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# How the Arab Spring Movement Has Been Covered by CNN, Fox News and MSNBC

Benjamin Snyder

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# **How the Arab Spring Movement Has Been Covered by CNN, Fox News and MSNBC**

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at  
Syracuse University

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and Renée Crown University Honors  
May 2013

Honors Capstone Project in Broadcast Journalism

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## Abstract

The Arab Spring movement has captivated the world over the past few years. Cable networks have played a large role covering the Arab Spring in the United States. CNN, Fox News and MSNBC are the three most watched cable networks and the ones that face the most scrutiny.

Cable news is often accused of catering to specific audiences, biased reporting and a variety of other criticisms. Most of these are leveled at the way the networks handle domestic issues. The Arab Spring represented an opportunity to see if the same critiques were true when cable focused on international events.

In terms of national issues, CNN is the network that is known for trying to remain in the center, or the middle of the political divide. Fox News is considered to aim for conservatives while MSNBC provides a liberal perspective. Each network has pundits that go against this framework but the majority of the content is focused in one direction. This project attempts to measure which network has provided the fairest and most comprehensive content regarding the Arab Spring.

Two shows on CNN, Fox News and MSNBC were chosen for analysis, making a total of six shows altogether. These shows all took place in the evening after the networks daytime news hours had completed. The evening shows are where cable really separates itself from broadcast news. The shows selected on CNN were Anderson Cooper 360° and The Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer. On Fox News Hannity and the O'Reilly Factor were analyzed. On MSNBC Hardball with Chris Matthews and The Rachel Maddow Show were selected.

Six events were chosen that were important to the Arab Spring in 2011. These were mass demonstrations beginning in Egypt in January, Egyptian leader Hosni Mubarak resigning in February, NATO forces intervening in Libya in March, Syrian protests causing violence throughout the country beginning in March, Mubarak going on trial in August and the Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi being killed in October.

Surveys were prepared that showed viewers clips of how a story was covered on each network that was analyzed. Viewers were then asked to rate the coverage they watched based on any perceived bias and the thoroughness of the coverage.

Viewer surveys showed that viewers still perceived a bias in Fox News and MSNBC's coverage of the Arab Spring. CNN was the network with the least perceived bias. Interestingly, even though MSNBC and Fox News scored high levels of bias amongst survey participants, the networks still rated highly in terms of the thoroughness and importance of the coverage they provided.

It can be concluded that Fox News and MSNBC still find a way to let their political agendas creep in to international stories while CNN manages to remain in the center. It cannot be concluded however, that the bias shown on any of the networks was necessarily a deterrent to how viewers felt about the quality of the coverage.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

The Arab Spring is the media term given to a series of protests across the Middle East and North Africa. The protests have generally been targeted against the government of a particular region. The first protests began in Tunisia on December 18<sup>th</sup>, 2010. After some success in Tunisia, protests started in many other countries, notably Egypt, Bahrain, Libya and Syria. One of the primary techniques used during the protests has been civil resistance, including demonstrations, marches, work strikes and rallies. In some areas violence has also been a component of the uprising, from both demonstrators and authorities trying to control them. While governments have tried to repress and censor what comes out of the protesting areas, social media and reporting from other countries has been crucial to spreading awareness about what is going on.

The Arab Spring has received widespread coverage on United States cable news networks. The three most watched cable news channels are CNN, Fox News and MSNBC. The events of the Arab Spring have translated well to television because they produce storytelling images, meaning the visuals that have come out of the movement can serve to greatly contribute to the public's understanding of

what is going on. For major news, taking place halfway across the world, American audiences rely on television to keep them informed throughout the day.

One of the interesting things about cable news in the United States is the level of scrutiny the networks face in their day-to-day reporting. Accusations of bias, overly broad coverage, a failure to focus on what's important and news simply for entertainment value are some of the many criticisms that are leveled against cable news. Also, unlike traditional newscasts on ABC, CBS and NBC, the three major cable news networks tend to be dominated by personalities rather than regular news anchors. This makes for interesting comparisons about how the same events are covered differently on CNN, Fox News and MSNBC.

The three major cable news outlets all have more traditional news hours during the daytime, meaning stories are basically delivered as they would be on broadcast network, without the anchors personality becoming part of the equation. At night though, hosts who can become as big of a viewer draw as the news itself take over. In some cases these people have clearly stated or inferred political leanings that viewers are aware of while watching their shows. This allows a person to seek out the programs that have views similar to their own, which makes for a very different way of getting the news.

The Arab Spring allows for the opportunity to examine how international stories fit in to a cable host's normal way of delivering the news. Questions arise surrounding how domestic politics factor during global events. Given the wide range of countries involved in the Arab Spring, and America's mixed relations with many of the governments involved, the Arab Spring gave way to a wide

range of opinions about what the U.S. role should be in the uprising. There are countries where the United States has chosen not to get involved, such as Syria, and then there are those where it has, such as Libya. This has made for a vast amount of coverage to analyze on the cable channels.

In order to make for a comprehensive and fair analysis of how the Arab Spring has been covered on CNN, Fox News and MSNBC, a clear window of examination has to be defined. There is so much involved with the Arab Spring coverage that the only way to truly do it justice is to have a narrow focus and scope. Since part of the interest of this paper lies in how the cable networks are different from broadcast, only evening programs will be analyzed, so as to capitalize on the different hosts with their political leanings and star-power involved. Two programs on each network have been chosen for analysis and comparison. They are each programs that air on a set time, Monday through Friday. The programs are:

Network	Program	Host	Starting Time (ET)
CNN	AC 360°	Anderson Cooper	8 pm
CNN	The Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer	Wolf Blitzer	5 pm
Fox News	Hannity	Sean Hannity	9 pm
Fox News	The O'Reilly Factor	Bill O'Reilly	8 pm
MSNBC	Hardball with Chris Matthews	Chris Matthews	5 pm
MSNBC	The Rachel Maddow Show	Rachel Maddow	9 pm

Part of what made choosing these six programs so important is that they can each be associated with the generalized political leanings of the network they air on. Fox News is considered to gear its content towards Conservatives, MSNBC towards Liberals and CNN tries to play it down the middle. The hosts of these programs go a long way towards backing up the reputation of their network. Bill O'Reilly is a registered Independent but he admits to holding conservative beliefs in many areas. Sean Hannity has openly admitted to his conservative leanings and he delivers the content of his show from a conservative perspective. Both O'Reilly and Hannity can be seen as in line with their networks target audience. Chris Matthews has worked for democrats in Congress and has been open about taking a liberal perspective on most matters. This also goes for Rachel Maddow who gears her content towards the liberal platform. These programs on MSNBC serve as a vast contrast to Fox's evening lineup. On CNN, Anderson Cooper and Wolf Blitzer have both been very withheld about any political alliance they may possess. This is also in line with the message their network aims for. It is important to note that none of these networks has stated that they are the place for one political mindset over another but these associations have become sort of implied through the programming and personalities they have hired over the years.

Since the Arab Spring is an ongoing event with stories continuing to develop it was important that this paper's analysis centered on stories that had clear beginnings and endings. Only events from the year 2011 will be examined. It would be almost impossible to gather comparative coverage for each country



that had a revolutionary event during this time period; so six events have been picked out that gained considerable coverage in the United States. Those six events are:

Event	Date Analyzed
Mass demonstrations begin in Egypt	January 31, 2011
Hosni Mubarak resigns	February 11, 2011
NATO intervention in Libya	March 21, 2011
Protests begin in Syria	March 25, April 12, December 12, 2011
Mubarak on trial	August 3, 2011
Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi killed	October 20, 2011

In order to adequately compare the programs and stories that will be examined only coverage from the day the story broke will be analyzed. Viewer surveys will be utilized to look at how adequately people feel the cable networks have covered a story. Two to three minute clips from one of the selected programs on each network will be shown to survey participants. This means that each participant will watch how the three different networks covered an event for each of the six events being examined. After they view the programs they will be asked to rate the coverage on its relevance, any perceived bias and how fulfilling they found the analysis to be. It ultimately came out to over thirty-six minutes of video that each participant was asked to look at. The website archive.org stores video from all the cable shows being analyzed and made it easy to gather video from each event.

