

Running Head: AMERICAN AND AFGHANI NEWS MEDIA OUTLETS

South Asian Security Seminar: The Phenomena of Security Building in Afghanistan

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Abstract

Public opinion polls show that the Afghan population considers the absence of security to be the most significant problem facing the country. As of 2008, one –third of Afghans believed that threats from insurgent attacks and criminal violence were the largest threats to building a secure nation (Asia Foundation, 2008). Though Afghans feel more secure now than they did under the Taliban, an atmosphere of insecurity persists in society. Gen. McChrystal, the NATO commander and senior U.S. military officer in Afghanistan, has repeatedly warned that without a significant increase in Afghan security forces, defeat is likely (McChrystal, 2009). In this reading, security is conceptualized as a function of increasing personnel, training, and equipment. However, one ponders if an increase in the number of armed forces is a sufficient response without addressing the overarching sense of insecurity prevalent among Afghan citizens.

Along these lines, my research seeks to investigate the relationship between the size of security forces and local perceptions of security. Specifically, I seek to determine the impact of the media on shaping how citizens perceive the security environment. While objective factors like troop presence are important, the extent to which they impact the perception of security is influenced by the way local media and combatant propaganda (ISAF, Taliban, etc.) shape citizens understanding of the conflict. Through media analysis of news reports from the Pajhwok News media in Afghanistan and the Washington Post in America, I will differentiate the impact of relative troop levels, casualties, and media representations of insurgent attacks as they relate to the prevailing sense of insecurity. The results indicated a variety of similarities and differences in tone, framing, and emotion throughout news media coverage; some outcomes were predicted and some contradicted existing research.

Introduction

On October 7, 2001, the United States began a multi-purpose military operation in Afghanistan to defeat Al-Qaida and the Taliban, to restore the rights of women, and to establish a democratic system of governance in Afghanistan. Since that day, all forms of American and Afghani media provided daily images and commentaries regarding the U.S. military campaign and the ongoing efforts to rebuild Afghanistan. Easy accessibility to reporters for covering the daily lives of the troops and the people in Afghanistan has also brought extensive coverage of the war to the American and Afghan public. In addition, various media forms became readily available to the public which portrayed different aspects and views of the war.

To the average person, the vast number of references to and stories pertaining to the war in Afghanistan may seem confusing. What stories can one believe? Are the stories supportive of the war in Afghanistan? How does the general public, the ordinary citizen, perceive the war in Afghanistan? Through content analysis, this study attempts to determine if coverage in support for the war in Afghanistan varied within the American and Afghani news media, including online sources. In particular, the study explored whether Pajhwok News and the Washington Post varied in framing support for the war in Afghanistan in their coverage of civil and military issues.

Literature Review

Understanding the concept of framing is very important in the context of conflict and political communication in order to know how the war in Afghanistan is presented in both the Afghan news media and in the American news media. Framing takes shape in

cultural symbols such as speeches, news items, conversations, symbolic actions, and ritual events as well as in public debates, government policies, legislation and court cases. The concept of framing is an established field in mass communication studies and is essential to the study of conflicts.

Social psychologists (Goffman, 1974; Entman, 1991; Gitlin, 1980) developed an analytical technique of framing to study and explain the role of the news media in defining issues for the public and in shaping public opinion. According to Entman, framing, “is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communication text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (Entman, 1993, p. Canadian Journal of Media Studies, Vol. 2(1) 132-52). Gitlin (1980) 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”.

