

NARRATING MURDER

An analysis of international crisis communication discourses following political assassinations

Master thesis

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List of abbreviations

AP	Alleged Perpetrator
DPM	Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia
DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea
EU	European Union
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FII	Future Investment Initiative
IRT	Image Restoration Theory
KCNA	Korean Central News Agency
KSA	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
MBS	Mohammed Bin Salman
MP	Member of Parliament
MSSD	Most Similar System Design
OP	Offended Party
OPCW	Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PM	Prime Minister
P3M	Public Meaning-Making Model
RMP	Royal Malaysia Police
SCCT	Situational Crisis Communication Theory
UK	United Kingdom
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
US	United States

1. Introduction

Political assassinations on a foreign soil are, categorically, of such incidents that trigger major international uproar creating a serious diplomatic crisis. A state-sanctioned clandestine elimination, or attempt thereof, of a political target on foreign soil is a significant offense on sovereignty. In the words of Jacques Follorou: “There is a non-spoken rule: everything is accepted except when foreign services come to kill people on your soil” (Follorou, May 16th, 2019). Evidently, the exposure of such events will inevitably lay blame on the alleged perpetrator, putting its status of the alleged perpetrator at major risk. However, the disclosure of this type of incident correspondingly affects the standing of the state in which the deed took place, as it exposes it to substantial offence. Such deed is an impudent transgression that shows utter defiance of respect from the alleged perpetrator for the exposed state.

In effect, this type of attack puts the posture of the latter state in question, which requires a forceful reassertion of sovereignty, as well as an effective blame-ignition strategies. Thus, such instances, forcing both the alleged backer and the offended party’ into a blaming, possibly zero-sum, stand-off, puts their standing on the world stage in jeopardy, which inherently provokes a diplomatic crisis between the two. This study understands the definition of a crisis as “A specific, unexpected and non-routine organizationally based event, or series of event, which creates high levels of uncertainty and threat or perceived threat to an organization’s high priority goals” (Seeger, Sellnow & Ulmer, 1998, p. 233, as cited in Coombs & Holladay, 2010, p.18). Hence, both actors must make use of crisis communication tools to uphold, defend and re-assert their reputation on the world stage. Blame-management and crisis exploitation go hand-in-hand. The outcome of these crises can have momentous consequences for either party, thus requiring a meticulous communication strategy that, if poorly handled, can potentially entail disastrous effects for the standing of the given state on the global arena.

This begs the following research question: *How do international state actors’ framed response strategies to bilateral diplomatic crises following a political assassination allow them to discursively uphold their standing on the world stage ?* Inspired by personal preceding elementary assessments, this thesis aims to deepen the understanding of communication strategies between state actors amidst a diplomatic crisis. It will do so by undertaking an evaluation of the crisis communication strategies of the Malaysian government and North Korean leadership following the

murder of Kim Jong-nam, the Russian Federation and the United Kingdom after the poisoning of Sergei and Yulia Skripal in Salisbury, England, and between Turkey and Saudi Arabia subsequent to the assassination of Jamal Khashoggi.

As noted earlier, communication is an essential tool of diplomacy and foreign policy, particularly in times of crisis when discourse and rhetorical strategies can well preserve one's state reputation, even in case of serious suspicion of involvement in brazen illegitimate deeds. If communication is a salient instrument to shield one actor's reputation and behavior, then it is equally crucial for spectators of such messages to be sufficiently equipped to discern the different meanings ascribed by those actors to such messages and the motives hiding behind them. Under an interpretative lens of study, language in discourse is not merely a tool-set of objective signifiers—i.e. words—but, as Foucault described: “Practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault, 1972, p.49). According to this definition of discourse, language, and, thus, communication, is a constantly morphing process with differing interpretation of its signifiers' meaning. Discourses, thus, do not convey universal objective significance, but convey hidden meaning. Hence, using interpretative methods to deconstruct one's narrative allows to highlight the rhetorical strategies employed by such actors in their attempt to impose their frame—and thus control the narrative—on the targeted audience. Therein lies the purpose of this study, to dissect each actor's crisis communication, highlight their narrative, scrutinise their rhetorical strategy, and, consequently, unveil their hidden meaning.

Moreover, contrasting the cases of Kim Jong-nam, the Skripals and Jamal Khashoggi allows to draw clues of answers as to the suitability of different rhetorical tactics to defend actors on the world stage. It is critical to note that the determination as to whether the blame imputed on the alleged perpetrators is veracious falls beyond the scope of this study. The veracity of the accusation imposed on them is irrelevant to this study, so long as the force of the blame is potent enough to trigger a response. Thus, the following assessment is solely focused on interpretatively determining both theirs and the offended states' responses to the deed, rather than to positively conclude on the truthfulness of these accusations. This paper will undertake its assessment by first laying out its theoretical framework under which it will operate and the research design it intends to follow. It will, then, consecutively offer a contextual clarification on each case, before undertaking separate discursive assessments for APs and OPs. This will be followed a final chapter

of analytical commentary, which shall consist of a contrasted assessment of all prime stakeholders' responses and a discussion of potential further academic endeavours.

2. Theoretical framework

a. *State of the art*

One strand of literature alone is far from sufficient to provide an efficient grasp of the crisis discourses underpinnings. As mentioned earlier, this thesis endorses Seeger, Sellnow and Ulmer's definition of a crisis. These authors are mentioned by Coombs and Holladay as one of the referential conceptualisations of crises. The latter authors, themselves, had traditionally been absolutely predominant in the corporate crisis communication field. However, new waves of scholars have started to point out failings in their academic standpoints, particularly in their focus on corporate reputation-shielding (Metzger, 2019, p.51). In effect, traditional crisis communication alone cannot provide sufficient theoretical tools to wholly encompass crisis communication—in its colloquial sense. To establish the essential building blocks to enable such full grasp, one needs to incorporate tenets of political science literature.

Traditional political science tends to focus on blame games, crisis communication on threats to organisational reputation. Yet, strikingly, none acknowledge that all three of them need and feed off each other. Blame games necessarily hold discursive agendas and inherently threaten the targeted organisations' reputation, hence threatening their own agenda, forcing them to take part in blame games, so on and so forth. An academic project undertaking to study one phenomenon without at least acknowledging the other is bound to be flawed. Here humbly lies the academic ambition of this paper: to use elements of all three scholarly strands—which virtually fail to acknowledge each other—offering academic links between the three to allow building blocks to address such gaps.

Crisis communication share similarities with political science and in terms of crisis response. Specific literature on crisis communication lends major focus on crisis response. Some of the most noteworthy models mapping out crisis response tactics revolve around the so-called Situation Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) and the Image Restoration Theory (IRT),

respectively mapped by Timothy Coombs and William Benoit (Coombs & Holladay, 2010, p.31). Coombs and Holladay describe the SCCT's elemental postulate as follows: "Crises are negative events, stakeholders will make attributions about crisis responsibility, [which] will affect how stakeholders interact with the organizations in crisis (2010, p.38). William Benoit, on the other hand, designed the IRT model as a tool of response following an "attack", which is composed both of an "offensive act" and an "accusation of responsibility for the act" (2010, p.31). Figure 1.1. and 1.2. introduce both models of crisis responses. The IRT seems more organisation-oriented, whereas the SCCT model brings the focus to stakeholders (2010, p.38). Yet, the large similitudes between the two are unequivocal. Moreover, crisis communication literature share with political science the same premise of accountability with the notion of blame-management as a conceptual vindication of their bearing. Granted accountability holds different meanings between a corporate executive, a domestic politician or a head of state on the international state. However, in political science as much as in crisis communication, if accountability is enough to trigger reaction, and thus, communication, it is worth assessing.

- 1 Denial: management claims there is no crisis.
- 2 Scapegoat: management blames some outside entity for the crisis.
- 3 Attack the Accuser: management confronts the group or person claiming that something is wrong.
- 4 Excuse: management attempts to minimize crisis responsibility by claiming lack of control over the event or lack of intent to do harm.
- 5 Justification: management attempts to minimize the perceived damage caused by the crisis.
- 6 Ingratiation: management praises other stakeholders and/or reminds people of past good works by the organization.
- 7 Concern: management expresses concern for victims.
- 8 Compassion: management offers money or other gifts to victims.
- 9 Regret: management indicates they feel badly about the crisis.
- 10 Apology: management accepts full responsibility for the crisis and asks stakeholders for forgiveness.

Figure 1.1. Situational Crisis Communication cluster (Coombs & Holladay, 2010, p. 36).

Denial

- Simple Denial: did not do it
- Shift the Blame: blame some one or thing other than the organization

Evading responsibility

- Provocation: response to some one else's actions
- Defeasibility: lack of information about or control over the situation
- Accidental: did not mean for it to happen
- Good intentions: actor meant well

Reducing offensiveness

- Bolstering: remind of the actor's positive qualities
- Minimize offensiveness of the act: claim little damage from the crisis
- Differentiation: compare act to similar ones
- Transcendence: place act in a different context
- Attack Accuser: challenge those who say there is a crisis
- Compensation: offer money or goods
- Corrective Action: restore situation to pre-act status and/or promise change and prevent a repeat of the act
- Mortification: ask for forgiveness; admit guilt and express regret

Figure 1.2. Image restoration strategies (Coombs & Holladay, 2010, p.32).

Both brands of literature hold similar emphasis on various concepts relevant to the scope of this study, such as the salience of leadership, framing and meaning-making. Indeed, leadership in times of crisis constitutes a significant aspect of crisis management, and hence, of crisis communication. Research on blame-avoidance has shown that perceptions of responsibility tend to climb to the highest levels of hierarchy, raising the incentives for political leaders to manage blame as effectively as possible (Boin, 't Hart & McConnel, 2009, p.86). Furthermore, blame-management literature established that fallouts of crises will vary depending on the seniority of the political leader, in both inward and outward term. The experience and skills of the targeted political executive inwardly affects its survival through the crisis, while its track record outwardly affect the severity of judgement from outside actors (Fischer & Kaiser, 2009, p.25). Crisis communication literature correspondingly supports this assessment. The SCCT holds that both the track record of an organisation under crisis and its prior reputation affect the degree of assigned responsibility on the given organisation (Coombs & Holladay, 2010, p.40). Assessments of international crises similarly pointed to the quick escalation of blame towards state leaders (Brändström, 2016, p. 12).

The role of leaders does not solely lie in their management of the crisis, but, more importantly so for the purpose of this study, in their ability to design meaning and discursively impose their favoured frame to the crisis. Robert Entman described framing as the process “to select some aspects of a perceived reality ... in such a way as to provide a particular...interpretation” (1993, p. 52). Lindholm and Olsson understood framing as “the selection of certain perspectives of reality over others” (2011, p.257). The literature on political crises is equally clear on the salience of framing in blame-management efforts (Brändström & Kuipers, 2003, p. 282). Kathleen McGraw emphasised the “active role taken by public officials in shaping citizens’ reactions to political events” (1991, p. 1133). According to Eva-Karin Olsson sense-making and messaging are two of the core tasks of crisis communication (2013, p. 220).

Meaning-making is an essential tool present in the crisis communication literature. Circumstances of the crisis, the public response to the latter and the perceived involvement of the given leader will call for different potential frames. Different theories of crisis communication observe different purposes to sense-making. Theories such as the IRT and SCCT emphasise executives’ focus on defending and/or repairing their image in face of a crisis. Restorative Rhetoric, on the other hand, emphasises the wish of leaders in crisis to provide sense to a disorientated public

to show control of the situation, save trust, and thus keep order (Griffin-Padgett & Allison, 2010, p. 380). Another strand seeks to assess where political leaders can place themselves to build a character with the potential to defend and, perhaps, strengthen their position (Jong, 2017, p.1026). Wouter Jong modelled four potential “roles” that leaders can assign themselves. The “mourner-in-chief” leads the outrage, as the impact of the crisis is high. As an “orchestrator”, where the perceived responsibility is high, the leader ought to adopt avoid—or manage—the blame, “buddy”, where the executive—free from high responsibility—sympathises and cooperates with victims, and “advocate”, where offense exceeds impact in such a way that the leader endorse a severe communication regarding other perpetrators (2017, p. 1033). This shall be relevant as it will be later incorporated in the method of analysis of this study. Figure 3 presents the overview of the public-meaning model.

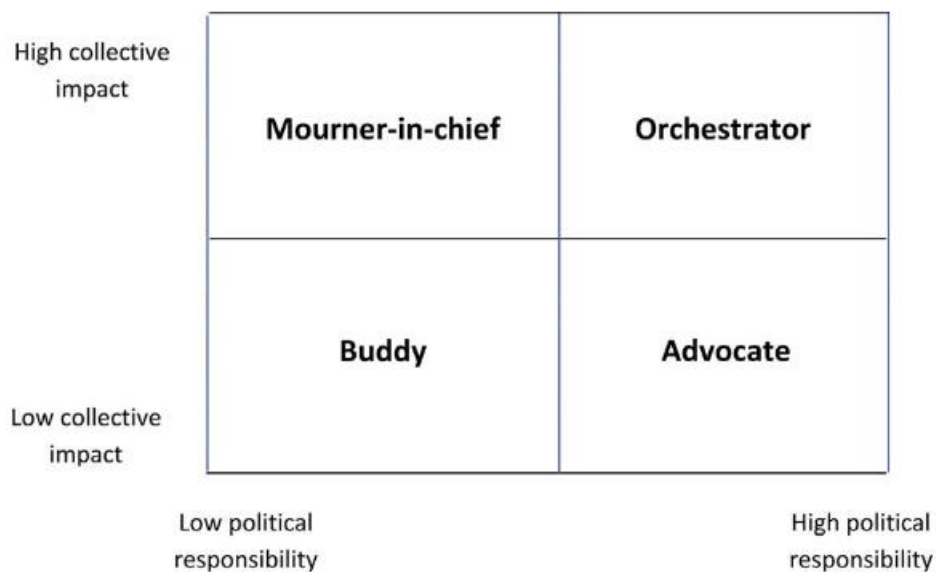


Figure 3. Public Meaning-Making model (P3M) (Jong, 2017, p.1033).

The political science academia further holds substantive strategies of crisis communication. As such, blame avoidance and blame management are two separate strategies (McGraw, 1991, p. 1153). The former relies heavily on denial, and remains virtually the most preferred strategy used in domestic crisis communication (Arendt, LaFleche, Limperopulos, 2017, p. 522). However, as one of the major scholars of blame avoidance strategies —Christopher Hood— ascertained, denial is anything but a fixed tactic. Resodihardjo, Carroll, van Eijk & Maris developed that responses to

blame may be altered overtime (2015, p.352). Indeed, circumstances may trigger the alleged perpetrator to undertake a number of discursive steps allowing an alleged perpetrator to gradually admit responsibility to a crisis, in what is called the “staged-retreat hypothesis” (Hood, Jennings, Dixon, Hogwood & Beeston, 2009, p.697 ; Resodihardjo et al., 2015, p. 352 ; Hood, Jennings & Copeland, 2016, p.552). At its perfect potential, by means of wisely use of timing and compelling frames, this strategy could allow a given perpetrator to maintain its status without significant damage.

<i>A: Problem Denial PD</i>	<i>B: Problem Admission but Responsibility Denial (PA + RD)</i>	<i>C: Problem and Responsibility Admission (PA + RA)</i>
<i>A1. Pure denial ('crisis, what crisis?')</i>	<i>B1. Open stance on who is responsible (announce or agree to investigation to determine who is responsible, without accepting responsibility)</i>	<i>C1. Explanation-only response, offering some account of what went wrong, but not accepting culpability</i>
<i>A2. Qualified denial (admission that there is some problem but denial that it is serious or significant (e.g., through justificatory arguments))</i>	<i>B2. Assert others to be responsible (blame victims, other agents, predecessors, successors, subordinates, superordinates, colleagues, etc.)</i>	<i>C2. Institutional action-taking response, offering institutional apology, compensation, remedial action (e.g., dismissal or disciplining of subordinates)</i>
<i>A3. Denial plus counterattack (portrayal of critics as whingers, knockers, politically motivated, etc., assertion that onus of proof rests on critics, threats of lawsuits, dismissals of moles and leakers, and other sanctions)</i>	<i>B3. Admission of some responsibility, but denial of major or ultimate responsibility (e.g., by offering 'wrong kind of snow' excuses or admission of only partial or 'technical' but not substantial responsibility)</i>	<i>C3. Admission of personal culpability (which may include resignation or an acknowledgement of error accompanied by an expression of determination to stay on and sort out the situation)</i>

Figure 4. Staged-retreat pathways (Hood et al., 2009, p.698).

Hood et al. set forth the different pathways one blamed party may undertake to gradually change their stance and allow some room of admission of culpability. These pathways, according to the latter authors, essentially follow three stages. First, a staged-retreat always starts from a “Problem Denial (PD)”—or stage A—which itself is divided into three types, “Pure denial(A1)”, “Qualified denial (A2)” and Aggressive denial “(A3)” (Hood et al., 2009, p. 698). Incidentally, Hood et al. identified PD’s tactical composition as one of denial, justification or excuses, tactics already set out, albeit not acknowledged, in the corporate crisis communication literature (Coombs & Holladay, 2010, p.36). The second stage (B) is the “Problem Admission but Responsibility Denial (PA+RD)”. Stage B can include either open stance on responsibility(B1)—i.e. an investigation—, scapegoating of responsibility (B2) or minimalization of substance of responsibility (B3). Finally, stage C entails : “Problem and Responsibility Admission (PA+RA)”. Here, C1 provides explanation with ultimate refusal of culpability. C2 oversees corrective action response, such as the dismissal of subordinates. C3 provides a full admission of responsibility (Hood et al., 2009, p.698). Figure 4 summarises Hood et al. pathways of staged-retreat.

