top Ten Languages by Volume

Aggregating the self-declared country field, 53 percent of users did not provide a country. Of those that did, the U.S. represented the largest majority (21.5 percent), followed by Great Britain (5.6 percent). Combining the undeclared users with those claiming to be in the U.S. and Britain constitutes 81.1 percent of the users. Syria is the next largest group at 2.9 percent. Although the majority of users did not self-declare, the top 10 countries roughly correlate to the top ten languages in Figure 8. The graphs in Figure 8 and Figure 9 show that the dataset is dominated by English and Arabic speaking users claiming to live in the U.S., Britain, and Syria.

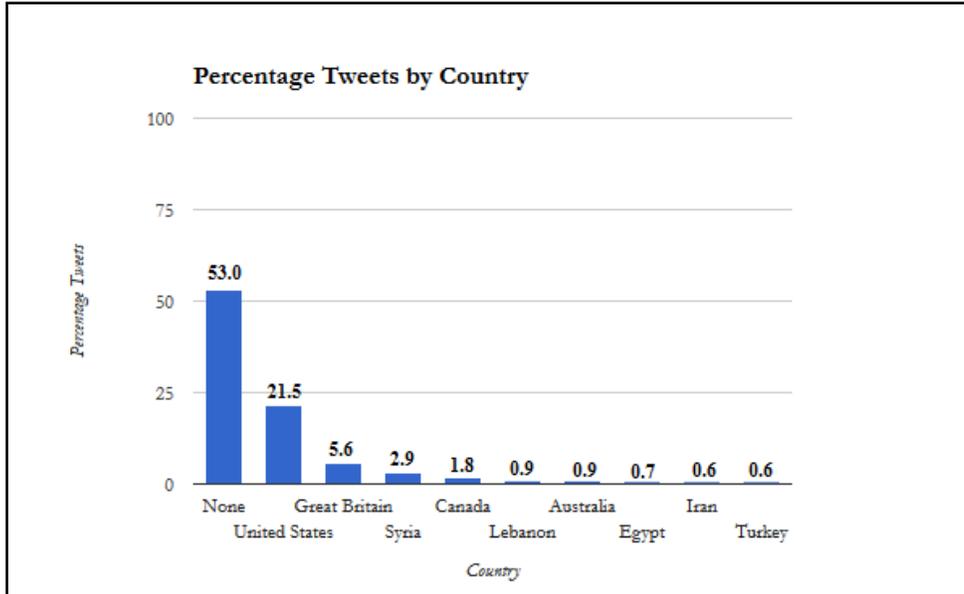


FIGURE 9 - Percentage Tweets by Country

The English and U.S. bias in the dataset is beneficial to this study in that it facilitates the analysis of U.S. reactions on Twitter. Since there is a large volume of English and U.S.-based tweets, the data will naturally represent a large variety of U.S. views and users. While the proportions of U.S. political views and ideologies on Twitter do not match the proportions in the full U.S. population, most political views will likely have some sort of representation on Twitter. This will assist the community detection algorithm in organizing tweets into meaningful affinity pools. If the number of tweets were very small, there would be a greater chance that the community detection algorithm would not pick up on meaningful patterns. This would also apply to the InDegree metric. On the other hand, the lack of Russian language data means that for this dataset attempting to study the reaction of Russian Twitter users to IO would not produce meaningful results. As a result of the nature of the dataset that emerged from the Twitter discussion regarding the Syrian chemical weapons incident, this thesis will focus on the English Twitter reaction.

2.3 Messaging and Narrative Identification

The final step in the combined qualitative, quantitative analytical method is to identify important messaging types and narratives within affinity pools using a mixture of wording analysis and by situating tweets within the political or socio-cultural context of the affinity pool. Identifying affinity pools of possible interest and their key Twitter users provides a starting point for discovering common

characteristics held within each affinity pool. These common characteristics can be a political ideology, identity or a common worldview. The analysis of both common affinity pool characteristics and tweet wording provides a foundation for understanding messages and narratives intended to influence.

One limitation of the methodology described in this chapter is that it does not look to measure influence success in terms of change before and after the August 21st chemical weapons incident. Due to the constraints described above in obtaining a baseline data set that includes data prior to the chemical weapons incident, behaviour-based Measures Of Effectiveness (MOE)¹²⁰ are difficult to implement. This analytical method would have involved looking for TA behaviours of interest before and after an IO campaign started in order to measure audience change. Since this thesis only has data after the chemical weapons were used on August 21st, it is not possible to compare Twitter behaviours before and after the incident. This makes it very difficult to observe changes in the Twitter audience as a result of IO messaging efforts with any degree of certainty. While the limited data puts bounds on the analysis, it is still possible to observe how IO is employed on Twitter and its short-term dynamics.

2.3.1 Wording Analysis

Army manuals provide a structured approach to identifying messaging efforts based on wording analysis that can be applied quickly during real-time analysis. The limited size of tweets forces Twitter users to be direct with their arguments, making it easier to identify key points through wording. FM 3-05.301 provides a basic template for presenting and analyzing main arguments and supporting factual evidence. This manual generalizes IO main arguments as follows: “Engaging in X (desired behaviour) will result in Y (desirable outcomes for the TA)”.¹²¹ According to this manual, an IO effort should have a main central argument with supporting arguments that “provide factual evidence, address causes and effects, and exploit vulnerabilities”.¹²² This format organizes the IO effort around a particular goal and where possible, an *observable* change in behaviour. As will be seen in the qualitative analysis below, arguments in this format are quickly and easily identified. Getting a quick idea of the adversary’s main arguments can be a catalyst for a faster response, which can be important to shaping the discussion on

¹²⁰ Tatham, Ibid. pp. 42-45.

¹²¹ Headquarters. *Psychological Operations Process Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures*. Department of the Army, *Field Manual No. FM 3-05.301* (Aug. 2007), pp. 2-24.

¹²² FM 3-05.301, pp. 2-25.

real-time media like Twitter, and not falling into a reactionary mode and thus losing the initiative.

The manual also introduces the wording concepts of “Appeals” and “Tactics” that can be used to easily make reference to deep social and cultural norms and beliefs. The appeals and tactics are “specific methods used to present information to the TA”¹²³ to attain the influence and persuasion objective(s), and include appeals such as: “legitimacy by tradition”, where previous group or societal norms are invoked; “legitimacy by legal authority”, where a recognized authority supports the main argument; “inevitability” and the “emotional fear of harm”, where the author would “rely on the emotion of fear, particularly fear of death, injury, or some other type of harm”; and the “bandwagon” appeal, which “play[s] upon the TA’s need to belong”.¹²⁴ Examples of *tactics* are: the “moral appeal”, which seeks to use the moral beliefs of a TA to encourage or urge compliance; “rewards and punishments”, which seeks compliance with the formulation, “if you do X you will get Y” or “if you do not do X, Y will happen to you”¹²⁵; “Expertise”, where a purported expert outlines the likely outcome of certain TA actions; and .¹²⁶ According to FM 3-05.301, appeals generally set the tone of the argument in order to keep the reader interested, while tactics are common argument types that can be used across TAs.¹²⁷ The interdisciplinary method will take advantage of these easy to use appeals and tactics to identify the ways that IO arguments are broadcast in tweets.

Appeals and tactics are not the only way of analyzing tweet wording. For example, Twitter is a highly competitive medium and, as a result, the *creative* quality of tweets can make a difference in user engagement. Twitter users not only want to be informed, but they also want to be entertained. While there is no simple analytical template or tool to measure tweet creativity, Twitter itself has provided suggestions, such as aiming for an approachable and informal style taking advantage of “wit” and “humor”, as “followers are more likely to respond to Tweets that are funny, newsworthy, and inspiring”.¹²⁸ These are very subjective

¹²³ Ibid. pp. 2-26 – 2-28.

¹²⁴ Ibid. pp. 2-25 – 2-26.

¹²⁵ Ibid. pp. 2-28.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid. pp. 2-25 – 2-26.

¹²⁸ Twitter. “Create your Twitter content strategy,” *Twitter Basics*. Web, 28 Oct. 2015.

factors to analyze, but they must be kept in mind when qualitatively analyzing tweet content.

2.3.2 Cyber-Communities as the Message

Twitter engagement goes beyond the influence of wording, however, with social-psychological factors coming to bear on Twitter interactions. As noted by Nicole Ames, professor of social media marketing at Harvard University, fresh, compelling content isn't enough to guarantee a following. The content must also actually "address a customer's want or need".¹²⁹ While initial reactions to important political events can often be based on a lack of initial information, one basic set of wants and needs that emerges during a geopolitical crisis is the need to know more information and how to make sense of it (i.e. interpret, contextualize, and process it as it gets presented in real time). This is especially true for horrendous incidents like the August 21st chemical massacre in Syria.

People make sense of information (and tweets) through the powerful impulse to conform to one's environment based on social pressure and an individual's upbringing. Generally, as explained by Ravi Gupta and Hugh Brooks, "the society a person inhabits, whether it be a country or a small group, strongly influences how that person thinks and acts."¹³⁰ This implies that for tweet content to be optimal for IO purposes, it should not only be creative and grab attention through words, but it should also address the TA's desire or need to understand events within the bounds of social and cultural norms and practices. Understanding the TA is key for this kind of analysis of IO efforts, as understanding the TA will facilitate monitoring communication tailored to it.

A society, or nation, can be composed of individuals with many world views, and Gupta and Brooks bring up the concept of fringe "non-conformists" that adopt new ways of viewing the world, which in turn influences those around them.¹³¹ According to these authors, influence efforts should take advantage of the social influence exerted by fringe groups. Fringe groups can provide a foundation for introducing new political or geopolitical viewpoints into a hostile social environment. In Syria, the data suggests both Russia and the U.S. support fringe groups in order to further their geopolitical agendas; the Russians support anti-

¹²⁹ Nicole Ames. "Successful Social Media Marketers Focus on Customer Needs." *The Language of Business Blog*, Harvard Division of Continuing Education. Web, 28 October 2015.

¹³⁰ Gupta, Ibid. pp. 305.

¹³¹ Ibid.

government activists in the U.S. (and West in general), such as Edward Snowden or WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange (who was given a full show on the *Russia Today* news service¹³²), while the U.S. supports what they deem (or hope, perhaps) to be Syrian moderate opposition in their confrontation with the Assad regime.

On Twitter, the natural desire to understand shocking events (and to do so through one's world view), the existence of like-minded TAs or cyber-communities (as discovered through social network analysis), and the IO goal of promoting one's geopolitical position come together in a unique way. As described by Marshall McLuhan "the medium is the message" because it is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action."¹³³ As shown on Twitter, tweets, replies, mentions and retweets shape human association and action into networks or communities of interaction. On Twitter, to follow in the spirit of McLuhan, "the message" transcends the wording of arguments – the message is the cyber-community itself. Influence will predominantly occur through the cyber-community, through a form of social pressure. On Twitter, the perception of truth does not often get created through fact checking and scientific study, but through a high volume of users believing the same thing (which in turn influences others to believe the same thing). In this sense, Twitter, as a platform, facilitates a form of mob legitimacy. With the network or cyber-community as the message, Twitter provides an ideal way to promote new social paradigms through fringe groups. If IO efforts can successfully build a cyber-community and following in a competitive (and even hostile) cultural environment, then it may be possible to influence other cyber-communities and users through social momentum. As will be shown in the following chapters, this is precisely what Russia has done on Twitter, and why Russia's IO efforts can be described as more effective than the U.S..

2.4 Methodology Conclusion

This chapter has provided the interdisciplinary methods that will be applied in the quantitative and qualitative chapters below. It will use social network analysis to discover cyber-communities and important nodes within the cyber-communities. With the social network analysis completed, it will be possible to delve into the tweet content qualitatively and to draw further conclusions about the efficacy of IO efforts of the U.S. and Russia on Twitter. With the interdisciplinary methodology laid out, it is now possible to assess the dominant quantitative patterns in the dataset.

¹³² "The Julian Assange Show." *Russia Today*. Web, 28 October 2015.

¹³³ McLuhan, Marshall. "Chapter 1: The Medium is the Message." *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964, pp. 2.

Chapter 3: *Quantitative Analysis*

This chapter will build a social network analysis of the tweets and, in the process, provide two important pieces of contextual information. The first, through InDegree scores, will be to identify which users have the potential to be influential in the social network: and thus important to the qualitative analysis in Chapter 3. The second vital piece of information will be the discovery of cyber-communities: affinity pools of Twitter users with similar characteristics. These cyber-communities will serve as virtual TAs and will provide the crucial frame of reference for understanding how effective Russian and U.S. IO efforts on Twitter were.

3.1 SNA – Network Dataset

Using the methods described in 1.1, a Twitter social network was created by extracting the retweets, mentions and replies from the roughly four million tweets in the dataset. Of the roughly four million tweets, 2,762,808 contained a retweet, mention, or reply. The resulting network graph had 738,729 users who authored a tweet that included a retweet, mention, or reply, or who were retweeted, mentioned, or replied to by another user. The 165,987 users that were not involved in the retweets, mentions, or replies but simply tweeted using the Syrian hashtags ("#Syria" and "#Сирия") were not included in the social network graph, since they did not directly interact with other Twitter users. Since they did not interact with other users, the SNA methods used in this thesis cannot place them into a larger cyber-community. They would simply each be placed into a cyber-community of one, adding no value to the SNA-based quantitative analysis.

3.2 SNA – InDegree Scores

Gephi generated InDegree and OutDegree scores for all users in the graph. Table 2 below InDegree scores for several noteworthy U.S. and Russian Twitter accounts. In addition to “official” U.S. and Russian accounts, the mainstream Russian news service with the highest InDegree (@RT_com) and the mainstream U.S. news service with the highest InDegree (@CNN) are provided in Table 2. The Syrian government does not maintain visible Twitter accounts, although the Syrian revolution network maintains an account @RevolutionSyria:

TABLE 2 - Noteworthy U.S., Russian, and Syrian users ordered by InDegree

Affiliation	User	InDegree	User Description
U.S.	@BarackObama	75,077	Account run by Obama's Organization for Action, includes Obama's personal tweets
Russia	@RT.com	38,260	<i>Russia Today</i> English Twitter news account
U.S.	@WhiteHouse	24,968	The Official White House Twitter Account, may include Obama's personal tweets
Syria	@RevolutionSyria	15,659	The official Twitter account for the Syrian Revolution Network
U.S.	@CNN	15,026	CNN news network Twitter account
U.S.	@StateDept	14,973	U.S. State Department official Twitter account
U.S.	@FoxNews	12,439	Fox News network Twitter account
U.S.	@JohnKerry	9,358	Account of U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry
Syria	@ProSyriana	1,929	Popular, unofficial pro-Assad Twitter account
Russia	@mfa_russia	869	Official Twitter account of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Russia	@PutinRF_Eng	597	Official English Twitter account for Vladimir Putin, includes Putin's personal tweets
Russia	@KremlinRussia_E	305	Official Kremlin news Twitter account in English
Russia	@PutinRF	178	Official Russian Twitter account for Vladimir Putin, includes Putin's personal tweets
Russia	@KremlinRussia	34	Official Kremlin news Twitter account in Russian
Russia	@MedvedevRussiaE	18	Official English Twitter account for Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev
Russia	@MedvedevRussia	5	Official Russian Twitter account for Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev

Table 2 reveals a drastic difference in the InDegree counts observed for the U.S. government accounts and the Russian government accounts. For example, the Russian language Twitter account for Russian Prime Minister @MedvedevRussia was only mentioned, retweeted or replied to five times out of roughly four million tweets. The U.S. Secretary of State @JohnKerry Twitter account, on the other hand, was mentioned, retweeted or replied to over nine thousand times. Given that the dataset is predominantly English with a large U.S. segment, as shown in Figures 8 and 9, the popularity of U.S. accounts is to be expected. Unlike the Russian government accounts, which had very low InDegree scores, the Russian mainstream English language news service @RT_com scored one of the largest InDegree ranks for the whole dataset, with over 38 thousand mentions, retweets or replies; this was more than double that of @CNN.

The relevance and implications of these scores is that they provide a model for measuring sociological power in social structures, including that of the Twitter platform. According to common social network analysis approaches to studying power, a user with a high InDegree can be said “to be prominent, or to have high prestige”, and users with large numbers of connections that can make many aware of their views are said to be influential.¹³⁴ Table 2 shows that for an English Twitter demographic, U.S. officials, U.S. mainstream media, Russian English-language mainstream media, and the Syrian opposition have high prestige, are prominent, and can make many aware of their views. Russian officials on the other hand maintain a low level of direct influence in this Twitter network (although it can be argued they maintain greater influence indirectly through *RT*, providing a platform to *appear* to be removed from Russian government bias and thus somehow more objective). As Table 2 shows, with the InDegree metric we can observe patterns that indicate potential power to influence on Twitter. The extended implications of these patterns will be fully explored in the qualitative analysis chapter that follows.

As the next section will discuss, however, it is important to note that this influence, prestige and potential is not evenly distributed among all Twitter users. As was shown in Figure 4, Twitter users can self-organize into informal cyber-community structures with common interests and attributes through mentions, retweets and replies. This means that we can discover cyber-communities where prestigious users will have greater influence, and cyber-communities where they will have lower influence. This can be useful for quantitatively framing targeted IO campaigns in Twitter networks.

¹³⁴ Robert Hanneman, Mark Riddle. “Centrality and Power: Degree centrality” in Introduction to social network analysis methods. University of California, Riverside. 2005

3.3 Cyber-Community Structure & Term Counts

To enable the discovery of previously "unknown...cyber-communities in social networks"¹³⁵, the Twitter social network can be divided into cyber-communities using the methods described above. Again, Gephi was used for the community detection process and to colour code the Twitter social network graph in Figure 10 below. The resulting network contains 14,232 identifiable cyber-communities, although the vast majority of the communities are very small. Out of the 14,232 cyber-communities, the smallest 14,214 cyber-communities only constitute 9.82% of the total social network. The largest 18 cyber-communities compose 90.18% of the graph. The notable U.S., Russian and Syrian Twitter users in Table 2 were found to be members of seven cyber-communities. These cyber-communities are detailed below in Table 3, including columns for a sample of the most frequent languages, hashtags, words occurring in tweet text, and words occurring in the user biography field (see Table 1 for field details). Only seven cyber-communities were included in Table 3 as the other large communities were not directly relevant to this study (such as a British cyber-community, and a cyber-community containing an assortment of news services). The seven cyber-communities in Table 3 were directly relevant to the U.S.-Russian IO campaigns.

