Reporting Afghanistan
Mapping Afghan conflict in Pakistani media

EMPOWERMENT THROUGH INFORMATION
INTERMEDIA Pakistan
Advocacy, Research & Training on Media Issues
Reporting Afghanistan

A media monitoring report analyzing news content from April to August 2012

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This report is part of an ongoing project to monitor various types of conflicts as covered by select samples of media in Pakistan, including newspapers and TV channels.

In this report, the focus is on Afghan conflict and related issues as reported by Pakistani media. The report contains in depth content analysis of news coverage of Afghan conflict and related issues in three newspapers and three TV news channels, over the period of five months — i.e. from May 1, 2012 to August 31, 2012.

The report has been prepared by Intermedia Pakistan, a Pakistani media development organization focusing on advocacy, research and training on media issues.
About INTERMEDIA Pakistan

Intermedia is a registered not-for-profit Pakistani independent media development and development communications organization. Intermedia’s vision statement aims at supporting freedom of expression, access to information and citizens making informed opinions and decisions as a means of promoting an informed, democratic and tolerant society.

Intermedia’s principal activities are centered on building technical and professional capacities and competencies of media organizations, including TV channels, radio stations and newspapers, and media rights bodies through trainings; promoting free media in Pakistan through fair media laws and reforms; and carrying out research, advocacy and analysis on democracy and media-related issues.

Intermedia Pakistan also focuses on building communications capacities of development organizations to help them improve their outreach. Intermedia focuses on improving the quality of civic and thematic dialogue and development communications critical to an open, pluralistic and democratic society by working with civil society groups and development sector organizations in improving their communications capacities in a dynamically evolving media sector.
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It is impossible to overestimate the importance of the Afghanistan-Pakistan relationship. Pakistan’s policy towards Afghanistan doesn’t just affect its relations with its volatile Western neighbor; it also has a heavy influence on Pakistan’s overall foreign policy, including its relations with United States. Pakistan’s dealings with Afghanistan have hovered between tense and volatile for the last two decades. Following the 9/11 attacks and the start of the global war against terrorism, this relationship has taken on new and delicate dimensions.

Keeping the importance of this relationship in mind, it is important to look how the Afghan conflict is covered in the Pakistani Media. This report is all about how Afghanistan and issues relating to the conflict going on there are monitored and reported by mainstream media in Pakistan.

Coverage of ‘the Afghan conflict’ in the Pakistani Media is a complex theme to tackle. The ongoing war in Afghanistan, the beginning of NATO’s pullout, the aspirations of the Afghan Peace Process and every security or political development in Afghanistan have an obvious and long term impact on Pakistan. Terrorism in Afghanistan and in the areas of its border with Pakistan are ardently linked together both by the law enforcement of either side or the media.

Militants from each side of the border use the other’s land as refuge and cross border raids and attacks are commonplace. It is almost impossible to meaningfully discuss the cause and effect of violent conflict on one side of the Durand Line without taking into account realities and conditions on the other.

Cross border infiltration between Pakistan and Afghanistan is not limited to militants. The presence of U.S. and NATO bases in Afghanistan and the continuing war on terror have had serious and often tragic consequences for Pakistan. The Salala Attack by NATO forces is just one example of NATO forces in Afghanistan perceiving Pakistani grounds as fair game.

While the Salala incident provoked a severe reaction from Pakistani leaders, NATO intrusions into Pakistan from Afghanistan are extremely common. In fact, unmanned drones flying from U.S. bases in Afghanistan have carried out more than 250 attacks inside Pakistan since 2005. These drone strikes clearly demonstrate how closely linked Pakistan is with the conflict in Afghanistan.
As the 2014 deadline for NATO’s pullout approaches, Afghanistan and Pakistan are poised to enter another yet another uncertain phase in their relationship. Given the long-standing levels of mistrust that exist between the two countries (despite a decade “working together” in the larger war on terror, a lot will depend on what unfolds in post-NATO Afghanistan. In this situation, it is extremely important to take a look at how the media in Pakistan perceives and reports on Afghanistan – not just about internal conflicts within Afghanistan - but also what those conflicts mean for Pakistan.

As the NATO pullout deadline approaches, it becomes extremely important to increase public understanding of the Afghan conflict, so as to ensure that Pakistan is able to engage with post-NATO Afghanistan in the best way possible. This analysis of media content on Afghanistan has been conducted with hopes that it will help media indulge in a bit of self reflection and work out the issues it currently faces while reporting on Afghanistan.

We recognize the logistical and practical issues that Pakistani journalists face while reporting on Afghanistan and hope that by highlighting the main and missing elements of Pakistani Media’s coverage of Afghanistan we will be able to generate a clear picture of the positive and negative aspects of Afghan coverage in Pakistani Media.

This report documents and analyzes coverage of the Afghan Conflict and related issues in six mainstream Pakistani news outlets. The following sub-themes have been tracked for monitoring and analysis:

**Terrorism in Afghanistan** — One of the key indicators of the security and stability situation in Afghanistan is the frequency of terrorism incidents. The fact that so many incidents continue to occur despite years of NATO’s presence, means this they are likely to continue to be a significant issue once the NATO pullout is complete.

**Drone Strikes** — Even though drone strikes are primarily a political issue between Pakistan and the United States, they emanate from Afghanistan. They are also a part of the larger fight against terrorism - the backbone of the Afghan Conflict. Another aspect of the drone strikes that connects both Pakistan and Afghanistan are the links between Pakistani and Afghan militants.

**Cross Border Attacks and Incursions** — The border between Pakistan and Afghanistan remains porous and dangerous for both sides. Afghan militants have crossed the border on numerous occasions to stage violent attacks on Pakistani soil. The cross border infiltrations are not limited to militants and non state elements alone. Government military and security forces on both sides of the border have frequently engaged with each other. There have been incidents of cross border fire, NATO gunships crossing over and shooting targets from Pakistan’s airspace. These myriad cross border incursions reflect how Pakistan and its border areas can be affected by an unstable Afghanistan.
**NATO Supply Lines** — Afghanistan is a land locked country; goods and supplies to Afghanistan must pass through a transit route from another country. NATO forces have been using multiple routes in Pakistan for the delivery of non-lethal equipment to Afghanistan. The NATO supply lines in Pakistan have been a matter of controversy, trucks carrying NATO containers have been attacked and the government has faced criticism from most right wing parties on allowing the transit despite continuing drone strikes. Earlier this year, Pakistan’s suspension of NATO supply lines through its territory highlighted a further inter-weaving of issues and impacts involving Pakistan, Afghanistan and the United States. Pakistan suspended the movement of NATO supplies and material across its border with Afghanistan to protest infringements of its territorial sovereignty by the U.S. The NATO Supply line issue was a hot topic during the monitoring period and remains a key issue relative to Pakistan’s role in the Afghan conflict.

**NATO Pullout and Afghan Peace Process** — NATO’s pullout from Afghanistan is scheduled to be completed next year. And the international community’s next moves in Afghanistan are not entirely clear. Nor is the impact the pullout will have on the security environment or the Afghan Government. All of these issues also have potentially serious implications for Pakistan, so this has also been closely monitored and analyzed.

**Pak-Afghan and Pak U.S. Relationship** — The relationships between Pakistan, Afghanistan and the United States are extremely interdependent. Perceptions of Pakistan inside Afghanistan are heavily impacted by Pakistan’s perceived role as an ally in the “war on terror”, and by the support it extends to the U.S military and NATO for their operations inside Afghanistan. This can in turn shape the actions and policies of both the Afghan Government and militants directed back at Pakistan. There are also open questions about how bilateral relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan will unfold following NATO’s 2013 withdrawal.
Historically, relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan have been far from ideal. But despite the political and social tensions between the two countries, these oft conflicting neighbours have also shared a historical bond. Pakistan was a key player during the Afghan resistance to Soviet forces and decades later, Pakistan still is home to millions of Afghan refugees. The shared border between Pakistan and Afghanistan is also a testament to the shared cultural and tribal bonds. Tribes on either side of the Durand Line enjoy a common history and share similar cultural and sociological perspectives.

Consider the interwoven relations between the citizens in Pakistan’s tribal belt and Afghan border areas add the geo-political situation of the post-9/11 world and view these with the lens of the ongoing armed conflict in which Pakistan features as a key player and the significance of the Afghan conflict and its impact on Pakistan becomes clear. In this report, we have attempted to establish whether the media in Pakistan is according any significance to the Afghan conflict and how the news narrative about the conflict is structured.

The data gathered during the course of this research makes one thing very clear; the Afghan conflict features often in Pakistani media, but, perhaps unsurprisingly, most of the news items refer to or are linked to the Afghan conflict only indirectly. Amongst the conflict sub themes that featured most prominently in Pakistani media are drone attacks, NATO supply line, NATO pullout and Afghan peace process and cross-border insurgency.

- **Pak-Afghan relations are vastly underreported.** The dynamics of relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan are vastly underreported and only 3% of the news pieces about Afghanistan that appeared in the monitored newspapers from April to August 2012 focused on Pak-Afghan relationship. The pattern is slightly different on TV and 8% of the Afghanistan-related news items in the 9 o’clock bulletins of the monitored channels made Pak-Afghan relations the key focus of the story.

- **NATO supply line is treated as a priority news subject by newspapers and TV.** NATO supply line and cross-border insurgency from Afghanistan were given importance of both TV and newspapers — 23% of the related news on TV and 18% in newspapers were about NATO supply. The news about suspension of the supply from Pakistan, the escalating tensions amongst Pakistan, Afghanistan and United States over this issue and the eventual resumption of the supply were widely discussed and analyzed by all the monitored media outlets. Some 21% of
the newspaper coverage on NATO supply route consisted of opinion and editorial pieces.

- **A significant number of opinion and analytical pieces are published on Afghan conflict.** In newspapers, 76% of the published articles were news stories while 24% were opinion, analysis or editorial pieces. The ratio of news vs. opinion is reasonably high. The frequency with which opinion pieces on the Afghan conflict were published is an indication of the fact that editors are according considerable importance to the topic.

- **Afghan peace process is not reported frequently, but, when reported, it is discussed analytically.** Even though NATO pullout and Afghan peace process was the news focus of only 16% of the total number of published stories, 16% of these stories were opinion or analytical pieces, which, in effect, resulted in a detailed and in-depth coverage of the theme.

- **AFP, local and foreign correspondents of newspapers are most frequently used sources.** More than half of the stories i.e. 53% of the stories on Afghan conflict were sourced to local correspondents of the newspapers and 13% to foreign correspondents. The rest were sourced to different news agencies. Both English newspapers seem to favor French wire service AFP when it comes to Afghan conflict news, and 18% of the news stories about Afghanistan were from AFP.

- **Terror incidents in Afghanistan are not prioritized by newspapers and TV channels.** A total of 371 casualties were reported in different terrorism incidents in Afghanistan. News about terror incidents in Afghanistan was not given much priority. Multiple incidents were grouped together into a single news item without much of a detail offered.

- **Pakistan features prominently in one-tenth of news items reporting terrorism in Afghanistan.** Media identifies the need for a joint anti-terrorism strategy and identifies the Haqqani Network as one of the most potent groups involved. However, Haqqanis’ link with militancy in Afghanistan has been reported only through quotes from American officials; the media has avoided linking the two together directly.

- **While reporting Green-on-Blue killings NATO officers have been given a heroic frame and have been referred to as ‘Westerners helping Afghanistan counter religious extremists’.**

- **Cross-border incursions from Afghanistan are given ample news space.** A total of 17 cross-border incursions were reported in the monitored period. Tribal region Bajaur Agency and Upper Dir District of northwestern Khyber
Pakhtunkhwa along the border with Afghanistan were reported as being most vulnerable to cross-border incursions from Afghanistan. Thirty-three Pakistani soldiers and law enforcers were reported dead in these incursions. Over a dozen tribesmen and over 100 militants were also reported to be killed. In the opinion pieces published on the theme of cross-border incursions multiple analysts and writers made a reference to the safe-havens Pakistan-based outlawed militant outfit Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has apparently found in Afghanistan.

- **ISAF and NATO forces have been mentioned in 33% of the news stories about cross-border incursions.** The media seems to harbor a deep mistrust of the ISAF and American forces in Afghanistan; most opinion pieces commenting on the forces have framed them in a manipulative and deceitful role.

- **Reporting about drone attacks is incomplete; disparities in casualty figures reported by different newspapers are common.** Drone attacks in Pakistan’s tribal areas were also monitored. A total of 23 drone attacks were reported by the media from April to August 2012.

- **Different newspapers gave different casualty figures in drone strikes and other details in the news stories also varied.** A few disparities were also found in the reported number of drone strike casualties in local newspapers and International news sources; however, the difference was not very significant. Some positive and a number of negative aspects of the drone strategy have been discussed in the monitored papers; the conclusion after these arguments has been largely on the negative side.

- **Pakistani media largely sees the drone strategy as a violation of Pakistan’s sovereignty and international laws.** The United States has been portrayed as a bully with no regard for human life or for moral and legal obligations. The Pakistani government has been portrayed as either incompetent or sly playing a double-game on the drone issue.

- **Media coverage was neither overtly for or against the suspension of NATO supplies routes.** The resumption of the NATO supplies through Pakistan was welcomed by the media; however, misgivings and questions about the United States’ attitude over the issue remained.

- **Pakistani media does not believe that the Afghan security forces are ready or capable of managing the extremist and terrorist element in Afghanistan after NATO pullout.** Media coverage also reflects the fear that Pakistan stands to suffer a violent blowback from Afghanistan once the NATO forces have pulled out.
• The media portrays Afghanistan and the Haqqanis as detrimental factors that would define Pakistan’s relations with the U.S. The media identifies a need to redefine Pak-Afghan relationship so that both governments can help each other counter terrorist elements after the NATO pullout.

• There is a clear lack of trust in the Afghan government’s capability to handle the volatile situation in Afghanistan and the media remains deeply fearful of a rise in Taliban influence within the government post-NATO pullout.

Apart from news monitoring, this research also takes a look at Afghan and Pakistani journalists’ perception of the coverage of Afghan conflict in Pakistani media. A group of Pakistani journalists who have reported actively on Afghanistan participated in a short survey and 93% of them said that media has a role to play in improving relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

• Majority of Pakistani journalists find Afghan conflict coverage inadequate. Over 83% of these journalists termed the coverage of Afghan conflict as being inadequate. The majority of these journalists said that a lack of interest in the Afghan conflict in Pakistani media organizations is the main reason for this inadequate coverage. Some 67% of the journalists termed Afghan coverage in newspapers overtly negative, while 60% also termed the coverage on TV as being overtly negative.