Yet, as McGraw noted : “Avoidance of a blame generating situation is not always possible” (1991, p.1135). Hence, if avoidance is not possible, blame management strategies come into play. A notable difference between the two lies in the fact that, while denial plays a central role in blame avoidance, in blame management, framing assumes that significance. This latter observation holds particularly relevant on the international arena, where the principal principle of sovereignty—at least to some normative extent—clears states of the hierarchical patterns of accountability that structure the interactions between organisations in crisis in domestic politics and between corporations and their stakeholders in business. Hence, framing on the international stage is an essential tool of crisis management. Correspondingly, MPD argues that various governments engage themselves and, in the struggle of competing narratives, foreign public, through the mediation of the “global news media” (Golan, 2013, 1252). The crisis then becomes a discursive struggle between the narratives of different centrally involved players (Boin et al., 2009, p.84). From crisis exploitation manoeuvres to IRT, SCCT, staged-retreat or meaning-making; in this arena, a wide branch of strategies are at the disposal of state actors during a bilateral diplomatic crisis (Boin et al., 2009, p.89 ; Coombs & Holladay, 2010, p.31 ; Hood, 2016, p.552 ; Jong, 2017, p.1033).

Herein lies a meaningful gap in the overall literature covering communication strategies in times of crisis. There are remarkable similarities among all three strands of the literature, in fact the strength of their conceptual bridges constitutes the relevance of their joint appreciation for this study in the first place. However, each strand witnesses a gap significant enough to be noted to and accounted for. As could be recognised earlier, the literature on crisis communication, for example by stressing the perception of “stakeholders” towards the organisation in crisis, lends a heavier focus on corporate units of analysis. Even the notion of “global crisis communication”, a notable aspect of the crisis communication literature, overlooks intergovernmental communications to rather focus on the ever-increasing transnational reach of crises and their implications for corporations (Coombs & Holladay, 2010, p.423). Crisis communication tends to overly emphasise notions of reputation-shielding and image-repair, while ignoring structural opportunities (Ulmer & Sellnow, 2002, p.362). In fairness, this emphasis might be structurally explained, as branding could tend to be more flexible for corporations, while incentive to structural change less present than in public affairs. Some conceptual tenets from the crisis communication literature imbricate with political science literature. For example, aspects of visibility and “excusability”—developed in crisis communication—somewhat overlap with the framing dimensions of severity and responsibility, which were noted in political literature (Brändström & Kuipers, 2003, p.290 ; Hearit, 2006, p.12).

However, literature on blame management and avoidance strategies tend to ignore strategical models of crisis communication to develop their own framework of analysis. Moreover, research on crisis communication applied to the international political arena remains scarce. Therefore, if both strands are relatively furnished in analytical tools to study crisis rhetorical strategies, their reluctance to reach across fields produces academic blind corners that ultimately hinders their ability to fulfil their explanatory potential. Assessing interactions of crisis communication strategies between centrally involved state actors on the international arenas, this study could erase these blind spots by building a bridge between the analytical tools and conceptual structures of all both brands of literature.

b. Analytical framework

The study of discourses, as the study of the use of languages, hold particularly germane tenets to understand state's discursive practices of meaning-making to protect and further their positioning on the world stage. A research methodology studying language fundamentally needs to operate with an interpretative lens. The latter can be understood in opposition to a so-called "neo-positivist" lens (Gottweis, 2006, p. 461). The latter epistemological viewpoint intrinsically regards language as a neutral means to convey objective message (2006, p.464). This value-free understanding of speech inherently denies the underlying assumptions of meaning-making that literature assessing framing in communication upholds (Fischer, 2007, p.224). An interpretative umbrella allows to ascribe meaning according to constructed values and identities, and to effectively assess discourses.

Laffey and Weldes (2004) offered a brief summary of those underpinnings. First, discourses are "sets of rules that both enable practices and are reproduced and/or transformed by them" (Laffey & Weldes, 2004, p. 28). Second, discourse is not limited to textual messaging, or a narrow understanding of language in general. Third, discourses are performative, in that their usage allows the transformation of objects and subjects, the production of truths and the relations among them. Fourth, discourse are intricately linked to institutions, with the ability to strengthen or defy them, which makes them inherently political, thus incarnating struggle for power (2004, p.28). One of the underpinnings of the study of discourses lies in the challenge of an objective observable truth, which causes the varying methods that derive from it to be essentially inductive (Hardy, Harley & Phillips, 2004, p.21 ; Gottweis, 2006, p.467).

3. Methodology

a. Case-selection procedure

The principal units of analysis are referred to as *prime stakeholders*, divided into two types of stakeholder: the *alleged perpetrator* (AP) and the *offended party* (OP). Both these actors need to be independent sovereign states. As to narrow down the scope of the study, to qualify as prime stakeholder, a state needs to be both *centrally* and *immediately* involved. A *centrally* involved state

is unexpectedly put at the centre of the crisis and directly concerned. This, thus, excludes any communication from outside actors, such as allied or more distantly related sovereign states, from the scope of this study. An *immediately* involved stakeholder was directly implicated and centrally involved in the crisis right at its onset. This, in its turn, excludes any potential actor that could have been subject of a blame at a later point in time, for example after new investigations. As hinted at in the introduction, and according to this thesis' endorsed definition of a crisis, the cases selected shall illustrate an incident that triggered a diplomatic crisis of such magnitude that it put the standing of the prime stakeholder in the international arena at serious jeopardy.

Therefore, the selected cases ought to share an initial contextual footing, yet with differing outcomes. Specifically, the selected cases here should encompass an assassination attempt, regardless whether ultimately successful or not, on an individual, whose political figure could potentially prove adversarial to the regime of his own country, abroad, where blame quickly fell on the leadership of the victim's home country. In line with these selection criteria, three cases appear optimal to conduct this study. As this thesis assesses the communication strategies of APs and OPs, each around a single assassination attempt, this study undertakes what Hansen might call a "comparative discursive encounter" (2013, p.68). Translated from interpretative method language, this essentially amounts to a comparative case study. Indeed, this thesis endeavours to contrast different discursive strategies from different state actors around a similar contextual footing.

Early February 2017, Kim Jong-nam, the older brother of the current Supreme Leader of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), Kim Jong-un, was attacked with a chemical nerve agent at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport in Malaysia (Zolkepli, February 14th, 2017). Various media reports had recounted that, before the rise of Kim Jong-un, Kim Jong-nam was foreseen within the North Korean elite as the 'heir apparent' of Kim Jong-il, and had already been subject to previous attempts at his life (Swan, August 23rd, 2016). The mere conduct of an autopsy by the Malaysian authorities Kim Jong-nam's body triggered a rapid escalation to a full-blown diplomatic crisis between the Malaysian government the DPRK, while the global news media was quick to point out the potential responsibility of the North Korean leadership (Kumar, March 4th, 2017; Choe & Gladstone, February 14th, 2017).

In March 2018, Sergei Skripal, a former Russian spy, who had served a prison sentence in Russia for high treason after sharing information to the United Kingdom (UK), was, likewise, poisoned with a nerve agent in Salisbury, England (Dodd, Harding & MacAskill, March 8th, 2018). Within days, Members of Parliament (MP) and British media pundits swiftly mounted pressure to explicitly take action against Russia (*BBC*, March 12th, 2018). This, in its turn, escalated to a diplomatic crisis between the UK and Russia, leading to economic sanctions and the expulsion of dozens of diplomats from both sides (Vonberg & Carroll, March 17th, 2018).

Finally, October 2018, Jamal Khashoggi, an exiled journalist, former ally of Mohammed Bin Salman (MBS), Crown Prince of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) was declared missing, and shortly confirmed dead, after entering the Saudi consulate (*BBC*, October 7th, 2018). Again within days, the Turkish executive explicitly implicated the Saudi leadership in the murder of the journalist, triggering months of hot global media coverage of the crisis with continuous twists and public rhetorical back-and-forth between Turkey and the KSA (*BBC*, October 22nd, 2018). The APs studied here are North Korea, Russia and Saudi Arabia. The OPs are Malaysia, Turkey and the UK. All six actors share the quality of prime stakeholder. If the starting premise of those three cases appear strikingly similar, the assessment of each actor's crisis communication will show substantial variations in response, despite analogous contextual frames.

b. Data-collection method

This study aims to grasp how state discursively frame their crisis communication strategies to shield their reputation, and potentially advance their global standing. Methodologically speaking this thesis, thus, need to draws its data-collection procedure from techniques conducive to discourse analysis. Accordingly, this study selected its data using Hansen's method of textual selection (2013, p.73). The latter author dissects textual along four dimensions, the intertextual models, the number of selves, the temporal perspective and the scope of the event (2013, p.67). Intertextual models comprises four layers of discursive debates, official statements, the wider political debate, cultural representations and marginal discourses. The number of selves delineates which units of analysis, as producers of the analysed discourses, are under assessment. The temporal perspective establishes the timeframe of analysis, while the scope of event underlines the event(s) around which discourses are produced.

Hence, the intertextual model of this assessment's data-collection procedure need not focus on marginal or cultural objects of analysis, and shall, thus, mostly analytically focus on official discursive products, such as speeches, press statements or general official comments. The data was traced either by directly sourcing on official websites, such as legislative, governmental, organisational or international organisation's websites, these include Russia's Foreign Ministry website, United Nations Security Council (UNSC) meetings minute, transcription of sessions of the House of Commons in Hansard, or the website of the Royal Malaysia Police (RMP). When such comments could not be found directly find through official channels, secondary sources were used by means of tracing back the original source of certain statements. Such is the case with Malaysian newspaper, *The Star Online*, which published full —videotaped or transcribed— original press conferences and press releases of the Malaysian government, North Korean embassy or the RMP, *Russia Today*, which published similar primary sources of Russian official communication, e.g. the Russian Ambassador to the UK, Alexander Yakovenko, or *The Washington Post*, which posted Recep Tahir Erdogan's speech to Turkey's "Grand National Assembly".

c. Method of analysis and operationalisation

As hinted at in the analytical framework, this study will make use of discourse analysis instruments to shed light on its research puzzle. As such, this thesis operates an assessment of how states performatively struggle with discursive sparring partners—here AP and OP over an attempted assassination claim—to impose their worldview, and, thus, defend and further their global positioning. Several features of discourse analysis need to be delineated here to understand how the collected shall be operationalised in this study. The most basic element of discourse analytics lies in the determination of the relationship between signified, as a the sign in its raw form, and signifier, i.e. the practice of the sign and the meaning it carries (Huysmans, 1998, p.228). To grasp the essence of the signifier, one can rely on such observations such as contextual clues, historical practice of the signifier by the producer of the speech or through cross-assessment with other discursive clues.

The theoretical ambition of this thesis—to bridge studies of discourse in diplomatic crisis communication across crisis communication and political science academic literature— would call

for a deductively stirred method of analysis, where empirical evidence and analytical findings are applied to existing concepts and theories (Neuman, 2014, p.69). However, a strictly deductive approach would not entirely fit the purpose of this analysis for two reasons. First, the reach of this study calls for a narrative approach, thus a discursive method. However, narrative approaches to social sciences only function under an interpretive lens, which, at their core, challenge the neopositivists assumptions of a neutral and objective reality, truth and language that is observable through a universal deductive lens. The study of languages, therefore, call for inductive approaches to analytical endeavours. Second, if literature on blame management and crisis communication is rich on actors *subjected* to blame, very little scholarly work could be found that analyses actors *subjecting* blame. Therefore, the assessment of OPs will, inevitably, entail more inductive reasoning. Thus, to overcome this gap, this thesis shall make use of abductive reasoning, where, in sum, inductive processes of grounded theory are, inferred, applied and contrasted to existing theories (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012, p. 168).

Such discursive clues are analytically garnered through a process of “mapping”. This can be done through the cataloguing of references by the speaker to its *Self*, i.e. and the speaker and perceived kin, and of *Others*, any unit perceived alien to its kin. Furthermore, this is coupled with a classification of dominant and marginal thematic patterns. This process of categorisation allows to determine the rhetorical dynamics of the speaker’s communication. It allows to identify tactics of inclusion and exclusion. The exposition of identification and differentiation processes, as well as the identifying of emphasis and marginalised themes, allows to uncover the raw meaning of the speaker, in the form of presented, i.e. picked, knowledges and truths.

Hence, the rhetorical dynamic of a given actor’s discourse can be roughly understood as the interaction of the sum of textual references to *self* and *others*, grouped in identification and differentiation processes, with the sum of textual *dominant* and *marginal* patterns, amounting to presented knowledges and truths. The exposed dynamic provides a robust ground to dissect character discourse, where the speaker normatively position itself and the outside world in light of the issue at hand, hence constituting the speaker’s viewpoint. Finally, these steps achieved permits to identify the discursive function of this worldview. Contrasting the speaker’s worldview with context allows to delineate the intended generated effect, which ultimately discloses the speaker’s communication strategy.

This method of analysis offers a rigorous meticulous framework to dissect political discourse, though it remains too imprecise to accurately determine state's discursive strategies to defend and further their positioning on the world stage amidst a diplomatic crisis. However, it does provide an opportunity to bridge the gap between the previously identified conceptual fields that are serviceable for this thesis' undertaking. Hence, to successfully operationalise the collected data, one needs to incorporate determined concepts and models from the political science and crisis communication literature into this method of discourse analysis. Particularly, the SCCT, the IRT and blame-management strategies emerge as particularly valuable to pin-point the specific discursive dynamics employed by both APs and OPs. To contrast and overlap identification and differentiation processes with those outlined modes and presented knowledges and truths allow to grasp exhaustive view of the discursive dynamics at hand. As character discourse dissects the positioning of the speaker in light of the issue at hand, findings in that realm shall be applied to the P3M, as the latter delineates the role ascribed to themselves by public leaders. Finally, these results will be made subject to a critical assessment by contrast of the discursive encounters and the contextual situation to determine whether these strategies do offer potential to fulfil their purpose.

The operationalisation of the results is then concluded by their classification and summary—which can be found in Figure 5.1. and 5.2. These figures incorporate the SCCT/IRT communication tactics employed, the prime stakeholders positioning on the P3M, the APs' use of stage retreat, the tone employed and the legitimised emotions employed. Four different types of tone were, here, identified. An 'offensive'¹ tone uses aggressive rhetoric to formally blame the opponent stakeholders for the crisis and initiates escalation of rhetoric. A 'pro-active' tone falls short of formally blaming the opponent stakeholders, yet discursively puts significant pressure on the latter for the resolve of the crisis. A 'Defensive' tone uses similarly aggressive rhetoric as an offensive tone, yet leaves the initiative of escalation to its opponent. A stakeholder adopting a defensive tone, thus, tends to wait for its opponent to raise its rhetoric before raising its own. Finally, a 'Conciliatory' tone avoids direct conflict with its opponent and discursively seeks to resolve the crisis at hand, under the chosen frame of the producer. Figure 4 exposes this operationalisation.

¹ 'Offensive', here, should be understood here in its strategical military-like sense, and not in the colloquial understanding, i.e. insulting.