Table 3 - Cyber-Communities with Notable U.S. and Russian Twitter Users as Members¹³⁶

Rank by Size and colour in Figure 10	Languages	Most Frequent Hashtags	Most Frequent Tweet Words	Most Frequent Biography Words
1 (Red)	en: 664995 xx: 9734 fr: 1170 id: 1107	#syria: 683793 #tcot: 85790 #benghazi: 53753 #obama: 35385	obama: 115591 @barackobama: 83578 war: 78719 us: 54587	conservative: 110041 love: 57398 god: 48496 christian: 44096

¹³⁵ Vincent D. Blondel, J.L. Guillaume, R. Lambiotte, E. Lefebvre. "Fast unfolding of communities in large networks". *Journal of Statistical Mechanics: Theory and Experiment*, Issue 10, pp. 10008 (Oct. 2008).

¹³⁶ The language "xx" represents users that did not specify their language in their Twitter biography.

Rank by Size and colour in Figure 10	Languages	Most Frequent Hashtags	Most Frequent Tweet Words	Most Frequent Biography Words
	de: 983 es: 960 sk: 536 nl: 226 fi: 176 it: 164 ar: 133 da: 102 pl: 81 vi: 78 no: 74 sv: 73 ms: 42 tr: 42 pt: 40 hi: 32	#p2: 17892 #impeach: 15562 #teaparty: 10528 #tlot: 10070 #pjnet: 10049 #impeachobama: 9457 #congress: 9127 #tgd: 8859 #egypt: 8607 #uniteblue: 7779 #gop: 7753 #nsa: 7631 #war: 7486 #justiceforbenghazi: 7217 #rednationrising: 6412 #ccot: 6406	military: 44190 qaeda: 42831 congress: 39050 vote: 37010 please: 36322 attack: 31257 action: 30828 president: 30581 dear: 30477 sec: 28682 aid: 26698 rebel: 25054 article: 24963 strike: 24095 clause: 23786 syria: 23727	life: 38694 country: 35373 american: 34403 proud: 30165 pro: 29062 fan: 27369 constitution: 26745 wife: 25891 america: 25159 freedom: 24824 family: 24584 political: 24420 politics: 23400 mom: 23245 news: 23215 patriot: 22589
	Notable Twitter users: @BarackObama, @FoxNews, @JohnKerry, @KremlinRussia_E, @MedvedevRussiaE			
2 (Purple)	en: 423698 xx: 6955 ar: 1959 fr: 1814 es: 1584 de: 1296 sk: 461	#syria: 444558 #obama: 23294 #us: 17794 #nowarwithsyria: 17294 #handsoffsyria: 17238 #assad: 13142 #iraq: 12095	war: 65811 us: 63060 attack: 43511 chemical: 38070 @rt_com: 30614 weapons: 28416 military: 25925	love: 20077 world: 18341 anti: 18132 politics: 15760 human: 14928 us: 14240 life: 14105

Rank by Size and colour in Figure 10	Languages	Most Frequent Hashtags	Most Frequent Tweet Words	Most Frequent Biography Words
	it: 461 id: 445 ms: 430 tr: 364 nl: 322 ja: 311 el: 172 ru: 171 da: 169 et: 142 fi: 129 sv: 119 ko: 73	#russia: 9528 #usa: 9433 #israel: 8365 #fsa: 8106 #kerry: 7842 #opsyria: 6911 #war: 6415 #un: 6093 #iran: 6043 #uk: 5430 #damascus: 5424 #alqaeda: 4887 #egypt: 4737	obama: 25169 syria: 20945 rebels: 18794 syrian: 17789 strike: 15873 intervention: 15255 assad: 14997 uk: 13147 un: 12530 gas: 11490 vote: 11405 world: 11332 used: 11310	truth: 13988 rights: 12914 justice: 11680 news: 11050 like: 10894 activist: 10852 music: 10168 social: 10023 political: 10012 peace: 9954 free: 9786 freedom: 9354 time: 8514
	Notable Twitter users: @RT_com, @KremlinRussia, @WikiLeaks, @OccupyWallst, @PressTV, @ProSyriana			
3 (Green)	en: 420540 ar: 5425 fr: 4600 xx: 4287 de: 1503 es: 933 sk: 786 id: 688	#syria: 445252 #assad: 31119 #damascus: 17731 #us: 12855 #iran: 12481 #obama: 11526 #russia: 10726 #act2endassadswar: 8575	chemical: 43127 assad: 40399 us: 37739 attack: 32386 weapons: 29723 war: 22280 regime: 22087 syrian: 20238	news: 32390 syria: 29358 world: 25266 human: 19556 rights: 19287 politics: 18569 endorsement: 18065 la: 17041

Rank by Size and colour in Figure 10	Languages	Most Frequent Hashtags	Most Frequent Tweet Words	Most Frequent Biography Words
	tr: 592 it: 522 nl: 461 ja: 370 ms: 214 no: 180 pl: 172 da: 147 sv: 142 fi: 115 cs: 70 ru: 55	#egypt: 8536 #un: 8151 #cw: 7794 #cwmassacre: 7508 #turkey: 6270 #usa: 6060 #lebanon: 5868 #aleppo: 5385 #fsa: 5020 #israel: 4951 #iraq: 4951 #congress: 4147	obama: 18843 military: 17666 syria: 15657 children: 15429 strike: 15424 un: 14575 today: 14562 rebels: 13035 use: 12910 world: 12696 @revolutionsyria: 12171 intervention: 11933	east: 16851 international: 16439 middle: 16238 free: 16025 views: 15862 english: 15744 journalist: 13874 writer: 13809 freedom: 13524 endorsements: 12919 syrian: 12708 rts: 12228
	Notable Twitter users: @AJArabic, @alarabiya, @CNNArabic, @RevolutionSyria, @PutinRF Eng			
4 (light blue)	en: 57245 no: 1129 es: 729 xx: 561 it: 470 ar: 276 fr: 149 ca: 115 id: 100	#syria: 61653 #childrenofsyria: 9966 #refugees: 1814 #iraq: 1649 #lebanon: 1437 #egypt: 1387 #jordan: 1192 #g20: 1151 #palestine: 1010	refugees: 10921 million: 10004 children: 8798 @refugees: 8322 help: 6738 @unicef: 6728 violence: 5264 crisis: 4067 conflict: 3984	love: 4097 world: 3653 views: 2540 life: 2507 international: 2241 music: 2228 social: 1922 lover: 1779 rights: 1731

Rank by Size and colour in Figure 10	Languages	Most Frequent Hashtags	Most Frequent Tweet Words	Most Frequent Biography Words
	sk: 68 ja: 58 nl: 49 fi: 44 de: 39 da: 30 tr: 17 ru: 16 el: 12 ms: 9 pl: 9	#syriacrisis: 890 #syriapeacetalks: 768 #humanrights: 719 #wecanhelp: 668 #unhcr: 606 #savesyriaschildren: 591 #refugee: 580 #unicef: 494 #peace: 446 #siria: 434 #children: 414	refugee: 3816 child: 3747 syrian: 3394 please: 3265 must: 3193 @unicefusa: 3159 us: 3026 pls: 2829 war: 2741 @unicef_uk: 2653 unhcr: 2453	la: 1681 writer: 1613 media: 1613 humanitarian: 1605 student: 1548 human: 1516 un: 1499 fan: 1457 like: 1358 development: 1357 news: 1310
Notable Twitter users: @Refugees, @Unicef, @Amnesty, @Oxfam, @PutinRF				
5 (yellow)	en: 44052 es: 246 xx: 183 nl: 60 ar: 49 de: 39 fr: 17 ro: 16 it: 16 tr: 13	#syria: 44907 #obama: 1845 #assad: 1323 #breaking: 1261 #cnn: 1120 #ac360: 1090 #newday: 1050 #ustalktoiran: 934 #outfront: 630 #ac360later: 575	@cnn: 10565 pm: 6271 obama: 6124 @ac: 6010 us: 5454 chemical: 4156 president: 4126 et: 3824 strike: 3759 @wolfblitzer: 3698	news: 4463 love: 3133 life: 1952 world: 1493 fan: 1481 writer: 1426 music: 1386 cnn: 1360 lover: 1320 producer: 1241

Rank by Size and colour in Figure 10	Languages	Most Frequent Hashtags	Most Frequent Tweet Words	Most Frequent Biography Words
	el: 13	#egypt: 406	@andersoncooper: 3551	@cnn: 1166
	ru: 12	#mustread: 383	war: 3528	social: 1130
	pt: 10	#putin: 308	@cnnbrk: 3024	student: 1117
	ja: 9	#russia: 298	attack: 2921	twitter: 1071
	sv: 8	#israel: 255	@cnnsitroom: 2797	et: 1039
	sk: 7	#sais: 248	weapons: 2783	tv: 1008
	da: 6	#johnkerry: 247	military: 2766	sports: 1004
	id: 5	#newsocial: 232	@barackobama: 2740	like: 978
	no: 4	#chemicalweapons: 229	watch: 2647	new: 931
	uk: 3	#iraq: 216	live: 2508	politics: 919
Notable Twitter users: @CNN				
6 (dark blue)	en: 41254	#syria: 42493	talks: 16036	love: 2332
	es: 405	#seckerry: 1788	@whitehouse: 14061	world: 1968
	ru: 340	#obama: 815	obama: 11506	life: 1884
	xx: 290	#iran: 452	president: 8492	news: 1346
	ar: 154	#egypt: 446	peace: 8285	social: 1237
	fr: 60	#us: 435	ceasefire: 8089	american: 1183
	de: 50	#chrisbrowntoday: 323	start: 8022	religion: 1157
	id: 38	#un: 283	massacres: 7828	music: 1122
	sk: 31	#russia: 258	@statedept: 6917	lover: 1097
	it: 26	#iraq: 246	weapons: 6401	human: 1090
ja: 23	#israel: 224	chemical: 6249	la: 1076	

Rank by Size and colour in Figure 10	Languages	Most Frequent Hashtags	Most Frequent Tweet Words	Most Frequent Biography Words
	tr: 14 uk: 9 fi: 8 hi: 5 bo: 5 ms: 4 nl: 4 vi: 4 et: 3	#assad: 194 #siria: 171 #islam: 166 #secdef: 154 #war: 145 #peace: 141 #ageofalz: 132 #tunisia: 127 #algerie: 118	us: 6155 @hassanrouhani: 4837 @barackobama: 4690 use: 4542 @jzarif: 4341 iran: 4153 watch: 3326 world: 3018 assad: 2730	media: 1062 rights: 999 politics: 993 writer: 941 director: 842 twitter: 836 fan: 824 father: 797 student: 784
	<p>Notable Twitter users: @WhiteHouse, @StateDept, @AmbassadorPower, @AmbassadorRice, @MFA_Russia, @DeptOfDefense</p>			
7 (pink)	ru: 11352 en: 3344 uk: 728 xx: 299 ar: 131 id: 72 de: 54 fr: 44 sk: 24 it: 11 es: 9 bg: 4	#syria: 6250 #britain: 984 #news: 388 #obama: 346 #rt: 299 #usa: 294 #russia: 289 #us: 260 #nervegas: 250 #g20: 234 #france: 192 #boycottsochi2014: 159	в: 7409 #Сирия: 5991 Сирии: 4333 #СИРИЯ: 3361 @molnia_me: 2995 #сирия: 2552 США: 2435 по: 2319 не: 1855 @ruvr_ru: 1831 на: 1791 и: 1740	и: 3253 в: 2170 britain: 1444 от: 1186 ваших: 1140 не: 1090 Мир: 791 like: 787 great: 739 Всеm: 733 official: 730 made: 729

Rank by Size and colour in Figure 10	Languages	Most Frequent Hashtags	Most Frequent Tweet Words	Most Frequent Biography Words
	fi: 3	#r4bia: 149	@rt_russian: 1571	пожаловать: 726
	sv: 1	#un: 144	@scoopit: 1405	Добро: 725
	tr: 1	#war: 144	o: 1162	Рай: 722
	el: 1	#international: 132	c: 1155	Мы: 586
	pt: 1	#ff: 123	#новости: 1116	законов: 578
	nl: 1	#america: 116	#США: 985	принципов: 569
		#iran: 98	Сирию: 906	правительств: 569
		#assad: 92	что: 838	флагов: 567
Notable Twitter users: @MedvedevRussia				

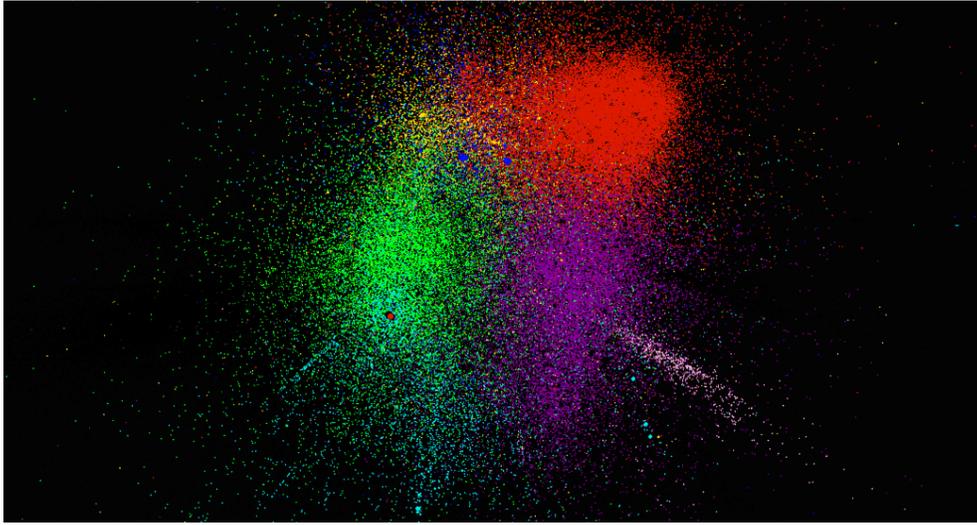


FIGURE 10 - Twitter Mentions Cyber Community Graph Color Coded

As can be observed in Figure 10, the cyber communities are visually distinct, with nodes in the same community appearing close to one another. Using the various frequency metrics provided in Table 3, it is possible to identify some of the more important cyber-communities for this thesis.

3.3.1 Summary of Key Cyber-Communities

Based on the most frequent words showing up in the biography field of Twitter users in the red cyber-community, it would appear that the political right in the U.S. dominates. Common words include “conservative”, “God”, “Christian”, and “patriot”: all of which point to a conservative identity. The top hashtags for this cyber-community also show that U.S. republican conservatives likely dominate. Hashtags like #tcot (Top Conservatives on Twitter), #gop (Republican Party), #teaparty and #benghazi are frequently used by pro-Republican Twitter users.¹³⁷¹³⁸

¹³⁷ “List of Top Conservative Hashtags Used On Twitter”. [PolitiBlast](#). Web, 3 Feb. 2015

¹³⁸ Bradley Klapper, D. Cassata. “Republicans Focus On Benghazi Ahead Of Midterm Elections”. [Huffington Post](#), (June 2014). Web, 4 Feb. 2015

The second largest (purple) cyber-community reveals similar macro-level political patterns of interest. The top hashtags for this cyber-community contains clues that it may be dominated by those wishing to perpetuate an anti-war discourse. This can be seen through the hashtags #nowarwithsyria, and #handsoffsyria in Table 3. The most common biography words contain “activist”, “peace”, and “social”, which suggest a pacifist identity or cause.

In the third largest (green) cyber-community, we can see that Arabic is the second most popular language, with the highest number of tweets in Arabic out of all of the cyber-communities in Table 3. This community mentions the Syrian moderate opposition Twitter account @RevolutionSyria frequently, and has #act2endassadswar as one of its most tweeted hashtags. The most frequent biography words reference news and journalism, with a focus on “human” and “rights”. While the cyber-community is dominated by English tweets, it contains many Sunni-Arab major news sources Twitter accounts, such as @AJArabic (Al Jazeera Arabic), and @AlArabiya (Saudi sponsored news agency).

The fourth largest, and light blue, cyber-community appears to be dominated by humanitarian Twitter accounts. Common biography words are “humanitarian” and “student”, common tweet words are “refugees” and “unhcr”, and frequent hashtags also follow this pattern, such as “#childrenofsyria”, and “#unicef”.

The fifth largest cyber-community appears to be dominated by fans of CNN (which was included in Table 2 due to it being the U.S. news service with the highest InDegree score). Most of the top tweet words in the cyber-community are in relation to CNN, or mention CNN accounts. The sixth largest cyber-community in Table 3 does not appear to have a clear political bias, although some of the most frequent mentions in the tweets are to U.S. government Twitter accounts, and a variety of international heads of state and diplomats. This cyber-community may represent a variety of Twitter users that have an interest in official government accounts and state representatives. The last cyber-community in Table 3, unlike any other, does not have English as the predominant language. This appears to be a Russian language cyber-community; the most frequent words are in Cyrillic. Despite Russian being the main language, it is interesting to note that the most frequent hashtags are still in English. This shows that that the English language is a dominant force on Twitter, and even cyber-communities based in another language use English hashtags as a norm.

This method of aggregating the language, word, and hashtag counts for the cyber-communities is useful for gaining a quick sense of existing potential political bias, or at least shared set of interests, within a cyber-community affinity pool. By breaking the social network graph apart into affinity groups like this, common narratives begin to emerge that speak to an ability *to be influenced by* a directed IO campaign.

