War and Peace Journalism: Representation of Conflict on Afghan Soil through Global Media

Ahmad Zia Elham1*, Rahmatullah Haand1, Azizullah Sadiq1

1 School of Journalism and Communication, Shaikh Zayed University, Khost, Afghanistan

ABSTRACT

The world longest war against terrorism is expected to end. The United States of America is set to fully withdraw from Afghanistan in September 2021. This study, informed by Galtung’s model of War and Peace, examines how the New York Times and China Daily depict this war and the recently initiated peace process. Combined method of qualitative and quantitative contents analysis was used and the two newspapers’ coverage from September 2018 to August 2019 was chosen. 144 stories were extracted and 73 exemplar stories, which met the selection criteria were studied. The findings show that both newspapers excessively used elite-oriented and visible effects of war frames. The study also found that the NYT uses demeaning language, portrayed the Taliban as a dominant force, demoralized Afghan government and security forces; it also held the Afghan people responsible for the war. Implications of this study are discussed.

Keywords: WAR AND PEACE JOURNALISM, MEDIA FRAMES, NEW YORK TIMES, CHINA DAILY, AFGHANISTAN, AFGHAN GOVERNMENT, THE TALIBAN, TERRORISM

Introduction

Afghans have long been suffering from the proxy wars of global and regional powers, being waged on their homeland. Started in 1978, the ongoing war went through different phases and its 41st anniversary was recently in Afghanistan. These imposed conflicts have always been branded and hence political deliberation or finding alternatives discouraged as unresolvable and unending. But why they should be unending? The Afghans have a proverb in the Pashto language: If the mountain is high, it has a path over its top. Therefore, though the conflict and peace issues in Afghanistan are complicated, there are ways to find a solution. There is a classic quote of the Greek tragic dramatist Aeschylus: “In war, truth is the first casualty”. Unfortunately, it still seems to be true, particularly in the media coverage of the US War on Afghan soil. The main cause of its complication seems to be the discursive blurring narrative surrounding the conflict. Most of the international media are one of the key armaments for manufacturing mass confusions through biased, partisan and unbalanced reporting of the American war in Afghanistan.
Afghanistan has been in the grip of conflicts since 1978. Although the war on Afghan soil has taken many shapes over the past four decades, the ‘Saur Revolution’ followed by the United Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) invasion marked the beginning of a long phase of military violence and instability which is still wreaking havoc in the country. For a better understanding, the conflicts in Afghanistan can be divided into different phases. The reign of death and destruction started with a military coup by the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), the so called Saur Revolution in 1978, in which president Daoud Khan was deposed and killed (Noorzai, 2012). It was followed by power struggle among three communist rivals, Noor Mohammad Tarakai, Hafizullah Amin, and Babrak Karmal, until the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 (Maass, 2006; Gritzner & Shroder, 2007). In the second phase (1980-1989), ‘Mujahideen’, who were receiving support from CIA through Pakistan’s ISI, fought against the Soviets. This deadly power struggles cost lives of more than 1.5 million Afghans and 15000 Soviet troops (Collins, 2011). After the withdrawal of the Soviets in February 1989, the third phase of ‘civil war’ (1989-2001) started. Once again the proxies of regional and international powers scrambled to Afghanistan to spill the blood of thousands of innocent civilians. During this ‘civil war’, from 1989 to 1992 the militant groups of ‘Mujahideen’ fought against Dr. Najibullah’s regime supported and left behind by the Soviets until he was ousted in 1992 (Rasanayagam, 2002). After taking power, ‘Mujahideen’ indulged in their internal disputes from 1992 to1994 (Maass, 2006). In 1994, the ‘Mujahideen’ project ended and “Pakistan planted the seeds of the eventual rise of the Taliban” (Strickland, 2006).

