

The Iran–Israel war in international news media: A comparative analysis of news frames

Uluslararası haber medyasında İran-İsrail savaşı: Haber çerçevelerinin karşılaştırmalı analizi

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Abstract

This study comparatively examines how the Iran-Israel war is framed in the international news media. It aims to identify similarities and differences in the ways CNN, TRT World, Al Jazeera, and Russia Today (RT) construct the conflict through their thematic priorities, actor representations, source use, linguistic emphases, and political-discursive orientation. The research covers 160 news reports published between February 28 and April 28, 2026, with 40 reports selected from each news organization. The reports were analyzed using content analysis. The findings reveal distinct framing patterns across the four outlets. CNN primarily emphasizes regional security, U.S. decision-making processes, and energy markets, whereas TRT World highlights criticism of Israel, anti-war rhetoric, and regional stability. Al Jazeera gives greater prominence to Gulf security, civilian impacts, and debates on law and legitimacy. RT, by contrast, foregrounds U.S.-Israeli interventionism, criticism of the West, and Iran's sovereignty discourse. Overall, the findings show that the same conflict is presented through different framing priorities and political-discursive orientations, producing distinct interpretations of the war across international news organizations.

Keywords: Iran-Israel war, news framing, international media, war reporting

Öz

Bu çalışma, İran-İsrail savaşının uluslararası haber medyasında çerçevelenme biçimini karşılaştırmalı olarak incelemektedir. Çalışma, CNN, TRT World, Al Jazeera ve Russia Today'in (RT) çatışmayı ele alış biçimindeki benzerlik ve farklılıkları ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır. Araştırmada, CNN, TRT World, Al Jazeera ve Russia Today (RT) tarafından 28 Şubat-28 Nisan 2026 tarihleri arasında yayımlanan 160 haber değerlendirilmiştir. Her haber kuruluşundan seçilen 40 haber; ana tema, baskın çerçeve, aktör temsilleri, kaynak kullanımı, dilsel vurgular ve politik-söylemsel yönelim açısından içerik analizi yöntemiyle incelenmiştir. Bulgular, haber kuruluşlarının savaşı ortak bir anlatı içinde sunmadığını göstermektedir. CNN bölgesel güvenlik, ABD'nin karar alma süreçleri ve enerji piyasalarını öne çıkarırken, TRT World İsrail eleştirisini savaş karşıtı söylem ve bölgesel istikrarla birlikte ele almıştır. Al Jazeera'da ise Körfez güvenliği, siviller üzerindeki etkiler ve hukuk/meşruiyet tartışmaları daha belirgindir. RT ise ABD-İsrail müdahaleciliği, Batı eleştirisi ve İran'ın egemenlik söylemini öne çıkarmıştır. Genel olarak bulgular, aynı çatışmanın farklı çerçeveleme öncelikleri ve politik-söylemsel yönelimler doğrultusunda sunulduğunu göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İran-İsrail savaşı, haber çerçeveleme, uluslararası medya, savaş haberleri

Citation:

Kaya, E. B. (2026). The Iran–Israel war in international news media: A comparative analysis of news frames, 23, e1983571.
<https://doi.org/10.26466/opusjsr.1983571>

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Introduction

Ben Aharon (2024) notes that Iran and Israel maintained semi-covert relations before 1979, while the 1980s and 1990s marked a transition toward the mutual hostility that became firmly established in the early 2000s. Rezaei and Cohen (2014) argue that the Islamic Revolution ended the close relationship between the two countries and redirected Iran's foreign policy. They further associate the emergence of direct rivalry with the collapse of the Soviet Union and Iraq's defeat in the Gulf War, which altered the regional balance and intensified competition for regional leadership. Iran's growing regional influence and military power increasingly challenged Israel's dominance. This historical and geopolitical rivalry provides the broader context for the contemporary Iran–Israel conflict.

The Iran–Israel war is not limited to military tensions between the two countries; it is also significant in terms of regional security, energy policies, diplomacy, and international power balances. Such conflicts can be covered in different ways in the international news media depending on the priorities and political stances of news organizations.

The way international conflicts are framed in the media not only influences the narrative of the news but also shapes how the conflict is politically interpreted. According to Evans (2010, p. 209), the way external conflicts are framed in the media determines how the public and policymakers perceive the causes, consequences, and significance of these conflicts. Therefore, examining how the Iran–Israel war is presented in different news organizations is important for understanding the political meanings produced through news coverage.

The news media is not merely a tool that reports on events in political conflicts; it is a key actor that contributes to the formation of the political agenda and plays a role in constructing social frames related to the conflict (Wolfsfeld, 1997, p. 3). Reuben (2009, p. 60) states that the news media can reinforce conflict dynamics by framing the conflict's issues, the identities of the parties involved, the relationships between them, and the conflict process

in specific ways. Therefore, it is important to examine which actors are highlighted in war and crisis coverage, to whom responsibility is attributed, and within what political framework the conflict is presented.

The study analyzes news reports published between February 28 and April 28, 2026, in terms of themes, dominant frames, actors, source use, modes of representation, and political-discursive orientation. Thus, it examines how different news organizations interpret the same issue through their news priorities, actors, and discursive emphases.

