

The New York Times' Framing of Involvement of the Russian Federation in Arms and Nuclear Trade with the Islamic Republic of Iran in 2009-2011

by

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Submitted to the William Allen White School of
Journalism and Mass Communication and the Graduate Faculty of
the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
of Master of Science

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Acceptance Page

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Abstract

This study examines the mediated portrait of nuclear and arms trade between Russia and Iran in *The New York Times* in 2009-2011, applying framing theory as a tool. I used three frames, pre-defined in earlier studies: *attribution of responsibility*, *conflict* and *economic*. I content analyzed 78 newspaper articles to see the salient points in coverage of the controversial business that Russia does with Iran. I also was interested to see if the declared “reset” with Russia was indicated in the publications.

The results showed that the conflict frame was most commonly used in the coverage of the issue followed by the economic and attribution of responsibility frames. Nevertheless, overall, the frames indicate the policy of “reset.”

The study contributes to better understanding of media framing and its effects and sets the ground for further research on the topic.

Contents

Introduction.....	1
Literature Review.....	2
U.S.-Iranian Relations.....	3
Russian-Iranian Relations	3
U.S.-Russian Relations	7
Iranian Nuclear Program.....	8
State-Press Relations.....	10
U.S. Media Coverage of Iran	12
U.S. Media Coverage of Russia.....	13
Theoretical Framework: Framing	14
Research Questions	20
Method	20
Measurement.....	22
Findings and Discussion	23
Answer to R.Q. 1	23
Answer to R.Q.2	26
Answer to R.Q.3	27
Limitations of the Study.....	28
Suggestions for Future Research.....	28
Conclusion	29
References.....	30
Appendix 1.....	43
Appendix 3.....	44

Introduction

The Nuclear Program of Iran is one of the most vexing issues facing the international community today. United States officials believe that Iran plans to build facilities to construct nuclear weapons (*The New York Times*, 2012). Iran's explicit anti-American foreign policies make a nuclear-armed Iran very undesirable to the United States. American officials have to work with Russia when dealing with Iran. The United States currently has no direct diplomatic ties with Iran while Russia is Iran's active trading partner (CIA World Factbook, 2012). Russia is the other major nuclear power in the world and therefore the United States must work with it on worldwide weapon proliferation issues, including those of Iran.

The United States and Russia have worked closely on security issues since the end of the Cold War. For instance, the two powers worked to secure Russia's nuclear arsenal (Bunn, 2005). However, Russia's foreign policy is often at odds with that of the United States. Russia has alliances with Iran and Venezuela that represent economic and geopolitical interests. Both are significant trading partners and both balanced American interests in their respective regions (U.S. Department of State, 2009-2011).

The mass media arguably is the most important source of information about international relations for the public. Members of the public typically don't have personal experience with the newsmakers. Therefore, the public relies on the media for primary information on international issues. But many factors in society influence the media on what to cover and how to cover it. This complex process of figuring out what to present, picking facts, adding context and selecting language in the editorial process is what we call framing.

This study examines how Russian business and political ties with Iran and, particularly with its nuclear project, have been portrayed in a leading American national newspaper – *The*

New York Times. This study is important because it further expands our understanding of media frames and framing effects.

I chose the current time period because President Barak Obama took office in 2009. He promised to significantly improve relations with Russia and Iran (e.g. Grant, 2012; Rozen, 2012). Meanwhile Iran had intensified international tension by declaring significant progress in the nuclear industry. I begin this report by examining scholarly literature concerning the history of relations among the three countries and discussing media frames.

Literature Review

Iran started to create its national nuclear energy system in the mid-1950s when Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi ordered the establishment of a nuclear research center at Tehran University. In 1957 Iran and the U.S. signed a civil nuclear co-operation agreement as part of America's "Atoms for Peace" program. For the next twenty years Iran installed a number of nuclear reactors in its territory with the assistance of the United States (see, for example, *New York Times*, 2010). The Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 put an end to the Shah's regime and its nuclear program. However, in 1989 authorities of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) started to seek partners to rebuild the Iranian nuclear program. Iran chose Russia as its partner for nuclear energy technology and knowledge.

U.S.-Iranian Relations

After the Iranian revolution the United States failed to establish direct relations with the new leaders of the Islamic Republic. Bill (1988) wrote that although the United States acknowledged the revolution it made a number of early diplomatic missteps. Eventually these errors harmed American interests in the country and shifted the power toward the radicals. Behrooz (1990) said the Iranian post-revolutionary government was a coalition between the Islamic liberal Freedom Movement and the secular National Front. The new government's concept of relations with the world was flexible. Iran remained independent politically (as supreme leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini wished) and more receptive to the West in order to restrain influence and the threat of the East. Behrooz proceeds with fact that the relatively liberal provisional government was not anti-American. But the provisional Government did not last long. The clergy-dominated Islamic Republic Party prevailed over the liberals. Khomeini was aware of that. According to Bill (1988), the United States' admission of the dethroned Shah onto American soil on October 22, 1979 infuriated Iranian authorities. Extremists captured the U.S. Embassy in Tehran and for 444 days held 52 American citizens hostage. U.S.-Iranian relations were broken completely.

Russian-Iranian Relations

Iran's location, its trading capability and its authority in the Islamic world has always drawn Moscow's close attention (Freedman, 2002). Although the Soviet Union welcomed the collapse of Shah's pro-American regime, it did not have many opportunities to take its advantage there. Hermann (1990) explained that the Soviets were "latecomers" to the revolution and did not contribute to it. Besides the U.S.S.R. officially was an atheistic state and had contented itself for

fifteen years with a comfortable relationship with the Shah. Since Moscow did not have much influence over Teheran it settled for Iran's overt anti-Americanism.

