



"The President as a Character: A Narrative Analysis of USA TODAY and the New York Times Coverage of Drone Strikes during the Obama Presidency"

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Abstract

In this paper, I will examine the Obama administration's use of drone strikes through a narrative analysis of text from the news sources USA TODAY and The New York Times about how President Obama is specifically constructed as a narrative character. This study intends not to focus on Obama the president but instead a media source's representation of Obama through a narrative construct. This process illustrates the importance of connecting a socially significant topic, an important world leader and an interpretative research approach intended to highlight the complexity of character construction when understanding media representations. I will discuss these topics by first giving some background about drone strikes and the political and economic interests that help to shape media content in the U.S. Next, I will explain the importance of narrative when constructing understandings of media text and how those understandings help to formulate conclusions about the media discourse that flows freely through modern life. Then, I will give examples from the USA TODAY text that illustrate the findings about the construction of the character of President Obama. Finally, I will illustrate some conclusions and options for future research about drone strikes, narrative and media discourse.

Keywords: Narrative; Political economy; Drone strikes

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Narrative Analysis

The current political landscape continues to move away from the free flow of information from the government to the populace and instead places a priority on security. During the current presidency, the Obama administration has prosecuted more people under the Espionage Act for the leaking of government information than all other administrations combined [1]. While this attack on truth telling continues, corporate profits are the highest in the U.S. since WWII [2]. In this time of criminalizing dissent juxtaposed with unprecedented corporate wealth, scholars attempt to use a number of different theories to provide a new way to look at both economic and political problems. The relationship between media and power provides a specific lens to examine how a populace engages in the political and economic discussion in society. The relationship between the government and the media explores one way to define and examine how

media and power functions in the larger field of media studies. Mosco [3] examined political economy and its relationship with both social relations and power. This connection between social relations and power, however, does not happen in a vacuum. The procurement, distribution and consumption of resources guide the directions of the social relations and power. To understand this in a media context, Mosco looked at the continued growth of the media corporation as an entity in modern society. With fewer companies owning all mainstream media outlets, the critical scholar questions how these very few owners produce a diverse amount of content for viewers to consume. While this process may have begun in the western world, the continued growth of the global economy has shown how political economy can be applied to the presence of western media corporations in the developing world. This neocolonial connection also shows the influence from the continued marriage between the media and the government. Mosco's understanding of political economy in

terms of social relations and power have provided opportunities to question the continued growth of corporate influence in media but also the growing intimacy between the government and the media.

Hale [4] studied how the media and the dominant government position can also provide context to an emerging international issue. Most of the information people receive about international issues, especially the factual content about those issues, comes from the mass media. The mass media used a particular frame to establish how facts are shown to the public and what facts becomes a part of the media discourse [4]. The political climate also helps frame that discourse and provides the lens for the public to view a particular subject, such as war. For example, the media framed the U.S. intervention in Kosovo as a “humanitarian” mission, while the invasion of Iraq followed the dominant government narrative of preemptive war against a dangerous threat from a rogue state that had weapons of mass destruction. For these political reasons, the media consistently referred to Iraq in terms of contest, while never using that type of frame when referring to Kosovo. This example illustrates the continued dexterity of political elites and how they can influence not only media content, in terms of facts, but also how the public digests that content, in terms of frames. Based on these two example, the media content and media frames during a particular international conflict have been influenced by the political aims of the U.S. government.

In this complex political and media environment, drone strikes represent a particularly complicated example about the relationship between a governmental political action and the information available to the public about that particular action. Drone strikes have become a significant part of the war on Al-Qaeda utilized by the Obama presidency. In 2010, Obama administration used 117 signature strikes in Pakistan in an effort to curb the Al-Qaeda presence [5]. For example, in November 2011, a Hellfire missile fired from a U.S. drone killed 16-year-old Tariq Aziz and his 12-year-old cousin Waheed Khan. Earlier in the same week, Aziz appeared at a public meeting condemning the drone strikes with several western reporters. While two U.S. lawyers at the meeting stated the U.S. does support the idea of a person being innocent until proven guilty, the officials did not levy any charges against Aziz when they had a chance, nor did they give any explanation after Aziz’s death [6] One key reason that could help establish the credibility of using drone strikes involves the precision of the instrument of war. While previous U.S. wars involved heavy amount of bombing in both WWII and in Vietnam, the drone strikes could minimize the impact of civilian casualties that accompanied previous U.S. bombing efforts throughout the world. By using drone strikes, President Obama could argue that the drone strikes help to minimize the problem of terrorist cells by ending the lives of those involved in the cell, while at the same time not disturbing the civilian population that surrounds that terror cell.