Accordingly, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do CNN, TRT World, Al Jazeera, and RT differ in the main themes and dominant frames through which they present the Iran–Israel war?
2. Which actors are foregrounded or backgrounded in each news organization's coverage, and how are these actors represented?
3. How do linguistic emphases and source-use patterns differ across the four news organizations?
4. What political-discursive orientations characterize each news organization's coverage of the war?

By comparing the four news organizations across these dimensions, the study seeks to reveal the relationship between news framing, actor representation, source use, and political discourse in war reporting, thereby contributing to the literature on international war coverage across different editorial and political contexts.

Theoretical Framework

News Framing and War Reporting

War journalism tends to frame conflict as a struggle between opposing sides seeking to prevail over one another, an approach that can contribute to polarization and escalation. In contrast, peace jour-

nalism is centered on conflict transformation, depolarization, and de-escalation (Galtung, 1998). Lynch (2015, p. 193) emphasizes the role of editors and reporters in deciding what to report and how to report it in ways that create opportunities for audiences to consider and value nonviolent responses to conflict. This distinction provides a useful theoretical basis for examining how news organizations construct conflict through their reporting choices and whether their coverage tends toward polarization and escalation or gives greater visibility to conflict transformation and nonviolent responses.

In war and conflict reporting, the media does not merely convey events but also assigns specific meanings to them. According to Maslog, Lee, and Kim (2006, p. 20), conflict news or war journalism assumes that the conflict possesses news value. Therefore, in war news, which events are reported is as important as how these events are constructed in terms of which parties, causes, and consequences are emphasized. Park and Oliullah (2025, p. 124) also point out that during times of war, the media does not merely convey information but also contributes to the formation of public opinion and the shaping of interest in the conflict. From this perspective, war reporting offers an important avenue for understanding how the conflict is interpreted at the social and political levels.

Framing analysis is widely used in the study of war and conflict reporting (Al Nahed & Hammond, 2018, p. 365). Similarly, Evans (2010, p. 210) states that framing studies aim to explain which elements the media selects and which it highlights when presenting a topic to the public. This approach demonstrates that war reporting involves more than the event itself; it also concerns who is highlighted, which causes are emphasized, and which parties are held responsible.

The framing concept is theoretically rooted in Erving Goffman's (1974) framework analysis. Goffman argues that individuals make sense of the events they encounter in daily life through specific interpretive schemas. This approach has provided an important theoretical foundation for explaining

how news content is selected, organized, and presented within specific meaning frames in media studies. According to Entman (1993), framing is the process of selecting certain aspects of perceived reality to make them more visible and thereby support a specific interpretation. In this process, the media defines an issue, explains its causes, offers moral judgments, and implies possible solutions. Consequently, the frames used in news reports can influence how individuals perceive, interpret, and evaluate events.

Frames become particularly prominent during times of war and crisis. This is because, during these periods, news texts present the parties to the conflict, its causes, victims, perpetrators, and potential consequences within specific narratives. According to Gamson and Modigliani (1989, p. 3), media discourse can influence the public's evaluation of events by structuring them within specific interpretive packages. Kaur and Arora (2025, p. 1) also suggest that the frames used by the news media, particularly during periods of conflict, can have a powerful impact on readers' opinions and may even exacerbate the conflict itself. For this reason, the frames used in war reporting influence not only the narrative form of the news but also how the conflict is positioned in the public sphere.

The role of the media in conflict processes is a significant area of debate in international communication and war journalism studies. Gilboa (2009, p. 88) argues that despite the critical importance of the roles the media plays in conflict and conflict resolution processes, this field has been relatively neglected by both researchers and practitioners. This situation demonstrates that war and conflict news must be examined not only at the level of event reporting but also in terms of framing, actor selection, source usage, and the production of political discourse.

Actor Representation and Political Discourse in the Media

Actor representation in conflict news is one of the fundamental elements that determine the political dimension of the news narrative. Tenenboim-

Weinblatt, Hanitzsch, and Nagar (2016, pp. 155–156) approach conflict news through actors and events, evaluating these two elements as the building blocks of the news narrative. According to the authors, the visibility of actors in conflict news and which side is attributed responsibility are crucial for understanding how the news narrative is constructed. Therefore, which actors are placed at the center, which are pushed to the background, and which sides are positioned as responsible or victimized directly influence the political meaning of the conflict.

Actor representation concerns not only who is included in the news text but also how these individuals or groups are named and associated with specific actions. These choices are among the key elements that determine the political orientation of news discourse. Zhu and Liu (2024, p. 361) emphasize that examining how media discourse frames conflicts contributes to understanding how the roles and actions of actors involved in the conflict are interpreted, evaluated, and justified. This approach demonstrates that in war reporting, actors can be presented not merely as news sources or parties to the event, but within different political and moral positions. Actors may be positioned at times as legitimate or defensive, and at other times as threatening, aggressive, victimized, or responsible parties.

The labels used in conflict news are important discursive tools that determine how actors are perceived by the public. Ononiwu (2023, p. 14) states that derogatory labels such as “occupiers,” “militants,” “neo-Nazis,” and “terrorists” can be used deliberately in news reports. According to the author, such labels can increase tension between two groups by creating a stereotypical or inaccurate image of the out-group. The terminology used in war news not only defines the actors but also assigns specific political and moral meanings to them.

