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Comparative Analysis of Media Coverage of the Turkish Drone (Akinci) in the Iranian President's Helicopter Search

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Abstract

This study investigates how international news media framed the role of Bayraktar Akıncı drone in the search operation following the May 2024 helicopter crash that resulted in the death of the president of Iran. Drawing on Entman's framing theory, the study aims to identify dominant frames and examine how the evaluative tone toward Turkish and Iranian technological capabilities varies across media. Using qualitative content analysis, seven English-language articles from Anadolu Agency, IRNA, Frontline-The-Hindu, Reuters, The Independent UK, Newsweek, and CBS News were coded in MAXQDA. Applying Entman's four framing functions, the analysis shows that operational–technological framing defined the crash primarily as a logistical and environmental problem solvable through UAV capability (problem definition and treatment recommendation). In contrast, Iranian and select Western outlets reoriented causal attribution by questioning the drone's effectiveness (causal interpretation) and embedded nationalist or geopolitical evaluations when assessing technological performance (moral evaluation). Variations in tone functioned as indirect geopolitical signaling, transforming crisis reporting into a form of symbolic "drone diplomacy," where technological performance operated as a proxy for national prestige and strategic positioning. Tonal patterns were closely aligned with geopolitical proximity: Turkish and neutral outlets were largely positive or balanced, whereas Iranian and some Western outlets were largely skeptical or critical. Source usage played a pivotal role in shaping frames, with Turkish and Iranian outlets relying heavily on domestic official statements, reinforcing national narratives.

Keywords: Drone Technology; Framing Analysis; Iran; Media Framing; News Coverage; Türkiye

Introduction

The portrayal of technological capabilities in international news media plays a pivotal role in shaping public perception and diplomatic discourse (Dhruwey & Rajpopat, 2025). Media framing influences how technological advancements are perceived globally, affecting national pride, diplomatic relations, and public opinion (Ju, Sannusi, & Mohamad, 2023). The recent helicopter crash that resulted in the death of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and other high-ranking officials provides a significant case study for analyzing media narratives surrounding technological contributions and geopolitical dynamics.

The May 2024 helicopter crash is a tractable case for examining how media across political and geographic contexts construct narratives about technological assistance in crisis situations and thereby contribute to broader debates about 'drone diplomacy' and national prestige (Borsari, 2022; Campbell, 2024). Different news outlets often frame the same event through varying lenses, emphasizing particular aspects to suit their narrative objectives (Sheets, Rowling, & Jones, 2015).. For example, studies have shown that media framing can significantly affect audience perceptions of technological

capabilities and international relations (Dell'Orto, Dong, Schneeweis, & Moore, 2004; Yousaf, 2015). In this case, Turkish media highlighted the role of the Turkish Akinci drone in the search operation, portraying it as a symbol of national technological prowess (Acil, 2024). Conversely, Iranian media downplayed the Turkish contribution, focusing instead on Iran's domestic technological capabilities and reflecting a critical stance towards external assistance (IRNA, 2024). Western media, in contrast, often focuses on broader geopolitical implications, including Raisi's controversial political legacy and the significance of the drone technology within the context of international relations.

Recent scholarship identifies drones not only as military tools but also as instruments of statecraft and diplomacy whereby states leverage UAV exports, training and operational support to secure influence abroad, see (Borsari, 2022; Bryan, 2018; Campbell, 2024; Sayler, 2015). The Turkish Bayraktar program is a central case in this literature because Turkish UAVs have been visible in multiple theatres (Ukraine, Libya, Nagorno-Karabakh), and Turkish UAV exports have been linked to diplomatic ties and security partnerships. Positioning the Raisi helicopter case within this debate allows analysis of whether media narratives reproduce, contest, or instrumentalize that emergent diplomacy literature.