The true impact of a drone strike comes not from the political decision for using the drone strikes to help solve the problems of terrorism but when a policy decision does not end with the

intended result. For example, during the drone strikes, even with the sophisticated military equipment, the fact remains that many innocent people die. When this happens in an area such as Pakistan, which is not technically a war zone, the act becomes, as articulated by human rights lawyer Clive Stafford Smith, an act of murder [7]. This heinous result shows that while conducting drone strikes remains structurally sound in its justification, the fallout from the results of the drone strikes could lead to another decision that the human cost of war kills too many and that President Obama needs to find another policy.

In this paper, author will examine the Obama administration’s use of drone strikes through a narrative analysis of text from the news sources USA TODAY and *The New York Times* about how President Obama is specifically constructed as a narrative character. This study intends not to focus on Obama the president but instead a media source’s representation of Obama through a narrative construct. This process illustrates the importance of connecting a socially significant topic, an important world leader and an interpretative research approach intended to highlight the complexity of character construction when understanding media representations. I will discuss these topics by first giving some background about drone strikes and the political and economic interests that help to shape media content in the U.S. Next, I will explain the importance of narrative when constructing understandings of media text and how those understanding help to formulate conclusions about the media discourse that flows freely through modern life. Then, I will give examples from the USA TODAY text that illustrate the findings about the construction of the character of President Obama. Finally, I will illustrate some conclusions and options for future research about drone strikes, narrative and media discourse.

Drone Strikes

A drone is an airplane that the United States uses for both combat and noncombat missions around the world. The drones used by the military are pilotless devices. A military official may be controlling a drone over Pakistan while sitting in an office in Virginia. The United States uses two types of drones: predator and reaper. The first drone came from a defense contractor to the military in 1994. The first drone with weapons on it developed in 2000. The first drone strike took place in 2002 in Yemen [8]. The drones not only provide strikes but also video surveillance technology. When the military engages in a strike, it does so after determining behavior from the thousands of hours of video surveillance that a drone can provide. Drone strikes began under the presidency of George W. Bush, who used nine drone strikes in Pakistan from 2004 to 2007 and 33 drone strikes in Pakistan in 2008 [9]

While neglected by the academic community, the drone strikes, a key component of the Obama administration’s foreign policy practices, have come under fire from a variety of news agencies around the world. This choice by *The New York Times* and other notable journalists including *Moneyball* author Michael Lewis, come at the same time as the Obama administration either refusing to release information about drone victims or managing that information to disperse at their own digression [10].

The *Times* and other U.S. media outlets have also adopted specific policy and linguistic choices established by the Obama administration without critical questioning or inquiry. These decisions by media outlets have caused some critics to question the role of the media in covering this issue [10,11]. The policy choices made by the Obama administration in relation to the drone strikes have largely been viewed as something that may not in fact be legal under international law and caused some members of the Obama administration to refer to the drone strike policy as a “cowboy mentality”, [12]. These examples illustrate how the U.S. mainstream media has neglected to question the legality and political wisdom of a foreign policy decision by the Obama administration.

In relation to the linguistic choices and media coverage, the use of the term “surgical” by the Obama administration has been used by U.S. media accounts and been adopted into the discourse when talking about drone strikes publicly [11]. Another term that has led to some controversy is the use of the term “militant”. The Obama administration has decided to refer to “all adult males killed in strike zones as militants” [10]. The U.S. mainstream media have continued to use the term militant, even though most of these media outlets rely on a single source, the Obama administration, for their evidence to support their reporting [10,13]. These media organizations have continued to rely on the Obama administration for their information almost exclusively even though previous reporting by Greenwald [7] has shown that the Obama administration has in fact lied about the number of civilian deaths caused by drone strikes in Pakistan. In fact the numbers of civilians killed in these tribal areas are much higher than the numbers being reported by the Obama administration [14].