• Majority of Afghan journalists also find Afghan conflict coverage inadequate. A group of journalists from Afghanistan also took part in a survey regarding coverage of Afghan conflict in Pakistani media. Nearly 86% of the Afghan journalists found the coverage to be inadequate and 86% also termed it ‘overtly negative’. All the Afghan respondents said that media has an important role in improving relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Suggesting ways to improve the current media coverage, 85% of the Afghan journalists indicated the need to bring out Afghan voices in the Pakistani media.
News gathering and production becomes a daunting prospect on occasions when news and developments happen out of the country, especially thematic, in-depth coverage. Even though this report focuses on thematic coverage of the Afghan conflict and related issues, the theme gets its fair share of coverage in Pakistan, comparable to that in Afghanistan itself or in the United States.

In the first section of news analysis, we will focus on three basic quantitative indicators of news coverage: The focus, type and source of the news story.

The Afghan conflict is complex. When it comes to news, it throws up multi-dimensional and multi-layered stories. Monitoring this theme often means monitoring news items that do not make a direct mention of the conflict in Afghanistan but are a direct result of the war brewing in Afghanistan. The Afghan conflict also features as a microcosm of the global war against terror in that it symbolizes, at least for the present, a focused theatre of the war when it comes to the news audience worldwide. For Pakistan, of course, the impending NATO pullout from Afghanistan has direct consequences.

Monitoring the Afghan conflict in Pakistani media also means that elements of the conflict that have a direct impact and relevance on this side of the border receive vastly more coverage. So, while terrorism in Afghanistan and the Afghan peace process have had their share of news stories in newspapers and on TV, it is the NATO supply line, cross-border incursions and drone strikes that have generated the largest chunk of news content. Unexpectedly, a good percentage of the news content consists of news commentary, analysis and opinion pieces. While both English newspapers i.e. Dawn and The Express Tribune show similar trends in basic coverage indicators, the Urdu newspaper Jang’s coverage has been slightly different.

**News focus**

Drone strikes in Pakistan and cross-border insurgency remained the most covered themes in all monitored newspapers. Among the 602 published news pieces, 19% were about drone strikes in FATA, 17% were about the NATO supply line issue, 15% about cross-border insurgency from Afghanistan, 16% related to NATO pullout in 2014 and Afghan peace process, 13% reported on terrorism incidents in Afghanistan while 12% related to Pak-Afghan or Pak-U.S. relations in context of Afghan conflict.
NATO pullout in 2014 and the Afghan peace process were covered in detail in both *Dawn* and *The Express Tribune* with 21% stories in *The Express Tribune* and 14% stories in *Dawn* dedicated to these themes. In *Jang*, however, only 6% of the stories on Afghan conflict focused on NATO pullout or Afghan peace process. Among other popular themes were NATO Supply and drone attacks. In *Dawn*, the NATO supply line was a significant focus with 16% of the Afghan conflict coverage dedicated to the theme.

In *The Express Tribune*, the second most popular theme was drone strikes with 19% of total Afghanistan-related coverage dedicated to drone strikes. Drone strikes also generated the highest number of news stories in *Jang*, with 29% of the total news stories related to Afghan conflict focusing on drone strikes and related issues or statements.

Both NATO supply and drone strikes highlight the deep impact that the Afghan crisis has on Pakistan. It also points out the crucial role that Pakistan has to play in the context of the transformation of the Afghan conflict. Below is a graphical look at the key themes relating to Afghan conflict that the three monitored newspapers covered from April to August 2012.
News content type
With a theme as complex and intertwined with the peace in the region, it is a given that a significant percentage of the total news content relating to the Afghan conflict would consist of opinion pieces in the form of news analysis, editorials, columns, opinion editorials and even letters to the editor. The monitoring establishes that it really is so. Among the 602 articles published in the monitored newspapers from April to August 2012, as many as 143 were opinion pieces i.e. 24% of the total coverage was of analytical nature.
The Express Tribune published the highest percentage of opinion pieces with 26% of the entire news content on Afghan conflict consisting of opinion pieces. In thematic news content that appeared in Dawn, 25% consisted of opinion pieces while Jang had the lowest percentage of opinion pieces with only 14% of the published content on Afghan conflict being opinion and editorial pieces.

The NATO pullout in 2014 and the Afghan peace process remained the most widely discussed theme in opinion pieces with 27% of them discussing this theme.
News sources

The knotty, and often controversial, issue of the Afghan conflict necessitates diverse opinion and arguments to establish the truth. The credibility of news, therefore, is a factor of news sources that newspapers use to generate news content. An underlying assumption with a theme based in a foreign land would be that the local correspondents would not be generating the larger chunk of the news content for reasons of access, if nothing else. However, since the Afghan conflict is so closely intertwined with Pakistan, dependency on a ‘foreign’ news base factor to stay informed about developments in Afghanistan does not come into play much.

In fact, the data gathered during the monitoring process shows that local correspondents generated as much as 53% of the total news content published in the monitored newspapers. Both Dawn and the Tribune attributed a good number of stories to their foreign correspondents. AFP has been the most widely used news agency for both Dawn and Tribune with 19% Afghanistan related stories in Dawn and 21% Afghanistan related stories in the Tribune attributed to AFP. The Urdu newspaper Jang, however, showed a preference for the Online news agency with 15% of Afghanistan related content attributed to Online and only 11% attributed to AFP preferred by both English newspapers.

The comparison between the news sources being used by the monitored newspapers is quite interesting.
Both mainstream English newspapers apparently rely on the same news sources and haven’t published a single story from two local agencies preferred by *Jang* i.e. Online and Sana.

Comparison: News sources in *Dawn* and *The Express Tribune*
In a country like Pakistan where the percentage of illiterate people far exceeds those with the ability to read and write, television is a true mass medium. For the last 12 years, since the current crisis in Afghanistan in the wake of American intervention in post-2001, the impact, relevance and outreach of television has grown along with the conflict in the region. TV news and talk shows have become primetime entertainment for a nation deeply affected by the conflict in the region deeply connected to that in Afghanistan. TV has emerged and remains as one of the key mediums that influence and mould the public opinion in Pakistan.

Even though the reach and impact of the television is greater than that of newspapers, with the benefit of regular updates, this report only takes into account the coverage of the Afghan conflict in the most watched news bulletin of the day — the 9 o’clock news. This restriction was dictated by cost and logistical constraints as monitoring TV through the cycle of news and updates can be an expensive and time-consuming undertaking. The data presented here is, thus, reflective only of the hour-long bulletin at 9 o’clock — the longest and the most comprehensive of the day, compared to on-the-hour bulletins and updates that don’t exceed 10 minutes at the most — and not of the collective coverage of Afghan conflict in the news bulletins through the day on the monitored TV channels.

Given the limitations of TV coverage monitoring, this report aims to determine the significance and importance given to Afghan conflict-related news in the 9 o’clock bulletins of TV channels. From April to August 2012, the three monitored channels aired a total of 71 stories about the Afghan conflict. Amongst these 71 were straight news stories, seven were beepers (live-cross between the reporter and the news presenter) and three were news packages.

**News focus**

Like newspapers, TV channels also dedicated most of the airtime to drone strikes, NATO supply and cross-border insurgency when it comes to coverage of the Afghan conflict. Drone strikes remained the most widely covered theme with 28% of the coverage dedicated to drone strikes, NATO supply bagged 23% of the related coverage, while cross-border attacks and insurgency related news items made up for 15% of the related news coverage.
Unlike the newspapers, the monitored TV news content does not include much coverage of terrorism related incidents in Afghanistan. Only 7% of the Afghan conflict coverage on TV focuses on terrorism in Afghanistan as opposed to the 13% coverage in monitored newspapers.

The Pakistan-U.S. relations in context of Afghan conflict have generated 10% of the thematic news content, but NATO pullout and Afghan peace process does not seem to be a preferred theme for TV news channels and only 6% of the thematic coverage focuses on the pullout and peace process.

The reason for this might be the fact that this data reflects only the 9pm news bulletin content that due to time constraint allows only coverage of the important news items, not analysis as done in the current affairs programmes and talk shows.

The comparison between Geo News, Waqt News and Samaa News shows that there are similarities between news policies when it comes to the coverage of Afghan conflict.
Type of news item

Given the news coverage trends in Pakistani TV where bulletins are almost entirely composed of straight news stories, it does not come as a surprise that a significant number of the monitored news items consist of event reporting. Among the items aired by the monitored channels, 86% were simple news stories in OC-VO or OC-VO-1SOT format. Only 5% of the stories were aired as Beepers and only 1% of the thematic news content consisted of news packages. All the news items aired were reactionary in tone. The lack of detailed reporting on the theme in this regard seems more a factor of time constraint that the 9 o’clock bulletin faces than lack of interest in the theme on part of the news channel.

News priority

The priority given to any news item can be determined by the airing slot allotted to that particular news item while deciding the running order news in a bulletin — the most important news in terms of impact, relevance, proximity etc. takes precedence over the less important. While important news items are aired in earlier slots, these news items are usually aired in

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1 OC-VO refers to On-Camera and Voice Over, a common TV news format which consists of the news anchor reading the lead on camera and then switching to pre-recorded visuals for the rest of the voice over. OC-VO-SOT is the basic OC-VO with an addition of ‘Sound-on-Tape’ clip which shows a pre-recorded clip of someone from the field giving a quote on camera.
blocks of similar themes so determination of airing time does not exactly portray the importance that a particular news item has for the rundown producer. Certain news themes demand lengthier coverage and the duration of each news item obviously has a bearing on the time that other news items in the rundown would air at.

To get an estimation of how the rundown producer conceived the news items in terms of importance, we decided to simply check whether news related to the Afghan conflict has been aired among the first 10 news items of the bulletin.

It is interesting to note that more than 46% of the total Afghan conflict stories were aired among the first 10 items of the news bulletins — 15% of the stories aired among the first 10 news items of the bulletin were either beepers or packages. Most of the prioritized news items focused on drone attacks.

**News significance**

Another factor determining the importance given to the theme is the duration of the stories aired. Since the 9 o’clock bulletins on TV channels aim to include the important news of the day, it is usually difficult to squeeze in lengthy news items. However, as much as 44% of the news stories aired on the Afghan conflict were over one minute in duration showing that TV stations are dedicating a significant amount of time to stories about the Afghan conflict.
Duration of stories aired on Afghan conflict

- More than 2 minutes: 8%
- 1-2 minutes: 36%
- Less than a minute: 54%

Focus of news items over one minute

- Nato supply: 6
- Pak-Afghan relations: 5
- Pak-U.S. relations: 4
- NATO pullout: 3
- Drone strikes: 2
- Cross-border incursions: 1
- Nato supply: 0

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When it comes to airing stories longer than a minute, Waqt News has taken the lead — airing 53% of the long stories.

While the percentage of lengthy stories on the monitored theme might not be very high given the time limitations in the 9 o’clock bulletin, the relatively high percentage shows that the monitored channels are giving both priority and significance to the Afghan conflict in their main news bulletin.
**Coverage of terrorism in Afghanistan**

**Context**
The bleak security and political situation in Afghanistan is a secret to none. With the NATO pullout drawing near, the political, economic and security situation in Afghanistan is continuously a matter of deep concern for all global actors. The Afghan government is seen as weak and ineffective, while the Taliban violence seems to have no end. Terrorism incidents in Afghanistan are common place and varied. From suicide blasts affecting mostly civilians to targeted bomb attacks and ambushes of the NATO forces, the violence rages all over the country. A recent surge in Afghan law enforcement personnel turning on their foreign counterparts has been alarming. The fact of the matter is; so varied and numerous are these incidents of terrorism in Afghanistan, that Pakistani media is only covering only the most gory, the most disastrous of these attacks. The question is: Is a more detailed coverage of terrorism in Afghanistan even important or necessary?

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<th>KEY FINDINGS</th>
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<td>12% of the news pieces on terrorism in Afghanistan mention Pakistan; all these articles mention Pakistani non-state actors and half of them also mention Pakistani state actors.</td>
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<td>Media identifies the need for a joint anti-terrorism strategy.</td>
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<td>Three quarters of the stories that mention Pakistan in context of terrorism in Afghanistan have identified the Haqqani Network as the possible link.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Haqqanis’ link with militancy in Afghanistan has been reported only through quotes from American officials; the media has avoided linking the two together directly.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wherever action against the Haqqanis has been discussed, only the security forces have been mentioned. The political government has not been mentioned even once, indicating that the media does not believe that the political administration has a part to play in this regard.</td>
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<tr>
<td>While reporting Green-on-Blue killings, NATO officers have been given a heroic frame and have been referred to as ‘Westerners helping Afghanistan counter religious extremists’.</td>
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Mention of the ‘Pakistan link’

One can hardly deny Pakistan’s active role and impact on Afghanistan’s internal situation. An analysis of all news items published on the theme of terrorism in Afghanistan reveals that 12% of the total news items on the conflict theme mention either Pakistan or a group originating from Pakistan.

While at a glance, 12% might not seem like a large percentage, but, it is important to note that nearly half of the news items reporting terrorism attacks in the Pak-Afghan border area reported a link to Pakistan. An important factor of the coverage is that in 60% of the news items that reported a link between Pakistan and terrorism in Afghanistan, the alleged link or lack thereof was mentioned in the headline.

A headline in The Express Tribune on August 13, 2012 says ‘Pakistan-linked’ attack on Kabul foiled’; another carries the pretext ‘The Haqqani Connection’; another in Jang quotes Sherry Rehman, Pakistan’s ambassador in U.S., as saying, ‘Don’t point fingers at Pakistan in connection with attacks in Kabul.’ The newspapers have also quoted Afghan officials freely, even when they are directly accusing Pakistan of being involved in supporting the terrorist, anti-government forces. A news piece published on 29th July 2012 quotes Eklil Hakimi, Afghan Ambassador to the U.S., stating that ‘the opposition forces in Afghanistan receive money, training and equipment from the other side of the Durand Line.’ This data shows that Pakistani media outlets are actively reporting the alleged links between terrorism in Afghanistan and Pakistan or Pakistan-based militant outfits.

Mention of state and non-state actors from Pakistan

All of the articles that mention Pakistan in context of Terrorism in Afghanistan have mentioned the involvement of non-state actors, particularly the Haqqani Network. However, half of these articles also call upon the state’s failure to act against these elements.