Before beginning the surveys it was important to gather background research on the programs being analyzed and the events being covered. The

television ratings for each of the selected programs could potentially help determine why certain networks and hosts go after the audience that they do. Of the six programs The O'Reilly Factor and Hannity far outdistance their competition on CNN and MSNBC. Throughout 2011 the O'Reilly Factor routinely ranked as the most watched cable news program with about three million viewers each evening. Hannity averaged about two million viewers and Fox News beat the combined totals of CNN and MSNBC's programming during this time. None of the other four shows even managed a million viewers a night. Fox News also doubled up its competition amongst the important viewer demographics of 25-54 and 35-64 year olds (Guthrie). One of the reasons for the viewership gap may be that people are looking for the shows that cater to their interests. This would provide support for the common generalizations about cable networks pandering to specific audiences.

Fox News's position as the most watched network could provide evidence to the claim that there is a liberal bias in the media. If there are more outlets for liberals to turn to individual programs could struggle to get the same kind of audiences as Fox News because Conservatives have fewer places to look. There is also just the idea of going with what is most familiar to you. For example, the Yankees play a majority of their games on the YES Network. So if given the choice between watching Yankees analysis on ESPN, NBC Sports or YES, most viewers are likely to choose YES because it is the outlet they are the most familiar with for coverage. If Fox News really does cater to conservatives then conservatives will seek Fox News for their viewing needs. This goes for MSNBC

and liberals as well but with a smaller slice of the viewership pie. As long as programs continue to possess perceived political leanings they will face scrutiny from various groups and people concerned that they are not delivering the news the way it was meant to be, meaning without bias.

Another interesting note to the ratings game is just how small of an audience the cable networks receive as compared to the broadcast networks. The nightly news programs on ABC, CBS and NBC still combine for over twenty million viewers an evening on weeknights (Kondolojy). With the spread of cable during the late nineties and beginning part of the century it is interesting to note that the broadcast networks have yet to be etched out from the top of the ratings leaderboard. Of course, these newscasts are during limited windows of the early evening and morning while the cable channels are on all day but still, a majority of television viewers choose to get their information from the broadcast networks.

Once the six events to analyze had been selected and extensive research had been conducted for background information, clips could be picked for viewer surveys. Because participants would only be watching just enough of the coverage to get a gist of what its aim was, the clips would start at the beginning of the coverage of a particular day's event. Opinions from fifteen Chicago-based participants were collected on each of the segments. The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 56. Before beginning to watch the clips the participants were asked to associate the hosts with a particular political ideology. The results were:

Host	Conservative	Liberal	Undefined	I don't know
Blitzer	3	2	7	3
Cooper	2	4	7	2
Hannity	10	0	2	3
O'Reilly	11	0	2	2
Maddow	0	10	1	4
Matthews	1	9	2	3

The results lined up well with the commonly held opinion about CNN, Fox News and MSNBC. A majority of participants described Blitzer and Cooper as undefined, which fits with CNN's approach of delivering news down the middle. There were a few people who associated them with a political philosophy. Participants strongly felt that Hannity and O'Reilly held conservative views. Not one participant described either host as liberal. Maddow and Matthews fit MSNBC's profile by being described as liberals. Matthews did get one conservative vote but there were none for Maddow.

Participants were asked to rate the coverage based on a list of statements. A scale of 1 to 5 was used, with 1 meaning strongly disagree and 5 meaning strongly agree. The statements were:

1. The coverage you have just watched was presented without bias.
2. The coverage you have just watched was thorough and adequate.
3. The coverage you just watched was important.

Then the participants were asked to comment on any perceived bias they noticed while watching a clip. At the very end of the last clip participants were asked if they had changed their mind about any of the political ideologies of the hosts they had watched.

It was very important to have a thorough understanding of the background behind each of the six events being viewed. This would help to make clear what exactly happened and what American cable networks chose to focus on.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Demonstrations Begin in Egypt**

#### **Background**

The Arab Spring is considered to have started in Tunisia during December 2010 with a series of street demonstrations. The story that grabbed the most attention in Tunisia and around the world occurred when a street vendor named Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire in response to harassment he felt he faced from a city official. The demonstrations were mostly peaceful but they continued to rise in intensity and numbers until Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali was ousted from the presidency on January 14<sup>th</sup>, 2011. Ben Ali had been in power for over twenty-three years and his removal served as a sign to others of what protests could accomplish when people are united (Abouzeid).

The Arab Spring began to catch American attention when the government of former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak was threatened in January 2011. Eighteen straight days of protests in Egypt were eventually met with Mubarak's resignation and indicated to people all around the world that a real revolution was taking place. Mubarak has been in power for twenty years and was considered by many in the western world to be holding a dictatorship. The story in America was about how monumental it was for a country known for having repressed citizens

to ouster a leader who had been in power for two decades. America has had a mixed relationship with Mubarak's government but the stories during this period mostly centered on the positive message of what the Arab Spring could accomplish.

While the ongoing uprising in Tunisia had been slowly gaining traction in America, Egyptian audiences were watching with vast interest because it was a sign that they too could revolt against a government that they did not agree with. Protests began on January 25<sup>th</sup> and within a few days the government attempted to eliminate the country's internet access so protesters could not organize through social media. Demonstrators continued to reside though, mostly through peaceful measures, with over 50,000 people occupying Tahrir Square in downtown Cairo. This is not to say that the eighteen days of protests were not met without any violence. 846 people were killed and over 6,000 people were injured amongst protesters and government security forces (Issacharoff).

Many of the problems people had with the Egyptian government stemmed from a feeling that they lacked adequate legal rights. Due to state of emergency laws that had been in effect in Egypt since 1967 many constitutional rights were suspended and heavy censorship was placed over citizens. Emergency law prevented citizens from staging demonstrations, and allowed the government to imprison people without trial for any period of time. Voting corruption, police brutality and economic issues, such as a high unemployment rate also contributed to people's anger. Citizens felt that Mubarak's government went against the ideals

of democracy and when they saw that Tunisians were having success in their revolt it became clear they could try to (Issacharoff).

Mubarak was able to win five consecutive elections without any major challenge. Until 2005, he ran unopposed in each election. In 2005, his opponent Ayman Nour was arrested shortly after losing to Mubarak under allegations of forgery. It is widely believed that the elections were rigged and that people were either coerced not to vote or that the results were fraudulent. International monitoring agencies were not allowed to monitor the elections and a 2007 UN survey concluded that voter turnout was only around twenty-five percent because people were scared to vote against Mubarak's regime (Sharp).

Egypt's population has doubled over the past forty years and a large part of the population relies on subsidized goods. People felt that Mubarak was making deals with foreign investors to stimulate his own bank account at the expense of citizens. While Mubarak and his family had a net worth that was estimated to be in the billions, a majority of Egyptians were making less than ten U.S. dollars per day. Other high-ranking members of Mubarak's government were also thought to be made quite well off in exchange for maintaining the status quo in the country. Urban youths, in particular, face widespread unemployment, despite being well educated, and these are the people who would be responsible for much of the protesting out on the streets (Sharp).

Another source of tension between Egyptian citizens and the government came from police brutality that had been exercised ever since emergency law went into effect. Mubarak's regime was known for deploying plainclothes forces



that would listen for anything negative said about the government. Torture from police officers has been widely documented as a method of obtaining information and forcing confessions (Sharp). This is one of the fears Egyptians had to overcome before starting their own protests after seeing what the Tunisians had been able to accomplish.

Protesters demanded an end to Mubarak's government and an end to emergency law. They wanted to have a fair say in who their leaders were and how resources are distributed in the country. Many labor unions also went on strike to contribute to the resistance against the government (Weinthal). The police and military forces were not able to enforce curfew laws because there were too many people to manage in the country's major cities. In areas where violence broke out, riots ensued and soon the military stopped trying to enforce the laws as a way to limit the amount of physical harm being caused. It soon became clear that even after eliminating internet access the government would not be able to gain back control over its citizens.