The examples depicted above indicate the complexity of the drone strikes issue because it involves the secrecy of a democratic government, the ability of media to have access to official governmental sources and the larger economic concerns of making a desirable media product for the consumer. The media outlets, however, seem to continue to trust the Obama administration for information about the drone strikes, even though, the Obama administration has provided figures about the number of deaths attributed to the drone strikes at two percent, a number deemed low based on a joint study by the Stanford and New York University Schools of Law [13].

When examining how media and power function on the reporting of drones by the mainstream media, a few key points stand out. First, large portions of the in depth reporting about the drone strikes have come from media outlets outside of the U.S. From *The Guardian* in England, to the global website *The Global Post*, to the continued reports coming from the people of Pakistan and transmitted through the *Al-Jazeera* website, the global media, much more so than the U.S. media have been at the forefront of the reporting on this issue. These media sources have given voice to U.S. critics including constitutional lawyer and journalist Glenn Greenwald and other U.S. scholars [10]. This initial insight seems to reflect the inability of U.S. news agencies, including such stalwarts as *The New York Times*, to report with the same depth as their foreign counterparts.

Political Economy and Media

Many political economists have used traditional Marxian ideas to help explain how communication and media scholars can adapt these principles to the specific field of communication and media studies. These scholars emphasize that production involves creating a product and transforming that product for use in the market through technology and labor. This process rings true with both the dissemination of communication and how that fits with the media structure. Specific types of communication, i.e. the fastest and easiest, are privileged over others. The media acts in many of the same ways, as compartmentalizing specific facets of gathering information and sharing that information with the larger culture [15]. As the consumerist society has grown, however, the complicated intersections between the larger populace and the product have led many to question the Marxian perspective [16]. However, when considering the relationship between political economy and media, the focus of time allotted any alternative perspective that challenges any form of capitalism seems to reify the importance or at least acknowledging the importance of Marxian ideas in outlining a specific political and economic perspective.

A clear and concise definition of the synthesis between political economy, communication and the media is needed to narrow down the talking points from generalized understanding of politics and economics to the field of media and communication. Here is one example: Messages are situated within political and cultural assumptions about what is normal and acceptable within the society. In news production these include beliefs about hierarchies of access, about who has the right to speak, what are the key political institutions and what is “acceptable” behavior. On an everyday level, the television, media and radio also provide information about specific events, which tacitly relate to these unspoken assumptions [16]. Based on this definition, the larger structures that dominate a society impact the type of communication and what type of media will inform and entertain a specific country and the larger society. In the United States, some of these structures include an emphasis on capitalism; the importance of monetary accumulation and a two party dominated political system. These structures rarely come under critical intellectual examination in the larger culture. One reason for this lack of engagement could be that the media does not attempt to challenge these institutions and their shared importance.

The marriage of political structures and economic structures help to define the role of media in society. Political economy does not look at a media system as something that cannot be changed or something that is not without significant room for growth in a multitude of ways [17]. The U.S. media model depends heavily on professional journalism and revenue streams that primarily come from advertising. This model has been exported to media sources around the world, primarily from U.S. based media corporate conglomerates. These types of neoliberal policies have caused changes to virtually every media sources in every country throughout the world. These giant U.S. media corporations understand how local audiences work and adjust

their content to fit the cultural interests of their audience. These corporations also partner with local media sources in their effort to distribute content, while growing their global brand. These media corporations, however, do not abandon all “good” U.S. commercial practices. The global advertising giants have continued to consolidate, showing that U.S. economic practices in both media and industry that depend on media increasingly adopt the U.S. media model [17]. This media phenomenon shows the crafty adjustments transnational media corporations make as they continue to stake their economic claim to a larger portion of the global media landscape.

Narrative

For this particular study, I used a narrative coding category system when examining the USA TODAY and *The New York Times* text. I examined both news sources articles under the search term “drone strikes” from the years 2009 to 2013 to coincide with the beginning of President Obama’s time in office. Using these search terms, I found 672 articles. I narrowed the articles into five narrative categories: setting, character, action, focus and tone. For the purposes of this article, I am using the narrative category of character to examine these media sources coverage of President Obama as a character in the drone strike narrative. Cultural scholars believe in the importance of the discursive. While the social scientist may focus on the tangible and what can be proven, the cultural scholar understands the numerous iterations of the discursive and how that can both expand the outcomes of any study while complicating the process of moving toward those outcomes. Wittgenstein explained this complexity by managing the pursuit of truth through the vehicle of language games to help explain any idea or phenomena under the research umbrella [18]. Language develops and takes hold from cultural standards developed by both dominant and minority groups with the meanings and importance changing based on which group acts as the determiner in the specific context. These different groups establish different cultural standards along with basic ideas of criteria, which could create a different set of results based on the group or the information that is being researched. The epistemologist sees these multiple texts and multiple identities in one cultural location as an opportunity instead of a hindrance. The need to consider numerous factors when coming to any conclusion about the importance of knowledge develops not only from the established sources but the voices often times from outside the traditional power structure.

