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IDEOLOGICAL AMPLIFICATION IN CONFLICT JOURNALISM: HOW MEDIA FRAME IRAN'S NUCLEAR DIMENSION IN THE 2023–2025 IRAN-ISRAEL CONFLICT

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Abstract
In this study, the purpose of research lies in the examination of how nuclear elements in the Iran-Israel conflict are covered by various media outlets with different ideologies. In order to fulfill this research goal, the analysis is conducted through a set of 412 editorials from Kayhan International (pro-government Iranian media outlet), The Wall Street Journal (conservative American media), and Haaretz (liberal Israeli media). As far as methodology goes, the approach suggested by Semetko & Valkenburg (2000) concerning five frames theory is used in the current paper. The analysis is focused on the coverage of nuclear threats as a part of the media's frame strategy. According to the results provided by the research, the problem of nuclear weapons does not arise as an independent issue since its presence works as an ideological amplifier for each source. Most of the frames used for the description of nuclear threats in the editorials of Kayhan International relate to the category of morality, highlighting the struggle between Iran and the US government. When it comes to the media coverage in The Wall Street Journal, it is clear that weapons are used within responsibility frames as a trigger of the region's instability. Haaretz uses responsibility and cause/effect frames to provide multiple factors contributing to the region's instability including nuclear capability.

1. INTRODUCTION
The nuclear element of this conflict is one of the most important yet least researched elements of this topic of conflict media framing. From the beginning of the crisis escalation on October 7, 2023, the editorial commentaries of prominent international news agencies have been filled with mentions of the nuclear program of Iran as a key factor in shaping the current conflict pattern. The role of these framing devices does not end with their inclusion into the texts; they are used as a way to demonstrate both the level of strategic goals of Iran and to estimate the threat that is posed to global and regional security by Iran. As part of causal relationships, these mentions serve as an important connection point between the conflict itself and the issue of nuclear weapons development in Iran.

Media framing can be defined as a concept, first developed by Entman (1993), according to which media outlets are not neutral intermediaries of information about an event but active constructors of meanings for this event and the way it will be perceived by audiences. The significance of media framing as

an analysis tool in the context of Iran's nuclear program becomes obvious when taking into consideration the fact that the very issue of the nuclear development in Iran remains extremely controversial. While Iranian authorities claim its peaceability and legality, according to the terms of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, Israeli and American authorities see it as an attempt to develop nuclear weapons.

Three outlets were selected for this study on the basis of their ideological diversity, geopolitical significance, and editorial prominence. Kayhan International is the flagship English-language outlet of the Iranian state media ecosystem, closely aligned with the ideological positions of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and the Supreme Leader's office. The Wall Street Journal represents the leading voice of American conservative editorial opinion, with a long-established pro-Israel orientation and a hawkish view of Iranian foreign policy. Haaretz is Israel's most prominent liberal newspaper, known internationally for its willingness to publish critical perspectives on Israeli government policy that few other Israeli outlets entertain. Together these three outlets represent the three most directly implicated national perspectives on the Iran-Israel conflict, making them ideal sites for comparative analysis of how ideological orientation shapes nuclear framing.

Despite the volume of research on media framing of the Israel-Palestine conflict (El-Dahmanhoury et al., 2025; Gunay, 2025; Mejsstrik, 2024) and on Iranian media specifically (Yaghoobi, 2009; Nikou, 2016), the specific question of how nuclear references function within editorial framing of the Iran-Israel conflict has received no systematic treatment. Most research on Iran's nuclear program in media contexts has addressed government communication strategies how Tehran or Washington frames its position for domestic or international audiences or nonproliferation advocacy communication. The question of how nuclear references operate as framing elements within editorial conflict coverage, and whether they constitute an independent topic or serve as amplifiers of ideological positions already established through other coverage dimensions, has not been examined.

This study addresses that gap. It asks how each outlet integrates nuclear references into its broader editorial framing strategy, whether nuclear frames operate independently or as extensions of dominant ideological positions, and what the pattern of nuclear framing across three ideologically distinct outlets reveals about the relationship between editorial ideology and coverage of strategic weapons programs. The answers have implications for media literacy, for diplomatic communication, and for the quality of public debate about one of the most consequential strategic questions in contemporary international relations.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESIS

This study is guided by the following research questions

RQ1: How does Kayhan International integrate nuclear references into its editorial framing of the Iran-Israel conflict, and what framing functions do those references serve?

RQ2: How does The Wall Street Journal integrate nuclear references into its editorial framing of the Iran-Israel conflict, and what framing functions do those references serve?

