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Article:	**From Friends to Foe and Foe to Friends: A Reconciliation Process between Taliban and the US Government**
Author(s):	Tabinda Sadiq Ph.D. Scholar Media Studies Bahria University Islamabad tabindasadiq@gmail.com
	Syed Abdul Siraj Senior Professor, Department of Media Studies, Bahria University
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Author(s) Note:	Tabinda Sadiq is a Ph.D. Scholar Media Studies at Bahria University Islamabad Email: tabindasadiq@gmail.com
	Syed Abdul Siraj is serving as a Senior Professor at Department of Media Studies, Bahria University

ABSTRACT

This study examines the reconciliation process between the Taliban and US government to end the conflict stemming from 9/11 attacks. The U.S. war on terror failed to defeat terrorism, causing both parties to seek peace negotiations. The process took 5+ years in Doha, Qatar and resulted in the Taliban taking over Kabul in 2020. The study analyzes international press coverage of the reconciliation from 2015 to 2020, focusing on major stakeholders. Results show that the Pakistani newspaper Dawn gave the most coverage, followed by the New York Times and Pajhwok Afghan. The most widely covered topic was official statements by countries involved. Coverage relied on official sources.

Keywords: United States, Afghanistan, Reconciliation, Taliban, Media, Episodic frame

Introduction:
Brief Historical Background Taliban-US Conflict

Ahmad Shah Durrani united the Pashtun tribes of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, and India in 1774 to form the region now known as modern-day Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, and India. The region has a history of being a battlefield for great empires and conquerors, including Genghis Khan and Alexander the Great, who both suffered defeats while attempting to conquer the area (Jones, 2009). The first Anglo-Afghan war lasted from 1839 to 1842 and resulted in the death of all but one of the 16,000 British soldiers who participated. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 resulted in the defeat of the Soviet Union, which was a major factor in its eventual downfall (Smith et al., 2013). The United States and a few Arab nations supported Afghanistan's Mujahidin during the Soviet occupation (ten years) and the Taliban headship was overthrown in December 2001.

The United States launched reconciliation efforts in Afghanistan after the Taliban rule was ousted. However, the country's economy was underdeveloped, there were numerous ethnic-sectarian issues, and warlords who were given power during two decades of unrest challenged the legitimacy of the central government, making it difficult to establish a Western-style democracy (Hussain & Lynch, 2019). During the Bush administration from 2001 to 2003, the U.S. military policy in Afghanistan was to kill or capture the Taliban and Al Qaeda leaders, but the rise of insurgency in Afghanistan after 2004 led to a modification of the war strategy to state building. However, the neglect of rural regions paved the way for the Taliban's comeback, threatening government authority in large swaths of Afghanistan (World Bank Group, 2021).

Since 2004, the U.S. has encouraged state-building measures guided by a liberal reconciliation philosophy in Afghanistan. The goal of state building has been to establish a stable, democratic, and centrally controlled government in Kabul. However, socioeconomic unfairness and growing inequalities among Afghans have hindered the advancement of peace and democracy, and the liberalized Afghan economy has exacerbated farmers' dissatisfaction with the government and foreign partners, leading to increased support for the Taliban in rural areas (Tisdall, 2018). All three U.S. administrations (Bush, Obama, and Trump) believed that stabilizing Afghanistan would be a self-reinforcing process of revolution to peace, democracy, and a market economy, but the liberal reconciliation program has had negative effects on the country's progress.

Structure of the Afghan Conflict

The conflict in Afghanistan has been one of the most complex in history, dating back to the late 1970s when Kabul saw a power struggle between four ideological groups. The royalist elite conservatives and liberal reformists, the Moscow-oriented Marxists, the Maoists, and the emerging Islamist group who used Islam as a tool for political change, all split among rival factions. This power struggle led to the communist coup d'état known as the Saur Revolution in April 1978, led by Marxist leader Noor Mohammad Taraki. This sparked a full-intensity guerilla war between the communist regime in Kabul, backed by Moscow, and the armed Mujahidin resistance, backed by the United States. The conflict has been ongoing for decades, with various groups vying for power

and influence in the region.. (News, 2021; *U.S. Relations With Afghanistan - United States Department of State*, 2022)

Reconciliation Process

The definition of Reconciliation may mean different things to different people in various contexts. In common parlance, Reconciliation means some agreement between disputants or adversaries. However, conflict transformation proclaims to transform conflict into something desired in a longer timeframe, focusing not only on the content of the conflict but, more importantly, on the context and relationship between the actors involved. Compared with the conflict resolution perspective, the crucial innovations of the conflict transformation approach include, therefore.