We now have a practical way to analyze and segment the macro-level properties of the graph, which can be used to better understand how the influence and “prestige” held by the Twitter users in Table 2 is distributed within the Twitter social network. For example, look at the first two Twitter users in Table 2, @BarackObama and @RT_com. These two accounts are the most mentioned, retweeted or replied to in the dataset, with @BarackObama having an InDegree count of 75,077 and @RT_com having a count of 38,260. While these two accounts are very popular, they are not equally popular amongst all Twitter users.

We can see this in the insights provided by Table 3. The most mentioned Twitter account in the first cyber-community, dominated by a U.S.-based conservative Twitter audience, is @BarackObama. We do not see this high frequency of mentions of @BarackObama in any of the other cyber-communities in Table 3. This would imply that Obama’s personal Twitter account has a large influence or “prestige” amongst the Republican Twitter cyber-community. The fact that Obama has a very high disapproval rating amongst Republicans means that we must qualify what “influential” and “prestige” mean.¹³⁹ In this case, “influential” and “prestige” may not mean “popular” or “approval”, but it does mean that regardless of how a Republican Twitter cyber-community feels about Obama, he still holds a significant amount of influence over the nature of their Tweets. In other words, this shows that Obama, as the U.S. President, is important to Republicans even if they are generally not fans of his.

If we turn our attention to the @RT_com Russian news English language Twitter account, we can see that it holds a high influence and prestige over the second largest cyber-community. This affinity group, as mentioned, appears to be dominated by an anti-war, activist narrative. In the case of @RT_com, influence and prestige may imply that Twitter users in this cyber-community tend to turn to @RT_com for news and opinions. Given that *Russia Today* is a mainstream, Kremlin-funded news channel,¹⁴⁰ and that Putin has stated that it was designed to “break the Anglo-Saxon monopoly on the global information streams”, and “cannot help but reflect the Russian government’s official position”,¹⁴¹ we can safely deduce that it directly reflects the Russian desire to use Twitter as an IO tool. And

¹³⁹ Polls showed disapproval rating percentages ranging from the high 60s to the low 80s. “President Obama Job Approval Among Republicans”. *Real Clear Politics*. Web, 4 Feb. 2015

¹⁴⁰ Josh Halliday. “BBC World Service fears losing information war as *Russia Today* ramps up pressure”. *The Guardian*. Web, 4 Feb. 2015

¹⁴¹ Max Fisher. “In case you weren’t clear on *Russia Today*’s relationship to Moscow, Putin clears it up”. *The Washington Post*. Web, 4 Feb. 2015

it seems effective. Table 3 shows that it has been most successful amongst the anti-war, activist Twitter user group.

3.4 Conclusion

The quantitative analysis has shown that clear cyber-communities built around common affinities have emerged. The term frequency counts demonstrate that these cyber-communities have political biases, which the qualitative section will confirm. These biased cyber-communities serve as virtual TAs that can be targeted by IO efforts and/or be a vehicle to influence other cyber-communities and Twitter users. The cyber-community phenomenon also shows that fringe groups can have a disproportionately large presence on Twitter, perhaps giving the impression of legitimacy to fringe groups through greater penetration. As will be discussed in further detail below, an example of this can be seen with the second largest cyber-community headed by @RT_com. The InDegree scores also demonstrate that within these affinity pools, some Twitter users are more popular than others, which can place them in a better position to influence and spread their ideas. With the cyber-community analysis in mind, let us now scrutinize the qualitative aspects of grouped tweets to see what kinds of IO messages persuaded, how, why, and for whom.

Chapter 4 - *Qualitative Analysis*

This chapter will qualitatively frame the broader quantitative patterns observed in the previous chapter. It will initially provide a description of the key points of contention between the U.S. and Russia that will be manifest in the Twitter war of tweets. It will then analyze U.S. IO efforts on Twitter, the cyber-communities that emerged around these efforts, and how other communities influenced the U.S. conservative cyber-community. Finally, this chapter will investigate the Russian IO effort. It will look at the Russian government Twitter presence, the prominence of *Russia Today's* Twitter IO efforts, the narratives that were promoted, and the cyber-communities that emerged around Russian IO efforts. This chapter's qualitative investigation is required to further refine, and bring to light, the arguments, narratives, and overall IO efforts in the war of tweets over the chemical weapons incident. It will compile the geopolitical context of Syria, the domestic U.S. political environment and the observed quantitative patterns into a single picture from which it will be possible to generate conclusions on the effective, if limited, use of Twitter as an IO tool.

4.1 U.S. and Russian Disagreements

Previously, it was shown that both the U.S. and Russia have longstanding geopolitical interests in Syria that informed their reactions to the Syrian chemical weapons incident of 21 August 2013; these interests manifested in and directed official actions and reactions during the incident. Official state press releases provide a viewpoint from which to deconstruct and analyze state interests and political positioning following the incident, and Table 4 in Appendix A lists official state press releases which identify U.S. and Russian political stances by day between August 21st and September 18th 2013.

From this table, we can quickly see where U.S. and Russian statements are at odds. What is important to this thesis, however, is how these political disagreements translated into tweets and Twitter networks. While both countries publicly claimed that there had to be an impartial UN weapons investigation, and a long-term political solution to the conflict, the war of words played out on Twitter revealed an information operations battle going on in the interstices of official statements that questions the degree of sincerity, at the time at least, to such claims.

4.1.1 Disagreement 1 – Legality

The Russians, wanting to avoid any potential U.S. military strike, continuously vetoed any military action at the UNSC. They also sought to portray U.S. intervention that would bypass the UNSC, as a result of their vetoes, as illegal and undermining the legitimacy and norms of international law. The Russians sought to position themselves publicly as protecting international law, not as an

arbitrary power protecting its self-interests in Syria. Tweets such as the ones below by @RT_com showed the Russian position in the disagreement:

“What intl law? '#Syria strike possibility tramples regulations'
[@tmtotsei_rt](http://t.co/0mK3VF8srU)”¹⁴²

“Lavrov: NATO statement they can go into #Syria without UN sanctions is perilous route <http://t.co/NyyfB2Erha>”¹⁴³

“U.S. would use any UN chemical weapons report to justify attack on #Syria' - Afshin Rattansi to RT [#Assad](http://t.co/a9pAgRqVJl)”¹⁴⁴

The U.S., on the other hand, sought to portray Russian UNSC vetoes as blocking meaningful action to uphold the international laws against chemical weapons use, thus making the indirect accusation that the UNSC was inept, if outright failing in its moral responsibilities. The U.S. sought to position themselves as upholding international norms and moral righteousness against chemical weapons use and, by extension, ensuring international order.

““If we are serious about upholding a ban on chemical weapons use, then an international response is required.” —President Obama on #Syria”¹⁴⁵

“Obama: “A failure to stand against the use of chemical weapons would weaken prohibitions against other weapons of mass destruction.” #Syria”¹⁴⁶

““The [@UN] Security Council the world needs to deal with this crisis is not the one we have.” —@AmbassadorPower #Syria”¹⁴⁷

Both the U.S. and Russians sought to convince the public that their actions were upholding a legitimate international order and that the other's actions were promoting chaos in the region.

¹⁴² Twitter post, September 7, 2013, 4:51 p.m., http://twitter.com/RT_com

¹⁴³ Twitter post, August 26, 2013, 8:47 a.m., http://twitter.com/RT_com

¹⁴⁴ Twitter post, August 28, 2013, 1:49 a.m., http://twitter.com/RT_com

¹⁴⁵ Twitter post, September 6, 2013, 10:30 a.m., <http://twitter.com/WhiteHouse>

¹⁴⁶ Twitter post, September 10, 2013, 9:07 p.m., <http://twitter.com/WhiteHouse>

¹⁴⁷ Twitter post, September 6, 2013, 2:39 p.m., <http://twitter.com/WhiteHouse>

4.1.2 Disagreement 2 – Potential International Intervention

Both U.S. and Russian statements recognized the war-weary state of many in the U.S., and globally, with the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. Stuck with a previous “red-line” discourse, Obama sought limited military action in response to the chemical weapons use. U.S. statements reflected the fact that they would have a difficult time garnering public support for a military intervention in Syria. As Obama’s statement on 6 September 2013 demonstrates,

“for the American people at least, the concern really has to do with understanding that what we’re describing here would be limited and proportional and designed to address this problem of chemical weapons use and upholding a norm that helps keep all of us safe”¹⁴⁸

Obama’s statement claims that unlike the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Syrian intervention would be limited in time and scope and would be a direct result of the state-sponsored use of chemical weapons. Such claims were also reflected in official U.S. tweets:

““What we will do is consider options that meet the narrow concern around chemical weapons.” —President Obama on #Syria”¹⁴⁹

““This will not be Iraq or Afghanistan. There will be no American boots on the ground period.” @AmbassadorRice on the need to act in #Syria”¹⁵⁰

“Rice on #Syria: “These would be limited strikes to deter the Syrian regime from using chemical weapons and degrade their ability to do.””¹⁵¹

Limiting military action to a proportional response in part served as a justification for military action and example of U.S. adherence to international legal norms of proportional responses in conflict. The message of limited military action was a key IO element of Obama addressing the war weariness of domestic TAs – a major political challenge to pursuing military options. This messaging sought to help U.S. credibility and therefore strengthen a U.S. geopolitical stance by offering U.S. and allied commanders the option of military force.

¹⁴⁸ Barack Obama. “Remarks by President Obama in a Press Conference at the G20”. White House Speeches & Remarks Web Site. 6 September 2013.

¹⁴⁹ Twitter post, August 30, 2013, 4:23 p.m., <http://twitter.com/WhiteHouse>

¹⁵⁰ Twitter post, September 09, 2013, 1:17 p.m., <http://twitter.com/WhiteHouse>

¹⁵¹ Twitter post, September 09, 2013, 1:16 p.m., <http://twitter.com/WhiteHouse>

To counter Obama's IO (especially to counter the perception of limited military action), the Russians sought to leverage war-weariness to avoid military strikes against the Assad regime. Additionally, unlike the Obama Administration that was reluctantly advocating for small-scale intervention intended to deter further chemical weapons use, the Russians sought to portray any military intervention as a high cost, long-term commitment that would result in further instability. As discussed, this tactic was used in a *New York Times* opinion editorial written by Putin, and it can also be seen in Russian tweets. The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs account, @mfa_russia, was somewhat reserved, only having retweeted one tweet pushing this viewpoint:

“RT @VoiceofRussia There is no alternative to politico-diplomatic settlement in #Syria, use of force fraught with further destabilization—#Russia MFA to Brahim”¹⁵²

Unlike @mfa_russia, however, the @RT_com account was more direct:

“Obama moving towards war in #Syria, just like Bush moved towards war in #Iraq, - Russian MP <http://t.co/Qp7UyxnoIP>”¹⁵³

“#Syria crisis: Moscow reminds U.S. of Iraq mistakes <http://t.co/tu6UIPt96b>”¹⁵⁴

“Lavrov on #Syria: Libya, Iraq lessons not learned by international actors, mistakes repeated - LIVE FEED in English <http://t.co/NFXHhaxVET>”¹⁵⁵

“Brewing Storm: 'Western military intervention will worsen #Syria' <http://t.co/mf8dUKQbjh>”¹⁵⁶

The Russian “stability” viewpoint can be seen most strongly in the @RT_com tweets, which imply that military intervention in Syria would be the same as Iraq, would repeat the same mistakes, and would worsen Syria overall. The Obama Administration claimed the intervention would not be a repeat of Iraq and would only involve aerial strikes as a response to chemical weapons use. The disagreement between Russian and U.S. viewpoints on the nature of (and need for) an intervention was clear.

¹⁵² Twitter post, August 28, 2013, 2:20 a.m., <http://twitter.com/WhiteHouse>

¹⁵³ Twitter post, August 25, 2013, 3:26 p.m., http://twitter.com/RT_com

¹⁵⁴ Twitter post, August 25, 2013, 7:43 p.m., http://twitter.com/RT_com

¹⁵⁵ Twitter post, August 26, 2013, 8:46 a.m., http://twitter.com/RT_com

¹⁵⁶ Twitter post, August 26, 2013, 3:29 p.m., http://twitter.com/RT_com

4.1.3 Disagreement 3 - Culpability

The last, and possibly most important, disagreement was over responsibility for the attack. This was the most important disagreement because if a particular party were considered to be culpable for the attack, it would be much easier to justify the use of military force against that group. Having an agreed upon culpable party would have important geopolitical ramifications for both sides, as it could tip the civil war in favour of one party or another. The U.S. consistently stated that the Assad regime was responsible, while Russian officials and media deflected this claim and blamed Syrian opposition groups.

Explicit blame for the chemical weapons attack by the Assad regime by U.S. Twitter users in Table 2, however, was slow to occur in comparison to Russian tweets blaming the opposition forces. That it took over two weeks for the @WhiteHouse to produce a tweet stating the Assad regime's culpability for the attack indicates a slow and reactive U.S. Twitter IO effort from the @WhiteHouse account on the subject of culpability. This implies that the U.S. Administration did not consider Twitter an important medium in the soft war to counter Russian IO and promote the Administration's viewpoint. The first tweet by the @WhiteHouse explicitly blaming the Syrian regime did not occur until September 5th, 2013:

“President Obama on the need to respond to the Assad regime's chemical weapons use in #Syria: <http://t.co/nnA24wf42l>, <http://t.co/tp51tjVmxV>”¹⁵⁷

Unlike @RT_com, which openly maintained a biased Russian position over the culpability disagreement throughout the crises, @CNN did not. The fact that CNN did not immediately follow suit with the Obama Administration's position but waited for days, in comparison to RT's immediate and constant regurgitation of the Russian position, is an indication that CNN was not state-driven in its reporting, and was not acting as tool of U.S. IO. The closest it came to tweeting a claim of culpability of the Assad regime was on September 10th, when it retweeted a quote from Obama:

“RT @OutFrontCNN Pres. Obama: "If we fail to act, the Assad regime will see no reason to stop using chemical weapons." #Syria @CNN TV”¹⁵⁸

The Twitter account for Fox News was only slightly quicker to draw a connection to the Assad regime's culpability for the attack tweeting on August 30th:

¹⁵⁷ Twitter post, September 05, 2013, 4:29 p.m., <http://twitter.com/WhiteHouse>

¹⁵⁸ Twitter post, September 10, 2013, 21:08 a.m., <http://twitter.com/CNN>

“WATCH: Kerry: 'We Know' #Assad regime used chemical weapons in #Syria
<http://t.co/UxPabaHLeq>”¹⁵⁹

“READ: U.S. government's assessment of #Syria's use of chemical weapons
<http://t.co/jzpl8SS3vb>”¹⁶⁰

The reasons for this slightly quicker response are unclear, but it may be that in this case Fox news inadvertently acted as an IO tool for the Obama Administration. Fox News, however, also retweeted comments by Ron Paul on August 31st that created doubt as to the culpable party:

“RT @FoxBusiness Flashback: Ron Paul: We're Not Positive Who Set Off the Gas. Ron Paul on why the U.S. should stay out of #Syria <http://t.co/rZ888sbml8>”¹⁶¹

The Russians, on the other hand, wasted no time in deflecting any possible blame for the chemical attack on the Syrian regime onto the armed opposition. Russian officials argued that it was used with the hope of soliciting outside military intervention against the Assad regime. They also claimed that Western and Arab mass media were purposely spreading misinformation to create public backing for an armed intervention by Western and regional Sunni powers. To illustrate, consider that immediately following the attack on the 21st, @RT_com tweeted the following:

“Only rebels benefit from alleged #Syria chem attack, as it may greenlight intervention' - Patrick Henningsen to RT <http://t.co/x5ifaqWlmf>”¹⁶²

“BREAKING: Russia suggests #Syria 'chemical attack' carried out by rebels, provocation not ruled out <http://t.co/CXmBZV820i>”¹⁶³

“Russia suggests #Syria 'chemical attack' carried out by rebels, might be “a provocation planned in advance” (DETAILS) <http://t.co/VSCzV29aMK>”¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁹ Twitter post, August 30, 2013, 2:22 p.m., <http://twitter.com/FoxNews>

¹⁶⁰ Twitter post, August 30, 2013, 2:21 p.m., <http://twitter.com/FoxNews>

¹⁶¹ Twitter post, August 31, 2013, 9:30 p.m., <http://twitter.com/FoxNews>

¹⁶² Twitter post, August 21, 2013, 07:40 a.m., http://twitter.com/RT_com

¹⁶³ Twitter post, August 21, 2013, 11:44 a.m., http://twitter.com/RT_com

¹⁶⁴ Twitter post, August 21, 2013, 12:21 a.m., http://twitter.com/RT_com

“Russia suggests #Syria ‘chemical attack’ was ‘planned provocation’ by rebels
<http://t.co/CXmBZV820i>”¹⁶⁵

This shows a tight coordination of messaging in time and content between the Russian government and *RT*. These tweets were picked up and retweeted by twitter users in the purple affinity pool in Table 3, such as @Way2Wonderland, a pro-Russian, anti-American conspiracy theorist with a relatively high InDegree of 2832:

“RT @RT_com BREAKING: Russia suggests #Syria 'chemical attack' carried out by rebels, provocation not ruled out <http://t.co/CXmBZV820i>”¹⁶⁶

In the IO context, *RT*'s tweets are a useful example of an effort to affect “the adversary[’s] decision cycle, align[ing] with the commander’s objectives”. Russia’s main objective was to impede military attacks against the Assad regime. As shown, a reluctant Obama was put on the defensive by war-weariness, which the Russians reinforced. For the Russians, U.S. public opinion was a key and convenient element to influencing Obama’s decision to use force. While measuring the exact influence created by Russian interference in U.S. domestic politics is difficult to quantify, it is clear that the Russians sought to manipulate the U.S. democratic system for their own geopolitical gain through carefully placed propaganda and messaging. Relative to the American IO that followed, it can be said that they achieved some measure of success.