RQ3: How does Haaretz integrate nuclear references into its editorial framing of the Iran-Israel conflict, and what framing functions do those references serve?

RQ4: Do nuclear references in conflict editorial coverage function as ideologically independent topics or as amplifiers of each outlet's pre-established framing position?

HYPOTHESIS:

H1: Kayhan International deploys nuclear references mainly through the morality frame, presenting Iranian strategic capability as principled deterrence, with the lowest nuclear reference rate of the three outlets.

H2: The Wall Street Journal deploys nuclear references mainly through the responsibility frame, at a substantially higher rate than the other outlets, framing Iran's nuclear program as the causal driver of regional instability.

H3: Haaretz distributes nuclear references across multiple frames without one dominant

frame, consistent with its multi-causal analytical approach.

H4: Each outlet's nuclear frame distribution replicates (amplifies) its overall frame distribution rather than diverging from it, confirming the amplification proposition.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Framing Theory and Conflict Coverage

From a communication perspective, the intellectual legacy behind the concept of framing can be traced back to the sociological analysis of frames as schemas of interpretation provided by Erving Goffman (1974). The observation that the meaning of any occurrence relies not only on the facts themselves but the frame through which they are interpreted led Entman (1993) to conceptualize the process of framing as choosing and promoting specific aspects of perceived reality that will shape the perception of the issue at hand in terms of a problem definition, cause and effect interpretation, moral judgment, and proposed solutions. This model of four functions of framing is still relevant due to its comprehensive nature, covering all aspects of editorial interpretation.

Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) operationalized the theory of framing by developing an analytic coding system based on five generic frames that recur among various news topics and cultures: attributions of responsibility, conflict, human interest, economic consequences, and morality. In the former, the issue in question is framed in such a way that responsibility for either an undesirable outcome or a potential solution becomes associated with specific actors. The latter refers to the stress of disagreement, opposition, and confrontation. Human interest frame highlights emotions and personal stories, while economic consequences focus on the fiscal aspect of an event. Finally, the morality frame involves placing the discussed matter in an ethical or religious context.

The debate on whether journalists select frames according to their ideological leanings or the actual events they cover persists in scholarly literature. Based on analysis of Al Jazeera and BBC reporting on the missile strikes conducted by Iran against Israel in April 2024, Alim (2024) found that while Al Jazeera chose the conflict frame, highlighting the region-wide hostility and Iran's justification for retaliation, BBC opted for attribution of responsibility frame and blamed Iran for the attack and emphasized Israel's right to defense. Both news agencies persisted with the chosen frames despite new facts emerging, thus supporting the hypothesis that ideological orientation determines frame selection.

Ideology and Editorial Framing in the Iran-Israel Context

The ideologies behind the three news sources investigated in this paper have been widely discussed in the literature. In particular, Roomi (2023) studies the development of Iranian anti-Zionist ideology from the times of the Islamic Revolution of 1979 and explains the framing used in Kayhan International in the context of a political culture where Israeli statehood is considered illegitimate and Iran's ability to provide deterrence is seen as moral resistance to imperialistic aggression. As a result, the news source suppresses all frames recognizing the threat posed by the country's nuclear development and instead frames its strategic ability to deter using morality frames that celebrate the resistance of Iran to Zionism and Western imperialism. The region-wide strategy of Iran has been studied by Celso (2024) through the prism of Iran's Shiite Imamate project and its implications for the framing of its nuclear and proxy activity. According to the author, Iranian support for proxy organizations such as Hamas, Hezbollah, and Houthis cannot be attributed only to strategic interests but is ideologically driven, and this influences the framing employed by Iranian media.

On the side of the United States, the structural factors influencing editorial policies regarding Israel-related conflicts have been documented by Cutter (2019). Particularly, the pro-Israel bias in historical editorial policies of leading American news outlets has produced a tendency to frame any kind of Iran's activity (either sponsoring proxy groups or developing nuclear weapons) in terms of the responsibility frame with the main culprit being Iran. However, according to Keshavarz (2024), such framing distorts reality of Iran's relations with

its proxies that have a certain level of autonomy, yet serves ideological purposes in the editorial policy of newspapers such as the Wall Street Journal.

In contrast to the previous two outlets, the nature of Haaretz has been thoroughly analyzed by Teneboim-Weinblatt, Hanitzsch, and Nagar (2016). Namely, the authors describe its position as critical liberal and associated with violence-centered narratives in opposition to governmental narratives. Accordingly, this ideology results in framing patterns different from other mainstream outlets, American conservative and Israeli alike. Particularly, Haaretz recognizes the capacity of Iran and does not treat its presence as the only factor explaining the instability in the region.