1. Adding to the goal of solving undesired disputes a more important one of building something desired,
2. Shifting the focus from the issue/content of the conflict onto the contextual relationship that underlies the conflict, and
3. Expand the relatively short period to deal with the conflict into a longer timeframe.

Reconciliation in the Afghan Context

In the Afghan context, "Reconciliation" has been used to describe the notion of negotiating with the Taliban, even though the strategy has been difficult to implement, and only uncertain progress has been made toward official conversations. In recent years, the literature has generated many intense controversies, especially because of the prospect of dialogues. Using the current round of peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban, this literature examination explores possible outcomes in Afghanistan. To meet American expectations, an Afghan state that is free, independent, democratic, and at peace with itself and its neighbors must be achieved (Ahmed & Yousaf, 2018; Haynes, 2009; Mirza et al., 2020)

Post-conflict reconstruction necessitates Reconciliation from a divided road to a shared future. Compromising democratically resolves problems that generate disagreement, whereas Reconciliation focuses on repairing the rifts developed between the parties involved. As we have defined, Reconciliation goes beyond conflict resolution because it allows the parties internalize their new connection and incorporate it into their own identities rather than simply relying on pragmatic collaboration to bring about peace (Braithwaite & Wardak, 2013; Wardak & Braithwaite, 2013). Use the case study of Afghanistan to show how U.S. foreign policy flaws have impeded the United States' ability to fulfill its goals in the war in Afghanistan. Many economic, social, civic, and political advances have been gained in Afghanistan during the past 20 years due to the sacrifices made by the United States. Even though admitting these accomplishments, this section will focus on several failures in U.S. policy, flaws in leadership decisions, and other basic reasons that prevented the United States from reaching its stated goal.

The Process of Qatar Negotiation, a Shift of Positivity

In 2011, the US government demonstrated its commitment to resolving political and security issues in Afghanistan through peace talks with the Taliban. The Bonn conference of the same year saw the introduction of an Afghan-led peace process (Grewal, 2003). VP Joe Biden stated that the

Taliban was not considered an adversary and expressed the desire to reach a compromise that included them (Bew et al., 2013). The Afghan government, under President Hamid Karzai, also supported the peace talks with the Taliban, although there were some reservations, particularly with the official opening of a Taliban office in Qatar (Johns & Jacquet, 2018). The Taliban representatives stated on a television program in February 2021 that they would not hold talks with the Karzai government, as they considered it a puppet, and the talks would not be useful in resolving the issue (Brummitt, 2012).

However, the peace talks faced challenges and eventually broke down due to differences raised by various parties. The Taliban had the intention to negotiate with US officials, believing they were leaders from Afghanistan (Brummitt, 2012). At the time, the Taliban were looking for a US withdrawal of soldiers in Afghanistan and a commitment to peaceful interaction, which was a fundamental requirement set by the US (Staff, 2012). The peace talks can be seen as a passive effort as the necessary measures were not taken to gain the confidence of all parties involved.

Objectives & Research Questions

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To examine the coverage of reconciliation between the Taliban and the USA in the regional countries and international press
2. To investigate the episodic media coverage frames during the reconciliation process.
3. To document the sources of news used in the coverage of the reconciliation process.

Hence, the research questions would be:

RQ1: To what extent did the selected press give coverage to the reconciliation process between the Taliban and the U.S. Government?

RQ2: What topics did the selected press cover on the reconciliation process between the Taliban and the U.S. Government?