4.2 U.S. and Russian IO on Twitter

4.2.1 American IO on Twitter

4.2.1.1 Obama Administration’s Influence Efforts

The Twitter response to the chemical attack was largely a projection of U.S. domestic politics on an international issue. This would have placed the Obama Administration in a prime position to advocate for U.S. geopolitical interests on Twitter. As discussed, an important aspect of U.S. geopolitical interests in Syria is in reducing Russian influence in the region, and more specifically supporting the pro-democratic opposition in Syria. The U.S. also has interests in reducing the availability of weapons of mass destruction in the region, both to protect U.S. regional allies and U.S. citizens abroad. The Obama Administration’s influence efforts on Twitter with regards to the chemical attack were generally geared

¹⁶⁵ Twitter post, August 21, 2013, 9:33 p.m., http://twitter.com/RT_com

¹⁶⁶ Twitter post, August 21, 2013, 7:38 p.m., <http://twitter.com/Way2Wonderland>

towards convincing the U.S. domestic population that the Assad regime had to be held accountable for the chemical attack.

If we look at @WhiteHouse tweets, we can see a consistent and frequent message that the Assad regime must be held accountable for the use of chemical weapons:

““We have exhausted the alternatives.” —@AmbassadorPower on the need for a military response to the use of chemical weapons in #Syria”¹⁶⁷

“It's time to hold the Assad regime accountable for its use of chemical weapons in #Syria > <http://t.co/h8Sf00OMvN> <http://t.co/Bu3cpdN6>”¹⁶⁸

“The use of chemical weapons on innocent civilians cannot stand —> <http://t.co/9uaOryb8Rp> #Syria, <http://t.co/S7XuEnLFu3>”¹⁶⁹

These tweets are reiterations of the U.S. stance that the Syrian government was responsible for the chemical attack and that the international community must act to demonstrate that chemical weapons use will not be tolerated as a norm.

“Rice: "The reason Pres. Obama decided to pursue limited strikes is that we & others have already exhausted a host of other measures." #Syria”¹⁷⁰

Convincing the U.S. public that another foreign military intervention was necessary would be difficult. As explained by historian Gary Hess, “in these late twentieth-century conflicts, presidents were asking Americans to defend distant, small countries, not to react against a direct assault on the United States”.¹⁷¹ This paradigm has continued in the 21st century. The Obama Administration was asking the U.S. public to support degrading Assad’s chemical weapons capability to prevent future chemical weapons use against Syrian citizens, and in order to maintain an international norm against chemical weapons use that for Americans seemed like something from the distant past and history texts. In order to justify

¹⁶⁷ Twitter post, September 6, 2013, 2:36 p.m., <http://twitter.com/whitehouse>

¹⁶⁸ Twitter post, September 8, 2013, 8:34 p.m., <http://twitter.com/whitehouse>

¹⁶⁹ Twitter post, September 9, 2013, 8:51 p.m., <http://twitter.com/whitehouse>

¹⁷⁰ Twitter post, September 9, 2013, 1:10 p.m., <http://twitter.com/whitehouse>

¹⁷¹ Gary R. Hess. *Presidential Decisions for War: Korea, Vietnam, the Persian Gulf and Iraq*. Second Edition, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2009), pp. 6.

and make possible military action more appealing to the U.S. public, the Obama Administration indicated U.S. ground troops would not be deployed:

““We're not considering any open-ended commitment. We're not considering any boots-on-the-ground approach.” —President Obama on #Syria”¹⁷²

In addition to proposing a limited military engagement, the Obama Administration also used the bandwagon appeal to generate public support:

“President Obama on #Syria: “We will be much more effective—we will be stronger—if we take action together as one nation.””¹⁷³

““This is the world's red line...98% of the world's population...agree that the use of chemical weapons is abhorrent.” —@AmbassadorPower #Syria”¹⁷⁴

According to the FM 3-05.301, the “bandwagon” appeal “play[s] upon the TA’s need to belong”. The “98% of the world” statistic uses the bandwagon appeal to garner support for acting to enforce norms against chemical weapons use by positioning the U.S. as but one player among an already concerned global band. Moreover, one of the primary influence tactics used by @WhiteHouse tweets reveal its use of the doctrinal IO tactic called “Expertise”:

““Foreign policy experts from the left, right and center have strongly endorsed such action.” @AmbassadorRice on limited strikes in #Syria”¹⁷⁵

FM 3-05.301 explains that the tactic of “Expertise” can be used to appear more persuasive.¹⁷⁶ In this case, the @WhiteHouse is trying to show that pursuing military action goes beyond bi-partisan politics and that “political experts” have proven this. For the domestic U.S. TA, the main argument appears to follow the format: public support for action against Assad’s chemical weapons capability will result in a stronger enforcement of international norms and a safer world. The desired TA behaviour is support for possible military action; the desirable outcome

¹⁷² Twitter post, August 30, 2013, 4:22 p.m., <http://twitter.com/whitehouse>

¹⁷³ Twitter post, September 3, 2013, 12:20 p.m., <http://twitter.com/whitehouse>

¹⁷⁴ Twitter post, September 5, 2013, 1:21 p.m., <http://twitter.com/whitehouse>

¹⁷⁵ Twitter post, September 9, 2013, 1:23 p.m., <http://twitter.com/whitehouse>

¹⁷⁶ FM 3-05.301, pp. 2-28.

is an international system that does not condone the use of chemical weapons and can reassure itself that words matter.

4.2.1.2 Twitter Networks Formed in Response to Obama's Efforts

As with @RT_com, IO social network analysis provides useful insights into the audience that emerged around the Obama Administration's Twitter accounts. Both @WhiteHouse and @StateDept Twitter users formed part of the sixth largest cyber-community, according to Table 3. Unlike the cyber-community that emerged around @RT_com, the sixth cyber-community was politically broad and diverse. The "Most Frequent Biography Words" did not reveal overt political biases, and nor did the most frequently used hashtags.

If we look at the most popular Twitter users in this cyber-community by InDegree, we see that this cyber-community has a general interest in international affairs and a general focus on U.S. government Twitter users. In addition to the @WhiteHouse and @StateDept, other U.S. government Twitter users with high InDegrees in this cyber-community were @AmbassadorPower, @AmbassadorRice, @nscpress, @whlive, @statedeptlive, etc. Other Twitter users with high InDegrees were from foreign governments, such as @HassanRouhani, @Jzarif, @netanyahu, etc. The wide variety of foreign government Twitter users indicate that the cyber-community is interested in international affairs at large, versus the more limited geopolitical interest of one group.

From these observations, it is apparent that the U.S. IO efforts were successful in leading (in terms of InDegree popularity) an international affairs cyber-community of interest on Twitter. While leading an international affairs affinity pool is important, it does not necessarily mean that @WhiteHouse and @StateDept had the larger appeal to the U.S. domestic population required to potentially influence their perceptions.

Social network analysis supports the argument that the Obama Administration was not very successful in garnering bi-partisan support amongst Twitter users. The largest cyber community in the data set (cyber-community 1 in Table 3) was a majority conservative Republican cyber-community. The "Most Frequent Biography Words" include "conservative", "Christian", "constitution", "freedom", and "patriot." On the surface, it may seem ironic that the two most frequent words in tweets in this cyber-community were "obama" and "@barackobama", but in fact, the top hashtags indicate that this cyber-community was highly *critical* of Obama. Frequently used hashtags, such as #impeach and #impeachobama, indicate a strong bias against the Obama Administration. Many of the most popular users in this cyber-community (by InDegree) were Republican officials, most of who were not in favour of Obama's proposed military intervention:

“Opposing intervention in #Syria isn't isolationism. It's simply an attempt at a more reasoned foreign policy. Read: <http://t.co/o3B2Uz4XPr>”¹⁷⁷

“I intend to vote against authorizing military force against #Syria #CallwithCruz”¹⁷⁸

“The Obama Administration still has not presented a compelling U.S. interest in attacking #Syria or a coherent long-term strategy.”¹⁷⁹

According to their tweets, the most popular Republican Twitter users were not convinced by Obama's information efforts. It is interesting to note that the Twitter user with the largest number of mentions in the largely Republican cyber-community was @BarackObama. The fact that @BarackObama did not author any tweets in the dataset indicates that the cyber-community was having a one-way discussion with @BarackObama. Given that Obama's individual Twitter profile (as opposed to the white house profile) received such high attention from the largest cyber-community in the data set, that @BarackObama in no way interacted with this cyber-community, and that garnering public support for his Administration's efforts was stated as an important goal, suggests that there was a missed opportunity here. The Obama Administration had the chance to reach out and justify how their actions benefited U.S. interests. Although not an easy task, non-partisan messages to the largely Republican cyber-community might have garnered increased public support on Twitter.

Another TA that the Obama Administration failed to directly interact with on Twitter were the liberal humanitarian and liberal international users. This set of users was split into two distinct-but-related cyber-communities. The first was a set of users in the fourth largest cyber-community that were, quite probably, generally irrelevant TAs for U.S. IO efforts on Twitter. Many users in this cyber-community expressed a dominant humanitarian worldview, such as @Oxfam and @Amnesty, and they conventionally refrain themselves from supporting any one side during conflict. The same held true in Syria. In order to gain access to suffering groups, organizations like Oxfam have traditionally sought neutrality to avoid being seen as arbitrarily supporting any one particular party in a conflict.¹⁸⁰ This would make these users unlikely TAs for IO efforts.

¹⁷⁷ Twitter post, September 13, 2013, 9:30 a.m., <http://twitter.com/senrandpaul>

¹⁷⁸ Twitter post, September 9, 2013, 8:26 p.m., <http://twitter.com/sentedcruz>

¹⁷⁹ Twitter post, September 1, 2013, 4:59 p.m., <http://twitter.com/repjustinamash>

¹⁸⁰ “Oxfam's role in humanitarian Action: Oxfam Policy Compendium Note” *Oxfam International*, (June 2013). Web, 14 Nov. 2015, pp. 3.

The second group of liberal humanitarian users, on the other hand, in the third largest cyber-community, was vocal in its opposition both to the Assad regime and to Russia's political attempts to support it. One of the Twitter users with the highest InDegree in this cyber-community, the Human Rights Watch account @HRW, was critical of Russian policies at the UN:

“RT @KooyJan Since 2011, #UNSC paralyzed on #Syria & unable to help curtail atrocities because of vetoes #Russia & #China <http://t.co/RsCKUWj9fs>”¹⁸¹

This mirrored the Obama Administration's statements that the Russians were blocking meaningful action at the UNSC. They also sided with U.S. arguments that the Assad regime was responsible for the attack:

“#Syria: Government Likely Culprit in Chemical Attack - New Evidence based on Rocket Analysis, Witness Accounts <http://t.co/4KeYFWkvxN>”¹⁸²

Despite the fact that the Obama Administration Twitter accounts were not part of this affinity pool, it is possible that the U.S. Administration political stances had some traction. In fact, these groups were only critical of the Obama Administration for not having a strong enough response to the chemical attack:

“RT @KenRoth Obama credibility at stake on #Syria chemical weapons. What about world's on mass slaughter w/ conventional weapons? <http://t.co/sFdt8adMkk>”¹⁸³

“RT @KenRoth Kerry's speech had no plan by any means to protect vast majority of #Syria civilians dying from conventional weapons. <http://t.co/aoYnyv2vf7>”¹⁸⁴

This affinity pool also had several important Syrian opposition twitter accounts, such as @RevolutionSyria and @Fsa_Media_Hub that were directly opposed to the Assad regime:

“We are the children of #Syria; what have we done to be murdered?” Victims of Assad's chemical attacks. <http://t.co/l4mlAavCPd>”¹⁸⁵

¹⁸¹ Twitter post, August 28, 2013, 4:28 a.m., <http://twitter.com/hrw>

¹⁸² Twitter post, September 10, 2013, 11:21 a.m., <http://twitter.com/hrw>

¹⁸³ Twitter post, August 31, 2013, 10:24 a.m., <http://twitter.com/hrw>

¹⁸⁴ Twitter post, August 31, 2013, 08:02 a.m., <http://twitter.com/hrw>

¹⁸⁵ Twitter post, August 21, 2013, 06:05 p.m., <http://twitter.com/RevolutionSyria>

“Assad kills 1300 children gassing his own cities. This makes it impossible for a political solution. #chemical_massacre #Syria”¹⁸⁶

This affinity pool, containing the Syrian opposition accounts and the liberal humanitarian accounts opposed to the Assad regime, were the main element of support for a U.S.-led military intervention in Syria and for supporting the claim that the Assad regime was responsible for the attack. The @WhiteHouse and @StateDept, however, did not make any reference to either of these groups in their Twitter IO efforts, other than one tweet by @StateDept to say the opposition did not have the capability to carry out the attack. The Obama Administration missed the opportunity to garner support from Republicans on Twitter and also missed the opportunity to leverage pre-existing support from liberal humanitarians supporting the opposition and Arab Spring movement. Polls showed that Obama failed to sufficiently explain the need for an intervention.¹⁸⁷ The Obama Administration’s IO efforts on Twitter missed several opportunities to garner support.

4.2.1.3 Inter-Twitter Network Dynamics

In this dataset, the many similarities in criticisms between the Republican users and RT-led fringe Left in Table 3 shows that the opposition from the fringe Left came from an overall anti-war worldview, while the Republican opposition came from an overall disapproval of Obama. As shown, disaffected left and Republican Twitter users mentioned in this data set with high InDegrees were opposed to military intervention. Polls showed that in general, Twitter aside, the difference between Republicans in favor and opposed to military intervention was not that great: 35% in favour, 40% opposed, and 24% unsure.¹⁸⁸ It is not surprising that in this Syrian dataset, the popular Republican users tend to have a negative view of Obama’s initiatives and were opposed to intervention. It has been shown that in general, when on Twitter, both Republican and Democratic users tend to engage in negative viewpoints, and this was observed in the dataset.¹⁸⁹

One example of this inter-community dynamic involves the spread of the argument that U.S. military intervention would assist Sunni extremist groups in Syria. Between August 27th and 29th, former Democratic representative and anti-

¹⁸⁶ Twitter post, August 21, 2013, 02:26 p.m., http://twitter.com/Fsa_Media_Hub

¹⁸⁷ “Public Opinion Runs Against Syrian Airstrikes: Few See U.S. Military Action Discouraging Chemical Weapons Use.” *Pew Research Center*, (Sept. 2013), pp. 2.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid. pp. 1.

¹⁸⁹ Mitchel, PEW, Ibid. pp. 1.

war activist Dennis Kucinich was promoting the idea that U.S. airstrikes in Syria would turn the U.S. Air Force into “al Qaeda’s air force”.¹⁹⁰ Kucinich made this claim in an interview with *The Hill* newspaper, which subsequently was picked up on Twitter. Kucinich himself later retweeted his statement on the 29th of August:

“RT @AbbyMartin .@Dennis_Kucinich: Military strikes on #Syria would make U.S. 'al-Qaeda's air force' and could lead to World War Three: <http://t.co/AfMuABU83s>”¹⁹¹

This argument by Kucinich spread on Twitter. Figure 11 below shows that there was a spike in mentions of Kucinich’s name following this interview on the 28th and 29th:

¹⁹⁰ Pecquet, Julian. “Kucinich: Syria strike would turn U.S. into ‘al Qaeda’s air force’” *The Hill*, 27 August 2013. Web, 15 November 2015.

¹⁹¹ Twitter post, August 29, 2013, 7:04 p.m., http://twitter.com/Dennis_Kucinich

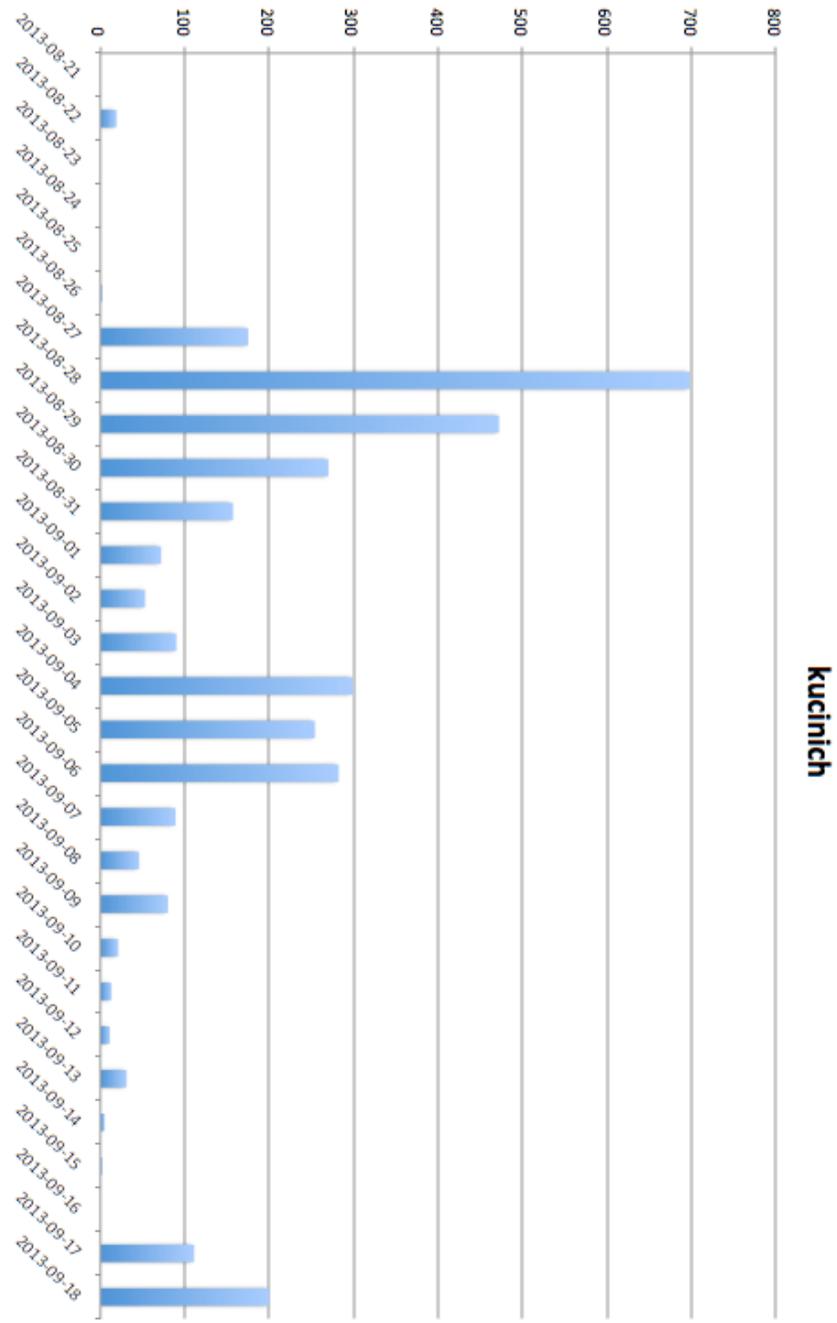


Figure 11 - Mentions of “kucinich” by day

Figure 12 below, which shows the mentions of “terror” by day for the duration of the dataset, also shows that the highest peak in the mentions of terror was following Kucinich’s interview.