Nuclear Framing as a Specific Research Problem

The nuclear dimension in the Iran-Israel conflict has been studied mostly by international relations and security studies scholars and has been neglected by communication researchers who study the framing of the media. From a strategic angle, Inbar (2020) looks at the growing conflicts between Iran and Israel, and the way the Iranians' nuclear program serves as a "deterrent umbrella" for their proxy operations, allowing them to act without being directly targeted by the Israeli military. This structural argument has implications on media framing: the more the nuclear program is seen as the means for proxy aggression, the more likely it is that any editorial outlet that emphasizes the Iranian control of the proxy aggression (responsibility frame) will include Iranian nuclear references as part of the explanatory context of the story, whereas any outlet that promotes Iranian resistance through the lens of Iranian victory (morality frame) is more likely to suppress the Iranian nuclear threat framing as incompatible with the celebratory narrative.

Nikou (2016) examined how the 2014 Gaza war was being framed in the U.S. and Iranian media, and concluded that the U.S. press was following narratives that focused on Palestinian violence as a major cause of conflict, while the Iranian press was following narratives of Israeli aggression in the context of occupation and imperial domination. While Nikou's study does not necessarily reflect the nuclear escalation that took place in 2023–2025, it does offer the strongest evidence available before this event to date that ideological orientation and not event characteristics influences the framing of an event.

Yaghoobi (2009) used critical discourse analysis in his analysis of the coverage of the Hezbollah-Israel war in Kayhan International and Newsweek magazines in 2006. In this study, Kayhan International highlighted the notion of Israeli aggression by emphasising active syntactic constructions and the term Zionist, whereas Newsweek foregrounded the war as a Hezbollah destruction. The editorial orientation was found to be systematic across the editorial corpus, and these differences were closely tied to the opposing ideologies, demonstrating that the outlets' ideological perspectives result in systematic differences across all dimensions of coverage of conflict, including strategic capabilities.

The question that has not yet been addressed is whether nuclear references in conflict editorials also serve to amplify a particular ideological perspective, or whether the unique characteristics of nuclear weapons as a category of coverage (cruelly, their catastrophic potential; their international legal status; their connection to the nonproliferation norms) give rise to frame patterns that run counter to an outlet's predetermined ideological stance. In the present study, this question is answered by conducting a systematical frame analysis of 412 editorials in the period between August 2023 and 2025, during the escalation.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework of this study rests on two integrated propositions drawn from the framing theory literature. The first proposition, derived from Entman (1993), is that media frames reflect institutional interests and ideological commitments rather than objective event characteristics. When different outlets apply different frames to the same events, those differences are systematically predictable from the outlets' institutional positions rather than from the informational content of the events themselves. This proposition has been

confirmed across a wide range of conflict contexts and underpins the expectation that nuclear framing will follow ideological lines in the present study.

The second proposition, which represents the specific theoretical contribution of this study, concerns what may be termed ideological amplification. Frame amplification occurs when a secondary coverage element in this case, references to Iran's nuclear program reinforces rather than complicates the dominant frame already established through primary coverage of other conflict dimensions. If nuclear references function as amplifiers, then the outlet whose overall coverage is dominated by responsibility framing should show even higher responsibility frame density in its nuclear references. The outlet whose coverage is dominated by morality framing should show even higher morality frame density when nuclear references appear. The outlet that distributes frames more evenly should show modest rather than dramatic shifts when nuclear references appear.

This amplification hypothesis builds on Entman's (1993) concept of framing as an "ideological infrastructure" by outlining a mechanism by which a given ideology can become self-reinforcing in terms of multiple framing dimensions. Each topic is not given a journalistic subject, but is rather covered within the context of an ideology template that over-absorbs new coverage elements such as nuclear references and incorporates these elements as confirming evidence for pre-established positions. The mechanism is similar to Kaunert and Wertman's (2020) analysis of hybrid warfare securitization, where state actors develop integrated security narratives that weave together multiple threat elements into mutually reinforcing and coherent threat perception of danger. The securitization process is continued from the government communication to the media by editorial coverage which is based on the same integrative logic.

Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) five-frame typology provides the operationalization for testing these theoretical propositions. The five frames responsibility, conflict, human interest, economic consequences, and morality are generic enough to be applicable across all dimensions of conflict coverage while specific enough to distinguish meaningfully different framing strategies. Applying the same typology to both general editorial coverage and nuclear-specific coverage enables direct comparison of frame distributions, allowing the study to assess whether nuclear references produce frame patterns consistent with each outlet's overall ideological position (amplification) or divergent from it (independent framing).