Literature Review

There are several ways to construct peace, all of which reduce the likelihood of war. They all want to alter its political, economic, and social landscape. An individual's move from polarization to a good connection and violence to peace can be reflected in cognitive, emotional, and behavioral shifts. All these groups can benefit from the media's influence. Since it "transcends" all other forms of activity, the United Nations has defined the growth of local media as a peacebuilding problem that is "cross-cutting." Thus, independent media have an almost natural capacity to assist in resolving conflict and peacebuilding. For him, the media's primary roles are like those in conflict resolution: dispelling misunderstandings, redefining issues, establishing stakeholder interests, reducing distrust, and giving people an opportunity to expire allowing people it remains to be debated whether the media can be used to promote peace. This tendency may be seen in policymaking, where the Dayton Accords that ended the Bosnian war did not contain a media intervention plan. In addition, the Millennium Development Goals include no mention of the need for independent, local media (Zhu et al., 2020).

Crucial Role of Media in U.S. the -Taliban Conflict

Afghanistan's media industry underwent changes after the Taliban banned television and allowed only one radio station, Sharia. Today, there are 75 TV channels, 175 FM radio stations, and 800 periodicals. Competition in the license market has made it hard for managers to retain staff. International media outlets increased coverage of Afghanistan's politics, economy, and democracy, with major news organizations dedicating significant coverage (Haqqani, 2020; Mashal, 2020). However, US news coverage of Afghanistan declined by roughly half since 2008, with an increase in critical reporting due to rising corruption and poor governance (research data). In the case of the 2009 Afghan presidential election plagued by fraud, the author suggested the US government focus on criteria for President Karzai's development projects (Braithwaite & Wardak, 2013). President Karzai accused foreign nations of meddling in the election, which worsened the negative perception of the outcome.

The main protagonist in the UAV program is the United States government. As of January 30, 2012, eight years into the Pakistani drone program, President Obama had only acknowledged its existence in an official statement. "The American military does not frequently confirm drone operations," the BBC's assessment of nine stories found in March 2010. As seen by this quotation, the uncritical building of the covert manner surrounding U.S. government drone strikes was built on a persistent absence of response (Mccrisken, 2012).

Media in Peace Talk

The search for "crucial moments" in media was conducted to identify points of conflict and discourse. Researchers recommended finding these moments from a large corpus of literature (Ahmed & Yousaf, 2018). The potential of independent media in conflict resolution and peacebuilding is significant (Bartholomé et al., 2018). However, the use of media for promoting peace remains a topic of debate and is not always integrated into policymaking (Anastasiou, 2008). An evaluation of media peacebuilding programs is necessary, and failure to examine these programs prevents their widespread adoption (Anastasiou, 2008). The international community and Afghan government's inconsistent policy since 2001, and the media's focus on amnesty rather than peacebuilding, has hindered the nation-building process and stability (Betz & Williams, 2017). The involvement of other countries in the region and the increase in organized crime are also contributing factors to the ongoing instability (Betz & Williams, 2017).

Media Post-Taliban Achievements

Journalism has a unique function during violent conflicts, where it serves as a source of information. Instead of simply being a conduit for information from other sources, journalism transforms the data into news by undergoing a series of activities that give it specific qualities. Journalists gather data from multiple sources, edit it, and create stories that can range from close replicas of the source materials to reconstructed content (Lynch, 2007). The growth of the media industry in Afghanistan post-Taliban is a notable achievement, with hundreds of print publications, around 100 radio stations, and several television channels, along with an increasing number of people using mobile phones and internet (Iqbal & Hussain, 2017). The author recommends that researchers explore "Cruces moments" in the media, where actors dispute and discourses clash, to

examine the role of power in shaping discourse. Afghanistan's media landscape, despite its growth, highlights the fragility of media in post-conflict societies (Group, 2021).

