A comparative analysis of cold war and post-cold war media framing of aviation disasters

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ABSTRACT

This study builds on previous research that examined U.S. media coverage of two airline disasters – KAL007 and IR655 – during the Cold War in the 1980s. It explores *new Cold War* frames in *The New York Times* and *The Moscow Times'* coverage of the downing of Malaysian Airlines Flight MH17 in 2014. Additionally, U.S. and Russian official narratives of the incident were compared to the MH17 coverage by the two selected newspapers. Results reveal an absence of hostile Cold War assertions but indicate a link between media frames and the U.S. and Russian government positions. Additionally, findings shed light on the Moscow-Washington relations against the backdrop of intense confrontation between Russia and the West not witnessed since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

1. Introduction

Media coverage of international events during the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union has long been an issue of interest for mass communication researchers [1], [2], [3]. With two super powers engaged in a fierce competition in every field of knowledge and science along with ground battle in proxy wars across the globe, framing theory was an important tool to understand if American and Soviet media acted as propaganda tools. However, collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) or Soviet Union in 1991 faded much of the research interest on Cold War events.

However, the Ukraine crisis that began in 2013 renewed an interest in reviewing the pre-1991 world order as some observers compared the West-Russia tension over Ukraine to the Cold War situation [4], [5]. Some analysts opposed the Cold War comparison by saying that it is an exaggerated interpretation of events. However, they agree that it was the most intense confrontation between Russia and the West since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991[6], [7].

During the Ukraine crisis, one particular incident infuriated the West that prompted harsh actions against Russia – downing of the Malaysian Airlines Flight MH17. The incident occurred on July 17, 2014, and drew global attention and a harsh response from the West, which accused the pro-Russian separatists of killing all 298 people on board. The U.S. said that the Russian-supplied missiles might have been used to shoot down the plane. However, the U.S. intelligence officials later said that they believed the separatists did it by mistake [8].

The MH17 incident is interestingly similar to two separate incidents during the Cold War – the downing of a Korean passenger plane by a Soviet fighter jet in 1983 (KAL007) and the downing of an Iranian passenger plane by a U.S. cruiser in 1988 (IR655). Entman [1] found that the American media overwhelmingly used *murder frame* in the coverage of Korean Airlines incident and *technical glitch frame* in the Iran Air coverage. According to Entman [1], it was dissimilar coverage of two structurally similar incidents that had significant political impacts during the Cold War.

This study investigated the coverage of MH17 incident by a U.S. newspaper – *The New York Times* – and a Russian newspaper – *The Moscow Times* – to understand if the Cold War framing still exists more than two decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union. It was suggested that the newspapers' coverage reflected the official diplomatic positions of Washington and Moscow. Moreover, Entman's [1] findings on *The New York Times'* KAL007 and IR655 coverage were compared to the newspaper's MH17 coverage to understand changes (if any) in U.S. media framing during the subsequent two-plus decades.

Though previous research ventures have studied Cold War media framing [9], [1], [2], [10], little attention has been paid on whether those frames have changed in the post-Cold War era. Moreover, few studies have focused on Soviet media's Cold War frames, though U.S. media framing was examined extensively. These gaps in existing literature raise certain questions considered in this article that help us better understand framing processes in both American and Russian media.

2. Theoritical Framework

In this section, media framing literature will be outlined followed by a discussion of West-Russia relations and specific backgrounds of the three incidents mentioned above: Korean Airlines Flight 007 of 1983, Iran Air Flight 655 of 1988, and Malaysian Airlines Flight MH17 of 2014.

2.1. Media Framing

Framing theory is widely used to examine patterns of media coverage. Different media can interpret an event in different ways that may ultimately have dissimilar impacts on the audience depending on how that event was framed. Goffman [11], who introduced framing theory, believed that the interpretation of an event depends on "primary frameworks" used to explain that event (p. 24). Gitlin [12] defines media frames as "persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation of selection, emphasis and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse, whether verbal or visual" (p. 7).

Entman [13] emphasized the importance of "selection and salience" (p. 52) in the framing process. He argued that the political communication is affected by the media frames, which "call attention to some aspects of reality while obscuring other elements, which might lead audience to have different reactions" (p. 55). Kendall [14] argues that frames are used by the media to emphasize some events and ignore others. According to Gamson [15], "facts have no intrinsic meaning. They take on their meaning by being embedded in a frame or story line that organizes them and gives them coherence, selecting certain ones to emphasize while ignoring others" (p. 157). Dimitrova and Connolly-Ahern [16] describe media frame as a process to highlight and de-emphasize some ideas.