Iran lost many of its political partners and investors following the Islamic Revolution. German company Kraftwerk Union A.G. (Siemens/KWU) refused to complete construction of the nuclear power plant in Bushehr that was started in 1974. The new Iranian government had to freeze the project until it found a new contractor. Some scholars state that due to its tarnished image, the IRI did not have much of a chance to find a nuclear contractor in the West. Therefore, Iran chose Russia in 1989 (e.g. Aras & Ozbay, 2006).

The Soviet Union desperately needed hard currency by the late 1980s. Future Iranian president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani appeared in Moscow in 1989. He was the highest level Iranian official in the Russian capital since the Shah's last visit in 1974 (Safranchuk, 1998). At that time both sides agreed to be long-term trading and economic partners. The program sent Russian specialists to Iran to assess the country's energy facilities. According to Safranchuk (1998), that assessment was the beginning of the Russian-Iranian partnership in the nuclear realm.

The legal basis for Russia's export-control policy was a 1992 presidential decree that developed a list of nuclear-related materials, equipment and technologies intended for peaceful purposes. The decree ordered the Russian Foreign Ministry (MID) to work with international organizations to ensure Russia's list matched that of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) (Safranchuk 1998). In 1999 Russian President Boris Yeltsin signed a federal law that detailed specifics of Russian nuclear trade. The law provided for the comprehensive control of any export deal, required written assurance that purchased materials would not be used in

development of weapons of mass destruction, and stated that Russia had a right to maintain control of exported materials in compliance with the terms of the deal.

Back in 1992 Russia and Iran had signed the agreement “About Peaceful Use of Nuclear Energy.” Russia agreed to finish the construction of the suspended Bushehr nuclear power plant under supervision of the IAEA and supply three light-water reactors of 1000 MW each. Scholars specifically point out the fact that Russia refused to build a heavy-water nuclear facility that could have been used to produce nuclear arms (Aras & Ozbay, 2006; Orlov, 1997). According to Orlov (1997), to guarantee Iran’s peaceful intentions Russia postponed any further steps until Iran concluded a treaty with the IAEA. Following IAEA approval in January 1995, both sides signed the contract to finish construction of the first power unit at Bushehr.

The United States roundly criticized the 1995 agreement. It should be mentioned that, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the U.S. had concerns that the former Soviet republics simply could not watch over their nuclear inheritance and that nuclear arms would get into the wrong hands in rogue states. As for the Russian deals with Iran, the U.S. and its allies accused Russia of sharing nuclear arms technologies with Iran. Safranchuk (1998) listed the concerns:

- The Russian reactor could be used to produce weapons-grade plutonium;
- Iran would likely use the new uranium enrichment facilities to produce weapons;
- Iran would acquire knowledge that would help it to develop nuclear arms.

The United States still suspected Iran had the intention to get nuclear weapons. This resulted in frequently strengthening economic sanctions against the Islamic Republic (*The New York Times*, 2012). These fears were based on the active development of nuclear facilities in Iran and numerous IAEA reports where the international agency expressed its concerns regarding Iran’s capability to produce nuclear weapons (IAEA Boar Report, 2009-2011).

In response to Iran rejecting any idea of stopping its uranium enrichment, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) passed Resolution 1737 in 2006. The Resolution imposed sanctions against trade of nuclear-related technologies and blocked assets of key individuals and companies involved. In subsequent years the U.N. Security Council passed three more resolutions that tightened sanctions. In addition to international actions the United States and its allies banned operations with Iranian banks and some individuals (U.S. Department of Treasury, 2012; Reuters, 2009).

Russia traditionally dismissed tough sanctions against its valued business partner. For example, UNSC resolution 1744, the first resolution on Iran, was amended several times after objections from these two countries. Although Russia accepted all previous resolutions of the Security Council, it holds the opinion that the pressure should not be too hard. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (MID) insists on compromise as the only option. MID warns that excessive pressure on Iran could result in the opposite effect. Commenting on recent sanctions against Iranian financial institutions by the United Kingdom and Canada in November 2011, the MID stated that it has an impression that "...for some of our partners strengthening the pressure on Iran is becoming nearly an end on itself."

The Russian side claimed the "Bushehr deal" with Iran was completely legal (Safranchuk, 1998). Russia agreed with the U.S. to exclude from the contract construction of uranium enrichment facilities. As for the U.S. concerns about the transfer of knowledge in the nuclear realm that Iran could use for military needs, Russia referred to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Russia's point is that Iran, just like 198 other countries including Russia and United States, is a co-signer of NPT and complies with it. Therefore, Russia holds, there is no reason to distrust Iran. In Russian literature, Safranchuk (1998) wrote, critics of

Russian business with Iran focus on the expediency of this partnership in favor of Russia and to the discredit of Iran.

Russia stated on numerous occasions that it does not want Iran to acquire nuclear weapons (Mizin, 2010). Indeed, why would Russia need another powerful Islamic state with ambitions for regional leadership while Russia itself tries to restore its significance? However, Iran is rich enough to be considered economically important. From this perspective, Russia's perspective in international debates about Iran is that Iran should not be oppressed. According to NPT, Iran has a right to its peaceful nuclear energy program. More so, the fourth article of NPT declares that co-signers have to help each other in peaceful nuclear energy development. Thus, Russian officials feel, Iran could step out of the NPT if it is cornered.

Iran is an important factor for Russia's economy and foreign policy. Control on Iranian nuclear facilities is powerful political leverage. It strengthens Russian positions in dealing with the U.S. and lets Russia keep an eye on Iran's nuclear intentions as well. Eventually, the amount of Russian involvement in trade with Iran is the best descriptor of the nature of Russia's support of Iran.

U.S.-Russian Relations

It was important for U.S. national security after the end of the Cold War to transform Russia internally and integrate it externally into the West. Goldgeier and Mcfaul (2003) wrote President Bill Clinton believed in the idea of a democratic transformation in Russia. President George W. Bush believed that treating Russia as a great power – irrespective of regime type – served the American national interests. In contrast to his father, however, George W. Bush saw gains from cooperation with this power and worried less about threats emanating from Russia.