Understanding these framing mechanisms is crucial for several reasons. Media framing not only influences public perception by highlighting certain aspects of an event but also shapes attitudes towards technological advancements and international collaboration (Scheufele, 1999). For instance, the emphasis on technology as either a symbol of national pride or a tool with limited effectiveness can impact how audiences view a country's technological status and its role in global affairs. This framing also affects diplomatic relations, as the portrayal of technological contributions can either foster or hinder international communication (Wong & Mulupi, 2024). This study employs a comparative framing analysis to examine how various media outlets depict the subject matter through technological, operational, and geopolitical lenses. By assessing the tone of coverage and the emphasis on technological aspects, the research aims to uncover underlying biases and their potential influence on audience perceptions. Furthermore, the integration of expert opinions and official statements offers a comprehensive perspective on the alignment or divergence between media narratives and official accounts, as well as technological realities. The sample comprises English-language news articles from a diverse array of sources, including regional outlets such as Türkiye's Anadolu Agency and Iran's Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA), alongside international Western media organizations like Newsweek, Reuters, The Independent (UK), and CBS News, and, Frontline The Hindu. This selection facilitates a comparative analysis of regional and international media framing. We focus on English-language coverage to ensure comparability in audience reach and framing style; future work should extend to Persian/Turkish sources to capture domestic discursive dynamics.

The analysis is guided by Entman's framing theory (1993), operationalized through coding categories for problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and recommended remedies. Media framing theory, as articulated by (Goffman, 1974) and further developed by scholars such as Entman (1993) and Scheufele (1999), provides a critical lens for understanding how news media shape public perception through the selection and presentation of information. Framing involves the emphasis of certain aspects of reality while downplaying others, thus influencing how events are perceived and understood by audiences. This theoretical framework is particularly relevant in analyzing the coverage of technological advancements and their implications in media narratives.

Despite growing scholarship on drone diplomacy and media framing of military technologies, limited attention has been paid to how humanitarian or crisis-based drone deployments are framed across competing geopolitical media systems. Existing research predominantly examines battlefield usage, export politics, or long-term strategic influence, leaving unexplored how framing functions operate in real-time crisis reporting, where technological assistance intersects with national prestige. Moreover, few studies explicitly operationalize Entman's four framing functions within the context of emerging drone diplomacy narratives. This study addresses that gap by linking framing theory to crisis-

based technological discourse across geopolitically diverse outlets. This study aims to compare how selected English-language news outlets framed the Turkish Akinci drone's role in locating the wreckage of President Raisi's helicopter. To systematically examine how framing operates across geopolitical contexts, Entman's four analytical functions are translated into observable dimensions: technological problem definition, operational and environmental causal attribution, geopolitical moral evaluation, and recommendations. The research questions are derived directly from this operationalization. It addresses three research questions:

(1) What dominant frames (technological, operational, geopolitical) do outlets deploy?

(2) How does tone toward Turkish and Iranian technology vary by outlet origin?

(3) To what extent do expert/official sources shape those frames?

Research Method

This study employs a qualitative content analysis to examine the media framing of the helicopter crash that resulted in the death of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and other officials. The analysis focuses on how various media outlets construct narratives around the incident, particularly through technological, operational, and geopolitical lenses. By assessing the tone of coverage and the emphasis on technological elements and expert opinions, the study aims to uncover underlying biases and their potential impact on audience perceptions.

Sampling and Data Collection

Seven English-language news articles published between 20–23 May 2024. Inclusion criteria: (1) English text available online; (2) focused on the Raisi helicopter crash and the role of Turkish drones; (3) published by recognized news outlets. Selected outlets: Anadolu Agency, Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) (English), Frontline The Hindu/Frontline, Reuters, The Independent (UK), Newsweek, CBS News. These articles were selected based on their relevance to the research topic and their representation of different geopolitical perspectives. As the study involves analysis of publicly available news articles, no ethical approval was required. However, all sources have been appropriately cited to acknowledge the original authors and publications.