This is also related to how the image of the enemy is constructed in conflict reporting. According to Osimen, Dele-Dada, and Osere (2025, pp. 2–3), the media plays a significant role in shaping public perception, particularly through the construction

of enemy images during periods of conflict. The authors suggest that enemy images are constructed through selective media framing, biased language, and the presentation of opposing sides in sharp contrast. In this process, the opposing side is often portrayed as malicious, irrational, or inhuman; complex conflicts can be reduced to a “good-versus-evil” dichotomy. Therefore, actor representation is not merely about who appears in the news; it also reveals the political and moral positions to which the parties are assigned.

Method

Research Model

This study examines how the Iran-Israel war is framed in the international news media using comparative content analysis. The research investigates how news organizations from different countries and with different political and editorial orientations present the same war through actors, modes of representation, linguistic emphases, source use, and political-discursive orientations.

Research Corpus and Sampling

The research corpus consists of online news articles published by international news organizations on the Iran-Israel war. The study includes TRT World, CNN, Al Jazeera, and Russia Today (RT). These organizations were selected because they represent different editorial stances and are well-known international news organizations. This selection made it possible to compare how the war was framed by news organizations based in Türkiye, the U.S., Qatar, and Russia.

The corpus consists of news articles published between February 28, 2026, and April 28, 2026. This timeframe was selected because it covers a period in which news coverage of the Iran-Israel war intensified and the war became more visible in the international media through issues such as regional security, energy markets, diplomacy, military escalation, and political accountability. A total

of 160 news articles were analyzed, with 40 articles selected from each news outlet. Article selection considered both direct relevance to the Iran-Israel war and temporal coverage across the study period. Updated versions of the same news item were treated as a single article and were not counted as separate entries. The articles were selected through purposive sampling following a screening of potentially relevant news items published during the specified period. When the number of eligible items exceeded 40, priority was given to articles with greater direct relevance to the war while maintaining temporal coverage across the study period. The aim was to construct a comparable corpus of directly relevant news reports from each organization rather than to include all items published during the period. Only news texts directly related to the Iran-Israel war were included. Opinion pieces, editorials, video content, live blogs, and indirect content that did not directly focus on the war were excluded.

Data Collection Process

The data were collected from English-language news texts available on the official websites of the selected news organizations. Keywords such as “Iran-Israel war,” “Iran Israel war,” “US Israel Iran,” and “Hormuz” were used to identify relevant news stories. During the data collection process, the headline, publication date, news organization, full news text, sources used, prominent actors, and general context of each news story were recorded. These elements formed the basis for the coding and analysis process.

Data Analysis and Coding Categories

The data were analyzed using content analysis. The analytical dimensions were developed with reference to the literature on news framing, war reporting, and actor representation. Goffman (1974) provided a theoretical basis for understanding frames as interpretive structures through which events are organized and made meaningful. Entman

(1993) further informed the identification of dominant frames by emphasizing the selection and salience of particular aspects of perceived reality. Tenenboim-Weinblatt et al. (2016) drew attention to the visibility of actors and the attribution of responsibility in conflict news, which informed the distinction between dominant and secondary actors. Zhu and Liu (2024) further emphasized that the roles and actions assigned to conflict actors are central to how they are interpreted and evaluated, providing a basis for examining modes of representation. The linguistic emphasis category was informed by studies showing how labeling, biased language, and oppositional constructions can shape the portrayal of conflict actors (Ononiwu, 2023; Osimen et al., 2025). Source use was also included as an analytical dimension in light of research demonstrating that the sources privileged in war reporting can influence how conflict is framed (Maslog, Lee, & Kim, 2006). The specific themes, frame labels, and political-discursive orientation categories were subsequently refined through repeated examination of the news corpus in accordance with the research questions.

In operational terms, the coding scheme was designed to capture how particular aspects of the war were selected and made salient in the news. The main theme and dominant frame categories were used to identify how the central problem or issue was defined in each news story. Causal interpretations were examined through the attribution of responsibility, modes of representation, and linguistic emphases related to responsibility and blame. Moral evaluations were addressed through modes of representation, linguistic emphasis, and political-discursive orientation, which revealed how actors and actions were legitimized, criticized, or evaluated. Treatment recommendations were reflected in categories related to diplomacy, ceasefire, de-escalation, and the search for diplomatic solutions. In this way, Entman’s (1993) four framing functions provided an analytical guide for interpreting the coding categories rather than serving as a separate coding scheme.

Each news story was coded according to the following categories: main theme, dominant frame,

dominant actor, secondary actors, mode of representation, linguistic emphasis, use of sources, and political-discursive orientation. For each news story, one dominant theme and one dominant frame were assigned. One primary category was also assigned for mode of representation, linguistic emphasis, source use, and political-discursive orientation, based on the dominant pattern in each news story. If a news story contained more than one possible theme or frame, the most prominent category was selected by considering the headline, introductory paragraph, and overall emphasis of the text.

The person, institution, or group that formed the primary focus of the news story was coded as the dominant actor. Other individuals, institutions, and groups mentioned in the story were coded as secondary actors. Since some news stories included more than one secondary actor, multiple selections were made in this category.