The definitions by the authors can specifically be associated to the field of political communication. According to Gitlin (1980), frames, “largely unspoken and unacknowledged, organize the world both for journalist who report it and in some important degree, for us why rely on their reports” (p. 7). Similarly, Entman (1991) differentiated individual frames as “information-processing schemata” of individuals and media frame as “attributes of the news itself” (p.7)

The different frames which media sources use may reflect deliberate distortions of reality. According to Neuman, Just and Crigler (1992) “They give story a “spin” taking into account their organizational and modality constraints, professional judgments, and

certain judgments about the audience” (p.20) The differing views may also, however, be less intentional and reflect a subjective and even non-conscious construction or reconstruction of reality. In general, we can state that the perception of a conflict situation is not a given, but a constructed reality. Mass media actively set the frames of reference that readers or viewers use to interpret and discuss public events (Tuchman, 1978, p. ix). This construction of reality can evolve over time, as the social, cultural and economic environment changes, when new parties become involved, or when mediators or the media become engaged. Within the realm of political communication, framing has to be defined and operationalized on the basis of social constructivism.

The framing of a conflict is a reciprocal and recurrent process which can have a major impact on the development of the conflict. How parties perceive a conflict may strongly affect the actions people take, influencing the intensity and character of the conflict. Kindler and Sanders suggestion (1990) that frames serve both as “devices embedded in political discourse”, or media frames, and as “internal structures of the mind,”, or individual frames (p.74). This translates into shaping public opinion. Within the realm of political communication, the way involved parties or outsiders frame a conflict can trigger a process of escalation or de-escalation of the conflict.

Within the context of conflict and war, scholars refer to frames as “cognitive structures held in memory and used to guide interpretation of new experience” (Minsky, 1975; Tannen, 1979). Furthermore, “parties rely on these mental structures to interpret or make sense of ongoing events” (Gray, 1997). People create and use frames to make sense of a situation in order to identify and interpret specific aspects that seem important in understanding the situation which provides the cognitive and conceptual

ability to communicate that interpretation to others. Framing occupies a central role in the occurrence, the development, and the resolution of these conflicts.

The literature on framing indicates that media frames provide moral judgment, and causal interpretation for media-focused problems, events, and issues. Media frames generally may represent specific ideology. After looking at the media frames, including the Canadian Journal of Media Studies, Vol. 2(1) uses 135 attractive words, metaphors, and phrases helping to determine the “tone” of media coverage of an event or issue. My intent is to look at the differences in metaphors, expressions, and words which used by the U.S and Afghan news media in depicting the Afghan War. I will identify if there is difference between the U.S and Afghan news media in support for events or issues in respect to the U.S involvement in Afghanistan.

Methodology

To examine how the news media frames issues and events, content analysis is an important step in identifying news patterns that are a commonly observed and interpreted component of the news environment. To conduct the research, I utilized a content analysis method integrating data collection and analytical techniques to measure the occurrence of identifiable elements in a text or message (Keyton, 2001). A content analysis of 100 articles posted on the home pages of Pajhwok News and the Washington Post websites were conducted. These news media outlets were chosen because of their geographical location, and because of their known influence on key decision makers within the government of Afghanistan and the United States. The selected news media outlets have a national audience that few newspapers can claim.

Each analytic sample was selected based on their support of the war in Afghanistan within two categories: (1) civil issues addressing coverage of democracy and governance, women's rights, military issues, the new Afghan government, descriptions of life in Afghanistan, stories related to the building of schools and hospitals, and the training of the Afghani police force; and (2) military issues addressing coverage of counterinsurgency operations of foreign forces, life stories of individual military members and their families, battles, death tolls, military unit stories, insurgent attacks, and civilian casualties.

Stories were collected using the Lexis-Nexis database from the American University Library. Each article was analyzed to determine the tone of the story and the frame employed based on the choice of words and expressions used in the articles. Results were assessed using an attitude scale similar to the one employed by Pfau, et al. (2001) in assessing the overall tone of the news media concerning the Iraq War. The research featured one primary independent variable. This independent variable was American and Afghani news media's framing of the war in Afghanistan. The unit of analysis was the stories covered in the news reports. The study featured one dependent variable. This variable identifies how Afghani and American news media produce different coverage in supporting or not supporting the War in Afghanistan. This dependent variable was determined as the result of the overall tone/attitude which was assessed via two bipolar adjective pairs, positive to negative.