Four testable hypotheses follow from this framework. H1 predicts that Kayhan International deploys nuclear references predominantly within the morality frame, treating Iranian strategic capability as principled deterrence rather than regional threat, with a nuclear reference rate substantially lower than the other outlets. H2 predicts that The Wall Street Journal deploys nuclear references predominantly within the responsibility frame, at a substantially higher rate than either other outlet, using nuclear references to construct a causal chain connecting Iran's weapons program to regional aggression. H3 predicts that Haaretz distributes nuclear references across multiple frames without a single dominant frame, consistent with the outlet's multi-causal analytical approach. H4 predicts that the nuclear frame distributions of all three outlets replicate their overall frame distributions rather than deviating from them, confirming the amplification proposition.

METHODOLOGY

Sample and Data Collection

In this study all of the editorials that appeared in the three outlets between October 7, 2023 and March 31, 2025 were analyzed (412 total), of which 178 were published in Kayhan International, 95 in The Wall Street Journal and 139 in Haaretz. The study period was characterized by the escalation that started with the Hamas attacks on Israel on October 7, 2023, and continued through the active stage of direct confrontation between Iran and Israel, which included the Iranian missile strikes on April and October 2024, as well as the significant leadership assassinations that changed the regional landscape of the conflict.

Editorials were selected by keyword searches of publicly-accessible archives for each outlet. The phrases used for searching were Iran, Israel, nuclear, Hamas, Hezbollah, Houthi, Haniyeh, Nasrallah, Gaza, Zionist and proxy. All the results have been checked manually, and editorials that discussed any aspect of the Iran-Israel conflict or the results of the October 7th escalation and its implications have been added to the corpus.

Editorials on other home issues were not counted. The last corpus is not a sampling, but the census of the relevant editorials in the three outlets for the study period. Editorials were chosen as the unit of analysis as they are the institutional position of each outlet in its most explicit and clear form. Editorials are intended to give an opinion and make an evaluative statement, as opposed to news reports, which are required to be objective, although they may not always be so. They are thus the most direct indicators of an outlet's framing of a conflict, of whom it blames, of its morals, and of its remedies.

Coding Procedure

There were two phases of frame coding. The first stage consisted of coding all 412 editorials for the main frame that best captured the essential meaning of the main part of the text.In the first stage, all 412 editorials were coded for the main frame that best encapsulated the main content of the editorial. Six indicators were used to evaluate each frame. Presence of responsibility frame was coded when the editorial concluded that a policy decision, action or failure of an actor or actors was a cause of regional instability, violence or crisis. The conflict frame was coded present when a hostile confrontation between the parties was the main feature of the editorial foreground. The human interest frame was coded as present when the editorial focused on the civilian suffering, personal story, or humanitarian consequences as main concerns. The economic consequences frame was coded present when the editorial was related to financial costs or sanctions or material implications.

The presence of the morality frame was coded when the editorial assessed actors' actions in terms of religious values, ethics and principles. One main frame was selected from each editorial, depending on which frame appeared most salient most prominently, was most frequently invoked in the editorial, and was most central to the argumentative structure of the editorial.

During the second phase, each of the 412 editorials was individually checked for the appearance of nuclear references without any interdependence. A nuclear reference was considered any reference directly related to Iran's nuclear program, nuclear weapons capability, uranium enrichment, weapons-grade material, centrifuge activity, nuclear deterrence, nuclear breakout timeline or IAEA-related terms pertaining to its strategic capability.

Editorials with at least one nuclear reference were then coded according to the dominant framing function of the nuclear references with the same 5-frame scheme: responsibility function (nuclear references assigning the region to an Iranian nuclear ambition), conflict function (nuclear references situating the program in competitive regional context), morality function (nuclear references referring to the program as a deterrent or as a dangerous provocation), human interest function (nuclear references referring to the program in terms of humanitarian or civilian consequences), and economic function (nuclear references referring to the program in terms of sanctions, costs and material consequences).

Inter-Coder Reliability

Two trained coders worked independently on all 412 editorials. Inter-coder reliability was assessed using Cohen's kappa for both the primary frame assignment stage and the nuclear reference identification and framing stages. For primary frame assignment, kappa = 0.83, indicating strong agreement. For nuclear reference identification, kappa = 0.86. For nuclear frame function assignment, kappa = 0.81. All three reliability values meet or exceed the 0.80 threshold commonly used in media framing research. Disagreements were resolved through discussion and consensus between the two coders.

Statistical Analysis

Chi-square tests were used to assess whether differences in nuclear reference rates across outlets were statistically significant, and whether nuclear frame function distributions differed across outlets. Effect sizes are reported as Cramer's V. A separate chi-square test assessed whether each outlet's nuclear frame distribution differed significantly from its overall frame distribution, enabling direct assessment of the amplification hypothesis.