This study is grounded in the media framing theory. As noted in [13]-[16], *selection, exclusion, emphasis,* and *ignoring* are at the core of framing theory. This study, therefore, focuses on the developments and changes of Cold War frames to understand how global events are highlighted and downplayed. During the Cold War, media frames divided the world in *friends* and *enemies* of the U.S. and Soviet Union [17].

Similar to this study, previous research used framing theory to examine newspaper coverage [1], [18], [19], [3]. A theoretical framework developed by Entman [1] was used in this study because a common ground was required to compare the coverage of Cold War and post-Cold War events. Entman's model (described in detail in the method section) worked for this study because all three incidents investigated in his research and this study were significantly similar. Considering the impacts of media coverage on diplomacy [20], framing theory would help us better understand history and the shifts in the U.S. and Russian foreign policies.

Cold War and Media Framing

Cold War is defined as the political, military, and economic tension and competition between the United States and the Soviet Union that started after the World War II in 1945 and continued until 1991 [9]. With journalists heavily dependent on the official sources for news coverage at that time, media framing of international events during the Cold War hardly maintained journalistic norms [1]. Tuchman [10] observed that some media even criticized the Americans who refused to fight in Vietnam War on moral or ethical grounds. Popularity of Cold War paradigms among American journalists often made it difficult to distinguish between media narratives and the White House rhetoric. The end of the Cold War bolstered the influence of the American media as the journalists took a more critical stance towards U.S. foreign policy [1]. It began during the Vietnam War when reporters started challenging government narratives [9].

The end of the Cold War ignited hope in the international politics about peace and stability in the world. As an important tool of soft power, the media coverage of international events was expected to have significant changes. The expectation about soft power was caused by the way the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. Bahador [20] explains, "it was not tanks and cruise missiles, after all, that brought down the Soviet Empire, according to soft power advocates, but rather fax machines, blue jeans and television" (p. 37). But this expectation was hardly met as conflicts among nations, ideologies, and races increased after 1991.

However, the journalists had difficulties in explaining post-Cold War conflicts due to the absence of a confrontation between the West and the communist East [18]. The western journalists, however, could not come out of the skepticism over the former Soviet Union as the Cold War frame still dominated the coverage of conflicts that involved Russia in the last two decades. Although the Cold War officially ended in 1991, the Cold War assertions reignited in post-Cold War conflicts including 1999 Kosovo war and 2003 Iraq war [21].

2.2. West-Russia Relations

The euphoria of bringing Soviet Union under western influence did not last longer, partly because the West apparently did not completely abandon its Cold War policies after 1991. North Atlantic Treaty Organization or NATO, which was formed to prevent Kremlin's influence, continued to expand after the end of the Cold War. Though Russia was always a European country, the Western media as well as the western governments were unwilling to include Russia in European matters. A study of American newspaper by Dittmer [22] found that though sometimes media use the term "Western" to describe Russia, other terms such as "oriental," and "sleeping giant" dominate the discourse (p. 58). Charvin [23] argues that the 2014 Ukraine crisis is an example that the West has not changed its anti-Russian rhetoric since the end of Cold War. He writes:

The Ukrainian crisis is but an element of global policy of pushing Russia aside and cutting short its ties with the neighboring Soviet successor-states. This policy is part of a wider project of blocking Russia's full-fledged return to the international arena, a natural right of any sovereign state (p. 46).

Russians, however, cannot evade the criticism as well for the deterioration of relations with the West. With an aim to recover some of its influence in Europe, Russia has invested heavily in the London Stock Market, German businesses, and in some other countries making them heavily dependent on Russia. Moscow also signed bilateral gas deals with some countries including Hungary, Bulgaria, and Ukraine, which was beneficial for these countries but was seen by the European Commission in Brussels as a breach of EU law [24]. European concerns further deepened over Russian involvement in the internal politics of its east-European neighbors. Particularly, Moscow's role in 2005 Kyrgyzstan revolution, 2004-2005 Ukrainian protests, and during 2008 Russia-Georgia war dashed Russia's hope of rebranding itself as a thriving democracy [25].

On the other hand, Russians have also been skeptical about the West in the post-Cold War period. According to Shlapentokh [26], a 2009 survey found that two-thirds of the Russian population considers the United States a hostile nation as the anti-American sentiment among Russians increased from 22 percent in 2000 to 50 percent in 2009. Shlapentokh [26], however, argues that this anti-American sentiment is limited to the Russian ruling elites and that it is not widespread among ordinary people. Russians were also found to be distrustful about its neighbors

who broke away from the Soviet Union in the early 1990s. A survey by Levada Center in 2009 found that almost half of the Russian population considers Georgia and Ukraine as vital threats [26].