This Foucauldian understanding of social power and the social locations as helping impact the types of discourses and language used to help accrue knowledge can prove difficult when wanting to determine specific answers to specified research questions under consideration for a particular study. The relationship between the larger hegemonic discourses and the smaller discourses from disparate sources that challenge the prevailing norms, however, may prove most insightful for the epistemologist who adheres to deep readings and the depth of knowledge that can emerge from qualitative research. The standard notion of research either reinforcing or challenge dominant and colossal time honored truths may now become obsolete with the changing discourses and cultural lens that shape that discourse [19]. The results

conducted from a study now may not have the same impact or even conclusions when the social environment and the political tone of a particular time period change.

The use of character as a category has a number of different uses when looking at media text. Phelan (1989) uses the example of a character from fiction to help establish not only the importance of narrative in shaping discussion about characters but also how the dissection of those characters shape the ideology that pervades from that story. The audience in this example has specific expectations of how a narrative constructs characters and how those characters establish a connection with dominant values. When the characters make decisions that conflict with the dominant values, the narrative acts as the corrective to establish the characters, and not the narrative, as the problematic element [19]. The narrative serves the historical dominant ideologies of that given society, while the characters act as the dissenting. While the construction of character of this study focuses on a “real” person, the depiction of that character involves a number of social and ideological factors that influence not the humanity of that particular person, but instead how the media depicts that person through textual examples. For this reason, the use of character allows for the media discourse to serve as the template for a depth unavailable to other methods of social critique. For this study, I asked two research questions:

RQ 1: How does the USA TODAY text depict President Obama as a character?

RQ 2: How does *The New York Times* text depict President Obama as a character?

USA Today Text

In the USA TODAY analysis, the content focused on a pro American perspective in relation to the drone strikes. However, that perspective had a nuanced picture of the character of President Obama. I will use examples from the news content that illustrated how the construction of the narrative in relation to character developed throughout the news coverage. In relation to the drone strike media content, Obama acts as both a triumphant victor and an iconoclastic dictator in reference to the drone strike content. Obama acts as leader when the message of success behind a drone strike is articulated and as a dictator when the reasons for using drone strikes is articulated. The idea of the policy being good or bad does not fit under the character of Obama; only the reasons behind why it exists and how did Obama come up with the reasoning for targeting the terrorist characters he did.

Obama as triumphant victor comes up in a variety of different ways. One of which comes from lips of John Brennan, an advisor to Obama on terrorism policy before becoming the nominee to head the CIA in 2013.

Brennan also detailed the Obama administration's rationale for using drone strikes against al-Qaeda targets, the first time the Obama administration has publicly laid out its defense of targeted killings outside of “hot” battlefields such as Afghanistan. “In full accordance with the law and in order to prevent terrorist attacks on the United States and to save American lives-the United States government conducts targeted strikes against specific al-Qaeda