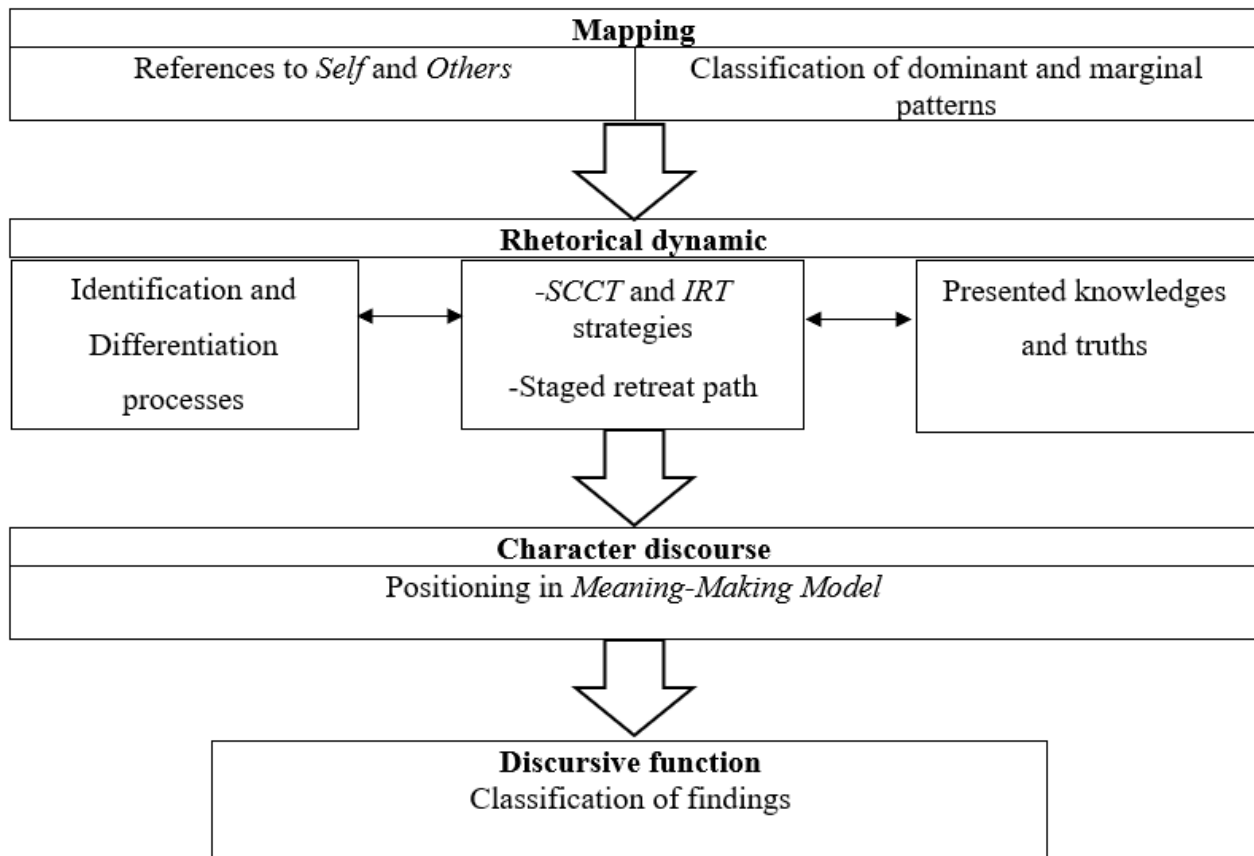


Figure 4. Operationalisation

d. Limitations

Naturally, this thesis is not devoid of any limitation. One major challenge to this research’s reliability came with the issue of language. Indeed, of all six actors studied, only two grant an official status to English: the UK—naturally as its official language— and Malaysia, which allows English for a number of administrative use (National Language Acts, 1963). The author speaking neither Russian, Malaysian, Korean or Arabic. However, this shortcoming is cushioned by the fact that all the sources found, save two, were either directly produced in English or provided for through an official translation from the producer of the source. In certain instances, the author had to strengthen the reliability of certain sources by cross-verifying them with sources reporting the same statements. Such was the case in instances (a) where the source language was other than English, but translated through secondary means back to English, (b) where the full —textual— statement lacked video-taping and was published through secondary sources, or (c) where the full statement could not be found in the original source, and thus only extracts could be found in

secondary sources. However, the author endeavoured to limit his reliance on secondary sources, i.e. media reporting for its substance of analysis, as much as possible. He solely used it as a primary means of research for the recollection of basic chronological facts deemed relevant to the studied cases.

A potential shortcoming lies in the fact that, to the better knowledge of the author, there is no established model of crisis communication, or blame-management, in the academia that is purposefully designed to fit the structures of accountability of the international arena. Indeed, the models used at present were sketch along the assumptions of domestic—or corporate—logics of accountability. In the intergovernmental structures of the global stage the principle of sovereignty is prime. This entails that there is virtually no international hierarchical structure powerful enough to pose an existential threat to the power of international leaders. This could hinder the adaptability the models used at hand on the international arena. Individually each of these models would not prove sufficient for conclusive and valid findings. However, the abductive approach of this thesis, which combines various models of crisis communication—namely the SCCT/IRT cluster, the P3M, staged-retreat hypothesis and restorative rhetoric—with inductive findings of discourse analysis, allows for a comprehensive grasp of state actors’ employed communication strategies.

4. Crises’ accounts

a. *The assassination of Kim Jong-nam*

Kim Jong-nam died of a seizure on his way to the hospital, twenty minutes after having a VX nerve agent spread over his face at Kuala Lumpur International Airport (Holmes & Phillips, February 24th, 2017). The victim although travelling on a fake passport as “Kim Chol”, was consensually identified in media reports as Kim Jong-nam (Zolkepli, February 14th, 2017). The latter was half-brother of the current ruler of North Korea—Kim Jong-un (Zolkepli, February 14th, 2017). Pundits were quick to raise suspicions towards the North Korean leadership (Choe & Gladstone, February 14th, 2017). Curiously, in spite of damning suspicions from South Korea and international media coverage, both Malaysian, as the OP, and North Korea, as the AP, restrained from any official comment in the immediate aftermath of the incident. Communication from Malaysian authorities remained limited to updates on the investigation from the Malaysian police. Through veiled diplomatic channels, the DPRK requested Malaysia to extradite the body back to

Pyongyang (Zolkepli, February 14th, 2017). The RMP rejected that request, indicating that the release of the body would only take place following results of a full body autopsy (Zolkepli, February 14th, 2017). The first governmental reaction on the Malaysian side came from Deputy Prime Minister (DPM) Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, who confirmed the victim was, indeed, Kim Jong-nam, and denied any request from the DPRK to release the body (Abas, February 16th, 2017 ; DPM, February 17th, 2017).

The RMP, on the other hand, tenuously abstained from referring to the victim as “Kim Jong-nam”. RMP officials insisted on using the name found in the passport of the victim’s body, i.e. “Kim Chol”, and denied ever referring to the victim as “Kim Jong-nam” (Deputy Inspector-General, February 18th, 2017 ; Inspector-General, February 22nd, 2017). Press releases from the RMP consistently referred to Kim Jong-nam with generic terms such as “Korean male” “Korean National” or “North Korean citizen” (Inspector-General, February 14th, 2017; Inspector-General, February 15th, 2017; Inspector-General, February 24th, 2017). It would take a month for the RMP to officially confirm Kim Jong-nam’s identity (Inspector-General, March 10th, 2017). Nevertheless, the Malaysian government discourse’s initially remained relatively sober towards the DPRK. Hamidi left the brunt of the communication to the police, solely re-affirming the security of the airport and even expressing confidence that Malaysian-DPRK relations would remain: “Intact” (Abas, February 16th, 2017 ; DPM, February 16th, 2017).

Five days into the case, the DPRK Ambassador to Malaysia, Kang Chol, personally attempted to inspect the body at the morgue and was rebuffed by security. He denounced the autopsy procedure and accused Malaysia of colluding : “With outside forces ... interested to damage the image of our republic” (North Korean Ambassador, February 17th, 2017). Kang further discarded the affair as an attempt by the South Korean: “Puppet... to escape from a miserable state of the largest political scandals” and : “Demand[ed] the Malaysian side not to be entangled in political plots with outside forces” (North Korean Ambassador, February 17th, 2017). Kang ended his statement by: “Strongly” condemning Malaysia (North Korean Ambassador, February 17th, 2017).

The Deputy Inspector-General of the RMP, Noor Rashid Ibrahim dismissed Kang’s forceful condemnation, stating: “They can comment anything, we just follow our rules and regulations” (Deputy Inspector-General, February 18th, 2017). The Deputy Inspector-General

emphasised that four suspects were North Korean, and that the body would not be released until the deceased's "next-of-kin" would physically come forward for identification (Deputy Inspector-General, February 18th, 2017). Asked to clarify who the RMP expected to come forward, and under what timeframe, Noor candidly dispensed a two weeks deadline for "any of his family members...not necessarily his half-brother...brothers and sisters, his children" whilst still declining to confirm or deny whether the deceased was Kim Jong-nam (Deputy Inspector-General, February 18th, 2017).

Kang doubled down on his rhetoric. The Ambassador charged Noor's: "False allegation" and "Malaysia's unjust behaviours and contradictions" (North Korean Ambassador, February 19th, 2017). Kang vividly opposed numerous points emitted by the Deputy-Inspector General. Insisting on the natural cause of death, he expressed strong doubts regarding the diagnosis : "There is no clear evidence on the cause of death...it only increases the doubts that it would be someone else's hand behind the investigation...this incident is politicised by Malaysia in collusion with South Korea(North Korean Ambassador, February 19th, 2017). Kang dismissed the summoning of Kim Jong-nam's next-of-kin as: "Unlawful" and "Preposterous" (North Korean Ambassador, February 19th, 2017). The Ambassador claimed Malaysia's responsibility in: "The murder of our citizen in Malaysia" should his passing away not be a: "Natural one", while at the same time proposing a joint investigation between the two countries. Kang further blamed the RMP for: "Rumours spread to the public to defame the image of the [DPRK]", while later accusing them of police brutality towards North Korean citizen, qualifying it as a: "Human rights abuse that can only be seen in a US gang film" (North Korean Ambassador, February 19th, 2017).

This antagonistic stance triggered fiery reactions from the Malaysian government. PM Najib Abdul Razak dismissed the DPRK's proposal for a joint investigation, defended the professionalism of the RMP and re-asserted Malaysia's objectivity. He concluded as such: "We have no reason why we would want to do something that would paint the North Koreans in a bad light... we expect them to understand we apply the rule of law in Malaysia" (Prime Minister of Malaysia, February 19th, 2017 ; Lai, February 20th, 2017). Najib called out Kang's boisterous rhetoric as: "Uncalled for", "Diplomatically rude", supported by "Sweeping and baseless statements" before adding that Malaysia "Will never be the pawn of any country"(Prime Minister of Malaysia, February 21st, 2019).

Malaysia's foreign minister, Anifah Haji Aman, had similarly issued a press statement, expressing grave offence to the DPRK's: "Deeply insulting" allegations "Culled from delusions, lies and half-truths ... in all civilised nations, it is the norm for cases such as these to be comprehensively investigated" (Wisma Putra, February 20th, 2017). On the 22nd of February, the RMP Inspector-General announced the indictment of several North Korean citizens—including a DPRK embassy staff—and confirming the cause of death as poisoning (Inspector-General, February 22nd, 2017). The poison was identified as the VX nerve agent, which is banned by the Chemical Weapons Convention (1993)—of which the DPRK is not a signatory, raising further surmise towards the regime (Inspector-General, February 22nd, 2017 ; Holmes & Phillips, February 24th, 2017).

A few days after a series of Malaysian condemnation and warnings the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), the DPRK's state-run news agency, persevered on Kang's talking points (*BBC*, February 23rd, 2017 ; Holmes & Phillips, February 24th, 2017). The report clamoured against the RMP's handling of the case as: "Illegal and immoral", claiming the investigation was an act of politicisation, an "Anti-DPRK conspiratorial racket... wanton human rights abuse ... contrary to human ethics and morality" (*BBC*, February 23rd, 2017). It explicitly blamed Malaysia for the crisis : "The biggest responsibility for his death rests with the government of Malaysia as the citizen of the DPRK died in its land" (*BBC*, February 23rd, 2017). This sparked such a low in DPRK-Malaysia relations that North Korea sent a special envoy to deal with the case with three stated objectives : "(1) The return of the body of the deceased DPRK citizen...(2) The release of the DPRK citizen arrested...(3) The development of the friendly relations between the DPRK and the Malaysian government" (Special Envoy, March 2nd, 2017). 7

Still, the Malaysian government re-instated visa requirements for North Korean citizens and expelled Kang from Malaysia (*AFP*, March 5th, 2017). This led to the DPRK banning Malaysians to leave the country until: "Fair settlement of the case", a move that Najib Razak qualified as an "Abhorrent act", before barring North Koreans to leave Malaysia (Fifield, March 7th, 2017). In the midst of the stand-off, the RMP officially confirmed that the victim they had so far been referring to with generic terms was Kim Jong-nam (Inspector-General, March 10th, 2017). Relations between the DPRK and Malaysia, however, were formally normalised by the end of March through a deal that saw Malaysia release the body to North Korea, and citizens of both

countries being allowed to leave their respective territories, including suspects to the crime that had escaped the RMP until then (Head, March 30th, 2017).

b. The Skripals poisoning

Sergei Skripal, a former Russian double agent and his daughter Yulia, were, on the 4th of March 2018, brought to a hospital in Salisbury, England after being discovered lying unconscious in a shopping square (Harding, Morris & Bannock, March 6th 2018). The poison would later be revealed to be of the “Novichok” type. an extremely potent military-grade nerve agent, once described by a United States (US) military report as “toxic as VX...more difficult to detect and easier to manufacture” (Gertz, February 4th, 1997 ; *Hansard*, 12th March 2018, col.621). Incidentally, this type of chemical weapon, and the agents it exploits, is believed to have been developed by the Soviet Union during the end of the Cold War (Tucker, 2006, p.231). The British press was quick to draw parallels with previous cases of suspicious deaths of Russian citizen hostile to their government (White, 2008, p.2 ; Harding, Morris & Bannock, March 10th, 2018). The oddly analogous *modus operandi* prompted pundits to point fingers towards a potential Russian involvement. Boris Johnson, head of the Foreign Office, was the first official to comment on the incident, immediately reverberating pundit’s suspicions: “There is much speculation about the disturbing incident in Salisbury” (*Hansard*, 6th March 2018, col. 169). Johnson repeatedly maintained it was too early to point fingers, yet consistently validated some of the MPs’: “Speculations”, and footnoted these precautions by re-assuring that the UK would respond “Appropriately and robustly” (*Hansard*, 6th March 2018, col. 169).

Two days later, Home secretary Amber Rudd further detailed the government’s position. Rudd refrained from confirming: “Speculation” while still asserting the UK’s position should their veracity be confirmed. Rudd escalated the rhetoric, branding it a: “Brazen and reckless act...an attempted murder in the most cruel and public way” (*Hansard*, 8th March 2018, col. 487). She similarly stated the government will: “Respond in a robust and appropriate manner”, while scaling up the tone : “We are committed to doing all we can to bring the perpetrators to justice—whoever they are, and wherever they may be” (*Hansard*, 6th March 2018, col. 487). Blame would not be formally put on Russia until PM Theresa May intervened on both the 12th and 14th of March 2018. The PM indicated her government considered Russia’s involvement: “highly likely”(*Hansard*, 12th

March 2018, col.621). The PM stated that only two scenarios could provide sufficient explanation for the attack. Either it was: “A direct act against our country” or the Russian Federation let others get their grip on it (*Hansard*, 12th March 2018, col.621). Britain imposed a deadline at midnight the next day for Russia to choose either one of the two possibilities,. Otherwise, The PM threatened: “We would conclude that this action amounts to an unlawful use of force...against the United Kingdom”, which would be met with sanctions (*Hansard*, 12th March 2018, col.621).

On the 7th of March, the Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson dismissed the issue as a: “Traditional fake stor[y]... used to further escalate the anti-Russian campaign in the Western media space” (Foreign Ministry, March 7th, 2018). Although at that point in time no British government official had formally blamed on his country, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov alleged, on the 9th of March, to be: “Accused not only of this, but of everything that our Western partners believe is wrong on this planet” (Foreign Ministry, March 9th, 2018). Lavrov stated not a single fact had been presented but : “TV reports”. He mocked “pretentious [journalists] with serious faces” threatening his country, before stating: “It is not serious. It is again propaganda fair and square and stirring up hysteria” (Russian Foreign Ministry, March 9th, 2018). Lavrov hinted proposed Russian assistance, shall it be provided with: “Relevant information” and advised journalists to “receive information from using professional, not propaganda channels” (Russian Foreign Ministry, March 9th, 2018).

Lavrov rejected the UK’s deadline, only this time abstaining from dismissing it as propaganda, instead backing Russia’s response around legal argumentation. He made references to procedures of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), where, according to Lavrov, when a party is suspected of using a banned chemical weapon, the impacted state should issue a formal query to the suspected party through OPCW channels, and the latter ought to respond within a ten-day’s time (Russian Foreign Ministry, March 13th, 2019). Lavrov claimed that the suspected country is entitled to request samples of the substance to operate its own investigation (Russian Foreign Ministry, March 13th, 2019). This remained a central point of argumentation of Russia’s discourse, as much as the UK consistently rejected this point (*UNSC*, 2018a., p.8 ; *The Telegraph*, March 31st, 2018).

The same day, May dispatched a letter to the UNSC, formally notifying the latter that the British government estimated: “Highly likely that the Russian Federation was responsible for this

attack”, branding the deed as: “Clear challenge ... to the rules-based international order” (*UNSC*, March 13th, 2018). The following day at a UNSC meeting, in light of Russia’s refusal to comply with the UK’s deadline, the OP : “Concluded that the Russian State was involved”, hence formally discarding any room for doubt on who to blame (*UNSC*, 2018a, p.3). May judged Russia’s response as not credible and a : “Complete disdain for the gravity of these events” (*Hansard*, 14th March 2018, col. 855). The PM announced the expulsion of twenty-three Russian diplomats, proposed new legislative measures to strengthen counter-espionage and allow more economic sanctions and froze all high-level bilateral contacts between the UK and Russia (*Hansard*, 14th March 2018, col. 857). May emphasised the row only concerned the Russian state and assured the House of the support and endorsement of the US, France and Germany (*Hansard*, 14th March 2018, col. 857).

The UK’s full and formal allegation of Russian involvement triggered an indignant reaction from Russian representatives. Russian Ambassador to the UNSC Vasily Nebenzya, on top of calling the PM: “Irresponsible”, her deadline “Null and void”, and British allegations against Russia: “Unfounded, superficial [and] monstrous”, compared British government officials with Inspector Lestrade, a character from Sherlock Holmes, whom he described in the following terms : “Not terribly intelligent and deduction is not his forte” (*UNSC*, 2018a., p.10). Nebenzya asserted Russia had destroyed its stockpile of nerve agents, reasserted Lavrov’s remarks on the propagandistic nature of the UK’s accusations and questioned British motives behind their allegations (*UNSC*, 2018a., p.8). Russia effectively retaliated on the 17th of March, right after Johnson claimed it was: “Overwhelmingly likely” Putin had personally ordered the attack (Elgot & MacAskill, March 16th, 2018 ; Carroll & Kentish, March 17th, 2018). This was deemed as a: “Shocking and unforgivable breach of diplomatic rules of decent behaviour” by the Kremlin’s spokesman(Elgot & MacAskill, March 16th, 2018 ; Carroll & Kentish, March 17th, 2018 ; *TASS*, March 17th, 2018). The Russian Foreign Ministry announced three measures of retaliation, (1) the expulsion of twenty-three British diplomats, (2) the cancellation of the opening of a British General Consulate in St-Petersburg and (3) the termination of the British Council in the Russian Federation (Russian Foreign Ministry, March 28th, 2018).