Taliban were the seminars graduates, majority of them Pashtuns, prepared by ISI, through which the government of ‘Mujahideen’ was overthrown in September 1996 (T. H. Johnson & Mason, 2007). But the resistance of ‘Northern Alliance’, who had control in some parts of northern Afghanistan, was still in place until the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 (Achikzad, 2012; Bowman & Dale, 2009; Collins, 2011; Maass, 2006). The war in Afghanistan has systematically been transformed from an anti-Soviet resistance to a dramatic competition between other factions. The last phase is the US ‘War on Terror’ with a distracting missionary slogan of ‘Operation Enduring freedom’ continued for almost two decades with still no clear end in sight (Cristol, 2019; Cordesman, 2019; Gopal, 2014; Baral, 2013; Cassidy, 2012; Linschoten & Kuehn, 2012).

There is a telling proverb in the Pashto language: Blood cannot be washed/cleaned by blood. Hence, it is obvious that disputes ultimately, should be solved through negotiations, and a political settlement seems to be the only way to end the American war on Afghan soil. During the past four decades of war, the first attempt at peacebuilding was made in late 1986, when National Reconciliation Policy (NRP) was announced. But this was completely derailed by the armed conflicts of ‘Mujahideen’, serving the interests of America and Pakistan (Najibullah, 2017). Besides that, during the US war on Afghan soil, though initially the US policy was focused only on ‘defeating’ the terrorists (Tiwari, 2016); later it was changed to reintegration of the Taliban foot soldiers, and more later, was widened to the reconciliation of their leadership (Sheikh & Greenwood, 2013). In the past two decades, several attempts of reconciliation and building peace have been made but all have been faced by
many constraints and stalemates (Cornish & Timory, 2013; Sheikh & Greenwood, 2013; UNDP, 2017; Kuehn, 2018; Mohammadi, 2018; Tiwari, 2016; Royo Aspa et al. 2018; Zaki, 2019). Although the previous peace struggles were not much hopeful, the peace initiatives in 2018 were notably significant and it raised real expectations among Afghans for dreaming an inclusive peace. In September 2018, the former US ambassador to Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad was appointed as Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation (SRAR), who led the last nine rounds of US-Taliban face to face peace talks from October 12, 2018 to August 22, 2019. Eight rounds of talks were held in Doha of Qatar where the Taliban’s political office exists and one round in UAE (Shah & Nordland, 2018; Rotman, 2018; Aljazeera, 2018; CBS, 2018; Tolonew, 2019; Tolonews, 2019; Sediqi & Jain, 2019a, Jain, 2019; Qazi, 2019; Sediqi & Jain, 2019b). Finally, an ‘Agreement of Bringing Peace to Afghanistan’ was signed by the US and Taliban on 29 February 2020 to open the door for ‘Intra-Afghan’ Dialogue (Hansler, 2020).

Review of the Literature

Numerous studies on the foreign wars on Afghan soil overwhelmingly narrates just the exhausting and tragic stories of the bloody unending conflicts. They depict the Afghans as a deprived and hopeless nation which born, grows and dies during the imposed wars. Other studies discuss some of the manifest aspects of the involved actors, causes, and consequences. But one thing in all these studies is common: All have been written from foreign perspectives and do not represent the indigenous voices of Afghans (Cristol, 2019; R. Johnson, 1979; Edwards, 2002; Gopal, 2014; Collins, 2011; Cassidy, 2012; Cordesman, 2019; Baral, 2013; Ewans, 2005). Critical work to investigate the hidden root-causes of these imposed wars and to expose the untruths and cover-ups are yet to be seen.