terrorists, sometimes using remotely piloted aircraft, often referred to publicly as drones," Brennan said. "And I'm here today because President Obama has instructed us to be more open with the American people about these efforts [20]". Brennan's articulation of the rationale for using drone strikes hits a number of triumphant victor notes. First, the Obama administration is doing the U.S. public a favor by being more open about the reasoning behind the drone strikes in an effort to bridge the information gap. Second, the drone strikes only target bad people. Al Qaeda terrorists who pose a threat to U.S. security. These drones provide a strong example not only of American force but a symbol of humanity that only obliterates the bad. Finally, Brennan gave the reasoning for the drone strikes on his timetable. Even though drone strikes have been documented since Obama came into office in 2009, he gives an acknowledgement of transparency in 2012, not at all in coincidence with upcoming 2012 election. Therefore, while the act of transparency may be a legitimate one for the character of Obama, it also acts as a strategic political one as well. A triumphant victor always has a trump card and Obama has one in the death of Bin Laden in 2011. The lasting impact of his death still resonates in the media a year after the action. The slaying of bin Laden was, instead, a strategic triumph and a marker of the way the war on terrorism is changing: a departure from large-scale ground wars with fuzzy objectives, tragic costs, unintended consequences and inconclusive endings, and toward a razor-sharp focus on decimating his al-Qaeda organization. Results are already measurable, headlined by bin Laden's demise. Since then, drone strikes have killed about half of al-Qaeda's top 20 leaders and reduced the strength of "al-Qaeda Central" to perhaps no more than 100. Documents found in bin Laden's compound show the organization to be under so much pressure that it can't mount the international threat it still aspires to achieve. ("A year after Bin Laden's death Al Qaeda down but not out, 2012).

In this character pronouncement, the victor has several reasons to account for his success. The drone strikes that Obama uses are only seen in this narrative structure as a measure of success in line with other successes, such as killing Bin Laden and continuing to fight the al Qaeda presence. Therefore, drone strikes function as another part of a larger character narrative; Obama gets things done by continuing to dominate the Al Qaeda leadership network.

With the upcoming 2012 election, the character of Obama became a complex politician who does not really want to use drone strikes but wants to keep Americans "safe". It's not a pure hawk-and-dove kind of distinction. By launching the high-risk raid to kill Osama bin Laden, aggressively prosecuting the war on terror with drone strikes, pressing the war in Afghanistan, backing Libyans who overthrew Moammar Gadhafi, and unequivocally asserting that he won't let Iran develop nuclear weapons, Obama doesn't qualify as passive. Meanwhile, despite Romney's tough stance, he went out of his way Monday to say he wouldn't use U.S. military force in Syria and would do so only as a last resort in Iran. (Spirited debate yields few foreign policy differences, 2012). Obama and even Romney in this example cannot be judged by conventional terms of warmonger or peacemaker. Instead new terms need to be applied to their foreign policy decisions. However, as indicated in the article, Obama acts as the President

who showed he is "tough" enough by engaging in drone strikes that kill terrorist leaders. He has challenged the idea he is "tough" by engaging in drone strikes in silence, while still promulgating those strikes if successful. Overall, the character of Obama, when he is a triumphant victor, sees these successes and attempts to lessen the doubts. Drone attacks convey unmistakable messages: U.S. forces are always watching, and someone close to the leaders might be betraying them. With luck, this distracts and destabilizes al-Qaeda. The program does not come without cost. Strikes from 3 miles to 5 miles up often produce "collateral damage," the sanitized phrase for the killing or maiming of innocent bystanders. The strike on al-Yazid, for example, is reported to have killed his wife and at least one of his three children ("Drones take toll on al-Qaeda leaders", 2010). Obama knows the risks that his policy entails, yet for the good of the U.S., he continues to practice them. While the occasional incident may happen that challenges that narrative, like a terrorist incident in the U.S. that happened at least in part because of the existence of drone program, is worth it to keep the U.S. safe. While women and children may die, the character of Obama continues his commitment to winning a war against al Qaeda.

In contrast, the iconoclastic dictator takes several forms. The critique of the character of Obama comes from the right and the left, the activists and the legislators. Drone strikes provide one of the few things that politically oppositional groups can agree on. The iconoclastic dictator section takes many shapes. John Bolton, U.S. ambassador to the United Nations under President George W. Bush, said the Obama administration is not taking such action because it doesn't believe in the existence of a global threat from Islamic terrorism. "This is a symptom of policy being driven by ideology rather than facts on the ground," Bolton said [21]. In this example the character of Obama is seen as too weak and could use some toughening up to uphold the legacy of the Bush administration. From the left, or in this case people who have read the Constitution, the legality of drone strikes is questioned. The Fifth Amendment guarantees that "no person" can be "deprived of life, liberty or property without due process of law." It is the bedrock protection Americans have always had against a rogue government. It's one of the rights that set the U.S. apart from countries where the dictator decides what the law is. Why should it be so casually discarded? Lawmakers who allow fear of terrorism to overcome respect for more than two centuries of American legal tradition wrote this indefinite-detention measure into last year's defense authorization bill. President Obama promised not to use the authority against American citizens, but that doesn't undo the law, or bind him or any successor. A federal district court ruled the law unconstitutional last month, but higher courts have yet to weigh in. The House effectively renewed the authority last month. The Senate could take it up soon. ("Defense measure lets president lock citizens up indefinitely", 2012). Drone strikes become another refuge for the civil libertarian who fights against other human rights issues, such as indefinite detention and the legality behind that detention. Without the legal rationale engaged with in a democratic manner, the iconoclastic dictator becomes a distant figure, executing orders, in the case of drone strikes literally, from a faraway place that threatens the very document that the country based its legal existence on when it

