

Building "Just Peace": Frame Construction and International Communication Paradigm of China's Mainstream Media on the Current Middle East Crisis

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Abstract. This paper aims to discuss the reporting strategies and communication paradigms adopted by China's mainstream media when covering the ongoing Middle East crisis. Based on Zang Guoren's three-level news framing theory, this paper conducts a content analysis with news reports on Middle East conflicts released by mainstream media including People's Daily as research samples. The study finds that unlike Western media, which frequently adopt ideologically driven and confrontation-focused news frames, China's mainstream media constructs a just peace framework centered on safeguarding international law and opposing hegemonism. This communication paradigm not only shapes China's image as a responsible great power that holds objective and impartial stances, but also offers a new path for public information communication amid sudden geopolitical conflicts beyond Cold War mindsets.

Keywords: Middle East Crisis, Framing Theory, Three-Level Analysis, Peace Journalism, People's Daily

1. Introduction

The current Middle East crisis keeps escalating. The confrontations between Palestine and Israel as well as the conflicts between Iran and Israel have formed complicated situations. Core clashes have broken through their original scopes and spread to surrounding regions and related fields. Geopolitical contradictions are intertwined with various complex factors, bringing negative impacts on the security order of the international community. Fierce debates have thus emerged in global public opinion. News media act not only as recorders of wars, but also as judges of the nature of wars and guides of international public voices. They play key roles in building news frames and setting news agendas.

Western media have long held dominant positions in public opinion regarding international wars, and their news narratives often carry biased tendencies. Against this background, this research intends to analyze how reports from China's mainstream media on the current Middle East crisis break Western discourse monopoly and express independent national stances, as well as the textual frames and reporting strategies contained in these reports. The research can provide practical

evidence for China's communication practices during major international conflicts. Meanwhile, it helps explore a path of peace journalism with Chinese characteristics from a non-Western communication perspective, and offers references for boosting China's discourse power in international communication.

2. Literature review and theoretical perspective

2.1. Evolution of news frames in war coverage

Most war coverage frames adopted by Western media fall into two categories: ideology-oriented frames and confrontation-focused frames. Chinese scholars have carried out abundant sample-based research on this topic. For instance, one study selected front-page news reports on the Iraq War from 25 major American daily newspapers as research objects. It analyzed that the news frames matched the government's intention to support military operations, while certain anti-war content was reserved, resulting in homogeneous news topics [1]. During reports on the Libyan War, news frames of *The Times* obviously leaned toward NATO. News headlines carried provocative tones, and in-depth reports made up the majority of content [2]. When the Iraq War broke out, American media set news topics of anti-terrorism and patriotic mobilization for audiences, and adopted embedded journalist reporting modes [3]. During the Russia-Ukraine conflict, *The New York Times* applied differentiated reporting frames for domestic and foreign parties. It published a large number of negative articles with negative word choices, and spared no effort to describe miserable scenes in Ukraine [4].

Different from Western media that mostly focus on military clashes, Chinese media often adopt neutral and peacekeeping reporting frames. Reports on the Libyan War published by *Jiefang Daily* centered on NATO military operations, international conferences and civilian casualties, with headlines simply stating objective facts [2]. During the Iraq War, Chinese media mainly covered refugee sufferings and stuck to anti-war frames [3]. News segments about the Syrian War on *News Network* mostly took brief news forms. Apart from updates on war situations, they paid extra attention to humanitarian relief and international peace talks [5].

Overall, existing research mostly focuses on past military conflicts such as the Iraq War, Libyan War and Russia-Ukraine conflict. Specialized analyses targeting the current round of Middle East crisis are scarce. Moreover, few studies systematically dissect reports from China's mainstream media via framing theory from indigenous research perspectives.

2.2. Theoretical tool

Framing theory was introduced to China in the 1990s and has drawn wide attention and discussions among scholars. Within Chinese academic circles, the three-level framing theory put forward by scholar Zang Guoren stands as the representative achievement in framing research. He divides the internal structure of news frames into three levels: high-level, mid-level and low-level structures. The high-level structure defines news themes and the nature of news events. The mid-level structure covers core events, prior incidents, historical backgrounds, outcomes, influences, cause attribution and evaluation. The low-level structure focuses on language and rhetoric in news reports, including word choices, tones and writing styles.

3. Research design and methodology

3.1. Research subjects

This paper selects relevant texts from three official mainstream Chinese media: *People's Daily*, *Global Times* and *Xinhua Daily Telegraph*. As official mainstream media in China, they possess strong agenda-setting capabilities and representativeness in international communication. Their editorial texts carry clear stance expressions, which facilitate the analysis of news frames embedded in reporting texts.

