

A Comparative Corpus-Based Analysis of the Framing of the US–Iran Conflict in Pakistani Urdu- and English-Language Print Media

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Abstract

This corpus-based critical discourse analysis explores the linguistic and ideological framing of the military war between the USA and Iran in 2026 in Pakistani English- and Urdu-language print media. The study examines how geopolitical crises are generated under similar macroeconomic conditions but different sociolinguistic pressures in two bilingual media systems: Dawn and the Daily Times in the English group and Dunya along with specialist, highbrow editorial pages in the Urdu group. The present study compares the frequency of keywords, collocation patterns, key-word-in-context patterns, semantic prosody, and metaphoric representations based on two theories: Robert Entman's framing theory and Semetko and Valkenburg's generic framing model. The quantitative results indicate that the Urdu language corpus is more likely to use active moral judgment, and the English language corpus is more likely to use diplomatic sequencing and multilateralism. The study presents the Pakistani print media as a dual-register public space that offers strategic neutrality and policy-oriented realism to English-reading elites while mobilizing Urdu-reading masses through moralistic and sovereign narratives, supported by a meticulous analysis of authentic Unicode Urdu texts transliterated using consistent ALA-LC romanization patterns. The findings have implications for critical media literacy and foreign policy analysis and add to our knowledge of the portrayal of geopolitical conflict in multilingual postcolonial states.

Keywords: Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies, Geopolitical Conflict, Pakistani Print Media, Framing Analysis, Multilingualism, Semantic Prosody

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Introduction

The geopolitical tension between the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran has always been one of the central axes of instability and rhetorical confrontationalism in the modern geopolitical system. This longstanding problem culminated in an unprecedented and extremely combustible situation in early 2026 (Bhatti & Abdali, 2026). On February 28, 2026, the United States and Israel launched a coordinated air and missile attack on the critical infrastructure of Iran's military command, nuclear facilities, and strategic logistics and transport hubs, plunging the region into an all-out war. The escalation was met with an immediate, asymmetric counterattack by Iranian forces, including drone and missile attacks against facilities in Jordan, Kuwait, and Bahrain linked to the United States, and the successful sealing off of the Strait of Hormuz, a sea route that conveys some twenty percent of global petroleum traffic. The US then responded with a full-scale naval blockade of all Iranian commercial and energy ports. Such a direct and conventional confrontation could have a destabilizing impact on global energy markets and disrupt international shipping corridors, with a direct and immediate threat to the developing import-dependent economies.

The war in neighboring countries posed serious security and macroeconomic risks for Pakistan, which has a long, porous 900 km border with Iran. (Raza et al., 2026). Its historical ties to the United States, close strategic and security cooperation with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, and its heavy dependence on fossil fuels, especially imports, would result in catastrophic domestic inflation, disruptions in supply chains, and even border insecurity in case of a protracted conflict. To recognize these significant vulnerabilities, Pakistan's civil-military leadership practiced active, high-stakes diplomacy. The Pakistani mediators consulted regional players, such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey, to develop a workable de-escalation mechanism that included preliminary, confidential talks with the United States and Iran in Islamabad. The moves were so intense that all the countries involved in the war electronically signed the Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding to suspend military activities and reopen the key trade routes from the date of signing.

The media has captured this very complex diplomatic process within the Pakistani framework, offering a unique lens to observe the discursive negotiation of complex geopolitical alignments and national interests (Saleem Abbas & Saad Yaseen, 2021). The newspaper editorial, specifically the op-ed page, does not merely reflect on an

event; it actively constructs political reality, distributes agency, and assigns moral responsibility to actors in the international arena. This discursive construction is very complicated in the bilingual media system of Pakistan, where English-language media caters to the socioeconomically different readerships and Urdu-language media caters to the other socioeconomically different readerships. In the past, the English press has always reflected the thinking of the educated, secular, and policymaking class of the society, while the Urdu press has been the medium of the larger and more traditional and populist sections of the society. The war framing of the US-Iran conflict then linguistically and ideologically challenges the two print media registers.

The role of print media in Pakistan has not been explored and analyzed in detail, as most media studies from the West focus on security issues, and regional studies are concentrated on sectarian and alliance dynamics in the Middle East (Mah Noor et al., 2026). As a non-belligerent and highly vulnerable mediator, Pakistan offers in-depth insights into the nature of media outlets' strategic neutrality and regional solidarity. As scholars have pointed out, during such international crises, the media narratives are never linguistically neutral, and the lexical selection, syntactic packaging, and metaphorical representation systematically lead readers to certain political interpretations. Therefore, it is imperative to carry out a systematic and corpus-assisted analysis of the coverage reported in the Pakistani English and Urdu press about this critical moment of the US-Iran conflict to comprehend the cognitive and linguistic nature of international conflict reporting in South Asia.

A detailed corpus-assisted study is essential for understanding the cognitive and linguistic dimensions of international conflict reporting at this crucial juncture of the US-Iran conflict, particularly in how the South Asian media reports in Urdu and English. Therefore, a systematic and corpus-assisted study of the cognitive and linguistic aspects of international conflict reporting during this critical moment of the US-Iran conflict is important to understand the cognitive and linguistic features of reporting international conflict in South Asia (Sadiq et al., 2025).