Hypothesis: U.S News media as represented by the Washington Post is more likely to be supportive of the war efforts in framing the war in Afghanistan as compared to the Afghan news media as represented by Pajhwok News. Is the difference significant?

To evaluate the Hypotheses that the U.S. news media is more supportive of the war in Afghanistan in the coverage of civil and military issues as compared to the Afghan news media, 100 articles with over 400 words or more published between April 2006 and April 2011 were read and coded. Smaller articles of less than 400 words seemed to report casualties. In reading the published news media reports, I was able to see trends in coverage and themes that emerged from the articles. This study brings together two produced original sets of data which included 100 news reports - 50 U.S. and 50 Afghan - from two major American and Afghan news media outlets: the Washington Post and Pajhwok News.

This study measures the difference in the interpretation of references and expressions in each of the national press to other countries by coding variable as 0 when, in the case of Afghanistan it was negative and 1 when it was positive (or vice versa in the case of a U.S. article). Finally, the stories were coded for whether the reference to the opposing country was positive or negative. Each of the articles were also coded for whether or not it presented civil issues such as the rights of women, or democracy and governance, as a source of positive or negative coverage. Each article on military issues was coded for the presence of negative or positive mentions of specific frames and expressions in support of the war in Afghanistan.

Analysis /Results

After analyzing the issues of the rights of women, democracy and governance, interpretations of events, events of insurgent attacks and counterinsurgency operations of the international armed forces in Afghanistan as reported by two national news media, I was able to find the following statistical results through two proportional Z tests

in Table 1, 2, and 3. Since no direction had been predicted in the differences of news media sources, this will be a two-tailed test. The Z distribution will be used to establish the critical region. Setting alpha at 0.05 two-tailed, (any difference with a probability less than α is rare and will cause us to reject the H_0) since $\alpha = 0.05$, the critical region begins with a z score of ± 1.96 .

| | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| Table 1: The proportion of each news media classified as positive in framing support for war in Afghanistan. | |
| Sample 1 | Sample 2 |
| American News Media (Washington Post) | Afghan News Media (Pajhwok News) |
| Support of the U.S War in Afghanistan | Support of the U.S War in Afghanistan |
| Ps1 = 0.7 | Ps2 = 0.54 |
| N1= 50 | N2= 50 |

In Table 1: Since the test statistic, Z (obtained) = 1.67), does not fall into the critical region as marked by the Z (critical) of ± 1.96 , we fail to reject the null hypothesis. The difference between the sample proportions is no greater than what would be expected if the null hypothesis were true and only random chance were operating. American and Afghan news media are not significantly different in terms of their positive support of the U.S War in Afghanistan as measured in the test.

| | |
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| Table 2: The proportion of each news media classified as positive in interpreting the civil issues (women rights and democracy and governance) to show support for U.S involvement in Afghanistan. | |
| Sample 1 | Sample 2 |

| American News Media (Washington Post) | Afghan News Media (Pajhwok News) |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| Support of Civil Issues | Support of Civil Issues |
| Ps1 = 0.76 | Ps2 = 0.72 |
| N1= 25 | N2= 25 |

In Table 2: Since the test statistic, Z (obtained) = 0.33), does not fall into the critical region as marked by the Z (critical) of ± 1.96 , we fail to reject the null hypothesis. The difference between the sample proportions is no greater than what would be expected if the null hypothesis were true and only random chance were operating. American and Afghan news media are not significantly different in terms of their positive support of civil issues (women rights and governance and democracy) in framing the U.S War in Afghanistan as measured in the test.

| Table 3: The proportion of each news media classified as positive in framing military aspects of the war in Afghanistan to show support for the U.S involvement in Afghanistan. | |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| Sample 1 | Sample 2 |
| American News Media (Washington Post) | Afghan News Media (Pajhwok News) |
| Support of Military Issues | Support of Military Issues |
| Ps1 = 0.64 | Ps2 = 0.36 |
| N1= 25 | N2= 25 |

In Table 3: Since the test statistic, Z (obtained) = 2.0), fall in the critical the critical region as marked by the Z (critical) of ± 1.96 , we reject null hypothesis. There is an actual difference between American and Afghan news media. They are significantly

different in terms of their positive support of military issues (counterinsurgency operations of the U.S and event of insurgent attacks) in framing the U.S War in Afghanistan as measured in the test.