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<td>Mentioned Pakistan</td>
<td>12%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mentioned Pakistani state actors</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentioned Pakistani non-state actors</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only one of the news items contained only a reference to Pakistan’s state actors’ — i.e. Pakistani intelligence agencies’ — involvement in a sectarian attack in Kabul. The news published in The Express Tribune on June 20, 2012 quotes Afghan Attorney General Mohammad Essaq Atak; “It (plan to carry a sectarian attack in Afghanistan) was started from Peshawar and this (attack) was administered by our neighbor’s intelligence organs.”

However, this news piece is an exception rather than norm — among all the news items that mention the Pakistan link to terrorism in Afghanistan, this is the only one that contains an allegation about Pakistan’s direct link to an attack without a counter-statement from Pakistani officials.
Tone of media coverage linking state elements to terrorism in Afghanistan

Almost one-tenth of the total coverage on terrorism in Afghanistan consisted of opinion and editorial pieces and all these mention Pakistan’s possible link. The tone of most opinion/editorial pieces reflects a reproach towards state elements for failing to act against militant groups operating in the region. However, this is true in only two English newspapers *Dawn* and *The Express Tribune*. *Jang*, the only Urdu newspaper monitored for this research, did not publish any editorials or opinion pieces that linked Pakistan to terrorism in Afghanistan.

Multiple opinion/editorial pieces in the English language press also draw comparisons between the suffering of Afghan and Pakistani people at the hand of terrorists while calling for a joint strategy against the menace of terrorism. An op-ed in *Dawn*, translated from Pashto language newspaper *Daily Khabroona* states; “It is a matter of concern for both Pakistan and Afghanistan that terrorists have been targeting law-enforcement agencies, sensitive government installations and state functionaries…..It is need of the hour for both countries to check the movement of such people, so that the menace of terrorism can be controlled.”

Other editorials/opinion pieces in *Dawn* and *The Express Tribune* reflect similar sentiment. From this, one can deduce that the English language press in Pakistan does not deny the reality of Pakistan-based terrorist outfits operating in Afghanistan. The monitored papers have not only reported on these links whenever they have come to light, they have also expressed dissatisfaction over the manner the government and the military are responding to this threat.

Haqqani Network in news about Afghanistan

More than three quarters of the news stories that mentioned Pakistani non-state actors in connection with terrorist attacks in Afghanistan made a direct reference to the Haqqani Network. The remaining quarter of the stories mentioned Taliban supporters in Pakistan.

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Framing of the Haqqani Network
A close look at all the articles that mention the Haqqani Network reveals that neither the news pieces nor the editorials have mentioned their link to terrorism in Afghanistan directly; all the news pieces have carefully framed sentences saying that it is the United States that is placing the blame on Haqqani Network.

Even when the security establishment is being taken to task for not conducting an operation against the Haqqanis, the framing of the sentences is very careful; for example, an editorial states ‘it is the perception that Pakistan sees the Haqqani Network as an asset.”

An opinion piece in Dawn states; “We will see in the next few days, a spate of leaked reports claiming that the attack was the handiwork of the Haqqanis.” Other opinion pieces use quotes from U.S. officials to establish a link between Haqqanis and terrorism in Afghanistan. The same trend is present in the news items; from quotes of the Afghan ambassador to U.S. to U.S. Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker, the newspapers have left it to the Americans to lay accusations on the network.

This shows a bit of safe playing on the media’s side. Not a single news or opinion piece has mentioned the alleged link without mentioning that the original accusation comes from the United States. The media seems to be carefully avoiding taking a direct stance against the network.

Another reason for this trend might simply be the lack of direct information regarding the Haqqani Network. The network operates in areas that are nearly impossible and highly dangerous. Journalists from that area are constantly under threat from both militants and security forces, which means that they have to carefully tailor their message to avoid putting their lives at risk.

Perhaps, the practice of mentioning the network only through official quotes is a way to avoid publication of unconfirmed information while simultaneously ensuring that the journalists do not face an additional threat.

Reporting of Haqqani Network and Pakistan’s security forces’ strategy
Nearly 67% of the stories that mentioned Haqqani Network also mentioned Pakistan’s security forces. Around three-fifths of these talk of the Pakistan’s failure to act against the militant group while the rest mentioned that these alleged links between Pakistan security forces and Haqqanis might simply be a pressure tactic to get the operation in North Waziristan started.
In almost half of the articles the tone used to describe the Pakistan security forces’ attitude towards the Haqqani Network is quite harsh. An editorial published on June 25, 2012, in *The Express Tribune* states; “Part of the blame (for an attack outside Kabul) has to go to Pakistan. The U.S. has blamed Pakistan-based Haqqani Network for the attack. The Pakistan military has repeatedly refused to take action against it; making up what some would say are excuses for why it cannot do so. There is also a perception that Pakistan sees the Haqqani Network as an asset that will help maintain influence in post-war Afghanistan.”  

Another editorial reads; “By keeping the Haqqani Network operational, it (Pakistan) thinks it can both counteract Indian influence in Afghanistan and get a seat in the post-U.S. Afghan government that it expects to be dominated by the Taliban. We need to realize how unwise this plan is.”

The criticism directed towards Pakistani security agencies is not limited to opinion pieces; a news piece about a security forum in Aspen quotes Admiral Mullen’s statement on the Haqqani Network calling the Haqqani Network ‘a veritable arm of the ISI.’ Interestingly, while the security forces are mentioned in most of the articles referring to the Haqqani Network, the Pakistan government has not been mentioned even once. These trends can be indicative of two things;

1. The media does not believe that the civilian government holds the authority to take policy decisions regarding a crackdown/operation against the Haqqani Network.

2. As the media is growing, the ‘sacred cows’ of the yore are being brought into the limelight. It would have been quite difficult for the media to openly criticize the security forces a few years back, but now, the forces are being questioned openly in the media.

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However, not all the articles that mention Pakistan’s security forces are critical of the army’s reluctance to start an operation against the Haqqani Network. In fact, in a number of pieces, the writers suggest that the constant linking of terrorism in Afghanistan with the Haqqani Network might simply be a ploy to build pressure on Pakistan to conduct the operation.

While both the monitored English newspapers present both critical and skeptical views over security forces strategy towards the Haqqanis, the Urdu newspaper *Jang* is once again noticeable for its silence over this matter. Not a single opinion piece in *Jang* discusses the Haqqani Network, their possible link to terror attacks in Afghanistan and Pakistan security forces’ policy towards them.

This leads one to conclude that while the English language press is open to publishing diverse views on potentially controversial themes, the Urdu language press is not too keen on doing that, yet.

**Reporting the Green-On-Blue Killings**

Given the significance of Green-on-Blue killings and their possible implication on post-NATO Afghanistan, it is surprising that Pakistani media has not discussed these incidents in detail. From April to August 2012, the monitored newspapers reported a total of nine incidents of Green-on-Blue shootings; three features and two articles were also published. None went into much detail about what this trend means for Pakistan and how Pakistan stands to be affected by the ‘defectors’ in Afghan Army after 2014.

**Framing of Green-on-Blue incidents**

Most of the news articles reporting Green-on-Blue incidents have framed the NATO troops as ‘Western forces helping Kabul fight the Taliban’. The NATO troops have been given a rather heroic frame and their 10-year long presence in Afghanistan has been described in positive terms. The news articles perpetuate the impression that NATO troops are being wronged by their Afghan colleagues.

Consider this example; “An increasing number of Afghan soldiers have turned their weapons against NATO troops who are helping Kabul fight a decade long insurgency by hard-line Taliban Islamists.”\(^5\) Another news item mentions; “The shooting underscored the difficulties facing NATO troops as they work alongside and train Afghan forces.”

These sentences reflect how the NATO and Afghan forces have been framed in almost all the news items reporting Green-on-Blue killings. While framing the green-on-blue killings, cultural differences have been quoted more often than possible Taliban insurgency as a reason behind the increase in these incidents.

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Projected impact of Green-on-Blue killings on NATO pullout and Afghan peace process

Half of the news and opinion pieces on NATO Green-on-Blue killings express concern over the possible impact of this trend on NATO pullout and news coverage remains divided over the possible reasons for the increase in attacks. However, multiple news items have expressed alarm over possible Taliban infiltration in the Afghan forces.

The media has not made any direct projections about the impact of these killings on the NATO pullout and Afghan peace process, but the following questions have been raised in multiple articles:

- The issue of trust between NATO and Afghan forces
- The implications of heavy Taliban infiltration in Afghan Army post NATO pullout
- The fear that these killings might be used as an excuse for extended or residual American presence in the region post the pullout.

In all the articles, these points have been posed only as questions and no clear deductions have been drawn. For a media known for being opinionated, this reluctance in drawing any clear conclusions is interesting.

Only two opinion pieces on the theme were published in the monitored papers; both of these also refrain from making any direct projections regarding the impact of Green-on-Blue killings. However, the possible impact on Pakistan has been discussed in both these articles. However, the writer is less concerned with the possibility that these killings may indicate a Taliban insurgency within the ranks of the Afghan National Army; rather the key point of concern is that the United States might opt to continue residual presence in Afghanistan after 2014. This might be indicative of an inlaid bias against the American troops in the region, which is propelling the writers to perceive them as more potent threats than Taliban insurgents in the guise of Afghan National Army.
Coverage of cross-border incursions

Context
Pakistan’s border with Afghanistan has been unstable for a while now, but the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan has made this porous border more dangerous than ever before. Pakistani forces and civilians on this side of the border are threatened and at times targeted by both Afghan militants and ISAF forces. The Salala air raid remains one of the harrowing examples of cross-border incursions by the ISAF/NATO forces.

The incursions by militants have been no less violent. From attacking civilians, ambushing of Pakistan Army check-posts, crossing the border in dozens to wreak havoc and, in one instance, even kidnapping a local shepherd and impounding his cattle, cross-border incursions have ceased to be an inconvenience and have turned into a major menace.

In this section, this report takes a look at the reporting of cross-border incursions from April to August 2012 and media’s coverage of these incidents.

KEY FINDINGS

- There are slight disparities in reported casualty figures in cross-border incursions in Dawn and The Express Tribune; Jang has mostly refrained from quoting exact casualty figures.
- ISAF and NATO forces have been referred in 33% of the news stories about cross-border incursions — the references have been made even in news pieces reporting incursions from militants.
- Statements on cross-border incursions from Afghan and Pakistani officials have been given equal new space.
- The media seems to harbor a deep mistrust of the ISAF and American forces in Afghanistan; most opinion pieces commenting on the forces have framed them in a manipulative and deceitful role.
- Multiple opinion pieces and editorials link the increase in cross-border incursions to the U.S’ desire for an operation against the Haqqani Network.
Casualties in cross-border incursions

On August 26, 2012, more than 100 Afghan militants crossed over into Bajaur and ambushed a Pakistan Army check post; the resulting fight between the militants and the security forces lasted nearly five days. In the five months before this incident, Pakistani media had reported at least 17 other incidents of cross-border violations by both Afghan militants and security forces in Afghanistan.

Given the frequency of these incidents, it is no surprise that news about cross-border insurgency incidents constitute over 15% of the total coverage both on TV and newspapers. New stories about these incidents were more detailed and lengthy than other (even local) news coming or originating from the Pak-Afghan border.

However, Jang did not report these incidents in as much detail as The Express Tribune and Dawn. The casualty figures of civilians and Pakistani security agencies in the monitored English newspapers were very specific, but in Jang, the casualties were mentioned in vague terms with multiple news items simply reporting ‘many’ or ‘multiple’ casualties. A comparison of casualty figures in six randomly selected incidents shows slight disparity in Dawn and Tribune reports.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Tribune</th>
<th>Dawn</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22-May</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-June</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-July</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-Aug</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>28-Aug</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-Aug</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Disparities in reported casualties in six cross border incursions

<graph>

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<table>
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<th>Date</th>
<th>Tribune</th>
<th>Dawn</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22-May</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-June</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-July</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-Aug</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>28-Aug</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>30-Aug</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Disparities in reported casualties in six cross border incursions

<graph>
A closer look at news items reporting cross-border incursions reveals that both Dawn and Tribune rely more heavily on their own correspondents than Jang. Some 93% of the stories in Dawn and 79% of the stories in Tribune were credited to the newspaper’s own correspondents, while in Jang only 41% of the stories were reported by the paper’s own correspondent while the rest were credited to agencies.

Perhaps, it is the English paper’s reliance on their own correspondents that has allowed them to quote exact casualty figures in these incidents.

**Referencing ISAF, NATO, Afghan National Army and Taliban**

It is easy to identify the main players in cross-border incursions. The news stories on the theme mention Afghan militants, ISAF/NATO or American forces, Afghan Border Force, Afghan National Army and Taliban frequently. The reported incidents are blamed mostly on Afghan militants or Taliban but ISAF/NATO and the Afghan National Army have also been blamed in multiple instances.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference to key elements involved in cross-border incursions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afghan border force, 21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afghan gov., 22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISAF/NATO, 33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taliban, 45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total stories</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both Afghan Taliban and TTP have been mentioned in these news stories. News stories in which the invading militants have not been specified as the Taliban have used the term ‘Afghan militants’ to describe them.

Around 90% of the stories report intrusions by Afghan militants or Taliban who are said to have found a safe haven in Afghanistan. The rest of the stories are either about raids or shelling by Afghan Border Force or ISAF and NATO forces or statements by Pakistani, Afghan, American or ISAF officials regarding the issue of cross border attacks.
Interestingly, in the news stories, both Pakistani and Afghan authorities and security agencies have been given an almost equal amount of news space. Sherry Rehman, Pakistan’s ambassador to the United States, is the only political personality whose statements on the issue have appeared more than once; most of the reported official positions have been taken by the security/military leadership.

**Framing of ISAF, NATO and American forces in opinion pieces**

More than 41% of the opinion pieces and editorials on the theme of cross-border incursions have discussed the role of ISAF, NATO or American forces, specifically intrusions from the forces and their failure or reluctance to secure the porous border. The majority of the opinion/editorial pieces that mention ISAF, NATO and American forces in Afghanistan have framed them with mistrust about their role and intentions.

Bear in mind that most of these opinion pieces were written before the formal apology about the Salala incident, and the bitter framing of the forces might be a result of that incident. The forces’ reluctance to take concrete action against the TTP’s alleged ‘safe heavens’ in Afghanistan and their failure to secure the border has been extensively discussed and the discourse is marked by a complete deficit of trust towards the forces.

As an example, consider this statement; “...ISAF commanders are trying to affect a rapprochement with Pakistan through serious parleys and a new series of aggressive acts has been launched against Islamabad through absconding local militants.”

Another editorial in *Dawn* states; “....Pakistani security establishment, (which) believes that Afghan and American forces in Afghanistan have either looked the other way or not done enough to stop the attacks into Pakistan. It is an entirely plausible accusation and one that neither the Afghan government nor the Americans have done much too credibly distance themselves from.”