This paper adopts purposive sampling. Centered on the Middle East crisis, it selects representative feature stories, news dispatches and editorial articles released between February and March 2026 that deliver core official attitudes. Finally, 28 valid samples are screened out, including 11 articles from *People's Daily*, 12 from *Global Times* and 5 from *Xinhua Daily Telegraph*. Though the sample size is limited, textual depth and discourse features of these materials are sufficient to meet the requirements of qualitative frame analysis.

Table 1. Basic information of sampled reports

Source	Release Date	Genre	Topic
<i>People's Daily</i>	March 4, 2026	Editorial	Politics
<i>People's Daily</i>	March 4, 2026	News Dispatch	Diplomacy
<i>People's Daily</i>	March 1, 2026	News Dispatch	Politics
<i>People's Daily</i>	February 10, 2026	News Dispatch	Politics
<i>People's Daily</i>	March 24, 2026	Feature Commentary	Politics
<i>People's Daily</i>	February 25, 2026	News Dispatch	Military, Politics
<i>People's Daily</i>	March 23, 2026	News Dispatch	Economy
<i>People's Daily</i>	March 26, 2026	News Dispatch	Politics, Military
<i>People's Daily</i>	March 25, 2026	News Dispatch	Politics
<i>People's Daily</i>	March 20, 2026	News Dispatch	Politics
<i>People's Daily</i>	March 19, 2026	News Dispatch	Military
<i>Global Times</i>	March 5, 2026	Feature Story	Politics, Military
<i>Global Times</i>	March 5, 2026	News Dispatch	Politics, Diplomacy
<i>Global Times</i>	March 7, 2026	News Dispatch	Military, Economy
<i>Global Times</i>	March 3, 2026	News Dispatch	Military
<i>Global Times</i>	March 28, 2026	Feature Story	Politics, Military
<i>Global Times</i>	March 30, 2026	News Dispatch	Military
<i>Global Times</i>	February 25, 2026	News Dispatch	Military
<i>Global Times</i>	March 31, 2026	News Dispatch	Military, Politics
<i>Global Times</i>	March 12, 2026	News Dispatch	Politics, Military
<i>Global Times</i>	March 30, 2026	News Dispatch	Military

Table 1. (continued)

<i>Global Times</i>	March 30, 2026	Editorial	Politics
<i>Global Times</i>	March 27, 2026	News Dispatch	Politics, Diplomacy
<i>Xinhua Daily Telegraph</i>	March 24, 2026	Editorial	Politics, Ethics
<i>Xinhua Daily Telegraph</i>	March 1, 2026	Feature Commentary	Military, Politics
<i>Xinhua Daily Telegraph</i>	March 20, 2026	Editorial	Politics, Diplomacy
<i>Xinhua Daily Telegraph</i>	March 29, 2026	Editorial	Politics
<i>Xinhua Daily Telegraph</i>	March 30, 2026	Feature Commentary	Politics, Military

3.2. Research methodology

This paper adopts qualitative textual analysis, and takes Zang Guoren's three-level framing theory as the major analytical tool to systematically interpret collected samples.

In specific practice, news texts are divided into three analytical levels. The high-level frame defines the nature of news events, which answers the core question "what kind of event is this". The mid-level frame focuses on core topics, actors and their relations within reports, explaining "how this event is narrated". The low-level frame analyzes how media convey positions and attitudes through word choices, sentence structures and expression patterns from linguistic and rhetorical dimensions.

4. Empirical analysis

4.1. Analysis of high-level frames

The high-level frame fundamentally defines the nature of news events. Referring to Jiang Lei's analytical framework [6], this research presents how China's mainstream media define the Middle East crisis from two dimensions: news genre selection and agenda setting.

4.1.1. News genre selection guided by value leadership

News genres serve as the primary carrier for media to set stances and deliver value orientations. Among the 28 sampled reports, media mainly adopt four genres: news dispatches, editorials, feature commentaries and feature stories. There are 17 news dispatches, 7 editorials, and 4 feature commentaries plus feature stories in total.

The distribution of genres shows that China's mainstream media do not merely publish objective factual reports. Instead, they consciously use different news genres to integrate all coverage of the Middle East crisis under unified value judgments. News dispatches strictly record military developments, official statements from various countries, responses of the international community and humanitarian crises, providing factual foundations for event definition. Editorials deliver macro evaluations of news events, mainly labeling relevant acts as violations of international law, unilateral bullying and acts that damage peace. Feature commentaries and feature stories further reveal the roots and risks of wars. Together, these genres lift news coverage from single incident reporting to discussions of international order and war ethics.

4.1.2. Agenda setting centered on just peace

Agenda setting acts as the core presentation form of high-level frames. Media reclassify and define the meaning of events by highlighting certain topics and downplaying others. Topics covered in sampled reports are highly concentrated, falling into four main categories: political topics, military topics, diplomatic topics and economic and people's livelihood topics. Political and military topics take absolutely dominant positions, while marginal topics such as internal governance are barely covered. The Western mainstream narratives of counter-terrorism and regime change are not adopted.