Several Scholars have studied the peace process in Afghanistan (Jarstad, 2012; Powell, 2014; Seerat, 2015; Fazly, 2016; Khan & Pervaz, 2016; Vishwakarma, 2017; Khan & Abbasi (2016); Heela Najibullah, 2017; Foxley, 2014; Ahmed, 2017; Kaura, 2018; Ikram-Ul-Haq 2018; Pandey, 2019). It can be inferred from their studies that the war on Afghan soil is militarily unwinnable and a political settlement is the only way to end the war. Hence they suggest peace talks, negotiations and reconciliation between the warring sides and the role of state and non-state actors as a third party. Besides, some studies emphasize the political economy of war and peace, the influence of Afghanistan’s strongmen, the politics of drugs, the growing presence of international forces, drone airstrikes, civilian casualties, double-dealing of regional and international actors and the less attention given to the statebuilding as the main constraints and hurdles for peace in Afghanistan (Rubin 2006; Zaki, 2019; Giustozzi, 2007; van Ham & Kamminga, 2007; Suhrke, 2015; Ottosen, 2010; Ginty, 2010). Similarly, some studies have debated the media representation of war and peace in Afghanistan from different aspects. Studies investigating state-press relations reveal that media follow the official foreign policies of their respective countries and to a greater extent is influenced by those who are in power (Rasul, 2010; Rasul, Robinson, and McDowell, 2017; Schoch, 2011). Other studies have examined media framing of the war and
peace. Noorzai (2012) identifies state-building, occupation as a failure, and civilian victims as the dominant frames, while Hamid (2014) has found that Pakistani and British press mostly frame the coverage of American war on Afghan territory negatively.

The studies reviewed for this paper have focused only on the historical analysis of war on Afghan soil. They are limited to themes such as causes of the war complication, the formation of insurgents, counterinsurgency and counterterrorism, juxtaposing the US war in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Vietnam; US-Taliban relationships, Taliban narratives, peace talks with Taliban, negotiations, and the main hurdles for peace. Based on Galtung’s model, only Ottosen (2010) has examined the Canadian media coverage of war and peace in Afghanistan. This shows majority of studies around this topic ignore the media coverage. Also due to the recent peace initiatives i.e. the nine rounds of direct US-Taliban talks in 2018 and 2019, a study which should examine media coverage by employing Galtung’s model is pertinent. Hence this study tends to examine the approach of The NYT and China Daily. The former belongs to the US which is the world superpower and directly involved international actor in the ongoing war and peace issues in Afghanistan, and the latter is an emerging world power and a powerful neighbor of Afghanistan. The paper examines their coverage of war and peace on the Afghan soil.

This study is guided by two research questions formulated as below.

**RQ1:** What are the dominant indicators of war journalism and peace journalism manifest in The NYT and China Daily’s coverage of the war and peace on Afghan soil?

**RQ2:** To what extent did The NYT and China Daily’s coverage of war and peace in Afghanistan was war-oriented/peace-oriented?

**Theoretical Framework**

This study is guided by Johan Galtung’s model of war and peace journalism (1986). The term Peace Journalism was coined in 1970s by Neumann & Fahmy (2012), and developed in Galtung & Fischer (1998). Some scholars linked the concept of peace journalism to framing theory (Lee, 2010; Seraj, 2008; Neumann & Fahmy, 2012; Hussain, 2014). Although, a standard definition of framing is yet to be introduced (Entman, 1993; Scheufele, 1999), media frames defined by Entman (2004) is “selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution.” Lee & Maslog (2005) argues: “the news coverage of conflict, including the reporting about war, is grounded in the notion of conflict as a news value” (P. 311). Therefore, conflict reporting is often sensational and gets more attention hence increases circulation and ratings. However, this notion was challenged by a well-known Norwegian Professor and peace intellectual, Johan Galtung, who introduced two competing frames ‘Peace journalism versus war journalism’ for the wartime reporting (Yang & Fong, 2009). Peace journalism is a viable alternative to more conventional war reporting that gives voice to people rather than elite to make the disputes more transparent and consequently open the door for resolution of the war (Galtung, 1986, 1998, 2013; Lee & Maslog, 2005; Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005; Lynch, 2015; Çiftcioğlu, 2017).
Furthermore, Galtung & Fischer (1998) associated war journalism to sports journalism, which typically sees its object in terms of a zero-sum game where the winner takes all. Therefore, a productive alternative model, he argued, can be the health journalism which comprehensively goes beyond the visible effects of an illness and conveys its causes and future preventive measures (Yang & Fong, 2009). Besides that, war coverage is reactive (violence must occur before reporting), whereas peace journalism embraces a proactive stance (reporting takes place before and after the conflict) (Neumann & Fahmy, 2012).