Increasing popularity of conspiracy theories in Russia is one of the key reasons behind these adverse sentiments among Russians towards other nations. For example, the post-election unrest in 2011 and the famous Pussy Riot Protest in 2012 by the Russian punk rock band were framed as western conspiracies [27]. Media play a significant role in spreading these sentiments among ordinary Russians. More than 90 percent of Russian media receive government subsidy while President Vladimir Putin has tightened his grip on media through consolidations and new laws [28], [29].

2.3. Korean Airlines Flight 007

One of the major international incidents during the Cold War was the shooting down of Korean Airlines (KAL) Flight 007 by a Soviet fighter jet on September 1, 1983, which killed 269 passengers and crews. Sixty-one Americans and 28 Japanese were on board while majority of the victims were South Koreans [30]. KAL007 was on its way from New York to Seoul, with a stopover in Anchorage, Alaska. The plane reportedly entered into the Russian airspace mistakenly and flew nearer to a Soviet military installation in Kamchatka Peninsula.

According to Thomas [30], the Soviet pilots considered it as a U.S. spy plane, not a passenger flight. A report by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) indicated that the incident was a direct result of missile attacks [31]. U.S. President Ronald Reagan harshly criticized the Soviet Union, but the communist country dismissed any wrongdoing.

2.4. Iran Air Flight 655

Iran Air Flight 655 (IR655) was shot down by USS Vincennes in the Strait of Hormuz on July 3, 1988, killing all 290 passengers and crews on board. All but 38 passengers were Iranian nationals. The incident happened few minutes after the plane took off from Bandar Abbas Airport in southern Iran, bound for Dubai. The U.S. claimed that the plane was descending towards its ship and the soldiers wrongfully considered it an F-14 fighter jet [32]. An ICAO report concluded that the airliner was destroyed by two surface-to-air missiles [33]. On the day the plane was shot down, U.S. President Reagan issued a statement justifying the action. Eight years after the incident in 1996, the U.S. paid $61.8 million in *ex gratia* compensation to the Iranian victim families to discontinue a case in the International Court of Justice initiated by Iran (Crowley, 2013) [34].

However, the U.S. has never admitted responsibility and rather awarded the Vincennes crews [35]. Though many expected a harsh Soviet reaction, Moscow responded to IR655 incident with a simple short statement where no tough words were directed towards the U.S. [36]. This response was in line with the improving Soviet-U.S. relations during the final days of the Cold War.

2.5. Ukraine Crisis and the MH17 Air Incident

The Ukraine crisis, which quickly turned into a West-Russia tension, unfolded in East Europe in late 2013 and early 2014. Protests began in November 2013 when then-Ukrainian President Yanukovich abandoned a trade agreement with the European Union seeking a closer tie with Russia. Amid violent protests, President Yanukovich fled capital Kiev on February 21, 2014, and the parliament overwhelmingly voted to remove him from his post the next day. Meanwhile in Crimea, a south-eastern region of Ukraine, pro-Russian activists seized government buildings to protest the new Kiev administration. They also held a referendum where 95 percent people voted for separation from Ukraine. On March 18, 2014, Russian President Putin signed a treaty annexing Crimea into Russia [37]. The U.S. and EU responded with imposing new sanctions against Putin's inner circle and by excluding Russia from the meetings of the G-8, a group of the world's eight strongest economies. The Russian move was also snubbed by the United Nations General Assembly, which approved a resolution declaring the annexation of Crimea illegal [38].

Inspired by Crimea's success, pro-Russian separatists in Donetsk, Luhansk, and Kharkiv in eastern Ukraine region began demonstrations to demand a referendum on independence. Ukraine

responded by sending troops unfolding a full-fledge battle in the eastern region [39]. Amid this ongoing conflict, Ukraine elected Petro Poroshenko as its new leader. Shortly after taking office, the new president rejected a Russian natural gas deal further escalating tensions with Russia [38].

However, the conflict reached to a new international height after the downing of the Malaysian Airlines Flight MH17. The plane was shot down in the Donetsk region of eastern Ukraine on its way from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur, killing all 298 passengers and crews. It was downed near the rebel-controlled village of Grabove close to the Russian border [40]. Of the victims, 192 were from the Netherlands, 44 from Malaysia, 27 from Australia, 12 from Indonesia, 10 from the United Kingdom, four from Germany, four from Belgium, three from the Philippines, and one each from Canada and New Zealand [41].