was founded. In this battle of political argumentation, what role do people have in the mind of an iconoclastic dictator? In this discussion, the topic becomes less about the drone strikes and more about the future if a drone strike is not used.

Civilian casualties. Strikes that are aimed at terrorists but also kill non-combatants, including children, are enormously damaging to the United States. They turn local populations against the U.S. and put enormous pressure on governments such as Pakistan's and Yemen's to stop cooperating with U.S. forces. Accurate counts of civilian casualties are virtually impossible to get, but the U.S. appears to be making progress toward reducing what's euphemistically called "collateral damage." The New America Foundation estimates that civilian deaths have fallen from half of all drone deaths in 2008 to fewer than 10% last year, a total of somewhere between 16 and 36 people. The anti-American backlash stoked by these deaths argues strongly for concentrating attacks on dangerous and high-ranking leaders who can't realistically be captured or killed any other way. Rules of engagement. President Obama and administration officials have begun speaking openly about the once supposedly secret drone attacks, claiming authority for them under the same post-9/11 law that the Bush administration frequently invoked to justify its actions against suspected terrorists. The number of drone strikes rose from 52 during the Bush presidency to 278 under Obama, peaking in 2010, according to a Bureau of Investigative Journalism analysis ("Drone kills stir controversy, but what's the alternative", 2012).

People die in drone strikes, sometimes the wrong people. This statement flies in the face of the governmental discussion of triumphant victory and the abstract notion of the philosophy behind using drone strikes. When these people die, there is a negative reaction of anti-America sentiment. Even though every precaution has ostensibly taken place, "collateral damage" still happens. However, for the people impacted it means losing the life of a loved one. With the increase in frequency of the drone strikes during the Obama administration the likelihood increases of a generation of people who support the ending of terrorism but feel the loss of a person of value to them, an emptiness that only an iconoclastic dictator would continue as a means of policy. Obama remains not only the most complex character in the media content but also in the impact of drone strikes moving forward. His character represents but the majesty of American military majesty but also the human dangers of that majesty. While continuing to end terrorism through drone strikes, sometimes civilian people die, providing two divergent images of Obama as a character: triumphant victor and iconoclastic dictator.

New York Times Analysis

Similar to the USA TODAY section on the character of Obama, the *New York Times* turns the life of the president from a person to an important character in the drone strike story. The *New York Times* produces much more depth and intricate components to the character of Obama and produced content that both admires his intellect and challenges his continued public silence on drone strikes. When Obama finally speaks on the record in 2013 about the use of drone strikes, the *New York Times* fawns over the

character of Obama with passion similar to a fan about his or her favorite athletic player. However, in the next few months, the coverage becomes much more critical of the character of Obama when his policy on drone strikes does not reflect his rhetoric on the same issue.