The coding categories were distinguished according to the different aspects of the news stories they were intended to capture. Main theme referred to the primary issue addressed in the story, whereas dominant frame referred to the main interpretive perspective through which that issue was presented. Dominant and secondary actors were distinguished according to their prominence in the news narrative, while mode of representation focused on the roles and characteristics attributed to those actors. Linguistic emphasis was identified through recurring words, expressions, and discursive patterns that contributed to the way the conflict was presented and was therefore treated separately from the dominant frame itself. Source use was determined by examining which types of sources were used in the story and whether the reporting relied mainly on official actors, specialists or analysts, civilians or eyewitnesses, news agencies, or a combination of different source types. Political-discursive orientation was distinguished from dominant frame by referring to the broader political perspective reflected in the story as a whole, especially through patterns of responsibility attribution, legitimacy, sover-

eignty, intervention, diplomacy, and political alignment. In this way, the categories were used to separate the subject of the story, its main interpretive frame, the prominence and representation of actors, the language used, the sources relied on, and the broader political orientation of the story. The six political-discursive orientations were operationalized respectively through criticism of military intervention and war, prioritization of regional stability, emphasis on multilateral crisis management, foregrounding of Iran's security and sovereignty, support for diplomacy and de-escalation, and alignment with U.S.-Israeli security arguments.

For example, expressions such as "regional unity" and "new security bloc" supported the identification of a regional security frame, whereas expressions such as "worst-case scenario," "radioactive contamination," and "reckless attacks" were treated as textual indicators of risk, responsibility, and law and legitimacy. Such textual cues were evaluated together with the headline, lead paragraph, and overall emphasis of the news story rather than coded in isolation.

The coding was conducted by a single researcher. To improve coding consistency, the same coding criteria were applied to all news stories, and coding decisions were reviewed repeatedly across the dataset.

The coded data were presented in tables with frequency and percentage distributions. These distributions were used to show similarities and differences among the news organizations. In addition to these distributions, the findings were also evaluated in terms of news discourse, political framing, and modes of representation.

Findings

This section presents a comparative analysis of the coding results for a total of 160 news stories published by TRT World, CNN, Al Jazeera, and RT. Each news story was evaluated based on the following categories: main theme, dominant frame, dominant actor, secondary actors, mode of representation, linguistic emphasis, source use, and political-

discursive orientation. Forty news stories were analyzed from each news organization.

This difference indicates that CNN approaches the war primarily through the lens of security and

Table 1. Main Themes in the News

Main Theme	TRT World	CNN	Al Jazeera	RT	Total
Regional spread and security risk	11 (27.5%)	19 (47.5%)	15 (37.5%)	7 (17.5%)	52 (32.5%)
Political actors and alliances	11 (27.5%)	9 (22.5%)	5 (12.5%)	11 (27.5%)	36 (22.5%)
Economic, energy, and market impacts	4 (10%)	7 (17.5%)	9 (22.5%)	3 (7.5%)	23 (14.4%)
Diplomacy and ceasefire	6 (15%)	4 (10%)	3 (7.5%)	8 (20%)	21 (13.1%)
Military operations	5 (12.5%)	1 (2.5%)	4 (10%)	4 (10%)	14 (8.8%)
Law, legitimacy, and sovereignty	3 (7.5%)	0 (0%)	4 (10%)	7 (17.5%)	14 (8.8%)
Total	40	40	40	40	160

Table 1 shows that the four news outlets covered the Iran-Israel war through different thematic emphases. The prominence of the “regional spread and security risk” theme in the overall distribution indicates that the war was reported not merely as a military standoff between two countries, but through the lens of a broader potential regional crisis. This theme is particularly evident in CNN and Al Jazeera. On CNN, this theme is primarily linked to global security, energy transit routes, and the U.S.’s strategic role in the region. On Al Jazeera, however, the focus is on Gulf countries, the Strait of Hormuz, energy infrastructure, and concerns about regional stability.

On TRT World and RT, in addition to security risks, political actors and alliances also take center stage. This indicates that the war is addressed in these two outlets alongside actor relationships, international positions, and power balances. While TRT World addresses the war primarily in the context of regional stability and political responsibility, RT emphasizes U.S.-Israel relations, Western interventionism, and Iran’s position.

Another notable point in the table is that the theme of “law, legitimacy, and sovereignty” is absent from CNN, whereas it is more prominent on RT and Al Jazeera.

strategic risks, whereas RT and Al Jazeera allocate more space to discussions on law, legitimacy, and sovereignty. Consequently, the thematic distribution reveals that news organizations diverge not only in their choice of topics but also in the political meaning they ascribe to the war.

The overall distribution in Table 2 shows that the regional security frame is the most prominent frame. This indicates that the war is generally interpreted not only as a bilateral military confrontation but also as a broader regional and international security issue. CNN uses this frame most frequently, linking the war to strategic risks, U.S. involvement, energy security, and the possibility of regional escalation. For example, one CNN report described the conflict as “widening by the hour” and “drawing in other countries across the region,” while also referring to fears about the global economy. The report’s emphasis on the widening geographical scope of the war and its regional consequences supported its coding within the regional security frame.