The incident sparked outrage and condemnation from across the globe, particularly from the Netherlands, which accounts for two-thirds of the total number of victims. Though many blamed the pro-Russian rebels of eastern Ukraine, Russian President Putin put blame on Ukraine. On July 18, 2014, Putin began a pre-scheduled official meeting by standing in silence for a minute to mourn the deaths of the MH17 victims. In his speech at the meeting, Putin said that the "tragedy would not have occurred if there were peace in that country, or in any case, if hostilities had not resumed in southeast Ukraine. And certainly, the government over whose territory it occurred is responsible for this terrible tragedy" [42]. In his first reaction, U.S. President Barack Obama issued a statement indirectly linking Russia to the incident:

Evidence indicates that the plane was shot down by a surface-to-air missile that was launched from an area that is controlled by Russian-backed separatists inside of Ukraine. We also know that this is not the first time a plane has been shot down in eastern Ukraine. Over the last several weeks, Russian-backed separatists have shot down a Ukrainian transport plane and a Ukrainian helicopter, and they claimed responsibility for shooting down a Ukrainian fighter jet. Moreover, we know that these separatists have received a steady flow of support from Russia. This includes arms and training. It includes heavy weapons, and it includes anti-aircraft weapons. [43]

The pro-Russian rebels, however, denied having Russian-made missiles capable of shooting down airplanes flying on high altitude [44]. A preliminary investigation report submitted to the ICAO blamed Russian-made Buk missile for the incident [45]. Though the event was widely reported in global media, it received little attention in Russia where the state-run media highlighted numerous conspiracy theories [46]. According to Koshkin [47], the Western and Russian media covered the MH17 incident differently and it was like a media battle between Kremlin and the rest of the world.

2.6. Research Questions

The tragedies of KAL007 in 1983, IR655 in 1988, and MH17 in 2014 have similarities in the ways the incidents took place and because of their effects on the Washington-Moscow relations. With U.S.-Russia relations hitting a new low amid a "new Cold War" debate, as argued in [6], [48], [49], [7], [50], [51], [4], it is important to study possible changes of Cold War frames to expand academic conversation on media framing and to better understand U.S.-Russia rivalry. Thus, this paper considered three following research questions:

RQ1: To what extent does *The New York Times* coverage of MH17 incident differ, if at all, with *The Moscow Times*?

RQ2: To what extent do *The New York Times* and *The Moscow Times* coverage of MH17 incident seem to reflect, if at all, official U.S. and Russian positions respectively?

RQ3: To what extent does Entman's findings on *The New York Times'* KAL007 and IR655 coverage differ, if at all, from this study's findings on a similar incident (MH17)?

3. Method

This study incorporated a framing analysis of the coverage of MH17 incident by *The New York Times* and *The Moscow Times.* The study period ranges from July 17, 2014, the day the plane was downed, to September 10, 2014, the day newspapers around the world published the first report on an international investigation on the incident. In line with Entman's [1] research, a mixed method of qualitative and quantitative approaches was used.

The New York Times articles were found in Lexis Nexis search while *The Moscow Times* stories were downloaded from www.themoscowtimes.com. "Malaysia," "Malaysian Airlines," and "MH17" keywords were used to search for the articles. The initial search yielded 187 *New York Times* and 160 *Moscow Times* articles. After eliminating duplications, agency reports, blogs, editorials, and opinion columns, 78 hard news stories on the MH17 incident were identified. Of those, 53 were *New York Times* stories and 25 *Moscow Times* stories. Agency reports were excluded because those are not original stories filed by the newspapers' reporters while editorials, blogs, and opinion columns were excluded because this study focused on news stories only. This research covers almost the entire MH17 coverage by *The New York Times* and *The Moscow Times* as few news reports were published in these two newspapers beyond this study's 56-day sample period.

The New York Times was selected for this study because it is one of the largest U.S. dailies [52] and has been often described as the *newspaper of record* with high influence on decision makers [19]. Another reason is its extensive coverage of international events including the Cold War [9]. Moreover, *The New York Times* has been examined in numerous studies related to Cold War framing and international conflicts [21], [9], [1], [18], [10].

The Moscow Times was Russia's only daily newspaper in English and was read by Russia's elites, policy makers, educated circles, business people, expats, international readers, foreign tourists, and diplomatic missions [53], [54], [55]. The newspaper formed an alliance with International Herald Tribune [56] and the UK-based Guardian newspaper [57] and was Russia's only independent English-language newspaper before it was sold to a pro-Kremlin Russian owner in March 2015 and relaunched as a weekly in November 2015 [58], [59], [60]. Though the Russian daily did not have a large readership like *The New York Times*, it had other necessary characteristics to be compared with the American daily. For example, when Russian President Vladimir Putin wrote an op-ed in *The New York Times* in 2013 to warn against U.S. intervention in Syria, then head of the U.S. Armed Services Committee and a former Republican representative, Buck McKeon, responded to Putin by writing an op-ed in *The Moscow Times* [61]. Also, the Russian daily was frequently quoted by the world's leading news media including BBC, *The New York Times, The Guardian,* and *Le Monde* [62].