The UK denounced Russia’s attitude on the global arena and went on a real coordinated diplomatic offensive, publishing short infomercial-type videos castigating: “Russian state aggression in the past few years”, “Russia’s impact on global security” or “Russian State

disinformation” (Prime Minister’s Office, April 18th, 2018). Britain discursively exploited its network of allies, spreading its talking points in a letter to NATO, securing a joint statement with France and Germany as well as a European Council press release fully and explicitly endorsing the UK’s narrative (Prime Minister’s Office, March 15th, 2018; European Council, 2018, p.4 ; HM Government, 13th April, 2018). This diplomatic offensive led to the expulsion of 151 Russian diplomats by twenty-six countries.

Russia retaliated with surgical precision, expelling one diplomat for each of its own expelled while tensing its rhetoric(Adams, March 31st, 2018). The Foreign Ministry indicted Britain for their : “Inability to ensure the safety of Russian citizens”, providing as examples the Skripals but also the names of Alexander Litvinenko, Badri Patarkatsishvili, Alexander Pereplichny, Boris Berezovsky and Nikolai Glushkov (Foreign Ministry, March 28th, 2018). All, incidentally, widely suspected in the Western media landscape to have been targeted by Russia (Harding, Morris & Bannock, March 10th, 2018). Russia insisted on the spat being a purposefully orchestrated diplomatic smear campaign, accusing the British intelligence services of being responsible for the poisoning: “We will regard this incident as an attempt on the life of Russian citizens as part of a large-scale political provocation” (Foreign Ministry, March 28th, 2018).

c. The disappearance of Jamal Khashoggi

At his death, Jamal Khashoggi was a Saudi columnist in political exile in the US (Kazancioglu, October 11th, 2018; Malbrunot, October 18th, 2018). He was reported missing on the 2nd of October 2018, four hours after entering the Saudi consulate in Istanbul (Barthe, October 4th, 2018). Turkey almost immediately reacted to reports of Khashoggi’s disappearance. On the 3rd of October, the spokesman of the Presidency informed the press Turkey believed the journalist to still be in the consulate, adding that the case: “Had a dimension of international law” (Fahim, October 3rd, 2018). This triggered an immediate response by Saudi Arabia, which denied the spokesman’s claim (Fahim, October 3rd, 2018). The Saudi consulate asserted in a follow-up statement it was working with Turkish authorities to: “Uncover the circumstances of the disappearance of Jamal Khashoggi after departing the Consulate” (Fahim, October 3rd, 2018).

The Saudi Crown Prince responded to reports of Turkish investigators heavily suspecting murder in the consulate. MBS branded these reports as: “Rumours”, yet, feinting ignorance stated : “We are very keen to know what happened to him” (Flanders, *et al.*, October 5th, 2018). He concurred that he gathered Khashoggi : “Entered and ...got out after a few minutes or one hour”, adding that Saudi Arabia had nothing to hide and welcomed Turkish authorities to search the consulate (Flanders, *et al.*, October 5th, 2018). MBS’ comments echoed one of his officials, who asserted that Jamal Khashoggi left the consulate alive and was neither : “In the consulate nor in Saudi custody” (*BBC*, October 10th, 2018). This was followed by statements exclusively stating the KSA was open to cooperate with Turkish authorities to: “Uncover the circumstances” of Khashoggi’s disappearance (*BBC*, October 10th, 2018).

The relationship between the two countries did not, initially, suffer from the incident *per se*, despite contradicting standpoints. Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, commented on the issue on the 7th of October. Erdogan called the incident: “Upsetting”, claiming Khashoggi was an :“Old friend ...long-known” (Turkish President, October 7th, 2018). While he expressed: “Good faith”, he also uttered wariness in the prospect of an: “Undesirable situation” (Turkish President, October 7th, 2018). Erdogan added: “Those in our country and in the world who advocate freedoms ... will not quit following this case. I will follow it myself” (Turkish President, October 7th, 2018). Erdogan then endorsed a leadership role in monitoring the case : “Whatever comes of this, we will be the ones to declare it to the world” (Turkish President, October 7th, 2018). Meanwhile, the Turkish press had been fuelling and mounting increasing coverage and pressure on Saudi Arabia. (*BBC*, October 10th, 2018). Particularly damning was footage suggesting Saudi agents had entered and left Istanbul concordant with the timeframe of Khashoggi’s disappearance within the consulate (*BBC*, October 10th, 2018 ; Mustafa, October 10th, 2018). International media outlets reported that Turkish authorities had, by the 6th of October, internally concluded Jamal Khashoggi had been murdered inside the Saudi consulate (Fahim, October 6th, 2018).

On the 9th of October, the Saudi Ambassador to the US, Khalid Bin Salman, published a “personal message”. The Ambassador addressed what he considered: “Malicious leaks and grim rumours” (*Al Arabiya*, October 9th, 2018). He praised Khashoggi as a personal friend, whose well-being was the foremost priority of the Kingdom(*Al Arabiya*, October 9th, 2018). He advanced Khashoggi had made several visits to Saudi diplomatic missions in the months that preceded his

missing without any harm being done to him (*Al Arabiya*, October 9th, 2018 ; O'Connor, October 15th, 2018). Aside one comment from Erdogan asserting that the KSA needed to prove Khashoggi was alive, both countries abstained from offering any notable remark for another ten days (Turkish President, October 8th, 2018 ; Tuysuz & McKenzie, October 9th, 2018).

On the 19th of October, Saudi Arabia astoundingly admitted that Khashoggi had died in its consulate. The announcement came with publication of three missives. The first held that King Abdalla had ordered the Kingdom's Public Prosecutor to : "Conduct further investigations into the case" (KSA Embassy, October 19th, 2018a). The second, from the same Public Prosecutor, stated : "Preliminary investigations ... revealed that the discussions took place between him and the persons whom he met [in the consulate] ... led quarrels and an altercation, which tragically resulted in his death" (KSA Embassy, October 19th, 2018b). The third press release announced the sacking of several KSA military and intelligence officers (KSA Embassy, October 19th, 2018c).

This account would not hold three days. On the 21st of October, the Saudi Foreign Minister, Adel al-Jubeir nuanced the rather evasive statements his country had published a few days earlier, which hinted at a random altercation resulting in accidental death. Al-Jubeir provided Khashoggi's death was a result of a: "Rogue operation", where Saudi security agents acted: "Outside the scope of their authority" (O'Reilly, October 21st, 2018). Denying knowledge of the whereabouts of the body, Al-Jubeir exonerated any kind of senior Saudi responsibility, stating: "The Crown Prince [was] not aware of this...our intelligence service was not aware of this" (O'Reilly, October 21st, 2018). He blamed the KSA's change of stance on those same agents, holding the latter wrote a false report (O'Reilly, October 21st, 2018). Calling the incident : "A terrible mistake. A terrible tragedy", he offered his condolences to the victim's family and promised that the culprits would be put to justice (O'Reilly, October 21st, 2018).

In response, Erdogan delivered a speech to the Turkish Grand National Assembly solely focused on Khashoggi case. The days preceding that address, Erdogan had teased both the international press and heads of states, promising ground-breaking evidences to reveal the: "Naked truth" (Wintour & Borger, October 23rd, 2018). During his speech, he provided a chronological account of the Turkish authorities' investigation, the nature of their cooperation with, and the deeds and stances of, Saudi Arabia (Turkish President, October 23rd, 2018). Erdogan called out the – Saudi— media : "Campaigns to smear and corner our country" (Turkish President, October 23rd,

2018). He explained Turkey's offence at the crime, i.e. that the murder took place inside Turkey's borders (Turkish President, October 23rd, 2018). Erdogan elevated Turkey to : "The representative of the world's common conscious" (Turkish President, October 23rd, 2018). The President asked rhetorical questions concerning the case, yet warning that: "Pinning such a case on some intelligence and security members will not satisfy us" (Turkish President, October 23rd, 2018). Although he vindicated King Salman, Erdogan still warned that: "Any other culprits ...must be included in the investigation" (Turkish President, October 23rd, 2018).

The same day, the KSA released video disclosing the son and brother of Jamal Khashoggi meeting and shaking hands with the Crown Prince and the King themselves (*British Broadcasting Network*, October 23rd, 2018). The following day, MBS called the deed a : "Heinous crime that cannot be justified" (FII, October 24th, 2018). He, however, proceeded to denounce : "Many that are trying to use this painful thing to drive a wedge between Saudi Arabia and Turkey" (FII, October 24th, 2018). Explicitly mentioning Erdogan, he insisted that the Khashoggi case would not impact the diplomatic relationship between the two countries. The next day, the Saudi General Attorney affirmed the "suspects had committed their acts with premeditated intention" (*Saudi Press Agency*, October 25th, 2018).

5. Comparative assessment of Alleged Perpetrators' communication strategies

a. *North Korea*

North Korea adopted an offensive tone throughout its diplomatic spat with Malaysia. With regards to the SCCT and IRT strategies, the DPRK used "Scapegoat"/ "Shift the Blame", "Attack [the] Accuser", "Transcendence" and "Denial". The latter respectively refer to : "Blaming some outside entity for the crisis", "blame someone or thing other than the organization", "Challenge those who say there is a crisis", "Place act in different context" and "Claims there is no crisis" (Coombs & Holladay, 2010, p.32). The findings show that North Korea's communication on the murder of Kim Jong-nam are conducive to Hood et al.'s staged-retreat model. The DPRK's retreat is identified as $(A1+A3) + (B1+B2) + C2$. This means that North Korea offered first a pure denial

combined with counterattacks, followed by a scapegoating of responsibility coupled with open stance, and concluded by action-driven response (Hood et al., 2009, p.698).

There was a willingness from APs to discursively define their own roles according to their own rules. This is known as “character discourse”, a discursive process where the producer of a speech designs its rhetorical dynamic to build certain characteristics for itself and assign others to other actors. The P3M, detailed in Figure 3, relates to this concept, as it offers a visualisation of what roles public leaders endorse in times of crisis (Jong, 2017, p.1033). With “High collective impact/low responsibility”, a “Mourner-in-chief” uses language of sympathy to relate to victims of a crisis. An “Orchestrator”, with high collective impact and responsibility, is conscient and open of its responsibility and manoeuvres around accountability. This role is characterised by language of apologia. A “Buddy”, with low collective impact and political responsibility, offers sympathy, but with lesser stakes and gravity. An “Advocate”, with high political responsibility and low impact, adopts militant language, taking the forefront as a leader of outrage (Jong, 2017, p.1033). State actors, through their character discourse, attempt to endorse some of these cloaks as a discursive strategy to defend their standing. North Korea, here, attempted to frame itself in a role of “Advocate”.

The latter’s communication made extensive use of offensive rhetoric to defend its position. The DPRK’s responses consistently presented every Malaysian actions with forceful remarks. When mentioning the holding of Kim Jong-nam’s body, Kang referred to a: “Forced ...post-mortem, without permission and without attendance” (North Korean Ambassador, February 17th, 2017). The Ambassador called the investigation : “Absurd” and Malaysia’s conduct : “Unjust”, “Unlawful”, “Fabricated ... an undisguised encroachment upon the sovereignty of the DPRK” (North Korean Ambassador, February 19th, 2017 ; *BBC*, February 23rd, 2017). North Korea linked the RMP’s investigation with efforts of : “Political plots”, led by : “Hostile forces”, “The South Korean puppet authorities”, or the “South Korean plotter” (North Korean Ambassador, February 19th, 2017). The DPRK assigned a double responsibility on Malaysia, both for the death of Kim Jong-nam, and for the high suspicions on the regime’s hand behind the murder. It asserted : “The biggest responsibility rests with the government of Malaysia ... There are so many rumours to defame the image of the [DPRK]. The Malaysian police should bear the full responsibility for that” (North Korean Ambassador, February 19th, 2017 ; *BBC*, February 23rd, 2017). It not only attacked

Malaysia for its handling of the investigation, but blamed the OP for both the media coverage, the suspicions on the regime and the death of Kim Jong-nam. If North Korea did use a few, yet forcefully of the tactics set out by Coombs and Benoit.

North Korea exploited a nuanced form of denial. Not once did DPRK officials mention the name “Kim Jong-nam”. North Korean officials undertook a great deal of effort to remain as vague as possible when mentioning the victim. References to Kim Jong-nam vary from “the body” “a diplomatic passport holder of the DPRK”, “a DPRK citizen”, “the diplomatic passport holder”, the “citizen” or “Kim Chol”, which is the closest the regime came to naming him (North Korean Ambassador, February 17th, 2017; North Korean Ambassador, February 19th, 2017 ; *BBC*, February 23rd, 2017). DPRK officials framed their communication as far from the issue of Kim Jong-nam’s identity as possible. It did raise the issue as one of contention, asserting the Embassy had identified him as: “Kim Chol” and they “Did not know any other name”, and scorned the Malaysian police for or using: “The other name” (North Korean Ambassador, February 19th, 2017). On the other hand, the DPRK deployed lengthy arguments to demonstrate how Malaysia was responsible for the death of its citizen, colluding with “hostile forces” or unveil the scandal of the RMP’s holding of the body. This contrast shows North Korea was not interested in lingering on the identity of Kim Jong-nam.

The DPRK attempted to marginalise the salience of Kim Jong-nam, which would diminish suspicions towards the regime. North Korea’s handled Kim Jong-nam’s quality through a formal and substantial differentiation process from Malaysia. It formally marginalised the issue of Kim’s identity, seeking to avoid addressing the matter, while substantially diverging on the interpretation itself of who the victim was, when it did address the issue. Instead, North Korean officials diverted the most central points of contention from Kim’s identity, his quality as a person, to the physical location of its body. Hence, the DPRK rhetorically used the body, and its quality as one of a citizen of the DRPK, as an identification process. Insisting that the : “Diplomatic passport holder of the DPRK fainted from a heart attack ... a natural death”, further attempts to diminish the newsworthiness of the event (North Korean Ambassador, February 19th, 2017). Avoiding to name the victim renders his death anonymous, less relatable, therefore uneventful and unimportant. Why worry about an anonymous DPRK citizen who died of a heart attack in an airport? Hence, minimising the importance of the event would permit to thief the essence the crisis, which

constitutes a form of denial. North Korea's aggressive stance against Malaysia thus discursively provides for a "Pure Denial", where the AP attempts to frame the death of the victim as an uneventful incident and a "Denial plus counterattack", where it charges robustly against the Malaysian investigation.

One could understandably expect that the DPRK would follow two of either paths. Either it would remain firm on this stance, denying the very essence of the crisis while criticizing actors attributing importance to it. Or it would operate on a timely problem admission to effect a conclusive staged-retreat. However, curiously, the regime chose neither of these two options. Instead, North Korea did offer a joint investigation, on several occasions, announced having offered a joint investigation to Malaysia: "We suggest the[*sic*] joint investigation on this incident for a clear clarification", "The DPRK has already proposed a joint investigation" (North Korean Ambassador, February 19th, 2017 ; *BBC*, February 23rd, 2017). To propose, or establish, a joint investigation inherently hints—and in that case explicitly stated by DPRK representatives—that the producer of that proposal does not hold a comprehensive grasp of the incident, thus declaring what Hood et al. calls an : "Open stance on who is responsible" (Hood et al., p.698). However, in the same statements, North Korea forcefully asserted its own understanding of the Kim Jong-nam's death and explicitly condemned Malaysia for investigating the same manner, while at the same time stating a need for clarification. Hence, it is reasonable to argue here, that if timing is of the essence in staged-retreat, the DPRK's simultaneous confident assertions and admission of problem in need of clarification does not provide for the best use of this strategy.

Furthermore, the fact that the DPRK did send a special envoy to Malaysia, with as one of its clearly stated objectives to develop : "The friendly relations between the DPRK and the Malaysian government" is a discursive statement of its own right. A literal interpretation would only allow to understand this objective as an innocent relation-developing undertaking. However, to send a Special Envoy in full range of media coverage in the midst of a diplomatic crisis that remained a hot, sensitive, topic in international media outlets with such a specific goal conveys a message conducive to an : "Action-taking response". Admittedly, North Korea did not hint whatsoever at any kind of "soul-searching", internal investigation or restructuring. Yet it does show that, in spite of the aggressive rhetoric and tough confrontational stances, the DPRK valued

its relation with Malaysia enough to come to the negotiating table, effectively retreating and watering-down its fiery position.

In pure Daoist fashion, the DPRK's communication kept a consistently aggressive rhetoric on a series of select issues, as in to choose their rhetorical battleground. As mentioned above, it purposefully avoided to delve deep into the contention of Kim Jong-nam's identity. However, North Korean representatives provided themselves with ample room to lambast Malaysia in select choices. Namely, North Korea mostly went on the offensive regarding the arrest of North Korean citizen and, largely, on the investigation into the murder itself. Thus, while the DPRK addressed Kim's identity plainly without immediate qualitative judgement, it did not refrain from describing Malaysia's handling of the investigation as "baseless", "absurd", "unfriendly", "alarming" or "desperate", among other terms (North Korean Ambassador, February 19th, 2017). North Korea held no qualms at pouring disdainful comments at Malaysian authorities one second, and the other re-asserting the DPRK's representatives "respect" for the Malaysian police and laws (North Korean Ambassador, February 19th, 2017).