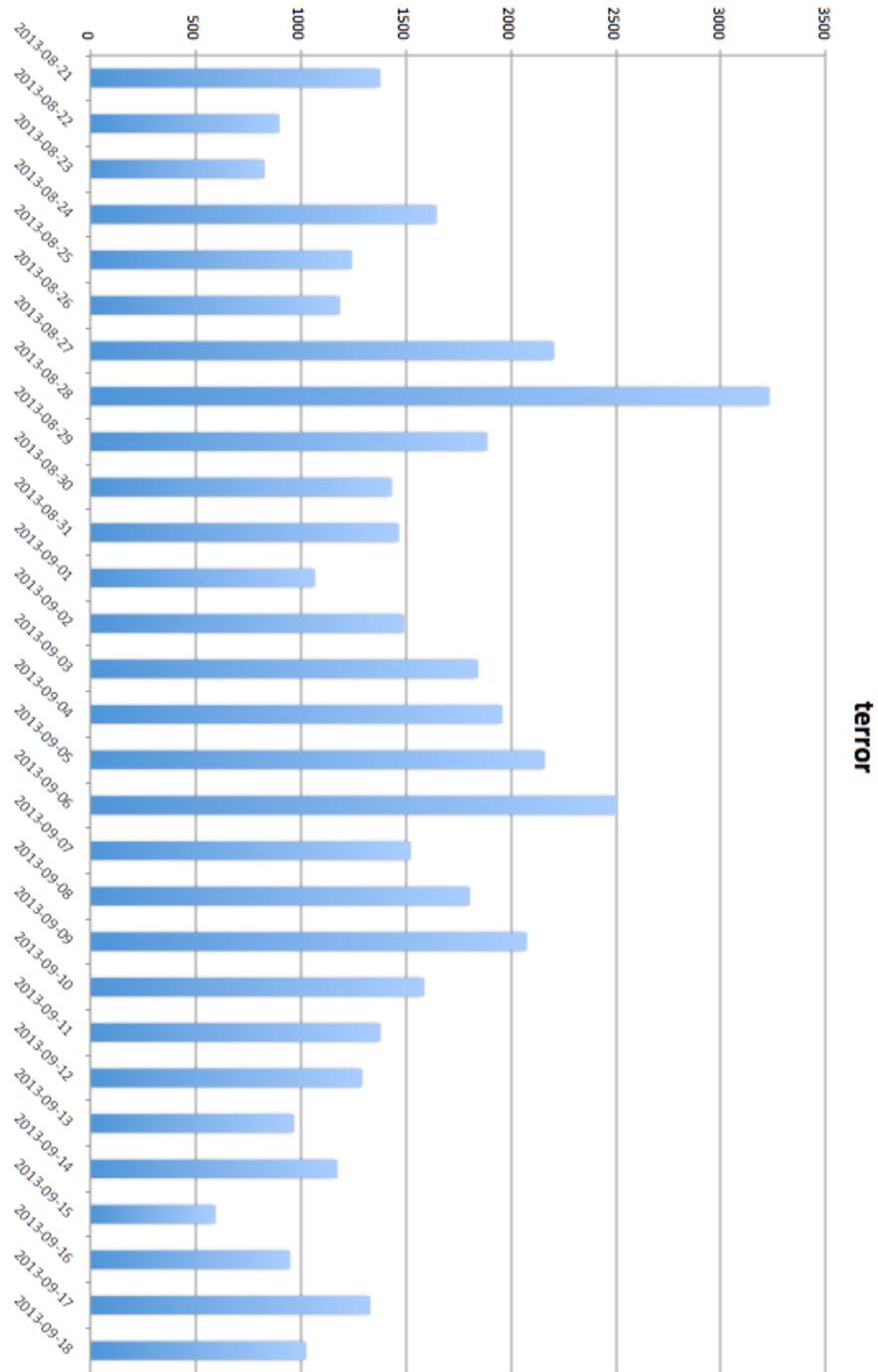


Figure 12 - Mentions of "terror" by day

Given that Kucinich was a Democratic representative and anti-war activist, it is not surprising that users from the disaffected left affinity pool repeated his argument:

“#VIRAL: Bombing #Syria would make U.S. pilots ‘Al-Qaeda's air force’ – Kucinich <http://t.co/P15h648uRw>”¹⁹²

The @RT_com account even tweeted the argument three times between the 28th and 29th, showing an emphasis on this argument. What is interesting to note is that this argument (advocated by an anti-war Democratic representative) was also picked up by the critical Republicans on Twitter:

“Kucinich: Syria Intervention Turns Us Into 'Al Qaeda's Air Force' #SYRIA #OPSLAM #TCOT <http://t.co/UI9iffZ2BY> via @BreitbartNews”¹⁹³

“Ted Cruz: The United States is not ‘Al-Qaeda’s Air Force’. <http://t.co/6KUZUTA7TE> #Syria”¹⁹⁴

As this last tweet shows, the Republican senator Ted Cruz went as far as to make public statements on September 4th 2013, mirroring those of Kucinich.¹⁹⁵ While Kucinich’s statement may not have had an influence on Cruz’s opinions or worldview, it would appear that political arguments were opportunistically spread across affinity groups in order to promote their individual agendas. Both the disaffected left and critical right were using Twitter IO to attack the Obama Administration’s efforts and the arguments used in the process crossed the borders of conventional political affinity pools. Kucinich may or may not have been influential in changing already held beliefs, but the data shows he was influential in the choice of argument used in IO efforts against Obama’s plans.

4.2.1.4 U.S. IO Findings Summary

The U.S. IO efforts on Twitter, with some hesitation, tried to convince the domestic population that military intervention was required. The @WhiteHouse and @StateDept accounts predominately resonated with an international affairs community of interest but failed to garner large-scale support on Twitter. The largest affinity pool in the Twitter dataset was a Republican community generally

¹⁹² Twitter post, August 28, 2013, 3:11 a.m., http://twitter.com/RT_com

¹⁹³ Twitter post, August 28, 2013, 11:11 a.m., <http://twitter.com/ChristiChat>

¹⁹⁴ Twitter post, September 04, 2013, 2:15 p.m., <http://twitter.com/YoungCons>

¹⁹⁵ Flynn, Mike. “Ted Cruz: U.S. is not ‘Al-Qaeda’s Air Force’” *Breitbart*, 4 September 2014. Web, 15 November 2015.

critical of Obama's policies. Frequent mentions of Obama's individual account from this community did not translate into support because of the critical tone in the mentions. The liberal humanitarian cyber-community opposed to the Assad regime was a natural source of support for Obama's efforts, but the Obama Administration's accounts did not make any reference to these groups in their Twitter IO efforts. The Obama Administration did not take advantage of the opportunity to garner support from Republicans who were having a one-way conversation on Twitter with Obama's account, and it also missed the opportunity to leverage pre-existing support from liberal humanitarians supporting the opposition and Arab Spring movement. Polls showed that Obama failed to sufficiently explain the need for an intervention to deter chemical weapons use.¹⁹⁶

4.2.2 Russian IO on Twitter

As shown, quantitatively we observe a high degree of participation in the Syrian dataset by both left and right-leaning Twitter cyber-communities. Since both sides of the political spectrum were present in the Twitter dataset for this study, discerning Russia's influence efforts will require looking at content published by notable Russian accounts while framing qualitative observations within quantitative patterns of who interacted with Russian accounts. One important quantitative factor that can frame our qualitative analysis of notable Russian Twitter content is the cyber-communities in Table 3 that emerged during the crises. The emergence of these cyber-communities provides us with a quantitative view into the communities that engaged most with notable Russian user's content.

4.2.2.1 Russian Government Accounts

Quantitatively most Russian Twitter accounts in Table 2 (@mfa_russia, @PutinRF_Eng, @KremlinRussia_E, @PutinRF, @KremlinRussia, @MedvedevRussiaE, @MedvedevRussia) were mentioned, replied to or retweeted infrequently, and only @ PutinRF_Eng and @mfa_russia authored tweets. The authored tweets of @mfa_russia and @PutinRF_Eng largely consisted of statements repeating the Russian political stance shown in the Appendix, and did not provide useful additional insight into the Russian Twitter TA. Although @mfa_russia's footprint in the dataset was relatively small, the account was used to broadcast and reinforce Putin's New York Time's article:

¹⁹⁶ "Public Opinion Runs Against Syrian Airstrikes: Few See U.S. Military Action Discouraging Chemical Weapons Use." *Pew Research Center*, (Sept. 2013), pp. 2.

“RT @mission_russian Syrian Alternative - Article by Vladimir #Putin in *New York Times* on #Syria...”¹⁹⁷

The @mission_russian Twitter user is an account for the Russian Mission in Geneva, and this tweet was only found to have 20 retweets in the dataset. This coordinated use of Twitter as an IO force multiplier is qualitatively interesting even if the quantitative impact was small, because it shows that the Russian government considers Twitter an important enough medium to coordinate their efforts. The low InDegree of these Russian Twitter users is due to their lack of tweets regarding the Syrian crises, and due to the fact that Russian official government accounts do not appeal to a U.S. domestic audience.

4.2.2.2 *Russia Today @RT_com*

The Russian state-funded user that drove the most interest and activity was *Russia Today*'s @RT_com. Censored and funded by the Russian government, the *Russia Today* newspaper was designed as a soft war tool to “provide relentlessly negative media coverage of the west – in particular, the United States”.¹⁹⁸ The *RT* news agency is an integral part of Russia's global IO strategy, and according to former *RT* correspondents, *RT* was engineered for “a war...a P.R. war”.¹⁹⁹ This state-funded, global mass media war for hearts and minds is centered on strengthening national geopolitical interests through soft power. The ultimate goal is not to dominate minds, but shape them for geopolitical benefit.²⁰⁰ Observing @RT_com's authored tweets, one can quickly see that the relentless anti-American IO not only exists in the satellite television broadcasts, but also on online ICTs. From the replies, retweets and mentions in the data set, we can also observe the kind of audience @RT_com's messaging resonates with on Twitter.

With regards to Syria, *RT* has a known geopolitical motive to shape Twitter users' minds towards believing that United States foreign policies are harmful and should be stopped. The tweets below are a qualitative sample of @RT_com's authored tweets that demonstrate this IO effort:

¹⁹⁷ Twitter post, September 12, 2013, 7:15 a.m., http://twitter.com/mission_russian

¹⁹⁸ Ann Cooper. “Julian Assange's New Platform: RT” *Columbia Journalism Review* (Jan. 2012). Web. 2 June 2015.

¹⁹⁹ Julia Ioffe. “What is *Russia Today*? The Kremlin's propaganda outlet has an identity crisis”. *Columbia Journalism Review* (Sept. 2010). Web. 2 June 2015.

²⁰⁰ Julia, Ibid.

“Bombing #Syria would make U.S. pilots ‘Al-Qaeda's air force’ – Kucinich
<http://t.co/P15h648uRw>”²⁰¹

“#Syria charade: West bent on war, UN investigation meaningless (Op-Edge by
@NeilClark66) <http://t.co/mjVcXVhyLA>”²⁰²

“Moral Obscenity: Toxic background to U.S. chemical 'highground'
<http://t.co/gQmBVL6ddW> @portnayanc #Vietnam #Iraq #Syria”²⁰³

“No more #American bombing democracy' Photo by @MFinoshina_RT - Pics from
#Syria on RT's Instagram <http://t.co/fjIiHKtMua>”²⁰⁴

“No law will stop Obama’s democracy-bombs over #Syria (Op-Edge)
<http://t.co/r5OJlcIuIe>”²⁰⁵

“Opinion: U.S. must curb inappropriate, unconstitutional posture on #Syria strike
<http://t.co/By2i0YHRy4>”²⁰⁶

These tweets do not form an objective form of journalism, and they serve to broadcast Russian IO propaganda rather than factual reporting. *RT* tweets not only toe the official Russian line on the Syrian crisis, but unlike official Russian government accounts in Table 2, take it one step further: they take the official stance and rebrand it in a way that generates entertaining, cleverly worded lines to convert their TA. The wording in these tweets is designed to either persuade or reinforce beliefs that U.S. foreign policy is immoral, hypocritical, and indeed illegal. Phrases like “democracy-bombs” seek to create a negative image of democracy and juxtapose the democratic system of political freedoms with seemingly-opposing violent military actions. *RT* claims the U.S. is acting unconstitutionally, that “no law” can deter Obama and that regardless of UN investigations, the U.S. is arbitrarily “bent on war”. *RT* uses colourful language in referring to U.S. policies as “moral obscenity” and utilizes a play on words by calling U.S. history “toxic” with regards to chemical weapons. By quoting

²⁰¹ Twitter post, August 28, 2013, 9:16 p.m., http://twitter.com/rt_com

²⁰² Twitter post, August 26, 2013, 10:41 a.m., http://twitter.com/rt_com

²⁰³ Twitter post, August 29, 2013, 11:16 a.m., http://twitter.com/rt_com

²⁰⁴ Twitter post, September 5, 2013, 2:38 p.m., http://twitter.com/rt_com

²⁰⁵ Twitter post, September 5, 2013, 9:59 a.m., http://twitter.com/rt_com

²⁰⁶ Twitter post, September 11, 2013, 4:22 p.m., http://twitter.com/rt_com

Kucinich, *RT* also takes advantage of the clever association between U.S. pilots and terrorism by stating that U.S. bombs would aid Al-Qaeda by weakening Assad's regime. *RT*, and Kucinich, in essence were calling the U.S. Air Force terrorists. When compared to tweets of @mfa_russia, @RT_com is by far a greater IO tool in the Russian effort to vilify the U.S. on Twitter.

4.2.2.3 Russian Target Audience in America

The relentless negative imagery *RT* creates is designed to resonate with a particular audience, but the question remains which audience. As mentioned above, it is possible to use the TAA framework provided in the Marine Corps' IO handbook to help identify which TA Russia was looking to influence.²⁰⁷ First, finding the TA requires identifying a broad audience. Demographically, from Table 3 and Table 4, we can see that the Twitter data set consists of predominantly English speakers claiming to be in the U.S.. Also, it was shown Twitter in the U.S. generally has a younger than 30 Democratic-leaning audience. For the Russians, this is important because reaching the U.S. Anglophone population is key to pressuring the U.S. government. Twitter can thus serve as an ICT platform through which to reach this desired general audience. The handbook requires that the TA is accessible, which the Twitter platform provides, and that the TA be susceptible: "able and willing to be influenced".²⁰⁸ This requirement may seem out of place, as it is unclear why a U.S., left-leaning Twitter audience may be willing to be influenced by a conservative, generally anti-liberal and anti-democratic Russian government and its mass media propaganda outlet.

The susceptibility of a U.S.-based, young, generally left-leaning Twitter audience can be seen through what Boler and Nemorin call a "new mediascape" where users "[turn] significantly toward alternatives to [Western] mainstream and corporate-owned news sources".²⁰⁹ According to Boler and Nemorin, this new mediascape was born out of growing information technology and a mass anti-war movement and counter reaction to Whitehouse media censorship following the events of 9/11. Boler and Nemorin claim the Bush Administration's use of false

²⁰⁷ *Information Operations Planner's Handbook, Draft*. Marine Corps Information Operations Center. (June 2012).

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.* pp. D-2.

²⁰⁹ Megan Boler and Selena Nemorin. "Dissent, Truthiness, and Skepticism in the Global Media Landscape: Twenty-First Century Propaganda in Times of War" in *The Oxford Handbook of Propaganda Studies*, eds. Jonathan Auerback and Russ Castronovo (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

intelligence, “racial demonization and Islamophobia”²¹⁰ were central to creating a “key shift toward a crisis of faith in both media and politicians, marking a watershed moment in the history of news media”²¹¹. From these post-9/11 “information wars”, Boler and Nemorin claim whistleblowing groups like WikiLeaks were formed in response to what they saw as the “decline of the democratic functions of the mass media”.²¹² While Boler and Nemorin correctly describe the mindset of a post-9/11 movement popular amongst an audience skeptical of U.S. politicians and mass media, they are shortsighted and incorrect in stating that alternatives to U.S. mass media through Foreign news channels and ICTs are a “genuine cause for hope”.²¹³ Rather, it should be a cause for concern that an entire segment of the U.S. population, out of frustration, has been left looking for alternative news sources in a new digital media landscape saturated with foreign, geopolitically-motivated news sources.

Having a large segment of the population willing and ready to be influenced by highly censored and equally biased adversarial foreign powers through “alternative news” has implications for how the U.S. democratic system can be pressured to act against its own interests for foreign geopolitical gain. A blind faith in the objectivity of “alternative” foreign state-censored media is no better than assuming corporate U.S. media has no biases of their own, and is hardly a “genuine cause for hope”. Regardless, there is a segment of the U.S. population willing and ready to be influenced by foreign mass media, thus fulfilling the TA requirement. The desired behaviour the Russians are looking for is increased pressure on the Obama Administration to not attack Syria militarily. In the U.S., political freedoms make the act of opposing the government publicly on policies an acceptable practice. The fact the desired behaviour is accepted also increases the susceptibility of the U.S. segment to be influenced by Russian propaganda and demonstrate the desired behaviours.

4.2.2.4 Russian Twitter Narratives and Arguments

From the sample of @RT_com tweet content above, we can observe that the susceptible, younger than 30, left-leaning U.S. Twitter TA is being targeted with arguments crafted to reinforce a general anti-war stance. From these and other tweets, it is possible to define a Russian main argument in greater detail. Using the

²¹⁰ Ibid. pp. 394.

