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Analyzing Media Coverage on the Fall of Kabul : A Critical Analysis of National and International Newspapers**Muhammad Inayat¹**¹Assistant Professor, Media Studies, Karakoram International University, Gilgit Baltistan Pakistan.Email: imnyat385@gmail.com

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Abstract

The present study aims to investigate the portrayal of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in the news coverage of Pakistani newspaper Dawn, the U.S. newspaper, the New York Times, a Russian newspaper, the Moscow Times, and the Indian newspaper, The Hindu during the fall of Kabul from 16 July to 14 September 2021. The purpose of the study is to investigate how the newspapers of the selected four countries cover the withdrawal in the light of their respective national interest. This study analyzes the media and government relationship, whereas the study mainly revisits the application of 'indexing theory' in the context of the media's coverage of the issue of Afghanistan quantitatively and qualitatively to determine the soft or otherwise critical relationship between media and government. The results, which are mixed in their nature, suggest that the elites' differences on the issue of the US forces' withdrawal from Afghanistan, coupled with the state of uncertainty over the issue of Afghanistan. Revisiting the Indexing Theory in the context of activated oppositional voices in the United States, hence the US newspaper The New York Times, and even the Russian newspaper, the Moscow Times, were found more critical to the governments than Dawn and The Hindu, which highlighted the issue of Afghanistan more in the context of 'proximity' extended support to their respective governments respectively.

Keywords: Fall of Kabul, Foreign policy Government-media nexus, Indexing Theory, International Print Media, National interests

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1. Introduction

The longest war in Afghanistan ended after 20 years started by American and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces. After a long time of American force's presence in Afghanistan, the Taliban returned to power. On 15 August 2021, the Taliban swiftly entered the capital of Afghanistan Kabul. They overthrew the democratic government of President Ashraf Ghani, and mainstream and social media showed it to the entire world. The global media gave extensive coverage to the fast falls of Kabul in a single night and the next day Taliban captured the entire country. However, different countries' press framed the takeover of the Taliban differently according to their annexed government policy. According to Bennet (2006), independent coverage of mainstream media is important for the political systems of the modern world. The study intends to find out the foreign policies of four countries that are directly or indirectly involved in this war, Pakistan, India, the United States of America, and Russia during the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan in their newspapers. During conflict and political controversies, the media plays an important role in determining the media and government relationship, it become the main interest of many countries. Media-government relationship study got due space in

literature after the seminal work of Hallin (1986), who examines US media reporting on the Vietnam War. This study evaluates the media-government relationship in the conflict in Afghanistan after US forces withdrew from the newspapers of Pakistan, the US, India, and Russia.

The Bennet indexing theory (1990) got excessive attention from media scholars after reporting the Vietnam War in US media. Bennet (1990) states that media freedom and counter-framing in democratic countries on reporting foreign policy issues is the main function of indexing theory. Furthermore, Bennet and Pfetsch (2018) stated that indexing theory tells the elite policy regarding foreign issues and indicates media reliance on executives of the country. Althaus et al., (1996) state that it expresses the discourse of elitists with media. The indexing theory indicates a relationship between media and the elite for foreign policy during war and conflict (Robinson, 2016). Furthermore, according to the theory, three factors have reduced reliance on the elite point of view, they created unexpected events for their interest, and counter-narratives are produced skillfully by the elite (Bennet & Pfetsch, 2018; Bennet et al., 2008).

The study delves into the examination of coverage of the following newspapers: *Dawn*, *The Moscow Times*, *The New York Times*, and *The Hindu*. These country's newspapers covered political events in Afghanistan for their interest of the state or elite foreign policies. The selected newspaper operated under different government systems; therefore, it is expected that media reliance on elite discourse varies from newspaper to newspaper. However, the previous literature on media policies is US or Western-centric in their coverage. The previous literature shows media and foreign policy of a country are spare in the global south. The study examines the event fall of Kabul and how America and neighbouring countries framed the fall of Kabul in a global south press.

1.1 Problem Statement

This research aims to examine and analyze how the media of the United States, Russia, India, and Pakistan represented the fall of Kabul in the context of their foreign policy. The problem at hand is to understand the diverse strategic interests, motivations, and diplomatic responses of these key international actors, and to elucidate how their respective foreign policies are influenced by the unfolding events in Afghanistan. By exploring these dynamics, the study seeks to gain insights into the broader implications for regional stability, security, and international relations in the South Asian and Central Asian regions.

2. Literature Review

War on Terror and Peace Talks

After the 9/11 attacks in 2001, the United States invaded Afghanistan and started a dialogue with the Taliban government in a few months. According to Nasrullah (2021), the Taliban fighters are forced to take shelter in the western part of the country, and many cross over to Pakistan. The United States and its allies formed a national government in Kabul while the Taliban started an insurgency in the entire country which became a serious threat to the territorial integrity of the country. Taliban have no proper militant outfit to fight against the national government but take some support from Pakistan, Iran, Russia, and Saudi Arabia for fighting. In 2014 when the US officially announced to wind up its military mission in Afghanistan, the Taliban got a hole and strengthened their resistance in the country (Grossman, 2014).