Peace journalism aims to de-escalate war and violence, promote peace, and create opportunities for resolution of disputes through a unique way of reporting conflicts in favor of peace (Siraj, 2010). It tends “to condemn the conflict by showing the white and black of all sides and to minimize the rift between opposing parties by not repeating what will demonize one side and set the stage for conflict” (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005). Peace journalism is “when editors and reporters make choices of what to report and how to report it that create opportunities for society at large to consider and to value non-violent responses to conflict” (Lynch & McGoldrick cited by Lynch, 2015 P. 193).

**Method**

This study is a content analysis and employs Galtung’s model of war and peace journalism (1986) to understand the proportion of war and peace orientations in The NYT and China Daily’s coverage of American war and peace in Afghanistan. Within the selected time period, from 1st Sep 2018 to 31st Aug 2019, a total of 144 news stories were retrieved from the original websites of both newspapers through searching five different terms e.g. (Afghanistan, War, Conflict, Peace, Taliban) from the advance search option. Thus, 107 news stories were collected from NYT and 37 were from China Daily. Moreover, first, the researcher examined all 144 stories for a general understanding and to identify certain permanent shared patterns. Then 73 those stories were selected which were deemed as exemplars of all other stories. These 73 stories contain all features which all the 144 had and this was the well representative sample. In this study, the coding system of the news stories was done in SPSS. First, the data set was created based on the 18 indicators of Galtung’s model. Then, all the selected news stories were closely read and coded based on the embedded verbal and thematic frames.

**Sampling**

The sample of stories was drawn based on four different categories. First, all those stories from both the papers were clubbed together in one category which had reported similar events/themes. Seven such matching stories could be found. In the second category, those news stories from both newspapers were selected which included in their titles/sub-titles the terms “war” or “conflict.” Four stories were selected from The NYT, whereas seven were collected from the China Daily. The third and fourth categories followed the criteria of the second category. For the third category, the term “peace” was the delineating word in the headlines, and 16 stories were selected from The NYT while seven were selected from China Daily. Similarly, those stories which comprised the word “Taliban” in the headlines were grouped in the fourth category. Seventeen news stories were collected
from The NYT while eight were selected from China Daily. So overall, 73 out of 144 news stories were finally selected for this study; 44 from The New York Times whereas 29 from China Daily.

**Findings**

RQ1: The first research question is designed to find out the dominant indicators in The NYT and China Daily’s coverage of the American war and peace in Afghanistan. The following table 1 indicates the dominant indicators in the coverage of these papers.

Table 1: Comparison of Galtung’s indicators in the coverage of The NYT & China Daily

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elite Oriented</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
<td>Elite Oriented</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visible Effects of war</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
<td>Visible Effects of war</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differences Oriented</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>Avoid Dichotomy</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses of Demonizing Language</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>Multi-party Orientation</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partisan</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>Causes and Consequences</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Here and Now</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>Differences Oriented</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid Dichotomy</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>Win-win Orientation</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zero-sum Orientation</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>Uses of Demonizing Language</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-party Orientation</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>Non-partisan</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Causes and Consequences</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>Solution Oriented</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solution Oriented</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>Avoid Demonizing Language</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-party Orientation</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>Partisan</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dichotomy</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>Here and Now</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Win-win Orientation</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>Zero-sum Orientation</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-partisan</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>Dichotomy</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid Demonizing Language</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>People Oriented</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People Oriented</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>Two-party Orientation</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invisible Effects of war</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>Invisible Effects of war</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RQ2: The second research question of this study was formulated to examine the coverage of both newspapers in terms of the 18 indicators of Galtung’s model of war and peace journalism to examine whether their coverage in the selected time period is war-oriented or peace-oriented, and as well as to ascertain the level of their war and peace orientations. The findings shown in the following table have answered the question.