Al Jazeera gives more space to the economic cost and law/legitimacy frames, which shows that the war is interpreted through Gulf security, energy infrastructure, civilian consequences, and international law debates. A clear example is Al Jazeera’s report titled “Are US-Israeli attacks against Iran legal under international law?”, which examined the strikes through the UN Charter, self-defence, the

Table 2. Prominent Frames in the News

Dominant Frame	TRT World	CNN	Al Jazeera	RT	Total
Regional security	10 (25%)	17 (42.5%)	9 (22.5%)	6 (15%)	42 (26.3%)
Military tension and escalation	7 (17.5%)	4 (10%)	7 (17.5%)	9 (22.5%)	27 (16.9%)
Economic cost	4 (10%)	7 (17.5%)	10 (25%)	3 (7.5%)	24 (15%)
Law and legitimacy	3 (7.5%)	1 (2.5%)	8 (20%)	8 (20%)	20 (12.5%)
Seeking a diplomatic solution	3 (7.5%)	4 (10%)	3 (7.5%)	5 (12.5%)	15 (9.4%)
Anti-war sentiment	5 (12.5%)	4 (10%)	1 (2.5%)	3 (7.5%)	13 (8.1%)
U.S.-Israel partnership	3 (7.5%)	2 (5%)	2 (5%)	4 (10%)	11 (6.9%)
Israel’s responsibility	5 (12.5%)	1 (2.5%)	0 (0%)	2 (5%)	8 (5%)
Total	40	40	40	40	160

prohibition on the use of force, and the question of aggression. These legal references provided direct textual indicators for the law and legitimacy frame.

RT, by contrast, places greater emphasis on military tension and law/legitimacy, framing the war around U.S.-Israeli interventionism and Iran's sovereignty claims. TRT World, on the other hand, presents a more mixed framing pattern, combining regional security, military tension, anti-war sentiment, and Israel's responsibility.

Table 3. Dominant Actors in the News

Dominant Actor	TRT World	CNN	Al Jazeera	RT	Total
American actors	14 (35%)	19 (47.5%)	12 (30%)	17 (42.5%)	62 (38.8%)
Iranian actors	8 (20%)	8 (20%)	7 (17.5%)	10 (25%)	33 (20.6%)
Israeli actors	9 (22.5%)	7 (17.5%)	4 (10%)	3 (7.5%)	23 (14.4%)
International actors	7 (17.5%)	2 (5%)	2 (5%)	7 (17.5%)	18 (11.3%)
Regional actors	0 (0%)	2 (5%)	8 (20%)	2 (5%)	12 (7.5%)
Civilians	2 (5%)	2 (5%)	7 (17.5%)	1 (2.5%)	12 (7.5%)
Total	40	40	40	40	160

As shown in Table 3, the news coverage highlights actors beyond Iran and Israel. The most striking finding is that U.S. actors constitute the most visible and dominant group across the entire sample. This indicates that the war is not framed only through Iran and Israel, but also through the U.S.'s role in the region.

Actor visibility varies by media outlet. On CNN, U.S. actors are highlighted alongside Washington-based decision-making processes and security risks. On RT, however, the U.S. is portrayed primarily as the instigator of the war, an interventionist power, and a representative of Western-centric politics. The greater emphasis on regional actors and civilians in Al Jazeera indicates that the war is being addressed in conjunction with Gulf security and the social consequences of the war. On TRT World, however, the distribution of actors is more balanced; the war is not framed through a single actor but is examined alongside the roles of various parties.

The secondary actor table indicates other actors mentioned in the text but not at the center of the news story. Since some news stories feature more than one secondary actor, this category is open to multiple selections.

According to Table 4, Iranian, Israeli, and U.S. actors frequently appear at the secondary level as well. This table demonstrates that the war is addressed in news reports not solely through the lens of a single side, but through the roles of various actors.

Iran appears in news reports at times as a military target, at times as a threat, a diplomatic counterpart, or an actor with the capacity to retaliate. Israel, meanwhile, stands out in the context of security justifications, attacks, military targets, and responsibility for the war. The strong presence of the U.S. as a secondary actor shows that the war is discussed not only through Iran and Israel, but also through the U.S.'s role in the region.

The greater visibility of regional actors, particularly on Al Jazeera, indicates that this outlet frames the war in the context of Gulf security, energy transit routes, the Strait of Hormuz, and concerns about regional stability. In contrast, the limited presence of civilians and various segments of society is noteworthy. Although civilians and various segments of society appear in the news, the focus is primarily on states, leaders, military institutions, and international actors. From this perspective, the picture shows that the war is covered in the news not only through the lens of Iran and Israel but also in conjunction with the U.S., regional actors, and in-

Table 4. Secondary Actors in the News

Secondary Actor	TRT World	CNN	Al Jazeera	RT	Total
Iranian actors	28 (70%)	36 (90%)	34 (85%)	34 (85%)	132 (82.5%)
Israeli actors	28 (70%)	32 (80%)	32 (80%)	29 (72.5%)	121 (75.6%)
American actors	22 (55%)	30 (75%)	28 (70%)	29 (72.5%)	109 (68.1%)
Regional actors	19 (47.5%)	29 (72.5%)	30 (75%)	23 (57.5%)	101 (63.1%)
International actors	8 (20%)	15 (37.5%)	16 (40%)	19 (47.5%)	58 (36.3%)
Civilians	2 (5%)	9 (22.5%)	10 (25%)	9 (22.5%)	30 (18.8%)

ternational institutions. Nevertheless, the emphasis of the news remains heavily on security, diplomacy, and power relations.