The beginning of the protests on January 25<sup>th</sup> coincided with National Police Day, a national holiday in Egypt. The original idea was to protest abuses by the police in front of the Ministry of Interior in Cairo but it soon became clear that protesters had enough support to increase their demands to eliminating emergency law, and enacting term limits for the president. The day of revolt drew thousands of protesters in Cairo and other Egyptian cities and mostly took place without violence (Shukrallah).

The number of protesters began to grow into the hundreds of thousands in Egypt over the next few days. By January 28<sup>th</sup> police forces had been withdrawn from the streets and the military was brought in. Stores in Cairo were broken into and buildings were burned down. Still though, no major casualties were reported. On January 28<sup>th</sup> President Mubarak made a televised address to the nation pledging to form a new government and adhere to some of the concessions citizens were calling for, such as voting reforms. Mubarak allegedly gave the military permission to kill protesters. Mubarak's message did not work though and after the military chose to exercise restraint and not use violence on January 29, Mubarak made another televised address on February 1<sup>st</sup> saying that he would not seek another term but that he would not step down now so that he could oversee a peaceful transition. This only served to escalate tensions Mubarak supporters and those calling for his removal (Shukrallah).

### **Program Content**

For the story about Egypt's protests, news content from Monday, January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2011 was analyzed. Over the weekend the military presence in Cairo had increased but they were allowing people to protest peacefully. This marked a week since demonstrations began spreading throughout Egypt and it became clear that the story was not going away.

On CNN, The Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer led off its show on January 31<sup>st</sup> with live coverage from Egypt. Anderson Cooper was in Egypt and he joined Blitzer to report on what he has seen and whom he has spoken with.

Cooper heard from opposition leader Mohamed ElBaradei, who he said made it clear that protesters would not give up until Mubarak had been ousted. Cooper also said that Mubarak had yet to give any indication that he would be relinquishing power (Video 1).

Then Blitzer spoke with frequent contributor Fareed Zakaria, who reported that the Egyptian military was refusing to comply with Mubarak's orders to shoot at the protesters and said that he could not envision a scenario in which Mubarak was able to maintain power for much longer. Zakaria also made it clear that there were still regular citizens who would rather see Mubarak leave on his own terms but said that the great majority of the country wanted him gone immediately (Video 1).

This was the top story on The Situation Room this evening. It was told mainly from the perspective of what CNN contributors were seeing and hearing in Egypt. The main information it included concerned the military's refusal to counter the protesters with violence and most of the video shown was of peaceful protesters gathered in Tahrir Square. The recent history this reporting chronicled was about a televised address that Mubarak had made over the weekend in which he pledged to form a new government but not step down.

On Fox News, Sean Hannity's show started off its Egypt coverage with a clip of White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs from his press conference earlier that day. Gibbs said that the White House did not necessarily want Mubarak to resign but it did want to see a peaceful resolution to the protests. Then Hannity brought in Khairi Abaza from the Foundation for Defense of

Democracies. Abaza and Hannity spoke over video clips of chaos in Egypt, with lots of burning fires. Hannity asked Abaza if the only way change could come about is through Radicalism. Abaza did not believe that was the case because a majority of the protests thus far had been peaceful (Video 2).

Abaza went on to elaborate on some of the grievances Egyptians have with their government, such as anger over an unfair voting system. He pointed out that only 20 percent of the population voted in the 2005 presidential election and said that before now people did not know how to speak out. Hannity went on to ask Abaza about the Muslim Brotherhood, to which he responded that before the Muslim Brotherhood had not had much of a say in the political activity in Egypt but that an opportunity could be presenting itself (Video 2).

This was the first story of the night on Hannity. It was mainly told from Abaza's perspective given what he had seen from Egypt's struggle for democracy in the past. The video that was used to tell the story was different from what The Situation Room had used that same day. This video was more chaotic and showed rioting along with peaceful protesting.

On MSNBC, Hardball with Chris Matthews brought in Richard Engel after Matthews explained that America had to play a bit of a balancing act when it comes to Egypt. He said that America needs to support democracy but also that Egypt has been an important ally that has helped keep peace in Israel and fight against Islamic fundamentalism. Engel said that the Muslim Brotherhood was taking over more authority in Egypt while all the protests were playing out. He said it was the Muslim Brotherhood that was responsible for organizing protesters

and getting them to stop looting and causing other forms of damage. Engel acknowledged that it was still too soon to tell whether or not the army was going to continue allowing peaceful protests but that things were moving along relatively safely. Matthews and Engel spoke about the different sort of authority the Egyptian army possesses compared to America's. The army in Egypt doesn't just follow orders, it has a say in the actions it takes through the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (Video 3).

Matthews also discussed a clip of Secretary Clinton on Meet the Press over the weekend in which she went over the vast obstacles that stand in the way of Egypt achieving democracy and how it is important that America and other democracies support the Egyptian people. Clinton said who retains power should not be the issue; the issue should be how Egypt mends the grievances that its citizens currently feel for the government (Video 3).

Matthews led off his show with Egypt. Most of the video Hardball showed was of peaceful protests. The story was mainly told from an American perspective of how democracy could be achieved in Egypt. The reporting from Engel contained a lot of information about what steps the Muslim Brotherhood was taking to lead the protesters while maintaining peace.

### Survey Results

Program	The coverage you have just watched was presented without bias.	The coverage you have just watched was thorough and adequate.	The coverage you just watched was important.
The Situation Room	4.5	3.8	4.2
Hannity	2.8	4	4.3
Hardball	3.4	4	3.9

The Situation Room's coverage of Egypt's uprising was considered less biased than Hannity and Hardball's. Hannity was voted more biased than Maddow's show. One person commented on the survey that Hannity's show only showed clips of riots and didn't adequately convey that a majority of Egyptians were protesting peacefully. Even though The Situation Room's coverage was considered the least bias it was also thought to be less thorough than Hannity and Hardball's. The coverage on Hannity was voted the most important over the Situation Room followed by Hardball. This might be because Khairi Abaza and Hannity went into greater detail about the implications of a new government than CNN and MSNBC did.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Mubarak resigns**

#### **Background**

Over the next ten days violence began to break out as Mubarak supporters felt they were running out of ways to regain control. It appeared a military coup would be the only way to oust Mubarak from power when, on February 10<sup>th</sup>, he reiterated his refusal to step down while continuing to grant concessions, such as handing over some of his power to other entities. But on February 11, after eighteen days of protests, Mubarak finally agreed to hand over power to a council of senior officers in the Egyptian military, the Supreme Council of the Egyptian Armed Forces. This led to celebrations throughout the country. The Council made it clear right from the start on February 11<sup>th</sup> that it would not be a substitute for the kind of leadership Egyptians really wanted, which is a fairly elected government (Egypt's Army Vows). In the transition period before an election could be organized the Council tried to determine a fair and safe way to establish true democracy. It would take until the end of the year before a parliamentary election was organized and over a year before a new president was elected.

While protests and reforms were taking place in Egypt, much of the coverage in the United States focused on the impact the event would have in

America. The United States provides over a billion dollars annually in military aid to Egypt and over 250 million in economic aid. These close ties made for a difficult political situation for President Obama to navigate. Obama spoke with Mubarak during the protests and said in public remarks that the Egyptian people would determine the future of the country. Obama called on both sides in Egypt to refrain from violence and come to a peaceful resolution (Johnston).

Vice president Joe Biden did not hesitate to express how important Mubarak has been to U.S. interests in the region, calling him a responsible ally. Biden expressed concern that the unrest was not in the best interests of America or Egypt. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton agreed with Biden that the Egyptian government has been an ally but also that they have a chance now to listen to what their citizens want and do the right thing for their people (Biden Discusses Unrest)..

It was clear that the American government did not want to risk losing a crucial partner in the region but that they also didn't want to go against their own views of democracy in calling for an end to the protests. The relatively quick resolution to the movement in Egypt meant that America did not need to get as involved as it would in Libya a short while later.

### **Program Content**

For the story about Hosni Mubarak resigning, content from Friday, February 11<sup>th</sup>, 2011 was analyzed. Mubarak's resignation had been announced at noon Eastern Time so by the time nightly programming began everyone had been



given a chance to examine the situation and it was the major story around the world.