FINDINGS

Overall Frame Distribution

Table 1 presents the primary frame distribution across the full 412-editorial corpus, establishing the baseline framing positions within which nuclear references operate. Each editorial is coded for one primary frame.

Table 1: Primary Frame Distribution by Outlet (N = 412)

Frame	Kayhan Intl. (n=178)	Wall St. Journal (n=95)	Haaretz (n=139)	Total (N=412)
Responsibility	19.7% (n=35)	52.6% (n=50)	28.8% (n=40)	30.3% (n=125)
Conflict	42.1% (n=75)	22.1% (n=21)	22.3% (n=31)	30.8% (n=127)
Morality	27.5% (n=49)	14.7% (n=14)	16.5% (n=23)	20.8% (n=86)
Human Interest	7.9% (n=14)	6.3% (n=6)	24.5% (n=34)	13.1% (n=54)
Economic	2.8% (n=5)	4.2% (n=4)	7.9% (n=11)	4.9% (n=20)
Total	**100% (n=178)**	**100% (n=95)**	**100% (n=139)**	**100% (n=412)**

Note. Each editorial received one primary frame assignment based on salience. Cross-outlet differences are statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 74.31$, $df = 8$, $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = 0.30$). Inter-coder reliability $\kappa = 0.83$.

Conflict (42.1%) dominates the framing of Kayhan International news articles, with morality (27.5%) being the second most used frame, owing to its focus on emphasizing the conflictual nature of the Iran-Israel relationship and moral position of Iran against Israeli aggression. In The Wall Street Journal, responsibility (52.6%) stands out as the dominant frame due to its editorial inclination to lay responsibility for regional instability at the feet of Iran's policies. Haaretz's distribution is relatively even among responsibility (28.8%), conflict (22.3%), and human interest (24.5%), a reflection of its multi-causal analysis in the liberal tradition. Human interest (24.5%) takes precedence in Haaretz compared to Kayhan (7.9%) and WSJ (6.3%).

Nuclear Reference Prevalence

Table 2 presents the frequency with which nuclear references appeared in each outlet's editorial corpus. The pattern of nuclear reference rates diverges substantially across outlets.

Table 2: Nuclear Reference Prevalence by Outlet

Outlet	Total Editorials	With Nuclear Refs.	Nuclear Rate (%)	Dominant Frame
Kayhan International	178	22	12.4%	Morality
Wall Street Journal	95	63	66.3%	Responsibility
Haaretz	139	44	31.7%	Responsibility (qualified)
Total	**412**	**129**	**31.3%**	

Note. Cross-outlet nuclear reference rate differences are statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 81.47$, $df = 2$, $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = 0.45$). Inter-coder reliability for nuclear reference identification $\kappa = 0.86$.

The WSJ has incorporated nuclear references in 66.3% of the editorials on the topic of the conflict between Iran and Israel, a practice nearly five times more common than the use of the term by Kayhan International (12.4%), and more than twice as frequent as its use by Haaretz (31.7%). This discrepancy is itself a signal in the context of the framing process. For the WSJ, nuclear references serve as one way of implementing the dominant responsibility framing through which coverage on this topic has been conducted, making it frequent. In the case of Kayhan, this would contradict their morality framing which praises Iranian resistance, so that it is infrequent there.

Nuclear Frame Function Distribution

Table 3 shows how nuclear references were distributed across the five frames within each outlet's coverage, revealing the dominant framing function nuclear references serve.

Table 3: Frame Function of Nuclear References by Outlet

Frame Function	Kayhan Intl. (n=22)	Wall St. Journal (n=63)	Haaretz (n=44)
Responsibility (Iranian causation)	9.1%	68.3%	36.4%
Conflict (competitive dynamics)	13.6%	15.9%	27.3%
Morality (deterrence / threat eval.)	63.6%	11.1%	20.5%
Human Interest (humanitarian risk)	9.1%	3.2%	11.4%
Economic (sanctions / costs)	4.5%	11.1%	6.8%

Note. Percentages represent the proportion of nuclear-reference editorials within each outlet assigned to each frame function. Cross-outlet nuclear frame function distribution: $\chi^2 = 62.18$, $df = 8$, $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = 0.39$. Inter-coder reliability for nuclear frame function assignment $\kappa = 0.81$.