In another opinion piece commenting upon a statement from US-ISAF commander General John Allen, the writer states; “Allen’s statement entails a number of questions; was the general speaking off the cuff or consciously conveying a message to his counterparts in Rawalpindi? Was he really serious when talking about “extra or sufficient attention” in case Pakistan unleashed an operation in North Waziristan, or warning that Pakistan’s refusal to go after the Al Qaeda-linked Haqqani Network will continue to invite aggression from across the border?”

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These three statements reflect the tone that the media has used for ISAF and American forces in Afghanistan. The media seems to harbor a deep mistrust about the forces and the opinion and editorial pieces give the impression that the journalists believe that the incursions from Afghanistan have partial if not complete support from the international forces in Afghanistan.

The ISAF, NATO and American forces have been framed in a manipulative and deceitful role, and multiple journalists have indicated that the increase in cross-border incursions might be their way to force Pakistan Army to launch an operation in North Waziristan against the Haqqani Network.

No opinion pieces written during April to August 2012 comment specifically on air-space violations and cross-border shelling by Afghan Border Force of ISAF and NATO forces.

**Coverage of incursions from Pakistan**

In the monitored time period, no physical incursions from Pakistan were reported. There were a few incidents of cross-border firing and only one incident of heavy cross-border firing which led to the dismissal of two Afghan ministers. However, none of these incidents drew enough media coverage to allow a trend mapping or content analysis.
Coverage of drone strikes

Context
One might question the direct relevance of drone strikes with the Afghan conflict — the fact remains that drone strikes in Pakistan have been so easily possible simply because of the U.S. and ISAF presence in Afghanistan. According to South Asia Terrorism Portal 9 as many as 2371 people have been killed in 251 drone strikes carried out in the last seven years. This year alone 10 at least 35 drone strikes have resulted in over 250 deaths. The Pakistani media obviously reports drone strikes seriously. However, the very nature of these strikes makes them a hard subject to report.

KEY FINDINGS

- There are slight disparities in the reported number of drone strike casualties in the monitored newspapers.
- A few disparities were also found in the reported number of drone strike casualties in local newspapers and an international news source; however the difference was not very significant.
- Some positive and a number of negative aspects of the drone strategy have been discussed in the monitored papers; the conclusion after these arguments has been largely on the negative side.
- Pakistani media largely sees the drone strategy as a violation of Pakistan’s sovereignty and international laws.
- The majority of ‘letters to the editor’ on the drone warfare appear to be pro-drones.
- The United States has been portrayed as a bully with no regard for human life or for moral and legal obligations.
- The Pakistani government has been portrayed as either incompetent or sly playing a double game on the drone issue.
- The role of security establishment in Pakistan has not been discussed in detail and only subtle references have been made.

Disparities among reported casualties

It is imperative to note that although the drone strikes are reported regularly, the coverage is often incomplete. A look at the monitored data reveals that all three newspapers have often mentioned different figures when reporting casualties in drone strikes.

Here is a comparative look at some of the incidents as reported by all three papers;

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Casualties reported in Tribune</th>
<th>Casualties reported in Dawn</th>
<th>Casualties reported in Jang</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May 29, 2012</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 24, 2012</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 3, 2012</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 4, 2012</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 26, 2012</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug 18, 2012</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug 19, 2012</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug 19, 2012</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug 22, 2012</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In general, Jang has quoted higher casualty figures as compared to Dawn and The Express Tribune.

Disparities among reported casualties in drone strikes
While the disparities in reported casualties are small, the difference in the number of reported injuries is often larger. *Jang* has mostly refrained from quoting the exact number of injured and has used ‘dozens injured’ in multiple news pieces.

**Comparison with an international source**

The casualty stats quoted in Pakistani news outlets are often deemed suspect; to see how these figures compare with a neutral news source, the same set of figures used to analyze disparities in reported casualties in local press, were compared with an international information source, the South Asia Terrorism Portal, SATP. The SATP is one of the most current and extensive databases tracking drone strikes in Pakistan as and when they occur.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Reported casualties in local newspapers</th>
<th>Casualties reported in South Asia Terrorism Portal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May 29, 2012</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 24, 2012</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 3, 2012</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 4, 2012</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 26, 2012</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug 18, 2012</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug 19, 2012</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug 19, 2012</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug 22, 2012</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This comparison shows that on average the casualty figures reported by Pakistani media in the reporting period are either the same or less than those reported in the South Asia Terrorism Portal. There is only one instance in which SATP reported a smaller number of casualties.

**Comparison of reported casualty figures with SATP**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Reported casualties in local newspapers</th>
<th>Casualties reported in South Asia Terrorism Portal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>June</td>
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<td>Aug.</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aug.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11 This column reflects the average number of casualties reported i.e. sum of casualties reported in *Dawn*, *The Express Tribune* and *Jang* divided by 3 and rounded off to the closest whole number.
Looking at this chart makes one thing obvious; the differences in the number of reported casualties are not very drastic. We can only assume that the disparities in reported casualty figures in multiple news outlets are a result of a lack of access to direct information.

However, a significant difference is noticed in the way that local newspapers and SATP are referring to drone casualties:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>News source</th>
<th>Drone targets referred to as;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dawn &amp; The Express Tribune</td>
<td>Suspected militants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jang</td>
<td>People (Afraid)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Asia Terrorism Portal</td>
<td>Militants</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This difference in how the casualties are referred can be seen in most of the news items whether they are included in the small 10 strikes sample analyzed above or not. This shows that the Pakistani media is not adhering to the practice of automatically assuming the ‘militant’ status of anyone targeted in a drone strike.

**Portrayal of the drone strategy**

The United States’ drone policy in Pakistan has been deemed extremely controversial at a global level. The recently released and highly acclaimed report ‘Living under the Drones,’ researched and published by NYU and Stanford University, ‘presents evidence of the damaging and counterproductive effects of current U.S. drone strike policies.’ With the global press and research institutes waking up to the counterproductive impact of the drone strategy, it is no surprise that there is an increasingly negative portrayal of the drone policy in Pakistani press. What is surprising, however, is the fact that a large percentage of opinion and editorial pieces analyzed for this report contained references to both positive and negative aspects of the drone strategy.

**Reference to different aspects of drone strategy in opinion / editorial pieces**

| Only negative 62% | Both positive and negative 28% | Only positive 9% |

The very few pieces that actually termed the drone policy as positive were actually letters to the editor; three quarters of the letters published on drones were pro-drones while the minority contained either direct condemnation or mixed opinions about the policy.

The only exception again, is Jang, in which all the opinion and editorial pieces on drone strategy have focused only on the negative aspects and not a single positive aspect has been mentioned even in passing.

**Positive aspects of the drone strategy as discussed in monitored sources**

Only two positive aspects of the drones have been referred to by the newspapers; the high level targets that have been terminated and the potential support that drones can offer to ground troops. However, the reference has been fleeting and is mostly followed by a ‘but’ that negates the value of the possible positive aspects.

A couple of articles however, have actually sought to build up a case for drones. Consider this example; “Drones have managed to kill more enemies of both the U.S. and Pakistan than what ground offensives or any other strategy attempted since 9/11 would have managed to eliminate. Considering the tactical aspect, drones suit Pakistan militarily, too, as the ‘enemy’ had confined itself to remote and virtually non-accessible positions in North Waziristan and its bordering agencies. For example, any Pakistani ground offensive aimed at finishing off Baitullah Mehsud would have cost hundreds of the Pakistan Army soldiers their lives and would have probably led to more civilian casualties than a precise drone strike.”

The article goes on to argue that drones have helped the Pakistani security establishment ‘confine the enemy’.

Another article states; “the terrorists are not there because of drone strikes but precisely the opposite is the case: drone strikes continue (legally or illegally) because of these homicidal fanatics. There is nothing that you can do to ‘not’ provoke them, they want to be provoked, and in fact they are already provoked.”

But, this approach to drones is an exception, not the norm. Multiple articles and editorials have admitted that the drones have managed to take out some heavy targets but most draw the conclusion that the civilian casualties and the backlash make drone strikes more harmful than beneficial.

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Negative aspects of the drone strategy as discussed in monitored sources

The arguments terming the drone policy negative are better defined and discussed in greater detail. While only two positive aspects were referred to by the media, the key arguments against the drone policy are various;

- The civilian casualties and its impact on the war against terrorism
- The illegality of these strikes
- The suspect manner in which targets are chosen (all adult males in a certain region)
- The threat to Pakistan’s sovereignty
- And the lack of evidence that the drones have actually helped

The civilian casualties remain the topmost argument against drone strikes. Multiple articles have expressed the fear that civilian deaths might be even more than currently believed as the American administration is reported to consider “all military-age males in a strike zone as combatants”.15

The projected impact of these casualties includes ‘the persistent argument that deaths caused by drone strikes, especially the civilian deaths, have actually helped Al Qaeda and the Taliban to recruit more volunteers.’16

Multiple articles have dealt extensively with the legal standing of the drone warfare and termed them illegal in both local and international laws.

All in all, it is fair to say that the monitored newspapers have discussed both negative and positive aspects of the drone warfare in detail and have arrived at a conclusion that the drone strikes in Pakistan are illegal and are doing more harm than good.

Portrayal of the United States17

In the context of the continuing drone strikes United States has been framed as a powerful bully that is using all possible tactics to get its way regardless of international laws and obligations. In multiple articles the United States’ absolute refusal to stop or even take Pakistani security establishment on board has been scorned. Nadir Hussain writing for The Express Tribune backs the sentiment that ‘the U.S. is a wanton aggressor that has no regard for

17 Reflects the portrayal of the United States only in opinion, analysis and editorial pieces
human life’ and states that; “The U.S., however, in an inversion of all morality, has already declared everyone guilty before blasting them to death.”\(^\text{18}\)

This portrayal of the U.S. as a force with no regard for human life has been repeated in multiple articles. An editorial in *Jang* states; “The United States and NATO are operating in FATA with no regard for moral or legal ethics.” An article in *Dawn* highlights the illegality of the drone warfare by stating, “is Pakistan justified in objecting to American drone attacks? Clearly, it has not attacked the U.S. nor has the Security Council approved drone attacks.”\(^\text{19}\)

Interestingly, however, the newspapers are much harsher towards the Pakistani government than they are about the United States.

Even while lamenting about how Pakistan’s pleas for an end to the drone warfare fall on deaf ears, the Pakistani government is given more of the blame than the United States, which as the newspapers put it ‘simply does not trust Pakistan.’ In another piece the writer refers to the Pakistan Army’s inaction against the Haqqanis and states that; ‘The U.S. has been *forced* into increasing the number of drone attacks in the country.’

All in all, the newspapers have largely portrayed the United States as a force that is not listening to reason, but the brunt of the blame for the U.S. attitude has been placed with the Pakistani government and security establishment.

**Portrayal of the Pakistani government\(^\text{20}\)**

In the context of the continuing drone strikes the Pakistani government has been treated in two different frames;

- As a sly policy maker, playing a double game with the public
- As a helpless onlooker that isn’t or can’t do enough to actually implement the parliament’s decision to forcefully demand an end to the drone warfare

Consider these statements; “it should now be clear that the government is involved in a charade, as futile complaints to the Americans allow the government to maintain plausible deniability even as it seems that both the civilians and military have resigned themselves to the reality of drone attacks.”\(^\text{21}\)

Another editorial claims that “The government’s private stance on drones does make a mockery of the parliament’s recommendations on resetting ties with the U.S.” \(^\text{22}\)


\(^{19}\) Not a redundant concept – Niaz Murtaza – *Dawn* - [http://dawn.com/2012/06/08/not-a-redundant-concept/](http://dawn.com/2012/06/08/not-a-redundant-concept/)

\(^{20}\) Reflects the portrayal of the United States only in opinion, analysis and editorial pieces


Similar sentiments have been expressed in multiple other articles on the theme, however, here again; Jang takes a slightly different route. Where both the English papers appear to be placing a significant part of the blame with the government, Jang portrays the government as a helpless onlooker whose efforts to ensure an end to the drone warfare aren’t getting anywhere. An editorial in Jang states; “Pakistan’s government, parliament and political powers are constantly trying to convince the United States that drone attacks are resulting in an increase in militancy.” On the other hand, we have the English papers making statements like; “The drone attacks have created distrust between government and people as the later believe that the rulers are fully involved.”

However subtle, one can easily deduce the slight difference in the way that the government and its role in the drone warfare is being perceived and portrayed by the English and the Urdu press.

**Portrayal of the Pakistani security establishment**

There have been multiple news items regarding the army and the security establishment’s contact with the United States and the NATO forces on the issue of drone warfare. However, the role of the army and the security establishment has not been debated much in the opinion and editorial pieces.

The army/security establishment has been mentioned in only 30% of the opinion pieces and that too only fleetingly. It is difficult to draw a clear conclusion about how exactly the security establishment have been portrayed as no clear trend can be seen emerging in the few articles that do make a reference to them. The only common element that has been repeated in multiple articles making a reference to the army or security establishment is a reference their inaction against the Haqqanis, which is significant because, as the newspapers put it, “our complaints (about drone strikes) are sure to fall on deaf ears as long as we refuse to tackle the challenge posed by the Haqqanis.”

Is the media placing some of the blame for continuing drone attacks on the security establishment by linking them with the lack of action against Haqqanis? Perhaps yes, but it is doing so in a subtle and indirect manner.

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23 Reflects the portrayal of the United States only in opinion, analysis and editorial pieces
Coverage of NATO supply issue

Context
The NATO supply line is at the core of Pakistan’s formal engagement with the United States over the war against terrorism continuing in Afghanistan. NATO trucks have been using the supply routes in Khyber Agency and Balochistan to supply U.S. and international forces fighting in Afghanistan. The supply line links Pakistan closely to the strategic side of the Afghan conflict and is also detrimental in the formation of public opinion about Pakistan’s policies both at home and in Afghanistan. The supply line refers to the transit route given to NATO for the transmission of innumerable containers of supplies for NATO forces deployed in Afghanistan. The content of these containers have been a subject of controversy since the start and more recently have been formally limited only to ‘diplomatic supplies’.

After the unfortunate attack at Salala, the supply line was closed for months. During the monitored period i.e. April to August 2012, the suspension and restoration of the NATO Supply generated a huge amount of news content.