The US signed a peace agreement with the Taliban in 2020, after long one-year negotiations (Shahid, 2021). Taliban has signed an agreement with the US in Doha, the US will leave Afghanistan within a year and the Taliban should be in contact with the Afghanistan government (Shahid, 2021). US President Joe Biden in April 2021 announced that the US military would leave Afghanistan in September 2021, the Taliban started capturing new areas and increased their attacks on the Afghan military. The Taliban fighter meanwhile continues offenses and at the early start of August, they capture the capitals of the important provinces. Finally, on 15 August 2021, without much resistance from the national government of Afghanistan, the Taliban entered the capital city of Afghanistan Kabul, the President Ashraf Ghani fled from the country (Shahid, 2021).

Foreign policy issues and media

Bennet (1990) states that the elite do not allow media to report critically on policy issues but they use it for their interest. According to Hallin (1989), the elite is responsible for the controlling of media for ideology and objectivity. According to Entman (2003), in the following three situations, media coverage is critical in the political scenario: in a conflict situation where the official is busy, counter-frames are generated

through mid-level sources, and culturally ambiguous events happening. Additionally, the government makes powerful media policies to report policy issues, such as foreign policy issues and war-related issues. However, during a conflict, it would be easy for the elite to stop the production of counter-frames and bring national unity. Moreover, the media does not create any challenge for the official policy even if the media is free from the influence of officials Hackett, 2006; (Entman, 2010). Indexing theory accommodates these arguments in mainstream media of the US and elsewhere in the world. Bennet (1990), media professionals used the voices of the elite in a particular event from the news boardroom to beat reports. The traditional media has representation even though the ecosystem of information has completely changed (Bennet & Pfetsch, 2018), while critics think that this idea is no longer valid (Hjorland, 2018).

Furthermore, social media platforms do not reduce the dominant presence of the elite class, their presence is still alive due to many technique-like trolls and bots initiating trends that are followed by the public (Fahmy, 2021). According to Wolsfeld et al., (2013), social media covers the same political events as traditional media. Empirical support for indexing theory has been provided by many studies in the last three decades. Zingarelli (2010), studied 42 policy issues, and US news media mainly followed the elite perspectives. Groshek (2008), conducted a study on *The New York Times* and *Washington Post* reports on the Iraq conflict, he examined that the primary source of a newspaper was officials' sources for reporting. Bennet et al., (2006) say that similarly in the case of Abu Ghraib, the US media for saving the face of the government from the public criticism of policy change from torture to unfortunate abuse. Similarly, indexing patterns of Arab Spring examined by Ha (2017), US newspapers support the elite policy on Arab Spring but the elite do not allow the media to talk about the policy of supporting the dictators in the Arab world by the government.

Furthermore, the indexation trend is not only limited to the coverage of Arab Countries or those countries invaded by the United States. Mujumdar (2020), examines the framing of India during the Cold War, from 1967 to 1991 in *The New York Times* on a similar pattern of indexation. He found that the US government forced media on the issue of India. Rasul et al., (2016), similarly, to Pakistani and Indian, the press favoured their country's policy in the coverage of the Afghan war. Furthermore, many studies found derivation from the indexing formulations. Mulherin and Iskan (2019) say that Australia used indexing theory to test government policies on the Islamic State fight. The newspapers of Australia follow the official policy in a reasonable point but at the same time challenge the perspective of the elite consciences. Furthermore, according to Time magazine reporting, the US government is very critical in the conflict in Iraq (Harp et al., 2010). Otopalik and Schaefer (2008), conducted a study in Japan; they found that the coverage of foreign policies, and government decisions is mixed with military force decisions.

According to the believer of indexing theory, in the following three cases the media coverage is more critical; happening of suddenly huge events for example death on a large- scale, the opposition parties make counter-frames, and the issues are censored earlier (Bennet & Pfetsch, 2018). In the recent past, in the Taliban takeover to a great extent, these factors are absent. The Russian media is expected to use more official sources as compared to non-official sources.

According to Glazier and Boydston, 2012; and Speer, 2017, in many situations media behave independently as compared to following elite policy. Tactical or procedural criticism, of a war conflict, is discussed so many times in existing literature (Robinson et al., 2009; Zollmann, 2015; Hjarvard & Kristensen, 2014). According to Hallin (1989), US media was more critical at the end of the Vietnam War. The reporting of US media on the Iraq invasion is challenged by the government (Zollmann, 2015). He points out that the reporting of the US media was procedural and reported negatively on collateral damage. Today's media is educating people in several ways like health, education, community development, children, adults, women empowerment, gender rights, gender discrimination, human rights, politics, entertainment, etc. (Shehzad et al., 2019). Hussain (2020) state that the media reports only substance on the damage of human-like civilian casualties, food, and children facing problems.