The contrasts across outlets are marked. Kayhan International channels 63.6% of its nuclear references through the morality frame, positioning Iranian strategic capability as principled deterrence and deflecting responsibility attribution entirely. The Wall Street Journal directs 68.3% of nuclear references through the responsibility frame, establishing Iran's weapons program as the causal explanation for regional aggression. Haaretz distributes nuclear references across responsibility (36.4%), conflict (27.3%), and morality (20.5%) with no single dominant cluster, reflecting the outlet's multi-causal editorial approach.

Amplification Analysis: Nuclear vs. Overall Frame Distributions

Tables 4, 5, and 6 present the amplification analysis, comparing each outlet's nuclear frame distribution against its overall primary frame distribution to assess whether nuclear references intensify or deviate from dominant framing positions.

Table 4: Kayhan International Nuclear vs. Overall Frame Distribution

Frame	Overall (%)	Nuclear Refs. (%)	Difference (pp)
Responsibility	19.7%	9.1%	−10.6
Conflict	42.1%	13.6%	−28.5
Morality	27.5%	63.6%	**+36.1**
Human Interest	7.9%	9.1%	+1.2
Economic	2.8%	4.5%	+1.7

Note. pp = percentage points. Highlighted row indicates the frame most intensified in nuclear coverage relative to overall coverage.

Table 5: Wall Street Journal Nuclear vs. Overall Frame Distribution

Frame	Overall (%)	Nuclear Refs. (%)	Difference (pp)
Responsibility	52.6%	68.3%	**+15.7**
Conflict	22.1%	15.9%	−6.2

Morality	14.7%	11.1%	−3.6
Human Interest	6.3%	3.2%	−3.1
Economic	4.2%	11.1%	+6.9

Note. pp = percentage points. Highlighted row indicates the frame most intensified in nuclear coverage relative to overall coverage.

Table 6: Haaretz Nuclear vs. Overall Frame Distribution

Frame	Overall (%)	Nuclear Refs. (%)	Difference (pp)
Responsibility	28.8%	36.4%	+7.6
Conflict	22.3%	27.3%	+5.0
Morality	16.5%	20.5%	+4.0
Human Interest	24.5%	11.4%	−13.1
Economic	7.9%	6.8%	−1.1

Note. pp = percentage points. No single frame is dramatically amplified, consistent with Haaretz's multi-causal analytical approach.

Indeed, amplification is confirmed by the data in accordance with the theoretical expectations. The highest amplification in nuclear news coverage is found in Kayhan through the use of the morality frame a 36.1 percent increase in relation to all frames used in that newspaper's coverage, constituting the maximum amplification in any case examined. This implies that if Kayhan editorials have any nuclear references, then they amplify them as references highlighting principled resistance on the part of Iran. Thus, nuclear references in this publication do not highlight the conflict but instead focus on the morality framework. The WSJ also has one frame intensified in nuclear news – the responsibility frame amplified by 15.7 percent. Thus, it can be concluded that nuclear references emphasize the responsibility of Iran for the destabilization of the region. Haaretz does not show any distinct amplification. However, the most intense deviation is a reduction of 13.1 percent in the use of the human interest frame for nuclear stories.

DISCUSSION

H1 forecasted that Kayhan International would have nuclear references mainly in the morality frame and a nuclear reference rate significantly lower than the other outlets. The results support H1. The nuclear reference rate for Kayhan is lowest (12.4%) among the three outlets, and 63.6% of his nuclear references are coded in the morality frame. Nuclear coverage has the highest amplification in the study at 36.1 percentage points.

H2 estimated that WSJ's nuclear mentions would be made mostly within the responsibility frame area, compared to the other outlets, who would have limited use of nuclear. The results correspond with the finding of H2. The nuclear reference rate (66.3%) is the highest of the three outlets and 68.3% of the nuclear references are coded into the responsibility frame intensifying category by 15.7 percentage points above the overall reference rate for the outlet (52.6%). The prediction for Haaretz was that the references to the nuclear issue would be spread across different frames, with no one dominant cluster.

H3's prediction was that there would be no single dominant cluster of nuclear references in Haaretz. The results partly support the hypothesis H3. Haaretz doesn't have a specific nuclear frame like Kayhan's morality cluster, or WSJ's responsibility cluster. But responsibility framing seems to be a little more common in nuclear coverage (36.4%) than conflict or morality framing. The lack of dramatic amplification, as opposed to the presence of perfect evenness, is the hallmark of Haaretz's nuclear framing.

H4 assumed that nuclear frame distributions would be the same as the distributions of the overall frames of each outlet. The results support the H4 and WSJ, but partially support H4 for Haaretz. Kayhan's and WSJ's nuclear frame distributions are quite strong, giving

their dominant overall frames a boost. The nuclear distribution profile is fairly similar to that of all of Haaretz, except in human interest, which is less salient in the coverage of the nuclear topic, indicating that the nuclear issue has a slight tendency to alter the coverage from a human interest perspective to a strategic one.