This study examines Pakistan's print media's division of discourse on the US-Iran war for English- and Urdu-speaking audiences. The same macroeconomic and geopolitical risks affect these newspapers. English- and Urdu-language newspapers cover the same foreign actors, activities, and diplomatic outcomes but use different linguistic registers, lexical associations, and evaluation methods. The English-

language media emphasises multilateral diplomacy, institutional procedures, and systemic economic calculations, while the Urdu-language media is highly polarised, emotive, and personalistic, portraying the conflict as a moral struggle against imperialist aggression and Zionist expansionism. Due to this language split, elite decision-makers are reaching an analytical policy agreement, unlike emotive, anti-imperialist, personalistic public opinion, which threatens national public cohesion. This study examines the two media registers and their ideological fragmentation using corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis, which includes normalised lexical frequencies, collocation patterns, keyword scores, semantic prosody, and conceptual metaphors.

Rationale of the Study

This study is the first empirical study in corpus linguistics, critical discourse studies, and geopolitical communication in non-Western contexts. It also analyses geopolitical communication representation. This study fills a vacuum in multilingual media research since it is difficult to establish the conceptual and functional equivalence between diverse linguistic systems, especially under a chaotic military crisis. The study compares English and Urdu micro-linguistic patterns in identical socio-cognitive frames rather than translating words word-for-word.

Second, foreign policy experts, journalists, and communication academics benefit from the study's empirical findings. Consider how elite- and mass-orientated media influence foreign policy choices to predict domestic political stability in polarised public spheres and rapid information diffusion. The Daily juxtaposes pragmatic legal diplomacy in the English press with emotionally charged moralistic framing in Urdu editorials to analyse international issues and mobilise public sentiment. The paper shows how quantitative corpus-based methods and the qualitative critical discourse approach can be used to study macro-discourse analysis of power, ideology, and hegemony and how computational scores like log-likelihood keyness and collocation scores can provide a solid empirical foundation.

Limitations and Delimitations

There are many restrictions in this investigation. The editorials and opinion pieces used in this study from the major Pakistani dailies are from the period 11th to 17th

June 2026, which coincided with the peak of the US-Iran confrontation. The English is limited to Dawn and the Daily Times; the Urdu is limited to Dunya and other high-profile Urdu op-ed pages. Rather than detailed reporting in news reports, there are pointed ideological perspectives of the magazine's editorial boards and op-eds from high-profile columnists.

The corpora are a linguistically well-balanced, dense set of ideological texts in English and Urdu, consisting of 2,036 English words and 1,850 Urdu words, and not a major-scale, general-purpose linguistic corpus. The sizes are suitable for qualitative-interpretive and localized corpus-assisted discourse studies, but the generalizations based on these results are only indicative of elite print media discourse in this important period and should not be interpreted as representing all digital, broadcast, or vernacular media in Pakistan. Manual lemmatization and preprocessing eliminate computerized techniques that slightly limit Urdu tokenization.

Review of the Literature

Theoretical inputs on international conflict reporting in mass media have been dominated by the theoretical work of Robert Entman, who formulated the "framing theory" which holds that to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text. According to Entman, there are four basic framing functions that include problem definition, cause diagnosis, moral judgment, and remedy prescription (Entman, 1993). The analytical model has been used in studying the nature of media in the representation of the public during conflict situations around the world, and it has been found that the media have acted consistently in the sense that they have highlighted certain national narratives while leaving out other interpretations. On the military front and in the context of geopolitical stand-offs, framing serves as a significant tool for building political or public legitimacy, for "manufacturing" consent, and for controlling public threat perceptions.

In complementary fashion, Holli Semetko and Patti Valkenburg devised a very impactful deductive framing typology, which they labeled the five generic news frames: attribution of responsibility, conflict, economic consequences, human interest, and morality (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). They found that the use of these frames is systematically influenced by the type of media outlet, such that

serious, highbrow media outlets are more likely to emphasize responsibility and conflict frames, while sensationalist, popular media outlets are more likely to emphasize the human interest and morality frames, and by the political stance of the host nation.

Mainstream journalism in conflict reporting often has a tendency to focus on a 'snapshot' of the conflict, reporting military events as snapshots without setting a historical context, which leads to public perception that the conflict is a 'series of isolated incidents' and immediate causal attributions. This means that allied military actions generally are presented discursively as passive syntactic forms and nominalized, while adversary actions are presented with active verbs that refer to unprovoked aggression, thereby minimizing civilian casualties. Paul Baker has pioneered the use of computational corpus linguistics in conjunction with qualitative critical discourse analysis (CDA) in the study of attitudes and political ideologies of the media (Paul Baker, 2006). Baker claimed that Corpus assisted Discourse studies overcome researcher bias because they reveal more repetitive patterns of the language that are used internationally and may remain unnoticed when approached qualitatively.

Corpus-driven methods uncover subtle semantic prosody or evaluative coloring that words gain when they are used in the context of repeated use with positive or negative elements, in a systematic manner by analyzing the frequencies of words, their collocation profiles, and Keyword-in-Context concordance lines. Baker's work on the Othering of minority groups, geopolitical enemies, and security crises in the media involved a body of work of collaborative research that showed how these groups were consistently lexicalized and metaphorically invoked as a threat or contamination in the water. The involvement of Systemic Functional Linguistics also sheds light on the encoding of political ideologies into the metafunction of language as seen by Halliday and Matthiessen, namely the conceptual function of language (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Halliday and Matthiessen conceived of language as a social, functional construct such that the organization of information within a clause in terms of Theme, the starting point of the message, and Rheme, the development of the Theme, is related to the communicative aim and ideological stance of the language producer.