The key studies found that over time media alternate perspectives due to professionalism (Hamilton, 2010, Rowling et al., 2018). Furthermore, Rowling and colleagues (2021), state that for the balance reporting, US media used foreign sources in Lebanon- Israel conflict reporting while most US officials have a pro-Israel stance. In addition, Entman (2004), studied that the media of the US focused on foreign sources

in 1985–1986, Libyan crises for critical perspectives, and in 1983 and Panama in 1989–1990, U.S. invasions of Grenada. Media of the U.S. used foreign sources for the critical reporting of the U.S. policies on war (Rowling et al., 2018).

Glazier and Boydston, 2012; and Robinson et al., 2012, suggest that during the crunch time in a conflict, the media follow the official line and with time become independent and even critical. Furthermore, the media frame of the elite decreases with time (Glazier and Boydston, 2012). However, criticism of the media is usually absent in shorter wars and where the strategic objectives of a country are achieved (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005). Political communication scholars do not give importance to natural media coverage. According to Hussain (2020), it is not a monolithic discourse but to a great extent, it varies. Reporting of violent deaths, injuries, and damages to infrastructure apart from them, the journalists report stories about the suffering of children. During a foreign policy crisis, the country's high-profile executive is involved in controlling the foreign policy in the media (Bennet and Pfetsch, 2018).

Media-State Nexux

The classic definition of war propaganda by Lasswell is used for the control of the opinion of the enemy in wartime (Severin & Tankard, 2001). According to Louw (2003), in 1990, the military of the U.S. developed a new warfare model with the name of psychological operations. Media is used as a mode of propaganda for political action through rhetoric and symbolism. U.S. and Iraqi governments, in the Gulf War, through the images manage the words for the battlefield. According to Shaw (1996), coalition governments against Iraq not only won the military campaign but also won the virtual realm of television. Western media does not give proper attention to the killing of Iraqi soldiers and civilians in coalition attacks.

In the Afghanistan War, Taliban and U.S. officials did not agree on the amount of damage caused by the attacks. The Taliban officials claimed that their fighters had shot down the helicopter with anti-aircraft fire (Shanker & Myers, 2001). The U.S. officials claimed that it had accidentally crashed while landing in Pakistan. According to Sadik (2003), the Taliban Information Ministry official Abdul Hanan Hemat claimed that the U.S. forces use chemical and biological weapons but the U.S. Defense Department denied his claims.

During the Gulf War, the U.S. government and military controlled public relations through symbols and rhetorical strategies. Cheney (1993), the military officials force technical achievement in battle instead of policy issues and they force strongly for the troops and U.S. war policy. To get support for the military attacks, they told the world that the war would not be another Vietnam. Bush gives another notion that the U.S. fought for a “New World Order,” that it works like a universal symbol, to talk about military sacrifice (Cheney 1993).

In 2001, during the U.S. War on Afghanistan Pentagon gave clear instructions to the media that the media must show the events as bloodless as possible would not show the images of dead bodies, and would not show the brutality to reduce the acceptability of the war (Louw, 2003). This strategy is prepared to not repeat the mistakes of the Vietnam War, television is not allowed to televise the bloody images and it may change the minds of the U.S. public against the war. The goal of the U.S. is not only to destroy terrorists' networks but also to force the common public of Afghanistan to separate from the Taliban regime. America dropped food in Afghanistan to show them the soft image of America and their main goal is to liberate the women in Afghanistan.

Japerson and El-Kikhia (2003) identified three frames in the reporting of *CNN* and *Al Jazeera*: governess, military, and humanitarian. The coverage of both channels of the Afghanistan war is different; the coverage of *Al Jazeera* is in full favor of Afghanistan while the coverage of *CNN* is less in favor of Afghanistan. The coverage of *Al Jazeera* is about the human problems in Afghanistan while *CNN* coverage is about highlighting the issue to the world. The study aims to symbolize pictures of Saddam Hussain's Statue of the US War in Iraq. Furthermore, the purpose of Saddam Hussein's statue is to make public opinion (Aday, 2023).

Furthermore, media dependency is restricted to debates and opinions of elites, *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* at the time of the Arab Spring supported the opinion of the US government of supporting Arab dictatorship (Ha, 2017). Fake reporting about any society deeply impacts negatively, the

image of that nation's hearts (Saleem, 2007). The US media leading hours *Newsweek* and *The Economist* showed an image of Pakistan negatively after the Salala check post-episode on the border of Pakistan and Afghanistan, they represent their nation as a revival against the terror of war. Additionally, Khan (2014), US media presents Pakistan's dangers to Washington. Furthermore, Griffin (2004) states that US media portray the images of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars in favour of the US. In conflict zones, US media supports the US government's decisions. In the entire world, the media of developed countries have an impact on the underdeveloped countries' media.