²¹¹ Ibid. pp. 395.

²¹² Ibid. pp. 403.

²¹³ Ibid. pp. 406.

U.S. Army's psychological operations manual FM 3-05.301 discussed previously, it is possible to articulate the @RT_com main argument as: Opposing possible U.S.-led military strikes in Syria will result in the fulfillment and protection of democratic values. The tweets of @RT_com continuously and repeatedly propose that the main reason U.S. strikes should be opposed is because they will counter democratic values and efforts. Further, they also insinuate that U.S. geopolitical interests are counter to democratic values. This main message can be seen through tweets such as,

“U.S. going against democratic values in #Syria to protect its oil industry' (Colin Cavell to RT) <http://t.co/slUvuNRDO9>”²¹⁴

“No law will stop Obama's democracy-bombs over #Syria (Op-Edge) <http://t.co/r5OJlcIuIe>”²¹⁵

Syrious Strain: 'U.S. public opinion boxed Obama in, but he's still prone to war' <http://t.co/RRxUtSzeki> #Syria²¹⁶

By articulating Russian interests in terms of the TA's “desirable outcome” of a safe, principled democratic world, @RT_com is attempting to further Russia's geopolitical interests through IO on ICTs. In support of this main argument are a few secondary arguments that also seek to generate opposition to U.S.-led strikes. These arguments claim that by not supporting strikes: terrorists will not be supported, Syrian suffering will be reduced, and the legitimacy of the UN will be upheld. All of these secondary arguments are tied to the main argument of protecting democratic ideals. Sunni terrorism is strongly anti-democratic in nature, an anti-war audience may see suffering due to military action as anti-democratic, and for many the UN upholds democratic ideals internationally.

The @RT_com tweets also use appeals and tactics. The first appeal *RT* uses is the appeal to “legitimacy by tradition”. By appealing to the democratic tradition in the U.S., *RT* is looking to influence behaviours of those who have a democratic worldview. The same can be said for the appeal to “legitimacy by legal authority”. *RT* is claiming that their interpretation of international law and the UN authority must be upheld. According to the *RT* stance, if the U.S. engages in strikes it will be acting in an unlawful manner. Finally, *RT* appeals to “inevitability” and the “emotional fear of harm” by claiming that U.S. strikes will strengthen Syrian Sunni

²¹⁴ Twitter post, August 23, 2013, 12:54 p.m., http://twitter.com/rt_com

²¹⁵ Twitter post, September 5, 2013, 9:59 a.m., http://twitter.com/rt_com

²¹⁶ Twitter post, September 14, 2013, 4:56 a.m., http://twitter.com/rt_com

Terrorists. Claims that U.S. actions will strengthen ISIL do not need to be correct or based on more than speculation, but they do need to appeal to a sense of fear amongst the U.S. TA. In fact ISIL grew significantly in power following the non-military, diplomatic response to the Syrian chemical weapons incident.

RT's secondary arguments and appeal to the "legitimacy by tradition" of democracy through its branding as an alternative news source "questions" the status quo:



FIGURE 13 - @RT_com Twitter Home Page

A consistent element of U.S. culture and democratic political freedoms is the questioning of government and the majority status quo. The @RT_com home page bears a large banner stating "Question More." This banner is not targeting the legitimacy of *RT*'s reporting, or Russia's poor track record with political freedoms, but it is targeting an audience frustrated with the U.S. government and domestic political structures. This banner demonstrates a simple example of some of the messaging *RT* employs through its branding efforts. The secondary arguments and appeals can also be seen in tweets, such as those using the "tactic" of "moral appeal" to persuade its TA to believe that U.S. strikes will not reduce Syrian suffering:

“Brewing Storm: 'Western military intervention will worsen #Syria'
<http://t.co/mf8dUKQbjh>”²¹⁷

“Several days of airstrikes on #Syria will achieve little' - Karen Kwiatkowski to RT
<http://t.co/iW0BrdHPUL>”²¹⁸

“Obama should be stripped of his Nobel Peace prize if he starts #Syria war' -
@pavelandreev to RT <http://t.co/xn4ZCFKUzT>”²¹⁹

“Putin to (Nobel Prize winner) Obama: 'Think about future #Syria victims' (FULL
VIDEO) <http://t.co/smOrdkgvL4>”²²⁰

“#Syria Suffering: 'No boots on the ground' means 'only Syrians' blood will be spilt'
<http://t.co/UJ8bvClxXj>”²²¹

These tweets seek to “use the moral commitments of the” TA “to obtain compliance”²²². They are appealing to those who believe that wars are always immoral, that any action that causes any suffering, or “spilt blood”, is also immoral. In addition, *RT* uses the “tactic” of “rewards and punishments” (“if you do X you will get Y”²²³) by linking U.S. strikes to terrorism:

“If U.S. intervenes in #Syria it will be fighting alongside terrorists' - Karen Kwiatkowski to RT <http://t.co/3FnbgMjKgZ>”²²⁴

“Senate sanctions #Syria strike: 'Jihadists to thrive in case of attack'
<http://t.co/oQDJrAfAOB>”²²⁵

²¹⁷ Twitter post, August 26, 2013, 3:29 p.m., http://twitter.com/rt_com

²¹⁸ Twitter post, August 29, 2013, 8:51 a.m., http://twitter.com/rt_com

²¹⁹ Twitter post, August 29, 2013, 1:54 p.m., http://twitter.com/rt_com

²²⁰ Twitter post, August 31, 2013, 10:52 a.m., http://twitter.com/rt_com

²²¹ Twitter post, August 31, 2013, 9:48 a.m., http://twitter.com/rt_com

²²² FM 3-05.301, pp. 2-28.

²²³ FM 3-05.301, pp. 2-28.

²²⁴ Twitter post, August 29, 2013, 4:51 p.m., http://twitter.com/rt_com

²²⁵ Twitter post, September 5, 2013, 11:20 a.m., http://twitter.com/rt_com

RT is trying to influence through aversion to a seemingly dangerous outcome or “punishment”. As an example, in the second tweet, the U.S. Senate sanctioned military action, and the “punishment” was the thriving of Jihadists. Finally, *RT* also makes frequent reference to the illegality of U.S. actions within international law:

“What intl law? '#Syria strike possibility tramples regulations'
[@tmtotsei_rt](http://t.co/0mK3VF8srU)”²²⁶

“U.S. uses international law, UN to own advantage in Middle East'
[#Syria](http://t.co/LBSxpjO9Er)”²²⁷

“No law will stop Obama’s democracy-bombs over #Syria (Op-Edge)
<http://t.co/r5OJlcIule>”²²⁸

These tweets assume that the TA recognizes the authority of international law and the UN, and would be influenced by an argument claiming the U.S. is violating these authorities. An analysis of @RT_com’s tweet content shows a clear effort to influence a young, left-leaning, U.S.-based Twitter audience with democratic values and that is frustrated with the U.S. government following 9/11 and the Afghanistan and Iraq wars. In order to further its own geopolitical interests, it deploys standard IO tactics on the Twitter ICT platform, taking full advantage of psychological operations methodologies. Further investigation, however, is required to determine if these IO efforts were successful.

4.2.2.5 Russian IO and Twitter Network Affinity Groups

We can gain insights into the success @RT_com may or may not have had with this TA through social network analysis. The social network analysis modeling introduced previously may help provide clues about the actual audience @RT_com’s messaging and narratives resonated with. The largest number of Twitter users interacting with @RT_com was within the second cyber-community in Table 3. From this we can generalize that the second cyber-community constituted the largest portion of @RT_com’s Twitter audience, and was where @RT_com’s influence was most concentrated. From Table 3 we can see that English was the most common language for the second cyber-community, and from further investigation into the dataset the U.S. was the most common country location self-identified. This shows that @RT_com was reaching its ideal

²²⁶ Twitter post, September 7, 2013, 4:51 p.m., http://twitter.com/rt_com

²²⁷ Twitter post, August 27, 2013, 1:51 p.m., http://twitter.com/rt_com

²²⁸ Twitter post, September 5, 2013, 9:59 a.m., http://twitter.com/rt_com

demographic TA through its Twitter IO efforts. Table 3 also shows that two of the most frequent hashtags of the second cyber-community demonstrate an antiwar stance: “#nowarwithsyria” and “#handsoffsyria”. This provides an indication that the tweets in @RT_com’s cyber-community contain an antiwar bias. As inferred previously through reverse TAA, Russian IO is seeking to resonate with the U.S.-based antiwar TA. In addition, one of the top “Most Frequent Biography Words” from Table 3 is “anti”, which if we dig deeper into the data set is most frequently seen followed by “tyranny”, “elitist”, “imperialist”, “fascist”, and “islamophobia” with “war” also frequently seen. By looking at tweets within this cyber-community, one can see that in this cyber-community, these words are predominantly aimed towards the U.S. government.

A core element of the stated identity and worldview of many of the members of this cyber-community is criticism of the U.S. government and foreign policy. Therefore from the results in Table 3 and further investigation into the dataset, it can be observed that @RT_com is resonating with an activist Twitter audience highly critical of U.S. foreign policy and geopolitics. As discussed previously Russia was seeking to use the U.S. disaffected, fringe left as a geopolitical tool to pressure the U.S. government. The quantitative network analysis shows that the Russians were able to successfully lead this affinity pool on Twitter predominantly through its @RT_com IO efforts.

While @RT_com had the highest degree and therefore most prominence in the second cyber-community in Table 3 (and played a major role in bringing this cyber-community together), observing the tweets of other popular Twitter users in the same cyber-community can provide additional insights into @RT_com’s actual Twitter audience. By observing other popular Twitter users, it is possible to observe common characteristics and viewpoints that resonate within the cyber-community. In addition to the disaffected U.S. left, one set of highly popular Twitter users @RT_com was associated with through its cyber-community were Syrian pro-Assad Twitter users. A few notable users in this set with a high Indegree were @Partisangirl, @ProSyriana, and @SyrianLionesss. Their tweets mirror the same arguments as the Russian and Syrian governments that the chemical attacks were a U.S. conspiracy to provide a justification for military intervention to topple the Assad regime:

“After this anyone who doesn't realise the U.S. govt/Israel was behind the chemical Strike and the UN sniper attack are delusional #Syria”²²⁹

²²⁹ Twitter post, August 26, 2013, 2:38 p.m., <http://twitter.com/partisangirl>

“RT @Way2Wonderland The only ones that would benefit from the use or alleged use of CW in #Syria is the bloodthirsty 'elite' who have been trying to invade.”²³⁰

“Two phone calls affirm the use of chemical weapons in #Homs by terrorists
<http://t.co/5CV07GF6dI> #Syria <http://t.co/LILJabbOg4>”²³¹

Tweets from these pro-Assad users were also strongly critical of U.S. foreign policy, leaders and the Free Syrian Army (FSA) opposition:

“#Kerry is a hypocrite and a war criminal and supports AlQaeda in #Syria
<http://t.co/XHmTZIjkZf>”²³²

“RT @theLemniscat If Obama's FSA terrorists could do this to a child, then they're capable of murdering kids to stage #CWattack <http://t.co/XhUIRVQqjj> #Syria”²³³

The pro-Assad Twitter users and @RT_com share the common Russian/Syrian stance of opposition culpability for the chemical attack and anti-American rhetoric. The narrative of U.S. foreign policy being equivalent to “elite” interests is introduced by @ProSyriana, which was not explicitly seen in @RT_com’s tweets. In part, this narrative helps explain the frequency of “anti” and “elitist” words showing up in the biography terms discussed previously.

Another set of highly popular Twitter users within @RT_com’s cyber-community, and part of the fringe Russian TA, were anarchist hacker collectives and general anti-U.S., anti-elitist activist users, such as @WikiLeaks, @Anon_Central, @AnonOpsLegion and @OccupyWallSt. This set of users were frequently seen urging Twitter users to stop military action against Syria:

“What if a movement actually stopped a war... before it happened? #Syria”²³⁴

“March in Los Angeles, California! #NoWarwithSyria #HandsOffSyria #Syria
<http://t.co/kQSeF4Wx1o>”²³⁵

²³⁰ Twitter post, August 21, 2013, 12:25 p.m., <http://twitter.com/ProSyriana>

²³¹ Twitter post, August 23, 2013, 12:53 p.m., <http://twitter.com/syrianlionesss>

²³² Twitter post, August 26, 2013, 2:55 p.m., <http://twitter.com/partisangirl>

²³³ Twitter post, August 21, 2013, 9:09 p.m., <http://twitter.com/prosyriana>

²³⁴ Twitter post, August 29, 2013, 9:01 p.m., <http://twitter.com/occupywallst>

²³⁵ Twitter post, September 3, 2013, 10:47 p.m., <http://twitter.com/anonopslegion>

“Say no to war. #Syria <http://t.co/RvZ4FzuuZ8>”²³⁶

“Two Marches on #Congress - Sat., Sept. 7 & Mon, Sept. 9 - Vote NO War Against #Syria! #NoWarOnSyria - <http://t.co/SEs0SSwgBx>”²³⁷

“RT @Way2Wonderland Saturday, August 31st 12:00-6:00 Times Square, NYC -- No War On #Syria Rally #HandsOffSyria @OccupyWallSt”²³⁸

“Don't forget to contact your State Senators and Reps and let the know you want to keep the U.S. out of #Syria <http://t.co/Cpdioxql7S>”²³⁹

These users have a clear and strong anti-war bias as can be seen through their tweets. These users also maintain the same main argument as @RT_com that opposing war is the only way to live up to democratic ideals:

“To the U.S. -- No free country starts a war. A nation that is free to choose will always choose peace. #Syria #handsoffsyria”²⁴⁰

“TO THE WORLD: The actions that the U.S. Government is threatening #Syria with is NOT the will of the people but that of a hijacked authority”²⁴¹

“RT @FearDept China and Russia are representing the will of the American People at the United Nations. We didn't think they'd stoop that low. #Syria”²⁴²

They also repeat the Russian and Assad regime's position of placing culpability for the chemical attack on the opposition and a U.S. conspiracy to intervene:

²³⁶ Twitter post, September 6, 2013, 3:53 a.m., <http://twitter.com/anonopslegion>

²³⁷ Twitter post, September 4, 2013, 3:24 p.m., <http://twitter.com/anonopslegion>

²³⁸ Twitter post, August 29, 2013, 1:12 a.m., http://twitter.com/anon_central

²³⁹ Twitter post, August 27, 2013, 1:03 p.m., http://twitter.com/anon_central

²⁴⁰ Twitter post, August 31, 2013, 1:08 p.m., <http://twitter.com/anonopslegion>

²⁴¹ Twitter post, September 1, 2013, 1:09 p.m., <http://twitter.com/anonopslegion>

²⁴² Twitter post, August 28, 2013, 11:46 p.m., http://twitter.com/anon_central

“So...#Obama said that he will attack #Syria even if the congress say NO, but now the UN said that "rebels" are responsible for gas attack...”²⁴³

“Jabhat al Nusra Speaks up -- The proofs that the terrorists in #Syria used the chemical weapons --<http://t.co/01kSAy8W5A>”²⁴⁴

“The truth is only one: U.S. invented lies to invade another country, did you remember Iraq ? #Syria”²⁴⁵

“#U.S. Planned Chemical Weapons False Flag Attack for #Syria, Leaked Documents here : <http://t.co/Qi9BKgQlaA>”²⁴⁶

They took the Russian message of opposition culpability one step further than @RT_com and broadcast misleading information, claiming the UN placed culpability on Syrian rebels. They also broadcast misinformation in the form of “Leaked Documents,” attempting to prove a U.S. conspiracy to invade. Finally, this set of users were highly critical of mainstream U.S. and Western media for a biased pro-U.S. government position:

“"Any dictator would admire the uniformity and obedience of the U.S. media." - Noam Chomsky #Syria”²⁴⁷

“RT @truthseeker0511 @Anon_Central Proof of #BBC propaganda, and the use of #chemical weapons by #Syria rebels: <http://t.co/qZuKjtlNeM>”²⁴⁸

“We all know #BBC takes pride in its research and is totally unbiased ... NOT! Exhibit A - #Syria, Houla massacre | <http://t.co/WoYxtha7Pc>”²⁴⁹

²⁴³ Twitter post, September 7, 2013, 1:23 p.m., <http://twitter.com/anonopslegion>

²⁴⁴ Twitter post, September 6, 2013, 4:52 p.m., <http://twitter.com/anonopslegion>

²⁴⁵ Twitter post, September 4, 2013, 1:42 p.m., <http://twitter.com/anonopslegion>

²⁴⁶ Twitter post, August 27, 2013, 8:06 p.m., http://twitter.com/anon_central

²⁴⁷ Twitter post, September 3, 2013, 10:29 p.m., <http://twitter.com/anonopslegion>

²⁴⁸ Twitter post, August 29, 2013, 6:14 a.m., http://twitter.com/anon_central

²⁴⁹ Twitter post, August 22, 2013, 2:25 a.m., http://twitter.com/anon_central

“@eliselabottcnn @joshelleyCNN "rogue commanders used CW in #Syria" oh really?”²⁵⁰

“#Breaking ::: #SEA broke JewYorkTimes again. > <http://t.co/6tA21ThmYa> #topeles | #SYRIA”²⁵¹

But frequently retweeted and lent credibility to @RT_com:

“Via @RT_com : Syrian rebels plan chemical attack on Israel from Assad-controlled territories - <http://t.co/Fs5i5VLVh8> | #Syria”²⁵²

“"Footage of Chemical Attack in Syria Is Fraud" - <http://t.co/56P2YY2fgN> | #Syria via @RT_com”²⁵³

“No law will stop Obama’s democracy-bombs over #Syria (Op-Edge) <http://t.co/XTtSm9FCCW>”²⁵⁴

“RT @RT_com 'Obama should be stripped of his Nobel Peace prize if he starts #Syria war' - @pavelandreev to RT <http://t.co/xn4ZCFKUzT>”²⁵⁵

Despite this set of users’ tendency to criticize U.S. mass media for pro-state propaganda, they are very willing to utilize @RT_com Russian IO propaganda as it provides them with ammunition to criticize the U.S. government. These users are either politically inexperienced and naïve (and are unaware of *RT*’s existence as a Russian soft war tool), or are so preoccupied with the single issue of criticizing the U.S. government that they will resonate with the criticism, regardless of *RT*’s ultimate intentions towards the U.S.. Regardless, this alignment of interests provides Russia a high degree of influence amongst this cyber-community and an entry point into U.S. domestic politics.