When the drone strikes first begin, the character of Obama distances himself from the story by not commenting on their use. The C.I.A. drone strike that killed Anwar al-Awlaki, the American-born propagandist for Al Qaeda's rising franchise in Yemen, was one more demonstration of what American officials describe as a cheap, safe and precise tool to eliminate enemies. It was also a sign that the decade-old American campaign against terrorism has reached a turning point. Disillusioned by huge costs and uncertain outcomes in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Obama administration has decisively embraced the drone, along with small-scale lightning raids like the one that killed Osama bin Laden in May, as the future of the fight against terrorist networks. Mr. Zenko, of the Council on Foreign Relations, worries about the growing perception that drones are the answer to terrorism, just a few years after many officials believed that invading and remaking countries would prove the cure. The recent string of successful strikes has prompted senior Obama administration officials to suggest that the demise of Al Qaeda may be within sight. But the history of terrorist movements shows that they are almost never ended by military force, he said. "What gets lost are all the other instruments of national power," including diplomacy, trade policy and development aid, Mr. Zenko said. "But these days those tools never get adequate consideration, because drones get all the attention [22]. At this point in the discourse, drone strikes had been happening off and on since Obama became president. However, only with the death of al-Awlaki, did the drone strikes connect the character of Obama to a much larger change in military policy. In many, similar ways to President Bush's foreign policy being defined by Iraq, Obama's foreign policy will be defined by drone strikes. The complicated nature of these strikes show the promise and hesitance at such a key U.S. point in foreign policy. In addition, all of this discussion about the success of drone strikes or how drone strikes happen to the detriment of foreign aid or international negotiation continues without the character of Obama commenting publically on drone strikes. While President Bush used deception and us versus them rhetoric to justify an illegal war in Iraq, President Obama, in silence, finds legal justification for drone strikes against al-Awlaki. However, the public has no role in this discussion, as the *New York Times* textual example illustrates, and is a policy based on tactical choices of military strikes in countries the U.S. is not specifically at war. The complexity of the character of Obama is in part defined by this passage. The character is both intellectually engaged in the policy choices of government while distant, based on the *New York Times* example, about the reasoning behind that policy. For this reason, when Obama commented on the death of al-Awlaki, his words showed the intricate doublespeak of a governmental leader. "The death of Awlaki is a major blow to Al Qaeda's most active operational affiliate", President Obama said in remarks at a swearing-in ceremony for the new chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, outside Washington. Mr. Obama said the cleric had taken "the lead role in planning and directing

the efforts to murder innocent Americans."Mr. Obama also called Mr. Awlaki "the leader of external operations for Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula" the first time the United States has publicly used that description of him. American officials say he inspired militants around the world and helped plan a number of terrorist plots, including the December 2009 attempt to blow up a jetliner bound for Detroit. The drone strike was the first C.I.A. strike in Yemen since 2002-there have been others since then by the military's Special Operations forces -and was part of an effort by the spy agency to duplicate in Yemen the covert war the it has been running in Pakistan [23,24]. What this excerpt reveals about the character of Obama is that when a drone strike goes well, even when it is a covert operation, the need to publicly comment is clear. In another example, when the drone strike goes poorly, the silence from him his deafening. Second, how the character of Obama defined "operational leader" remains unclear. Bin Laden could be specifically linked to the events of 9/11, yet the thread connecting al-Awlaki to the other potential terrorist events in the U.S. are not as clear. Finally, the need to eliminate an inspiration for terrorist events shows the lengths the character of Obama will go to nail the source of an ideological war with a drone strike. Obama is as concerned as President Bush with winning a protracted land war; he chooses drone strikes instead of a ground war as a tactic.

As illustrated earlier, the character of Obama remains silent on drone strikes when the target is not a successful hit. Here is the information from a drone strike gone deadly awry in Yemen in 2013. In this passage, note the lack of public statement from President Obama or any of the leading military or civilian officials.

Drone-fired missiles struck a convoy of cars returning from a wedding on Thursday afternoon in a remote area of Yemen, witnesses said, killing at least 11 people in what appeared to be the second American drone strike in the past week. Most of the dead appeared to be people suspected of being militants linked to Al Qaeda, according to tribal leaders in the area, but there were also reports that several civilians had been killed. The violence also sharpens a dilemma for President Obama, who said in May that he had approved new, stricter guidelines for drone strikes, and promised to make the drone campaign more transparent. After the president's speech, the frequency of drone strikes in Yemen briefly dipped [24]. As illustrated in this excerpt, President Obama makes not one public statement about a specific drone strike, as is the governmental policy. The strike appears, as first reported, to target Al Qaeda operatives, who pose some level of threat to U.S. security. For that reason, even when Obama pledged earlier in the year to scale back the drone strikes in Yemen, a strike like this served a purpose of eliminating a potential future terrorist.