Table 1. Sample & Metadata

No	Outlet	Date	Headline	Author	Word	URL
1	Anadolu Agency	May 20, 2024	Turkish Akinci drone located helicopter wreckage of Iranian president	Serdar Acil	283	https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/turkish-akinci-drone-located-helicopter-wreckage-of-iranian-president/3225053
2	CBS News	May 20, 2024	Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi killed in helicopter crash along with foreign minister, state media confirm	CBS News	897	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/iranian-president-ebrahim-raisi-killed-helicopter-crash/

3	Frontline	May 22, 2024	How drones from Türkiye located the helicopter carrying late Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi	Iftikhar Gilani	819	https://frontline.thehindu.com/world-affairs/how-drones-from-turkiye-located-the-helicopter-carrying-late-iranian-president-ebrahim-raisi/article68202429.ece
4	Independent UK	May 21, 2024	How helicopter crash that killed Iranian president Ebrahim Raisi unfolded	Andy Gregory	383	https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/iran-president-ebrahim-raisi-death-helicopter-crash-cause-b2548494.html
5	IRNA	May 22, 2024	Turkish drone failed to detect Iranian copter after crash: General Staff	IRNA	218	https://en.irna.ir/news/85485953/Turkish-drone-failed-to-detect-Iranian-copter-after-crash-General
6	Newsweek	May 21, 2024	Fact Check: Did Drone Doodle Turkish Flag Over Raisi Helicopter Crash Site?	Tom Norton	685	https://www.newsweek.com/fact-check-did-drone-doodle-turkish-flag-over-raisi-helicopter-crash-site-1902691
7	Reuters	May 22, 2024	Iran's Armed Forces downplay role of Turkish drone in finding President's crash site	Reuters	315	https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/irans-armed-forces-downplay-role-turkish-drone-finding-presidents-crash-site-2024-05-22/

Coding and reliability

The authors collaboratively developed a codebook that maps framing categories to specific indicators. All articles were manually coded by both researchers using MAXQDA software. To enhance coding consistency, the two coders first jointly coded two pilot articles, discussed discrepancies, and refined the codebook accordingly. The remaining five articles were then coded independently by both researchers. Given the exploratory nature of the study and the very small sample size (n=7), formal inter-coder reliability statistics (e.g., Cohen's kappa or percent agreement) were not calculated. Initial

coding agreement across framing categories reached approximately 85% prior to discussion. Most discrepancies concerned tone classification and the identification of secondary frames. These differences were examined through analytic memo comparison and iterative code refinement. Final coding decisions were reached through consensual validation, consistent with qualitative framing methodology prioritizing interpretive agreement over statistical reliability metrics. The qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA was employed to facilitate the coding and analysis process. The unit of analysis for this study is the individual news article. Each article was examined in its entirety to assess the framing of the incident, the tone of coverage, and the inclusion of technological details and expert opinions.

Framing Analysis and Coding Procedure

The study utilizes Entman's (1993) framing theory as the analytical framework, focusing on how media outlets select and emphasize certain aspects of the incident to construct a particular narrative. Operationalization of Entman's framing elements followed specific coding indicators:

- **Problem Definition:** How the crash was constructed (technological challenge, political crisis, environmental difficulty).
- **Causal Interpretation:** Attribution of success or failure to UAV capability, weather conditions, coordination, or domestic systems.
- **Moral Evaluation:** Presence of evaluative language signaling pride, skepticism, superiority, or inadequacy.
- **Treatment Recommendation:** Explicit or implicit presentation of technology as solution or validation of domestic capability.

For example, references to "advanced surveillance capability" were coded under problem definition and remedy framing, whereas statements such as "failed to detect" were coded under causal attribution and negative moral evaluation. The analysis involved the following steps:

1. **Framing Identification**: Each article was examined to identify the presence of technological, operational, and geopolitical frames.
2. **Tone Assessment**: Tone classification was based on lexical indicators and overall narrative orientation. Positive tone included language emphasizing effectiveness, coordination, innovation, or technological success. Negative tone included references to failure, limitation, skepticism, or corrective framing of external contribution. Neutral tone was assigned when coverage remained descriptive and avoided evaluative adjectives or blame attribution. Tone was assessed holistically at the article level rather than through isolated sentences.
3. **Technological Emphasis**: The extent to which each article emphasized technological aspects, such as the role of drones in the search and rescue operations, was assessed.
4. **Expert Opinions**: The inclusion and role of expert opinions and official statements were analyzed to understand how they influenced the framing of the incident.

This study adopts an event-focused qualitative case design. The aim is not statistical generalization but analytical generalization, consistent with interpretive framing research examining high-impact crisis events. The selected articles represent geopolitically diverse outlets that directly addressed the drone's involvement, enabling an in-depth comparison of framing functions rather than relying on frequency-based measures.