Pakistani press framed the image of Afghan Taliban negatively, Malik and Iqbal in 2009 found in newspapers' discourse analysis. Hussain (2021), conducted a study, and he found that the Pakistani press dominates one frame over another frame but ignores the crises of humans in Afghanistan. They frame peace very less as compared to other frames. Ulrich (2017), analyzed the content of the English newspaper, *The Nations*, *Daily Dawn*, and three local English newspapers, *The Frontier Post*, *Times of Sindh*, and *Baluchistan Express* in Pakistan in the Salala border army check-post incident. These newspapers show the incident in a spirit of 'nationalism'. Five generics and one regional frame she found in these newspapers. According to her, Pakistani media used two prominent frames in the conflict value frame and the rest of them in the morality frame. In addition, Aslam et al., (2017), on the CPEC project, analyzed Indian and Chinese press comparatively. *China Daily* and *Global Times* used the frame of economic, human, and welfare while *The Hindustan Times* and *Indian Express* used the frame of conflict and rivalries. Pak-China relations are examined through lens framing of American, Indian, and Pakistani press (Rizwan et al., 2019). Jehangir (2021) conducted a study on the war and peace frame of the Pak-Afghan relationship. He examined *Dawn*, *Express Tribune*, *News Line*, and *Herald news* and articles and found that Pakistani press supports the policy of the government, that Afghan refugees call terrorists in the country. Yousaf, and Usman (2022) observed peace and war frames in *Dawn* and *Nawa-i-waqt* during the Hong Kong dispute in China, both newspapers support China as compared to Hong Kong. The press of Pakistan focused on the humanitarian crisis more than the dispute. Hussain and Siraj (2018), take mainstream and local newspapers from Pakistan and Afghanistan; they found that newspapers framed the war and peace according to their state policy.

Theoretical Framework

The indexing theory depicts the relationship between media and government in terms of media treatment of the elite's political debates. Mass media news professionals from the boardroom to the beat, tend to "index" the range of voices and viewpoints in both news and editorials according to the range of views expressed in mainstream government debate about a given topic (Bennett, 1990). The study used indexing theory for the indexation of the foreign policy of Pakistan, the United States of America, Russia, and India toward the Taliban. The indexing theory has explored the state of the relationship between media and government in terms of media treatment toward elites. According to Bennett (1990), professionals of mass media from the boardroom to the beat, tend to "index" the range of voices and viewpoints in both news and editorials according to the range of views expressed in mainstream government debate about a given topic. In addition, the theory depicts the nature of media coverage based on elites' consensus/ agreement and elites' disagreement. The primary deal of the indexing theory is news coverage. Indexing theory identifies the independent role of media during policy crisis. Based on the available literature and objectives of the study the following hypotheses have been posed.

- H1*: The newspapers of the selected four countries, support their government's policies toward the Taliban.
- H2*: These newspapers are more inclined to cover tactical news stories than substantive ones.
- H3*: Reporting on government policies, the newspapers of the selected four countries apply tactical criticism instead of substantive criticism.
- H4*: The coverage of the selected four countries' newspapers is more favourable during the seized power of the Taliban instead in the aftermath of the Taliban.
- H5*: security-related aspects relied more on government sources as compared to the non-security-related aspects of the Afghan Crises that have been approved

3 Research Methodology

The study used both quantitative and qualitative methods. Through a qualitative approach, the researcher explored the nature of foreign policies of the newspaper toward the Taliban. Through quantitative data, the researcher analyzed the behaviour and affiliation of newspaper foreign policies toward the Taliban. The researcher utilized content analysis for the relationship between words and themes in the text.

Sample and Rational

In this study, four mainstream newspapers were selected; *Dawn*, *The New York Times*, *The Hindu*, and *The Moscow Times*. These four newspapers were considered the official or more aligned newspapers for foreign policies of the given countries. It is hypothesized that these four countries had direct or indirect involvement and had stakes in the Afghanistan war or the fall of Kabul. The researcher selected the whole newspaper as a unit of analysis and news stories from the given newspapers to analyze the relationship between media and government. The time frame of the study is two months, one month before and one month after the fall of Kabul. The time frame starts from 16 July and ends on 14 September 2021.

Data Collection

For this purpose, the whole newspapers were selected. The researchers used the Google search engines *Dawn*, *The New York Times*, *The Moscow Times*, and *The Hindu* for the results of Fall of Kabul, through keywords Taliban' Afghanistan, Doha agreement, Fall of Kabul, and US withdrawal. A total of 510 news stories were collected through the given keywords. The primary themes of the news stories were Afghanistan and the Taliban. The researcher only selected those stories that focused on Afghanistan once in the headline, in the leading paragraphs, or in the next two paragraphs of the story.

4. Findings of the Study

Table 1: Newspapers Support Government Policy Towards the Taliban Regime.

Newspapers	Favourable	Unfavorable	Neutral	Total	Chi-square P value
<i>Dawn</i>	43 (46%)	16 (17%)	34 (37%)	93(100%)	P value .001
<i>The Hindu</i>	41 (55%)	8(8%)	25 (37%)	74(100%)	P value .009
<i>The New York Times</i>	30 (45%)	25 (36%)	11 (19%)	66(100%)	P value .038
The Moscow Times	34 (70%)	3 (2%)	14 (28%)	51 (100%)	P value .000
Total	148 (54%)	52 (18%)	81 (30%)	284(100%)	P value .130

The researcher found that all the examined four newspapers followed government policies on the Taliban regime (Table 1). The percentage of the *Dawn* stories that support Pakistani government policies on the Taliban regime is 46% while the percentage of neutral stories is 34%. On the other hand, in *The Hindu* 55% of news stories support the Indian government's stance on the fall of Kabul while the percentage neutral is 37.