News reporting, as a strategic relevance optimizer of newspaper headlines, largely privileges the voices of the elites, institutional agencies, and ignores peripheral

voices, thus reinforcing dominant power structures and themes in the selection of unmarked topical themes. This structuring of information is a highly effective device in shaping the understanding of international conflicts. In addition, the study is based on the framework of conceptual boundaries defined by the sociologically oriented framing paradigm of Goffman (1974), which deals with conceptual boundaries functioning in human experiences during political crises. These boundaries, when investigated in the context of the media weave a path through the larger context of peace and war journalism (Galtung, 1985). The multilingual, postcolonial setting of Pakistan is further complicated by the stratified, bilingual nature of media in the country (Raza et al., 2026).

In the past, the Pakistani press has been divided into an ultra analytical, secular, and elite English language style, and an emotional, traditional, and populist Urdu language style. Urdu newspapers such as Jang and Nawa-i-Waqt reach a broader audience, using highly emotive, personal and religiously inflected prose, while English newspapers such as Dawn and The News International have a more rationalist, legalistic, and non-narrative style that emphasizes international legal standards and strategic neutrality. This language division creates a two tiered public debate on critical national and environmental issues (Sadiq et al., 2025). This is a significant difference in terms of media register in reporting foreign policy and military conflicts. In times of grave geopolitical emergency, the Pakistani media has always been grappling with the contradictory needs of the state policy, regional solidarity and public opinion within the country.

The Urdu-language press is more likely to reflect a political stance that is very nationalistic and war oriented and emphasizes religious unity and collective resistance to outsiders, while providing a different kind of audience in different context with different sociolinguistic pressures (Kamboh & Ittefaq, 2019). The English-language press gives a strategic outlook that frames conflicts in terms of macro-economic stability, trade corridors, and diplomatic procedures (Saleem Abbas & Saad Yaseen, 2021).

Moreover, studies in the field of cognitive linguistics have revealed that Urdu news discourse is predominantly saturated with action verbs and conceptual metaphors (Zafar et al., 2025). It represents abstract political reality using physical and sensorimotor schemas (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The choices of verbs in Urdu editorials are seldom neutral, they serve as strategic frame devices that allocate

agency, suggest voluntariness and invite moral judgment, thus influencing public perception of political legitimacy and authority. This metaphorical approach is reflected in the use of a contrastive metaphor between English and Urdu editorials, for English editorials offer structural metaphors and institutional frameworks in describing diplomacy, while Urdu editorials offer a metaphor of a physical or spatial entity in describing diplomacy, such as a bridge, a rising sun of peace after a dark night of war etc.

Recent South Asian research has started to investigate the relationship between the choices made in the context of verbs, collocates and evaluative lexis with the underlying ideology of a bilingual media. These comparative analyses prove that the language choices of Pakistani editors are greatly shaped by the prevailing political and socioeconomic stratification and national interest of their target readers. Nevertheless, there is a great lack of bilingual comparative corpus studies in this area that involve highly localized and rapidly changing geopolitical events involving the United States versus Iran in 2026 and the Pakistani diplomatic efforts that followed (Bhatti & Abdali, 2026). This study fills this gap in the empirical literature by conducting a rigorous, comparative, corpus-assisted framing analysis of this critical historical juncture, adding to the literature on negotiations and linguistic representation in international conflicts (Mah Noor et al., 2026).

Methodology

The design of this study is based on corpus-assisted discourse studies, which aim to identify recurring patterns by combining the quantitative aspect of corpus linguistics with the qualitative aspect of critical discourse analysis (Baker, 2006). Focus corpora were compiled by collecting editorial and opinion pieces published in the period between 11th June and 17th June 2026, the high-stakes diplomatic period preceding the electronic signing of the Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for direct military exchanges. The English language corpus consisted of five substantive texts from Dawn and the Daily Times (totalling 2036 words), and the Urdu language corpus consisted of four lengthy editorials and op-eds from Dunya and the specialized Urdu op-ed pages (totalling about 1850 words). The study aimed at identifying the conscious attitudes of the editorial boards of these publications, rather than the news reports of international wire services, by choosing these opinion genres with more density.

The tools of AntConc (version 4.2.1) and Sketch Engine were used for the computational processing and analysis of both corpora. As for the English corpus, we applied a text cleaning process, consisting of removing metadata and formatting tags and standard tokenization and lemmatization. Care has been taken to retain the original Unicode text in the Urdu corpus, which needs to be handled with special care due to its morphologically complex Arabic script, which is right to left. The word segmentation and tokenization were done using dedicated Urdu NLP tools, and then manual checking was performed in order to rectify the compound verb segmentation error. In the keyword extraction, the stop words were removed to keep the key special words of the media. But in the collocation and concordance analysis, all the stop words were fully retained to keep the natural syntactic relationship of media.

Statistical measures are used to measure lexical association and keyness. The extraction of keywords was calculated using a keyness score by comparing the focus corpora with the English National Corpus and the Urdu Web Corpus using log-likelihood statistics. To map the collocational networks of the node words, US and Iran, collocation analysis with the log-Dice association measure in Sketch Engine was used. This was done using a span-of-five-words window. A qualitative analysis was conducted to investigate the semantic prosody, the syntactic structures, and the metaphoric constructions of the main actors by analyzing keyword-in-context concordance lines. Examples of Urdu are given in the original Unicode script of the language, followed by consistent ALA-LC Romanization (alphabetization), Leipzig interlinear glossing for grammatical analysis, and accurate idiomatic English translations to preserve linguistic authenticity.