This research depends on Entman's [1] coding framework used to analyze American media's coverage of the KAL007 and IR655 incidents during the Cold War. However, this study focused on the contextual use of the words and terms used in Entman's framework because of the complex nature of the MH17 incident. For example, Entman counted the number of times the words "attack" and "tragedy" appeared in *The New York Times* to understand U.S. media framing in KAL007 and IR655 coverage. For KAL007, "attack" means it could be downed by the Soviet Union only, while for IR655, it means it could be downed by the Americans only. But for MH17 incident, the word "attack" means the plane was downed either by the pro-Russian separatists or the Ukrainian military since both sides possessed Buk missile, which caused the crash [45]. This is why this study compared "Russia Guilty vs. Tragedy" frame while Entman's research focused on "Attack vs. Tragedy." Otherwise, the frames developed by Entman were used.

Therefore, for comparison between *The New York Times* and *The Moscow Times* coverage (RQ1), three sets of frames were examined: (1) Russia Guilty vs. Tragedy (2) Humanizing vs. Neutral (3) Mistake vs. Deliberate. (As noted above, these frames were used by Entman [1], except for the first one, which was partially modified for the purpose of this study.) "Russia Guilty" implies any direct or indirect Russian link to the downing of MH17. Terms such as "pro-Russian separatists," "Russian-backed rebels," and "pro-Russian separatists accused of shooting down the plane" were considered to imply Russian guilt. Contextual use of the words "tragedy" and "downing" was considered to imply that the MH17 was simply a tragedy where reasons are either unknown or not established. It is evident that Russia preferred the use of the term "downing" instead

of "shot down" in the text of an UN Security Council resolution which verifies that "downing" is a neutral term [63].

According to Entman [1], "humanizing" frame include any term that humanize the victims. He defined phrases such as "innocent human beings," "loved ones," and "298 people" as humanizing while "travelers," "civilians," "passengers," "298 lives," and "those who died" were described as neutral terminology. This study also considered the stories "humanizing" if those described personal details of the victims compassionately. In Entman's [1] research, words like "atrocity," "kill," "massacre," "barbaric," "deliberate," "brutal," and "murder" represented "deliberate" frame while words like "mistaken," "tragic," "justified," and "understandable" defined "mistake" frame. This paper did not count the appearance of these words, rather examined how these words and terms were used contextually in the news reports.

President Obama and President Putin's first reactions to MH17 incident were analyzed and compared to *The New York Times* and *The Moscow Times* coverage to understand if the newspapers were independent from the U.S. and Russian government positions (RQ2). First presidential statements were selected for this analysis because initial official rhetoric is crucial in setting media framing of an event [1]. Entman found that in both KAL007 and IR655 coverage, news frames in U.S. media were influenced by initial White House rhetoric.

To further examine the newspapers' MH17 frames, the researchers counted how many times the American, Russian, and other officials were quoted or cited in the reports. The counting was done via the search function in the Microsoft Word document. Terms such as "American officials," "American intelligence officials," "Russian officials," "Ukrainian officials," "Malaysian officials," "Dutch officials," "separatist leader," "separatist commander," "Obama said," and "Putin said" were used in the search options. For comparing *The New York Times'* coverage of KAL007 and IR655 with that of the MH17 incident (RQ 3), Entman's (2004) research was compared to the findings of RQ1 and RQ2 of this study.

All samples were coded by the researchers. In order to verify the reliability of the coding scheme, 21 news articles (or approximately 26% of the total sample) were independently evaluated by a second coder. Intercoder reliability, calculated using Cohen's Kappa coefficient, are as follows: Russia Guilty vs. Tragedy: .89, Humanizing vs. Neutral: .75, and Deliberate vs. Mistake: .70. According to Lombard, Snyder-Duch, and Bracken [64], these agreements are considered acceptable.

4. Results and Discussion

RQ1: To what extent does The New York Times coverage of MH17 incident differ, if at all, with The Moscow Times?

This study has found that The New York Times used "tragedy" frame in 22 of 53 news stories (41.5%) while Russian guilt was implied in 31 stories (58.5%). On the other hand, The Moscow Times used "tragedy" frame in 22 news stories (88%) while three stories (12%) implied Russian guilt in the downing of MH17. See Table 1.

Table 1. Comparison of Russia Guilty vs. Tragedy Frames in MH17 Coverage

Newspaper	Russia Guilty	Tragedy	Total
Moscow Times	12% (n=3)	88% (n=22)	100% (n=25)
New York Times	58.5% (n=31)	41.5% (n=22)	100% (n=53)

In *The New York Times,* the most common words and phrases that described the reasons behind the MH17 incident were "shot down," "downing," "pro-Russian separatists," "pro-Moscow separatists," "separatists," and "pro-Russian rebels." On the other hand, the most common words and terms used by *The Moscow Times* were "downing," "crash," "tragedy," "separatists," "pro-Russian separatists," and "pro-Russian rebels."