The New Home, New Life program, a hit among men and women, aimed to change attitudes and behavior, with success being assessed through understanding, discussing, and acting on crucial concepts. However, evaluating the program's success is challenging due to a lack of infrastructure, difficulty in quantifying intangible goals, and the presence of multiple assistance and peace-building groups (Clark, 2012). The media coverage in both war and peacetime significantly impacts events, with the use of technology allowing for real-time news coverage from distant battles. However, this also leads to the development of sophisticated ways of manipulating information (News, 2021). In conclusion, journalism has a vital role in providing information during conflicts, and the media landscape in Afghanistan has improved since the fall of the Taliban, highlighting the need for continued efforts to protect free speech in post-conflict societies.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is Framing Theory. The core arguments of the study are how the regional countries and international press framed the reconciliation process to end the long conflict between the Taliban and the U.S. Government. Entman (1993) argues that news frames select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation for the item described (Entman, 1993b). Framing theory describes how people understand their surroundings through communication and how a matter is presented or perceived. Entman (1993) views that the press constructs an issue, and the public gets meaning about it according to their social, political, and national ideology. Furthermore, the frame is about what opinions journalists highlight and which sources might express them (Entman, 1993a).

The use of language such as statements, Mata pares, and similes are a form of framing technique to signify or defame a particular situation. Besides, the press sometimes also exploits remote memories of their audience to favor or against a person, country, or party involved in the event. This technique is called the 'Priming effect' (Abdul Siraj, n.d.; Hussain & Lynch, 2019; Siraj & Ramaprasad, 2007).

This paper explores conflict framing, a common dramaturgical approach in journalism, characterized by a conflict between several, usually two, actors who are opposed to each other. Instead of debating how politics affect society in a war, it is common for journalism to emphasize conflicts and build up a dramaturgy around a dualistic spectacle. In framing wars, various stakeholders want to push their point of view forward through their framing to public opinion (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Therefore, the sources for framing have an important role in the power aspects. According to Manning (2001), journalists in the mainstream Western media have become more dependent on political sources in recent years due to the decreased number of employed journalists and the increasing commercialization and conglomeration of media outlets, which makes political sources dominant in the framing of conflicts (Wasif, 2020).

Methodology

The study applies content analysis method to examine the framing of the reconciliation process between the Taliban and the U.S. Government in the seven selected English newspapers; New York Times (USA), Times of India (India), Dawn (Pakistan), Pajhwok Afghan (Afghanistan), China Daily (China) Tehran Times, and Moscow Times. The study selected the above regional countries, and the US press, keeping in view their association with the conflict, especially the

US, India, Pakistan, and Iran. The selection of other regional countries' press was because they are close to Afghanistan geographically, and their economic, trade, and sociability were affected directly and indirectly by the conflict. Another reason for selecting the above-mentioned newspapers is that they are the leading English newspapers in their respective countries with wide circulation. The selected newspapers published news on national and international affairs and provided a mindful insight into the policymakers of their respective countries. The Content Categorization Scheme is given in this table.

Table: Content Categorization Scheme

VARIABLES	CATEGORIES	CODING RULES
NEWS PAPER	1. New York Times	1. An American daily newspaper called New York Times will be coded as "New York Times."
	2. Times of India	2. An Indian daily English language newspaper called Times of India is coded as "Times of India."
	3. Dawn	3. A Pakistani daily English language newspaper called Dawn is coded as "Dawn."
	4. Pajhwok Afghan	4. An Afghani daily English language newspaper called Pajhwok Afghan is coded as "Pajhwok Afghan."
	5. China Daily	5. A Chinese daily newspaper in English language called China Daily is coded as "China Daily."
	6. The Moscow Times	6. A Russian daily English language newspaper called The Moscow Times is coded as "The Moscow Times."
	7. Tehran Times	7. An Iranian daily English language newspaper called Tehran Times is coded as "Tehran Times."
TYPES OF STORIES	1. News	1. A report or piece published on the front and back pages of the paper will be coded as "News."
LENGTH OF STORY	-	To be measured in ratio, word count to be measured in ratio.
SOURCES	1. Official	If the source of the news stories is from the government of that country, then it will be coded as the "Official" piece.
	2. Unofficial	If the byline of the story is by the reporter or official of the specific newspaper, then the story and news will be coded as "Unofficial."
EPISODIC FRAMES	a. Reconciliation	Any news story containing anything related to reconciliation (meeting to resolve issues) will be coded as "Reconciliation."
	b. Dismay	Showing/expressing dismay over some country's performance will be coded as "Dismay."
	c. Attacks	News related to attacks will be coded as "Attacks."
	d. Release of Prisoners	Release of prisoners will be coded as "Release of Prisoners."
	e. Forces Withdrawal	News of forces withdrawal will all be coded as "Evental/Episodic Frames."