Result

1. Framing of the Incident

Frontline The Hindu and Newsweek present a comprehensive view that intertwines operational and geopolitical dimensions. Frontline The Hindu emphasizes the drone's technical success in

overcoming challenging terrain and detecting heat sources: *"the drone, equipped with the latest surveillance technology… had the task of searching the difficult landscape"* (Gilani, 2024) while subtly embedding this operational achievement within a broader strategic and geopolitical context. Newsweek similarly highlights the operational significance of the drone, noting its navigation through adverse weather conditions and the symbolic dimension of its flight pattern resembling the Turkish flag. This framing not only underscores the technological prowess of the Turkish drone but also its broader implications for Turkish defense technology and international relations (Norton, 2024).

In contrast, Reuters adopts a critical stance on the Turkish drone's effectiveness, emphasizing operational failures and contrasting them with the success of Iranian rescue efforts. The coverage situates the incident within a context of geopolitical rivalry, reflecting ongoing tensions between Iran and Turkey over drone technologies and their roles in international conflicts (Reuters, 2024). Anadolu Agency provides a balanced narrative that focuses on the operational aspects of the rescue mission and the collaborative efforts between Turkish and Iranian authorities. By detailing the coordination and procedural elements of the operation, Anadolu Agency highlights a methodical approach while maintaining a relatively neutral stance on geopolitical and political dimensions (Acil, 2024). CBS News shifts the focus to the political implications of the helicopter crash within Iran. The coverage examines the impact of the incident on Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi's leadership and regional conflicts, portraying the Turkish drone's role as secondary to the broader political narrative (CBS News, 2024).

Independent UK and IRNA both emphasize Iranian domestic capabilities and resources, but with differing tones. It maintains a neutral and factual account, focusing on Iran's substantial domestic efforts and capabilities while acknowledging the Turkish drone's contribution in a minor role (Gregory, 2024). Conversely, IRNA downplays the effectiveness of the Turkish drone and highlights Iran's technological prowess, reflecting a narrative aimed at reinforcing national self-sufficiency and minimizing external contributions (IRNA, 2024). The varying frames employed by these media outlets illustrate how different editorial focuses and geopolitical perspectives shape the narrative of the Turkish drone's role in the search operation. By integrating operational details with broader political and strategic contexts, these outlets provide diverse interpretations that reflect their respective editorial stances and the geopolitical landscape.

2. Tone of Coverage

Frontline The Hindu adopts a predominantly positive tone towards the Turkish Bayraktar Akinci drone, highlighting its technological advancements and effective role in the search operation. The coverage praises the drone's capabilities and its contribution to locating the crash site, which reflects positively on Turkish defense technology. Despite this positive portrayal, the article maintains a neutral stance on broader geopolitical implications and the tragic nature of the event, ensuring that the coverage remains objective and factual (Gilani, 2024). Similarly, Newsweek also conveys a predominantly positive tone regarding the drone's performance. It underscores the effectiveness of the Turkish drone and its advanced features, portraying the flight path as a symbol of national pride. The tone remains largely favorable towards the drone's technological success, the mention of the symbolic flight pattern as an "act of patriotism" introduces a mild critical edge, reflecting a nuanced view of the drone's role within the broader context of the event (Norton, 2024).

In contrast, Reuters maintains a predominantly critical tone regarding the Turkish drone's performance. The article emphasizes the drone's operational failures, such as its inability to accurately locate the crash site, and highlights discrepancies in the provided coordinates. The critical perspective is reinforced by discussing the impact of challenging weather conditions on the drone's effectiveness. While the coverage remains factual and neutral in describing both Turkish and Iranian operations, the emphasis on the Turkish drone's limitations and the success of Iranian rescue efforts reflects a critical stance (Reuters, 2024). Anadolu Agency offers a positive tone regarding the Turkish drone's involvement in the rescue mission, emphasizing its successful execution and effective role in providing

critical information. The narrative reflects favorably on the drone's operational efficiency and technological capabilities. Despite this positive portrayal, the coverage maintains a neutral tone in reporting other aspects of the operation, such as deployment and coordination with Iranian authorities. This balanced approach ensures that the emphasis remains on the success of the mission without exhibiting overtly positive or negative language (Acil, 2024).