In Table 6, the emphasis in news coverage centers on tension, the risk of escalation, accountability, and security.

Table 5. Mode of Representation in the News

Mode of Representation	TRT World	CNN	Al Jazeera	RT	Total
Power directing the war	14 (35%)	22 (55%)	10 (25%)	13 (32.5%)	59 (36.9%)
Threat and security risk	4 (10%)	9 (22.5%)	12 (30%)	5 (12.5%)	30 (18.8%)
Diplomatic and mediating actor	8 (20%)	2 (5%)	2 (5%)	8 (20%)	20 (12.5%)
Aggressive and tension-escalating actor	5 (12.5%)	3 (7.5%)	4 (10%)	7 (17.5%)	19 (11.9%)
Civilians affected by the war	3 (7.5%)	3 (7.5%)	7 (17.5%)	1 (2.5%)	14 (8.8%)
Retaliating or resisting actor	3 (7.5%)	0 (0%)	5 (12.5%)	5 (12.5%)	13 (8.1%)
Victim or target actor	3 (7.5%)	1 (2.5%)	0 (0%)	1 (2.5%)	5 (3.1%)
Total	40	40	40	40	160

The findings presented in Table 5 suggest that actors are mostly portrayed as powers that direct the war or influence decision-making processes. Consequently, states, leaders, military institutions, and strategic decision-makers take center stage in the narrative of the war. This mode of representation is particularly evident on CNN. In CNN news reports, the war is addressed primarily through the moves of decision-making actors and security calculations, rather than through individual or societal impacts.

Representation styles also vary across organizations. On Al Jazeera, the greater emphasis on threats/security risks and civilians affected by the war indicates that the war is addressed through both regional risks and humanitarian consequences. The fact that the representation of “retaliating or resisting actors” occupies more space on RT and Al Jazeera compared to CNN indicates that Iran is portrayed not merely as a targeted party but also as an actor that responds and resists. Therefore, these representational forms reveal not only who the actors are but also the specific roles they are assigned within the war.

The fact that language related to tension and escalation ranks first indicates that the war is discussed in relation to the risk of regional spread. This emphasis is more pronounced on TRT World and CNN. TRT World focuses more on the risk of the war’s expansion and the dimension of political responsibility, while CNN devotes more attention to security threats and strategic risks. The textual basis of these categories can also be seen in individual reports. In an RT report on the risk of a nuclear incident in Iran, expressions such as “worst-case scenario,” “radioactive contamination,” and “reckless attacks” reinforced linguistic emphases related to risk, responsibility, and the legal and security consequences of the attacks.

Linguistic emphases vary significantly by organization. The greater prominence of legal and legitimacy language on Al Jazeera and RT indicates that the war is discussed on these two outlets in conjunction with debates on sovereignty, war crimes, civilian casualties, and international law. The strong emphasis on economics and energy in CNN and Al Jazeera, meanwhile, reveals that the war is also being reported through the lens of its impact on oil, LNG, the Strait of Hormuz, and markets.

Table 6. Linguistic Emphases in the News

Linguistic Emphasis	TRT World	CNN	Al Jazeera	RT	Total
Risk of tension and spread	10 (25%)	9 (22.5%)	6 (15%)	7 (17.5%)	32 (20%)
Responsibility and blame	10 (25%)	4 (10%)	5 (12.5%)	8 (20%)	27 (16.9%)
Security and threats	7 (17.5%)	9 (22.5%)	5 (12.5%)	4 (10%)	25 (15.6%)
Law and legitimacy	4 (10%)	1 (2.5%)	9 (22.5%)	8 (20%)	22 (13.8%)
Fragility and stability	5 (12.5%)	6 (15%)	4 (10%)	7 (17.5%)	22 (13.8%)
Economy and energy	1 (2.5%)	8 (20%)	8 (20%)	2 (5%)	19 (11.9%)
Diplomacy and ceasefire	3 (7.5%)	3 (7.5%)	3 (7.5%)	4 (10%)	13 (8.1%)
Total	40	40	40	40	160

Table 7. Source Use in the News

Source Use	TRT World	CNN	Al Jazeera	RT	Total
Mixed	24 (60%)	27 (67.5%)	30 (75%)	24 (60%)	105 (65.6%)
Specialist/analyst	1 (2.5%)	10 (25%)	7 (17.5%)	6 (15%)	24 (15%)
Official weighted	4 (10%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	9 (22.5%)	13 (8.1%)
Civilian/witness account	0 (0%)	3 (7.5%)	3 (7.5%)	0 (0%)	6 (3.8%)
Agency	11 (27.5%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (2.5%)	12 (7.5%)
Total	40	40	40	40	160

According to Table 7, mixed source use stands out across all four news organizations. News reports combine official statements, expert opinions, agency reports, and, in some cases, eyewitness accounts. However, the use of mixed sources does not in itself imply that the news reports are balanced. Which sources are emphasized directly influences the tone of the report and how the war is presented.