²⁵⁰ Twitter post, August 29, 2013, 4:39 a.m., http://twitter.com/anon_central

²⁵¹ Twitter post, August 27, 2013, 5:46 p.m., http://twitter.com/anon_central

²⁵² Twitter post, September 9, 2013, 12:01 p.m., <http://twitter.com/anonopslegion>

²⁵³ Twitter post, September 5, 2013, 11:49 a.m., <http://twitter.com/anonopslegion>

²⁵⁴ Twitter post, August 29, 2013, 1:54 a.m., http://twitter.com/anon_central

²⁵⁵ Twitter post, September 7, 2013, 1:23 p.m., <http://twitter.com/anonopslegion>

4.2.2.6 Russian IO Findings Summary

The pro-democracy, anti-war, anti-U.S. foreign policy narrative employed by @RT_com aligns well with the narratives of other popular users within its cyber-community. The mutual interest in broadcasting relentlessly negative media about U.S. military efforts and politicians within this cyber-community provides Russia with a convenient IO route to support U.S. fringe groups for geopolitical gain. As shown, both @RT_com and other prominent users within the cyber-community take the Russian and Syrian regime's position that the rebels, backed by a U.S.-led conspiracy to invade, are culpable for the chemical attack. They also carry many of the same secondary arguments, such as the U.S. is assisting Sunni terrorists and U.S. military action will only increase Syrian suffering. This argument was also picked up by the Republican affinity pool also looking to oppose Obama's efforts. In this sense, the fringe Left was influencing the arguments employed by Republicans. By using social network analysis, it was possible to quantitatively frame qualitative observations of the cyber-community that emerged around @RT_com. The combined qualitative and quantitative analysis shows that Russian views and geopolitical stances attracted the second largest cyber-community on Twitter, reaching a predominantly English and U.S.-based audience, based on user-declared location information.

While measuring the exact influence Russian Twitter efforts had in changing overall U.S. public opinion on military action in Syria, and how much this influenced Obama's decisions is beyond the scope of this study, it is clear that within the Twitter ICT platform, Russia's main IO tool @RT_com had some success in promoting the Russian geopolitical stance to its likely intended target audience. Also, it was able to play a central role in promoting and bringing together a cyber-community strongly opposed to U.S. foreign policy. Russia's attempts to opportunistically capitalize on a segment of the U.S. population looking for alternate news to U.S. mass media have centered on trying to build credibility and influence through alignment of narratives. Appearing to champion the anti-war, democratic cause provided a convenient psychological vessel through which to disseminate the Russian geopolitical position, and as was shown, the Russian position was picked up and echoed by an ad hoc affinity pool opposed to U.S. efforts.

4.3 Qualitative Conclusion

This chapter scrutinized the core content of the war of tweets between the U.S. and Russia, building on the broad patterns and cyber TAs observed in the quantitative section. With the core arguments between Russia and the U.S. delineated, this chapter took a closer look at the wording used in tweets, and what the common political traits were within the cyber-communities. U.S. IO efforts on Twitter to convince the domestic population of the necessity of upholding

international laws against chemical weapons massacres through military force largely missed the mark. The largest cyber TAs did not appear to rally around U.S. IO efforts. The opportunity to interact with conservative and liberal humanitarian cyber TAs was missed with a slow-to-react U.S. Twitter IO effort and a weak response from U.S. news media on Twitter.

The Russian effort, on the other hand, through its mass media proxy *Russia Today*, successfully led a cyber-community of fringe groups with a mutual interest in broadcasting relentlessly negative media about U.S. military efforts and foreign policy. Some of the main arguments shared by Russia and this cyber-community were also opportunistically repeated by elements of the Republican cyber-community looking to criticize Obama. By spinning their geopolitical position into an anti-war, anti-U.S. government narrative, Russian IO picked up some traction and support for their geopolitical position.

This chapter was key for fusing the geopolitical context of Syria, the domestic U.S. political environment, the concept of IO as a weapon of state warfare, and the observed quantitative patterns into a coherent picture of the whole in the aftermath of the chemical weapons incident. It demonstrated that Twitter can be used as an effective, if limited, IO tool and that the coordination of arguments and narratives within a cyber-community can act as a powerful force of influence on Twitter.

Chapter 5 - Conclusion

The chemical weapons massacre on 21 August 2013 in Ghouta, Syria was a direct affront to long-standing international laws and norms against their indiscriminate use and devastatingly cruel effects. The attack was not intended to murder just rebel opposition forces, but also women and children, and to inflict severe psychological harm. The unabashed use of mass casualty weapons poses a serious threat and challenge to international stability, and it is for this reason that the response of the international community to the August 21st attack was critical. This thesis specifically focused on the Twitter war of words between the U.S. and Russia as part of that process.

Although there is little to suggest that either side developed a proactive strategic communications plan to persuade Twitter target audiences from the onset, and instead remained largely *reactive*--to each other and to the broader emerging media and political discourse regarding the attack--Russia did, at the end of the day, emerge victorious in cyberspace, at least in the short term. It was able to gain the attention of a leftist anti-war audience in the U.S., exploited existing bipartisan tensions in the U.S., and ultimately it prevented, or at least delayed, any significant American or UN military intervention in Syria. However, any such claim to “victory” must inevitably remain qualified, for the Twitter communities that formed following the incident tended to self-select and to generally articulate pre-existing national and political biases. Moreover, the U.S. *did* eventually become militarily involved in Syria and, as is always the case with human behaviour, a multitude of influences come to bear on the formation of opinion.

5.1 Twitter as an IO tool and the August 2013 attack

The war of tweets was part of the wider ensuing geopolitical conflict to define and shape what action, if any, the international community would take in response to the massacre. The Twitter IO efforts of both the U.S. and Russia sought to support broader attempts to shape the international response in their favour, and they provided yet another opportunity and ICT platform to continue the decades-long information war between the two. For Russia, the Syrian Sarin gas incident, and what has transpired since, provides a means of trying to undermine the U.S. political process, what it deems to be ongoing U.S. hegemony, and to reassert itself on the international stage after two decades of relative obscurity. For the U.S., the incident provided an opportunity to reinforce the U.S.-led liberal international order and to decry the violation of laws against the use of chemical weapons.

The U.S. IO efforts demonstrated both a reactionary approach to the war of tweets and a divided U.S. domestic political response. The Obama Administration was reluctant to enforce its “red-line” and its Twitter IO efforts did not appear serious, with delayed, haphazard reactions, and it did not appear to resonate with a

TA beyond the limited audience of international affairs specialists. Serious questions should also be asked as to why the U.S., in the time of an international crisis, would politically turn on itself rather than unite against a chemical weapons slaughter. Bipartisan squabbling was evident in the Obama Administration's missed opportunities to interact with the domestic conservative cyber-community, while many within the conservative community were looking to simply criticize Obama, even to the point of opportunistically taking arguments from the Russian-led fringe left cyber-community. There is a strong tendency on Twitter to interact with like-minded individuals, and the Obama Administration's Twitter IO efforts failed to rise above this and act as a unifying force.

The data showed that Russia, through *Russia Today*'s brand leadership of a highly engaged fringe cyber-community (with the ability to influence U.S. conservatives), emerged as the "victor" in this war of tweets. That said, it needs to be stated again that any claims to victory or success on Twitter must be qualified, as it is exceedingly difficult, here, to attribute influence directly to the Russian IO efforts on Twitter during the four-week period following the chemical attack. Twitter users are influenced not only on Twitter but also from a multitude of other information mediums over time. Russia was also profiting from its cultivation of a fringe domestic following in the U.S. for years prior to the crisis. And the practical limitations of obtaining the dataset meant that getting an historical baseline of activity prior to the incident and comparing behaviours following the incident was not possible. The claims of victory here were solely within the bounds of the short-term timeframe; longer-term effects of influence on Twitter would be ideal as a follow-on study.

This thesis also showed that the cyber-community itself was a main element of the IO message on Twitter, carrying the power of social influence through crowds of like-minded individuals and groups with shared narratives. The cyber-community led by *Russia Today* showed that fringe groups can occupy a disproportionate presence on Twitter (compared to the larger population), and through the example of Kasich, showed the ability of fringe groups to influence other cyber-communities.

Russian IO demonstrated that when narratives are coordinated between the government IO efforts and those of the cyber-community, it could give the appearance of mob legitimacy to IO efforts. In addition, through the *Russia Today* brand, the Russian government did not act as an objective, dispassionate observer in U.S. domestic politics, but instead opportunistically acted as a direct member of the anti-war, anti-government movement: this despite Russia's continued use of military power in Syria, Ukraine, and elsewhere over the last couple decades.

5.2 *Twitter as an IO tool of soft war*

Beyond this single case study of the four-week chemical weapons crisis, there are potential applications of Twitter IO for Western militaries. NATO has realized that the “weaponization of information” cannot be ignored and has started drafting plans to combat adversary propaganda.²⁵⁶ From countering Russian propaganda in Baltic NATO countries, to battling Islamic extremist groups like ISIL for hearts and minds, there are clear areas of future study for Twitter as an IO tool in soft war. Investing greater effort in developing a nuanced understanding of the possibilities of Twitter IO through cyber TAA (borrowing from social network analysis methods), and in measuring long-term behavioural change, is also worthy of further study. Both Russia and ISIL have shown the utility of cultivating a cyber-community on Twitter as a means to their ends.

The weak U.S. IO effort observed in this thesis shows that Twitter IO efforts must be quick to respond in a real-time environment. Actors must quickly and in a fast-changing environment develop a clear TA *strategy* aimed at cultivating, influencing, monitoring, and readjusting for shifts in opinion within cyber-communities as competing message paradigms emerge. The U.S. IO effort was observed to be totally reactive, slow to respond, and lacking a coherent plan, and such lack of initiative cannot repeat itself if the West looks to remain resilient in the Information Age.

It is also clear that detailed cyber TAA must be conducted *before* international crises arise for IO efforts and associated intelligence efforts to be meaningful. Cultivating the attention and trust of a cyber-community takes time and planning, and it cannot be accomplished quickly whenever crises arise. The greatest benefit of having an active cyber-community following is that it provides future potential to rapidly propagate narratives and messages throughout Twitter and, indeed, all forms of social media that rely on groups to achieve a critical mass of persuasive power. There is no great mystery to ISIL’s success on Twitter: they were deliberate with their planning and efforts and did not brush Twitter aside as an unimportant soft war tool. They were able to generate a highly motivated following based on specific socio-cultural messaging, which they could then use to recruit and inspire direct action. ISIL’s success in recruiting and inspiring acts of violence, especially in suicide operations, shows the strength of affinity bonds existing in these cyber-communities.

²⁵⁶ Emmott, Robin. "NATO Drafts Plans to Combat Russia’s ‘weaponisation of Information’." *World News*. The Globe and Mail, 27 Jan. 2016. Web. 29 Feb. 2016.

5.3 Soft power and ICT/Social Media beyond Twitter

Twitter is only one tool in an entire information arsenal that states and non-state actors have at their disposal. Social media tools range from large platforms like Facebook to regional platforms native to Russia, China, and the Middle East. As this thesis has shown, Twitter and social media are emerging as soft power weapons in the global marketplace of ideas, and their role will only increase over time as more of the world gets connected.

The freedom and low cost of broadcasting information on social media platforms has opened up the floodgates to propaganda wars. The Arab Spring and ISIL's success were two early indications of this, followed by Russian IO efforts targeting Ukraine and NATO. Social media is not going to disappear from international conflict, and as this virtual phenomenon only gains in strength and in its ability to shape reality, so too will the ability of social media to radically influence the outcome of geopolitical conflict. The world's population is adopting social media exponentially, and not just in economically developed countries. A deep and nuanced understanding of IO in this cyber AO will be required for democratic Western societies to remain resilient in the face of increased IO efforts from a range of known, and as-yet unknown, threats in our era of unprecedented information exchange.

A robust social media effort founded upon detailed social network analysis and rigorous TAA *prior to* events occurring in hotspots around the world will be crucial for countering destructive social forces looking to assert themselves through the soft power that is Information Operations. Each social media platform favours the formation and sustenance of certain kinds of social networks and interactions, all of which will need to be taken into account as part of the strategic IO preparation and planning process. Whereas, for instance, Twitter promotes the broadcast of short bursts of information between large volumes of users in real time, a platform like Facebook favours closer personal ties and richer affinity pools of interest. A social media platform like LinkedIn lies somewhere in between, and each of the hundreds of available other social media platforms in cyberspace has its own tethers to a point on the virtual spectrum of real social influence. Some are more transient and reactive by nature, whereas others are more stable, personal, and "intimate," so to speak. Robust IO efforts will need to combine multiple social media platforms, but first they will need to identify and incorporate the unique characteristics, strengths, and weaknesses of each into a *plan* and, where possible, anticipate and then deliberately generate influence synergy and momentum among them all.

Regardless of the platform, the medium of social media in an increasingly globalized, media-rich, and interconnected virtual world naturally emits a message of crowd legitimacy. In this virtual world, soft power will be determined by the

ability of IO practitioners to harness the power of social networks unfettered by physical location and that can focus clearly and deliberately on affinities. In the virtual world, just as in the physical one, leadership in communities cannot be accomplished from a distance and at the last moment but must rather be the result of the continued cultivation of relationships and trust. This study concludes that although there are some inherent limitations of the use of Twitter and social media in general as ICT IO tools, if properly planned for and deployed, their messaging capability makes them potent tools in the ICT arsenal for state actors wanting to project soft power or even misinformation in a modern world increasingly susceptible to the forces of online influence and persuasion. These forces are capable of driving and shaping the ways societies politically swarm, and hence they influence the norms and values that persist, come to dominate, or indeed that risk becoming extinct.

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Appendix A – U.S. and Russian Foreign Policy Positions

Table 4 - 2013 Timeline and Summary of Official U.S. and Russian Political Stances Following the August 2013 Attack

Date	U.S.	Russia
21 August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support impartial UN chemical weapons investigation.²⁵⁷ • Assad should be removed from power.²⁵⁸ • Support international control and destruction of Syrian chemical weapons.²⁵⁹ • UN Security Council enforces consequences for failure of Assad regime to comply with destruction of chemical weapons.²⁶⁰ • Require political resolution to remove Assad from power.²⁶¹ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support impartial UN chemical weapons investigation.²⁶² • Middle East region media conducting information attack on Syrian government.²⁶³ • Chemical weapons attack is planned provocation for UNSC to take side of opposition.²⁶⁴

²⁵⁷ Office of the Press Secretary. "Press Briefing by Principal Deputy Press Secretary Josh Earnest, 8/21/2013." *The White House*. 21 Aug. 2013. Web. (Jan 2014).

²⁵⁸ Office of the Press Secretary, Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Office of the Press Secretary. " Ben Rhodes, Deputy National Security Advisor For Strategic Communications, on the President’s Trip to the United Nations General Assembly." *The White House*. 21 Aug. 2013. Web. (Jan 2014).

²⁶⁰ Office of the Press Secretary, Ibid.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² MFA Statements and Speeches. “Announcement by the official representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia Alexander Lukashevich regarding the messages about the use of chemical poisonous weapons in Syria” *Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Official Site*. 21 Aug. 2013. Web. (Jan 2014).

²⁶³ MFA, Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

22 August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assad regime denies responsibility.²⁶⁵ • Assad regime must allow UN inspection team full access to site.²⁶⁶ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Syrian authorities are cooperating with UN inspection team.²⁶⁷ • Require political settlement to end Syrian civil war.²⁶⁸ • Middle East region media inaccurate alleging Syrian forces responsible.²⁶⁹
23 August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • American boots on the ground not in the best interest of national security.²⁷⁰ • President is committed to working with international community.²⁷¹ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attack was a pre-planned conspiracy by the West: online material accusing Syrian troops was published several hours before the attack.²⁷² • The opposition has not signalled its consent for the UN investigation team. They are an obstacle to the team.²⁷³ • Anti-Syrian propaganda and European official calls for use of force inadmissible.²⁷⁴

²⁶⁵ Office of the Press Secretary. "Gaggle on Air Force One en route NY." *The White House*. 22 Aug. 2013. Web. (Jan 2014).

²⁶⁶ Office of the Press Secretary, Ibid.

²⁶⁷ MFA Statements and Speeches. "Briefing by the official representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia Alexander Lukashevich, 22 August 2013" *Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Official Site*. 22 Aug. 2013. Web. (Jan 2014).

²⁶⁸ MFA, Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Office of the Press Secretary. "Press Gaggle by Principal Deputy Press Secretary Josh Earnest, 8/23/2013." *The White House*. 23 Aug. 2013. Web. (Jan 2014).

²⁷¹ Office of the Press Secretary, Ibid.

²⁷² MFA Statements and Speeches. "Announcement by the official representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia Alexander Lukashevich regarding the messages about the incident in the Damascus suburb of Guta." *Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Official Site*. 23 Aug. 2013. Web. (Jan 2014).

²⁷³ MFA, Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

25 August		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unilateral geopolitics and use of force against Syria is against international law and a mistake.²⁷⁵ • The attack was a provocation by the Syrian opposition.²⁷⁶ • This provocation is similar to false information leading to Iraq intervention.²⁷⁷ • Unilateral force will lead to further regional destabilization.²⁷⁸ • U.S. and European threats of force against Syrian government work to dissuade opposition from negotiating a settlement.²⁷⁹
26 August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Syria has the capability, control over and motives to use chemical weapons.²⁸⁰ • Syrian regime has failed to cooperate with UN investigation, refusing entry to the team for five 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The opposition is strengthened by the information campaign in favour of a [foreign]military solution.²⁸² • Arming illegal groups in Syria creates threats in the region.²⁸³

²⁷⁵ MFA Statements and Speeches. “Announcement by the official representative of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Alexander Lukashevich regarding the consent of the Syrian government to grant UN experts access to the location of alleged use of chemical weapons in Eastern Ghouta.” *Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Official Site*. 25 Aug. 2013. Web. (Jan 2014).