In addition, *The New York Times* supports their government policy toward the Taliban is 45%. Unfavorable coverage of *The New York Times* is 36% while neutral is 19%. Table 1 shows that *The New York Times* supports their government policy toward the Taliban. On the other hand, the percentage of favourable coverage of *The Moscow Times* is 70% while neutral reports are 28%. *The Moscow Times* also supports their government's stance. One story in *The Moscow Times* criticized the government policy of the country on the Taliban government. *The Moscow Times* published the story on 17 August 2021 with the title "Russia Sees Kabul 'Stabilizing,' Taliban 'Restoring Order'". The story supports the Taliban government, "The Russian foreign ministry said Monday the situation in Kabul was "stabilizing" after the Afghan capital fell to the Taliban who have started to "restore public order." The Russian government supports the Taliban in Afghanistan. The foreign minister of Russia said that the Taliban stabilized Afghanistan. The story further

supports the Taliban government in Afghanistan. In another story, *The Moscow Times* published “If our Western colleagues care about the fate of the Afghan people, then there is no need to create additional problems for them in the form of freezing the gold and foreign exchange reserves of the Afghan state” Kabulov said”. Russia wants to think about the fate of Afghanistan and the Taliban. Kabulov requested from the western to do not to freeze the gold and foreign exchange reserves of the Afghan. Most stories published by *The Moscow Times* support their government policy toward the Taliban.

Table 1 shows that the entire four newspapers of the four countries broadly support their governments and align their narrative with their government’s foreign policies towards the Taliban. The existing literature proves that media support the initiatives of governments on their foreign policy during war times and conflict (Bennet et al., 2006; Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005; Rowling et al., 2018; Rowling et al., 2021). The finding of the study shows that the press coverage is substantially neutral on reporting the unfolding events after the Taliban takeover of Kabul. Reporting on chaos at Kabul International Airport and a heavy exodus of Afghan refugees are neutral. The results have supported posed *H1*: The newspapers of the four countries support their governments’ policies toward the Taliban. The Benne & Pfetsch (2018), argument found to support that the press supports elite policymakers during important international events.

Table 2: Distribution of critical stories in the selected press

Newspapers	Type of criticism		Total	Chi-square p-value
	Substantive	Tactical		
<i>Dawn</i>	5 (19%)	13 (81%)	18(100%)	P value .22
<i>The Hindu</i>	2 (18%)	6 (82%)	8(100%)	P value .20
<i>The New York Times</i>	8 (31%)	18 (69%)	26(100%)	P value .21
<i>The Moscow Times</i>	0	1 (100%)	1(100%)	P value .22
Total	15 (23%)	38 (83%)	53(100%)	P value .91

The above table 2 shows that substantive criticism of government policies is limited in the coverage of the selected newspapers while the coverage of all newspapers on government policies is tactical criticism. The substantive criticism of *Dawn* is 19% while the tactical criticism percentage is 81 on government policies towards the Taliban. Table 2 shows the huge amount of difference between Substantive and Tactical criticism of the coverage of government policies. The percentage of *The Hindu* on substantive criticism of government policies is 18% while on Tactical criticism is 82%. In the case of *The Hindu*, coverage of government policies has a huge amount of difference in Substantive and Tactical criticism. The percentage of the New York Times is 31 and 69 while the percentage of *The Moscow Times* is 0 and 1. *The Hindu* is an elitist and progressive newspaper in a secular democracy but the coverage of *The Hindu* is unexpectedly least critical. *The Hindu* publishes only two substantively critical stories on the government revisiting its Taliban policy that the Taliban are the new emerging faces in the region. *The Hindu* published a story on 11 August 2021, with the title “Afghan’s Army Chief of Staff replaced: local media reports”. In this story, the press states that “regular troops have often fled the battlefield”. The multiple fronts of the battle stretched the government's special operations forces and regular troops of the state left the battlefield. This story further criticizes the regular forces of the national government of Afghanistan on the response to Taliban attacks. They are trained forces but left the battlefield for the Taliban. Taliban capture the entire state without a little resistance. The story titled “Afghans Should Save Themselves: U.S.” states that “Afghan government forces are collapsing even faster than U.S. military leaders thought”. This story depicts the poor plan of the national government of Afghanistan against the Taliban takeover. The forces of Afghanistan failed to respond to the Taliban. The citizen of Afghanistan saved their lives because Kabul fell faster than the expectation of the US military leader. Further, the story states that the US did not stop the Taliban from capturing the democratic government of Ashraf Ghani. In this story, the press criticizes the US policy of withdrawal. US President