North Korean representatives endeavoured to frame their country as an innocent republic being the target of an unjust and arbitrary judicial harassment by a foreign power in collusion with its notable archenemies, the US and South Korea. One can see patterns of such framing at first in the stunt employed by Kang Chol on the 17th of February, when the Ambassador personally tried to visit the morgue in front of a sea of international reporters covering the scene. After being denied access by the Malaysian police, Kang Chol walked up to the media present there and offered a statement that had already been prepared, as he handed hard copies of the same statement to the journalists on scene (Naidu, February 18th, 2017). Here, Kang Chol conveyed an important message through a first degree medium; before pronouncing a single word, the Ambassador produced a forceful statement. Kang shows armed security denying a foreign official to access the remains of one of its own citizen. The DPRK Ambassador' oral statement then amplifies and confirms that message : "They forced a post-mortem without permission and without attendance from our side" (North Korean Ambassador, February 17th, 2017). The term "forced" is here particularly important, as the initial stunt would show a host country using security guards—abusing its monopoly of violence— first to deny access, and then, in the words of the Ambassador, to force an autopsy on a foreign citizen, without any legitimate monitoring. Thereby, Kang Chol endeavours to bring the

audience on his side from the start, so that it would be more prone to sympathise with the talking points he is about to roll out.

Thus, the premise of North Korea's frame discursively builds itself as this defamed scapegoat, a candid "Republic" victim of a hidden agendas and plots, is supposed to allow the regime to legitimately build outrage. The collective impact is low, but the political stakes are discursively elevated. Furthermore, that North Korea so intently attempted to avoid the matter of Kim Jong-nam's identity shows an ardent determination to reduce the salience of the event, and, thus, the collective impact even further. The North Korean strong, shocked and outraged lexicon is more credible should the victim be an anonymous ordinary North Korea citizen, rather than a potentially powerful rival to an absolute mighty regime leader. It is no wonder that the Special Envoy to Malaysia made it one of its foremost priority to secure the release of the North Korean citizen. Before him, Kang Chol and the KCNA ensured to discursively use, insisting on a : "Wanton human rights abuse", "Grave human rights violations", the arrest and warrant on North Korean as feed to its narrative of a Malaysian harassment of innocent North Koreans in collusion with the DPRK's archenemies (North Korean Ambassador, February 19th, 2017).

b. Russia

Russia adopted a similarly fiery response, if not visibly more offensive. In effect, transposed to the SCCT/IRT model, one could ascertain that Russian Federation representatives utilised "Simple Denial", "Scapegoat"/"Shift the Blame", "Attack [the] Accuser" and "Concern". The latter are described respectively as : "Did not do it", "Blames some outside entity", "Blame some one or thing other than the organisation", "Challenge those who say there is a crisis" and "Express concern for the victims" (Coombs & Holladay, 2010, p.32). The amount of evidence gathered to claim with confidence that Russia comprehensively made use of a staged-retreat strategy would be too thin. However, it is noteworthy that a certain pattern of the staged-retreat hypothesis remains relevant to Moscow's communication following the poisoning of the Skripals. Hence, in that regard, Russia particularly applied a pattern of (A3)+B1. The latter would translate as : "[Problem] denial plus counterattack" followed by an : "Open stance on who is responsible" (Hood et al., 2009, p.698).

On the P3M, one could, furthermore, discern Russia as discursively attempting to endorse the cloak of an “Advocate”.

Indeed, Russia’s communication was rather more equipped than North Korea in its offensive stance, both in terms of the diversity of its communication tactics and argumentative and rhetorical quality. First of all, contrary to North Korea, Russia did not shy away from mentioning Skripal’s name, or acknowledge its proficiency. Given the victim’s sensitive relationship to Moscow, as a spy that had turned on the FSB, Skripal’s quality could have been delicate to Moscow as an AP. On the contrary, instead of timorously avoiding the topic, Russia embraced and used the victims as a vindicating talking point. Moscow discursively used its concern for Sergei and Yulia Skripal. Indeed, Russian representatives repeatedly demanded consular access to both Skripals (UNSC, 2018b., p.6).

Russia’s repeated requests for consular access to Sergei Skripal was one central point of contention expressed by the country against the UK. For instance, Vasily Nebenzya pointed out that Skripal having served prison for his sedition : “no longer posed any kind of threat to [Russia]...but he is perfect for the role of the victim ... to justify all sorts of unthinkable lies, smears and derogatory public relations...blackening Russia’s reputation” (UNSC, 2018b., p.9). The Russian representative, additionally, claimed that the victim “had not received an antidote” (UNSC, 2018b., p.2). Hence, Nebenzya used Sergei Skripal as an argumentative tool to charge the UK. Moreover, Russia’s repeated requests for consular access to Sergei Skripal was one central point of contention expressed by the country against the UK. Russia fully embraced both the victim’s body integrity and its quality as a former spy. Yet using both as rhetorical weapons to attempt to turn the suspicions around against the UK allows Russia to identify the Skripal with itself but to differentiate it from the UK.

Russia’s denial was much more explicit and clear than that of the DPRK’s. From Moscow’s first senior governmental response to this day, Russia consistently and persistently denied any knowledge or involvement whatsoever. Sergei Lavrov’s first comment stated that Russia: “Has not seen a single fact” or called the UK’s government stance on the issue: “Not serious” (Foreign Ministry, March 9th, 2018). In the UNSC, Vasily Nebenzya deemed the : “The unfounded accusations ... totally unacceptable”, and asserted that Russia’s Foreign Ministry : “Sent a note ...that Russia was not party to the incident” (UNSC, 2018a., p.8). Vladimir Putin, nine months after

the events, similarly asked : “Is there any logic there? No there is none” (President of Russia, December 20th, 2018).

Moscow’s response particularly made a heavy use on attacking its accuser and shifting the blame. At first, Russian officials somewhat restrained the bluntness of their rhetoric. Sergei Lavrov did, initially, refrain from implicating the UK directly. However, from the moment the UK issued the deadline, Russia stepped up its narrative to fully go on a discursive offensive against the British. Moscow fired on a very regular basis a heap of accusations, offended language, and, sometimes, outright insults. UNSC meetings, in particular, showed lengthy and flowery exchanges between both the British and Russian representatives. The Russian ambassador accused the UK of : “Drumming up hysteria” or asserted that : “The truth is the last thing the British authorities are interested in” (*UNSC*, 2018a., p.8). Similarly as the DPRK, Russia lambasted the UK for what they considered being propagandistic motives : “War by propaganda...designed to produce a powerful information impact on an unenlightened and impressionable public” (*UNSC*, 2018a., p.8). Like North Korea lamenting treatments of North Korean citizen, Russia criticised the OP’s treatment of its own citizen in the UK : “The British authorities have demonstrated their inability to ensure the safety of Russian citizens” (Foreign Ministry, March 28th, 2018).

However, Russia went even further than the DPRK. North Korea put the responsibility on the death of Kim Jong-nam on Malaysia. Russia blamed the UK for all the deaths of troublesome Russian citizens, e.g. Litvinenko, for which Russia had consensually been blamed in the West. North Korea lamented that the RMP arrested North Korean citizens. Russia explicitly suggested that the British Intelligence Service had orchestrated the poisoning of Sergei Skripal (*UNSC*, 2018b., p.6 ; Foreign Ministry, March 28th, 2018). Moreover, while North Korea expressed outrage and indignation to the Malaysian conduct, Russia did not shy away from personally indicting British officials’ cognitive capacities on numerous occasions. The Russian Foreign Ministry stated that the UK government was acting : “Against all norms contrary to ...common sense (Foreign Ministry, March 28th, 2018). Nebenzya’s rebuttal against the British Ambassador’s presentation of evidence speaks volume as to the aggressivity of Russian rhetoric:

“Look at this travesty...an insult to intelligence. How can one respect people who are convinced by this kind of thing ?..And do those that are doing the convincing not understand that they are being

zombified, that they are participants in a collective psychosis?”
(UNSC, 2018b., p.5).

Denial, scapegoating, blame-shifting and attacking of the accuser are all valid tactics to apply to the communication of Russia regarding Sergei Skripal. However, the study of Russia’s response shows that one could not confidently assert that these tactics as such are enough to cover Russia’s diplomatic crisis communication strategy. Indeed, one major element of Russia’s discourse, that the SCCT/IRT cluster does satisfyingly address is a tactic of mockery. Indeed, the Russian federation’s rhetoric distinguishes itself from both the Saudi and the North Korean response in its extensive, and arguably adept, use of elements of irony, farcical metaphors, and cultural references to attack its accuser, belittle its argumentation and reinforce their own stance.

Indeed, Russian representatives did not lose a single opportunity to mock British accusations. From the onset of the crisis, Sergei Lavrov already derided what the Foreign Minister viewed as a Western obsession of blaming Russia for : “Everything [they] believe is wrong on this planet” (Foreign Ministry, March 9th, 2018). Particularly, Russia used the Security Council as a platform to extensively use irony to ridicule the British stance. Talking about British reports of Russian testing of Novichok agents on everyday furniture Nebenzya commented: “Could they not have come up with a realistic fake story?” (UNSC, 2018b., p.3). The Russian representative to the UNSC did not shy away from openly mocking the UK : “When I look at these British...statements, I am dumbfounded. O tempora! O Mores! What has happened to good old England ?” (UNSC, 2018b., p.4). Nor did he pulled the temptation to taunt Boris Johnson’s cultural resources, for instance ridiculing that the British Foreign Minister believed *Crime and Punishment* was an average bedside detective novel rather than a more profound philosophical work (UNSC, 2018b., p.5). Nebenzya also made several quoted several British cultural works of references to deride the UK. He, for instance, made a parallel with *Sherlock Holmes*’s Lestrade to doubt the reasoning capacities of British government officials, or quoted an actual excerpt of *Alice in Wonderland*, inferring what Russia perceived as an absurd and irrational endeavours from the UK (UNSC, 2018b., p.15).

Evidently, it would be far-stretched to assert that Russia’s unforgiving communication came close to a staged-retreat. However, Russia’s discourse did incorporate elements relevant to the staged-retreat hypothesis. Indeed, Lavrov’s initial remarks, stating that his country had not been

presented with any facts, did immediately come with a counterattack : “We have not seen a single fact. We only watch TV reports where your pretentious colleagues say that if Russia is guilty it will receive a response...this is not serious” (Foreign Ministry, March 9th, 2018). Yet, Russia’s denial of knowledge was shortly after followed by an open stance on responsibility. In effect, one of Russia’s consistent talking point came with an insistence for both the UK and itself to follow investigation procedures according to OPCW protocol (Foreign Ministry, March 13th, 2018 ; *UNSC*, 2018a., p.8 ; *UNSC*, 2018b., p.4). Russia did, indeed, formally proposed, correspondingly through an OCPW Executive Council meeting, a joint investigation with the UK, which the latter incidentally refused (*OPCW*, 2018a., p.1). Moreover, one can certainly discern a pattern of various intensity within Russia’s communication, which are concordant with the corresponding pathways of the staged-retreat hypothesis.

Only here, unlike North Korea, which relatively maintained the same level of fierceness in its rhetoric, one can denote a pattern of escalation of Moscow’s response. In effect, one can denote three different stages of escalation in the Russian tone, (1) pre-deadline, (2) within 24-hour ultimatum and (3) post-deadline. Indeed, pre-deadline, Russia abstained from attacking UK governmental officials head-on. It’s problem denial alluded to caution pertaining to a lack of knowledge, rather than an explicit denial of involvement. Lavrov’s comment about the West or journalists, for all its shade, remained generic. Besides, while on the 9th of March, if Russia did express willingness to assist in the case, it did not offer or propose a formal investigation. The second stage saw Russia undertake a more bull’s eye denial and counterattack. The Foreign Ministry formally denied involvement and clearly called out the UK for its : “Clear provocation” (Foreign Ministry, March 13th, 2018). It did stipulate it would not respond to the UK’s ultimatum until there would be a joint investigation. However, this demand remain informal, as no investigation was agreed to and no party used international protocol to establish such an investigation. Formal demand for investigation would only materialise post-deadline. The latter stage saw a firestorm of rhetorical sparring duels between the UK and Russia on all platforms, from their respective domestic conferences, to the UNSC, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), or the OPCW (*UNSC*, 2018a ; *UNSC*, 2018b ; *OPCW*, 2018a ; *OSCE*, 2018a).

Here, one can, therefore, identify a thought-provoking framework. Russia did not effectuate a staged-retreat, understood as a gradual timely loosening of denial. It did, however, endorse a

staged response, whereby the country gradually timed a strengthening of its rebuttal. More importantly, Russia's staged response does apply to the pathways set out by Hood. More engagingly still, Moscow made use of tactics assimilated by Hood for a staged-retreat, which entails a loosening of denial—first to admit a problem and then to accept accountability—for the opposite purpose as the staged-retreat hypothesis. On the contrary, Russia used the same pathways as this strategy to firmly confirm its denial with ever more assertion and deviate accountability to the UK with ever strengthening hardihood.

An important point to denote though lies in the fact that the Russian Federation did not arbitrarily scale up its rhetoric. Indeed, Moscow escalated its discourse solely in reaction to new developments in the communication of the British government. In effect, Russia held on any comment until senior UK officials did issue theirs. The first ever reaction from the Russian Foreign Ministry on the Salisbury incident only came about a day following Boris Johnson address to Parliament, which was parenthetically the first governmental reaction on the British side. Incidentally, Maria Zakharova refrain from attacking the UK directly, or addressing the matter in its substance altogether. The same way that Boris Johnson emphatically stated that no one should rush to conclusions. Sergei Lavrov's comment about the West blaming Russia for all the worlds misdeeds, the first Russian senior governmental reaction, came about a day after Amber Rudd's address promising repercussion should it be determined that Russia was involved. Russia only denounced the UK explicitly after the announcement of the latter's deadline. The former openly engaged in full discursive warfare after the pledge of sanctions following the deadline's passing and directly implicated the UK as being involved in the poisoning after the UK did act on its pledge.

Russia was then attempting to build a very similar character to what the DPRK discursively endeavoured to present, i.e. of a scapegoated innocent. However, it did so with more tact than its North Korean counterpart. A key to this tact is the aforementioned proportionality in response, which consists of two key elements, (1) to allow the UK to impose its rhythm on the crisis, i.e. to set the tone of the incident, and (2) to respond proportionally to its discursive opponent. Rhetorical persuasion shares significant characteristics with tactical(Combs, 2000, p.277). This might, thus, seem counter-productive at first glance. Framing contest as battle for control of the narrative is one of the core basic tenets of interpretive studies. Hence, relinquishing the initiative to the adversary could understandably intuitively seem detrimental.

However, to give up the rhythm and only respond proportionally to its discursive opponent gives credit to the character Russia aims to frame for itself. By never scaling up the rhetoric before the UK, Russia can endeavour to portray the latter as an irrational opinionated opponent that would be obstinate to blame Russia at any cost. Moreover, responding proportionally, for instance by expelling the exact same number of diplomats or to wait that UK implicates Russia directly before explicitly attacking the UK itself, allows to suggest a frame where Russia appears as a measured and reasonable actor, in contrast with a framed irrational and obstinate Britain. Thus, Russia's frame portrays Moscow as a cold-headed rational character legitimately, yet vigorously, defending its standing. In this way, the Russian Federation can vindicate its outrage and strong rhetoric by expressing startlement to Britain's framed absurd attitude. That accomplished, Russia endorses its role of an "Advocate" on the P3M. If its first reaction—expressing willingness to assist even though not enquired to—suggests a positioning as a "Buddy", letting the UK scale up the stakes allows Moscow to endorse a new role as "Advocate", scaling up its political responsibility to denounce its opponent in light of Britain's suggested irrational aggression. North Korea, on its hand, immediately adopted that mode and fiercely attacked Malaysia, when the latter's government had not shown, this far, any willingness to contend with the DPRK.

c. Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia's response to allegations indicting MBS as the backer of Khashoggi's murder distinguishes itself from the vigorous tones of North Korea and Russia. On the SCCT/IRT cluster, the KSA used a much more varied set of responses than the other two APs. These exhaustively include "Simple Denial"/"Denial", "Defeasibility"/"Excuse", "Accidental", "Regret", "Transcendence" and "Corrective Action". These respectively entail: "Did not do it/ claims there is no crisis", "Lack of information about or control of the incident/ lack of control over the event or lack of intent to do harm", "Did not mean to happen", "Indicat[ion] to feel badly about the crisis", "Place act in a different context" and "Promise change and prevent a repeat of the act" (Coombs & Holladay, 2010, p.32). It is noteworthy that of all three APs, Saudi Arabia is the one that exploited the staged-retreat hypothesis the most thoroughly. Particularly, one can discern a pattern pertaining to: $(A1+A2) + (B1+B2) + (C1+C2)$. Thus, Saudi Arabia' staged-retreat followed first a "Pure denial" pathway, complemented by a "Qualified denial", preceding an "Open stance"

where “Others [are] responsible”, concluded by an “Explanation-only response” with “Institutional action-taking response” (Hood, 2009, p.698).