On CNN, Anderson Cooper led off his program with celebrations taking place in the streets of Cairo. Cooper did not hold back in expressing his dismay with how Mubarak had waited so long to step down after compromising the nation's economy by shutting down the banks, transportation services and internet services. Cooper brought in CNN correspondent Ivan Watson who was right in the middle of the celebrations in Tahrir Square. Cooper spoke to Watson about what would happen to Mubarak now that he had stepped down and whether or not he would still have access to his money and be allowed to leave the country. Watson said that nothing had been decided yet but that Mubarak might be put on trial for crimes committed during or before the protests began (Video 4).

Cooper also had John King on to discuss how the American government handled foreign policy in this instance. King said that instead of President Obama being the public face, which would typically be the case, during this crisis Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and Admiral Mike Mullin, who have long-term ties to Egyptian military officials, were the ones who stole the spotlight. He said that the White House should be very pleased with this result because America was able to maintain distance without being forced to choose sides (Video 4).

Anderson Cooper 360° led off with Mubarak's resignation and Egypt was the discussion point for a majority of the show. Some of the video shown was

from right after Mubarak's resignation had been announced and then there was also some live video when Cooper spoke with CNN contributors. Even though the big news had happened hours ago there will still plenty of people celebrating through the night so the live video was interesting. Mubarak's resignation came after he had announced the previous day that he would not be stepping down but rather handing over some of his power to the vice president (Video 4).

On Fox News, Bill O'Reilly led off his show by saying that what happened in Egypt was finally some good news for America overseas. O'Reilly spoke with author and retired Colonel Ralph Peters about what the military taking over would mean for Egypt in the long run. Colonel Peters was optimistic about the capability of Egypt's military because it has worked closely with the United States in the past. He said the big thing for the U.S. would be making sure it maintains good relations with Egypt so that it can continue to rely on the country for support countering Islamic fundamentalism (Video 5).

O'Reilly also spoke with former Secretary of Defense William Cohen about how worried Egypt should be about Egypt's de facto head of state Mohamed Hussein Tantawi. Cohen said that Tantawi was against the Muslim Brotherhood but still willing to see a fair election in the country even if it means influence from the Brotherhood (Video 5).

The O'Reilly Factor led off with Egypt but did not spend as much time covering the story as the programs on CNN and MSNBC did. It got back to domestic issues earlier in the program. Most of the focus was on what Mubarak's ousting would mean for Egypt and how America would be impacted. The

information involved pertained to how Egypt would be able to transition into a democracy from here.

On MSNBC, Rachel Maddow began her program comparing Mubarak's resignation to the fall of the Berlin Wall and showed Tom Brokaw's coverage from Germany in 1989. She also brought Chris O'Donnell on and they took a moment to just listen to the celebration taking place in Tahrir Square. They then went on to discuss what they felt would be a very difficult transition period for the country, but they concluded that the resignation was a very big deal and a positive change for the region (Video 6).

Maddow then went on to show video of Fox News pundits dismissing the idea of democracy being able to exist anywhere in the Middle East outside of Israel. Maddow was critical of Fox News for not being supportive of progress in Egypt. Maddow also criticized the political right for raising questions about a conspiracy in Washington to bring down Mubarak. She brought on Eugene Robinson, who said that such conspiracies only add to Americans anxiety about the future (Video 6).

Maddow led off with Egypt and spent a majority of her show on the subject. She raised the issue of the American politics behind some of the coverage unlike Cooper and O'Reilly. It seemed she was just as interested in how the news was conveyed as she was in the story itself. In addition to showing NBC's coverage of the Berlin Wall being brought down, Maddow also showed a clip of Obama's speech in Cairo in 2009 in which he said that democracy can and should exist everywhere. She added historical context to the event (Video 6).

### Survey Results

Program	The coverage you have just watched was presented without bias.	The coverage you have just watched was thorough and adequate.	The coverage you just watched was important.
AC 360°	3.8	4.3	4.5
The O'Reilly Factor	4.2	4	4.3
The Rachel Maddow Show	3	4.5	4.5

The O'Reilly Factor was voted the least biased show on the night of Mubarak's resignation. The Rachel Maddow Show was thought to be the most biased. Two participants commented that they did not like Maddow showing what she said were clips of Fox doing a bad job covering the story, rather than just focusing on her show. Maddow's coverage of Mubarak's resignation was considered the most thorough and, like with the previous story, the show that was voted the least biased was also thought to be the least adequate. Each show scored high marks in terms of the importance of the story but O'Reilly lagged behind his competition by a bit here.

## **Chapter 4**

### **NATO Intervenes in Libya**

#### **Background**

After viewing the major impact from the people in Tunisia and Egypt, Bahraini youths began to envision a different future for their country as well. In January 2011 activists began to organize pro-democracy protests primarily through social media and email. The idea was to continue the tradition of most Arab Spring activists appealing in a peaceful manner. The protests were set to begin on February 14<sup>th</sup>, the ninth anniversary of the Constitution of 2002, which was passed without public consultation (Cockburn).

Sensing that protests would arise after Tunisia and Egypt, the Bahraini government increased social spending and alerted security forces to be on the lookout. Protests began on February 14<sup>th</sup> as scheduled but were met with immediate resistance from police. Over 6,000 people participated in demonstrations and political rallies throughout Bahrain. Tear gas and rubber bullets were used to stop people from protesting near the Pearl Roundabout in Manama. It was thought the pearl Roundabout would be used as Bahrain's version on Tahrir Square, which it ended up being until it was destroyed in March (Cockburn).

The first death of the uprising came on the first day as twenty-one year old Ali Mushaima was shot in the back and died under controversial circumstances. The police maintain that he was threatening to attack, while witnesses said he was simply walking away from them. The next day thousands of people went to Mushaima's funeral. A second person, Fadhel Al-Matrook, was killed from a shot to the back at the funeral, further igniting people's anger with the government. Protesters began to gather and setup tents at the Pearl Roundabout to express their anger. Over the next few days several Bahraini's would continue to go missing or die from violence (Cockburn).

Since this was very soon after Mubarak had stepped down in Egypt, most of the U.S. cable shows were still dominated by the aftermath of that and it took time for Bahrain's protests to gain traction in America. The Libyan revolution was harder to ignore though because it almost immediately led to violence and foreign assistance for the protesters.

Protesters in Libya were seeking to oust the government of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, who had been in power for over forty years. Protests began on February 15<sup>th</sup> but by mid March it became clear that Gaddafi's forces would be able to stem the uprising without support from other countries. As soon as the protests began in Libya the U.S. cut its ties with Gaddafi's regime and took a similar wait-and-see approach that it held with Egypt. Soon after violence started to erupt between rebel forces and Gaddafi's regime the U.S. called for the United Nations to authorize military intervention. On March 17<sup>th</sup> a resolution was passed through the United Nations Security Council that allowed for military intervention

in Libya. This established a no-fly zone and allowed for all means necessary to protect civilians, except for foreign occupation (Adler).

The United States was one of ten countries that approved the resolution and the country immediately began assisting by supplying the Libyan rebels with weapons. The U.S. was crucial to enforcing the no-fly zone and organizing international forces. Gaddafi's government initially announced that they would implement a ceasefire but this never happened and Gaddafi said that his forces would show no mercy. Foreign intervention ultimately would severely weaken Gaddafi's stronghold. After the Libyan government had been severely hampered the U.S. handed the primary responsibilities to NATO but continued to play an advising role. The rebels were eventually able to gain victory with the fall of Tripoli in August 2011 (Adler).

This was the first instance in the Arab Spring when the United States had been called to action by international governing bodies and there was widespread debate in the country about what actions, if any, the Obama administration should take. The United States was already involved in two wars and the effects from the uprising in Egypt had yet to be seen. There was a lot of questioning over what was in the best American interests here. Some members of both sides of Congress said that the Obama Administration was violating the U.S. Constitution by taking the country into a war that was undeclared by Congress, violating the War Powers Act. In June, Ohio Democratic Congressman and former presidential candidate Dennis Kucinich filed a lawsuit against the Obama Administration calling for an

end to U.S. military funds in the Libyan War (Peritz). The cable networks really began to jump on the story as soon as the U.S. became involved.