As Table 1 reveals, most of *The New York Times* reports held Russia responsible for the MH17 incident. However, these accusations against Russia were mostly indirect. American and other Western officials were quoted or cited in these reports, where Russia was accused of supporting and training separatists. For example, a report states: "The plane was shot out of the sky by a surface-to-air missile that American intelligence officials say was fired by pro-Russian rebels . . . The United States has said it suspects that Russia trained the rebels…" [65].

The Moscow Times used more neutral terms depicting the MH17 incident as a crash or a tragedy. As Table 1 shows, some of the news reports carried the sense that Russia was indirectly linked to the MH17 incident mainly because of its support for the separatists. However, 14 stories (56%) attempted to hold both Ukrainian military and the separatists equally responsible. For example, one story stated, "The Ukrainian government and a rebel group that controls the region have each blamed the other side for downing the plane" [66].

Table 2. Comparison of Humanizing vs. Neutral Frames in MH17 Coverage

Newspaper	Humanizing	Neutral	Total
Moscow Times	32% (n=8)	60% (n=15)	92% (n=23)
New York Times	60.38% (n=32)	26.41% (n=14)	86.79% (n=46)

Note. Dominant frames were absent in 8% (n=2) of *Moscow Times* and 13.21% (n=7) of *New York Times* stories.

In *The New York Times,* "humanizing" frame dominated in 32 stories (60.38%) while "neutral" frame was highlighted in 14 stories (26.41%). No "humanizing" or "neutral" frame was found in seven stories. *The Moscow Times* used "Humanizing" frame in eight stories (32%) while 15 stories (60%) were dominated by "neutral" frame. This framing pattern was absent in two other news stories. In *The New York Times,* the most commonly used humanizing term was "298 people." In some stories, personal details of the victims were described while few stories reported on the remains of the victims lying on the ground or about the mourning of Malaysians and Dutch people. One such description was. It seemed as if everyone in the Netherlands, a country of 16 million people, knew someone among the 189 Dutch nationals killed in the crash, whether personally, or as a friend of a friend, or simply by the familiarity of celebrity, as with Senator Willem Witteveen and the AIDS specialist Joep Lange [67].

The Moscow Times mostly used neutral terms such as "passengers," "passengers and crew," "298 lives," and "298 on board." In some cases, the newspaper used humanizing term "298 people." However, as Table 2 reveals, the domination of neutral terms almost doubles the number of humanizing terms in its news stories. Attempts were made to emphasize consequences of the MH17 incident and political actions taken by the U.S., Russia, Ukraine, Netherlands, Malaysia, and other stakeholders. But the stories seemed to downplay human stories by depicting it as a political incident rather than a humanizing one.

Table 3. Comparison of Deliberate vs. Mistake Frames in MH17 Coverage

Newspaper	Deliberate	Mistake	Total
Moscow Times	0% (n=0)	4% (n=1)	4% (n=1)
New York Times	1.89% (n=1)	5.67% (n=3)	7.56% (n=4)

Note. Dominant frames were absent in 96% (n=24) of *Moscow Times* and 92.44% (n=49) of *New York Times* stories.

However, both *The New York Times* and *The Moscow Times* seem to agree on the question of whether the Malaysian Airlines was downed deliberately or mistakenly. As Table 3 reveals, no *Moscow Times* report portrayed it as a deliberate action while only one story (4%) implied that it was mistakenly shot down by pro-Russian separatists. On the other hand, three *New York Times*

stories (5.67%) implied that it was a mistaken action by the separatists. Deliberate frame was found in only one *New York Times* story (1.89%) where the incident was compared to "murder," but it was done only after an ICAO investigation report was published. This absence of "deliberate" frame goes in line with the U.S. intelligence officials' early explanation that the plane might have been shot down mistakenly [8].

This study asked how differently the MH17 incident was covered by *The New York Times* and *The Moscow Times* (RQ1). The results show that majority of *The New York Times* stories highlighted it as a humanizing incident and found Russia guilty because of their support for the east-Ukrainian separatists. On the other hand, *The Moscow Times* downplayed Russian guilt and reported the incident as a tragedy. However, both newspapers apparently agree that the MH17 was not downed deliberately.

RQ2: To what extent do The New York Times and The Moscow Times coverage of MH17 incident seem to reflect, if at all, official U.S. and Russian positions respectively?