CBS presents a range of tones from neutral to critical. The coverage of the helicopter crash is factual and unbiased, detailing the crash site, weather conditions, and rescue efforts. For example, *"drone video… showing a heat signature at a site in the wilderness"* (CBS News, 2024). However, the article adopts a critical stance towards Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi's leadership, highlighting his controversial policies and involvement in human rights issues. Independent UK also maintains a neutral and informative tone, focusing on the factual aspects of the crash and the search efforts by citing *"drone footage… showed a fire… suspected to be wreckage of a helicopter"* (Gregory, 2024). The language is restrained, avoiding emotional or political bias. Just like CBS, in Independent UK, tone becomes more critical towards the end of the article, addressing Raisi's controversial policies and political career, though this criticism is secondary to the rescue operation's primary narrative. IRNA employs an assertive tone aimed at reinforcing Iran's strength and technological capabilities. The statement projects Iran as a regional power while subtly critiquing the effectiveness of the Turkish drone (IRNA, 2024). Despite expressing gratitude towards international support, the coverage undermines Turkey's contribution, reflecting a balanced yet assertive stance. This dual approach of acknowledging support while critically assessing external assistance highlights Iran's strategic positioning and national pride.

Overall, the tone of media coverage varies from positive and neutral to critical, reflecting each outlet's editorial focus and narrative strategy. This variation demonstrates how media tone can shape public perceptions of technological achievements, geopolitical dynamics, and political leadership.

a. *Emphasis on Technological Elements*

The Frontline offers a detailed examination of the Bayraktar Akinci drone's technological features, including its flight capabilities, avionics, and surveillance systems. The article provides comprehensive technical specifications such as speed, altitude, and sensor systems, positioning these elements as central to the narrative (Gilani, 2024). This focus underscores the importance of the drone's advanced technology in the successful execution of the search operation, highlighting how technological prowess can influence operational outcomes. Newsweek also provides a thorough description of the drone's technological features, including heat-sensing and livestreaming capabilities. For instance, *"the drone… followed a flight path in the shape of the crescent moon and star of the Turkish flag"* (Norton, 2024). While detailing technical aspects like flight path and tracking data, the article balances this information with a discussion of the operational challenges encountered during the mission. This balanced approach ensures that readers gain a comprehensive understanding of the drone's significance, integrating both technological and operational perspectives into the narrative.

Reuters offers an intensive comparative analysis of the technological capabilities of both Turkish and Iranian drones. The article examines specific features, such as synthetic-aperture radar on Iranian drones. It critiques the Turkish drone's detection limitations, focusing heavily on technological constraints and the impact of adverse weather conditions: *"Despite Turkey sending a drone… it failed to accurately locate the crash site"* (Reuters, 2024). This detailed evaluation underscores the central role of technological factors in assessing the performance and effectiveness of drones in the search-and-rescue operation.

Anadolu Agency provides a detailed account of the Akinci drone's technological capabilities and its role in the mission, emphasizing its successful detection of the wreckage and real-time data sharing: *"The wreckage was spotted, and the coordinates were sent to the Iranian authorities in real time"* (Acil, 2024). The discussion of technological elements is specific and integral to the narrative, reflecting the

drone's effectiveness and contributions to the mission. This focus on precise technological details underscores their importance in understanding the operational success.

CBS News features minimal emphasis on the technological aspects of the Turkish drone's role, noting only its identification of a heat signature near the crash site without a detailed analysis of its technical specifications. The article's focus remains on the broader narrative, rather than delving into technological details (CBS News, 2024). This limited exploration of technology reflects a broader narrative approach, where technological elements are secondary to the overarching story. Independent UK similarly provides a pragmatic mention of the Turkish drone's footage but does not explore its technological capabilities in depth. The coverage maintains a focus on the practical aspects of the search operation from an Iran-centric perspective, with limited emphasis on the technological contributions of the Turkish drone (Gregory, 2024). This approach underscores a focus on operational outcomes rather than detailed technological analysis.