However, when a closer examination of the event happens in *The New York Times* a week later, the silence from the character of Obama about who died in this strike is significant because of the actual people who died in this targeting. In some respects, the drone strike in Yemen last week resembled so many others from recent years: A hail of missiles slammed into a convoy of trucks on a remote desert road, killing at least 12 people. But this time the trucks were part of a wedding procession, making the customary

journey from the groom's house to the house of the bride. The Dec. 12 strike by the Pentagon, launched from an American base in Djibouti, killed at least a half-dozen innocent people, according to a number of tribal leaders and witnesses, and provoked a storm of outrage in the country. It also illuminated the reality behind the talk surrounding the Obama administration's new drone policy, which was announced with fanfare seven months ago. Although American officials say they are being more careful before launching drone strikes in Yemen, Pakistan and elsewhere and more transparent about the clandestine wars that President Obama has embraced the strike last week offers a window on the intelligence breakdowns and continuing liability of a targeted killing program that remains almost entirely secret. It remains unclear whom the Americans were trying to kill in the strike, which was carried out in a desolate area southeast of Yemen's capital, Sana. The murky details surrounding the strike raise questions about how rigorously American officials are applying the standards for lethal strikes that Mr. Obama laid out in a speech on May 23 at the National Defense University and whether such standards are even possible in such a remote and opaque environment [25].

More so than any specific drone strike, the late 2013 strike in Yemen that killed several members of a wedding party shows the duality of the Obama character in the *New York Times* depiction of drone strikes. First, when new details emerge about the actual people who died in the strike, Obama remained silent. This silence differed greatly from the very public comments he made after al-Awlaki's death. Second, involves the timing of the drone strikes [26]. When Obama spoke public about the death of al-Awlaki, the drone strike program remained a clandestine operation, at least from the perspective of comment from Obama administration officials. When this specific strike happened in Yemen, Obama had publicly commented on drone strikes and voiced a high level of government scrutiny with each strike. The silence is deafening after this particular drone strike. Finally, the lack of accountability from Obama or anyone in the administration is clear from this excerpt. The target of the strike remains unclear, no public comment and a lack of connection about this drone strike to the larger policy of drone strikes remains unanswered [27]. The duality of the character of Obama on drone strikes is clear from this example. When a drone strike kills a specific intended target, Obama responds; when the target hits a civilian target, the public comments stop.

The *New York Times* analysis of President Obama as a character has a much more nuanced view than the USA TODAY textual examples [28]. Obama, as a character, speaks publicly when a drone strike hits an intended target but remains deafeningly silent when the target kills civilians. Finally, the character of Obama has accomplished the goal of limiting the power of Al Qaeda based on a policy he did not comment about until over four years into his presidency. The new parameters he intended to establish to help enhance the success of drone strike policy has not happened, at least in the seven months that immediately followed his first public speech on drone strikes. The character of Obama continues to fight the war on Al Qaeda with drone strikes, without a clear explanation of how that policy works in practice.

Discussion

The character of Obama is a complex machination of several textual examples from both USA TODAY and *The New York Times*. In the USA TODAY section, Obama took on a more either/or depiction of hero or villain based on the textual examples and contextual circumstances of military actions that proved successful or failures [29]. The *New York Times* examples of the character of Obama provide a much more nuanced view that remains incomplete based on the ongoing fight against terrorism. Future research on the character of Obama in media discourse could move in a variety of different directions. In this section, I will focus on three possible directions for this study [30].

First, a study from alternative media sources could provide other insights from public discourse about the character of Obama. Alternative media can provide other actors accounts of public figures and provide different voices from outside the political structures, voices that sometimes are marginalized by mainstream content. These voices could provide another critique of the character of Obama and how that critique fit with the topic of drone strikes [31].

Another possible area of study could involve other narrative components and their relationship with the construction of the character of Obama in mainstream media texts on the topic of drone strikes. For example, the concept of setting may also allow insight into how the media constructs discourse about the character of Obama. The construction of the setting of the U.S. may differ greatly from the settings where drone strikes take place, including settings such as Pakistan or Yemen. This narrative component could also allow for a separate analysis of the topic of drone strikes that allow for great understanding of drone strikes, separate from the politically powerful construction of a public figure [32].

Finally, with the emerging threat from ISIS in Iraq and Syria, a new analysis of drone strikes in those regions in relation to President Obama would also provide a new avenue for future research for drone strikes. With the potential for comparison from previous media examples, the legitimacy of both drone strikes and the impact on a region would impact the character construction of Obama. The relationship with fear and possible retaliation with ISIS would provide more insight into the media construction of public figures and how those figures continue to be depicted in mainstream media text [33].

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