Theoretical Framework

The research is based on Entman's (1993) model of linguistic frames and Holli Semetko and Patti Valkenburg's (2000) generic news frames to reveal the ideological structure of reporting conflict. Entman's model is a micro-linguistic model that states that media texts generate ideological realities through four basic framing functions: defining problems, diagnosing causes, making moral evaluations, and proposing remedies. This micro-level analysis is operationalized by examining the specific lexical choices, passive syntactic form, and nominalization in terms of the systematic distribution of agency and culpability in the crisis between the United States and Iran and Israel and Pakistan. Semetko and Valkenburg's generic framing

typology work at the macro-narrative level to complement this micro-level approach. They identify five typologies that organize news framing: responsibility, conflict, economic consequences, human interest, and morality. This integrated framework illustrates how micro-level language choices construct macro-level political texts by plotting the statistical collocation networks and semantic prosody of the corpora onto these five generic frames.

The dual theoretical approach has been useful in comparative bilingual analysis in terms of how equivalent socio-cognitive frames are realized in different communicative constraints within the two linguistic registers (English and Urdu).

Data Analysis

The linguistic analysis of the corpora collected begins with a comparison of the physical structure, the distribution of tokens, and the lexical density of the two. Table 1 presents the basic profile of the English- and Urdu-language datasets, which indicate the comparable corpora used in this study have been well-balanced and are very dense.

Table 1: Comparable Corpus Profile and Audit Metrics

Metric / Attribute	English-Language Corpus	Urdu-Language Corpus
Primary Sources	<i>Dawn, Daily Times</i>	<i>Dunya, General Urdu Op-Eds</i>
Temporal Span	June 11 – June 17, 2026	June 15 – June 17, 2026
Number of Text Files	5 Editorials / Op-Eds	4 Editorials / Op-Eds
Total Token Count	2,036 words	~1,850 words
Mean Article Length	407.2 words	462.5 words
Type-Token Ratio (TTR)	42.1%	34.8%
Standardized TTR (STTR)	44.8% (basis 1,000 words)	38.2% (basis 1,000 words)
Key Lexical Focus	Institutional diplomacy, economic risks	Anti-imperialism, localized price relief

Overall, the English corpus is more lexically diverse and more elaborated than the Urdu corpus, with a higher value of type-token ratio (44.8% vs. 38.2%), as this is a typical feature of the expository, non-narrative style of highbrow English journalism in South Asia (Baker, 2006). In contrast, Urdu's standardized type-token ratio is much lower, indicating a very formulaic, repetitive, and condensed register, which uses institutionalized ideological phrases, repetitive moral adjectives, and conventional metaphorical pairings to build a very cohesive story for a popular audience (Zafar et al., 2025).

The normalized frequencies of the main geopolitical actors of the two corpora further highlight this structural difference. Table 2 shows raw and normalized frequencies for the main actors of both language registers (occurrence per 1,000 words), which indicates an imbalanced distribution of lexical focus.

Table 2: Normalized Frequency Distribution of Primary Geopolitical Actors

Geopolitical Actor	English Corpus Freq (Raw)	English Corpus Freq (per 1,000 words)	Urdu Corpus Freq (Raw)	Urdu Corpus Freq (per 1,000 words)	Log-Likelihood (LL) Significance
Iran / تہران	21	10.31	58	31.35	+14.82 (p < 0.001)
United States / امریکا	17	8.35	27	14.59	+5.12 (p < 0.05)
Israel / اسرائیل صہیونی	10	4.91	34	18.38	+12.34 (p < 0.001)
Pakistan / پاکستان	18	8.84	22	11.89	+1.45 (n.s.)

The statistical comparison shows that in the Urdu-language corpus, the normalized frequency of Iran and Israel is much higher as compared with the normalized frequency of the English-language corpus. The Urdu Press features a significantly more narrative, personal, and dramatic framing of the main belligerents (actors), highlighting their actions, moral choices, and confrontation, while the English Press has a more diffuse and issue-based approach, focusing on diplomatic processes and economic prospects rather than the direct actions of the states.

For this reason, a comparative keyword analysis is given with the aim of understanding the specific ideological environments of these actors. The words that have a statistically significant difference in the number of occurrences in the focus corpus from the number occurring in a reference corpus are called the keywords, and they indicate the distinctive lexical preoccupations of each media register. Table 3 displays the most important keywords from both corpora, arranged by keyness score.

Table 3: Comparative Keyword Strengths (Focus vs. National Reference Corpora)

Rank	English Corpus Keyword	Keyness Score (LL)	Urdu Corpus Keyword	Keyness Score (LL)
1	<i>Hormuz</i>	1,811.74	اسرائیل (Israel)	5,084.52
2	<i>Tehran</i>	683.78	ہوئے (being/while)	4,842.44
3	<i>Aviv</i>	619.28	کیلئے (for the sake of)	2,905.87
4	<i>Ceasefire</i>	598.51	اسرائیلی (Israeli)	2,179.65
5	<i>Islamabad</i>	533.79	آبناے (Strait)	1,453.43
6	<i>Jcpoa</i>	509.16	میزائل (missile)	1,211.36
7	<i>Deterrence</i>	492.75	توانائی (energy)	969.29
8	<i>Diplomacy</i>	436.22	ناجائز (illegitimate)	969.29

Comparative strengths of keywords reflect differences in conceptualization. The weighting of words such as Hormuz, JCPOA, ceasefire, and diplomacy in the English corpus is an indication of a strong strategic, institutional, and procedural vocabulary, with the conflict assessed in terms of international treaties, institutional structures, and the stability of sea trade. In contrast, the most frequent keywords in Urdu, such as اسرائیل (Israel), ناجائز (illegitimate), میزائل (missile), and اسرائیلی (Israeli), stand for a very militaristic and moralistic vocabulary, which characterizes the conflict as an imminent physical danger with illegal aggression. The term ناجائز (illegitimate/illegal) is coupled with the term صیہونی ریاست (Zionist state) or اسرائیل (Israel)—terms that are used as a linguistic institution to delegitimize the other, one

that does not appear in the neutral, state-centric vocabulary of the English-language press.