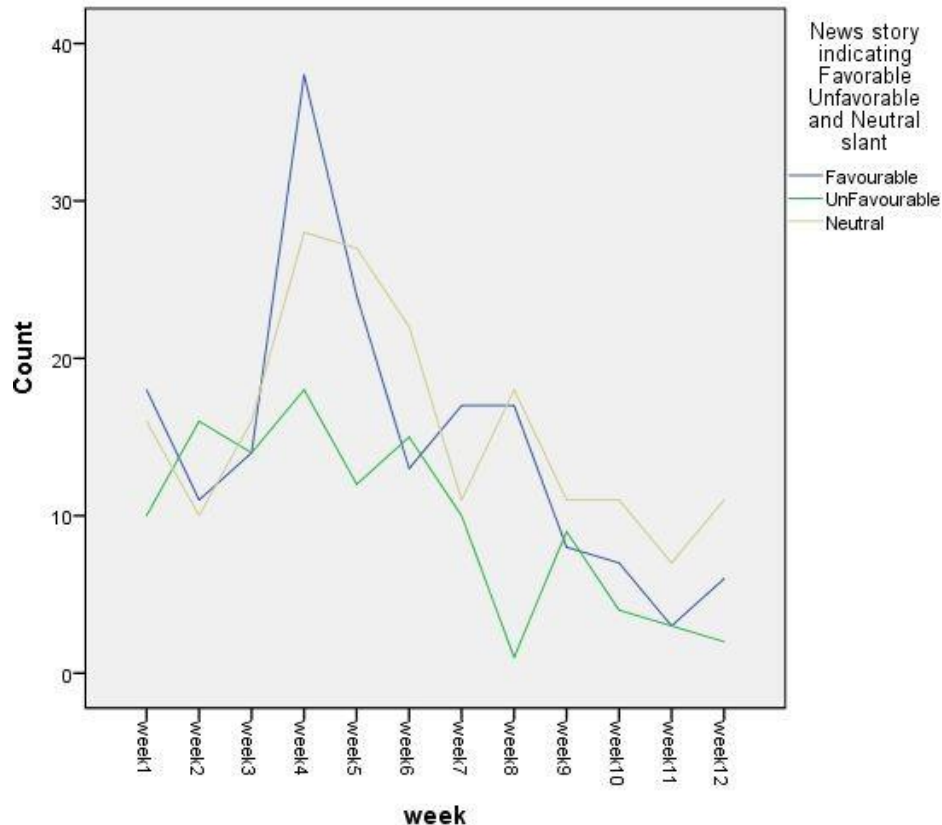
Joe Biden decides to leave Afghanistan in the hands of insurgent Taliban. The poor citizens have no place to hide from the insurgents. On 18 August 2021, *The Hindu* published another story titled “Taliban official says women lose value if their faces are visible to men in public”. The spokesperson of the Taliban warns the women to cover their faces when they come to public places for any necessary need. Further in the story, the press criticizes the policies of the Taliban on women's hijab. Women should be covering their faces, if they are not covering their faces, it will be a fitnah or sin for the nation. The above stories show that *The Hindu* is tactical toward the Taliban. The coverage of the press is tactical and the substantive coverage is absent. In the selected duration, *the Hindu* publishes only two stories that criticize or give suggestions to the government to think about policies of the government towards the Taliban.

The story in the *New York Times* published in titled “The Real Winner of the Afghan War? It's Not Who You Think” (August 26, 2021) gives an analytical angle on the Taliban takeover and blames Pakistan that she played a double game provided help to Taliban in the fall of Kabul. Furthermore, *The New York Times* publishes another story with the title “Taliban Occupy Afghan Presidential Palace”. This story states that “The Taliban effectively sealed their control of Afghanistan on Sunday, pouring into the capital, Kabul, and meeting little resistance as President Ashraf Ghani fled the country, the government collapsed, and chaos and fear gripped the city, with tens of thousands of people trying to escape”. *The New York Times* provides grounds for the US to withdraw from Afghanistan. Further in this story, the Taliban presents the insurgents. The US signed a peace agreement in Doha but on the other hand, presented a theme of the insurgents in the region.