Discussion

In examining the news reports from the Washington Post in Table 1 and 2, the Afghan War was labeled a “No Win War” as corruption and a lack for rule of law increased, and armed forces casualties escalated. Words and phrases such as: bringing reform, justice, rule of law, election process, health care, education, and human rights are used repeatedly in articles to legitimizing the U.S efforts in Afghanistan. Many articles showed support for U.S presence in its plan of “liberating” Afghan women and bringing democracy and a secure governance to post 9/11 Afghanistan. Words and phrases such as: Afghan civilians, innocent civilians, and children are used to appeal to its audience, showing they are victims of the insurgent attacks and human rights violations within Afghan society. Using words within the news report such as: strength, secure, stable, and peaceful are used to justify and legitimize the U.S involvement in Afghanistan, emphasizing the need for the presence and state building efforts of U.S and international armed forces.

Under Table 3 of the news articles, the Washington Post reports the decay of the insurgent attacks on civilians and the local population in Afghanistan to show support for the Afghan War. According to a news report of December 28, 2008, General McKiernan, Commander International Security Assistance Force (COMISAF), condemned suicide attacks on Afghan civilians and offered his sincere condolences to the families of those innocent civilians, and specifically children, killed and injured by

indiscriminate attacks. He stated that any attack demonstrates the insurgents' complete disregard for the people of Afghanistan they claim to represent (Washington Post, 2008). Furthermore General McKiernan emphasized that suicide insurgent acts only serve to strengthen the international communities' resolve to support the Afghan people in the pursuit of a more secure, stable, and peaceful future. News reports emphasize methods to present the position of the international armed forces in Afghanistan, further demonstrating their efforts in the process of security building in Afghanistan. The use of words such as condemns, sincere condolences, and regret emits an emotional human side of the ISAF commander, making an attempt to connect with the audience.

In reading the Washington Post news reports, it was noted that phrases used such as "enemies of Afghan" referred to the Taliban as an insurgent group, increasing the negative interpretation of the Taliban as enemies of the Afghan nation. Terror, fear, suffering and unnecessary brutal killings of civilians were also emphasized, condemning the insurgent attacks by the Taliban. This type of description of events catches the attention of the reader, conceptualizing the idea that the Taliban are the ones responsible for the increase of insecurity in Afghanistan. Such descriptive reports legitimize the presence of armed forces in the country in order to maintain security and to fight insurgents.

The news reports also included information about the injury of children and women during ISAF operations. This part of the report was presented modestly and phrases such as force incident, standard force procedures, and appropriate steps were taken, substantiated the international armed forces operations resulting in the injury of children during the operation. Expression of regrets in regards to the injury of the

civilians were stated in the report to show the human side of the armed forces operations, making connections to the audience, asking the reader to understand that the armed force operations are not meant to hurt, injure or kill any civilians.

Under the second set of reports in Table 2, focus was made on the Afghan local news reports from the Pajhwok News in English in explaining the interpretation of women rights, democracy and governance, and counterinsurgency and insurgency attacks in Afghanistan. In reference to women's rights and democracy and governances, the news reports from the Pajhwok Post used phrases such as: U.S commitment, American friends, cooperation, freedom, women participation, and gender equalities to frame support for U.S involvement in Afghanistan. U.S efforts to uphold the rule of law, to provide free and fair elections, to support human rights and the rights of women and children, the educating of women, building roads, providing health care, fighting corruption, and combating narcotics were key identifiers for continued U.S involvement in Afghanistan.