After the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks Russia joined an anti-terrorism coalition led by the United States. Nevertheless, the competition in business and politics remained. For instance, a share of influence in Eurasia and particularly in former Soviet republics is one of the points of tension. Russia considers Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Iran to be in its spheres of interest and vocally – and, sometimes, forcefully - reacts to American interference in those regions. The military conflict in Georgia in 2008 serves as an illustration of this notion. Mankoff (2009) agreed with this thought saying in August 2008 Russia clearly demonstrated its ambitions to be a major power, at least in its nearby regions. Nevertheless, newly elected president Barack Obama claimed improving relations with Russia to be one of his priorities (e.g. Indyk, Lieberthal, O’ Hanlon, 2012). Obama said during his first visit to Russia, “I seek to reset relations with Russia because I believe that Americans and Russians have many common interests, interests that our governments recently have not pursued as actively as we could have.” (The White House, 2009). The United States and Russia signed a new nuclear arms reduction treaty on April 8, 2011 (START). Candidate Obama presents the treaty as one of his major international achievements on national security during his 2012 presidential campaign (<http://www.barackobama.com/record/national-security?source=primary-nav>).

Iranian Nuclear Program

The Iranian nuclear program has been a vexing international issue because in the 1990s The Islamic Republic of Iran began actively developing its nuclear facilities, including construction of a nuclear plant in Busherh. American and European officials believe Iran is planning to develop nuclear weapons but Iran says that its goal in developing a nuclear program is to provide the country with atomic energy and diversify its oil-oriented economy. Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad dismissed Iran's use of nuclear weapons as a security issue

during an interview with NBC in July 2008. Ahmadinejad stated, “Again, did nuclear arms help the Soviet Union from falling and disintegrating? For that matter, did a nuclear bomb help the U.S. to prevail inside Iraq or Afghanistan, for that matter? Nuclear bombs belong to the 20th century. We are living in a new century... Nuclear energy must not be equaled to a nuclear bomb. This is a disservice to the society of man” (NBC News, 2008).

A 2007 Congressional report stated that IAEA inspections since 2003 have revealed two decades' worth of undeclared nuclear activities in Iran, including uranium enrichment and plutonium separation efforts. In negotiations with Germany, France, and the United Kingdom in 2003, Iran agreed to suspend sensitive activities. These negotiations broke down in August 2005. On Sept. 24, 2005 the IAEA Board of Governors found Iran to be in noncompliance with its Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) safeguards agreement and reported Iran's case to the U.N. Security Council in February 2006. The Security Council called upon Iran to suspend uranium enrichment, reconsider construction of its heavy water reactor, ratify and implement the Additional Protocol, and implement transparency measures. The Security Council adopted limited sanctions. Despite these measures, Iran has continued its enrichment activities, failing to meet deadline after deadline (Squassoni, 2007). Iran informed the IAEA on Sept. 21, 2009, that it was constructing a second enrichment facility near Qom. An analysis published in the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists by Oelrich and Barzashka on Nov. 24, 2009 said that the enrichment facility is “neither ideal for commercial nor for military purposes.” Several days later the Institute for Science and International Security issued a critique of Oelrich and Barzashka bulletin, which stated that after detailed evaluation it concluded that using 3,000 IR-1 centrifuges, and starting with natural uranium, Iran could produce enough weapons-grade uranium for one bomb in roughly one year. With the use of low enriched uranium, the facility could make weapons-grade

uranium significantly faster (Albright & Brannan, 2009). President Barak Obama spent 2009 trying to engage Iran diplomatically. Tehran initially accepted, but then rejected an offer for an interim solution under which it would ship some uranium out of the country for enrichment. In June 2010, after months of lobbying by the Obama administration and Europe, the United Nations Security Council voted to impose a fourth round of sanctions on Iran (New York Times, 2010). To date Russia has signaled a new willingness to consider sanctions.

State-Press Relations

Mass media influence on public opinion always has been attractive to governments (e.g. Tichenor, Donohue & Olien, 1980). Therefore, authorities in different countries attempt to influence the media in a way society allows (Yang, 2003). In China, for instance, media works under direct control of the ruling Communist Party (Chan, 1994). Although the U.S. media is considered free the government is still its most important source for political information (Hamilton & Lawrence, 2010; Hallin, 1986). The government is a frequent newsmaker and it is a privileged and strategic news source; therefore, it can set the agenda (Parachos, 1991). Grossman and Kumar (1981) described the nature of state-press relationships as a symbiosis of interaction and hostility.

Major U.S. newspapers (e.g. *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*) gave the public more negative exposure to the Reagan administration during Iran-Contra scandal than did the government commission (Brown, 1995). Yang (2003) found that *Chinese People's Daily Online*, the *China Daily*, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* coverage of air strikes on Kosovo in general were reflected their respective governments' attitudes toward the

issue. However, Chan (1994) found that in the case of Hong Kong's return to Chinese jurisdiction in 1997, *The New York Times* remained largely independent.

Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm (1956) set up four theories to explain the state-press relations. These theories were the authoritarian, the libertarian, the Soviet, and the social responsibility, with which they defined the relationship between the press and its domestic political environment. Authoritarian theory stated that mass media operates under the direct control of the authoritarian government. Libertarian press theory suggests the system when the media is free to decide what to publish. According to the Soviet theory the state-owned media were to serve the interests of the Soviet system. Unlike the press of an authoritative regime, the Soviet press was obligated to provide a view on the world through communist ideology. Social responsibility theory aims to provide easy access to different media. The media serves as educational source and can be controlled only by journalism ethics and community opinion.

Ozturk (2009) claimed after Sept. 11 attacks the state-press relationship in the U.S. experienced changes. The infamous terroristic attacks have affected society's views on freedoms. Since media-state relations are determined by the basic beliefs and assumptions of the society, pure libertarian or social responsibility theories can no longer be applied alone. Ozturk gave several examples of the restriction on the publication of pictures of dead American soldiers or the dismissal of journalists. He concluded with the thought that contemporary state-media relations seem to be a mixture of libertarian, social responsibility and authoritarian systems.