Dawn covered substantive coverage at 19% while tactical is 81%. *Dawn* published a story on 17 August 2021 with the title “No country more desirous of peace in Afghanistan than Pakistan: PM Imran tells Afghan delegation.” In this story, *Dawn* reports the stance of Pakistan on the Taliban's victory in Afghanistan. Prime Minister Imran Khan stated that “strong support and solidarity for the fraternal people of Afghanistan, linked to the people of Pakistan through immutable bonds of faith, history, geography, culture and kin-ship”. Here, *Dawn* supports the government policy that Afghanistan is our brotherly country. This story depicts the tactical policy of Pakistan toward the Taliban. Another story was published on 20 August 2021 with the title “Pakistan expects Taliban will fulfil promises on women and human rights: Army chief”. The published story depicts that the Pakistan Chief of Army Staff requested the international community to support the Taliban support them financially. He assures the international community that the Taliban will give rights to women and now they will allow the girls to get educations. Another, story published by *Dawn* on 19 August 2021 with the title “Propaganda against Taliban proving false says Qureshi. The foreign minister of Pakistan tells the media that there is a fear that the Taliban would impose a ban on the education of girls but it proves false. The general amnesty was announced by the Taliban and they allowed the girls to get education and business. In addition, the story supports the policy of the Pakistani government towards the Taliban. Another story was published in *Dawn* on 19 August 2021 with the title “Taliban ask US not to encourage locals to flee the country”. In this story Taliban requested to US to “They should not encourage the Afghan people to flee Afghanistan.” The Taliban said that our skilful people should not leave the country and it is the responsibility of the US to not encourage them to leave the state. The above stories show that *Dawn* supports the policies of the government on the issue of the fall of Kabul. Most of the coverage of the *Dawn* is tactical toward the Taliban issues. The press only publishes 5 stories on substantive, gives suggestions to the government on Taliban issues or border issues with the Taliban. *The Moscow Times* published only one story on tactical coverage. *The Moscow Times* support the policy of their governments. The news story levels a tactical criticism of the US government policy that Pakistan should be pressured to stop supporting the Taliban, as suggested by an unofficial source. Furthermore, the findings of the study line with previous literature that media go against its country's foreign policy measures broadly in tactical criticism (Zollmann, 2015; Robinson, 2012; Hallin, 1989). Both Pakistani and Indian newspapers are found similar to Western newspapers in their application of tactical criticism. *The H2* These newspapers are more inclined to cover tactical news stories than substantive ones are also supported. The West press used a tactical approach toward the Taliban because the West spent billions of dollars on their Afghan project two decades, after 9/11, and more than one million Afghans lost their life (*Aljazeera*, 2021). The newspapers of these countries are unable to ascribe this responsibility to their governments. The US policy on Afghanistan has failed to unfold the

humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, the traditional journalistic values of truth and the responsibility to offer accurate and critical reportage are largely compromised by the stern press and these responsibilities are also observed in many other armed conflicts in which US involved actively (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005; Rowling et al., 2018)

Graph 1: Fluctuations in support for government policies over time



The above graph shows that there are significant variations in the favourable coverage by the press over two months. Taliban captured more remote districts in the first week of August, the coverage of media is more apprehensive of their advancements and frequently questioned the fragility of the Afghan government. However, from the third week to the seventh week of the study, a sudden increase in support for the new de-facto government was noted when the Taliban entered Kabul and formed a new de-facto government. The researcher observed a gradual increase in the neutral coverage of media in the last month of the study on the Taliban issue.

Dawn published a story titled “Afghan conflict not in Pakistan’s interest: PM”. This story was published on 19 July 2021. In this story, Pakistan supports peace in Afghanistan. PM Imran Khan encourages Ashraf Ghani to negotiate with international communities and the Taliban for the peace of Afghanistan. He said that peace in Afghanistan is not only in the favor of Pakistan but is necessary for the entire region. It shows that the press supported Afghanistan from the early time of the study. On the other hand, another story was published on September 2, 2021, with the title “Everybody screwed up: Blame game begins over turbulent US exit from Afghanistan”. Similarly, the first story, this story also supports the evacuation of the US from Afghanistan. The *Dawn* favoured the government's stance from the first week of the study to the last week. *The New York Times* supports the government policy at the beginning week of the study and with the passing of time criticizes their government policies and at the last duration of the study again starts favourable coverage of the government towards the Taliban. *The Moscow Times* Shows the same behaviour at the start

of the study tail the end of the study. *The Hindu* did the same as *The New York Times*, at the start weeks of the study supported their government's stance and in the middle of the event criticized the country's policies and at the end of the study again supported the policies of the government towards the Taliban. The reporting of media in the decisive period of the conflict is more favourable in the overall result of the graph. Neutral coverage visibility becomes more in the last month of the study. An important point for the notice is that during the takeover; at any stage media does not produce critical perspectives on unfolding events in Afghanistan. *H3*: the coverage of the selected four countries' newspapers is more favourable during the seized power of the Taliban instead in the aftermath of the Taliban is also approved.

Table 3: Security and non-security issues distribution in terms of coverage

Issues	Favourable	Unfavorable	Neutral	Total	Chi-square P value
Security	173 (74%)	21 (10%)	40 (16%)	234(100%)	P value .000
Non-security	123 (44%)	43 (17%)	112 (39%)	278(100%)	P value .001
Total	296 (58%)	64 (13%)	151 (29%)	512(100%)	P value .001

Table 3, talks about the coverage of the press is 74% favourable to the government policies of their countries on issues of security like terrorism, threats, and anger toward citizens. On 9 September 2021, *The Hindu* published a story titled "From fighters to rulers", in the story press demanded from the international community that the Taliban should not promote militancy in the region. The story warns Pakistan that the Afghan land should not be used to threaten India. *The Hindu* reports a story with the title "A Taliban outreach that needs correction". In this story, the press states that the Taliban are divided into two categories good and bad. Taliban need to negotiate with India for the peace of the region. Further, the story depicts that the Taliban is bad for the Indian people and they are a threat to India. The story titled "Afghanistan Crisis Hits Surat's Textile Traders". In this story, the press focused on the trade between India and Afghanistan, after the takeover of the Taliban trade is near to close. The Surat's textile trader's payments stuck with businessmen from Afghanistan and Iran. This is a direct threat to the business or national interest of India, so in this case press favoured the stance of the state. In addition, *the Hindu* reported another story on 23 August 2021, Pakistan influenced the Taliban government, and India has fear that Afghan land will be used against India. These stories show that *The Hindu* favoured the government's stance on security issues.