KEY FINDINGS

- Media coverage was neither overtly for or against the suspension of NATO supplies routes.
- The resumption of the NATO supplies through Pakistan was welcomed by the media; however, misgivings and questions about the United States’ attitude over the issue remained.
- The media remained distrustful of the United States in the NATO supply issue coverage; the U.S. was portrayed as a bullying political force not willing to take Pakistan’s interests and demands into account.
Tone of news coverage on the suspension of NATO supply routes

Media’s coverage of the ban on NATO supply line is complicated; the tone of the coverage on NATO supply suspension cannot be classified as either positive or negative. In most of the news items and opinion pieces, it is obvious that media realizes and reports on the potentially harmful impact of the ban on Pakistan’s international standing.

At the same time, the media also gives a nod to the message that the authorities are trying to send through the suspension of NATO supplies through Pakistan.

An effort to quantify media’s tone over the issue was not successful — both news items and opinion/editorial content seem to largely understand the notion behind the initial suspension of NATO supply routes, but also stressed the need to resolve the issue.

Tone of news coverage on the resumption of NATO supply routes

Unlike the suspension of NATO supply routes, the media largely welcomed the resumption. Three quarters of the opinion and editorial pieces written after the resumption of the NATO supply line welcomed the development. The remaining quarter admitted that the resumption was necessary but lamented over American disregard for the conditions that Pakistan has proposed.

A total of 9 news items reported protests on the resumption of NATO supply routes. Difa-e-Pakistan Council, Jamaat-e-Islami, Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam, Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz were reported to have protested the resumption of the NATO supplies. However, these news articles did not show any apparent bias of the media. Only one editorial was published commenting upon the political parties’ protests of the resumption, and even that is critical of the conduct of political parties in this regard. The editorial states, “What is off-putting is the spectacle of the parliamentary opposition trying to gain electoral mileage from the NATO route affair.”

Is this sentiment reflective of media’s collective approach towards the parties protesting the resumption? Not really. But, the fact that no articles or editorials have been written to sympathize with the protesters’ point of view can be an indicator of the fact that the protests do not enjoy much support from the media.

On the other hand, multiple opinion and editorial pieces have hailed the resumption as a ‘positive sign’. Even Jang, that has been marked for its anti-American stance has published an article with the lead; “The good news is Pakistan’s civil-military rulers have made the principle decision to negotiate with the United States for the resumption of the NATO supply route.”

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25 Positive signs – Dawn - http://dawn.com/2012/05/16/positive-signs/
The media also reported on the positive impact of the resumption on the locals whose livelihood has been tied to the transit route for almost a decade.

All in all, the tone of coverage of resumption of NATO supply route was positive and welcoming.

Projected impact on Pak-U.S. relations
The media coverage on the suspension and resumption of the NATO supply route takes very definitive stands on Pak-U.S. relationship. The United States has been framed once again as a bullying superpower, unwilling to issue an apology for authorizing a raid within Pakistan that claimed lives of Pakistani soldiers. The United States has also been framed as a rigid political force loath to agree to any of Pakistan’s conditions.

Even after the resumption the overriding impression that one gets from the opinion and editorial pieces on the issue is that Pakistan has been short-changed by the U.S. The apology offered by the United States has been termed ‘half-hearted’; an opinion piece frames the apology as ‘a few carefully selected apologetic words.’ The U.S. decision to conduct multiple drone strikes right after the resumption was announced could be the reason behind the media’s apparent bitterness towards the superpower.

_Jang_, in an editorial, refers to drone strike and states, “After the loss of lives and the economic loss that Pakistan has suffered, the United States has decided to pay us back bombing and targeting peace-loving civilians in our tribal region.” The editor goes on to wonder whether the United States would pay any heed to Pakistan’s conditions for reopening the supply route.

In conclusion, the media has given utmost importance to the impact of the suspension and resumption of the NATO supply route on Pak-U.S. relationship. However, even though the resumption has been (seen?) as ‘a positive and hopeful development’ for Pak-U.S. relations, the overriding impression of the coverage is that a lot more needs to be done both by Pakistan and the U.S. to get this relationship back on track.

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Context

Afghanistan and Pakistan have historically shared a relationship that can only be categorized as complicated. With the NATO invasion in Afghanistan, the porous borders and the militant links in Pakistan’s tribal areas, the relationship between the two countries took on countless new dimensions. Pakistan became an ally of the U.S. against its neighbor and the regional security paradigm shifted forever. As the NATO forces in Afghanistan continue the pullout and look for a complete evacuation by 2014, Pak-Afghan relations continue to develop in complex ways. Pakistan’s engagement in the Afghan peace process is a must and this very engagement defines the parameters of not only Pakistan and Afghanistan relations but also dictates Pakistan’s relations with the U.S.

The key areas covered under NATO pullout and Afghan peace process are the NATO summit in Chicago, Pak-U.S. engagement over Afghanistan, Pak-Afghan relationship and media’s coverage of the Afghan government.

KEY FINDINGS

- More than two thirds of the headlines on Chicago Summit news items contained negative connotations.
- The media remains unconvinced of the practical impact of Chicago summit and coverage reflects the perception that not much could be achieved during the summit.
- The media does not seem to believe that the Afghan security forces are ready or capable of managing the extremist and terrorist element in Afghanistan after NATO pullout.
- Media coverage reflects the fear that Pakistan stands to suffer a violent blowback from Afghanistan.
- Media coverage regarding the NATO pullout is laced with fear of residual American presence in the border area; the media in Pakistan harbours various doubts regarding the American policy.
- The media portrays Afghanistan and the Haqqanis as the detrimental factors that would define Pakistan’s relations with the United States after the NATO pullout.
- The media in Pakistan identifies a need to redefine Pak-Afghan relationship so that both governments can help each other counter terrorist elements after the NATO pullout.
Coverage of Chicago Summit

The number of news items and opinion pieces focusing primarily on the Chicago Summit was fairly low. Less than a fourth of the total coverage consisted of editorial and opinion pieces so it is difficult to draw trends from those few pieces. In order to gauge the tone of the news coverage of the Chicago Summit, the headlines of the news items were checked for negative and positive connotations.

The opinion and editorial pieces published on the NATO summit in Chicago also reflect the doubtful tone that is apparent in news headlines. A writer claims “without a regional component, this much-ballyhooed NATO extravaganza is flirting with disaster — in the form of yet another major international conference that yields few substantive results.”

Another writes; “President Obama can congratulate himself on having presided successfully over the largest NATO gathering ever arranged and on having won an endorsement for the ‘irreversible’ departure of all NATO troops from Afghanistan by Dec 31, 2014, and for the cessation of active combat operations by NATO forces after July 2013. Beyond this what was achieved? No firm commitments or pledges were made by the NATO members for funding the $4.1bn that the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) will need annually for a decade.”

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Another reads, “Pakistan and U.S. appear to have lost their ingenuity and imagination, frozen in mutual recriminations, while oblivious to the looming dangers in post-2014 Afghanistan.”  

Similar sentiments can be seen in the rest of the opinion and editorial pieces as the media has persistently questioned the practical impact of this high level huddle in Chicago.

**Projections on the NATO pullout**

The NATO pullout and the Afghan peace process was the subject of the highest percentage of opinion and editorial pieces published on the Afghan conflict. Studying these opinion pieces shows that the media remains convinced that there would be a heavy NATO pullout in 2014; however, a few doubts plague this projection;

a. **Afghan National Army is not ready to face the challenge that Taliban and other extremist elements will present post-NATO pullout** – Almost all the opinion pieces on the expected NATO pullout have expressed a fear that Afghanistan will become even more destabilized after 2014. There is the fear that the Afghan government and the Afghan National Army are not ready to fight the extremist elements in Afghanistan. For example, an article reads; “NATO must keep pummeling the Taliban but it will also take a lot more effort to get the Afghans ready to continue this fight on their own. Right now they are dependent on NATO for planning, management, air support and logistics, Thousands of officer slots are empty because of problems finding literate, qualified candidates,” This statement has been repeated in different words in multiple opinion pieces lending support to the conclusion that the Pakistani media does not believe that the Afghan security forces are ready or capable of managing the extremist and terrorist element in Afghanistan after NATO pullout.

b. **Pakistan stands to suffer the blowback from Afghanistan** – There is also the fear that Afghanistan might not look very kindly upon Pakistan’s role in the war against terror. This fear is, of course, fuelled by the assumption that Afghanistan would be an unstable entity with more than just the government authorities commanding power. An article on the Afghan drawdown reads; “There is a fear than once the foreign forces exit, the country will fall into civil war with Al Qaeda elements in Pakistan unleashing extremists to destabilize the region, the latter’s role in achieving regional stability cannot be understated.” Similar statements have been made in nearly two thirds of the opinion pieces and editorials and one can thus say that media coverage reflects the fear that Pakistan stands to suffer a violent blowback from Afghanistan once the NATO forces have pulled out.

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c. **Doubts about residual American presence in Afghanistan** — Multiple news items and opinion pieces indicate the fear that the United States will maintain some sort of residual presence in Afghanistan, particularly in the Pak-Afghan border areas even after the NATO/ISAF forces have pulled out of Afghanistan. The focus on border areas is deemed important in a post-NATO context. For example, consider this statement, “the US is likely to enhance its troop presence and bases on the eastern Pakistan-Afghanistan border. We are likely to see an intensification of drone strikes in North and South Waziristan, and even an expansion of the strike coverage to Kurram and Mohmand agencies.”

Similar projections have been made in some other articles as well. There is a notion that the agreement with Afghanistan does not mean that, “The American forces in Afghanistan post-2014 will not continue counter-terrorism operations within and outside Afghanistan.” While the percentage of the articles projecting a residual American presence is less than 20%, other writers have also commented upon the ambiguity of the American plan and wondered about its implications for Pakistan. In conclusion, it is fair to say that the media in Pakistan harbors various doubts regarding the American policy in post-NATO pullout.

### How the media links NATO pullout and Pak-U.S. relationship

Pak-U.S. relations have been mentioned in nearly 80% of the opinion and editorial pieces on the theme. There is a resounding consensus in the monitored newspapers that Pakistan and United States need to quickly reformulate their relations for the sake of stability in the region.

Opinion and editorial pieces in all monitored newspapers are of the view that for at least the next decade, Pakistan’s relations with the United States will be ‘determined by American perception of Pakistan’s cooperation in Afghanistan.”

At the base of projected Pak-U.S. relations in post-NATO Afghanistan is Pakistan’s attitude towards the Haqqani Network. The majority of articles focusing on Pak-U.S. relations have mentioned the Haqqani Network as the definitive link. In this regard, the media holds Pakistan as the guilty party, not the United States. The United States’ frustration over Pakistan “continuing to support the Haqqani Network” has been mentioned in various articles. The need to rethink this policy has been stressed and re-stressed by the media. An article warns, “Unless Pakistan asserts its interests and priorities, it is likely to suffer further strategic reversals.”

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In conclusion, the media portrays Afghanistan and the Haqqanis as the detrimental factors that would define Pakistan’s relations with the United States after the NATO pullout and lays stress on the need for Pakistan to redefine its policy towards both Afghanistan and the Haqqani Network.

**How the media links NATO pullout and Pak-Afghan relationship**

Not much has been written about the direction Pak-Afghan relations could take after the NATO pullout. However, in the few articles that have focused on the theme, the importance of redefining the dynamics of the relations, specifically discarding the ‘strategic depth’ approach has been highlighted.

There are no clear trends that can be seen emerging apart from the stress on the need for improved relations built on mutual trust. Among the few elements mentioned in multiple articles is the notion that Pakistan needs to “help Kabul develop a meaningful dialogue with the Taliban and other insurgent entities.”

The only clear conclusion that can be drawn about media’s portrayal of Pak-Afghan relations post-NATO pullout is that the media identifies an urgent need to rethink and clearly define the Afghan policy on lines that ensure that both governments can help each other counter the terrorist elements operating on either side of the border.

**Portrayal of Afghan government**

In a research survey conducted with a group of Afghan journalists as part of this research report, a majority of journalists were shown to be of the opinion that the Pakistani media is pro-Taliban and does not hold the Afghan government in much regard. The impression among the Afghan journalists seems to suggest that Pakistani media deems the Karzai administration to be a ‘puppet government’. However, a detailed analysis of all the opinion and editorial pieces on the issue of NATO pullout and Afghan peace process did not reveal one instance in which the Afghan government has been termed ‘a puppet government’; only two statements come close to asserting that notion. A. G. Noorani, writing for *Dawn* states, “The security pact signed by Obama and Karzai reduces Afghanistan to a protectorate of the U.S.” In another article, the writer has quoted Taliban spokesman stating that “Karzai is no more than a stooge of the Americans.”

That said, while the bulk of articles mentioning the Afghan government do not imply that Karzai’s is a puppet regime, there is a serious lack of trust reflected in the media. The media converge paints the Afghan government as being incompetent and incapable of taking care of affairs once NATO has left the fort.

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The government’s role has been mentioned barely in a third of the opinion and editorial pieces on the sub theme and almost everywhere the government has been portrayed as largely inept and laden with corruption. Multiple articles have mentioned or hinted at the notion that “Karzai government has not been able to win the confidence of people due to pervasive corruption, poor governance and falling security.”

Given these trends, one can conclude that the media in Pakistan does not hold the Karzai government in high esteem and there is a clear lack of trust in the government’s capability to handle the volatile situation in Afghanistan.

On the issue of being pro-Taliban, the media seems convinced that there would be a heavy Taliban influence in the government once the pullout is complete. Perhaps, this is the reason why Afghan journalists perceive the Pakistani media to be pro-Taliban. However, a closer look at how the prospect of Taliban gaining control again has been portrayed shows that it isn't sympathy for Taliban, rather a fearful anticipation that is being conveyed.

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**Perceptions:**
Is it important to cover Afghan conflict?

**Context**
Pakistan’s media landscape has gone through serious and rapid transition in the way Pakistani media operates. The advent of private news channels, the inclusion of industrialists and seths into the journalistic arena and the resulting plurality in media outlets has been the subject of numerous studies; as media researchers the pace and direction of media development in Pakistan has been fascinating to us, but while exciting, the direction the media is heading toward is also quite alarming. In a situation when Pakistani media has a long way to go before even covering the country’s own issues properly, is it really even important to cover another country like Afghanistan?

Is it actually essential for media practitioners in Pakistan to try and understand the complexities of the Afghan conflict and cover them properly? To answer these questions, we approached two groups of journalists from Afghanistan and Pakistan.

We have seen earlier that at least 80% of the stories about Afghanistan have been sourced to international news agencies. In the current media and economic climate, the need to rely on news agencies for a topic that originates in a different country is of course understandable. But when it comes to the Pak-Afghan situation, the situation becomes slightly more complex. The conflict in Afghanistan is not just a conflict brewing in a neighboring country. It is a conflict that affects and is being affected by Pakistan in uncountable ways.