### **Program Content**

For the story about Libya, content from Monday, March 21<sup>st</sup> was analyzed. This was the first Monday after NATO had announced that international support would be given to the rebel forces in the country. This sparked wide debate on the cable news networks about whether the right decision had been made for America and about whether it was okay for the Obama Administration to bypass Congress in this instance.

On CNN, Wolf Blitzer led off his Libya coverage with the recent development that NATO would begin intervening. Blitzer spoke with international correspondent Mohammed Jamjoom about a variety of issues related to the story. One of the questions Blitzer had was about whether the international community has waited too long to intervene. Jamjoom said that many people in Libya were starting to believe that they would never get any help or relief since fighting had been going on for more than a month at this point (Video 7).

There was also the issue of whether or not America should have supported the NATO resolution to get involved. Some members of Congress were angry with the Obama Administration for agreeing to take action in Libya without going through Congress first. Jamjoom said that could be a political hurdle for Obama down the line if the result in Libya is not deemed successful. Jamjoom also pointed out that Obama's stated goal in intervening was different from what was



laid out in the NATO Resolution. Obama said Gaddafi has to go in order for the efforts to be successful but NATO was not as specific about what would constitute success. Jamjoom ultimately felt that it was a good thing America was acting through NATO though because it would have looked like the country was serving as the international policeman if it acted on its own (Video 7).

This was the major story on The Situation Room for the day and Blitzer brought in many correspondents to give their take on the legality of the U.S. getting involved and what NATO intervention would ultimately mean for Libya. Coverage was presented from both the perspective of American interests and the Libyan side.

On Fox news, Sean Hannity began his show by bringing in foreign correspondent Steve Harrigan in Tripoli. Harrigan reported on explosions that were occurring throughout the night near the Gaddafi compound. Harrigan said this was the third straight day of heavy incoming and outgoing attacks. Hannity then brought in former Colonel Oliver North and they both criticized Obama for not having a clearly laid out plan for success in Libya. North said that if Obama's ultimate goal was to get rid of Gaddafi, and that isn't NATO's goal, then the administration never should have aligned itself with NATO in this instance (Video 8).

Hannity criticized the president for trying to appeal to everyone while actually not making the best decision for anyone. He said that Obama should have gone through Congress like George Bush did before invading Iraq. He also said

that America had been dragged into Libya kicking and screaming because of its ties with NATO (Video 8).

This was the top story on Hannity just as it was on The Situation Room. The NATO resolution had been approved the previous week and the attacks that Harrigan was reporting on had started over the weekend. This program and the Situation Room were murky on the details about whether Obama really needed to go through Congress in this instance because the U.S. was not going to war; it was just fulfilling its role in NATO.

On MSNBC, Chris Matthews said that the question over whether to get involved in Libya has become one of the biggest struggles Obama has faced. He broke down the criticism being labeled on Obama into three groups. Those who say he waited too long to act, those who say he shouldn't have done anything at all, and those who say he hasn't done enough. He brought in Richard Engel, who was in Tripoli. Engel reported that rebel forces were waiting to see how successful the NATO airstrikes were before beginning to creep forward to Libyan government controlled areas (Video 9).

Matthews then brought in Mark Halperin from Time Magazine to discuss how America got involved. Halperin said that once it became clear British and French forces would be supporting the NATO resolution it became an easier decision for the Obama Administration to stick with its allies. Halperin also pointed out that while China and Russia abstained from voting neither country chose to exercise its veto power. Matthews also asked Halperin if the Obama Administration was more inclined to help after the Clinton Administration failed

to prevent genocide from occurring in Rwanda in the 90's. Halperin agreed that having Hillary Clinton in his cabinet might have been a crucial influence for Obama to want U.S. involvement (Video 9).

A majority of Hardball was spent focused on the situation in Libya. There was not as much video used by any of the networks on this story as there had been for Egypt presumably because most of the ground fighting and been put on hold for airstrikes. Coverage of these stories revealed a different facet to the Arab Spring because of the international presence and violence involved.

### Survey Results

Program	The coverage you have just watched was presented without bias.	The coverage you have just watched was thorough and adequate.	The coverage you just watched was important.
The Situation Room	3.9	4.2	4.1
Hannity	2.9	3.8	4.2
Hardball	4.2	4.3	4.4

Hannity was considered the most biased program covering Libya on March 21<sup>st</sup>, 2011. One commenter said that Hannity's reliance on verbal attacks against the President was what made it seem that Hannity had an agenda to his story. The commenter also felt it was unprofessional for Colonel Oliver North to have been so blunt in his criticism of the president. Hardball was considered the least biased. Hannity was also considered to be the show that did the least thorough job with the story and each program scored high marks on importance.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Violence in Syria**

#### **Background**

The Syrian Civil War began on March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2011 between the Ba'ath Party government and rebels seeking to oust it. Fueled by other Arab Spring movements before it the conflict had spread nationwide by April. Protesters are seeking an end to the forty year rule of the Ba'ath Party in the country. Protesters were also looking for the resignation of President Bashar al-Assad, whose family has held the presidency since 1971. In April the Syrian Army was deployed to prevent mass protests from forming and soldiers were ordered to shoot demonstrators (Sterling).

Many of the problems with the Assad government started with the way he came into power. Assad succeeded his father Hafez al-Assad after his death in 1999. Assad was thirty-four at the time of his father's death and the Syrian Constitution had an age requirement of forty. The Constitution was amended so that Assad could continue his family's rule. This led to widespread protests and violence from both citizens who were angry they did not have a say in their leadership and members of the government who did not support the constitutional change (Sterling).

Socioeconomic inequality is another area that protesters are rebelling against. Syria faces high youth unemployment rates and the past decade has seen a steep decline in the average citizen's standard of living. Bashar al-Assad has accelerated Syria's free market policies during his time in power, which have benefited a minority of people closest to and involved in the government while mostly hurting a majority of the nation's population (Sterling).

Perhaps the greatest contributor to the Arab Spring coming to Syria is the state of human rights in the country. Similarly to Egypt's state of emergency law, Syria was under emergency rule from 1963 until 2011. This granted security forces the power to arrest and detain citizens without the extra steps involved in a democratic legal practice. The government justified emergency rule by saying that the country was constantly under threat of attack from Israel. It was thought that when Bashar took power at such a young age he might take steps to make the country more democratic but Syria remains a one-party state without free elections. The Syrian government has also retained strict control over the types of goods its citizens have access, such as popular websites like Facebook and YouTube. Women and ethnic minorities face particularly harsh conditions from the government and rights of free expression and assembly have only become more limited since the uprising began (Sterling).

The protests eventually developed into an armed rebellion, just like in Libya and the opposition forces became more organized. Unlike Libya though, different rebel groups have mostly remained fractured throughout the country and have been unable to form a central leadership. As of 2013 the conflict is still

ongoing with different stages of protest and fighting taking place in cities and towns throughout the country (Sterling).

The Syrian government has been condemned internationally for using violence against its own citizens. For its part, the Syrian government labels its opposition as armed terrorists (Sterling).

The Syrian Civil War carries many parallels with the one in Libya going on at the same time in 2011. They were both started by rebel groups that began trying to protest peacefully but were quickly met with violent intervention from the government. The rebels involved in the Syrian War have not been able to make as much progress as those in Libya did though. The parallels between the two have led to calls for international bodies to step in like they did in Libya. The United States, along with the Arab League and European Union have all expressed support for the uprising. The United States has yet to contribute any support beyond formal approval though.

As of 2013 the United Nations estimates that the war's death toll has exceeded 70,000 and over a million Syrians have been displaced within the country. Both the government and protesters have been accused of civil rights violations. No end to the fighting is currently in sight (Nichols).