IRNA prominently emphasizes Iran's Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) technology, portraying it as superior to the technology of the Turkish UAV. The statement critiques the Turkish drone's limitations in locating the wreckage, despite its advanced imaging capabilities, reinforcing a narrative of Iranian technological superiority: *"Despite being equipped with night vision… the Turkish drone was not able to detect the helicopter"* (IRNA, 2024). This emphasis on Iran's technological advantage aligns with a nationalist framing that seeks to assert domestic technological prowess while downplaying external contributions. To conclude, the emphasis on technological elements in media coverage varies from detailed and central to minimal and pragmatic, reflecting differing editorial focuses and narrative strategies.

b. Inclusion of Expert Opinions and Official Statements

The incorporation of expert opinions and official statements significantly shapes the media coverage of the Turkish drone's role in the search for the Iranian President's helicopter. This approach not only enhances the credibility of the narratives but also influences the overall portrayal of technological and political elements. Frontline The Hindu features extensive statements from Turkish Transport Minister, who addresses the technical challenges and highlights the Bayraktar Akinci drone's capabilities.

Newsweek references statements from the Turkish Ministry of National Defense and flight-tracking services like RadarBox, providing context and validation to the reported flight pattern of the drone. While the article's use of expert opinions is somewhat limited, focusing on technical details and official statements, it effectively enhances the credibility of the information presented. Reuters relies heavily on official statements from the Iranian military, which critique the Turkish drone's performance and highlight the capabilities of Iranian drones. While these statements provide a critical perspective, the article includes minimal external expert opinions beyond the Iranian military viewpoint.

Anadolu Agency incorporates official statements and security sources to provide a detailed account of the coordination between Turkish and Iranian authorities. Although it includes official perspectives, the article does not feature direct expert quotes or in-depth analyses from external sources. Instead, it relies on factual reporting of the operational response, focusing on official accounts of the mission. CBS News includes statements from Iranian authorities and Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, focusing on political stability and leadership transition in Iran. The article does not feature extensive expert analysis of the Turkish drone's technological aspects or its implications. Independent UK incorporates official statements from Iranian Vice President and the state-run IRNA news agency, focusing on the immediate aftermath of the crash and leadership transition. The article provides factual reporting without delving into expert analysis or broader contextual insights. IRNA issues a statement from the Iranian military, which serves as a controlled narrative emphasizing Iranian technological

superiority and critiquing the Turkish drone's effectiveness. Although it lacks external expert opinions, the statement reflects Iran's authoritative stance on the incident and its diplomatic engagements.

The inclusion of expert opinions and official statements in media coverage plays a crucial role in shaping the portrayal of technological and political elements. Each outlet's approach reflects its editorial focus, ranging from detailed technological analysis to broader political narratives, and highlights the varying roles that expert and official voices play in influencing public perception. See table 2 for more details.

Table 2. Summary of Frames and Tone per News Item

Outlet	Dominant Frame	Secondary Frame	Tone toward Turkish UAV	Source type	Key Thematic Note
Frontline (India)	Technological / Operational	Humanitarian gesture	Positive	Turkish officials	Highlights AI, capability and symbolic gesture
Newsweek (US)	Operational / Symbolic	Patriotic gesture	Neutral-positive (mildly celebratory)	Turkish military	Focus on flight path flag pattern
Anadolu Agency (Turkey)	Technological & Operational	Coordination & diplomacy	Strongly positive	Official Turkish government sources	Attributed mission success to UAV
Reuters (UK intl.)	Geopolitical disclaiming	Technological capability	Negative/dismissive (toward Turkish contribution)	Iranian military statement	Downplays Turkish drone role
IRNA (Iran)	Nationalist / Restorative	Technological (Iranian)	Negative toward Turkish drone	Military source	Credits Iranian system, rejects Turkish success
Independent (UK)	Operational humanitarian	Political context	Neutral	Various	Balanced, descriptive narrative
CBS News	Geopolitical / Crisis amplification	Operational	Neutral	Military video + regional analysts	Linked crash to broader regional tension

Discussion

The comparative analysis reveals that media coverage of the Turkish Bayraktar Akinci drone during the Iranian president's helicopter search draws upon broader conceptualizations of technology as both operational instrument and geopolitical symbol. These interpretations vary not only across outlet origin but also in tone and use of authoritative voices. The following discussion builds directly on the three research questions and frames the interpretation using Entman's (1993) model of framing.