The results showed that frames presenting a particular foreign country's interest as a conflict with American interest caused readers to trust that country less and be less likely to favor friendly policies toward it and vice versa.

U.S. Media Coverage of Iran

In 2002, President Bush named Iran as a part of a so-called “Axis of Evil” (e.g. BBC News, 2002; *The New York Times* 2002). Thus, Iran was again officially named as an American enemy. After Bush’s speech, the portrayal of Iran’s government as undemocratic was a central theme in constructing the Iranian threat (Hayes, 2009). With the election of Iran’s current president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the coverage of Iran in *The New York Times* and the *Washington Post* as it related to the terror theme increased (Kamal, 2010). Iranian-American relations, or rather the absence of diplomatic relations, has been mostly characterized by iconic Iranian anti-Americanism (e.g. Clawson, 2004; Peterson, 2009). According to Brewer’s (2009) research the assumption could be made that this state of the two countries’ relations will likely make the reader look at the Islamic Republic negatively. Some 30 years after the U.S. broke diplomatic relations with Iran, 87 percent of Americans view Iran unfavorably (CNN, 2009). According to a Gallup Poll (2011), Americans rate Iran as the greatest U.S. enemy. However, the current U.S. administration has been trying to improve relations with Iran (*The New York Times*, 2009).

America’s proclamation of the War on Terror after 2001 was connected with the use of pre-existing cultural resources, codes, prejudices, and images to mobilize public support of military action (Reese and Lewis 2009). Kamal (2010) found that terror-related themes had increased in *New York Times* and *Washington Post* coverage of Iran by 2005. The use of cognates of the word “terror” and its derivatives increased from fewer than 100 mentions in 1979 to more than 500 mentions in 2005. Kamal (2010) suggested that such a frequency was a cue to the readers for how to think about the event. The paradox is that the media often have an unintentional partnership with terror. Since terrorism, by definition, is shocking and attention-

grabbing, it draws media attention (Powell, 2011). Thus, media face the dilemma of informing the audience yet reproducing terroristic effects over and over.

Terrorism frames in the U.S. media discourse supposedly incorporate a large Islamic aspect. However, scholarly findings showed varied results. Kumar (2010) said that Islam was framed in the media as a malicious religion. Powell (2011) wrote that today in the contemporary U.S. news cycle, Islam has strong connections to oil, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, and terror. However, from Ibrahim's (2010) point of view, the positive qualitative shift of Islam's depiction in the media happened not long after the terrorist attacks in Sept. 11, 2001. She said that the U.S. government made efforts to set the positive frames for American Islam. More stories about peaceful Islam in the U.S. were broadcasted. American Muslims were portrayed as loyal citizens and patriots just as Jews or Christians.

Another great symbol of Iran in the media is women. Veiled in the apparently impenetrable black chador, they are another great symbol of the Iranian denial of basic Western values. Roushnam (2004) stated that the U.S. media managed to form a seamless icon of retrograde fanaticism, and an enemy of "us" (p.24). Iranian women become the evidence of Iranian deviation. It is perfect graphic illustration for the media and one of the most powerful images.

U.S. Media Coverage of Russia

Covering Russia in the period of the first post-Soviet years to 1995, the U.S. media were still employing the constructions of the Cold War (Malinkina & McLeod, 2000; McKiney, 2007; Wang, 1995). Cohen (2001) said that the post-Cold War narrative of American journalism celebrated Russian transitioning to capitalism. However, during Putin's years, journalists switched to an antagonistic neo-Cold War narrative. Freedoms (or lack thereof) of Russian media

in 2000s become popular topic for western journalists and scholars (e.g. Feng-Yung Hu, 2009; Loory 2000; Lupis, 2005). Ibold (2007) found that in *The New York Times*, the percentage of positive articles fell from 29 percent in 1989 to 7 percent in 2005, and negative articles grew in an almost inverse relationship, with 9 percent in 1989 and 21 percent in 2005. However, unlike in Soviet times, in the 2000s the economic theme has prevailed over ideology. Articles tell the audience about the Kremlin's tightening control over oil ventures and its use of natural resource production as an instrument of influence in its foreign policy. Thus, it is not surprising that the media stories reflected the U.S. concern over whether the Russian assistance in building an Iranian light-water reactor served as cover for assisting Iran in a weapons program (Moeller, 2004).

The Russian military operation in Georgia added more black strokes to the negative media image of modern Russia. *The New York Times* portrayed Russia as an invader and occupant of Georgian territories (Basilaia, 2009). This conflict brought relations between Russia and the United States to their lowest point since the Cold War (King, 2008). King specifically pointed out that Western journalists were quick to compare the conflict with the previous Soviet crushing of the Prague Spring or Hitler's invasion of the Sudetenland.

I employ framing as a theoretical foundation for this study. Its essence is that a storyteller can emphasize certain parts of a set of information so they will have crucial influence on the audience's perception of the entire event. Framing thus can work in conjunction with redundancy to significantly influence public opinion.

Theoretical Framework: Framing

The body of literature on framing in media and communication is voluminous. The number of studies employing framing theory has been growing steadily since the early 1990s

and reached its peak during 2008-2009 (Vliegenthart & van Zoonen, 2011). However, I did not find a commonly accepted empirical definition of “frame.”

Most popular explanations of the literature came from classic studies. They state that frames are “principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters” Gitlin (1980, p. 6) or “a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events” (Gamson and Modigliani, 1987, p. 143). Perhaps, Entman (1993) gave most empirically applied definition: “To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating context, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (p. 52).