### **Program Content**

Coverage from different dates was used for the story about Syria. This was because it was difficult to find a date where CNN, Fox News and MSNBC shared comparable information about the uprising. Instead, dates were chosen where a show host took a clear political stance behind what the U.S. role should be in the

country. On CNN, an episode of Anderson Cooper 360° from Monday, December 12<sup>th</sup>, 2011 was shown. This was after the Syrian government allowed a group of officials from the Arab League to come into Syria and observe what was going on. On Fox News, an episode of the O'Reilly Factor from Friday, March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2011 was shown. This was when protests started to form in Damascus, the country's capital. On MSNBC, an episode of Hardball with Chris Matthews from Tuesday, April 12<sup>th</sup>, 2011 was shown. This was at a point where it appeared that Assad's government would be unwilling to make concessions with its people. Shortly after this though, Assad lifted Syria state of emergency, but protests continued.

Coverage inside Syria has been very hard to come by, especially in the first months after fighting began. Bashar al-Assad would not let foreign journalists into the country. Anderson Cooper was able to make contact with a medical student in Homs who went by the nickname Abu Rami. This occurred on December 12, 2011 just after the Syria warned citizens of Homs to hand over their weapons or face attack from government forces (Video 10).

Rami spoke of major casualties and a lack of medical equipment to care for the people who are wounded. Rami said that government forces had killed entire families. He spoke of spending the final moments with people before they died and how everyone's wish was for the end of the regime (Video 10).

While Rami was speaking video played of some of the attacks in Syria that have been documented on camera. The power of the video complemented the

tragic story Rami shared with Cooper and serves to create a feeling of helplessness that the Syrian people must face everyday. This is not a report focused on a specific story or event in Syria, but rather a description of just how much worse off Syrians have been in their uprising compared to other countries.

On Fox News, Bill O'Reilly raised the question shortly after the U.S. became involved in Libya if Americans now had an obligation to help the Syrians as well. He brought in military analyst Jack Keane who said that the policy Obama put in play in Libya shows that he does not know what he is doing when it comes to the military. O'Reilly also questioned Obama's leadership skills by saying that Obama was already going against the wishes of his own party in Libya so who knows what he will do in Syria (Video 11).

O'Reilly and Keane also agreed that Syria presented a much more difficult battle because of the ethnic tensions in the country that go along with the political strife. The consensus was the U.S. should wait and see what happens in Libya before making any plans to invade another country (Video 11).

There was not any video to go along with this story. This was likely because of Assad's ban on foreign reporters in Syria, making it difficult to get anything out of the country. The story was presented entirely from an American perspective of what should happen in Syria. This story arose from the questions that America's involvement in Libya sparked rather than an event.

On MSNBC, Chris Matthews used his final segment to explicitly state his feelings against invading Syria. He said that every night of a war helps to recruit more suicide bombers and that that the Middle East would not see us as liberators



if we went into Syria but rather as a neocolonial force that is simply pursuing our own interests, such as oil and a secure Israel (Video 12).

Matthews says we should only go to war with our enemies and that if we invaded Syria we would be putting our own interests at greater risk in the future. This was an interesting message to end the show with because it was the only time Matthews touched on Syria. The uprising has never dominated the news the way the events in Libya and Egypt did but it has been a part of it for longer now (Video 12).

During the final portion of his show, Matthews generally ends with a talking point about one of the day's events and it is meant to be his own opinion of something going on in the news. Even though Syria had not been a major story that day, the Arab Spring was still fresh in people's minds.

### Survey Results

Program	The coverage you have just watched was presented without bias.	The coverage you have just watched was thorough and adequate.	The coverage you just watched was important.
AC 360°	4.5	4.4	4.7
The O'Reilly Factor	2.7	3.5	3.6
Hardball	2.8	3.2	3

The O'Reilly Factor and Hardball both scored low marks when it came to their segments on Syria. Viewers gave Cooper the highest marks out of any program on all of the stories being analyzed for his interview with Abu Rami. People who reported high bias for The O'Reilly Factor and Hardball commented on how the programs went out of their way to use the Syrian uprising as a way to

fit into their political agenda rather than just reporting the story for what it was.

Cooper's program was also considered much more thorough and important than

The O'Reilly Factor and Hardball.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Mubarak on Trial**

#### **Background**

On August 3<sup>rd</sup> Hosni Mubarak appeared in court to stand trial for corruption and the premeditated killing of peaceful protesters. This was Mubarak's first public appearance since his resignation. He was wheeled in to a courthouse in Cairo on a hospital bed inside a cage. Mubarak pled not guilty. By this point Mubarak had been fined over 33 million in U.S. dollars for shutting down the internet during the protests and hurting the Egyptian economy. In June of 2012 Mubarak was found guilty of not putting a stop to the killing of protesters and sentenced to life in prison (Saleh).

CNN, Fox News and MSNBC showed live coverage from Tahrir Square during the period when protests were taking place. Once Mubarak resigned every major news program led with the story and focused on the celebration taking place in Tahrir Square and elsewhere around Egypt. Mubarak would remain in the news long after his resignation though, as the major cable networks would continue to cover his legal proceedings and the impact the new Egypt would have on America.

## Program Content

For the story about Mubarak's trial, coverage from Wednesday, August 3<sup>rd</sup> was used. This was the day of the trial and, just like with Mubarak's resignation, the large time difference between Cairo and the United States meant that the cable networks had already had all day to discuss in detail the implications of Mubarak's appearance in court.

On CNN, Wolf Blitzer spoke of the major collapse Mubarak has taken in Egypt. Blitzer said his image used to compete with pharaohs as symbols of Egypt but now all that has changed. Mohammed Jamjoom was in Cairo to get people's reactions to seeing their former president in a cage. People said they were speechless because they could not believe what they saw. It didn't matter if you were for or against Mubarak, Jamjoom said, you could never get used to how far the former leader has fallen (Video 13).

Blitzer relied heavily on the video of Mubarak in the courtroom lying on his bed in a cage. He asked Jamjoom whether the image could be used as a symbol for what the Arab Spring has brought about. Jamjoom said that some of the people he spoke with actually think Mubarak's appearance in court was a good sign for him. Mubarak denied all charges against him, which could mean that he was confident he could win his legal proceedings (Video 13).

This was the first day of Mubarak's trial so it was featured on most major news shows but not necessarily as the lead story. It was in the middle of The Situation Room Rundown and discussed for a few minutes. It had been the first

major news surrounding Mubarak in quite some time and many people did not think he would be able to make it to court because of his health struggles.

On Fox News, Bill O'Reilly only touched on Mubarak's trial in his program. He commented on how the former president might have been forced into court against his medical interests and embarrassed in front of the whole world. He also speculated about the potential dangers posed by showing Mubarak publicly in a country whose emotions over its former leader are still very fresh (Video 14).

He then reported the charges that Mubarak faced for killing pro-democracy demonstrators and corruption. This was not a big part of the hour but treated rather as a follow-up to a story that was settling down (Video 14).

The O'Reilly Factor showed the video of Mubarak being wheeled into the court and placed inside a cage in front of the cameras (Video 14). This storytelling image can be interpreted in many ways but it certainly grabbed the world's attention immediately.

On MSNBC, Rachel Maddow waited until the end of her program to address Mubarak's trial. She called it an unbelievable spectacle and referenced a New York Times report saying that Syria would pick today for a military assault in the city of Hama as a message to its people that what happened to Mubarak will not happen to Bashar al-Assad. Maddow also pointed out that MSNBC could not confirm that report because no foreign journalists are allowed in Syria (Video 15).

Like Blitzer and O'Reilly, Maddow relied on the video of Mubarak in court to tell just as much of the story as her script did. There was also video of

Egyptians cheering outside of the courthouse as Mubarak arrived in Cairo (Video 15).

None of the three networks chose to devote much time to the first day of the trial but the images of Mubarak in the courtroom were shown on all three. That image alone was enough to make it a story around the world.