The more diverse use of crisis communication tactics and comprehensive employ of Hood’s pathways compared to the DPRK and Russia finds its source in the fact that Saudi Arabia adopted a more conciliatory approach. Indeed, the KSA did make use of a proper staged-retreat strategy. In effect, assessing the Kingdom’s communication strategy, one can discern a cautious de-escalation approach, where virtually each next intervention brings in about an evolution of the Kingdom’s position on the issue. The earliest communication from Saudi officials conveyed pure problem denial. The very first Saudi comments were limited to deny Turkish claims that Khashoggi had never left the consulate, as KSA authorities contented to comment that the journalist had, indeed, left the consulate (Fahim, October 3rd, 2018). This was rapidly followed by a qualified denial, where Saudi officials, including the Crown Prince, expressed attentiveness to Khashoggi’s “disappearance”, and expressed willingness to cooperate with Turkish authorities (Flanders, *et al.*, October 5th, 2018).

The first step of the Saudi staged-retreat thus implied a nuanced qualifying of their problem admission. This means that the KSA, at the earliest onset of the crisis, denied the very presence of a crisis, by feigning ignorance and merely indicating the sum of their knowledge of the whereabouts of Jamal Khashoggi. To follow then with a qualified admission of a problem, admitting Khashoggi had disappeared, depicts a first attempts of distancing blame from the leadership of Saudi Arabia, even though the country was being implicated by media outlets early on. Indeed, by first denying a problem and then admitting a problem, Saudi Arabia poses itself as a collateral of the incident, instead of remaining at the centre stage. This would remain a silver lining of the KSA’s communication, which would gradually strengthened their exploitation of this position, of a mourning country attempting everything it can to bring justice to the Khashoggis.

Indeed, in spite of all the different versions Saudi Arabia put forward throughout the crisis, one can discern a particular frame the KSA attempted to present to the world that would remain consistent throughout. Saudi Arabia discursively aimed at framing a character where the Kingdom is just as shocked and horrified than the rest of the world in light of the disclosed facts. Saudi officials presented an act where the country is uncovering the incidents piece by piece, making sense of them and mourning with the world. The country’s framed storyline followed different

steps. First it did not know what happened, all it knew was that Khashoggi had left the consulate alive, here “Pure Denial” from Hood’s framework and “Denial” from the SCCT come into play (Fahim, October 3rd, 2018). Second, Saudi Arabia is still unaware of what happened but is concerned by Khashoggi’s disappearance, as MBS’ expressed on the 5th of March 2018, which alludes to “Defeasibility” on the IRT and “Qualified denial” on the staged-retreat pathways. (Flanders, *et al.*, October 5th, 2018). Third, it announced “preliminary findings” of an independent investigation, thus independent from the joint investigation with the Turkish authorities, to which both parties agreed early on (KSA Embassy, October 19th, 2018a). It is noteworthy that, in the meantime, Saudi Arabia had explicitly denied : “Malicious leaks and grim rumours”, concerning the direct involvement of MBS—cf. “Denial” (*Al Arabiya*, October 9th, 2018). Incidentally, the Saudi Ambassador to the US took the opportunity to bring about personal grievance as to Khashoggi’s disappearance, calling him a : “Friend”, and inflating his popularity in the Kingdom (*Al Arabiya*, October 9th, 2018). Curiously, the KSA did not seize this discursive opportunity to adopt an aggressive stance similar to that of the DPRK and Russia, using outrage as a lever to go on an offensive strategy against its accusatory.

On the contrary, it used this established grievance to aim at feeding this characterisation as a mourning nation even further. To that end, the three statements communicated successively on the 19th of October attempted to produce a three-fold revelation effect. The first revelation was on the fate of Jamal Khashoggi “Preliminary investigations...revealed that the discussions [inside the embassy] ...tragically resulted in death” (KSA Embassy, October 19th, 2018b). The second revealed the culprits: “Investigations are ...ongoing into the case with 18 Saudi suspects” (KSA Embassy, October 19th, 2018a). The third one disclosed Saudi’s corrective action in that regard: “His Majesty King Salman ... issued a Royal Order relieving the Deputy Chief of General Intelligence ...effective immediately” (KSA Embassy, October 19th, 2018c). This explains why much like Russia, Saudi Arabia did not keep Jamal Khashoggi, or his quality, away from its communication. The KSA it did not shy away to mention the journalist. In effect, the orchestrated meeting between King Salman’s and Jamal Khashoggi’ son suggests the contrary. the KSA never actively shied away from the issue of the body’s location, since it did every time attempt to address the whereabouts of Khashoggi, from reporting him missing to claiming he died as a result of a rogue operation. Saudi Arabia also embraced Khashoggi’s quality, never using it as a point of

contention against critics. Hence, Saudi officials did employ identification processes regarding the victim, however refraining from differentiating him from its AP, as North Korea did.

Hence, here one can discern that the KSA at the same time reached both open stance, an assertion of internal responsibility, an explanation and institutional action-taking response, thus *B1*, *B2* and *C2* on the staged-retreat scale respectively (Hood et al., 2009, p.698). Although the 19th of October's press statements strongly hinted at a lack of control, these kept an apparent formal and neutral tone—as would be expected from an independent investigation: “Stresses the commitment of [Saudi Arabia] to bring out the facts publicly, hold all those involved accountable... referring them to the courts” (KSA Embassy, October 19th, 2018a). It did, though, build on the mourning narrative already established a few weeks prior: “The Kingdom expresses its deep regret at the painful developments that have taken place” (KSA Embassy, October 19th, 2018a). The following day, Adel Al-Jubeir would essentially complete the new narrative of the Kingdom. The more lively and flexible second degree medium thus allowed the KSA to build upon this narrative. It provided a more detailed account of the Saudi explanation, emphasising on lack of control. The KSA's Foreign Minister offered a more profound expression of regret and compassion, as crisis communication tactics : “This is a terrible tragedy...we feel their [Khashoggi's family] pain ... I wish this could have been avoided and I can assure you that those responsible will be held accountable for this” (O'Reilly, October 21st, 2018). Al-Jubeir also took the opportunity to actively and explicitly deny suspicions of direct involvement of MBS.

Coverage on the Khashoggi case is virtually unanimous in determining that Saudi Arabia has been inconsistent throughout the incident. However, a closer scrutiny of their communication show that, at least according the Saudi strategy, the KSA's account of the incident would be coherent. Its comprehensive, and attempted timed, use of staged-retreat aimed at cloaking Saudi Arabia with the role of an unaware nation, which uncovered tragic and gruesome details of one of its own citizen. The KSA endeavoured characterise itself as a mourning nation, a mourner-in-chief, feeling regret at its lack of control over the incident, compassion for the relatives of the victims and outrage at malicious rumours that it could have ever been involved in such a ghastly affair. One need only watch MBS' comment on the matter at the Future Investment Initiative (FII), an economic forum aimed at attracting foreign investments. There the Crown Prince, amidst a cordial bonhomie with the respective prime ministers of Lebanon and Bahrain, suddenly adopts a grim

expression and grave tone to expressing that : “The Crime was really painful to all Saudis ... to every human in the world”, before switching to the topic of Saudi Arabia’s economic growth (FII, October 24th, 2018). In light of all of this, the Crown Prince and the King meet the Khashoggi family, records the meeting and spread it to the world, pledging Saudi determination at bringing the real culprits to justice and reforming its intelligence system. In the words of the Foreign Minister himself : “We are determined ...to ensure that something like this can never happen again” (O’reilly, October 21st, 2018). Figure 5.1. summarises the findings of this chapter.

	North Korea	Russia	Saudi Arabia
SCCT/IRT	-Denial -Scapegoat/Shift the Blame -Attack the Accuser	-Simple Denial -Scapegoat/Shift the Blame -Attack the Accuser -Concern	-Simple Denial/Denial <u>-Defeasability/Excuse</u> -Accidental -Regret <u>- Concern</u> -Corrective Action
Staged retreat	A3+B2+C2	A3+B1	(A1+A2)+(B1+B2)+(C1+C2)
P3M	Advocate	Advocate	Mourner-in-Chief
Tone	Offensive	Offensive	Conciliatory
Legitimised emotion	Outrage	Outrage	Grief

Figure 5.1. Findings for Alleged Perpetrators

6. Comparative assessment of Offended Parties

a. Malaysia

The Malaysian response to the assassination of Kim Jong-nam proved, or at least endeavoured, to demonstrate a certain cold-headedness, which contrast with both the attitude of its AP and the other OPs in these cases. The Malaysian government abstained from overtaking the centre stage, intervening only when strictly necessary, that is when North Korea seriously challenged the integrity of the South-East Asian country. On the SCCT/IRT spectrum, one can denote usage of “Denial”, “Attack the Accuser”, “Minimize Offensiveness”/“Justification” and “Ingration”. These amount to : “Claims there is no crisis”, “Confronts the group or person claiming that something is wrong”, “Claim little damage from the crisis” and “Praises other stakeholders” (Coombs & Holladay, 2010, p. 32). On the P3M, one can discern that Malaysia’s endorsed frame falls closest to the “Buddy” role.

Indeed, early communication on the Malaysian side showed little to no willingness to feed discord between Malaysia and the DPRK. The earliest comments by government officials took on a rather procedural tone. Indeed, the DPM in his first press conference on the matter focused on restorative rhetoric. In a more pragmatism approach to sense-making, Ahmad Zahid Hamidi put a certain emphasis on the safety of Kuala Lumpur International Airport : “Security... is at the highest level. We have high definition CCTV... omnipresence and security systems. This incident ... is a very isolated case (DPM, February 17th, 2017). Kim Jong-nam was attacked in broad day light during rush hour of major international airport with a banned military-grade nerve agent, in full view of the public’s eye. It is, thus, understandable that Malaysia’s first order of priority was to provide guarantees as to the safety of the airport.

Thus, besides an initial step up for restorative rhetoric, the Malaysian government essentially discursively recused itself, and let the brunt of the communication to its national police. Indeed, the RMP took up an important role during the incident. It held several press conferences and regularly updated the media with the conduct of the investigation. Hence, the Malaysian government initially abstaining from producing any substantial or qualified comment on the nature of the crisis left a type of communicative vacuum that was filled by the Malaysian police, through its Deputy Inspector and Inspector-General. This essentially pushed the RMP to the centre-stage

of the rhetoric sparring between Malaysia and the DPRK. The Malaysian police became central both as part of the discursive strategy of Malaysia and as a principal target of attacks from the DPRK.

As such, the RMP strived to present its investigation as a purely procedural, and, more importantly, as a neutral and impartial endeavour. To this end, in spite of the multitude of updates and willingness to show transparency with live question and answers with the media, the RMP's communication showed a certain readiness in asserting caution. As mentioned earlier, during the first months of the event, and beside virtual consensus in the international press that the victim was, in fact Kim Jong-nam, the Malaysian police actually restrained from endorsing this conclusion. The RMP confined itself to referring to generic terms, such as: "A Korean male", even cautiously initially provisionally identifying him as "Kim Chol" based on the passport that was found in his body (Inspector-General, February 14th, 2017). This does not mean, however, that the police did not assert itself forcefully. If the police did demonstrate caution, it did not play into the rhetoric book of North Korea either.

Indeed, the RMP, insisted on several points vigorously and repeatedly, which became central points of attack from the DPRK. For instance, the Malaysian police asserted itself forcefully when it emphasised and repeated that it would keep the body of Kim Jong-nam until a "next-of-kin" of the victim would come forward, in Malaysia, for identification. On this matter, particularly, the RMP endorsed a blunt approach, in spite its apparent caution. The RMP did not hesitate to emphatically insist in call for the closest relatives of the victim to physically come forward at the morgue : "The most eligible to identify the body physically is the next-of-kin...it is very very important for family, the close family members of the deceased to come forward to assist us" (Deputy Inspector-General, February 18th, 2017). It had undoubtedly, in light of the overwhelming assumption that the victim was Kim Jong-nam, not escaped the attention of the police that the most able "next-of-kin" to come forward would have been Kim Jong-un himself. The RMP's Deputy Inspector-General did not hesitate, incidentally, to explicitly mention "brothers" as potential valid next-of-kin for identification (Deputy Inspector-General, February 18th, 2017).

The RMP's posture, here, allowed to challenge the standing of North Korea without openly provoking the DPRK. Indeed, the Malaysian police, when confronted about the DPRK's repeated attack against the investigation, feigned routine procedure: "We have all the right under our

criminal procedure...we just follow our rules and regulations” (Deputy Inspector-General, February 18th, 2017). This emphasis on a mere procedural course, by candidly summoning the “next-of-kin” to come forward, permitted to challenge the standing of the DPRK whilst keeping a discursive high ground. By explicitly calling on the closest family members to come forward, the RMP essentially dares Kim Jong-un himself to bend to the Malaysian investigative procedure. It belittles the absolute leader of a sovereign nation—whose state propaganda reportedly confers his family god-like virtues—to a mere citizen, subject, like anyone else, to the laws and regulations of Malaysia (Lim, 2015, p.87).

This is further suggested by some other comments of the RMP’s leadership. Noor Rashid Ibrahim thus stated: “[The next-of-kin] have to produce evidence...and convince us...only when we are satisfied then we will proceed to the next action” (Deputy Inspector-General, February 18th, 2017). Hence, not only is the RMP daring the Supreme Leader of a totalitarian to come forward, but it is reminding the world that the Malaysian police holds the discretionary power of the final say. Not to forget that the police effectively barred entry to the North Korean Ambassador, when the latter attempted to visit the morgue. The RMP, a corps agent of the Malaysian state, under pretence of candid procedure is, thus, autonomously asserting its power over a sovereign country with one of the most powerful militaries in the world.

That the Malaysian government initially gave discursive autonomy to its police does not mean it did not actively joust with the DPRK. The Malaysian police conduct and discourse seemingly irritated North Korean representatives. Indeed, in his hardy statements, Kang Chol zealously attacked the RMP, referring its stance as: “absurd allegations”, alleging that the investigation was : “Out of political aim” and that it could simply not trust the investigation (North Korean Ambassador, February 19th, 2017). Incidentally, the North Korean Ambassador did take the bait, stating that : “Malaysian law cannot overwhelm international laws” (North Korean Ambassador, February 19th, 2017). It is precisely as the DPRK lashed unto the candid provocations of the RMP that the Malaysian government took the stage to defend its police and lambast North Korea. The PM of Malaysia, Najib Razak, quickly came to the defence of the RMP, stating : “Absolute confidence” in their professionalism (Prime Minister of Malaysia, February 20th, 2019).

Razak also lashed at North Korea’s : “Sweeping and baseless statements” to assert that “Malaysia is not the pawn ...and will never be the pawn of any country”, which, evidently, includes

North Korea (Prime Minister of Malaysia, February 21st, 2019). This was followed by a strongly worded statement of the Foreign Minister, which —besides judging the DPRK’s rhetoric as : “Culled from delusions, lies and half-truths” or “Deeply insulting”— stated that : “In all civilised nations, it is the norm for cases such as these to be comprehensively investigated” (Wisma Putra, February 20th, 2017). This particular phrasing is gravely assaulting. It refers to the North Korean startlement at the Malaysian police work, and explains the process as one being of “civilised nations”. In rhetoric, as a principle, what needs explicit mention, is not evident. To assert that civilised nations understand and incorporate these norms of investigation is to heavily suggest that the DPRK, is not in fact, civilised.

The Malaysian government’s initial restraint, followed by vigorous responses in reaction to the DPRK aggressive tone echoes the pattern undertaken by Russia. The latter escalated its rhetoric relatively proportionally and always in reaction to new developments in the British discourse. Similarly, the Malaysian government expressed stance to the world was essentially that it did not see any reason to be at odds with North Korea, until the DPRK lashed at its OP. This offered Malaysia reasonable ground to express outrage and offense at its AP, the same way Russia letting the UK take the initiative aimed at legitimising its own outrage. Hence, the Malaysian restriction on visas for North Korean citizens and the expulsion of the North Korean Ambassador could be justified on transparent, discursive grounds that the whole world could witness.

To punish the DPRK because it had openly insulted Malaysia makes for a safer ground of sentence than to sanction the regime for the deed itself. The latter would have given the opportunity for North Korea to dispute the grounds of sanction by stirring doubt and scepticism as to the veracity of the suspicions on Kim Jong-nam’s assassination, thus de-legitimising the Malaysian outrage. Here, it would virtually be unarguable that the DPRK’s diplomatically offended Malaysia as the world had witness its rhetoric first-hand. Here, the autonomy given to, and the caution adopted by, the RMP reinforces the Malaysian legitimacy. It showed a government respecting of the separation of responsibilities, thus not obstructing fair procedure, and a national police inclined to impartially establish the truth. Contrary to the two other APs, Malaysia, thus, did not cloak itself in “Advocate” mode, raising the political stakes, and taking the initiative as a standard-bearer of universal values against a brutal regime. It’s seeming cold-headedness and reactive attacks to public insults would point rather to a “Buddy” role on the P3M.

b. The United Kingdom

Britain is, out of the three studied OPs, the one state who lashed at its AP, Russia. Britain did dedicate meaningful emphasis on restorative rhetoric and made plentiful use of the SSCT/IRT cluster, namely “Scapegoat”, “Attack the Accuser”, “Ingratiation” and “Differentiation”. These communication tactics are described as : “Blames some outside entity”, “Confronts the group ... claiming something is wrong”, “Praises other stakeholders and/or reminds people of past good works by the organization” and “Compare act to similar ones” (Coombs & Holladay, 2010, p. 32). On the P3M, the UK adopted an attitude concordant to “Advocate” (Jong, 2017, p.1033).