China's mainstream media frame the current Middle East crisis as acts of unilateral hegemonism that damage the international legal order centered on the UN Charter, rather than simple regional military conflicts. By continuously focusing on legitimate national sovereignty, norms of international law, political negotiations and humanitarian protection, media form clear Chinese definitions that distinguish justice from injustice, peace from warfare, and rules from power politics. Eventually, a stable, unified high-level frame of just peace with distinct value orientations is established.

4.2. Analysis of mid-level frames

If high-level frames answer "what this event is", mid-level frames further explain "how this event is narrated". At this level, media guide audiences' emotions and attitudes by highlighting core events and shaping images of actors.

4.2.1. Event selection focused on war consequences

The selection and arrangement of core events constitute an important way to construct mid-level frames.

Sampled reports emphasize spillover effects of wars and regional security risks, putting more weight on war consequences rather than military updates. Among the 28 samples, 16 articles describe specific outcomes including economic losses and humanitarian disasters as well as shocks to global energy supplies. Texts mention attacks on energy facilities in Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, and security alerts issued by the US Embassy in Kuwait. These contents expand the influence of conflicts beyond confrontations between the US and Iran to the whole Middle East region. Reports also cover risks to energy supply, damaged infrastructure and civilian casualties, extending military operations to economic and social fields.

When organizing core events, sampled reports widely record attitudes of the international community toward this round of conflicts. For example, two reports namely *UN: Middle East Conflicts Bring Severe Economic Losses to Arab Regions* and *Iran Launches the 62nd Wave of Attacks on US and Israeli Military Bases* cite views from an emergency meeting of the UN Human Rights Council. The meeting points out that US and Israeli air strikes against Iranian campuses killed a large number of teachers and students, identifies such acts as war crimes, and calls on all parties to abide by the UN Charter and immediately cease fire and stop hostilities. Wars are no longer limited to partial confrontations, but placed within the framework of international order and global governance.

Meanwhile, all three mainstream media stress peaceful settlement approaches. Reports from *Global Times* mention that war escalation will push regional situations further out of control, and hold that diplomatic communication and political negotiations form necessary solutions. Instead of

presenting wars as eye-catching confrontational events, media guide audiences to focus on methods to stop conflict escalation.

Generally speaking, sampled reports form an obvious peace-oriented narrative within core event frames. They reduce dramatic battlefield descriptions and strengthen discussions on war consequences and settlement solutions, shifting the narrative focus from clashes to peace.

4.2.2. Actor shaping centered on role differences

News media usually create different images of actors by selecting, sorting, emphasizing and connecting relevant subjects.

In reports from the three mainstream media, China is portrayed as an advocate for peace and a mediator of conflicts. Media coverage prioritizes China's diplomatic statements. The United Nations and other international actors are framed as defenders of international order. A large number of quotes from the UN, the EU and Arab countries calling for ceasefire in *Global Times* prove that most of the international community opposes the worsening of tensions.

In contrast, the United States and Israel are frequently linked to military strikes and conflict escalation. Sampled reports repeatedly mention military attacks launched by the US and Israel against Iran, highlighting their leading roles in pushing tensions upward.

Reports do not only focus on the two warring sides. They also depict Gulf countries and neighboring regions as groups dragged into conflicts, and civilians occupy important positions in coverage as well. For instance, articles repeatedly mention civilian casualties and damages to people's livelihoods caused by wars, defining ordinary residents as direct victims of military conflicts.

4.3. Analysis of low-level frames

Low-level frames concentrate on the organization of words, sentence patterns and expressions in news texts. Low-level frame analysis explores how specific linguistic arrangements shape audiences' understanding of news events.

4.3.1. Word choices centered on peace and order

This paper uses natural language processing (NLP) text mining tools to segment words and count word frequencies across the 28 sampled reports. After removing meaningless function words such as auxiliary words and conjunctions, core high-frequency words appearing at least 19 times are extracted to build the semantic network of low-level frames in this research.

All sampled reports revolve around war-related content. Words such as Iran, the United States, war, country, strike and conflict appear frequently in the texts. Specifically, Iran appears 489 times, the United States 311 times, war 128 times, strike 109 times and conflict 76 times. This shows that wars and military clashes remain the basic reporting content. Repeated use of words including war, attack, escalation and threat reflects continuous media attention to worsening tensions and conflict expansion.

Meanwhile, reports lay heavy stress on peace and international order. Words linked to peace and order such as international law, diplomacy, stability and negotiation also record high frequencies. It indicates that sampled reports do not merely cover battlefield conditions. Instead, they pay more attention to the impacts of wars on global order and tend to interpret conflicts from the perspective of political consultations.