Table 2: Comparative analysis of The NYT & China Daily in terms of war and peace orientation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peace/Conflict Journalism</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
<td>Peace/Conflict Journalism</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>53.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invisible Effects of war</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>Invisible Effects of war</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solution Oriented</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>Solution Oriented</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People Oriented</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>People Oriented</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Causes and Consequences</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>Causes and Consequences</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid Dichotomy</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>Avoid Dichotomy</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-party Orientation</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>Multi-party Orientation</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-partisan</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>Non-partisan</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Win-win Orientation</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>Win-win Orientation</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoid Demonizing Language</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>Avoid Demonizing Language</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total 118 | 30.8% Total 142 | 53.7%
The above two tables answered the quantitative aspect of this research. In the subsequent discussion section tends to deliberate the latent meanings of the text and frames which are consciously/unconsciously embedded in the news stories.

**Discussion**

Media play an enormous role in constructing social realities and it can radically influence the public perceptions. Media operate in such a subtle and ideological way that only a small number of critical readers can delineate its true intentions. The majority of audiences are mostly passive receivers and make their social debates based on the agendas and framing the media thrust on them. Moreover, most of the news are about conflicts and violence which only represent one side or aspect of the social reality. If journalists do not critically assess the value of the news, then the propaganda of wartime created by those in power will be imposed on media as the sole truth and will also be passively received by the audience. Arno (2009) argues, “If a negative side of news media performance is their preoccupation with conflict and alarm, a potential positive side is their role in conflict management” (P. 39). But through critical journalism embedded in the philosophy of social responsibility (for details see Four Theory of Media, 1956, you can this text), journalists can profoundly challenge the propaganda of the elites. According to Galtung (2013), although the news media due to its nature cannot ignore the war news, its focus should not be just on portraying war and violence. The analysis of this study revealed that the coverage of The NYT was heavily war oriented with the percentage of 69.2 while China Daily’s coverage was peace oriented with 53.7% of its contents falling in that category.

Furthermore, in the coverage of both newspapers, the responsibility of the US war in Afghanistan was repeatedly attributed to the Afghans. One of the dominant frames both these newspapers deploy is that the Al-Qaeda’s leader Osama Bin Laden was given sanctuary by the Taliban regime and the 9/11 attack was staged from the Afghan soil. The recent US-Taliban peace negotiation has four elements, one of which is the guarantee by the latter that Afghan territory shall not be used against the former and its allies. Both papers emphasized this point out of proportion while ignoring or under-reporting the other three elements name these three here again. This seems an attempt to stave off criticism from the US’s twenty years futile war and the destruction it caused to Afghans and orient peoples’ attention towards the principle reason deter of attacking the country. But this is betrayed by the fact that Osama was found and killed in Pakistan’s garrison city of Abbottabad, a few hundred meters from the country’s most top security zone, Pakistan military academy, Kakul. But the newspapers conspicuously avoid providing this context while discussing American war.
Moreover, in reporting such critical events of wartime, journalists overwhelmingly depend on elite as their news sources that consciously/unconsciously make media as a volunteer propaganda tool for their cover-ups and lies. Therefore, due to this one-sided debate in which local (diverse) voices are not counted, the media never challenge the propagandistic debate of elites and the responsibility of the US’ bloody war in Afghanistan is one-sidedly attributed to the Afghans. Bennett (2016) has also pointed out to the same issue of the US media treatment of the US war in Iraq. “…research on the Iraq War showed that, despite credible evidence that Iraq lacked weapons of mass destruction, the US press reported the rationale for the Iraq War in 2002–2003 largely as the Bush administration scripted it.”