Dawn reports a story with the title "Don't worry, everything will be okay: ISI chief during Kabul visit". In this story, the press tells that the ISI chief talks with the Taliban on the border issue, and both decide that any terrorist organization would not benefit from crossing the border. All those who cross the border would be checked properly. Similarly, in another story press reports that Pakistan deports over 2100 Afghan nationals back to Afghanistan. This story further discusses the situation of Afghan refugees on the Chaman border after the takeover of the Taliban. Those who leave Afghanistan due to the fear of the Taliban start living near the Chaman border in Pakistan. Pakistan has a policy that the Afghan citizens who live in Pakistan, most of them are involved in criminal activities and they are threats to Pakistani citizens, threats of terrorism, and threats for the state. This story supports the government's policy on security issues. Coverage of non-security issues, on the other hand almost favorable and neutral (44% and 39%, respectively), and unfavourable stories are 16%. The value of P (.08) shows that there is no significant difference. The story of *The New York Times* published with the title "The Taliban celebrates victory, with a crisis looming" on 31 August 2021. In this story, the journalist implicitly criticizes the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in a lurch. Further, the story states that the people of Afghanistan face a humanitarian disaster. It is the responsibility of the Taliban to help those citizens who want to leave the country. Somewhat, the reporting of the press *The New York Times* is unfavorable of the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan. The use of the word 'victory' instead of takeover in the headline, is "rather misleading since the Taliban did not go through a democratic process to achieve a 'victory'". Therefore, the *H4*: the coverage of the selected four countries' newspapers

is more favourable during the seized power of the Taliban instead in the aftermath of the Taliban is approved.

Table 4: Distribution of source in terms of topics being covered

Issues	Official	non-official	Foreign	Total	Chi-square p value
Security issues	241 (83)	25 (8)	27 (9)	293(100)	P value .000
Non-security	71 (31)	47 (23)	102 (46)	220(100)	P value .001
Total	312 (58)	72(16)	129 (28)	513(100)	P value .001

The above table 4 shows that in the conflict in Afghanistan, security-related events were reported through official sources. The percentage of official sources is 84% while non-official is 8% and the foreign sources percentage is 8% with a statistically significant difference (p-value .000). The percentage of official sources is 32 while the non-official national sources percentage is 22. The value of p (.001) shows that there is a significant difference among the sources.

Dawn reports a story on 8 September 2021, Pakistan return Afghan citizens live near the Chaman border in the Pakistan region after the Taliban takeover. *Dawn* used official sources for the coverage of the story. Similarly, another story covered *Dawn* on 20 August 2021. In this story, the press used the official source of Pakistan, the chief of the army Qamar Javed Bajwa expects from Afghan Taliban to live in peace in the region.

The Hindu reported a story on August 24, 2021, titled India's mission of evacuation from Afghanistan in the name of Devi Shakti Operation. In this operation India has decided to call back has citizens from Afghanistan after the takeover of the Taliban. The press used the official source for the coverage of the story. Similarly, another story was reported by *The Hindu* on 31 August 2021 with the title last trop exist Afghanistan, ending American longest War. In this story the press talks about the withdrawal of the US from Afghanistan. The longest war in the history of Afghanistan finally ended and Americans decided to leave Afghanistan. Taliban came into power and they are a threat to India. The press used official sources for the coverage of the story. *The Hindu* mostly used official sources for the coverage of the security issues. In very few stories the press selects unofficial sources for the coverage of events on security issues.

The New York Times reports a story on 15 August 2021 with the title Taliban Occupy Afghan Presidential Palace. Further in this story, the press focused on the life of Americans in Afghanistan. The press further focused on the American officials stuck in Afghanistan and the Taliban as a great threat to them. In addition, another story published by the press states that the Taliban is a great threat to the West as well as to the neighbouring countries. The findings of the study are very interesting to the existing literature where researchers state that due to the changing of information in the ecosystem in world, international indexing has become more prominent (Bennet & Pfetsch, 2018; Wolsefld, 2018). However, the study finds that international indexing is related to the occurrence of non-security events. The study found that non-security events are delinked from policymaking measures; it is easy for the press to involve foreign sources for information. *H5*: security-related aspects relied more on government sources as compared to the non-security-related aspects of the Afghan Crises that have been approved.

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