4.3.2. Sentence structures dominated by causal and adversative relations

Sentence structures organize information and strengthen logical links between events. Different logical sentence patterns guide audiences to form distinct cognitive paths.

A large number of causal sentences are adopted in sampled reports to deduce outcomes triggered by war escalation. Expressions such as "war escalation will further threaten regional stability" and "military conflicts may lead to spillover risks to energy security" build a logical chain where conflicts produce negative consequences, highlighting harmful impacts of wars.

Adversative sentences are also widely used. They shift narrative focuses and direct attention away from wars toward peaceful settlement paths. Examples include "though all sides hold divided positions, political settlement remains the only way to resolve disputes" and "even as tensions keep rising, most parts of the international community still call for ceasefire". Adversative logic places peace proposals as core information.

Conditional sentences appear in reports to predict risks brought by further conflict deterioration. Phrases such as "if tensions escalate further, the security of the whole Middle East will face severe threats" strengthen the warning tone of news coverage.

4.3.3. Information source construction prioritizing multilateral authoritative voices

In terms of information presentation, sampled reports combine direct and indirect quotations with clear biased tendencies. On one hand, media frequently cite official statements from UN officials, leaders of Middle Eastern countries and spokespersons of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They rely on multilateral voices to prove the rationality and universality of ceasefire appeals. On the other hand, statements from the US and Israel are mostly paraphrased through indirect quotations. This method creates emotional distance between readers and the two countries, weakening the legitimacy of their military operations.

5. Discussion: Breaking Western Discourse Monopoly and the Construction of Peace Journalism with Chinese Characteristics

Findings from the above empirical analysis prove that during coverage of the current Middle East crisis, three major Chinese mainstream media have stepped out of war narrative frames controlled by Western media and formed an independent discourse system with unique core values.

4.4. From conflict spectacle to order maintenance: deconstruction of western news frames

For a long time, Western media have applied binary confrontation frames to war coverage. They tend to describe military battles and battlefield destruction in dramatic ways, and some reports carry ideological biases and Orientalist perspectives. However, this research finds that China's mainstream media refuse to simplify the Middle East crisis as regional camp confrontations. Instead, they upgrade the essence of the conflict to unilateral hegemonic acts that damage international order. At the mid-level narrative stage, media reduce dramatic battlefield descriptions and shift focus to economic losses, humanitarian disasters and multilateral peace-making efforts caused by war spillover. Such frame design effectively breaks the Western mainstream narrative of fighting violence with violence, offering global audiences a new perspective to understand the Middle East situation.

4.5. Text practice of peace journalism with chinese characteristics

Western scholar Galtung put forward the concept of peace journalism, advocating that media should focus on conflict backgrounds, non-violent settlement paths and sufferings of ordinary people. Research results show that reporting strategies adopted by China's mainstream media during this round of Middle East crisis serve as a practical form of peace journalism with Chinese characteristics.

In rhetoric and sentence selection, the three media use causal sentences to display war harms, and adopt conditional and adversative sentences to warn of war risks and call for rational restraint. In word choices, neutral peace-related words such as dialogue, consultation and international law are prioritized, replacing confrontational expressions commonly seen in Western reports. Such narratives reflect China's diplomatic purpose of safeguarding world peace and promoting common development. They also demonstrate China's moral responsibility as a responsible major power, transforming news media from mere war observers into disseminators and promoters of peace ideas.

5. Conclusion and prospect

Taking Zang Guoren's three-level framing theory as the analytical tool, this paper systematically analyzes 28 reports on the Middle East crisis published by three official Chinese mainstream media between February and March 2026. The research draws the following conclusions. At the high-level frame stage, Chinese media define the Middle East crisis as an act that damages international law and peaceful global order. At the mid-level frame stage, reporting topics concentrate heavily on war consequences, humanitarian crises and multilateral diplomatic mediation. At the low-level frame stage, media build a complete semantic system centered on peace. Overall, war coverage produced by China's mainstream media has formed strong agenda-setting capacity. It achieves remarkable results in breaking Western discourse monopoly and constructing non-Western narratives for international conflicts.

Nevertheless, this research still has certain limitations. First, samples only include written reports from official print media. Multi-modal coverage such as short videos and social media posts are not incorporated, lacking frame comparisons between text, images and audio-visual materials. Second, this research conducts qualitative analysis based on text content. It only analyzes media reporting logic from the production side, without adopting questionnaires or interviews to quantitatively study how international audiences receive these reports. Future research can adopt multi-modal discourse analysis, combined with cross-border audience surveys and sentiment quantification methods, to explore the actual communication effects of China's mainstream media peace narratives in cross-cultural contexts.

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