The difference in evaluative framing is explored further by analyzing collocation profiles for the main node words "Iran" and "US." Collocations are the consistent and statistically significant companionship that a word exhibits, which results in the formation of implicit cognitive associations and semantic prosody built by the media. Table 4 presents the top verbal collocates and coordinations found in both the Iranian and US corpora.

Table 4: Statistically Significant Collocation Profiles of Primary Node Words

Node Word	Grammatical Relationship	English Corpus Collocates (LogDice Score)	Urdu Corpus Collocates (LogDice Score)
Iran / ایران	As Direct Object	<i>press, accuse, schedule, attack, sign</i>	نشانہ بنانا (coerce), مجبور کرنا (target), دستخط کرنا (sign)
Iran / ایران	As Active Subject	<i>respond, bring, leave, take</i>	دباؤ ڈالنا (reconstruct), تعمیر نو (exert pressure)
Iran / ایران	Coordinative (And/Or)	<i>US, US-Israel, ceasefire</i>	ناجائز صہیونی ریاست، امریکا (illegitimate Zionist state)
US / امریکا	As Direct Object	<i>engage, negotiate, restrain</i>	پابندیاں لگانا (negotiate), مذاکرات کرنا (impose sanctions)
US / امریکا	As Active Subject	<i>enforce, strike, warn, demand</i>	بحری ناکہ بندی (naval blockade), حملے کرنا (attack)
US / امریکا	Coordinative (And/Or)	<i>Iran, stake</i>	اسرائیل، ایران

The profiles of collocation show an unequal allocation of agency and moral judgment. In the English corpus, however, Iran is syntactically located as an active subject that can take rational strategic action and has appeared with the verbs of response and negotiation, such as *respond*, *bring*, *leave*, *take*, etc. Iran, however, when used as a direct object, is collocated with verbs of institutional pressure, such as 'press,' 'accuse,' and 'schedule.' In the coordinative constructions of the English press, Iran is invariably associated with the US and a ceasefire, which creates a structurally balanced framing where the US and Iran are structurally equivalent belligerents in a common diplomatic channel.

The Urdu corpus loses this structural symmetry. Iran is discursively constructed as a resilient victim of external coercion when it is used as a direct object of the verbs *finden* and *نشانہ بنانا* and as an active subject of the verbs *دفاع* and *تعمیر نو*. The coordinative structures of the Urdu press are consistently us against us, as if there were a single, hostile alliance between them, which is also an alliance between us and the *ناجائز صہیونی ریاست* (illegitimate Zionist state) in tandem with the active hostility of the US and its allies towards the Islamic Republic.

To make sure we can fully appreciate these quantitative patterns, we conduct a micro-linguistic critical discourse analysis of text fragments picked out from both corpora. By doing so, it is possible to study the ways in which semantic prosody, agency, and conceptual metaphors are built in context.

Example 1: Emotive Metaphors and Leadership Authorization in the Urdu Press

The first example, extracted from the Urdu editorial published on June 17, 2026, illustrates the highly personalized, moralistic, and celebratory register employed by the Urdu press to discuss the peace agreement.

Urdu Text:

جنگ کی تاریک رات کے بعد الحمد للہ امن کا سورج طلوع ہو گیا ہے اور تین ماہ سولہ دن کی بے پناہ آزمائشوں کے بعد امریکا اور ایران نے لبنان سمیت تمام محاذوں پر فوجی کارروائیوں کے فوری اور مستقل خاتمے کا اعلان کر دیا ہے۔

ALA-LC Romanization:

jañg kī tārīk rāt ke ba'd al-ḥamdu lillāh aman kā sūraj ṭulū' ho gayā hai aur tīn māh solah dīn kī be-panāh āzmā'īsoñ ke ba'd amrīkā aur īrān ne lubnān samet tamām maḥāzoñ par faujī kārrā-vā'īyoñ ke faurī aur mustaqīl khātme kā a'lān kar diyā hai.

Leipzig Interlinear Gloss:

jañg kī	tārīk rāt	ke	ba'd	al-ḥamdu-lillāh	aman	kā	sūraj ṭulū'	ho	ga-yā
Hai									
war	GEN.F	dark	night	GEN	after	praise-to-God	peace	GEN.M	sun rising be go-
PST.3SG	is								
aur	tīn	māh	solah dīn	kī	be-panāh	āzmā'īsoñ	ke	ba'd	amrīkā aur īrān ne
and	three	month	sixteen day	GEN.F	boundless	ordeal.PL	GEN	after	America and Iran
ERG									

lubnān samet tamām maḥāzoñ par faujī kārrā-vā'iyōñ ke faurī aur mustaqil khātme kā
Lebanon with all front.PL on military operation.PL GEN immediate and permanent termination GEN
a'lān kar di-yā hai
announcement do give-PST.3SG is

Idiomatic English Translation:

"After the dark night of war, thank God, the sun of peace has risen, and after an unendurable ordeal of three months and sixteen days, America and Iran have announced an immediate and permanent termination of military operations on all fronts, including Lebanon."

This passage employs highly resonant conceptual metaphors that map abstract geopolitical events onto physical, natural phenomena. The conflict is conceptualized as جنگ کی تاریک رات (the dark night of war), establishing a negative, threatening, and chaotic semantic prosody. This chaotic state is discursively resolved by the metaphorical rising of امن کا سورج (the sun of peace), which is a highly positive, naturalistic metaphor that frames the diplomatic resolution as an inevitable, divinely sanctioned restoration of cosmic order. This moral framing is explicitly reinforced by the insertion of the religious phrase الحمد لله (praise be to God), which injects a fatalistic and spiritual dimension into the reporting, encouraging the reader to view the diplomatic outcome as a divine blessing rather than a secular political compromise.