RQ1 asked: What dominant frames (technological, operational, and geopolitical) do outlets deploy?

The findings indicate that technological and operational frames are most prevalent across international outlets, while geopolitical and nationalist counter frames appear more prominently in Iranian and select global coverage. Entman's (1993) framework explains this as a function of problem definition. For some outlets, the crisis presented an opportunity to showcase modern drone effectiveness, while others repositioned the story to emphasize internal capacity or avoid dependence narratives. For instance, Frontline The Hindu foregrounds operational prowess, highlighting the drone's ability to function in difficult terrain*"*(Gilani, 2024). This aligns with Entman's "solution framing,"

presenting technology as the response to crisis. Newsweek similarly adopts a dual frame, documenting operational execution while weaving symbolic representation into narrative (Norton, 2024), which transitions into "moral evaluation," assigning meaning beyond mere functionality.

In contrast, Reuters, employing a geopolitical counter-frame, emphasizes operational failure and Iranian recovery actions (Reuters, 2024). This represents Entman's causal attribution, shifting responsibility from Turkish innovation to Iranian efficacy. A similar pattern is seen in IRNA, which frames the incident as a demonstration of Iranian technological independence (IRNA, 2024). This illustrates boundary framing, wherein the story becomes tied to domestic legitimacy rather than multinational collaboration (Freeman & Freeland, 2016). Conversely, Independent UK and CBS News engage in what might be described as neutral operational framing, reporting factual details without evaluative coloring. CBS notes, *"drone video… showing a heat signature at a site in the wilderness"* (CBS News, 2024), prioritizing technical observation over interpretive conclusions.

RQ2 asked: How does tone toward Turkish and Iranian technology vary by outlet origin?

The results indicate a direct association between outlet geostrategic alignment and evaluative tone. Outlets geographically or diplomatically closer to Turkey (e.g., Anadolu Agency) adopt a strongly positive tone, emphasizing coordination and operational efficiency (Acil, 2024). This aligns with moral evaluation in Entman's model, presenting Turkey as the responsible problem solver. Meanwhile, Frontline The Hindu displays a tone generally positive toward the drone's contribution, without politicizing it. Newsweek follows a similar pattern, praising the technology but introducing subtle critique when referencing symbolic flight patterns. Here, tone shifts from appreciative operational framing to skeptical ethical framing, particularly when the symbolic element is noted as possibly inappropriate given the tragic context (Norton, 2024). In contrast, critical tone appears primarily in Iranian and non-aligned Western coverage. Reuters emphasizes operational inaccuracies and questions Turkish capability, embedding the functional critique within a geopolitical tension narrative. IRNA heightens criticism through assertive nationalistic discourse, framing Iranian capability as superior and Turkish intervention as supplementary.

Outlets like CBS and Independent UK maintain tone neutrality in reporting drone involvement, while turning more critical when addressing Raisi's internal governance and regional policies. Interestingly, these shifts suggest that tone toward technology is often decoupled from evaluations of political leadership, implying that technological appraisal may remain objective even within otherwise critical ideological coverage.

RQ3 asked: To what extent do expert/official sources shape those frames?

The findings indicate that authority-based sourcing was pivotal in shaping narrative direction particularly when outlets adopted critical stances toward the drone's performance. Where positive operational framing occurs (Frontline, Anadolu), statements from Turkish officials are prevalent. For instance, Frontline leverages statements from the Turkish Transport Minister to reinforce operational capability (Gilani, 2024). This aligns with source-driven credibility framing, common when external technology is being positively positioned. Conversely, Reuters relies almost exclusively on Iranian military attributions, with no counterbalancing expert commentary from external sources. This creates what could be described as monologic framing, where authority is used not to explain, but to redefine operational narrative in favor of the reporting nation's technological prowess. IRNA adopts the same approach, emphasizing government-issued statements to justify evaluative reorientation. Interestingly, Newsweek and Independent include official statements but do not rely on them to shape narrative conclusions. Instead, expert or official references are used descriptively (e.g., RadarBox), without dominating interpretive assessment (Norton, 2024). This aligns with informational sourcing rather than interpretative sourcing, allowing editorial independence.