### Survey Results

Program	The coverage you have just watched was presented without bias.	The coverage you have just watched was thorough and adequate.	The coverage you just watched was important.
The Situation Room	4.1	4	4.3
The O'Reilly Factor	3.5	3.7	3.5
The Rachel Maddow Show	3.5	4.2	4

All three programs scored relatively strong non-bias marks for Mubarak's trial. This might be because all the coverage was fairly light on script and heavy on video of Mubarak in the courthouse. Rachel Maddow was considered to have had the most thorough coverage, possibly because she related Mubarak's trial to a story in Syria. The Situation Room's content was considered most important, while O'Reilly's the least.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Muammar Gaddafi Killed**

#### **Background**

Another major story that highlights how the Arab Spring was covered on the big three U.S. cable news networks was the killing of Muammar Gaddafi on October 20, 2011. By September Gaddafi's forces had been thoroughly defeated and the National Transitional Council (NTC), the de facto government of Libya, had control of all the major cities. Gaddafi still held several small towns in the western part of the country and he was able to retreat to the town of Sirte after the fall of Tripoli. At this point Gaddafi announced that he would be willing to negotiate but the NTC rejected the offer because they held the majority of the power at this point (Gaddafi: How he died).

Fighting continued in the few remaining towns that were loyal to Gaddafi, including Sirte. Gaddafi had to continue to change residences to escape capture. On October 20<sup>th</sup> NATO bombers attacked a convoy of over 70 cars, including one that Gaddafi was being transported in. NATO forces were able to identify their target by intercepting a satellite phone call made by Gaddafi. The car was damaged and Gaddafi fled to a construction site near the northwestern city of

Misrata with his remaining protection and hid inside drainage pipes (Gaddafi: How he died).

Later that day Gaddafi was discovered by a rebel group from Misrata and beaten. The events were all filmed on a cell phone camera. He was later taken by ambulance to Misrata and found to be dead upon arrival. Libya's chief forensic pathologist Dr. Othman al-Zintani performed the autopsy of Gaddafi and told the press that he died from a gunshot wound. The NTC claimed that Gaddafi has been caught in the middle of gunfire and died from his bullet wounds. There were conflicting reports from witnesses though, claiming that Gaddafi was shot in the stomach after being beaten. Gaddafi's son Mutassim, who was traveling with his father, was also killed on the same day during what is now called the Battle of Sirte (Gaddafi: How he died).

Gaddafi's body was publicly displayed in Misrata for four days after his death with people from all around the country coming to view him. NATO has denied knowing that the car it struck was carrying Gaddafi. The NTC initially said that Gaddafi's body would be returned to his family after an autopsy was conducted but on October 25<sup>th</sup> his body was buried by the NTC in an unidentified location in the desert. This was likely done to prevent Gaddafi's family from burying the body somewhere where it could not be kept secret (Gaddafi: How he died).

President Obama called Gaddafi's death a big step toward to ridding Libya of Tyranny but also said that the country still has a long way to go to get to democracy. Secretary Clinton said that there should be an investigation into his



death but said that it was a good thing. Along with the United States, the UN and UK among other governments have called for an investigation into how exactly Gaddafi died. If he was killed purposely by the NTC it could be considered a war crime. In October 2011 NTC Prime Minister Mahmoud Jibril announced that a commission would be formed to investigate Gaddafi's death (Gaddafi: How he died).

The Libyan civil war officially ended on October 23 after the NTC declared that Libya had been liberated. NATO ended its mission on October 31<sup>st</sup> but announced that it would make sure there were not any further attacks against civilians during the transition period. Much of the coverage in the U.S. evaluated how successful America's efforts were in ending the war and whether the Obama administration had made the right decision. Now that the U.S. had stuck up for one Arab Spring country many wondered whether there would be calls for involvement in others, such as Syria, a country that was in the middle of its own uprising where rebels were struggling to find any success.

### **Program Content**

For the story about Gaddafi's death, content from Thursday, October 20<sup>th</sup>, 2011 was used. This was the day Gaddafi had been killed and at the time the evening programs began there were still many questions surrounding how exactly he died. The focus was on what this would mean for the war in Libya and whether this justified America's involvement.

On CNN, Anderson Cooper began his program by showing some of the images taken at the time of Gaddafi's death. Cooper pointed out that it had not yet been confirmed if he was killed during a fight, or by trying to escape or by execution. Cooper also showed Obama's address from the White House before speaking with correspondent Ben Farmer, who was traveling with a rebel group in Sirte when Gaddafi died. Farmer was able to explain how the group of vehicles Gaddafi was traveling with was attacked from the sky and then people fled to shelter in the surrounding areas. He was not exactly sure how Gaddafi was found but said that he was armed with a gun and likely injured from the attack on his vehicle (Video 16).

Cooper also spoke with correspondent Dan Rivers about the videos coming out from Sirte showing an injured Gaddafi being taken away by rebel forces. Rivers said it appears that he was bleeding around the head but it isn't clear whether that is because he was being hit around the head or from an earlier injury. Cooper said that rebel forces were rejoicing in their victory and that they hoped this would be an end to the fighting (Video 16).

Cooper spent the first part of his show going over Gaddafi's death and addressing some of the more puzzling aspects of his life, like a peculiar appearance he had on Larry King Live a few years ago. Most of the video used for the story came from people's cell phones that were with Gaddafi at the time of his death. Cooper and his contributors were careful not to state anything as fact that had not yet been confirmed because of the conflicting reports surrounding his death.

On Fox News, Hannity brought on Colonel Oliver North to discuss Gaddafi's death. This was a particularly interesting segment because Gaddafi had unsuccessfully targeted North and his family for assassination decades earlier when Ronald Reagan authorized a raid on Gaddafi's terror training centers. North said it's great that Gaddafi's gone but he is skeptical that real change will occur any time soon (Video 17).

Hannity asked North about what was left in the country for the U.S. to be fearful of. North said that more people have weapons now than before and that America and other world powers will have to carefully monitor the rebel transition in Libya so the country does not become a breeding ground for terrorists. North was careful to point out that the country still has a long way to go (Video 17).

Hannity address Gaddafi's death right at the beginning of his show before coming back to it with Colonel North later in the hour. They looked at the events from an American and international perspective in terms of what a new Libya would mean for the region. They did not spend much time debating how Gaddafi actually died since new videos were still coming out nothing had been confirmed yet (Video 17).

On MSNBC, Rachel Maddow remarked how Libya had seen revolutions on both sides of its borders in Tunisia and Egypt before this point. Maddow also showed video of Gaddafi being dragged and beaten. Maddow brought on Richard Engel to get his take in what the new government would be like in Libya. Engel

said that it will be a religious government but it was hard to know how it would treat its citizens or respond to extremist groups (Video 18).

Engel did say that he thought the fighting phase of the revolution was over now that Gaddafi was dead. He said that the most challenging part could be maintaining order in the country before a new government could be formed but that people were at least enjoying a brief moment of celebration (Video 18).

Maddow and Engel touched on both the U.S. perspective and Libya's perspective of what Gaddafi's death means for the future. All three networks used video taken from cell phones shortly before Gaddafi's death. Maddow devoted time to the story right at the beginning of her show and then came back to it later to address it in further detail. Just like on CNN and Fox News, Maddow was careful to only state that Gaddafi was dead and point out that how he died was not yet determined (Video 18).

### Survey Results

Program	The coverage you have just watched was presented without bias.	The coverage you have just watched was thorough and adequate.	The coverage you just watched was important.
AC 360°	3.4	3.9	4.4
Hannity	3.2	4	4
The Rachel Maddow Show	3.4	4.2	4.3

Hannity was again considered to have had the most biased coverage when it came to Gaddafi's death. One participant commented that Hannity and Oliver North seemed determined to make it clear that Obama did not make the right decision by going into Libya. The opinions were pretty similar throughout for this

story perhaps because each show was going off of the video coming out of Libya showing Gaddafi's last moments. The video sort of stole the spotlight away from the other relevant news in the story.

## Chapter 8

### Conclusion

Host	Conservative	Liberal	Undefined	I don't know
Blitzer	1	4	7	3
Cooper	1	5	8	1
Hannity	10	0	2	3
O'Reilly	12	0	2	1
Maddow	0	13	1	1
Matthews	0	10	2	3

After the survey participants finished watching the clips, they were again asked to describe the political ideologies of the hosts they had just watched. This was to see if anyone's opinion had changed as a result of the content they had been shown. Someone's mind could also change because watching the video helped them remember a host who they had forgotten before or had not heard from in awhile. The results after watching the video were very similar to the ones that came before it. A majority of participants still described CNN's hosts as undefined, Fox's as conservatives and MSNBC's as liberals. Slightly more people identified Blitzer and Cooper as liberal this time around. One more person considered O'Reilly a conservative and Matthews a liberal. Maddow had a three-

person increase in the amount of people who viewed her as liberal. Hannity's numbers stayed exactly the same.