As the NATO pullout draws nearer, the links between Pakistan and Afghanistan grow even more complex and potentially dangerous. In such a situation, the media’s role in reporting the Afghan conflict becomes even more important.

To see whether media practitioners in Pakistan and Afghanistan recognize the importance of Afghan conflict coverage, we surveyed two groups of journalists from Pakistan and Afghanistan.

**Afghan conflict in Pakistani media:**

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40 Survey Questionnaire for Pakistani Journalists – Annexure 5
41 Survey Questionnaire for Afghan Journalists – Annexure 6
Pakistan journalists’ perceptions
To gauge how important Pakistani journalists view the Afghan conflict, an online survey was circulated among a group of journalists who had experience of reporting on Afghanistan — the survey was distributed among 25 journalists mostly based in border areas (FATA, Balochistan and Peshawar). However, only 15 journalists responded, while others excused themselves on the pretext that despite having reported on Afghanistan, they did not consider themselves to be well aware of the context and importance of the theme. A brief analysis of the survey and responses follows.

Respondent demographics
A total number of 15 journalists with varying degrees of experience and belonging to different news organizations took part in this survey. The majority of respondents were mid-career with 5-10 years of experience. The respondents belong to both mainstream and smaller news organizations from all over Pakistan.

Journalistic experience of respondents

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<td>2-5 years</td>
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<td>5-10 years</td>
<td>40%</td>
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<td>More than 10 years</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
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Respondents’ organizations

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One of the respondents was reporting as a freelance reporter in multiple new organizations. As can be seen in the table the respondents represent a total of nine newspapers and four TV channels.

**Adequacy and tone of Afghan coverage**
A majority of respondents agreed that Pakistani media isn’t covering Afghanistan adequately. As many as 83.3% of the respondents said that the Afghan conflict coverage was inadequate.

There was a slight difference in the perceived adequacy on Afghan conflict coverage in print and electronic media. Afghan conflict coverage on TV was called inadequate by 93% of the respondents as opposed to 73% who found the print coverage inadequate.
The respondents were further asked to identify the main reasons for inadequate coverage of the Afghan conflict. A majority of them blamed lack of interest on media’s part and external pressures for the lack of in-depth coverage of the conflict. Another reason identified by a majority of the respondents was lack of reliable sources for reporting on Afghanistan.

A respondent from Quetta pointed out that one of the reasons for inadequate coverage on Afghanistan is the fact that “No-one pays the local media for their Afghan coverage.”

Another respondent, referring to the fact that only some key themes are reported from Afghanistan noted that “Most journalists think that only terrorism makes news from Afghanistan.” This perception on the part of the journalists is leading to a dearth of news items on other Afghan issues like the impact of Afghan conflict on development, youth, culture and internal Afghan politics etc.

One of the respondents pointed out that Pakistani media reports from its ideological standpoint. He said, “(Pakistani) Media is presenting opinion as news. Due to sheer laziness, most reporters do not bother to look up views alternate to Pakistani security establishments.”

This ‘laziness’ as referred to by the respondent leads to an influx of news items carrying similar themes and presenting similar tones. Not only is plurality missing when it comes to reporting the Afghan conflict, but perhaps, important news items are also missed because they might not seem that important through the security establishment’s radar.

This very issue is perhaps behind the respondents’ assessment that most of the Afghan conflict related coverage of TV and newspapers is overtly negative.
Main sources of information
The lack of sources was identified as one of the reasons for inadequate coverage of Afghan conflict. The respondents were further asked to identify the three main sources they use when reporting Afghanistan. The majority of reporters identified international news agencies, western media and internet as main sources of information on Afghanistan.

Key news sources for Reporting Afghanistan

Afghanistan related themes in media
The respondents were asked to identify the most frequently reported and the most under-reported themes from and about Afghanistan. Foreign military presence in Afghanistan and Afghan conflict were identified as the key topic of discussion in the media while democracy in Afghanistan and development were identified as the most under-reported themes.

There seems to be confusion amongst respondents about the theme of politics in Afghanistan. While 80% of them identified politics as one of the key themes reported about Afghanistan, the same percentage i.e. 80% of them also identified democracy and parliament in Afghanistan amongst the most under reported themes. Perhaps the political themes reporters identify as being covered frequently relate only to political relations with U.S. and other countries, while internal political development is thought to be under-reported.
The majority of respondents of this survey are of the opinion that the quality of media content currently being generated on the theme of Afghan conflict is bad. Not a single respondent found the quality of coverage to be good and around 33% respondents rated Afghan conflict content as average.

**Quality on news content on Afghan conflict**

- **Bad**: 67%
- **Average**: 33%

### Media’s role in improving Pak-Afghan relations

The majority of respondents believe that the media has a role to play in improving relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan — more than 93% of the respondents recognized media’s role in this regard and expressed the hope that media can be a part of improving relations between the two countries. The journalists have identified a number of steps that in their opinion will help Pakistani media play a positive role in Pak-Afghan relations and increasing public understanding of the Afghan conflict.

According to one of the respondents, the coverage and understanding of Afghan conflict can be improved by “tapping resources from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, FATA and Balochistan.” The respondent says that people and sources in these regions have a different and holistic understanding of the Afghan conflict. Utilizing sources from this region will help the media develop a clear understanding of the Afghan conflict and identify the impact and affects of the conflict on Pakistan.

Another respondent suggests visiting different parts of Afghanistan in order to understand the society at a grass roots level and report on Afghanistan from that perspective. This view is seconded by 80% of the respondents who suggest reporting on ‘Afghan society rather than the official Afghanistan’.

Eighty percent of the journalists also suggest increasing individual and institutional collaborations with Afghan journalists and media outlets. This would mean better sources in
Afghanistan, a chance to gather first-hand information and also help Pakistani media practitioners understand the Afghan perspective, which in turn, will lead to better, more accurate coverage and increased understanding.

As many as 67% of the respondents also suggest bringing out local Afghan voices and generating human interest stories from Afghanistan. While good, this suggestion has serious practicality issues. Bringing out local Afghan voices is not possible without visiting Afghanistan frequently, an option that might be difficult considering the monetary implications and security situation in the region.

Another suggestion made by around 47% of the respondents is to give news space to Afghan journalists. This option is viable especially for the print media, who can diversify and broaden their coverage of Afghan conflict by including pieces from Afghan journalists. This option also addresses the issue of including local Afghan voices.

Exchanging in joint collaborative reporting projects and exchange of information between Pakistani and Afghan media outlets has also been recommended by more than 53% of the respondents.

According to the respondents all these measures would result in a more comprehensive coverage of the Afghan conflict, thus, helping the public better understand different dimensions of the Afghan conflict, which in turn would help create better relations between the two countries.

**Difficulties in reporting Afghan conflict**

Almost all the journalists who participated in this survey recognized the need for better, more comprehensive coverage of the Afghan conflict. However, there are numerous and very real difficulties that the journalists face when it comes to reporting Afghanistan.

One of the basic issues that journalists have identified is the security situation and the sensitive nature of news. As we have seen in the monitored themes, the Afghan conflict intertwines with Pakistan in multi-dimensional and mostly dangerous ways. The security paradigm between Pakistan and Afghanistan is extremely complex. Thus, the security issues that accompany reporting on Afghan conflict have been a major hurdle in production of quality news reports.

Ali Shah, a respondent from Balochistan wrote; “I report from Balochistan, Pakistan's area-wise biggest province which shares a border with volatile Kandahar and Helmand provinces of Afghanistan. I have been only reporting terrorist incidents in Spin Boldak and other Afghan neighboring towns. There is no proper Afghan information official in bordering towns to contradict or confirm any news. We are solely dependent on common Afghans who inform us about any incident. There seems to be no chain of command in Afghan forces to coordinate with media on either side of the border.”
This sentiment has been repeated by multiple respondents in different words. Lack of sources is obviously a huge problem, additionally as respondents have mentioned, the lack of resources and means to independently confirm information is also a hurdle; most journalists have pointed out that the only information about Afghanistan that they receive is state or military controlled.

Another dimension of this ‘controlled information’ phenomena was highlighted by a journalist who said, “Urdu media — print and electronic — essentially keeps views like mine out. There's an undeclared censorship on us who talk differently than the gospel peddled by Pakistani state.”

Wasail Yousufzai, a journalist from Peshawar-based *The Frontier Post* pointed out that he produced a program for youth, which aired from Afghanistan. The main hurdle his team faced was a lack of communication and facilities in Afghanistan. Other journalists pointed out that women, culture and social issues are hard to cover, especially when it comes to covering these themes from anywhere out of Kabul.

For Aslam Khan, working with Express Media Group the barrier of language is a great hindrance in properly reporting the Afghan conflict.

Another journalist Zia-ur-Rehman, associated with *The Friday Times* articulated a number of issues including a lack of funding, reluctance on the part of Pakistani and Afghan officials to share information relating to the Afghan conflict and a lack of collaboration between Pakistani and Afghan journalists. Zia-ur-Rehman says he has some personal contacts in Afghan media community but it is not at the level of joint or collaborative reporting venture. He feels the recently launched exchange programs are providing great opportunities to journalists of both sides to make contacts.

**Afghan conflict in Pakistani media:**
**Afghan journalists’ perceptions**

The suggestion of increased collaboration with Afghan media has been repeated by a number of Pakistani journalists, which brings into picture another player; the Afghan media practitioners. In this section, we will take a look at how the Afghan media perceives coverage of the Afghan conflict in Pakistani media and whether they attach any significance to it.

**Respondent demographics**

A total of 35 Afghan journalists were contacted for the sake of this survey. All of these journalists have previous experience working with Pakistani media through fellowships, partnerships or informal collaborations. Surprisingly, most of the Afghan journalists did not take part in this survey on the pretext of not having real understanding of the Pakistani media.

In all, only seven journalists from Afghanistan responded to this survey. Most of the respondents are young and have mid career, 5-10 years of journalistic experience.
The respondents belong to both print and electronic media and report actively on Pak-Afghan Issues.

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<td>Radio Free Europe</td>
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<td>Internews</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>Freelancer / IMS and Afghan Journalist Committee</td>
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Keeping in mind, the low level of participation from Afghan journalists, we also conducted a brief online interview with **Abdul Mujeeb Khalvatgar**, Executive Director of Nai, a media development organization working in Afghanistan.

**Adequacy and tone of Afghan coverage**

We saw that 83% of the Pakistani journalists agreed that Pakistani media isn’t covering Afghanistan adequately. The response from Afghanistan was much the same; nearly 86% of the Afghan respondents found media coverage of Afghan conflict in Pakistani media inadequate. All these respondents have read and watched Pakistani newspapers and TV news channels, keeping an eye out for coverage of Afghan conflict and are thus in a position to offer informed opinions about the theme.

**Perceived adequacy of Afghan conflict coverage**

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42 Details about Nai can be found here [http://www.nai.org.af/en/node/1](http://www.nai.org.af/en/node/1)
The Afghan respondents were further asked to indicate what they thought of the tone of news items on Afghan conflict. As with the Pakistani journalists, most of the Afghan journalists also said that Pakistani media gave overtly negative coverage to Afghan conflict and related issues.

All the respondents who termed Pakistani media’s coverage of Afghan conflict inadequate also indicated that it is extremely important for Pakistani media to cover Afghan conflict adequately and more comprehensively.
The respondents, when asked to explain why they thought it was important for Pakistani media to cover the Afghan conflict adequately, most of the respondents highlighted the prevalent misunderstandings between Pakistan and Afghanistan and a need to resolve them.

A journalist from Newsweek pointed out that, “Media is a very important tool of making opinions. Pakistani media is painting an anti-Afghan and pro-Taliban picture for its own people.” He also points out that this negative portrayal of Afghanistan is creating security issues in Afghanistan.

Multiple respondents have simply pointed out a need to increase understanding between the people of the two neighboring countries.

Another point that multiple respondents stressed upon is a need for Pakistani media to highlight Pakistan’s own role in Afghanistan; whether political or military, the Afghan journalists seem to feel that there is a need to make Pakistani people understand how the countries are interacting on various levels.

Abdul Mujeeb Khalvatgar, E.D. Nai Afghanistan, also highlighted the importance of giving adequate coverage to Afghanistan in his interview.

He said: “It is very important for both Pakistani media/journalists to cover the conflict in depth. It is because I think the Afghanistan conflict is now not an issue only for Afghans but for the region and beyond as well. How we can cope with this is to have in-depth information on this and to make the public aware of it, in a way that it is happening. Otherwise, wrong information to the public and wrong information through media will fuel and spread the conflict. Furthermore, Afghanistan and Pakistan as two neighboring countries, always contributing to their problem solving process and have been always like to brothers rather than two neighbours. For example, almost two million Afghan refugees have been hosted by Pakistan and they think Pakistan is their second home, or not supporting India while there was a conflict between India and Pakistan almost 40 years ago; these two examples show how the two nations are closer to each other. As I mentioned, Afghan conflict is not limited to Afghanistan, it is affecting neighbours and even countries in the region. That is why I think having Pakistani media cover Afghan conflict in-depth is very important.”

**Media’s role in improving Pak-Afghan relations**

All the respondents from Afghanistan said that Pakistani media has an important role to play when it comes to improving relations between the two countries.

Abdul Mujeeb Khalvatgar, E.D. Nai Afghanistan, also agreed with the journalists, and recognized the role of media in improving bilateral relations. Khalvatgar further added: “Media in a community is drowning the lifestyle of the public, furthermore it gives idea to politicians to draw their long-term strategies. Saying that, media has a very important impact on relationships between any two nations. Especially when the Afghan public is confused on what
is going there in Pakistan against Afghanistan or vice versa. Thus, being a journalist it is very important to recognize the role as a middle man to give a clear picture of the situation to your public and then to guide your state on what to do and what not to, especially when it (pertains to) relationship between two countries.”

The respondents were also asked to indicate some steps that in their opinion would improve the Pakistani media’s coverage of Afghanistan and help it play a more positive role in improving relations between the two countries. Most of the journalists emphasized the need to bring Afghan voices in the Pakistani media and to report about the Afghan society, not just the violent side of the Afghan conflict.

All the respondents also asserted that it is also just as important for the Afghan media to give adequate coverage to Pakistan. Some 71% of them believed that currently, the Afghan media isn’t covering Pakistan adequately.

When asked why they attach importance to Afghan media’s coverage of Pakistan, most of the journalists once again pushed for the need to increase public understanding of the neighboring country. They also said how both countries are facing similar forms of conflict and are being affected by the conflict actors on either side, highlighting a need to report the brewing conflict both from Pakistan and Afghan perspectives.