Ideological Infrastructure and Nuclear Coverage

The main conclusion of this research, that nuclear references in the editorials of the conflict have the role of amplifying the ideas of the conflict rather than being an independent journalistic category, has theoretical and practical implications. It theoretically builds on the work of Entman (1993) on framing as ideologically specified by showing how the amplification mechanism can work with respect to multiple coverage dimensions. The three outlets studied do not treat the issue of Iran's nuclear program as a special case that demands analytical judgment; the nuclear program is treated as a confirmation of the preexisting ideological stance, which has formed based on their general editorial work on the Iran-Israel conflict.

This is in line with Yaghoobi's (2009) observation of the Hezbollah-Israel war, when the syntactic focus on the actions of the Israelis in the target language, combined with the creation of active constructions, showed ideological commitments that were found in all areas of coverage. In addition, it is similar to Alim's (2024) finding that Al Jazeera and BBC framed the missile strikes against Iran in April 2024 with pre-established institutional frames, rather than creating new ones that were responsive to the event's specific nature. Now, the evidence from three separate conflict settings and over time of conflict is converging on the finding that an ideology of conflict journalism is a template that absorbs new elements of conflict coverage, strategically significant ones such as the nuclear weapon programs, and integrates them into existing conflict narratives. It is important to highlight.

Kayhan's scale of morality amplification (36.1 percentage points). It's not only that Kayhan doesn't make Iran's nuclear program sound dangerous, he actively deflects the relatively few times the word "nuclear" is used, into a morality framing that promotes Iranian strategic capability as principled deterrence. This tends to indicate that rather than a substantive discussion about Iran's weapons program, the nuclear issue in Kayhan serves to bolster the outlet's fundamental message of Iranian moral legitimacy. The lack of nuclear references (12.4% of editorials) alongside the almost full and exclusive use of the topic of morality framing (63.6%) indicates a conscious editorial choice for nuclear topic avoidance, but selective affirmation of the moral.

The WSJ's Responsibility Amplification and Its Policy Implications

The responsibility amplification (15.7 percentage points) by WSJ shows how nuclear framing works in a conservative American editorial context. WSJ takes its responsibility frame approach with Iran-related editorials, directing 68.3% of nuclear-related references through that frame, in order to create a causal chain: If Iran funds and guides proxy organizations without fear of reprisal, its nuclear program is the reason, and the cycle of proxy aggression will continue if its nuclear program is not stopped. The seamless causal chain of nuclear program, proxy sponsorship, and regional destabilization is packaged into a single blame game, which naturalistically culminates in policy suggestions of pressure against Iran's nuclear weapons program through coercive measures.

This policy logic is reflected in the noticeable rise in the economic frame in nuclear coverage (4.2% of the overall coverage to 11.1% of nuclear editorials, an increase of 6.9%). The economic approach to coverage of nuclear issues reflects the WSJ's editorial stance that sanctions are the means to deal with the nuclear threat, as consistently promoted by WSJ editorials throughout the study period. The idea of economic sanctions as a tool that can be used to pressure Iran to slow its nuclear program is thus linked to a coherent policy stance: Iran is responsible for the region's instability and should be pressured to stop its nuclear program.

Haaretz's Qualified Nuclear Engagement

Haaretz's framing with the nuclear word is in a unique place between Kayhan's suppression and WSJ's amplification. The lack of dramatic frame amplification, together with a modest responsibility frame increase (from 28.8% of all stories to 36.4% in nuclear editorials, overall), indicates that Haaretz recognizes Iranian nuclear ambitions as a serious issue, but not the only one responsible for regional instability. This stance is in line with the outlet's liberal critical sensibility of assigning blame to a number of actors and avoiding the single-cause explanation that would make the Iranian nuclear program or the failure of the Israeli government the sole reason for the crisis.

The most conspicuous result of the Haaretz analysis is the sharp drop in human interest framing of nuclear coverage (from 24.5% of all nuclear coverage to 11.4% of all nuclear coverage, or a decrease of 13.1 points). In its overall coverage of conflict, Haaretz always links strategy with civilian impact casualties, displacement, humanitarian access. However, in nuclear coverage the outlet moves away from humanitarian angle and towards strategic analysis, indicating that nuclear nodes trigger a more distinctly security angle editorial approach. The change could be a result of the abstractness of the threat of nuclear weapons, as opposed to the more concrete nature of airstrikes, ground operations and hostage situations that Haaretz often uses to frame reports of conflicts in general.