Differences among the organizations are particularly evident in the use of expert, official, and civilian/eyewitness accounts. The greater emphasis on experts and analysts in CNN's coverage indicates that the war is analyzed in conjunction with its security, energy, and diplomatic dimensions. The more prominent use of official sources on RT indicates that news stories are constructed based on government statements and political positions. The limited use of civilian and eyewitness accounts on CNN and Al Jazeera indicates that civilian voices remain relatively limited as sources, even where humanitarian impacts are thematically visible. Therefore, source use is crucial for understanding what information the news is based on and through which voices the war is narrated.

This indicates that the war is framed not only through military developments, but also through questions of responsibility, regional stability, energy security, and broader political consequences.

On RT, Critical/Anti-War Orientation is particularly prominent. Together with the Iran-Centered Security and Sovereignty Orientation, this pattern shows that RT presents the war primarily through criticism of U.S.-Israeli intervention, responsibility for the conflict, and Iran's sovereignty and security concerns. CNN, in contrast, is dominated by a Multilateral Crisis-Management Orientation. Its coverage places greater emphasis on mutual risks, security balance, and crisis management. The absence of a Diplomatic/De-escalatory Orientation in CNN is also noteworthy, suggesting that diplomatic resolution is less prominent than risk management and multilateral security concerns.

On Al Jazeera, Regional Stability Orientation is the most prominent category, followed by Critical/Anti-War Orientation. This reflects the outlet's emphasis on Gulf security, the Strait of Hormuz, energy infrastructure, and the regional consequences of the war, alongside questions of political responsibility. TRT World displays an equal prominence of Critical/Anti-War Orientation and Regional Stability Orientation.

Table 8. Political-Discursive Orientation in the News

Political-Discursive Orientation	TRT World	CNN	Al Jazeera	RT	Total
Critical/Anti-War Orientation	13 (32.5%)	2 (5%)	12 (30%)	23 (57.5%)	50 (31.3%)
Regional Stability Orientation	13 (32.5%)	14 (35%)	18 (45%)	4 (10%)	49 (30.6%)
Multilateral Crisis-Management Orientation	1 (2.5%)	19 (47.5%)	5 (12.5%)	4 (10%)	29 (18.1%)
Iran-Centered Security and Sovereignty Orientation	6 (15%)	1 (2.5%)	2 (5%)	9 (22.5%)	18 (11.3%)
Diplomatic/De-escalatory Orientation	5 (12.5%)	0 (0%)	3 (7.5%)	0 (0%)	8 (5%)
U.S.-Israel-Aligned Orientation	2 (5%)	4 (10%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	6 (3.8%)
Total	40	40	40	40	160

Table 8 reveals clear differences in the political-discursive orientations of the four news organizations. Overall, Critical/Anti-War Orientation and Regional Stability Orientation are the two most prominent categories.

The presence of a Diplomatic/De-escalatory Orientation also indicates that TRT World gives some visibility to mediation, de-escalation, and the possibility of diplomatic resolution. This broader orientation is also visible in individual reports. For

Table 9. General Discourse Tendencies of News Organizations

News Organization	Prominent Theme/Frame	Prominent Actors	Political-Discursive Orientation	General News Discourse
CNN	Regional security, strategic risk, energy markets	U.S. actors	Multilateral Crisis-Management Orientation	Security, strategic risk, and crisis management discourse
TRT World	Regional stability, political actors, Israel's responsibility	The U.S., Israel, and international actors are relatively balanced	Critical/Anti-War; Regional Stability Orientation	Political responsibility, anti-war sentiment, and regional stability discourse
Al Jazeera	Gulf security, energy infrastructure, law and legitimacy	Regional actors and civilians are more visible	Regional Stability Orientation	Regional impacts, energy security, and legal/humanitarian consequences discourse
RT	Military tension and escalation, law and legitimacy, U.S.-Israel partnership	U.S. and Iranian actors are prominent	Critical/Anti-War; Iran-Centered Security and Sovereignty	U.S.-Israel interventionism, criticism of the West, and sovereignty discourse

instance, a TRT World story on Iran's proposal for a regional military alliance used expressions such as "regional unity," "new security bloc," and "without relying on outside powers," while presenting the proposed alliance as excluding the United States and Israel. These elements supported the identification of a regional security orientation combined with a critical stance toward a U.S.-Israel-centered security order.

Table 9 brings together the main differences among the four news organizations in terms of themes, actors, and political-discursive orientations. The results show that each outlet makes different actors, risks, and political perspectives more visible.

Discussion and Conclusion

According to the findings, news organizations differ both in the themes they emphasize and in the political meanings they attribute to the Iran-Israel war. Ergen (2024) argues that news content can be presented using different framing strategies linked to countries' political approaches. According to Dingin and Aslan (2025), news agencies' journalistic approaches are shaped in relation to their editorial policies and the foreign policy orientations of the countries they are affiliated with. From this perspective, the current findings indicate that the difference among news organizations stems not only from topic selection but also from the political meaning attributed to the war.

These differences can be interpreted through Entman's (1993) emphasis on selection and salience. The textual examples presented in the findings show that the news organizations make different aspects of the same conflict more prominent. CNN foregrounds regional escalation and strategic risk, Al Jazeera gives greater visibility to questions of law and legitimacy, TRT World combines regional security with criticism of a U.S.-Israel-centered security order, and RT places greater emphasis on intervention, responsibility, and sovereignty. In this sense, the differences observed across the four outlets reflect distinct framing priorities rather than differences in topic frequency alone. Since the present study did not directly examine newsroom decision-making or editorial policy, however, these contextual links should be understood as interpretive rather than causal.