British government has been relatively quick first at evoking potential Russian involvement into the poisoning of the Skripals, before the rapidly scaling up its rhetoric from pretence caution to full-on formal blame. Even in the very first addresses of government officials to Parliament, the potential involvement of Russian operatives had been, at least, allowed credentials. To a question from an MP regarding the UK’s government policy towards Russia, the Secretary of State of the Foreign Office, Boris Johnson, immediately responded with comments on the Salisbury incident : “Although he asks a general question about Russia, let me immediately say there is much speculation about the disturbing incident in Salisbury” (*Hansard*, 6th March, 2018, col. 169). While it is undoubtedly natural for a Cabinet member to jump to the hot topics, Johnson address, and in contrast with the Malaysian government’s initial attitude, shows little interest in soothing hasty speculations.

Indeed, Boris Johnson immediately drew parallels with the Litvinenko case and each of the Foreign Secretary’s points emphasised the UK’s strenuous relationship with Russia : “This House has profound differences with Russia”, “The United Kingdom...has responded with strength and determination”, “Whenever those sanctions have come up for renewal, Britain has consistently argued for their extension”; “The UK government have been in the lead in holding the Russians to account” (*Hansard*, 6th March, 2018, col.169). Later in questions and answers the Foreign Secretary would call Russia: “A malign and disruptive force” (*Hansard*, 6th March, 2018, col. 169). On a few occasions did Johnson advise against rushed judgements. However, each of these calls were immediately counterbalanced by antagonistic inclinations, either by crediting suspicions: “It is too early to speculate...but Members will have their suspicions” or by pledging retaliation: “Although

it would be wrong to prejudge...should evidence emerge that implies state responsibility, Her Majesty's government will respond appropriately and robustly" (*Hansard*, 6th March 2018, col. 169).

The Foreign Office fell short of formally blaming Russia yet. However, where most prime stakeholders elongated their communication into stages, the British government, from its first formal address, instantly discharged most of its communication tactics against Russia. Indeed, it confronted Russia about past crises, praised the supposed leading role of the UK in clashing with Russia during those past crises, and compared the deed to other similar incidents. Hence, Britain immediately cloaked its role as an advocate, not rushing to conclusions, but ready to take on the culprit, should those conclusions arise. Where Malaysia's very first order of business was to employ restorative rhetoric, the UK put its discursive priority on a particular framing of its soon-to-be opponent and its readiness for retaliation. This is striking as both OPs were responding to a highly similar attempts on life, a poisoning in the middle of a civilian public place with a banned military-grade nerve agent. Though, as mentioned earlier, the upset could arguably be slightly higher for Malaysia as dozens of civilians witnessed the attack as it was taking place.

However, if the UK did put precedence for rhetoric of retaliation, it also allow consequent emphasis on restorative rhetoric. Such did the Home secretary in her address to the Commons, on the 8th March. Amber Rudd allocated significant portion of her oration in sense-making. This entailed a nuanced version of ingratiation. Hence, instead of praising the UK's past robustness in relation to Russian conduct on the world stage, the Home secretary immediately lauded Britain's emergency services and, more broadly, all professionals working on the case : "Let me first pay tribute to the continued professionalism, dedication and courage of the emergency services", "The UK has a world-leading emergency response", "Tested by experts...who are world-renowned"(*Hansard*, 8th March, 2018, col. 486).

The Home Secretary made a great number of, specific, references to all the services and agencies : "The police are working closely with Public Health England, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the DSTL", "I spoke ...with Assistant Commissioner Mark Rowley", "Samples from the victims have been tested...at Porton Down" (*Hansard*, 8th March, 2018, col. 486). Thus, ingratiation, here, evidently serves sense-making purposes, to ensure the public that indeed: "Public safety continues to be the No.1 priority for this Government"

(*Hansard*, 8th March, 2018, col. 487). Furthermore, government officials in their addresses to Parliament would consistently remind that the public health risk is low (*Hansard*, 8th March, 2018, col. 487 ; *Hansard*, 12th March, 2018, col. 620 ; *Hansard*, 14th March, 2018, col. 856).

As stated earlier, the quarrel between the UK and Russia greatly intensified from the moment Britain imposed its 24-hours deadline for Russia to provide an explanation regarding the Salisbury incident. The framing of this deadline deserves particular attention. British PM, Theresa May, clearly stated four primary reasons for the UK government to conclude that Russia's involvement was : "Highly likely" (*Hansard*, 12th March, 2018, col.621). Incidentally, British diplomats would clarify repeatedly that: "Highly likely" was only used because, to their framing, only the judicial branch of government in Britain is able to pronounce culpability. Thus, British diplomats explicitly asserted that, in the British governmental language, 'highly likely' essentially meant the UK formally blamed Russia for the deed (*UNSC*, 2018a, p.7 ; *OSCE*, 2018b, p.2). The stated reasons for blame were namely (1) the : "positive identification" by Porton Down of the chemical being a never agent of the Novichok type, (2) the government's claimed knowledge of Russia's continued capability of producing this agent, (3) "Russia's record of conducting state-sponsored assassinations" and (4) the British government's: "Assessment that Russia views defectors as legitimate targets for assassinations" (*Hansard*, 12th March, 2018, col.621). From this endorsed paradigm, Britain mandated Moscow to pick one of two options, either Russia had deliberately attacked the UK with a banned military-grade chemical weapon, or it had lost control of its stock and : "allowed it to get into the hands of others" (*Hansard*, 12th March, 2018, col. 621).

Here, Britain attempted to discursively corner Russia into an awkward position. For Russia to actually select and confirm one of either explanation imposed by the UK would have been a self-imposed daunting humiliation, in particular for a country that is anything but known for sycophancy. Indeed, the first option would have essentially been a full and unreserved of admission of responsibility. While the second would be an acknowledgement of total irresponsibility and incompetence. The British government could not have reasonably expected that the Russian Federation would have complied with its deadline. Until then, although Russian comments had been dismissive and rather vigorous, it had always remained dismissive, and essentially refrained from adding any comment that would be substantial enough for the UK to react to. Thus, such radical demands forces a negative reaction from its opponent. This done, Britain would have a free

cheque to claim uncooperativeness from Russia to use that card to denounce the APs attitude, and place it within an overall frame of a pattern of Russian disdain for cooperation and international standards, thus legitimising further its outrage.

As the Russia, evidently, did not comply with any of the terms of the UK's deadline, the British diplomatic corps did extensively use that card to its advantage. At the first UNSC meeting on the matter, the British representative expressed the suggestion that Russia had lost control over its nerve agent as : "It has provided no credible explanation" (*UNSC*, 2018a., p.2). He further employed that argument to turn the Russian argument that the UK was not following the rules of the OPCW : "[Johnson] sought and explanation...as article IX clearly sets out we have the right to do. We have received no meaningful response. It is therefore Russia that is failing to comply" (*UNSC*, 2018a., p.2). The British Ambassador, similarly, suggested that Moscow's non-compliance with the UK's deadline was one element proving its scorn of international norms and values: "We have still to receive a formal response. Instead the Russian Federation has shown disdain for international law and for the work of the OPCW" (*OPCW*, 2018b, p.4).

Throughout the diplomatic crisis between the two countries, Britain attempted to frame the Russian state as a rogue state systematically disdainful of international norms and values. First of all, the UK repeatedly ensured to emphasise that it was at odds with the Russian government, and not its people. Theresa May insisted that: "Many Russian have made this country welcome...which we must continue to welcome" (*Hansard*, 12th March 2018, col.856). The British Representative to the UNSC made clear : "We have no disagreement with the Russian people" (*UNSC*, 2018a, p.3). Similarly, Boris Johnson emphatically pronounced : "The culprits of this are not the Russian people" (*DW*, March 19th, 2018). This is important as it plays to the British frame in depicting a Russian state gone increasingly volatile, drifting away from its own international commitments. The UK delegation to the OSCE, thus, called on Russia to : "To rebuild trust through a return to respect for shared commitments" (*OSCE*, 2018b, p.3).

Dissociating the Russian people from the Russian state also serves to delegitimise the Russian leadership from its people, by implying that the Russian government's action represents neither the values of the will of its people. It also allowed to subtly hint at a British wish for a change of leadership. Boris Johnson thus stated : "Our issue is with the Kremlin and the Russian state as it currently is" (*DW*, March 19th, 2018). Let us remind that the Russian Federation was

organising its Presidential election that exact month. Hence, this repeated emphasis in being at odds with the Russian state only worked, at least as an attempt to avoid fuelling talking points to Vladimir Putin on his campaign trail, at most as a veiled appeal to the Russian electorate. Echoing the hint against the current Russian leadership, British governmental and diplomatic staff further utilised Vladimir Putin as demonstration for their indictment of the Russian state.

On the 12th March, the PM characterised Putin as an aggressive actor. One that : “Showed video graphics of missile launches, including the modelling of attacks on the United States” (*Hansard*, 12th March, 2018, col.621). One that gives : “Legal sanction” to “Extra-judicial killing” (*Hansard*, 12th March, 2018, col. 621). The UK Ambassador to the UNSC cited a supposed direct quote of the Russian President: “He said, ‘Traitors will kick the bucket...those 30 pieces of silver they were given, they will choke on them.’” (*UNSC*, 2018a, p.11). Boris Johnson, in an interview, also cited what seems to be the same, paraphrased version, quote: “Vladimir Putin has himself said that traitors, i.e. defectors, such as Mr.Skripal, should be poisoned” (*DW*, March 19th, 2018).

In her second address to Parliament, Theresa May stated: “Many of us looked at post-Soviet Russia with hope. We wanted a better relationship, and it is tragic that President Putin has chosen to act this way” (*Hansard*, 14th March, 2018, col. 857). This statement speaks with volume in that regard. It associates directly “Post-Soviet Russia” with “Hope” and a “Better relationship”. Yet it associates tragedy with the actions of “President Putin”. Thus, Theresa May dissociated the quality of Vladimir Putin as President of Russia from the hope of a better relationship with the West. This, connected with the many British emphasis on their quarrel with the Russian leadership, rather than its people, hence implies further that the UK government was signalling to the Russian people, and the world, that in the eyes of the British hope, there would be hope of a better relationship, without Vladimir Putin. Therefore, the British government painted the latter, in particular, as a rogue bully leader perturbing both international and Russian citizens’ security.

In stark contrast to this characterisation of Russia, the UK, on the other hand, framed itself as this advocate and champion of international norms and liberal values, with a history of standing up to the challengers of this order, i.e. Russia. The Foreign Secretary’s address to the Commons, for instance, plentifully alluded to that idea. He referred to the UK’s: “Strength and determination” (*Hansard*, 6th March, 2018, col.169). Johnson further enumerated the list of retaliating measures against Russia’s so-framed pattern of aggression, which included: “leading the EU’s response to

the annexation of Crimea...co-ordinated with the United States and other allies” (*Hansard*, 6th March, 2018, col.169). Note here that Johnson placed the UK in a leading role in the European Union (EU) and explicitly mentioned the US as an essential partner, while outsourcing other major European forces, such as France and Germany—which equally played substantial roles in the Ukrainian crisis management process—as generic “other allies”. This discursively swells the UK’s influence as an international leader. Indicating coordination with the US, which traditionally views itself as the messianic guardian of international freedom, places the UK as an equal to the sole superpower of the world. To place the UK as the EU leader, on equal footing with the US, to take on Russia bloats the UK’s influential magnitude to that of a continental state, which incidentally plays well at a time of increasing domestic insecurity as to the British place in the world.

The support and solidarity offered by British allies and EU members additionally made for useful material to defend Britain’s characterisation of itself. The British Representative to the OSCE soundly illuminates this. Indeed, the latter exploited it to his advantage : “The strength of international reactions ... sends a message that States are ready to stand up for shared principles and for common security... enough is enough (*OSCE*, 2018b, p.3). Here, the UK Ambassador thanking the response of the States that did show solidarity with Britain acts as type of endorsement of the British stance. This is determined by the fact the British Representatives follows suit to associate this support with a message to the Russian state. A message produced and deliver by the UK Ambassador, but associated—through mentioning of the strength of international—with the dozens of state that supported the UK. A message that conveys a commitment to defend liberal norms and values. Enough is enough, says the UK and its supporters. Here, Britain seeks not just to claim leadership but to show it is, indeed, the standard-bear of collective values of the global order.

c. Turkey

Turkey exploited a certain discursive advantage in the issue of Jamal Khashoggi’s assassination. However, its leadership made a rather sporadic use of SCCT/IRT tactics. It did, though “Attack the accuser”, expressed “Concern” and “Bolstering”. The latter refer to : “Confronts the group or person claiming that something is wrong”, “Expresses concern for victims” and “Remind of the actor’s positive qualities” (Coombs & Holladay, 2010, p.32). On the P3M,

Turkey undoubtedly framed itself as an “Advocate”. Lastly, this OP made an extensive use of sense-making, albeit less for restorative purposes than to discursively elevate its own position amidst the crisis, hence politicising the sense-making process.

If it did not attempt to belittle its opponent, it did, however, consistently aimed at discursively exploit this position to advance its position on the world stage. Indeed, to the opposite of Malaysia, its leadership did not back away from the discursive stage of this incident whatsoever. In fact, early on, Recep Tayyip Erdogan took the centre-stage to raise the stakes of the event for his country. This was important, as out of the three OPs, Turkey is the one state which faced the least vigorous offence. Malaysia and the UK saw deliberate chemical agents attack on their soil. Kim Jong-nam was murdered in plain sight of dozens of civilians in a busy international hub. The attack on the Salisbury scarred a quiet English town, with three British citizens contaminated, including one police officer and one that resulted in death (Dodd, Morris, & Bannock, July 9th, 2018; Dearden, November 22nd, 2018). On the other hand, in the Khashoggi case, the potential impact on Turkish society was minimal. Besides, whilst the deed did happen within Turkish borders, it nonetheless technically happened on Saudi territory, as it took place within the Saudi consulate. This thus makes the offence on Turkey mostly normative and symbolic.

Thus, in his first comment on the issue, Recep Tayyip Erdogan set three basis for his frame, which that the President would consistently feed throughout the incident. First, Erdogan did refer his personal kin to the victim, hence justifying keenness and close personal scrutiny into the case : “Mr.Khashoggi is an old friend of mine” (Turkish President, October 7th, 2018). Second, the Turkish President normatively positioned himself. He thus stated : “I believe that those...who advocate for freedoms and the freedom of thought will not quit following this case” (Turkish President, October 7th, 2018). In his previous assertion, Erdogan had indicated he would follow the case very closely. Hence, there the President elevated the case to one of freedoms and freedom of thought. Having just mentioned he would be attentive to the developments of this incident, Erdogan presents himself as one of those advocate for these normative values. Third, the President vindicated his responsibility to scrutinise to case as one pertaining to the duties of his office : “I am also following this case personally as the President of Turkey and whatever comes of this, we will be the ones to declare it to the world” (Turkish President, October 7th, 2018). Later on, the Turkish President would explicitly lay down the offence on his country, and the rationale its stance

stems from : “This incident takes place in Istanbul, and we have a responsibility. So as those in a position of responsibility, it is our right to question this” (Turkish President, October 23rd, 2018) Thus, Erdogan constructed three main pillars as legitimization for his soon-to-come militant approach to the case; one of personal concern, one of normative positioning, and one of institutional responsibility.

Turkey did make heavy use of sense-making. These, naturally, served a traditional purpose of information of the press and the general public as to the developments of the case. However, one can suspect this employ of sense-making fulfilling a particular purpose taken advantage by the Turkish government. In effect, virtually each intervention of the Turkish government commenced with updates on the investigation or announcement as to the actions undertaken by the Turkish authorities. In particular, Recep Tayyip Erdogan’ address to the Grand Assembly allocated a significant portion—nearly half—of its speech to a detailed and specific account as to the timeline of events and history of the investigation, (Turkish President, October 23rd, 2018). Some characteristics of traditional sense-making were there present. For instance, much like Amber Rudd enumerated the agencies at work on the case, Erdogan made numerous references to the same vein. He mentioned : “Our intelligence and security officials...the chief prosecutor’s office and delegated deputy prosecutor” (*Al Jazeera*, October 23rd, 2018 ; *The Post*, October 23rd, 2018).

However, numerous discursive traits point to this employ of processes of sense-making as playing into the bigger frame portraying Turkey as a champion of truth. First of all, Erdogan asserted zealously Turkey’s responsibility to the case. In a press release, the Turkish Presidency referred to its: “Political and humanitarian duty to follow the issue” (Turkish President, October 8th, 2018). Ibrahim Kalen, the spokesperson of the Presidency pointed out that: “Our ultimate goal, duty and responsibility is to clear up the issue with all its aspects” (Presidential Spokesperson, October 22nd, 2018). During his speech, Erdogan stated : “This is within Turkish borders...we will, of course and inspect this murder within our borders and do everything necessary” (*Al Jazeera*, October 23rd, 2018 ; Turkish President, October 23rd, 2018). To insist on the attribution of responsibility aims at persuading the audience that the Turkish pro-activity is, indeed, legitimate. Responsibility is an invariable component of leadership. To assign responsibility to oneself virtually equates to endorse a role of leader, who can only be expected to follow on its duty and behave pro-actively. Thus, Turkey strived to ascribe itself with authority on the matter. Erdogan

asserted : “As Turkey, we carried out this whole process in accordance with international law and a state mentality... As Turkey, we will follow this issue until the end” (*Al Jazeera*, October 23rd, 2018 ; Turkish President, October 23rd, 2018). Notice how Erdogan utilised the proposition “As Turkey”. This usage of syntax customarily implies that the following proposition is an inherent quality of the subject, where the proposition is vindicated by the subject, instead of vindicating the subject. With this syntax, thus, Erdogan endeavours to establish as given fact that Turkey—being the legitimate leading authority on the matter—would evidently follow due process and scrutinise the issue until its resolve.