Unlike his colleagues, Entman named elements that at least can be derived empirically. For example, Matthes and Kohring (2008) wrote that a problem definition can consist of an issue and relevant actors who discuss the problem. A causal interpretation is an attribution of failure or success regarding a specific outcome. An evaluation can be positive, negative, or neutral and can refer to different objects. A treatment recommendation can include a call for or against a certain action. Nevertheless, every frame is attached to a specific context. For instance, it is clear that frames for Russia’s partnership with Iran differ from the frames for immigration issues in the United States.

Framing theory has sociological (e.g. Entman, 1991; Goffman, 1974; Gitlin, 1980; Gamson & Modigliani, 1987) and psychological foundations (e.g. Domke, Shah, & Wackman, 1998; Iyengar, 1991; Kahneman & Tversky, 1984). As sociological concept, framing is one of the peculiarities of humans’ perception of reality. People have pre-existing schemas or frames that guide them through life, giving the notion of good and evil, what is acceptable and what is

not. Those individual frames are based on peoples' personal experience, beliefs and culture (Entman, 1993). News producers have their personal frames as well. Besides, they have to quickly produce and deliver information to the audience in the most convenient form possible. Thus, media content is simplified and fragmented.

Framing does not end when information reaches the audience. Scheufele (1999) developed a scheme that conceptualizes framing as a continuous process: frame building, frame setting, individual-level effects of framing, and a link between individual frames and media frames. According to the scheme, journalists construct frames and media set those frames, showing people what is important at the moment. Audiences process incoming information through their individual frame systems, develop behaviors and attitudes, and then send feedback to journalists. This process is cyclical.

Nevertheless, based on the literature, I agree with Matthes and Kohring (2008) on the idea of the abstractedness of the frame. People see frames differently or don't see them at all. This trait of communication frames to a great extent complicates their identification.

Scholars name several ways for frame identification. Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) mention only deductive and inductive methods. Deductive seeks pre-defined frames in the text. In other words, the researcher knows what he or she is looking for. In turn, the inductive method implies that frames should be found manually through examining the text.

Matthes and Kohring (2008) identified six approaches. Those approaches are: hermeneutic, linguistic, manual holistic, computer-assisted, deductive approach, and cluster analysis. I examined them further to understand which one was suitable for this research.

The Hermeneutic or interpretative approach links the interpretation of content with cultural elements. However, in this case frame extraction wholly depends on the researcher's

interpretation. Therefore, a researcher may end up finding what he/she was consciously looking for. This can create a threat to reliability because the interpretation of frames may differ across researchers and coders.

The Linguistic approach identifies frames by analyzing the selection, placement, and structure of specific words and sentences in a text. The idea is that specific words are the building blocks of frames. The difference from the hermeneutic approach is that a researcher clearly determines the linguistic elements. Syntax, script, theme, and rhetoric can be measured to distinguish structural dimensions of frames. The major advantage of this approach is the systematic and thorough analysis. However, making frame analysis of a large amount of text is rather difficult and time-consuming. Moreover, it remains unclear how all these features are finally braided together to signify a frame.

The Manual Holistic approach assumes finding frames first by analyzing some part of a text. After that, frames should be coded as a holistic variable in a manual content analysis. Matthes and Kohring (2008) refer to Simon and Xenos (2000) who conducted an in-depth qualitative analysis of some newspaper texts in the first step and then generated six frames. The scholars defined those frames in a codebook and coded them in a subsequent quantitative content analysis. The main weakness of this method is that the perception and coding of frames strongly depend upon how the researcher perceives the issue.

The Computer-Assisted approach is based on the notion that frames could be detected by the occurrence of certain words and phrases in text (Entman, 1993). Using a computer search a researcher would find keywords that point to the frame presence. For example, such words as competition, competitiveness, and rival could form a “competition frame”. An obvious advantage of this method is accurate search results. However, a human coder computer is unable

to understand the complexity and richness of human language. Therefore, the search is limited to exact words, and some figures of speech like metaphors or metonymies may be missed. This approach also is criticized for weak validity because it associates frames only with words but not with the meaning of the text.

All approaches described above reveal frames inductively. In contrast, the Deductive approach, which was mentioned earlier, derives frames from the existing literature and searches for them in content (e.g. Dirikx & Gelders, 2010; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). Semetko & Valkenburg (2000) developed a highly cited study. They employed five frames that have been found in the news most often: attribution of responsibility, conflict, human interest, economic consequences, and morality. Each news story was analyzed through a series of 20 questions to which the coder had to answer “yes” or “no.” For instance, the conflict frame was measured with questions such as, “Does the story reflect disagreement between parties-individuals-groups countries?” Results showed that so-called sensationalist media were using the human interest frames more frequently. Serious media, however, preferred to use responsibility and conflict frames. Justifying the choice of method, authors wrote that inductive methods are labor intensive and time consuming. The Deductive approach, however, makes it necessary to have a clear idea of the kinds of frames likely to be found in the news.

Matthes and Kohring (2008) proposed a Hierarchical Cluster Analysis. They identify frames by breaking them down to their lowest units and finding them in texts. This method is based on Entman’s (1993) notion that frames consist of elements: a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation. For example the frame element “problem definition”, the central issue under investigation and the most important actor, is made of subtopics on the given issue. Authors assert that subtopics form a certain

pattern that can be identified across several texts in a sample. Subtopics as variables represent single frame elements grouped together. Matthes and Kohring (2008) specifically emphasize that any operational frame definition that denotes frame elements can be used in this method.

All approaches described above contribute to operationalization of framing theory. They are important for understanding frames. Nevertheless, unreliability of manual coding will always be a problem. Inductive methods to a great extent depend on the personal interpretation of a researcher. They are also time-consuming when the researcher has to process a large amount of text. The Deductive approach in turn is initially limited to established frames. Therefore, it is inflexible for identification of newly emerging frames.