Abdul Mujeeb Khalvatgar said that there might be an issue with the understanding of Afghan conflict. He says: “The conflict of Afghanistan is very complicated, even I could surely say that there are Afghan journalists who do not have a clear picture of Afghan conflict. Thus, Pakistani journalists surely do not have proper understanding of Afghanistan conflict. They see it through
the Pakistani government’s eyes, which is why it is not the proper picture of the issue here in Afghanistan.

“When I hear Pakistani journalists’ views on Afghanistan conflict, it clearly seems to be very naïve and indeed not in-depth. That is why I think having more information of the Afghan conflict and more relationships with Afghan journalists will let Pakistani journalists to know more about Afghanistan and consequently, provide a better picture of the Afghan conflict.”

Other journalists also highlighted their own grievances about Pakistani media’s coverage of Afghan conflict. One of the respondents noted: “The Pakistani media calls Afghanistan’s legitimate regime as a puppet regime, Karzai as a puppet and declares Afghan forces as puppets forces.” He goes on to say that such analogies do not present the real picture of Afghanistan and ends up painting a skewed picture of both the Afghan conflict and the Afghan society.

Another journalist draws an interesting comparison in the coverage of conflict between Pakistani and Afghan media coverage of the conflict. He says: “In Pakistan, I read about Afghan cross-border attack in several newspapers. In Afghanistan, I read about cross-border attacks from Pakistan.”

He says that neither media should report only negatively as it affects perceptions about each country.

Another journalist stressed the need to report more frequently on the social impacts of Afghan conflict.
Recommendations

The mere length of this report is a testament to the fact that Pakistani media is publishing a good quantity of news content related to the Afghan conflict. The monitored theme has generated both news and opinion pieces in all the monitored newspapers. On TV, a good number of related stories were prioritized and nearly half of them aired among the first 10 items of the news bulletin.

One can see that the media is giving due attention to the Afghan conflict — but are the issues reported in the media actually reflecting the situation on ground? In our research surveys with Pakistani and Afghan journalists, we can see various points of discontent. Despite the seemingly high number of news stories that have been published/broadcast most of the journalists from both sides of the border term Afghan conflict coverage as being ‘inadequate’, which means room for improvement doesn’t just exist, but media practitioners also see a dire need for it.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are driven both from the media content analysis and the suggestions made by journalists who participated in our research surveys.

• **Developing thematic understanding**
  Like the proverbial ‘real’ Pakistan, there isn’t any one reality to the Afghan conflict. Yet, journalists reporting on Afghan conflict need to develop a basic understanding of the Afghan conflict, especially how even the internal conflict in Afghanistan has possible ramifications for Pakistan. Since a small group of people are reporting on the Afghan conflict locally, it is advisable to conduct thematic trainings for them.

• **Adding the human element**
  Be it drone attacks, cross border intrusions or the fallout of suspending NATO supply line on local investors, the real human element of the news happenings have been largely ignored by the media. Bringing the human cost of the conflict to light would not only make the news relevant to the public but would also help people understand the issues better. As mentioned by journalists from Pakistan and Afghanistan, the current regional scenario makes it is extremely important to further understanding about the Afghan conflict.
• **Reporting in-depth**
  On the whole there have been a good many news features and opinion pieces published on various aspects of the Afghan conflict. However, most of the reporting and analysis has been driven by political statements and strategic developments and thus cater to only one aspect of the news while ignoring multiple dimensions and impacts. There is a need for media practitioners to take a deeper look into the impacts of conflict and include social impacts in their stories.

• **Using Afghan journalists as sources**
  The lack of firsthand sources in Afghanistan has resulted in an influx of ‘agency driven’ media content. While international news agencies do produce quality content, they are not in a position to cater to the unique needs of Pakistani media and media audience. Networking with Afghan media practitioners will help local journalists’ access credible sources of information.

• **Giving news space to Afghan journalists**
  One of the easiest and the most cost effective ways to include the Afghan perspective in Pakistani media is giving some news space in papers to Afghan journalists. Printing news items from Afghan journalists is also tricky; the issues of national interest might arise, but with proper editorial control exercised by the newspapers, it should not be difficult to give some space in papers to the Afghan journalists. It is important to have a clear idea of the Afghan perspective on the conflict as their own perceptions and interest would ultimately affect the Pak-Afghan relations, thus making that point of view very relevant for the Pakistani audience.

• **Joint reporting ventures**
  As suggested by multiple journalists, joint reporting ventures on the conflict, combining the expertise of both Pakistani and Afghan journalists could help the media present a more diverse and holistic picture of the conflict. It is apparent that the Afghan conflict is intertwined in various ways with Pakistan’s own conflict and to be able to present a complete picture featuring both sides of the news story would be a great step towards quality and detailed journalism.

• **Need for further research**
  In the research survey conducted, a majority of both Pakistani and Afghan journalists termed the Afghan conflict coverage as being overtly negative. There is a need to do further research on what exactly is forming these opinions, what the journalists specifically have in mind when they term the coverage negative and what needs to be done to remove the negative tinge from the news content.
Annexures
This research report, through clearly defined categories and indicators, aims to bring clarity about the media’s response to the Afghan conflict, Pakistan’s role in Afghan peace process and the impact of Afghan situation on Pakistan. What emerges is a picture portraying the linkages amongst Afghanistan, Pakistan and the United States in the context of the ongoing war and conflict in Afghanistan.

This report also attempts to bring forth the newsmaker’s perspective on the Afghan coverage by analyzing responses to multiple online surveys regarding Afghan coverage in Pakistani media taken by both Pakistani and Afghan journalists.

For the purpose of thematic analyses of content being published and aired, a select sample of news media was monitored for terrorism related news from April 2012 to May 2012. Three widely circulated newspapers and the 9 o’clock bulletins of three popular news channels were monitored and analyzed on a daily basis for five months.

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<th>MONITORING SAMPLE</th>
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The monitored media outlets were selected because they enjoy considerable popularity and influence over their audience. Geo News is the most popular and highly rated news channel of all. Jang and Dawn are among the highly circulated Urdu and English newspapers in the country. All news outlets monitored are considered fairly influential in shaping up public opinion.

The selection of TV channels was made to ensure that TV stations from different ends of spectrum had a representation. Geo News is the top rated news channel in Pakistan, Samaa TV enjoys ratings that place it at 2nd to 4th most popular while Waqt news doesn’t enjoy good ratings but represents a rather right wing, staunch ideological stance, aligning it with an important segment of the Pakistani society.

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43 Annexure 5 – Survey Questionnaire for Pakistani Journalists
44 Annexure 6 – Survey Questionnaire for Afghan Journalists
For quantitative analysis of print media coverage the focus, the type and the source of the news piece appearing in the monitored sources were noted. Since the news regarding Afghan conflict caters to a very diverse scope of information, there were no other data categories that were monitored across the complete selection of news. News items were further categorized on the basis of their key focus. The following are the key categories identified as main news focus of the monitored stories:

- Terrorism in Afghanistan
- Cross-border insurgency
- Drone attacks
- NATO supply
- NATO pullout from Afghanistan and Afghan peace process
- Pak-Afghan and Pak-U.S. relations in post-NATO Afghanistan
- Others

News items in each focus category were further divided into news and opinion pieces to determine which themes attract the maximum amount of commentary from Pakistani journalists. A timeline for reported events in relevant themes has also been developed.

The news coverage in *Dawn* and *The Express Tribune* has also been cross checked on the online databases on their websites; however, *Jang*’s coverage has not been cross checked online due to technical issues with the website.

It should be noted that while the selected newspapers were monitored in totality, the TV news coverage monitoring was restricted to one main, hour long news bulletin. The 9 o’clock bulletins of the selected TV channels have been recorded and monitored for all news related to Afghanistan and the news has been categorized in terms of focus, priority, significance, type and tone.

To determine journalists’ own perception of coverage of Afghan conflict in Pakistani media, Pakistani journalists who have reported on Afghanistan were invited to take part in a brief online survey titled “How Pakistani media reports Afghan conflict”. The survey questionnaire was developed to identify the key sources reporters engage for coverage of Afghan conflict, the main hurdles they face when reporting on Afghanistan and their own impressions about Afghan conflict coverage and its importance.

Another online survey was developed for Afghan journalists who enjoy an understanding of Pakistani media. This survey titled “Afghan conflict in Pakistani media” was taken by a small number of Afghan journalists to gauge how the Afghan media rates and perceives the coverage of Afghan conflict in Pakistani media outlets.
By Aurangzaib Khan

It has already been established that journalists in both Pakistan and Afghanistan realize the importance of in-depth, substantial reporting of Afghan conflict. The survey results have brought forth valuable data, but since the survey technique is not ideal for in-depth answers, Intermedia also conducted a brief focus group discussion in the provincial capital Peshawar of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on coverage of Afghan issues in Pakistan media. In an informal, open discussion, 10 journalists with varying level of experience expressed views about how they view Afghanistan, the geo-strategic and economic relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan, the changes and developments in the neighbouring country and where exactly media in Pakistan stands on these.

Afghanistan, as portrayed in Pakistani media
In the first part of the FGD, the participants were asked a very simple question, “What does Pakistani media think of Afghanistan today? The gist of the discussion that ensued after this question, follows;

Future directions; where Afghanistan is headed
Afghanistan is not going in the right direction. For strategic reasons, India’s presence in Afghanistan and the American’s cozying up to India through a nuclear deal has set out a path for proxy war after the U.S. leaves Afghanistan.

Afghanistan is divided between regions that are controlled by Karzai and others under the Taliban. The centre’s writ is restricted to Kabul. A vast majority in Afghanistan believes that after the hasty U.S. withdrawal, the Taliban will come down from the mountain and there will be no stability. Even when there is trouble along the border, some of the places like Kunar and Nooristan provinces are fairly developed.

The participants believed that despite the withdrawal plans, there would not be complete withdrawal of the American forces and American bases would sustain in Afghanistan even after the 2014 NATO pullout.

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47 Aurangzaib Khan is the Director Media development with Intermedia Pakistan
48 Questions directing the discussion included in Annexure 3
There are a number of factors at play in countries affected by a conflict: For a long time, it was the Afghan refugees coming to Pakistan and there are still some 1.2m in Pakistan, most of them seasonal or economic immigrants. But over the last decade or so, there has been a new trend — every month some five thousand Pakistanis leave for Afghanistan for jobs through visa received from the Peshawar and Quetta consulates.

**Human cost; how conflict is affecting the Afghan people**

Afghan people are fed up with the war. Ordinary people want peace and say they have suffered a lot. There are some six million girls back to school and the number of women availing scholarships far exceeds that of men. Likewise, some 80% skilled people are returning from abroad to work at home — obviously, they expect the situation to change for the better post 2014. The annual growth rate of 14% may be unrealistic or bloated, but there are certainly areas in which the country has shown remarkable progress such as building up the Afghan army — high on the nationalism sentiment.

Despite insurgency — when compared to that in Pakistan — the destruction ratio of Afghan schools is much less than that in Pakistan. The Taliban routinely target the NATO troops but not schools.

**The mindset; what Afghans think?**

The Hizb Islami and the Afghan Taliban suspect that the Americans want to continue stay under the guise of fighting the insurgency. May be the U.S. will not win the war but the Hizb wants that America should be given face saving so that it leaves the region. The Karzai administration has assured the world that the Afghan land would not be used against anyone including Americans. The Afghanistan of 80s when the resistance/jihad was against Soviet occupation and later under the civil war and Taliban when there was internal fighting is much different from Afghanistan today where there is insurgency but it doesn’t have a wider support from Afghans, little involvement on part of ordinary Afghans fed up with war and suffering. There is little support for Taliban. And it is obvious from the fact that resistance against foreign forces is not as organized as it was in the 80s and 90s. It is certainly not as widespread. It is a guerilla war, waged in pockets — in some ways identical to what’s happening in Pakistan.

The resistance in the 80s and 90s was supported by the U.S. and the Saudis, respectively. The Saudi involvement in Afghanistan has been exposed over the years and later its support for the Taliban and the elements that propped it has disabused the Afghan people of the supposedly positive Saudi role in local affairs, a hangover from jihad years when it armed the Mujahideen against Soviet invasion. As things stand now, they blame Pakistan — not Americans, not Saudis or Iran — for their troubles. Despite international presence and occupation, people now want to move towards reconciliation.

**Politics and economy: Where would Afghanistan go from here?**

Earlier, there was no constitution, no constituency for political forces or the legal contract with people. As a consequence, nationalism among the people is on the rise and there is a collective
sense of moving on and ahead. In the rural swathes of Afghanistan, the influence from the centre has been historically minimal, with the local tribes stronger than the central government. The elements in the periphery are so strong in fact that they care little for the centre. With the NATO-American presence, the forces in the periphery are quiet but as soon as the withdrawal happens, the country’s sovereignty would be threatened by elements that support the forces on the periphery.

The economy of Afghanistan is sustained by foreign funding. If the assistance is withdrawn, it will crumble because there are no local mechanisms taxes, production or trade to tide it over transition.

Likewise, in the 36 provinces, security is largely provided by foreign forces and if and when they exit, things will revert to bedlam because the Afghan National Army is not trained or equipped enough to take over security operations all over the country. Even when there are foreign forces, the likes of Fazlullah and Faqir Mohammad find sanctuaries there. What will happen if NATO and Americans leave?

Two kinds of mindsets exist — one, the informed one, want the U.S. to stay well until Afghanistan is strong enough to fight Saudi and Pakistani designs; the other want the U.S. to leave only after there are guarantees that Pakistan, Iran and Saudi interference will be met with force.

The agriculture sector has grown considerably. Until recently Afghanistan depended on agricultural import but last year Pakistan imported onions, tomatoes, even wheat from Afghanistan. There is need for promoting trade to overcome food insecurity.

**Global interest in Afghanistan**

It’s not just the NATO/Americans that are interested in Afghanistan but there is interest in its vast resources from all over the world. Its mineral wealth amounts to $3 trillion, with some 20 companies vying for exploration, including Chinese.

**Violent conflict in Afghanistan**

Attacks on security forces in Afghanistan are met with organized search and destroy operations. These counter-insurgency operations are much successful there than here in Pakistan. Under NATO guidance and support, the Afghan forces operational capacity is commendable and they are proving themselves to be up to the challenge cut out for them.