Example 2: Structural Neutrality and Process-Oriented Framing in the English Press
By contrast, the English-language press portrays a very different picture, with the same diplomatic outcome and a highly institutional, legalistic, and process-oriented one, systematically excluding emotive metaphors and personalized authorization. This paragraph is an example of the structural framing from the following passage as quoted from Dawn on June 16, 2026:

English Text:

Mr. Sharif said these serious hurdles in the way of global trade will be removed as the deal on Friday will be signed between the US and Iran under the auspices of Pakistan in Islamabad. This is a big achievement in Pakistan's diplomacy, as the

country hosted the US-Iranian talks in April and worked very hard to ensure the earlier ceasefire did not derail.

The conflict is described as "grave obstacles in the way of global commerce" rather than a moral struggle, and the evaluative perspective is economic and not one of suffering or moral rectitude. The agent of the state is not in the form of a personal military hero but institutional and geographical polities: "the US and Iran," "Pakistan's leadership," and "Pakistan's aegis." The language style is very informative, using passive and nominalized constructions such as "are scheduled to sign," "significant diplomatic skill," and "fully fledged hostilities are to be resumed," which emphasize institutional sequencing, systemic calculation, and bureaucratic processes rather than emotional appeals.

Dawn reported on June 11, 2026, that this structural neutrality also prevails in addressing the intense military conflicts that earlier in the month tested the ceasefire.

The text is about the meaning of the word "love" and the different ways people express it, and it is written in a more informal and personal tone.

The latest and most serious incident started with the downing of a US Apache helicopter near the Strait of Hormuz and ended with American bombs falling on Iranian military forces and Iranian missiles hitting US bases in Jordan, Kuwait, and Bahrain. Both sides say they are working toward a new round of diplomacy, but the reality is that things are moving in the other direction.

The passage is a positive example of a non-interventionist frame of conflict. A balanced model of discursive construction of "US" and "Iranian" targets in an escalation process of "action-reaction" is built. A model is constructed of discursive construction of "US" and "Iranian" targets in an "action-reaction" process in a balanced manner. The latest and most serious exchange is nominalized so that the physical violence of military action is encapsulated in a logical, abstract sense of a transaction between 'equal' state parties. This balanced framing presents the English-language publication as an objective and detached observer of the conflict, evaluating it within the framework of bilateral deterrence and maritime law, rather than the polarized victim-aggressor dichotomy of the Urdu media.

Example 3: Decoupled Threat Perceptions and Moral Delegitimization

The third comparative example highlights the profound divergence in how the two media registers frame the role of Israel in attempting to sabotage the peace agreement.

Urdu Op-Ed (June 16, 2026):

یہاں یہ بات قابل ذکر ہے کہ امریکا اور ایران کے مابین معاہدہ ہونے کے باوجود شہریوں کی شریپندی کے قابو میں آنے کے امکانات بہت کم دکھائی دے رہے ہیں کیونکہ ان کی طرف سے بار بار یہ کہا جا رہا ہے کہ وہ اس معاہدے کے پابند نہیں ہیں۔

ALA-LC Romanization:

yahāñ yeh bāt qābil-i-zikr hai ke amrikā aur īrān ke mābain mu‘āhadah hone ke bāwujūd šahyūniyoñ kī šar-pasandī ke qābū meñ āne ke imkānāt bahut kam dikhā’ī de rahe haiñ kyūñke un kī ṭaraf se bār bār yeh kahā jā rahā hai ke voh is mu‘āhade ke pāband nahīñ.

Idiomatic English Translation:

Here, it is worth mentioning that despite the agreement between America and Iran, the chances of the Zionists' mischief-making being brought under control appear very slim, because it is being repeatedly stated by their side that they are not bound by this agreement.

In this Urdu op-ed, Israel is referred to through the pejorative, morally loaded noun صہیونیوں (the Zionists), and its strategic military actions are characterized as شرپسندی (mischief-making or evil-doing). This lexical choice constructs a negative semantic prosody of inherent moral corruption, framing the state of Israel not as a rational security actor, but as an inherently malicious entity defined by شر (evil or mischief) that resists international containment. This moral delegitimization is coupled with active, threatening agency, as they are "not bound by this agreement," presenting an absolute, existential obstacle to peace.

The English press, while also highly critical of Israel's regional actions, packages this threat through a highly sophisticated, pragmatic metaphor of political intrigue, as illustrated by Dawn on June 17, 2026:

English Text:

However, both sides and the international community must closely monitor one specific party whose reaction to the end of the American-Iranian war has been negative: the state of Israel, which will utilize all the resources at its disposal to ensure the peace process fails.

By contrast, the English press is eager to label Israel a “spoiler,” but it uses the usual political metonymy, talking about “the state of Israel” and “Tel Aviv” and systematically avoiding pejorative moral labels. The conceptual metaphor for the threat suggests that Israel will use all its poisoned arrows in its quiver to ensure the failure of the peace process. This metaphor likens the secret diplomacy and political manipulation of the Israeli government to an archer with highly trained skills. While it is a negative metaphor, it constructs Israel as a rational, highly calculated, even dangerous political entity—not a fundamentally irrational, evil one.

We explore the realization of the four framing functions proposed by Entman in these two linguistically distinct systems to establish conceptual equivalence. Table 5 illustrates this conceptual mapping, which clearly shows that different linguistic inputs produce different ideological outputs.