Similarly, in more than half of the coverage of both newspapers were statements about the double-dealing of Pakistan in counterterrorism. For instance, “Pakistani military’s influence within the insurgency next door” or “Pakistan, where Taliban leaders have long taken sanctuary and Pakistan harbors Taliban leadership”. Reading such statements, the audiences will naturally criticize the media for just reporting what is going on in the wartime and not questioning the military and political strategists for not taking action against the double-dealing of Pakistan. It has been proved time and again (Jones, 2007; Relations & Kronstadt, 2012; Arsenault & Bacon, 2015) that most of the insurgents and their leadership have long been enjoying sanctuaries and safe havens in Pakistan. But these newspapers never raised this issue. Also they never questioned the fact that based only on a single claim by the Taliban that Laden was their guest, the US did not hesitate to attack Afghanistan, but America and its NATO allies are conspicuously silent about taking any military action against the double-dealing of Pakistan, which has been complicating their mission of counterterrorism in Afghanistan. If the US fights against the terrorism, then just waiting for the insurgents who take sanctuary and training next door, and come with full strength back to Afghanistan to fight against them and the Afghan government is their big fault/partnership of the double-dealing with Pakistan. It is obvious that America has the power and capability of crossing over the border to eradicate the roots of terrorism and insurgency and bring a final end to the dirty game.

So the analysis of the coverage of these newspapers show that it was more than 90 percent Elite-Oriented. The common peoples’ views who can expose the cover-ups and lies or can offer alternative perspective to the elite opinion were sidelined. The second most used indicator was Visible Effects of War. This indicator, according to Galtung (1986), only causes trauma in the audiences. The papers frequently use terms like “Militant assaults, Suicide attack, Explosions, Car bombs, Airstrikes, Bombing, Raids, Land mines, Roadside bombs, Gunfire, Assassinations, Bloodshed, Killings, Injuries, damages, and…”, which have the potential to spread terror and desperation among the public and also have zero-sum effects. Moreover, Differences Oriented indicators were used 79% and 69% by The NYT and China Daily respectively. For instance, in the coverage of The NYT comprised of terms such as “Afghan Leader Blindsided, Meetings abroad, violence at home; Peace talks urgency, violence at an intense pace; After Deadly Assault, Taliban Sit for Talks”, and some other similar statements can create differences among the warring sides, and can constrain the peace struggle. Similarly,
some statements which were representing the same indicator were found in the coverage of China Daily as well. e.g. “Talks with Khalilzad as a propaganda win; Agreement might let US extricate itself; the government… has been bypassed; Intense fighting all over the country, while Taliban are negotiating.” These statements can further escalate this dispute and widen the gap between the warring sides for reaching a peaceful agreement.

Furthermore, in the coverage of both newspapers, the indicator Dichotomy was also noticed with the 29% in The NYT and 20% in China Daily. For instance the terms “A puppet regime, fragile Afghan state, Islamist insurgents, Islamist extremists, Hardline Islamist militant, Islamist group, hardline Islamist figures, less hardline Islamic scholars”, questioned the sovereignty of the Afghan government and labeled Islam as a religion of extremism but this media did not discuss the US soldiers’ killing and wounding of more than 100,000 Afghan civilians or Pakistani state-supported Taliban attacks inside the country. The indicator “Uses of Demonizing Language” was also found with proportion of 72% in The NYT and 58% in China Daily. The statements “Ghani’s fears came true; fatal marginalization of the country’s leadership; Homes Lost and Lives Trampled; Helmand River…often bloodied; Moving from one tragedy to the next; Blood is finished, tears dried”, convey the victimizing image of a completely powerless, defeated and hopeless nation. With using this kind of victimizing language, the media can further push the Afghans into a huge trap of desperation without contextualizing the war’s main causes and consequences or appreciating the organic political resistance by Afghan men and women.