In keeping with framing theory, official and expert statements serve most strongly to drive causal and evaluative attribution (Entman, 1993). Outlets that cite single-source geopolitical actors tend to assert stronger narrative framing; those incorporating multi-source or non-authoritative data maintain informational neutrality. This is consistent with previous research, which states that reliance on political authority during crisis reporting often leads to implicitly nationalistic framing.

Across all findings, the relationship between frame type, tone, and source usage confirms framing theory's core postulate: media narratives are strategically constructed and contingent upon editorial alignment and geopolitical relevance. Operational-technological framing functions as an entry point for coverage, while geopolitical and symbolic dimensions emerge through evaluative and causal attribution, influenced largely by outlet origin and reliance on official sources. When national governments seek to assert technological sovereignty (as in IRNA and Reuters coverage), external contributions are discursively minimized. In contrast, when outlets aim to highlight innovation or reflect cooperative engagement (Frontline, Anadolu), operational frames are positively amplified.

Conclusion

This study examined how seven international media outlets framed the involvement of the Turkish Bayraktar Akinci drone in the search operation for the Iranian president's helicopter following the crash, focusing on dominant framing strategies, tonal variations, and the role of expert or official sources. The findings reveal that media discourse surrounding technologically mediated crisis response is not neutral; rather, it reflects editorial positioning, geopolitical alignment, and strategic narrative selection.

In response to RQ1, the analysis demonstrated that technologies such as the Akinci drone were framed through three primary lenses: operational efficiency, technological capability, and geopolitical significance. Outlets such as Frontline and Newsweek employed operational-technological framing, presenting the drone as a problem-solving instrument with symbolic value. In contrast, Reuters and IRNA decentered the drone's role through competitive geopolitical framing, emphasizing perceived limitations and highlighting Iranian operational success, illustrating how media narratives become a site of representation rather than reaction. Regarding RQ2, the tone varied noticeably by outlet origin. Media closer to Turkish or neutral geopolitical positioning adopted favorable or balanced tones, while outlets representing Iranian or more critical Western contexts leaned toward skeptical or diminishing representations. These tonal dynamics suggest that technological performance becomes narratively contingent on national-political relevance rather than on objective assessment alone. Addressing RQ3, the findings confirmed that expert and official attributions were instrumental in shaping narrative evaluations. Outlets such as Frontline and Anadolu strategically employed Turkish official voices to validate technological achievement, whereas Reuters and IRNA drew heavily on Iranian military sources to reinforce domestic capability and challenge external contributions. The absence of independent technical experts in all but a few reports indicates a reliance on authoritative sourcing over analytical depth.

Theoretically, this research contributes to framing studies by demonstrating that crisis-related technological discourse functions beyond the bounds of operational reporting; it actively participates in the negotiation of influence and image at international levels. Entman's framing framework proved particularly relevant in explaining how media actors assign responsibility, construct evaluative interpretations, and strategically signal national agency through narrative emphasis. The findings also extend emerging work in drone diplomacy, showing that the communicative role of UAVs increasingly mirrors their operational role, both as tools and as symbols. Practically, the study underscores the importance of media literacy and balanced sourcing in defense-related reporting. As the use of UAVs expands in humanitarian, civilian, and security contexts, understanding how media narratives shape public interpretation and international perception becomes increasingly significant. Integrating multi-source expertise and technical assessment may mitigate geopolitical distortion in future coverage.

The research is limited by its purposive sample and event-specific focus. While the limited sample restricts statistical inference, the study prioritizes depth of framing function analysis over breadth of frequency distribution. Future studies could expand the dataset temporally or incorporate audience reception analysis to assess the persuasive impact of framing variations. Comparative cross-language analysis would further deepen insight into regional narrative divergences and enhance understanding of culturally embedded technological discourse.

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