Per se, if there are more than 500 news stories on the subject in any of the selected papers, then systematic sampling techniques of one skip is used in the content analysis, and if there are more than 1000 news stories, then the two-skip method is used. In this research study, we used the one-skip method. Thus, a total of 652 new stories were selected for the research.

The researcher examined all news stories in the newspapers with the sources (official and unofficial). The unit of analysis for coding the content was the published stories in the selected press on the reconciliation between the Taliban and the US. The story's headline and intro were the recording units, while the whole story was the contextual unit for the coding decision.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows stories on coverage of the reconciliation process between the Taliban and the U.S. Government published in the selected region and U.S. newspapers during 2015-2020. As evident from the table above, a significant number of stories were published by the Pakistani Newspaper dawn (198, 30.4), followed by New York Times (145, 22.2) and Pajhwok Afghan (119. 18.3), respectively. In addition, the chi-square test reveals that Dawn has published stories significantly higher than other selected newspapers on the coverage of the reconciliation process between the Taliban and the U.S. Government.

Table 1: Coverage of Reconciliation in the press Newspapers   N   %   χ

2

Newspapers	N	%
New York Times	145	22.2%
China Daily	24	3.7%
Pajhwok Afghan	119	18.3%
Moscow Times	24	3.7%
Dawn	198	30.4%

Table 2 shows topics published on the issue of the reconciliation process between the Taliban and the U.S. Government in the selected newspapers. As is evident from the table, most of the coverage was given to statements of the leaders (230, 35.4) followed by meetings of the leaders (227, 34.8), respectively. The chi-square test reveals that the coverage of the leaders' statement was significantly higher (285.334, P= 000) than the other topics mentioned in the table.

Table 2: Topics published on the issue

Episodic Frames	N	%	χ^2	
Meetings	227	34.8%		
Statement of Leaders	230	35.3%	285.33 P= .000	
Attack	94	14.4%		
Release of Prisoners	15	2.3%		
Missing System	13	2.0%		

Table 3 is a cross-tabulation between the topics and the newspapers that covered them. It is evident from the table that the selected Pakistani newspaper, *Dawn* gave greater coverage (17.5 %) to the meetings officials' meetings topics, which was comparatively higher. This was also confirmed by the chi-square test (187.895, .001), which shows that the officials' meetings covered by the Pakistani newspaper *Dawn* were significantly higher than other papers covering the issue.

Table 3: Coverage of the Topics on Reconciliation by the Selected Newspapers

Selected Newspapers		Meetings	Leaders Statement	Attack	Prisoners Release	Forces Withd rawal	Taliban take Over	Total
New York Times	Count % of Total	14 2.2%	49 7.7%	51 8.0%	3 0.5%	8 1.3%	16 2.5%	141 22.1%
Times of India	Count % of Total	9 1.4%	21 3.3%	7 1.1%	3 0.5%	1 0.2%	0 0.0%	41 6.4%
Tehran Times	Count % of Total	36 5.6%	31 4.9%	12 1.9%	0 0.0%	13 2.0%	6 0.9%	98 15.3%
China Daily	Count % of Total	6 0.9%	11 1.7%	3 0.5%	0 0.0%	4 0.6%	0 0.0%	24 3.8%
Pajhwok Afghan	Count	45	43	10	8	4	8	118
	% of Total	7.0%	6.7%	1.6%	1.3%	0.6%	1.3%	18.5%
Moscow Times	Count % of Total	5 0.8%	10 1.6%	5 0.8%	0 0.0%	3 0.5%	1 0.2%	24 3.8%
Dawn	Count	112	65	6	1	3	6	193
	% of Total	17.5%	10.2%	0.9%	0.2%	0.5%	0.9%	30.2%
Total	Count	227	230	94	15	36	37	639
	% of Total	35.5%	36.0%	14.7%	2.3%	5.6%	5.8%	100.0%

Table 4 shows the sources used in the coverage of the selected newspapers. It is evident from the table that the official sources used in the coverage of the news stories are higher (460, 70.6) than the unofficial sources used in the coverage. The chi-square test also reveals that unofficial sources are much fewer in number than official sources, which are significantly higher.