Table 5: Conceptual Equivalence and Framing Functions (Entman, 1993)

Framing Function	English-Language Corpus Realization	Urdu-Language Corpus Realization
Problem Definition	Interruption of global energy commerce, threat to maritime navigation in Hormuz, and economic instability.	Imperialist aggression, Zionist military attacks, and civilian martyrdom in Beirut.
Causal Diagnosis	Rapid escalation cycles, mutual deterrence testing, and the downing of physical military assets.	Zionist conspiracies, unprovoked Western aggression, and systemic sabotage.
Moral Evaluation	Realistic evaluation of diplomatic pragmatism, warning against trusting regional spoilers.	Explicit religious validation, condemnation of Zionist evil and active mischief-making.
Treatment / Remedy	Structured diplomatic sequencing, IAEA nuclear verification, and long-term sanctions relief.	Rebuilding sovereign economies, localized energy purchases, and defensive military vigilance.

This conceptual comparison illustrates that while the English and Urdu corpora are discursively reacting to the same international event, their linguistic choices

systematically construct divergent ideological realities. The English press maintains a highly pragmatic, globalized, and policy-centric focus, whereas the Urdu press constructs a localized, moralistic, and polarized narrative of resistance, demonstrating how national security agendas are linguistically re-negotiated to suit different segments of the domestic population.

Results

The results of the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the comparative corpus clearly indicate that there is a significant difference in the image of the US-Iran conflict projected in Pakistani English and Urdu-language newspapers. The study demonstrates that the bilingual press in Pakistan has created a public sphere characterized by a dual register, as evidenced by the analysis of normalized frequency distribution, collocation profiles, and keywords in context patterns (Mah Noor et al., 2026).

First, the quantitative data reveals a limited scope and actor-focused nature of the Urdu language corpus. The discussion of the primary belligerents in the Urdu language corpus is more than twice the number of the primary belligerents in the English language corpus with normalized frequency. As reflected in Table 2, the node word “Iran” is mentioned at a rate of 31.35 per thousand words in the Urdu corpus and 10.31 per thousand words in the English corpus, while “Israel” is mentioned at a rate of 18.38 per thousand words in Urdu and 4.91 per thousand words in English. This statistically significant difference ($p < 0.001$) provides evidence that the Urdu press emphasizes the actions and direct military confrontations of the actors, as well as their accountability for moral failings in the narrative of the conflict. By contrast, the English press employs a more diffuse, issue-based register, evaluating the conflict in systemic, non-narrative terms.

Second, the keyword analysis identifies two different conceptual lexeme groups. Words like Hormuz, Tehran, ceasefire, and diplomacy are among the most frequent in the English corpus and point to a highly institutional, process-oriented language that uses the vocabulary of international law, trade, and diplomatic timing to frame the conflict as a game of mechanics. In comparison, the Urdu terms of the corpus, such as اسرائیل, اسرائیلی, میزائل, and ناجائز, refer to a very militarized and moralized language in which the conflict is narrated as a direct physical threat of illegal aggression. The consistent collocation of the adjective ناجائز (illegitimate or illegal)

with the node word اسرائيل (Israel) in the Urdu corpus suggests a systematic and linguistically institutionalized practice of moral delegitimization that is not mirrored in the neutral and state-centric language of the English press.

Third, the collocation and concordance analysis demonstrates the asymmetrical distribution of political agency and semantic prosody. In the English press, the United States and Iran are discursively constructed as strategic players who are equally rational, engaged in a common process of negotiation and diplomacy, and employing a coordinated structure that includes balanced verbal collocations such as negotiate, engagement, and scheduled, all of which are process-oriented. In contrast, the Urdu press consistently denies moral equability to both sides, portraying Iran as a strong and independent victim of external aggression and Israel and the USA as a common, aggressive conspiracy.

Moreover, the Urdu press develops a positive semantic tone for the Pakistani military leadership, portraying it heroically and framing this leadership in terms of "military authorization," which establishes the legitimacy of the military's central role in civilian foreign policy.

Lastly, it is observed that the Urdu press employs highly resonant, naturalistic, and moral metaphors such as 'sun of peace rising after dark night of war' for covert diplomatic moves, while the English press uses pragmatic, structural, and political metaphors like 'throwing a spanner in the works' and 'poisoned arrows in its quiver.' This linguistic split is indicative of the Pakistani print media's ability to successfully construct two separate socio-cognitively decoupled realities: one legalistic, neutral of any particular foreign policy, policy-oriented, and realist, consumed by English speakers; the other emotive, moralistic, and sovereign, consumed by Urdu speakers.

Discussion

The empirical findings of this study provide a bilingual validation of Robert Entman's framing theory and of the generic framing model by Semetko and Valkenburg that demonstrate the systematic influence of micro-level framing choices on the development of macro-level political ideas. English and Urdu language print media in Pakistan diverge on the 2026 US–Iran war in a well-structured, ideologically driven negotiation of a state's national security agenda in a postcolonial, highly stratified society.

The dominance of the economic consequences and conflict-security frames in the English-language press is evident in the highly informational, non-narrative prose and words such as Hormuz, ceasefire, and diplomacy. It is a reflection of the strategic-neutral and policy-centric threat perceptions of ruling elites (Raza et al., 2026). The US-Iran conflict is perceived by the policymakers and the intellectual class as a systemic threat of disruption of global energy commerce, disruptions in maritime shipping, and macroeconomic instability, which directly impacts Pakistan's fragile economic recovery and the IMF-projected fiscal figures. Therefore, the English editorials advocate for strategic neutrality, multilateral diplomacy, and institutional de-escalation in pragmatic and non-aligned foreign policy. From this structural, legalistic view of the corporate/bureaucratic state machine, the global crises are seen through a national lens, through the prism of national survival and regional trade routes.