The findings reveal that the use of actors and sources plays a significant role in determining the political tone of news reports. While U.S.-based decision-making processes, diplomatic actors, and security sources are more prominent in CNN's coverage, regional actors, civilians, and an emphasis on international law stand out in Al Jazeera's coverage. Criticism of Israel and anti-war sentiment become more pronounced on TRT World, whereas on RT, the U.S. and Israel are positioned as responsible and interventionist actors. According to Park and Oliullah (2025, p. 129), despite differing political stances, the American mainstream media tends to rely on Israeli and U.S. official sources when reporting on the Israel-Palestine war. Kaur and Arora

(2025, p. 6) also state that references to elite actors in war coverage are more frequent than those to public and civilian actors. Therefore, the use of sources is crucial for understanding what information the news is based on and which actors are given more prominence in the war.

The divergence between CNN and Al Jazeera is one of the most striking findings of the study. While CNN frames the war in terms of security, diplomacy, U.S.-centered decision-making processes, and multilateral risks, Al Jazeera highlights regional vulnerabilities, civilian impacts, and debates over law and legitimacy, demonstrating that the two organizations have different discursive priorities. Bashir, Ahmed, Mirza, and Elham (2025, p. 75) point out that CNN exhibits a more institutional and diplomatic orientation, while Al Jazeera tends toward a framing that carries greater moral urgency centered on victims and violations of international humanitarian law. According to Ibrar and Khan (2025, p. 42), while CNN constructs a security-focused frame, Al Jazeera makes narratives of resistance and humanitarian impact more visible. From this perspective, the distinction between security and diplomacy on the one hand and civilian impacts and debates on law and legitimacy on the other observed in the current study can be evaluated in line with previous CNN–Al Jazeera comparisons.

Alim, Effendi, and Wahyudi (2025, p. 178) emphasize that Al Jazeera addresses the war within its geopolitical context and regional implications. In this regard, the present study's finding that Al Jazeera emphasizes regional fragility, civilian impacts, and debates on law and legitimacy is consistent with previous findings.

The frames of TRT World and RT, however, constitute other key points of divergence in the study. In TRT World, a critical stance toward Israel, anti-war sentiment, and an emphasis on regional stability stand out. In RT, the war is presented primarily through U.S.-Israeli interventionism, criticism of the West, and Iran's sovereignty narrative. This distinction is important for understanding how the political tone shifts through actor naming and the attribution of responsibility in news reports. In this

regard, while the emphasis on law and legitimacy in RT is more closely linked to U.S.-Israeli interventionism and Iran's sovereignty discourse, the same emphasis in Al Jazeera is seen in conjunction with regional impacts, civilian consequences, and debates on international law. According to Sharaf Eldin (2019, pp. 95, 113), the choice of words used in news headlines can position the actors in the war in different ways. Sharaf Eldin's study shows that Al Jazeera tends to frame Palestinian actors primarily within the context of resistance and victimhood, whereas CNN associates Hamas with more negative and illegitimate actions. This aligns with the findings of the current research. In the analyzed news reports, the organizations present the Iran–Israel war through different actor designations, attributions of responsibility, and political emphases.

The difference between news organizations also relates to the perspective from which the war is presented to the reader. According to Evans (2010, pp. 223–224), two Middle Eastern wars of similar nature can be presented in the media through different frames. The author argues that one case is framed through "proximity," encouraging empathy with the victims, whereas the other is framed through "distance," creating emotional separation from them. In this study, news reports highlighting civilian impacts, human casualties, and concerns over law and legitimacy bring to the forefront the aspects of the war that affect people and daily life. In news stories focused on security, diplomacy, energy markets, and strategic decision-making processes, however, the war is primarily addressed through the lens of states, institutions, and decision-makers. This suggests that civilians and various segments of society often remain in the background of state-centered war narratives.

Finally, news language plays an important role in how the war is presented. According to Ononiwu (2023, p. 15), it is particularly important to avoid provocative and divisive news language during periods of intense war, as language choices can shape media consumers' opinions and play a role in either escalating or de-escalating wars. According

to the findings, the frames used and the representations of actors assign different political and moral meanings to the parties. Therefore, in news coverage of the Iran-Israel war, framing, actor representation, and political discourse must be evaluated together.

These differences show that international war reporting is shaped by the events being reported as well as by the actors made visible, the sources used, the responsibilities attributed, and the political framework through which the war is narrated. In this respect, the study contributes to the literature on international war journalism by showing how the same war can be represented with different priorities by news organizations operating in different political and institutional contexts.

However, the research is limited to a specific time frame and four news organizations. Future studies could include news organizations from different countries, longer time frames, visual materials, and social media content to provide a broader comparison of the war's media representation.

Declarations

Funding: The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and / or publication of this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest related to this study.

Ethical Approval: Ethical committee approval was not required for this study because This study is based on a content analysis of publicly available news articles. Ethics committee approval was not required, as no data were collected from human participants and no interventions or experimental procedures were conducted.

Data Availability: The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

AI Disclosure: No artificial intelligence (AI)-based tools or applications were used in the preparation

of this study. The entire content of the study was produced by the author in accordance with scientific research methods and academic ethical principles.

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