I considered frames likely be in the news due to the specifics of American affairs with Iran and Russia. The U.S. has no diplomatic ties with Iran (CIA World Factbook, 2012). Therefore, the United States cannot tolerate Russia's delivery of nuclear materials to Iran. For Russia, however, Iran is significant source of revenue (Ministry of Economic Development of Russian Federation, 2011). The Kremlin definitely values this political asset. At the same time I believe that Russian authorities realize they should maintain friendly relations with the United States. Therefore, I think that the following three out of five most common news frames (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000) will likely be in the news.

- The Economic frame emphasizes economic and financial aspects of the given issue
- The Conflict frame emphasize conflict between individuals or institutions
- The Responsibility frame finds individuals or institution responsible either for the cause of the problem or for its solution

Two frames were not included to the study. The Human Interest frame brings emotional angle to the presentation of the event. The Morality frame puts the issue in the context of moral or religious beliefs.

Research Questions

This study examines how Russian business and political ties with Iran's nuclear program have been portrayed in *The New York Times*. Therefore, my research questions are following:

R.Q. 1: Which of three frames was dominant in the coverage of nuclear and arms trade between Russia and Iran?

R.Q. 2: How the occurrence of the frames of Russia's nuclear and arms trade with Iran is related to landmarking events in international discussions of the Iranian nuclear program in 2009-2011?

R.Q. 3: Do the frames indicate a "reset" in the U.S. – Russian relationship?

Method

The New York Times articles were collected through the Dow Jones' Factiva database. Search parameters were: *Russia* and Iran* nuclear in all text and 2009-2011 in date*. The truncation symbol, asterisk (*), ensures including all of the possible spellings and word combinations (e.g. Russian, Iranian nuclear trade and others). The primary search netted 595 articles. A large number of those articles, however, concerned Russia's involvement in American and U.N. efforts to halt the Iranian nuclear program. Therefore the population (N=595) was manually screened to select the articles that mentioned Russian nuclear and/or arms trade with Iran. Eventually 78 articles from print and web editions of *The New York Times* were coded and analyzed. The unit of analysis was the story.

The coding process was conducted by the author (coder #1) and an additional coder (coder #2). The coder was a female American graduate student. The author coded 100 percent of the sample, created a codebook and code sheet (see Appendix 1). The author also trained the additional coder. Coder #2 coded 35 percent of the sample or 28 articles out of 78. The intercoder reliability between the first coder and the second coder was .75 using Holsti's formula. Cohen's Kappa was .31.

To find the frames in the stories I employed the set of questions developed by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000). The original questionnaire had 20 questions that were meant to measure the occurrence of five pre-defined frames. Each question can be answered YES or NO. In the codebook an affirmative answer was coded as 1 and negative as 0 respectively (see Appendix 2). I shortened the number of frames to three. I suggested that Attributing of Responsibility, Conflict and Economic frames were likely to appear in the given context.

I also modified questions that Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) developed to detect frames in the text. I added new and narrowed some of the existing questions to make them more suitable for the topic. Frame measurement proceeded from Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) and those who used their method (e.g. d'Haenens and de Lange, 2001; de Vreese et al., 2001; Kline et al., 2006; Dirikx and Gelders, 2010). All those studies considered a minimum of three questions to measure every frame. None of the referred studies, however, specified the exact number of affirmative answers per story that would be enough to determine the frame. Therefore I decided to count an affirmative answer as an indicator of the frame presence. To ensure that question items would cluster appropriately I created additional questions as well. In respect to my study I created five questions for the Attribution of Responsibility frame, six for the Conflict frame and four for the Economic frame. These were questions such as "Does the story suggest

that the Russian government has the ability to alleviate the problem in whole or its part?” (Attribution of Responsibility), “Does the story reflect a disagreement between American and Russian parties/individuals/groups/governments on Iran?” (Conflict), “Is there a mention of Russian financial ties with Iran or Russian financial losses or gains now or in the future?”(Economic). The frame was detected if the article answered at least one question in every cluster.

Measurement

My first research question asked *which one of three frames was dominant in the coverage of nuclear and arms trade between Russia and Iran*. To answer it I created a table and transferred my code sheet in binary format into it (see Appendix 2). The table shows distribution of answers to assigned questions throughout the body of examined articles. The first column has an index number for each article. The index number also serves as an identification number (ID) for each article. Three other columns form clusters of generic frames: Attribution of Responsibility, Conflict and Economic. The binary data in clusters represents affirmative and negative answers to the questions from the code sheet. All answers will be summarized to determine the mode which will be the most frequent frame.

To answer the second research question, which asks if occurrence of the frames related to landmarks in international discussions of Iranian Nuclear program in 2009-2011, I created a histogram. It helped to visualize the distribution of the data to plot its density. Thus, the highest or the lowest points on the histogram possibly could be correlated with certain political events, if any. The histogram’s X-axis represented the timeline from January 2009 to December 2011. The Y-axis charted the number of detected frames. Blue, red and green rectangles represented Attribution of Responsibility, Conflict and Economic frames respectively. The Histogram was

correlated with the Timeline (see Appendix 3), which indicated significant events in Iranian nuclear program during the time of the study.

Findings and Discussion

The present study was designed to examine how Russian business ties with Iran and, particularly with its nuclear project, have been portrayed in *The New York Times* through framing. Results showed the dominance of the Conflict frame. My method did not allow an unambiguous answer to the question about relationship between frames and landmarking events, but the frames do indicate the “reset” with Russia that President Obama declared. Details of my findings and analysis follow.

Answer to R.Q. 1

The most frequent frame was Conflict, with 130 total affirmative answers to six questions from the question list. It is important to mention that the number of affirmative answers should not be confused with the number of frames. However, since my first research question did not ask about exact number of frames in the stories I consider this value negligible.

The Conflict frame cluster contained:

- 40% of affirmative answers to the question “Does the story refer to two sides or to more than two sides of the problem or issue?”
- 23.84% of affirmative answers to the question “Does the story reflect disagreement between American and Russian parties/individuals/groups/governments on Iran?”
- 16.92% of affirmative answers to the question “Does the story reflect disagreement between Russia and Iran?”