In many news stories of The NYT, some terms were observed that were representing Hard Power/Waging War. For instance “Military pressure; Put pressure on the Taliban, peace isn’t coming by begging; a coordinated series of attacks; The torrent of airstrikes; to bleed the militant group; increased assaults have helped keep the Taliban engaged in peace talks; US dropped more than 7,000 bombs, missiles and other munitions; Joint forces conduct dozens of raids each month”. Such discursive representation of war leads to unrestrained use of hard power. In many cases, the US troops have targeted civilians in their airstrikes and raids, which has cost the lives of innocent men, women and children. This can strongly stimulate the sense of revenge in the minds of those youngsters who have lost their innocent family members in the bombings and raids of the American forces. Even similar atrocities are afflicted on common people by the insurgents as well. The insurgents, who have been killed in airstrikes or raids, other youngsters of their families soon have been seen on the battlefield with the sense of revenge. A statement of the spokesman of Taliban’s Qatar office Sohail Shaheen published in a report of The NYT said: “The more they kill, the more our blood will turn hot”. His declaration was about the recent intensification of the airstrikes and raids against the insurgents by the US forces and the Afghan government. The common people who are always ignored by media have many such untold stories. Unheeded and overlooked, the silencing of these stories by the media only prolong the war in Afghanistan. Bleeding and killing cannot solve the issue. The only solution is the declaration of a nationwide ceasefire and a real willingness for embracing peace. But media overemphasize hard indicators while underreport peaceful frames. The American strategy of the forty years war in Afghanistan can be best explained through this statement of
The NYT “Stop-and-go strategies from Washington throughout the war”.

This sentence means that whenever America wants to quit, it will at once announce that the war has ended without any consideration to the situation on Afghan soil or the mess it will leave behind. And until American geopolitical interests remain in this region, it will pose numerous excuses to protract the war, manufacturing shabby grounds. Also both newspapers regularly declare Afghan state as a failed and ineffective entity without explaining what criteria they use to reach such judgment. In this way, they advertently or otherwise, encourage Taliban and other insurgents groups and downgrade the morale of Afghan political and military leadership. In the coverage of the NYT, the state-building in Afghanistan was framed in a negative way. For example the “Widespread insecurity; endemic corruption; rampant drug trafficking; changing the Constitution; American yes-man; Taliban education officials”, are all those statements that can further push the already marginalized/ignored state towards failing. Simultaneously, there were some other themes which were depicting the Disunity or untidiness of the political leadership, widespread irregularities, corruption and fraud in the election process, Security risks, political chaos, and power-sharing, which can negatively affect the trust of the current government. Similarly, in the coverage of China Daily the statements “To chart the country’s political future; Accusations of fraud; Constitutional reforms” also can negatively affect the political stability and sovereignty of the Afghan government. The role of media here was also focused on reporting what is going on, which is just the obvious aspect of the issue, but to excavate the historical causes of the unending bloody American war in Afghanistan through objective and critical reporting, media should go beyond this obvious to further investigations of the hidden parts of the issues to expose the evil acts of the many regional and international players. This kind of reporting is what social responsibility theory and other notions of democratic and peace journalism advocate.

The frame of Demoralization was also observed in the coverage of both newspapers. In The NYT “Taliban had cranked up the pressure; Taliban…taking the lead in fight; Taliban fighters…better equipped than border security forces; failure to the Taliban’s purported possession of superior equipment; poorly equipped compared to the insurgents” are all those statements, which on one hand, consciously/unconsciously demoralize the Afghan government and especially the Afghan security forces, and on the other hand, it is a kind of indirect advertisement, support to and boosting the morale of the insurgents. Similarly, in the coverage of China Daily “Afghan forces bear the brunt of the conflict; two dozen fatalities a day; growing sense of hopelessness; Taliban…significant battlefield gains; Taliban control or influence about half of Afghanistan; dismiss as puppets; government as a proxy of Washington” are all statements which portray the Afghan government too much powerless and imbue desperations among the Afghan forces as well as common people. Besides that, in the coverage of The NYT, some terms and themes were noticed in which the current government of Afghanistan was shown completely marginalized in their own affairs especially the peace process, and instead, other countries like the United States, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and Qatar were shown as the dominant powers and final decision makers.
Conclusion