Implications for Media Literacy and Policy Discourse

The conclusion that the nuclear framing is not based on the merits of journalistic reporting, but rather on ideology has real-world consequences in the way publics and policy makers react to media coverage of Iran's weapons program. Readers of WSJ who are reading about the Iran-Israel conflict for the first time will find references to nuclear issues inside the frames that make Iran's role the main reason for the instability in the region. For the audiences primarily oriented to Kayhan, the reference to nuclear is unlikely to be seen often, and when it does occur it is within the frames of morality that justify Iranian strategic capability as resistance. Those readers who read Haaretz will be exposed to a more diverse story that does not rule out nuclear issues, but does not make them the main element.

These divergent nuclear framings correspond to different policy preferences. Research on framing effects has demonstrated that the frames to which audiences are exposed shape their judgments about the legitimacy of different policy responses, including the use of military force, the imposition of sanctions, and the pursuit of diplomatic engagement (Iyengar, 1991). While the present study is limited to content analysis and cannot establish direct effects on audiences, the divergence in nuclear framing documented here is consistent with the divergence in policy preferences that characterizes publics in the three countries whose outlets are examined.

The implication for media literacy is that readers engaging with coverage of Iran's nuclear program in the context of the Iran-Israel conflict should approach editorial positions with awareness of the framing framework within which nuclear references are embedded. A nuclear reference in a WSJ editorial is performing a different function establishing Iranian causal responsibility than a nuclear reference in a Kayhan editorial celebrating Iranian deterrence capability or in a Haaretz editorial acknowledging one dimension of a complex multi-causal situation. Understanding which frame function a nuclear reference serve is prerequisite to evaluating the editorial argument it supports.

LIMITATIONS

Scope Restricted to Editorials

The study is restricted to editorials only and does not cover news reporting.

Reliance on English-Language Editions

It relies solely on English-language editions of all three outlets, which may not fully represent domestic-language coverage.

Limited Timeframe

The seventeen-month timeframe (October 2023–March 2025) does not allow for longitudinal analysis of how nuclear framing

may have shifted across distinct phases of the conflict.

No Direct Audience or Policy Effects
As a content-analysis study, it cannot establish direct effects on audience perceptions or policy preferences only the framing patterns themselves.

CONCLUSION

This study compares and contrasts the three ideologically different media outlets – Kayhan International, The Wall Street Journal and Haaretz – in their depiction of Iran's nuclear dimension in their editorial reporting during the Iran-Israel conflict 2023-2025. The five-frame typology of editorials described by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) indicates that the references to nuclear topics in the editorial coverage of conflicts do not constitute a separate category of editorial discourse but rather are part of the larger category of the ideological framing position of each outlet.

Kayhan International's tendency to suppress the threat framing of the nuclear program is reflected by the inclusion of the rare nuclear reference within the morality frames, which gain a morality amplification of 36.1 percentage points above the nuclear program's amount of such frames. In a comparison with Kayhan, the WSW uses nuclear references more than five times and builds Iran's weapons program as the primary cause of regional instability by 15.7 percentage points. In a multi-causal framing structure, which is less prone to single-frame amplification, Haaretz recognizes the nuclear dimension, with only modest changes in the responsibility, conflict and morality frames, and a significant drop in the human interest frame in terms of coverage of the nuclear dimension.

This evidence supports the theory that lies at the core of this study, which states that ideology plays a role in amplifying conflicts through journalistic coverage and that the media coverage itself does not act as a neutral environment for evaluating the facts of the case. The coverage of nuclear issues in Iran is not influenced by the facts of the matter but rather by their interpretation. This has important implications for public understanding of the conflict and for the quality of policy discourse about one of the most consequential strategic questions in contemporary international relations.

The study's limitations include its restriction to editorials, its dependence on English-language editions of all three outlets, and the seventeen-month timeframe that does not allow longitudinal analysis of how nuclear framing evolved across distinct phases of the conflict. Future research should examine whether the amplification mechanism identified here extends to news reporting as well as editorial commentary, and whether it holds for outlets in additional countries with distinct positions on the Iran-Israel conflict. Audience research examining the effects of different nuclear frame exposures on policy preferences would complete the causal chain that content analysis alone cannot establish.

The central contribution of this study is to demonstrate that nuclear threat framing in conflict coverage is best understood not as a specialist subfield of conflict journalism but as an expression of the same ideological infrastructure that shapes all dimensions of each outlet's coverage. Recognizing this amplification mechanism is essential for evaluating how media coverage constructs public understanding of the relationship between Iran's weapons program and the broader conflict in which it is embedded.

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