Questions such as “Does one party/individual/group/country reproach another?” and “Does the story refer to Russia as winner or loser?” had a 2.3 percent frequency in affirmative responses. The question “Does the story refer to the U.S. and the West as winners or losers?” had 14.6 percent. Due to insignificant percentages of affirmative responses, those questions were considered as negligible.

Economic was the second frequent frame with 93 affirmative answers. Its cluster had 52% of affirmative answers to the question “Is there a mention of Russian financial ties with Iran or Russian financial losses or gains now or in the future?” and 31.18% of the stories answered affirmatively to the question “Is there a mention of the costs/degree of expense involved?” The other two questions had 3.22% and 12.9% of affirmative answers respectively and were considered insignificant.

The last cluster, the Attribution of Responsibility frame, collected 90 affirmative answers with the significant dominance of the question “Does the story suggest that Russian government has the ability to alleviate the problem in whole or its part?”

Overall dominance of the Conflict frame is not surprising. The reason for such expectation is the opposite views that Russia and the United States have on Iran’s nuclear program. With the reference to *The New York Times* I maintain that U.S. officials believe Iran is preparing to build nuclear weapons and, therefore, it should be stopped (“Iran’s nuclear program”, 2012). To do so, American diplomacy follows the tactics of carrots and sticks. Apparently, the sticks are prevailing so far. For instance, the recent Iran cut off from the global financial system SWIFT had denied Iran’s access to business transactions using the system. Russia also is concerned with Iran’s nuclear activity but Russia feels further pressing Iran would be counterproductive (Orlov, 2012). The number of tough sanctions, which had already been

imposed on Iran, had not improved the situation. Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs claims further sanctions could lead to change of the current Iranian regime. According to the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov, the Kremlin does not want to share responsibility for the consequences of an Iranian regime overthrow. Besides, Iran has geographic proximity to Russia and the country holds significant influence in the Muslim world, two realities important to Russia (Mamedova, 2012). Therefore, Moscow insists on further negotiations.

At first glance, the dominance of the Conflict frame might be seen as confirmation of Moeller's (2004) and Ibold's (2007) observations of a renewed Cold War narrative. However, according to the results, 40% of stories containing the Conflict frame did not emphasize the responsibility of Russia for the issue but mentioned different sides of the problem. For example, 22 articles mentioned disagreement between Russia and Iran. My impression was when Iran was going too far in its negligence of fair demands of the international community, Russia inclined to support the sanctions. By turn, Iran was expressing its concerns, saying Russia had yielded to the U.S. (e.g. Cooper & Mazetti, 2009; Baker, 2010). The newspaper had also noticed displeasure of some Republicans who claimed Obama was too compliant to Russia (e.g. Baker, 2010; Friedman, 2010; Baker, 2010).

The Economic frame is directly related to the topic of the study. I initially expected it to prevail over the other frames. The Conflict frame contained 40% of the stories that answered a rather general question while the Economic frame was detected with questions directly targeting Russia's financial ties with Iran. *The New York Times* very often mentioned Russia's commercial interests in the country as a primary reason for reluctance of Russia to support tougher sanctions.

In the Attribution of Responsibility cluster 54.4% of affirmative answers fall into the question about the ability of Russia to alleviate the problem. Therefore, I claim, the newspaper

pointed out the significant role Russia played in the diplomatic settlement of an issue about the Iranian nuclear program. For instance, in September 2009 a coalition led by the U.S. disclosed hidden nuclear facilities in Iran near the city of Qom. The cogent argument made Russia shift its position toward tougher sanctions against Iran. “President Obama, in his first visit to the opening of the United Nations General Assembly, made progress Wednesday on two key issues, wringing a concession from Russia to consider tough new sanctions against Iran and securing support from Moscow and Beijing for a Security Council resolution to curb nuclear weapons,” *The New York Times* wrote (Cooper, 2009).

Answer to R.Q.2

The nuclear program of Iran and talks surrounding it are definitely newsworthy to *The New York Times*. Any development of that situation is clearly a newsworthy event. It seems natural that the number of frames is likely to increase with the appearance of new information.

The histogram showed that significant events such as the disclosure of Iran’s secret nuclear sites in September 2009 provoked the greatest increase of the Attribution of Responsibility and Conflict frames for the entire period of observation. October 2009 was also marked with a rather high number of those frames. However, the IAEA report in August 2009 about continuing uranium enrichment in Iran was followed by a moderate increase of the Economic and Conflict frames. In contrast, in February 2010, when the U.N. indicated it had evidence of suspicious nuclear activity in Iran, frames were not found. The likely explanation is that my topic was relatively narrow and it did not spread to all the aspects of coverage of Iranian nuclear program. Therefore, the mechanism that I developed did not allow having an unambiguous answer to the second research question.

Answer to R.Q.3

President Obama's "reset" policy towards Russia definitely influenced media reporting on it. The number of examined stories on the topic, 51.1 percent, suggested the Russian government had the ability to help the U.S. with the Iranian "problem." The newspaper made an ironic comment on a gag gift gone awry concerning U.S. and Russian diplomats. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton presented the gift to Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. On March 2009 Mrs. Clinton presented Mr. Lavrov with a red plastic button emblazoned with the English word "reset" and the Russian word "peregruzka." The word "peregruzka" means "overcharge" but was confused with the word "perezagruzka" which is for "reset." Despite the comments about the difficulties of the reset process on the example with the gift, *The New York Times* had been repeatedly pointing to concrete achievements such as Russia's consent to let the U.S. use its airspace for the Afghan war or Russia's renunciation of the sale of S-300 missiles to Iran (Baker, 2009; Sagner&Kramer, 2010). Another indicator of the reset could be the Conflict frame. It showed certain disagreement within the U.S. Congress on the way the "reset" was handled. For instance, President Obama's intention to revive a civilian nuclear cooperation agreement with Russia that was shelved in protest of war in Georgia displeased some lawmakers. The bid to renew the pact is the latest effort in Obama's drive to repair relations with Russia and comes as he seeks Moscow's support for tough new sanctions against Iran. But word of the possible move has generated consternation in Congress, where some lawmakers were already skeptical of the deal and now worry that Mr. Obama is giving Russia too much." The *Times* reacted on the Republican election victory in 2010 Congressional with concern that the winners could undo progress partnership with Russia, which the newspaper called main success of Obama's foreign policy.