Erdogan did not limit itself to derive the legitimacy of its authority procedurally. The President also normatively elevated Turkey’s position. The Turkish President made several highly normative references, elevating his country, and himself, on a moral high ground. Indeed, as mentioned above, Erdogan associated his concern as per the crisis with advocates of “Freedoms and the freedom of thought” (Turkish President, October 7th, 2018). During his address, he further stated : “Covering up such a brutal act would wound the conscience of all mankind (Turkish President, October 23rd, 2018). The President, furthermore, made several references to the Islamic faith to legitimize Turkey’s responsibility (Turkish President, October 23rd, 2018). However, one need not dig too deep to find this normative association as Recep Tayyip Erdogan plainly asserted : “Turkey, as the representative of the world’s common conscious...is following up on the issue” (Turkish President, October 23rd, 2018). To bluntly assert Turkey to be the representative of the world’s common conscious speaks volumes as to Erdogan’s vision as to his country’s role in the affair.

Yet, the Turkish President did not solely limit himself in discursively granting a leading status to his country. Erdogan, additionally, exploited this affair to personalise this leadership to himself. Indeed, the very choice of personally addressing parliament in a lengthy address to present all the facts and evidence, which could have been perfectly acceptable for a Deputy Public Prosecutor to do at a press briefing, points to Erdogan’s willingness in putting himself at the centre stage. As the latter himself mentioned at the early onset of the crisis, the President took great interest in the affair for personal reasons (Turkish President, October 7th, 2018). Erdogan did not solely use domestic platforms to elevate his position, but also reached out to international actors.

Indeed, the President also distributed evidence to other international leaders, namely France, Germany, Canada and the US (McKernan, November 13th, 2018). The office of the Turkish Presidency was further adamant to precise that Erdogan: “Shared relevant information with the visiting leaders”, during the Istanbul-held ‘Quartet Summit on Syria’, between France, Germany, Russia and Turkey (Turkish President, October 27th, 2018). Thus reaching out to the rest of the world to discuss, present in public fora and share information and evidence to fellow international leaders thus echoes Britain’s swelling of its international normative leadership. Much like Britain, which boasted about international support and elevated itself to a ranking of defender of norms and values, Erdogan utilised the same process. By repeatedly emphasising his sharing of evidence with world leaders, for instance by enumerating the countries to which the recordings of the murder were delivered, Erdogan depicts himself as leading advocate and pro-active defender of freedoms.

Therefore, Erdogan characterised his persona, during the Khashoggi crisis, as one of ‘Prosecutor-in-chief’. Numerous discursive characteristics in his address to the Turkish Grand National Assembly point to this idea. Indeed, Erdogan not just positioned himself as an advocate for the : “World’s conscious”, but additionally built himself a prosecuting character, using language and lexica akin to judgement and inspection (*Al Jazeera*, October 23rd, 2018; Turkish President, October 23rd, 2018). The Turkish President’s language could confuse as to whether he was addressing a legislative parliament or a court of law. His long enumeration of the facts, evidences and chronological accounts of the case reminds the audience of prosecutor making his case in front of a judge: “First, let’s quickly refresh our memories...at 11:50 on September 28...On October 1 at 16:30, one day before the murder...at 01:45, a second three-man team again arrives...After looking into the camera records” (*Al Jazeera*, October 23rd, 2018; Turkish President, October 23rd, 2018).

Erdogan would go on long series of unanswered questions : “Why have these 15 people...met in Istanbul ? Who are these people ? Why have so many inconsistent statements been made? Who is this local collaborator?...Therefore you are obliged to reveal this local collaborator. You will reveal him” (*Al Jazeera*, October 23rd, 2018; Turkish President, October 23rd, 2018).The Turkish President shared personal judgements: “In order to not unjustly uncondemn anyone...Personally, I do not doubt the sincerity of King Salman” (*Al Jazeera*, October 23rd, 2018; Turkish President, October 23rd, 2018). Erdogan never formally blamed Saudi Arabia. Yetis

invectives, castigating interrogations and open chastisements of the Saudi versions minus-the King, discursively frames Saudi Arabia on the bench of the accused—without formal explicit suspicion—

	Malaysia	UK	Turkey
SCCT/IRT	-Denial -Attack the Accuser -Minimize offensiveness	-Scapegoat -Attack the Accuser -Ingratiation -Differentiation	-Attack the Accuser -Bolstering
P3M	Buddy	Advocate	Advocate
Sense-making	Restorative	Restorative	Political
Tone	Defensive (Proportional escalation)	Offensive	Pro-active
Legitimised emotion	Outrage	Outrage	Outrage

while framing the President on the court of Prosecutors, which is arguably not necessarily better. Figure 5.2. summarises the findings of this chapter.

Figure 5.2. Findings for Offended Parties

7. Analytical commentary

a. *Contrasted assessment of prime stakeholders’ responses.*

However, this is not to assert that states have no stakes in defending their standing on the world stage. A weakened reputation leads to strained bilateral relationships, which have real impact on states’ interest. The Khashoggi crisis broke out a little less than a month before Saudi Arabia’s FII, an economic forum aimed at attracting Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) into the country, in an attempt by MBS to diversify the Saudi economy (*BBC*, October 23rd, 2018 ; FII, October 24th, 2018). A state that is suspected of murdering journalists in cold blood within their own consulate does not make for the best branding for a country striving to sprout its attractiveness to foreign

investors. Incidentally, the media outrage over the Khashoggi case did lead to boycotts from influential actors of the global financial world, such the executive of JP Morgan or the head of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (*BBC*, October 23rd, 2018). This explains why MBS addressed the case during that particular forum with such a mourning and conciliatory tone. Furthermore, the fact that North Korea and Malaysia—an OP thus—met at the negotiating table shows there are concrete consequences to diplomatic strains, fuelled by discursive means. There are, therefore, real stakes lying behind a threat to global standing, and discursive means are real, impactful tools to defend them.

There, thus, similarly real stakes for OPs to take the stage. A foreign power brazenly attempting on the lives on one of their citizen on their soil is a blatant contempt of sovereignty. It is a daring and irreverential act that clearly indicates a lack of fear of repercussions. Moreover, the choice of weapon can have real repercussions on the safety of civilians present there. Hence, from the symbolic interest to concrete security stakes, such acts calls for urgent discursive defence. One can note that all three actors, thus Turkey included, used restorative rhetoric. This was, naturally, particular critical to both Malaysia and the UK, as the attacks took place on peaceful locations, an airport terminal and an average-size countryside English town, routinely frequented by civilians. Turkey, however, used restorative rhetoric rather to its advantage, as the deed indicated virtually no threat to any Turkish or non-Saudi citizen. Furthermore, one can denote that the language employed by OPs to normatively defend their standing were much more vigorous than in frames used to bolster public confidence in the safety of the exposed locations. This is best shown by the Kim Jong-nam case, where the Malaysian government only adopted strong offensive rhetoric when the DPRK discursively challenged both the government and its police' integrity. It explains why Turkey, although having the lowest collective impact from the incident, still embraced an increasingly pro-active tone throughout the crisis. It also offers clues as to the UK's rapid forceful tone towards the suspected culprits, as the attempt on the Skripals was far from the first instance of alleged state-sponsored attacks on Russian citizens.

If the Orchestrator model of the P3M was the least favourite model employed, Advocate was the most popular amongst prime stakeholders. Indeed, the latter four out of six—Turkey, Russia, the UK and North Korea—cloaked themselves with this mode. The characteristics of this role provides high political responsibility in confronting the culprit of the crisis, while at the same

time vindicating the Advocate from culpability. The nature of this model makes it compelling to both the essence of APs and OPs. It allows the former to deviate blame from them to the actual accusers. This explains why both Russia and North Korea adopted a similar rhetoric, accusing their OP of being responsible for the crisis, victimising their citizen, and exploiting the matter to orchestrate a smear campaign against the AP.

One can, additionally, observe, that Russia and North Korea adopted a similar framework of crisis communication tactics, with a sparse use of the whole cluster at hand and a heavy use of “Attack of the Accuser”, “Shift the Blame” and “Scapegoat”. In contrast, the KSA’s diversified and comprehensive use of crisis communication tactics and staged-retreat suggests that conciliatory strategies requires the employ of a more complex range of discursive tactics. On the contrary, offensive, blame-deviating strategies only necessitate a smaller use of these tactics, whilst practicing longer, more detailed and dialectic argumentation. Most of the KSA’s communication remained rather concise, while North Korea and Russia offered lengthy statements demonstrating in detail their rejection of their OPs stances.

Outrage as an emotion tend to stem from a logical process. One feels the affront associated with it when being confronted with a blatant and purposeful offense on one’s constructed norms, values or interest by another party endowed with agency. Hence, to successfully convey a credible and convincing expression of outrage, one needs to explicitly manifest these offenses and dialectically demonstrate how these offenses infringes on one own’s norms, values or interest. Concern and grief are both more intuitive and universal, as they relate to care for one’s kin. Norms, values and interest are abstract and subjectively defined. Care for kin is virtually universal. It needs no demonstration, thus requiring less lengthy communication.

The Advocate model appears compelling to OPs as its provides them with the impetus needed to defend their standing and feed their outrage against the AP. Furthermore, one can note that both OPs adopting the Advocate role, i.e. Turkey and the UK, designed their rhetoric to discursively exploit the crisis and swell their influence on the world stage. Erdogan, as President of Turkey, notably utilised the investigation into the Khashoggi’s assassination to characterise himself as a global prosecutor and champion of fundamental freedoms. Similarly, the UK framed their position on the international arena as one of a continental power, equal to the US and Russia, and foremost defender of international norms and values.

One key ingredient that was found in all prime stakeholder's strategies was the process of legitimisation of emotions, particularly of outrage. If the latter ingredient was common to all, the processes to produce it varied. The Russian and Malaysian government employed a similar process, where they abandoned the rhetorical initiative for their opponent to set the tone, and responded proportionally to the presented tone. Noteworthy here is that Malaysia derived its outrage from North Korea's rhetoric, rather than on the deed itself. The UK fuelled its outrage resource by discursively cornering Russia into a request they could do nothing but refuse. The former then employed this refusal as evidence for the UK's characterisation of Russia as a restless actor completely disdainful of international cooperation.

b. Discussion and potential pathways for further studies

This thesis has highlighted a number of compelling areas of research that would deserve further study. One such area lies in the need for updated versions of the existing models of crisis communication and blame-management. First of all, although SCCT/IRT cluster coined different their laid out modes as "strategies", this paper preferred the term "communication tactics", as they make singular elements that can be combined or divided with or amongst each other under different contexts to serve a certain strategical purpose. Moreover, assessment of Russia's response to the Skripals poisoning has shown a heavy use of irony and mockery. To the best of the ability of the author, this tactic could not satisfyingly fit any of the communication tactics laid down by Coombs or Benoit. Hence, implementing "Mockery" or "Irony" to the SCCT/IRT cluster could prove a useful addition to an already pertinent model.

The P3M and staged-retreat hypothesis have shown useful to complement understanding of communication strategies in contexts of diplomatic crises on the international arena. However, these have been designed and theoretically framed to analyse and discuss crisis communication and blame-management strategies under a domestic context. The latter naturally holds differing structural assumptions of accountability. It would be therefore, compelling to endeavour to update these theoretical models for the study of blame-management of international actors in the global arena. On the latter stage, sovereign states operate under intergovernmental structures of accountability, which differ substantially from domestic accountability.

However, this thesis abductive combination of the SCCT/IRT cluster with the P3M, staged-retreat hypothesis, restorative rhetoric and inductive observations allows for a rather comprehensive grasp of diplomatic crisis communication. The findings of this thesis might prove a useful building-block for academic endeavours striving to merge these models into one theory of public diplomatic crisis response. This theory would potentially include an inversed version of staged-retreat—i.e., 'staged escalation' as both the UK and Russia employed—and a framework laying out different legitimisation of emotions processes.

The rhetorical arena does not end at the lips of the producer. This study aimed at deconstructing and contrasting the different meanings of state actors diplomatic crisis communication strategies. However, the analysis of its concrete effectiveness fell outside the scope of this thesis. Therefore, as a follow-up to this thesis aim, it would be particularly compelling for an academic endeavour to strive to study the impact and effectiveness of such communication strategies. One could design a quantitative comprehensive media analysis aiming to discern to what extent state actors' discursive frames and talking points wind up being recycled or endorsed in the media landscape, and whether reception of these frames are positive, negative or indifferent. Furthermore, historical-tracing of diplomatic crisis communication amongst particular countries could prove a compelling addition to this area of research. Indeed, one could hypothesise that Russia's well-crafted and carefully designed argumentative rhetoric against the UK finds its roots in decades-long practices of diplomatic discursive sparring matches between Russia and the West, which could root back to the early days of the Soviet Union.

8. Conclusion

In sum, faced with a diplomatic crisis following a political assassination, or attempt thereof, on foreign soil state actors may employ similar tactics to concordant aims, yet the processes by which those tactics are employed differ. Some states would adopt an aggressive rhetoric. APs would deny wrongdoing and shift the blame towards their opponent stakeholders. Such was the case with the DPRK and Russia. The two of them adopted an aggressive stance, blaming their OP for the crisis, accusing them of oppressing their citizen and being victim of a worldwide propagandist plot against them. If the tactics between Russia and the DPRK were similar, denying wrong-doing, shifting the blame and forcefully challenging the integrity of their OP, their tone did

have nuanced, yet consequential differences. Whilst North Korea's earliest reaction essentially fired the first shot, immediately attacking Malaysia and escalating tensions, Russia refrained from explicitly and directly implicating the UK, until the latter would explicitly and directly implicate Russia. Hence, one can observe two different tones within these forceful rhetoric, an offensive and a defensive one. North Korea's offensive tone is characterised by an immediate and quick escalation of the rhetoric, while Russia's defensive tone is delineated by a staged escalation, where the initiative of escalation is left to the opponent stakeholder and the reaction remains relatively proportionate to the escalation.

One can observe this slight nuanced dichotomy amongst OPs too. Indeed, the UK government, although at first not formally implicating Russia, alluded from its first statements to a potential Russian involvement. Within a week, the UK formally blamed, sanctioned, lobbied abroad for allied sanctions and condemnations against Russia. Hence, although the substance, language and rhetoric differed, the tone of the UK was the same as the DPRK; offensive. Much like Russia, Malaysia presented a defensive tone. The latter only adopted an aggressive rhetoric after the DPRK repeatedly challenged its and its police integrity. Furthermore, the Malaysian government never implicated North Korea for the attack on Kim Jong-nam himself, but for the DPRK's attitude towards Malaysia in face of the crisis.

Turkey's pro-active tone differs from both the offensive British and Korean ones, or the defensive tones of Russia and Malaysia. Its use of active and regular sense-making did put a lot of pressure on Saudi Arabia, persistently updating the media on the affair, and pressuring the KSA to provide coherent and credible explanations. However, it never attacked Saudi Arabia face on. Malaysia and the UK did use sense-making too. Yet they were employed with a more practical function, using restorative rhetoric to bolster public confidence in the safety of the affected areas. Istanbul, though, suffered virtually no increased threat as a result of the attack on Khashoggi. Thus, Turkey's extensive sense-making suggest a politicisation of the process for the benefit of Erdogan's own characterisation as a Prosecutor-in-chief, champion of fundamental freedoms. This discursive swelling of global influence as international guardian of norms is, incidentally, found in the UK as well, which categorised itself as a continental-like power—as leader of the EU in confronting Russia.

Saudi Arabia adopted the least aggressive rhetoric. Although the DPRK and Russia used elements of staged-retreat, the KSA was the sole prime stakeholder to attempt the sensitive task of comprehensively effect this strategy. As such, Saudi Arabia adopted a conciliatory tone. It never attacked Turkey for its pro-activity. The Saudi leadership, through a wide range of communication tactics and often short communication, first pleaded ignorance of the matter, before recognising the disappearance of Khashoggi. It eventually confirmed the death of Khashoggi, according to an independent Saudi investigation, explaining it was the result of a rogue operation. The KSA thus to claim ignorance, concern, shock and grief, being the only stakeholder endorsing a role of Mourner-in-Chief in the P3M.

All these tactics and strategies employed by these stakeholders to manage the blame put on them, or assigning to others, are all striving for one key element. Without this essential component, prime stakeholders cannot hope to convincingly uphold their standing on the international arena. This fundamental ingredient is legitimation. To defend their reputation, state actors need to legitimise their emotion towards the crisis. All but one prime stakeholders strived to legitimise their outrage, while Saudi Arabia aimed at grief. By legitimising their emotion, state actors place themselves on the just side of the crisis, the one that is unjustly suffering from the crisis, and that rightly endeavours to correct that wrong. Be it staged-retreat or escalation; offensive tone or proportionate response; swelling influences or grieving frames, those strategies will establish a strong upholding if, and only if, they legitimise their states' grievances.

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