Contrary to the positive support of the U.S news media concerning military issues in Afghanistan, according to Table 3, Pajhwok News in reference to counterinsurgency operation and insurgent attacks, presents the U.S involvement in Afghanistan using a more negative interpretive tone of events. The news report published by Abdul Moeed Hashmi in 2010 constructs the event by applying words, phrases, and quotes from civilians who directly affect the sense of security among the people in Afghanistan. After an Afghan civilian was killed by ISAF, the report conveyed the idea that Afghans often blame the presence of foreign troops for the deteriorating security situation. Pajhwok News asserted that as the result of the death of an Afghan civilian, the crowds

chanted "death to Obama, death to America" as the body of the victim of the incident was put into the back of a taxi and driven away from the scene showing that the Afghan people are angry and despise the U.S strategy of securitizing Afghanistan (Hashimi, 2010). In an attempt to attract the reader towards the worsening of the security situation in Afghanistan, to draw attention to the diminishing of human security within the country and depicting negative frames for the U.S war in Afghanistan, as civilians are increasingly being targeted by security forces, the report quotes the victims' family member: "They killed my father, my younger brother is dead."

The news report continues to build awareness of the deteriorating security situation among Afghan people by quoting the government and the reaction of parliament officials toward the increase of casualties despite the presence of international armed forces in the country. The speaker of the lower house of the Afghan Parliament, warned of further unrest if civilian casualties were not stopped. He stated to the Afghan parliament that "Elders should take a unanimous decision in this regard, so as people can get rid of this barbarism". It shows that people are portrayed to be fed up ...this is really an important issue and ISAF should be cautious. The statement from the lower house is printed to portray the reaction of the Afghan government in regards to increasing insecurity in the country. The American government and their policies are conveyed as accountable for the worsening situation drawing parallels between the presence of armed forces and barbarism in regards to insecurity and the absence of civilian protection by the international armed forces.

Conclusion

The results indicated a variety of similarities and differences in tone, framing, and emotion throughout news media coverage; some outcomes were predicted and some contradicted existing research. After examining how the media has framed the description of civil and military issues when reporting the war in Afghanistan, it was concluded that the U.S media, as represented by the Washington Post, is more likely to show support for the war in Afghanistan, portraying counterinsurgency operations as a means to legitimize the war efforts, as opposed to the portrayal of the war by the Afghani news media as represented by Pajhwok News. It is also concluded that Afghan and U.S news media are not different in their support of how civil issues are portrayed within the archives of events: the rights of women, and democracy and governance. Parallel to the literature of framing, the Afghan news media coverage of military issues included explicit use of expressions and words that either did not support the war in Afghanistan or which completely condemned the war in Afghanistan

In order to continue my research in regards to the sense of security among Afghan people, I will try to find different ways the media is constructed when framing various security events in Afghanistan, looking at different sets of data in the future. This will consist of the national and local newspapers in the local languages of Dari and Pashto, and foreign language publications in English, and the publications of not only the Pajwhok news in Afghanistan, but also foreign publication outside the country. I will also continue looking at local print and publications of Radio Liberty website under the news archives of various events in print, as well as in audio and video, looking at different frameworks used in interpreting the security situation in Afghanistan in Dari,

Pashto and English. I also intend to include different news broadcasting stations in Afghanistan, and local publications such as the Afghan Daily, Kabul Press, and the Toloafghan Press. More precisely, I will be analyzing language usage, choice of words, and descriptions of different security events and situations in Afghanistan. This may include insurgent attacks, counterterrorism operations, and the verbal and nonverbal presentation of casualties and victims among Afghan people. For nonverbal aspects of the media, I will analyze pictures and graphics used to influence the audience emotionally while constructing the different security image in Afghanistan through publications of the national media and the international media.

This research takes as its starting point a plan developed for application to graduate school. In addition to fulfilling Capstone requirements, a primary goal of this project is to become as academically and experientially prepared as possible for graduate school. Entering graduate school with unique and well-developed research experiences will be an asset that helps me further develop and write an MA thesis. Another primary goal is to submit a paper upon graduation for publication in *Millennium*, *Journal of International Relations and Development*, and/or in *Security Studies*.

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