This study examined the representation of the American war and peace in Afghanistan in the coverage of The NYT and China Daily. The research was informed by Johan Galtung’s Model of War and Peace Journalism (1986). This study was aimed to find out the dominant indicators in the coverage of both newspapers and their war and peace orientation. A total of 73 news stories were examined both quantitatively and qualitatively in which 44 news stories were taken from The NYT while 29 from China Daily. The finding showed that in terms of Galtung’s model of war and peace indicators, the dominant indicator in the coverage of both newspapers was Elite-Oriented, closely followed by Visible Effects of War. Both these indicators, according to Galtung (1986) reinforce war and violence and blurs prospects of peace. In the coverage of The NYT, 42 out of 44 stories were Elite-Oriented, where 40 had the indicators of Visible Effects of War. In the similar vein, the coverage of China Daily was also dominated by Elite-Orientated indictors, found in 26 out of 29 news stories, while the Visible Effects of War was seen in its 25 news reports. Besides, according to the war and peace orientations, more than two-third (69.2%) of the coverage of The NYT was war-oriented, while China Daily’s coverage was in favor of peace journalism with the percentages of 53.7%.

The Americans and its allies are practicing military humanism in Afghanistan. They attacked Afghanistan with tanks, missiles, drones and all kinds of deadly sophisticated weapons but the slogan they raised was ‘Operations Enduring Freedom’, offering poisons covered with sweets to the Afghan nation and the rest of the morally responsible world. The war is on for nearly two decades, and still it deliberately wants to prolong the war for their strategic interests. But media always report just the obvious aspects of the conflict which can further complicate the war. The correspondents of the two analyzed newspapers have never challenged the presence of foreign military forces in Afghanistan. They never ask what kind of freedom they are procuring for the Afghans through the bloody operations, raids, displacing people, imprisoning people in Guantanamo bay like places. This American war has taken the lives of more than “150000 people” (Gul, 2019), and even it can be higher because the last two years were much deadlier than all previous years (Gall, 2017). If the American and its allies merely do not let the Afghan people just stay alive, then bringing any kind of freedoms is just a humiliating drama for them. The Americans are cunningly depicting their presence in favor of human rights of Afghans, which they brag saying that they have toppled the government of the Taliban where the women were shut inside their homes, the girls were deprived of educations and the Afghan people were mostly deprived of their human rights. But this is just one side and American (victor) version of the ongoing issues which only provides moral justifications for their invasion. The role of media is notably important in the resolution of wars if they follow Galtungs model of peace reporting. The media should give more space to the Afghan people and its democratically elected government. Moreover, they should contextualize the war and expose the American and regional powers’ interests in prolonging the war. But if media have become the stakeholders of the global military-industrial-complex, then such expectations are living in fool’s paradise.
Acknowledgments
The author would like to acknowledge and thank his supervisor Dr Xu Peixi, Azmat Afridi and a Phd candidate Mr Hazrat Mohammad Bahar for rigorously overseeing the paper.

References


19. Fazly, H. (2016). THE DEADLOCK OF AFGHAN PEACE PROCESS Table of Contents :


Corresponding Author: Ahmad Zia Elham, School of Journalism and Communication, Shaikh Zayed University, Khost, Afghanistan. Tel: +93774604762 Email: zia.elham@szu.edu.af

Mr. Ahmad Zia Elham has been teaching journalism in School of Journalism and Communication at Shaikh Zayed University, Khost, Afghanistan since September 2012. He also worked for BBC-AEP as a Writer & Producer of Radio programs from April 2011-June 2012. He completed his MA degree in International Journalism at Communication University of China, Beijing, China in July 2020. His BA degree was completed in Journalism at Shaikh Zayed University.

© 2021 by the authors. Author/authors are fully responsible for the text, figure, and data in above pages. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)