Program	The coverage you have just watched was presented without bias.	The coverage you have just watched was thorough and adequate.	The coverage you just watched was important.
AC 360°	3.9	4.2	4.5
The Situation Room	4.2	4	4.2
Hannity	3	3.9	4.2
The O'Reilly Factor	3.5	3.7	3.8
Hardball	3.5	3.8	3.8
The Rachel Maddow Show	3.3	4.3	4.3

The Situation Room and Anderson Cooper 360° were considered the least biased programs overall. This fits with the notion that CNN attempts to avoid bias in its programming more than Fox and MSNBC do. Hannity was considered the most biased show followed by The Rachel Maddow Show. Even though Maddow was considered one of the most biased hosts here program was evaluated as the most thorough, followed by Blitzer and Cooper's. The O'Reilly factor scored the lowest marks in this area. Cooper's coverage was considered to be the most important, followed by Maddow's. O'Reilly and Matthews' were considered the least important.

Network	The coverage you have just watched was presented without bias.	The coverage you have just watched was thorough and adequate.	The coverage you just watched was important.
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CNN	4	4.1	4.4
Fox News	3.2	3.8	4
MSNBC	3.4	4.1	4

CNN scored the top marks for presenting unbiased accounts of the stories that were monitored. Fox was considered the most biased and MSNBC was a close second. CNN and MSNBC tied for having the most thorough and adequate coverage, according to participants. CNN had the most important coverage and Fox News and MSNBC tied for second in this area.

The results of the user surveys go a long way towards describing how people felt about coverage of the Arab Spring movement on CNN, Fox News and MSNBC. CNN was considered the least biased network. This could mean that the channels efforts to report stories without supporting a clear political opinion could help it maintain journalistic integrity. Perhaps Fox News and MSNBC's catering to specific audiences creates an obstacle for the channels when it comes to presenting stories without bias.

The level of bias participants associated with a story did not necessarily factor in much with how thorough and important they found the content to be. It is interesting to note the lack of correlation here because it shows that programming with an opinion or point to make does not turn off viewers. This seems to be just something people have come to expect with certain cable shows.

There did not end up being much variation between the different networks with the exception of CNN, which far outdistanced itself from Fox News and MSNBC when it came to unbiased reporting. The channels finished very closely to one another in the other areas of the study. This might suggest a difference in



the way international events are perceived as opposed to domestic ones. There may not be as much of a difference in what viewers get out of the programming because there is less room and time for the networks to put forth their own agendas. It is also possible that the big three cable networks are very similar to each other in a lot of ways, except for the types of audience that they cater to.

A different way to conduct research could have been to have a larger pool of participants watch fewer stories for less time. It can be very demanding for people to watch over thirty minutes of content while evaluating it. This involves more organization with who is watching what but it also provides more data to analyze.

An interesting follow-up Capstone to this topic could involve analyzing how the cable networks have covered big stories happening in the United States. The Tea Party movement, for instance, could present a distinct way to compare an international story with a domestic one.

Any number of Capstone projects could have come out of the news coverage of the Arab Spring movement. How the events were covered on cable was the focus of this research because of how it pertains to the future of broadcasting in America and how people feel domestic politics play into the coverage of international stories.

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### **Summary of Capstone Project**

I have examined how United States cable news networks have covered the Arab Spring movement. I monitored CNN, Fox News and MSNBC, the three most watched cable channels. The purpose of this project is to help readers gain a thorough understanding of how objective the cable outlets have been in covering some of the most important international stories of the past several years. My research involved identifying what aspects and stories of the Arab Spring the networks chose to cover, analyzing how specific stories were covered and comparing one network to another in terms of what the viewer gained from the story.

In terms of domestic politics, CNN is generally considered to be the network that remains in the middle of the political divide. Fox News is thought to lean conservative and MSNBC towards liberals. My research will help to see if this same standard is true for international stories. This is not to say that you cannot have a readily apparent political position and still present a story objectively, but it can lead to bias in certain instances. Ultimately I have tried to determine which network has provided the most balanced and thorough coverage of the Arab Spring Movement.

In order to conduct measurable research I had to come up with a method that would allow me to narrow my focus. The Arab Spring is a huge and ongoing topic. I needed to limit my scope. I started out by creating a chart of every program produced on CNN, Fox News and MSNBC. I also put together a list of all the program hosts on each network. From here, I assessed any potential political leanings that specific programs had. I did this by compiling information

on what hosts had indicated in the past and who the regular contributors to a program. After doing this I began to define how I would go about assembling this information into a paper that would be beneficial and interesting to readers. I decided that I should not factor the networks general news hours into my Arab Spring analysis. This is the programming that airs in the afternoon and does not feature well-known hosts. These programs are specifically geared to provide information, without opinion. Each network has nightly programming that features news hosts as the stars of the show. This is very different than what broadcast networks have traditionally done, and I felt this would be the best place for me to hone in my research because it is the most viewed content and the programming in which most people associate a network with.

On CNN the programs I analyzed were The Situation Room with Wolf Blitzer and Anderson Cooper 360°. On Fox News I monitored The O'Reilly Factor and Hannity. On MSNBC I researched Hardball with Chris Matthews and the Rachel Maddow Show. Since I could not watch all of these programs at once, and most of the stories I chose to cover happened in the past, I relied heavily on the internet to provide content. Since I analyzed flagship programs on all of the networks the shows were easy to access online.

After establishing what content I would be covering I decided which stories I should focus on. In order to adequately cover a news story that has lasted as long as the Arab Spring I chose to pick out six events that all the networks covered to base my analysis around. I compiled this list with the knowledge that since this is an ongoing story another event could come along that also deserves

attention. With this knowledge I decided to set the end of 2011 as my cutoff date. This is to ensure that all of the information I present has been well documented, with clear outcomes. The stories I chose were as follows:

- Mass demonstration begin in Egypt (January 2011)
- Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak steps down (February 11, 2011)
- NATO begins to intervene in Libya (March, 2011)
- Syrian protests begin (March 16, 2011)
- Mubarak goes on trial (August 3, 2011)
- Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi killed (October 20, 2011)

After I had selected which stories and shows to focus on I needed to come up with a survey method. I decided to select short clips from the programs I covered that I would then show to survey participants for evaluation. For each of the six stories I chose one program on each of the three networks I monitored to show to participants for comparison. Meaning that one clip from a show on CNN, Fox News and MSNBC would be shown to participants for each story. This ultimately came out to over thirty-five minutes of video that I would be asking each participant to watch.

After watching a clip I would have viewers fill out a survey about it before having them move on to the next one. The survey included three statements and asked the viewers to rank their level of agreement with them from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The statements were:

1. The coverage you have just watched was presented without bias.
2. The coverage you have just watched was thorough and adequate.



3. The coverage you just watched was important.

I felt it was important to ask participants to rank the importance of the coverage to see if that had any correlation with how biased and thorough they felt it was. There was room for participant comments after the questions asking people to identify the elements of bias they noticed in a particular clip.

Additionally I also asked people to identify the political leanings of the hosts from the programs I monitored. I asked them this before and after they watched the clips so as to see if people would change their minds at all.

CNN was considered the most unbiased network followed distantly by MSNBC and Fox News. This was true to form as Fox News and MSNBC are considered to be the networks that are geared towards specific audiences and CNN aims for the center. I was surprised to discover that the level of bias viewers identified in a program did not necessarily impact how thorough or important they felt the content was. All the networks were perceived to be at least somewhat thorough and important.

This project was significant because it attempted to examine what people are looking for when they watch cable news. The presentation is definitely different than what you would see on a broadcast network's nightly news. This project has provided a method of researching how people feel about shows that are geared towards specific points of view and allows for comparison of how international events compare to the coverage of domestic ones.