Limitations of the Study

The first limitation of this study is that it employs pre-defined frames. All other frames in the articles were ignored by default. Therefore the findings of the study are limited. However none of the search methods mentioned in the literature review promised solid results.

The second limitation is the frame count. The questionnaire of the Attribution of Responsibility frame cluster has five questions; the Conflict frame cluster has six and the Economic frame cluster has four respectively. Some stories answered to more than one question, some answered to one question only. Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), originators of the method, did not mention this fact. They just wrote that there should be at least three questions in each cluster. Those who used the method earlier did not mention anything, either (d'Haenens and de Lange, 2001; de Vreese et al., 2001; Kline et al., 2006; Dirikx and Gelders, 2010). Therefore I decided that if the story affirmatively answers at least one question for each cluster, the frame would be considered detected.

Suggestions for Future Research

For future research on this topic I suggest examining *The New York Times'* editorials and readers' letters. The importance of editorials is that they directly refer to the newspaper's points on the issue. On a larger timescale, data from editorials could produce a solid understanding of the newspapers' perspective on the Russian nuclear and arms businesses with Iran. I also suggest future studies should definitely pay attention to the letters section as a source of frames that the audience sends to the media. In addition, I think that further inquiry should work on revealing the mechanism that connects media frames to real events. Thus, examination of editorials and letters could form a solid foundation for studies on a mediated image of the continuing controversial nuclear program of Iran and events surrounding.

Conclusion

The nuclear program of Iran and its development have been longtime issues. They infringed on some of the most powerful countries' interests. Therefore, the media should be specifically cautious about the accuracy of coverage of the problem. I believe that the way Russia's nuclear and arms trade with Iran was framed could have important implications for public understanding of the issue. The study demonstrated ambiguous nature of generic frames and the need to study them further.

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Appendix 1

Questions for frames determinations

Instructions for coder:

- Please write your name in the code sheet
- Make sure article IDs are correct
- Code any 28 articles

Please, answer the following questions and fill out the code sheet

YES=1 NO=0

Attribution of responsibility

1. Does the story suggest that Russian government has the ability to alleviate the problem in whole or its part?
2. Does the story suggest that Russian government is responsible for the issue/problem?
3. Does the story suggest solution(s) to the whole or part of the problem/issue?
4. Does the story suggest that an individual/group of people in Russia is (are) responsible for the issue/problem?
5. Does the story suggest that the problem requires urgent action?

Conflict frame

1. Does the story reflect disagreement between American and Russian parties/individuals/groups/governments on Iran?
2. Does the story reflect disagreement between Russia and Iran?
3. Does one party/individual/group/country reproach another? (Americans reproach Russians and vice versa)
4. Does the story refer to two sides or to more than two sides of the problem or issue?
5. Does the story refer to the U.S. and the West as winners or losers?
6. Does the story refer to Russia as a winner or loser?

Economic frame

1. Is there a mention of Russian financial ties with Iran or Russian financial losses or gains now or in the future?
2. Is there a mention of American financial losses or gains now or in the future?
3. Is there a mention of the costs/degree of expense involved?
4. Is there a reference to economic consequences of pursuing or not pursuing a course of action?

Appendix 3

Timeline. Development of the situation around Iranian nuclear program

2009

February

Speaking on the 30th anniversary of the Islamic revolution in Iran, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad says he would welcome talks with the US as long as they are based on "mutual respect".

June

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is declared to have won a resounding victory in the June 12, presidential election.

September

Iran admits that it is building a uranium enrichment plant near Qom, but insists it is for peaceful purposes.

October

Five permanent UN Security Council members plus Germany offer Iran a proposal to enrich its uranium in Russia and France.

November

Iran refuses to send its uranium to Russia and France. IAEA passes a resolution condemning Iran for developing a second uranium enrichment site in secret.

2010

February

Iran says it is ready to send uranium abroad for further enrichment under a deal agreed with the West. The U.S. calls on Tehran to match its words with actions.

May

Iran agreed to send its uranium to Turkey and Brazil for further enrichment. The United States rejected the deal because Iran had increased its uranium stockpile. Washington also believed the move was a delaying tactic to avert sanctions.

June

The U.N. Security Council imposed a fourth round of sanctions on Iran. At the same time the U.S. Congress expanded existing American sanctions on Iran.

July

Iran announced it had produced 20 kg of 20 percent enriched uranium. Western powers have repeatedly expressed fear that Iran's capability to enrich 20 percent would help it produce nuclear weapon material, which is around 90 percent.

August

The Russian Federal Atomic Energy Agency (Rosatom) announced that the first reactor at the Bushehr would soon be loaded with nuclear fuel and become Iran's first operational nuclear power plant.

The Bushehr reactor is officially completed.

December

Talks begin in Geneva between Iranian nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili and E.U. foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton, who is leading the discussions for the six world powers.

January

The six powers fail to prise any concessions from Iran. The E.U. and United States call the talks disappointing and say no further meetings are planned.

November

IAEA report suggests Iran was recently working on nuclear weaponry.

Sources:

Al Jazeera English; United States Institute of Peace; Reuters; BBC News.

68	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
69	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
70	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
71	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
72	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0
73	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
74	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
75	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
76	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0
77	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	0
78	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	0
Σ	46	16	19	2	7	31	22	3	52	19	3	49	3	29	12
Total	90					130					93				

Appendix 4. Frames occurred in articles by month