**Helpless in Pakistan: the issue of Afghan refugees**

Last year, the rate of repatriation was high compared to this year. Afghan refugees keep returning due to insecurity in Afghanistan. One of the untold stories is that Afghans depend for healthcare on Pakistan — 80% of the Peshawar-based Rehman Medical Institute’s patients are Afghans, and it is the leading healthcare institution in Pakistan where medical staff is Afghan or speaks Dari and notices are translated in Dari.
The refugees are harassed by the local police. Leading politicians and district officials give irresponsible statements about eviction of refugees that prompt police to harass them, ask for bribes or stop electricity supply to the localities where they live.

Impression of Pakistanis in Afghanistan is extremely negative especially that of people from Punjab, the state policy and that of the police.

**Portrayal of Afghanistan: positive or negative?**

The coverage of Afghanistan, the group agreed, is negative. Local media focus on conflict and military presence inside Afghanistan. There is a trust deficit between Pakistan and Afghanistan. In December last year, a well known Pakistani journalist met the governor of Kunar and mentioned that Pakistan blames Afghanistan for providing sanctuaries to warlords like Fazlullah and Faqir Mohammad and is it true that they are both in Afghanistan. To which the governor said, “Yes, it is true that they are here but we don’t protect or patronize them. They hide along the border. When we move against them, they cross over to the other side. When the Pakistani authorities hound them, they move into Afghan territory.”

Orakzai, a former governor of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, said there were 19 Indian consulates in Afghanistan when there are actually only four — in Herat, Kabul, Mazar and Kandahar. If someone so high up as Orakzai is so ill-informed then who can blame the likes of Hamid Zaid who say negative things about Afghanistan, a view that is then accepted and shared by people and media alike.

The Afghan consulate in Peshawar receives 200 applications daily from Pakistanis seeking jobs in Afghanistan. There is little known about the contribution and condition of Pakistani workers in Afghanistan because the Pakistani state’s narrative — and hence media’s — is focused on geo-strategic relations, not geo-economic.

For this reason precisely, even though some five million Afghans have lived and worked in Pakistan over the years compared to mere thousands in India, Afghans still treat Pakistan as an enemy and India a friend.

Besides a negative portrayal of Afghanistan in Pakistani media, there are a number of militant magazines aimed at local and Afghan population in Pakistan that promotes a negative and militaristic view of developments in Afghanistan. A journalist narrated a story of a desk editor at a Karachi-based vernacular daily that received news of 15 Afghan National Army soldiers dying in an insurgent attack. “He killed a fly on the table and said you could add that to the number, implying that the life of an Afghan soldier is no more valuable than that of a fly. The newspaper reported that 26 Afghan National Army soldiers died in the attack.”

A local journalist who works for a foreign wire service said that he got the news that Taliban and Hizb-e-Islami had killed 10 NATO soldiers and the wire service wanted him to verify. He
called around but no-one knew of it because there are no Pakistani journalists in the border areas of Afghanistan. The next day a leading Urdu daily carried the news with a byline. The journalist did his own investigation and found out that there was no military presence of NATO soldiers or equipment in the area where the attacks and deaths were reported to have happened.

Afghan politics and reconciliation efforts are not covered in Pakistani media adequately. The information that comes through is mostly based on research and surveys by western think-tanks and Pakistani media lacks the capacity to turn them into news and analysis.

Another issue with Pakistani media coverage is that it continues to be mired in the narrative that Pakistan helped defeat the Soviets — essentially promoting a jihad mindset even though there are journalists that think that such a policy could prove costly for the nation.

Jihadist publications are widely available as well as Afghan newspapers in English, Dari and Pashto that are locally published and sent to Afghanistan. Such publications published here and sent to Afghanistan find their way back also such as the journal *Tora Bora*.

While the jihad media is openly available — CDs, multimedia formats for copying on USB etc — the Afghanistan electronic media is banned by PEMRA that says they have no landing rights. On the other hand when Tulle TV asked for it, it wasn’t given any. Pakistan banned Khabaryal.com — an U.K.-based news website run by Afghans and known for fair coverage and breaking news. Its account of the attack on Salala post that blamed Pakistan for incursions invoked the wrath of Pakistani authorities.

The problem with such coverage of Afghanistan by certain jihadist journals and media is that when viewed by people outside Pakistan or Peshawar, they form the impression that it reflects popular sentiment here, like suggesting Peshawar is Talibanized even though the dominant view among journalists is radically different from that.

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The media needs to move away from the state narrative and embrace the geo-economic narrative rather than the geo-strategic one. As long as the state is not held accountable, we cannot hope for change or make it change its obsession with ‘strategic depth’. While media hesitates to challenge the strategic narrative for “fear of being killed”, the strategic argument will eventually kill everyone anyway.

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The militancy related activities are kept under wraps and conspiracy theories are allowed on media. This deters public empowerment. If negotiations, reconciliation, reporting and information exchange is not allowed, people stay in the dark and confused. If media on both sides is active and interacts, people would know where the Taliban, the Americans, the
Pakistanis or the Karzai Administration stand on issues of mutual interest, who to support and what games the state and non-state actors play, the spoilers and facilitators of peace. The people’s narrative will weaken the state narrative — Pakistan, U.S., Afghan and others — because they are part of the problem, because people are not allowed to see, know, speak and decide what should be and how.

There is certainly interest among people on both sides to get to know each other better but that is not reflected in media and initiatives that bring people together and their voices are not reported in media.

**Sources of information for reporting Afghan conflict**

In Afghanistan today, there is a concentration of international media. Half of the news and analyses about Afghanistan carried in Pakistani media comes from foreign journalists and news services. But for all the interest and discussion of Afghanistan in local media, there are no Pakistani reporters in Afghanistan except Khyber TV. Similarly, the media scene in Afghanistan is vibrant, with more radio stations than there are in Pakistan and they manage to reach into Pakistan in the border areas and beyond but we don’t create or generate any of our own independent local content and narrative on Afghanistan.

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Another reporter said, “I, as a reporter, cannot go to Bara in Khyber Agency. How can I go to Kunar?” implying that military presence in Afghanistan and hostility against Pakistanis makes it really difficult for Pakistani journalists to report on Afghanistan.

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Rahimullah Yousafzai is considered an authority on Afghanistan. When was the last time he was there?

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The media in Pakistan is strong and covers local news extensively and openly. But when it comes to Afghanistan, the media doesn’t try and the state doesn’t allow people to speak, or doesn’t broadcast for Afghanistan.

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The Public Information Department in Pakistan and Afghan authorities have recently signed an MoU which may allow TV on local cable and facilitate journalists to cover developments in the two countries.

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Most of the news about Afghanistan in Pakistani media comes from foreign media and journalists. “It is their narrative. Our interests related to security and reconstruction process in Afghanistan are not reflected. We don’t have independent analysis because neither media nor the Pakistani government is interested even when Afghanistan is the biggest and direct focus of
our trade and commerce activities today (in 2005-2006, our exports to Afghanistan amounted to $5 billion). About how much the local economy is driven by trade with Afghanistan, a reporter said when the export of poultry to Afghanistan was recently banned, the price fell by Rs30 locally. A laborer earns Rs300 as wage in Pakistan whereas in Afghanistan, a Pakistani laborer can earn Rs2000. Local tailors keep revising the prices upwards because their workers are forever tempted to go and work in Afghanistan where they can earn more.

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The trade is there but it is a kind of black market economy at work which is in the interest of the Pakistani state because it helps support the non-state actors. It is not in the interest of the state to allow economic activities to flourish formally — it certainly is not making any effort through official talks to open channels for such ties.
Annexure 3
Questions for Focus Group Discussion

1. Do Pakistani newspapers cover Afghanistan adequately?
   a. yes
   b. no
Briefly discuss reasons for each

2. Is this print media coverage:
   a. overtly positive
   b. overtly negative
   c. neutral
Briefly discuss reasons for each

3. Do Pakistani TV channels cover Afghanistan adequately?
   a. yes
   b. no
Briefly discuss reasons for each

4. Is this electronic media coverage:
   a. overtly positive
   b. overtly negative
   c. neutral
Briefly discuss reasons for each

5. What are the key topics of discussion in Pakistani media about Afghanistan?
   a. politics
   b. conflict
   c. foreign military presence in Afghanistan
   d. social issues
   e. business
   f. culture
   g. others (please explain)
Briefly discuss each topic for professional content, adequacy, relevance, usefulness
5. What are the main sources of information used by Pakistani media on coverage about Afghanistan?

   a. Western news agencies
   b. Western media (newspapers, TV, radio)
   c. Internet
   d. Afghan news sources (news agencies and private media's own reporting)
   e. Pakistani news sources (news agencies and private media's own sources)
   f. Afghan government
   g. Pakistani government
   h. Afghan military
   i. Pakistani military
   j. NATO/American military sources
   k. others (please mention)

Briefly discuss each

6. Can media in Pakistan play a role in improving relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan?

   a. yes
   b. no

7. If yes, briefly discuss steps (some examples below) that Pakistani media can take to play a positive role

   a. reporting about Afghan society — not just "official Afghanistan"
   b. bringing out local Afghan voices — more human interest stories
   c. promoting individual and institutional collaboration with Afghan journalists
   d. investing in joint/collaborative reporting ventures
   e. exchange of information/stories among media on both sides
   f. giving news space to Afghan journalists
   g. others (please mention)

8. How can human interest stories from Afghanistan be given more space in Pakistani media?

Discuss briefly.

9. Pakistan has about $1.5bn a year in formal trade with Afghanistan. The informal trade is twice as large. Why is there so little reporting on business issues in Pakistani and Afghan media about business issues?

Discuss briefly.
Annexure 4
Focus Group Discussion participants

1. **Dilawar Jan**  
   Reporter, *The News*

2. **Shamim Shahid**  
   Bureau Chief, *Pakistan Today*

3. **Tehsinullah**  
   Reporter, Afghan Islamic Press

4. **Ghulam Dastageer**  
   Reporter, *Herald*

5. **Yousaf Ali**  
   Reporter, *The News*

6. **Robina Rehman**  
   Researcher, Intermedia

7. **Khalid Khan**  
   Reporter, Mashal Radio

8. **Aqeel Yousafzai**  
   Reporter, DPA

9. **Syed Irfan Ashraf**  
   Teacher, Journalism Department, University of Peshawar
1. Do Pakistani newspapers cover Afghanistan adequately?
   a. yes
   b. no

2. Is this print media coverage:
   a. overtly positive
   b. overtly negative
   c. neutral

3. Do Pakistani TV channels cover Afghanistan adequately?
   a. yes
   b. no

4. Is this electronic media coverage:
   a. overtly positive
   b. overtly negative
   c. neutral

5. What are the key topics of discussion in Pakistani media about Afghanistan?
   a. politics
   b. conflict
   c. foreign military presence in Afghanistan
   d. social issues
   e. business
   f. culture
   g. others (please explain)

6. Which of the following themes about Afghanistan are most under-reported in Pakistani media? [Select 3 key themes]
   a. democracy / parliament in Afghanistan
   b. Afghan women
   c. business and economy in Afghanistan
   d. development in Afghanistan
   e. Afghan youth
   f. Afghan culture
   g. Others (please explain)
7. How would you rate the coverage of Pakistani media about Afghan conflict? [Select one]
   a. bad
   b. good
   c. average

8. If Pakistani media is not reporting the Afghan conflict adequately, what do you think are the main reasons [Select 3 themes]
   a. lack of interest in media organizations
   b. lack of interest in working journalists
   c. lack of information sources
   d. lack of infrastructure
   e. outside pressures / sensitive nature of news
   f. others (please explain)

9. What are the main sources of information used by Pakistani media on coverage about Afghanistan?
   a. Western news agencies
   b. Western media (newspapers, TV, radio)
   c. Internet
   d. Afghan news sources (news agencies and private media's own reporting)
   e. Pakistani news sources (news agencies and private media's own sources)
   f. Afghan government
   g. Pakistani government
   h. Afghan military
   i. Pakistani military
   j. NATO/American military sources
   k. others (please mention)

10. Can media in Pakistan play a role in improving relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan?
    a. yes
    b. no

11. If yes, briefly discuss steps (some examples below) that Pakistani media can take to play a positive role
    a. reporting about Afghan society — not just "official Afghanistan"
    b. bringing out local Afghan voices — more human interest stories
    c. promoting individual and institutional collaboration with Afghan journalists
    d. investing in joint/collaborative reporting ventures
    e. exchange of information/stories among media on both sides
    f. giving news space to Afghan journalists
    g. others (please mention)
1. Have you ever read Pakistani newspapers or seen Pakistani news channels on TV?
   a. yes
   b. no

2. If yes, then have you noticed any coverage about Afghanistan and conflict in Afghanistan?
   a. yes
   b. no

3. In your opinion is Pakistani media giving adequate coverage to Afghanistan?
   a. yes
   b. no
   c. don’t know

4. How would you classify the nature of Afghanistan related coverage in Pakistani media?
   a. overall positive
   b. overall negative
   c. neutral

5. In your opinion, is it important for media/journalists in Pakistan to give adequate coverage to Afghanistan?
   a. yes
   b. no

6. If yes, please explain in a few sentences, why you think it is important.

7. In your opinion can media in Pakistan play a role in improving relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan?
   a. yes
   b. no
8. If yes, then what in your opinion would be the most important steps that Pakistani media can take to play a positive role? (Tick 3 most relevant)
   a. reporting about Afghan society
   b. bringing out Afghan voices
   c. promoting collaborations with Afghan journalists
   d. investing in joint reporting ventures
   e. publishing / broadcasting proactive reports about Afghanistan
   f. giving news space to Afghan journalists
   g. any other (please explain)

9. In your opinion does the Afghan media give adequate coverage to Pakistan?
   a. yes
   b. no

10. In your opinion, is it important for the Afghan media to report issues related to Pakistan?
    a. yes
    b. no

11. If yes, and then please explain why.

12. Any additional comments on how the Pakistani media reports / should report Afghanistan related Issues.
About the author

Sadaf Baig has been associated with journalism for the last 10 years; she has spent the better part of her journalistic career in newsrooms of different TV channels. Over the course of the last 10 years Ms. Baig has worked on almost all the rungs of the production ladder. Starting from the tickers desk and leaving as a Senior Producer, she has had the chance to produce news packages, bulletins, daily/weekly shows, and documentaries. She has also been associated with CNN International, Atlanta as an ICFG fellow on Pakistan-United States Professional Partnership on Journalism. She is currently associated with Intermedia Pakistan as Director Research and Communications and is involved in various research and monitoring projects over journalism and state of media and is also involved in a key effort to promote journalist safety in Pakistan. She is currently in charge of Pakistan’s first website dedicated to journalist safety issues www.journalistsafety.org. You can write to her at sadaf.baig03@gmail.com or connect via twitter @nuqsh