²⁷⁶ MFA, Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ John Kerry. “Remarks on Syria.” *U.S. Department of State*. 26 Aug. 2013. Web. (Jan 2014).

²⁸² MFA Statements and Speeches. “Speech and answers to questions from the mass media by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov during the press conference on the topic of chemical weapons in Syria and the situation around the Syrian Arab Republic, Moscow, 26 August 2013.” *Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Official Site*. 26 Aug. 2013. Web. (Jan 2014).

²⁸³ MFA, Ibid.

	days and shelling the area further. ²⁸¹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internet provides evidence that rebels obtained chemical weapons from foreign countries.²⁸⁴ • Bombing Syria and leaving opposition to remove the regime will not solve the conflict.²⁸⁵
27 August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Syrian regime is responsible for the attack, and has the capacity to launch the attack.²⁸⁶ • Syrian statements about chemical weapons use have no credibility.²⁸⁷ • Long term solution is through negotiation and political resolution, not military force.²⁸⁸ • To not respond to chemical weapons use would invite further use.²⁸⁹ • Syrian regime bombardments of the area are a clear effort to destroy evidence.²⁹⁰ • Response will not include regime change [through military intervention].²⁹¹ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • U.S. showing proof of Syrian regime culpability is against UN independent investigation.²⁹³

²⁸¹ Kerry, Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ Office of the Press Secretary. " Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney, 8/27/2013." *The White House*. 27 Aug. 2013. Web. (Jan 2014).

²⁸⁷ Office of the Press Secretary, Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹³ MFA Statements and Speeches. "Announcement by the official representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia Alexander Lukashevich regarding the decision of the

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A red line has been crossed.²⁹² 	
28 August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Russia is opposing any meaningful UN resolutions with respect to Syria.²⁹⁴ • “we believe that it’s too late for the UN inspection to be credible, given the mass shelling that the regime has done in the affected areas”²⁹⁵ • “we believe the regime is trying to use the UN investigation to hide behind and to stall”²⁹⁶ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using force as a solution in Syria will lead to further destabilisation in Syria and in the region.²⁹⁷
29 August		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UN inspections should not only be carried out in Damascus but also three other places including Khan al-Asal.²⁹⁸
30 August		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unilateral action against Syria bypassing the UNSC is a violation of international law, will disrupt the political resolution of the conflict, and casualties. This should not be allowed.²⁹⁹

United States to postpone the Russian-American meeting on Syria.” *Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Official Site*. 26 Aug. 2013. Web. (Jan 2014).

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Marie Harf. "Daily Press Briefing". State Department Web Site. 28 Aug. 2013 (Sept. 2014)

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ MFA Statements and Speeches. “Phone conversation between Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Special Envoy to Syria Lajdar Brahimi.” *Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Official Site*. 28 Aug. 2013. Web. (Sept. 2014).

²⁹⁸ MFA Statements and Speeches. “Comment by the official representative of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Alexander Lukashevich regarding the UN mission investigating possible uses of chemical weapons in Syria.” *Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Official Site*. 29 Aug. 2013. Web. (Sept. 2014).

²⁹⁹ MFA Statements and Speeches. “Comment by the official representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia Alexander Lukashevich regarding the statements of the United States about the forceful action against Syria.” *Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Official Site*. 30 Aug. 2013. Web. (Sept. 2014).

4 September		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The “mass filling of information space” to impose responsibility on the Syrian government before results of the UN inspection is to prepare for military action.³⁰⁰ • “Syrian army personnel was affected by poisonous weapons on the 22, 24 and 25 August, when they found materials, equipment and containers with traces of Sarin gas in the suburbs of the Syrian capital city.”³⁰¹ • Military action against Syria may result in strikes against sensitive sites contaminating the surrounding area.³⁰² • The planned U.S. military interference is a violation of the UN Charter, and a form of armed reprisal. There is an attempt by the West to promote the concept of “Responsibility to Protect” and revive the notion of “humanitarian intervention”, which is not generally accepted.³⁰³
5 September		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All alleged uses of chemical weapons must be investigated by

³⁰⁰ MFA Statements and Speeches. “Comment by the Information and Press Department of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding the investigations into the use of chemical weapons in Syria.” *Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Official Site*. 4 Sept. 2013. Web. (Sept. 2014).

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² MFA Statements and Speeches. “Statement by the official representative of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Alexander Lukashevich, regarding the consequences of forceful action against Syria for nuclear security and nuclear non-proliferation.” *Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Official Site*. 4 Sept. 2013. Web. (Sept. 2014).

³⁰³ MFA Statements and Speeches. “Comment by the Information and Press Department of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding a possible forceful action by the United States against Syria.” *Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Official Site*. 4 Sept. 2013. Web. (Sept. 2014).

		the UNSC before making further decisions. ³⁰⁴
6 September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of chemical weapons is a threat to global peace and security and threatens neighbours – Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Israel. It destabilizes the region and increases the risk of chemical weapons falling into the hands of terror groups, and threatens to unravel international norm against chemical weapons³⁰⁵ • Some countries believe action must by principle go through UNSC, but given UNSC paralysis on the issue, to be serious about banning chemical weapons use an international response is required.³⁰⁶ • Experience with the war in Iraq colors how people view the situation in Syria in the U.S., Europe and around the world. This is how people analyze it. People are worried about a slippery slope and effectiveness of limited action. The U.S. can deliver a proportional limited action to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many countries seemed to show force bypassing UNSC will hurt the political resolution.³¹¹ • “We need to use every day, hour and minute to bring the thought of the harmfulness of the forceful scenario to the public using trustworthy channels”³¹² • The U.S. claims they have determined which group is responsible, but this can only be done by objective bodies like the UNSC.³¹³ • Wrongful interference by the U.S. should avoid hitting chemical site areas to avoid the threat of outbreaks harming civilians and the environment. Reckless action may also give access to chemical weapons to militias and terrorists. The U.S. bombing of Iraq’s Al Muthanna chemical weapons storage site in 1991 is an example

³⁰⁴ MFA Statements and Speeches. “Phone conversation between the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry.” *Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Official Site*. 5 Sept. 2013. Web. (Sept. 2014).

³⁰⁵ Office of the Press Secretary. "Remarks by President Obama in a Press Conference at the G20." *The White House*. 6 Sept. 2013. Web. (Sept. 2014).

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³¹¹ MFA Statements and Speeches. “Comment by the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov to the mass media, summarising the results of the meeting with foreign ministers of the G20 countries and the UN/LAS Special Envoy to Syria Lakhdar Brahimi, on the side-lines of the summit in St Petersburg, 6 August 2013.” *Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Official Site*. 6 Sept. 2013. Web. (Sept. 2014).

³¹² Ibid.

³¹³ Ibid.

	<p>degrade the use of chemical weapons and serve as a deterrent.³⁰⁷</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The case to make to the Congress and the American people over the next couple days is that the military action would be limited and proportional designed to uphold the norm against chemical weapons use.³⁰⁸ • The U.S. is imparting a sense of urgency, otherwise there would be pointless UN resolutions and the world would have moved on.³⁰⁹ • The U.S. is open to good non-military options.³¹⁰ 	<p>of environmental contamination.³¹⁴</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mother Agnes Mariam el-Salib, mother superior of St. James Monastery is convinced that the chemical attacks were a provocation by the opposition. Videos of the attack were filmed in advance to discredit the Syrian government. Mass media “started to post materials about the tragedy on the 21 August at 06:05, but the chemical attack took place between 03:00 and 05:00 in the morning”. The Western and regional media are acting on commission from “certain circles” and are interested in the promotion of false information. These media ignore the massacres conducted by terrorist groups in Latikia. Action must be based on verified information not flimsy U.S. versions of events.³¹⁵
9 Septem ber	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “President Obama, after careful consideration, has decided that it is in the national security interest of the United States to conduct 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walid Al-Muallem stated that the Syrian Army has never or will use

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

³¹⁴ MFA Statements and Speeches. “Comment by the Information and Press Department of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding the discussion in Washington of the “scenarios” of the United States’ military operation in Syria.” *Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Official Site*. 6 Sept. 2013. Web. (Sept. 2014).

³¹⁵ MFA Statements and Speeches. “Comment by the Information and Press Department of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding the testimonies of Mother Agnes Mariam el-Salib, mother superior of St. James Monastery (Qara, Syria).” *Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Official Site*. 6 Sept. 2013. Web. (Sept. 2014).

	<p>limited military strikes against the Syrian regime.”³¹⁶</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Military action will not be a repeat of Iraq or Afghanistan, “there will be no American boots on the ground – period.” It will also not be like Kosovo or Libya that had sustained air campaigns.³¹⁷ • There is a requirement to send a message to prevent a nuclear-armed Iran.³¹⁸ 	<p>chemical weapons against its own people.³¹⁹</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If international control over Syrian chemical weapons will stop U.S. strikes, we will work immediately with Damascus. Syria should hand over its chemical weapons for destruction, and accede to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.³²⁰ • U.S. strikes will result in increased refugees.³²¹ • Professional assessments by Carla Del Ponte (member of the independent UN commission for the monitoring and investigation of reported human rights abuses in Syria) indicate that she has information concerning the use of poisonous chemical weapons by militants.³²²
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³¹⁶ Office of the Press Secretary. "Remarks As Prepared for Delivery by National Security Advisor Susan E. Rice." *The White House*. 9 Sept. 2013. Web. (Sept. 2014).

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

³¹⁹ MFA Statements and Speeches. "Negotiations between the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and the Syrian President of the Council of Ministers / Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates Walid Al-Muallem." *Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Official Site*. 9 Sept. 2013. Web. (Sept. 2014).

³²⁰ MFA Statements and Speeches. "Announcement by the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov for the mass media regarding the situation with Syrian chemical weapons, Moscow, 9 September 2013." *Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Official Site*. 9 Sept. 2013. Web. (Sept. 2014).

³²¹ MFA Statements and Speeches. "Speech by the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and his answers to questions from the mass media during the press conference summarising the results of negotiations with the President of the Council of Ministers / Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates Walid Al-Muallem, Moscow, 9 September 2013." *Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Official Site*. 9 Sept. 2013. Web. (Sept. 2014).

³²² Ibid.

10 Septem ber	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • U.S. and allies have worked to provide humanitarian support and help the moderate opposition to shape a political settlement.³²³ • “In the days leading up to August 21st, we know that Assad’s chemical weapons personnel prepared for an attack near an area where they mix Sarin gas. They distributed gasmasks to their troops. Then they fired rockets from a regime-controlled area into 11 neighborhoods that the regime has been trying to wipe clear of opposition forces. Shortly after those rockets landed, the gas spread, and hospitals filled with the dying and the wounded. We know senior figures in Assad’s military machine reviewed the results of the attack, and the regime increased their shelling of the same neighborhoods in the days that followed. We’ve also studied samples of blood and hair from people at the site that tested positive for Sarin.”³²⁴ • U.S. democracy is stronger and more united when the congressional approval is sought by the President.³²⁵ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The French proposal to adopt a UNSC Chapter VII resolution to hold the Syrian government responsible is unacceptable.³³⁰ • Syrians regard their chemical weapons as a counter balance to Israeli nuclear weapons. You can’t ask Syria to disarm unilaterally while military action is being contemplated.³³¹
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³²³ Office of the Press Secretary. "Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Syria." *The White House*. 10 Sept. 2013. Web. (Sept. 2014).

³²⁴ Ibid.

³²⁵ Ibid.

³³⁰ MFA Statements and Speeches. "Phone conversation between the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and the French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius." *Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Official Site*. 10 Sept. 2013. Web. (Sept. 2014).

³³¹ President of Russia Statements and Speeches. "Comments on the chemical weapons situation in Syria". *Russian Presidential Executive Office Kremlin Web Site*. 10 Sept. 2013. Web (Sept. 2014).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any action, even limited, after the toll of Iraq and Afghanistan is going to be unpopular.³²⁶ • The U.S. should not remove a dictator by force, as Iraq showed the U.S. is responsible for everything that follows.³²⁷ • The threat of U.S. military action created the willingness of Syria and Russia to have Syria hand over chemical weapons arsenal, and join the Chemical Weapons Convention³²⁸ • Obama has asked Congress to postpone a vote on the use of military force due to this progress, but is keeping the military in a position to respond.³²⁹ 	
11 September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The U.S. goal now is to test the seriousness of the destruction of Assad's chemical weapons.³³² 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UN may suffer the fate of the League of Nations if the UNSC is bypassed for military intervention.³³³ • Many countries and leaders, like the Pope, oppose military intervention as there will be more civilian victims and escalation and unleash a new wave of terrorism.³³⁴ • Military intervention could undermine the Iranian nuclear problem and Israeli-Palestinian conflict and further destabilize the

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ Ibid.

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ Ibid.

³³² Jen Psaki. "Daily Press Briefing". State Department Web Site. 11 Sept. 2013 (Sept. 2014)

³³³ Putin, Ibid.

³³⁴ Ibid.

		<p>Middle East and North Africa. It could throw the entire system of international law and order out of balance.³³⁵</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Russia is not protecting the Syrian government, but international law.³³⁶ • Under international law force is only permitted in self-defense or by the UNSC. Anything else would be an act of aggression.³³⁷ • The chemical weapons were used by the opposition, to provoke “powerful foreign patrons” into siding with fundamentalists.³³⁸ • Military intervention in Syria would be ineffective and pointless like Afghanistan, Libya and Iraq. In the U.S. many draw an analogy between Syria and Iraq and ‘ask why their government would want to repeat recent mistakes’.³³⁹ • Military intervention would erode non-proliferation since international law doesn’t protect them.³⁴⁰
12 September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The allegation of the opposition using chemical weapons on the 21st is preposterous.³⁴¹ 	
14 September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Syrian willingness to destroy their chemical weapons can’t be a stalling tactic. If diplomacy fails 	

³³⁵ Ibid.

³³⁶ Ibid.

³³⁷ Ibid.

³³⁸ Ibid.

³³⁹ Ibid.

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

³⁴¹ Marie Harf. "Daily Press Briefing". State Department Web Site. 12 Sept. 2013 (Sept. 2014)

	the U.S. and international community must be willing to act. ³⁴²	
17 September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The U.S. wants the strongest possible obligations and enforcement mechanisms in the agreed diplomatic solution.³⁴³ • The U.S. reserves the right to take military action, but diplomacy is the preferred option.³⁴⁴ • There are serious consequences of not holding Assad accountable.³⁴⁵ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “There is an open letter from ex CIA and Pentagon employees to the U.S. President Barack Obama, in which the events of the 21 August are described as staging”.³⁴⁶
18 September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The U.S. has seen no credible evidence or reporting showing the opposition used chemical weapons in Syria.³⁴⁷ • Iraq is not a good historical comparison of the situation in Syria. The situations are different.³⁴⁸ 	

³⁴² Ibid.

³⁴³ Jen Psaki. "Daily Press Briefing". State Department Web Site. 17 Sept. 2013 (Sept. 2014)

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

³⁴⁵ Office of the Press Secretary. " Press Briefing by the Press Secretary Jay Carney , 09/17/13." *The White House*. 17 Sept. 2013. Web. (Sept. 2014).

³⁴⁶ MFA Statements and Speeches. “Speech by the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, and his answers to questions from the mass media during the press conference summarising the results of the negotiations with the French Foreign Minister, Laurent Fabius, Moscow, 17 September 2013.” *Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Official Site*. 17 Sept. 2013. Web. (Sept. 2014).

³⁴⁷ Marie Harf. "Daily Press Briefing". State Department Web Site. 18 Sept. 2013 (Sept. 2014)

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

Appendix B – Gephi Overview

The social network analysis tool Gephi was used in this thesis. It is an ideal tool for social scientists with mixed or no background in programming. With Gephi, it is possible to take an Excel list of Twitter users, and a list of the users they interacted with, import the Excel sheet into Gephi, and visually display it as a set of circles connected with lines (nodes and edges in the terminology of Gephi). Gephi then has a Community Detection button that will take the list of users and interactions and divide the users into groups based on who interacts with whom the most. Each group, and user in the group, will be given a number to identify its membership to a group.

The process of using Gephi for community detection is as simple as loading the data using the data importer:

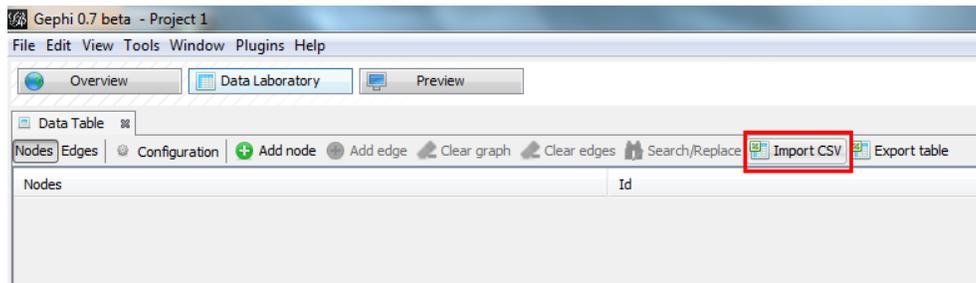


Figure 14 - Gephi Data Import³⁴⁹

and then running the algorithm:



Figure 15 - Run the Community Detection Algorithm³⁵⁰

Once the algorithm completes, every Twitter user in the social network is placed into a numbered community. The resulting data can then simply be exported to an Excel spreadsheet for further investigation:

³⁴⁹ Gephi. "Import CSV Data". Web, 7 Oct. 2015.

³⁵⁰ Gephi. "Gephi Tutorial Quick Start". Web, 7 Oct. 2015.



Figure 16 - Exporting Numbered Community Data

With the data exported, it is then possible to easily rank the Twitter users in each community by a variety of metrics.