Table 4: Sources of the news stories in the coverage

Sources of New	N	%	χ2	
Official %	460	70.6		P:
Unofficial			190	29.1 %
Missing System			2	

While, Table 5 shows the cross-tabulation between the topic and the sources, showing that the topics that are mostly covered with the official source were statements of the leaders (189, 29.2) followed by meetings of the officials (159, 25.0), respectively. The cross-tabulation also shows that a greater number of news stories whose sources were official was higher in number than the unofficial sources. The chi-square test also reveals that the official sources and the statement of the leaders were covered significantly higher than other topics.

Table 5: Cross-tabulation between topics and sources

Episodic Frames	Source	Official	Unofficial	Total	χ^2
Meetings	Count	159	68	227	
	% of Total	25.0%	10.7%	35.6%	
Attack	Count	59	33	92	
	% of Total	9.3%	5.2%	14.4%	
Release of Prisoners	Count		6	15	
Forces Withdrawal	Count	20	16	36	
Taliban taking	Count	20	17	37	
	% of Total	3.1%	2.7%	5.8%	
	% of Total	71.1%	28.9%	100.0%	

Discussion

The 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in the US sparked extensive media coverage worldwide. This event marked a turning point in the world, dividing it into two distinct entities, with the West being seen as civilized and the East, particularly the Muslim world, being viewed as cruel. The Taliban-led government in Afghanistan was blamed for the attacks as Osama Bin Laden, the mastermind behind the tragedy, was found to be residing there and the Taliban refused to hand him over to the US. In response, the US and NATO forces, along with some coalition countries including Pakistan, launched an attack on Afghanistan, leading to a war against terrorism. This war resulted in catastrophic consequences for Afghanistan, leading to massive loss of lives and property. The Taliban responded with guerrilla warfare and suicide bombings aimed at the US and NATO forces.

Johns Hopkins University professor, Jones, wrote a book in 2009, "The Graveyard of Empires," which highlights that only one out of 16,000 British soldiers survived the first Anglo-Afghan war (1839-1842). Similarly, the Soviet Union's ten-year occupation of Afghanistan (1979-1989) resulted in a defeat and was a major factor in the eventual collapse of the Soviet Union (Smith et al., 2013). The US and a few Arab nations supported the Mujahidin throughout the Soviet occupation. The Taliban ultimately succeeded in taking over Afghanistan in December 2001.

Over the past two decades, the US war on terror has failed to achieve its goal of defeating terrorism. The conflict has resulted in devastating effects on both sides, leading to a desire for peace negotiations. In 2020, a five-year reconciliation process in Doha, Qatar, resulted in an agreement leading to the Taliban taking over Kabul.

Conclusion

The study investigated the coverage of regional and international countries' press on the reconciliation process between the Taliban and the US. The reconciliation process was held in Doha, Qatar, to end the long conflict that stemmed from the 9/11 attacks in the USA. This study analyzed the content of the press coverage on the issue between 2015 and 2020—the peak time of the reconciliation. As evident from the results, the Pakistani newspaper, *Dawn,* gives greater coverage to the issue, followed by New York Times and Pajhwok Afghan, respectively. This coverage is obvious from the fact that these mentioned newspapers' countries were the major stockholder in the war on terror. The most widespread issue was 'Statements of the countries' directly associated with the issue. The coverage also used official than private sources in covering the issues in all the countries' press.

Suggestions

This study is based on the content analysis of the Regional and International press coverage of the reconciliation between the Taliban and the US to end the long war on terror. The scope of this study is limited to press coverage on the reconciliation issue only. Since the war on terror has been exceptionally long, it has affected people's lives in all the stakeholding countries. We suggest that future studies should be conducted on the social survey to explore the effects of the war on terror to find out people's reactions and the conflict-affected socio-economic fabric of the countries involved in the war on terror.

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