The strong words and terms found in U.S. president Obama's speech was "shot down," "Russian-backed separatists," "surface-to-air missile," "anti-aircraft weapons," and "support from Russia." The term "shot down" appeared three times and "Russian-backed separatists," twice in his speech [43]. These words indicate that Russia was indirectly linked to the MH17 incident mainly because of its support to the separatists. Interestingly, as cited in some political agenda setting studies [68], [69], this study has found that *The New York Times* extensively used the same or similar words and terms including "shot down," "pro-Russian rebels," Russian-backed separatists," "surface-to-air missile," and "Buk missile" in its reports. As Table 1 reveals, contextual use of these words suggests that the majority of *The New York Times* stories indirectly held Russia responsible, as did President Obama in his speech. For example, a report states: "Suspicion has fallen on pro-Russian rebels – a suspicion further fueled by American reports Friday that the missile that downed the jet came from rebel territory" [70].

Moreover, *The New York Times* prioritized American official sources over others in its coverage of MH17 incident, similar to what Entman [1] found in KAL007 and IR655 coverage. It was found that the newspaper quoted or cited unnamed American officials and intelligence officials 41 times while unnamed Ukrainian officials were quoted 22 times, unnamed Malaysian officials six times, unnamed Dutch officials twice, unnamed Russian officials twice, and unnamed pro-Russian separatists five times. However, it was found that the Ukrainian officials were more aggressive in anti-Russian rhetoric than American officials while Malaysian officials refrained from blaming Moscow. *The New York Times* quoted or cited President Obama 21 times while President Putin was quoted or cited only four times.

In the statement of President Putin, the strongest word was "tragedy" and it appeared twice in his brief speech. He also apparently held Ukraine responsible for MH17 incident saying ". . . the government over whose territory it occurred is responsible for this terrible tragedy" [42]. His statement implies that Russia sees MH17 incident merely as a tragedy and that the Ukraine government is responsible for it. As Table 1 reveals, *The Moscow Times* portrayed MH17 incident as a "tragedy" in most of its news stories, an indication of pursuing a pro-Moscow line in its coverage. However, the newspaper was not found to blame the Ukraine government entirely.

In *The Moscow Times,* Russian Foreign Ministry, Defense Ministry, Russian experts, and rebel leaders were quoted frequently while Western officials were quoted or cited fewer times. "Donetsk People's Republic," a term officially used by Russia and the separatists to describe a rebel-controlled area, appeared 10 times in the Moscow-based newspaper. *The New York Times* used the term a few times, but only to identify it as the self-proclaimed name of a rebel group in Ukraine's Donetsk region. In *The Moscow Times,* President Putin was quoted or cited 12 times while President Obama was quoted or cited only twice.

The RQ2 attempted to explore if *The New York Times* and *The Moscow Times* followed U.S. and Russian official positions in the MH17 coverage. The results show that *The New York Times* indirectly held Russia responsible because of its support for the separatists, as what President Obama did in his statement. The newspaper mostly relied on American and other Western officials to cover the incident. Though *The Moscow Times* was found to downplay Russian guilt in the MH17 incident, the newspaper did not attempt to hold Ukraine solely responsible, unlike President Putin.

RQ3: To what extent does Entman's findings on The New York Times' KAL007 and IR655 coverage differ, if at all, from this study's findings on a similar incident (MH17)?

As Table 4 shows, two-thirds of Entman's (2004) sample (67.3%) indicated Soviet guilt while 32.7% sample depicted it as a tragedy. In the case of IR655 incident, 48.4% sample implied American guilt while 51.6% sample interpreted it as a tragedy. This study found that almost three-fifths of *The News York Times* stories implied Russian guilt in MH17 coverage while the rest presented it as a tragedy. However, unlike the KAL007 incident, this time the implication of Russian guilt was indirect as Moscow was mainly accused of supporting and training the separatists who were blamed for downing the MH17.

Table 4. *New York Times* Frames of 3 Airline Incidents

Frames	KAL007 (1983)	IR655 (1988)	MH17 (2014)
Russia Guilty Vs.	67.3% (attack)	48.4% (attack)	58.5%
Tragedy	32.7%	51.6%	41.5%
Humanizing Vs.	48.4%	39.3%	60.38%
Neutral	51.6%	60.7%	26.41%
Deliberate Vs.	92.9%	23.1%	1.89%
Mistake	7.1%	76.9%	5.6%

In Entman's [1] study, 48.4% of *The New York Times* sample were "humanizing" and 51.6% "neutral" in KAL007 coverage while in IR655 coverage, 39.3% of the sample were "humanizing" and 60.7% "neutral." This study found that almost two-thirds of *New York Times'* MH17 stories contain dominant humanizing assertions. This means that the newspaper's MH17 framing is more similar to KAL007 than IR655.