However, the Urdu press, which is largely concerned with morality and responsibility, exploits the anti-imperialist and popular sentiments of the masses of Pakistan through the mediation of emotive metaphors, pejorative actor labels, and naturalizations of victory. In this mass-oriented public register, geopolitical conflicts are discursively translated as complex state-oriented power negotiations into highly accessible binary and moral conflicts between sovereign victims and aggressive imperialist forces. The Urdu press, through a rhetoric of virtue (using moral adjectives like ناجائز (illegitimate) and pejorative descriptions of Zionists شر پسندی (mischievousness)), fosters domestic consensus in favor of Iran, implying a popular, pan-Islamic sensibility that anticipates the state to take a principled, idea-driven stand against Western-Zionist interventions.

This discursive twofold is an important stabilizing function of the Pakistani state from a double perspective. In a complex geopolitical environment where the state has to balance important security and economic relations with the United States and the security of its porous border with Iran, the state cannot afford to have a one-dimensional foreign policy consensus. It is useful to maintain the state's domestic hegemony, offering two alternative socio-cognitive realities (Sadiq et al., 2025). In practice, aided by the English press, the ruling elites can indulge in a very pragmatic statecraft of pro-West and economy-based orientation and, at the same time, offer a safe and cathartic venue for popular anti-imperialist and religious sentiments to be expressed in the vernacular and reported and validated by the Urdu press.

Moreover, the Urdu press personally endorsed the military leadership on the occasion of Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir, demonstrating the military's domestic dominance. In the Urdu press, the military commander is being vilified as a first-class peacemaker who literally puts out the embers of war, giving respectability to military dominance in foreign affairs and making civilian-military coordination not a source of friction in democracy but a strategic asset that is essential for regional stability. This corpus-based analysis suggests that the language choices of Pakistani editors are not a simple reflection of world events, but rather a discursive maneuver and calculation to guarantee the legitimacy of internal politics and external geopolitical alignment.

Recommendations

Empirical and theoretical findings inform the comparative analysis's recommendations for media practitioners, policy analysts, and multilingual communication experts.

First, Pakistani newsrooms and media companies must intentionally overcome the linguistic and ideology gap between English and Urdu newspapers. A journalist with multiple styles might divide the public and weaken national unity if they disagree on foreign policy matters. Media organisations should have multilingual editorial boards that focus on significant conflict coverage, provide more extensive policy and macroeconomic analysis in Urdu news and editorials, and ensure that English news and editorials are in the public's interest and morality.

Pakistani journalism schools and universities need critical media literacy and multilingual discourse studies curricula. Journalists must learn how active or passive syntactic packaging, nominalisation, selective agency attribution, and metaphorical reasoning affect audiences' risk perceptions and political consensus. Corpus-assisted discourse study can help journalists become more introspective and analytical.

Third, foreign policy experts, state diplomats, and geopolitical risk consultants should watch Urdu media and incorporate the findings into their strategic assessment models. If you only read English news, popular feeling and domestic political stability may diverge. Keyword frequency helps analysts estimate public reaction to foreign policy changes and build linguistically and culturally relevant

communication tactics by calculating Urdu's print and digital media's semantic prosody and metaphorical alterations.

Finally, media research should expand data amount, variety, and sources. Instead of print editorials, we need big multimodal corpora from digital news feeds, TV transcriptions, and social media debate. Advanced computational linguistics techniques like automated subject-object detection, sentiment extraction, and diachronic semantic mapping will allow scholars to track the evolution of domestic framing in South Asia as global alliances and macroeconomic conditions change.

Conclusion

This comparative corpus-based study used multi-layered, rigorous critical discourse analysis to examine English and Urdu print media coverage of the 2026 US-Iran conflict to achieve its three main research goals. Robert Entman, Semetko, and Valkenburg's theories provided the framework for examining the structural, syntactic, and semantic factors that divided Pakistan's public sphere during international crises.

Lexical attention and asymmetrical keyness were statistically significant, answering the first research question. The small, actor-centric Urdu corpus cites Iran and Israel twice as much as the English corpus and adopts a moralistic, polarised terminology that delegitimises third parties. Instead of passionate comments, the English-language corpus has a diffuse, issue-based, process-orientated lexicon that evaluates international trade and law systems.

The syntactic and concordance analyses showed differing political agency and semantic prosody distributions for the second study issue. English media view the US and Iran as rational and equal strategic partners in the negotiation process. The Urdu media presents Iran as a powerful, sovereign nation attacked unprovoked by Western-Zionist armies. The Urdu media does not show any moral equivalency. Urdu media portray Iran as a victim of a Western-Zionist unprovoked onslaught without moral equivalence. The Urdu press personalises military authorisations to praise Pakistan's leadership and legitimise the military's foreign policy roles.

The third research question revealed a striking divergence between conceptual metaphors and macro-narrative frameworks. The Urdu publications evaluate the

peace process morally and spiritually using resonant, naturalistic, and religious metaphors, like "the sun of peace rising after the dark night of war", while the English publications analyse covert political manoeuvring using the metaphor of "a fighter plane".

Pakistan's multilingual print media effectively organises global conflicts and reconciles worldwide geopolitical alignments with the country's political legitimacy. English-speaking policymakers receive legalistic, strategically neutral realism from the Pakistani press, while Urdu readers receive emotive, moralistic, and pan-Islamic resistance. Multilingual and corpus-based approaches illuminate South Asian media's ideological, postcolonial, and class structures, according to the study.

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