However, major changes were found in the question of whether these events were "deliberate" or "mistakes." Entman's [1] research reveals that 92.9% of *The New York Times* sample interpreted KAL007 incident as "deliberate" while only 7.1% implied that it was a "mistake." On the other hand, 23.1% sample indicated that the IR655 was downed deliberately while more than two-thirds of the sample (76.9%) implied that the incident was a "mistake." Interestingly, these frames were almost completely absent in the coverage of MH17 incident. Though few news articles (5.67%) interpreted it as a "mistake," the only story that used the "deliberate" frame was published after an investigation report indicated that a surface-to-air missile might have been used in MH17 incident.

Entman [71] found that *The New York Times* used some adjectives and adverbs repeatedly to describe the KAL007 and IR655 incidents. The most common words used to describe the KAL007 incident were "brutal," "horrible/horrifying," "wanton," and "deliberate" while in the IR655 coverage, the most often words were "tragic," "mistaken," and "understandable" (p. 20). This study found that no *New York Times* story used "brutal," "horrifying," and "wanton" in the coverage of MH17. "Deliberate" appeared few times but was not used to determine the reasons behind the downing of the plane. The word "horrible" appeared four times, twice quoted by Dutch officials and one each by Russian President Putin and a pro-Russian separatist. This means the word was not used to define if MH17 was a deliberate incident or not. "Tragic" appeared four times and "mistaken," twice during the sample period. The careful use of the adjectives and adverbs indicates that *The New York Times* refrained from labeling MH17 a deliberate incident, unlike KAL007, and that its coverage was more similar to IR655 than KAL007.

The RQ3 attempted to explore difference between *The New York Times'* coverage of MH17 incident and that of KAL007 and IR655. The results show that the Cold War assertions were mostly absent in MH17 coverage, unlike KAL007 and IR655. While the KAL007 coverage directly accused Soviet Union, the MH17 coverage was indirect and less critical against Russia. In MH17 coverage, *The New York Times* was found to be more careful about its choice of words and frames. Perhaps the most intriguing result was that in all three incidents – KAL007, IR655, and MH17 – *The New York*

Times prioritized U.S. official sources and its coverage was in line with the official White House rhetoric.

5. Conclusion

This analysis of *The New York Times* and *The Moscow Times'* coverage of Malaysian Airlines Flight MH17 refines the debate over the *new Cold War* and media's role in Russia-U.S. relations. While previous approaches focused mostly on American media's role in Washington-Moscow relations, this study examined both sides to understand media frames and their connection to U.S.-Russia diplomacy. Moreover, comparison to Entman's [1] work helps us understand the historical perspectives of three airline disasters- KAL007, IR6555, and MH17.

This study makes several contributions to current scholarships. First, the findings of this study indicate that the mainstream U.S. and Russian newspapers apparently favored national interests in their coverage of the MH17 incident. *The New York Times* and *The Moscow Times'* dependency on government officials indicates an apparent support for their respective government positions [20]. However, a key finding about *The Moscow Times* was that the newspaper did not agree with Kremlin's claim that Ukraine was solely responsible for the MH17 incident. This is an important element that helps in the overall understanding of news coverage of Russian independent media before a new law was imposed in 2014 to control media [28], [72]. Second, comparison of three airline disasters contribute to the existing literature where research focusing on the changes to Cold War media framing is limited. Similar to the findings in [22], [71], [1], [10], results of this study indicate changes to Cold War frames and assertions in *The New York Times* coverage of MH17 incident. In particular, it appears that the newspaper has now moved its focus of criticism from the people or the nation as a whole, as found in [1], to the Russian regime. Third, findings indicate that the media framing of an international event depends on: the type of sources used [9] [1], official or government narratives [20], and the national and geopolitical interests [1], [47].

There are at least three limitations to this study. First, the analysis is limited to English-language newspapers only. Results may have been different if broadcast and online news sources as well as Russian-language media were included, and this could be an exciting realm for future research. Second, this study could not investigate changes to Soviet media's Cold War frames because of the unavailability of any English daily in the Soviet Union during the 1980s. Third, this study could not measure the influence of social media and the 24-hour news channels on the MH17 coverage, a situation absents during the Cold War.

Despite these limitations, the study provides several insights for analysts and policy makers both in the media and the diplomatic circles. First, it provides them an opportunity to distinguish between Cold War and post-Cold War media framing. Second, it shed light on the U.S. and Russian media coverage of an international crisis event in the post-Cold War time. Third, it provides an opportunity to rethink the rationales behind the *new Cold War* debate [51]. Future research may include a wide range of news sources including digital and non-traditional media. It may also focus on media framing of an issue where traditional powers such as U.S. or Russia is at confrontation with an emerging nation or a developing country. Such knowledge may help us understand the role of media and the government in both the developed and developing world.

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