

Pakistani English Press during War on Terror: A Media Conformity Approach

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Headings

- [Abstract](#)
- [Introduction](#)
- [Media Conformity to Foreign Policy](#)
- [Coverage of War on Terror from National & International Media](#)
- [Methodology](#)
- [Data Analysis](#)
- [Results](#)
- [Discussion & Conclusion](#)
- [References](#)

Abstract

The present research focused on how much Pakistani English press tracked the foreign policy stance of the Pakistani government in the presentation of incidents related to the war on terror. Pakistani authorities reinforced war on terror and Afghanistan war but did not support the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. For the present analysis, the editorials of *Dawn* and the *Nation* were selected from 12 September 2001 to 11 September 2003. Thematic analysis of the editorial coverage through NVIVO 10 was conducted. It was found that, during the war against Afghanistan that took place in 2001, Pakistani English press did not support the Pakistani government's stance. Many critical themes were noted from the data. However, during Iraq war that happened in 2003, Pakistani English press toed the Pakistani government's policy during and stressed the government to take more proactive stance against Iraq war. Overall, it could be stated that the Pakistani English press partially conformed the foreign policy stance of Pakistani government in the coverage of the war on terror incidents.

Key Words: Pakistani English Press, War on Terror, Media Conformity Theory, Editorials, Thematic Analysis.

Introduction

War on terror was launched by the US government in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. Afghanistan was the first target in this regard. In October 2001, Afghanistan was confronted by US coalition army (Rose, 2002). US airstrikes on the civilians caused more than 3000 casualties (Herold, 2002). But these casualties were never reported by US media. US media did cards-stacking and only focused on the legitimization of their government's actions (Riddick, 2012; Traugott & Brader, 2003). Later on, though opposed by UNO (Quille, Gasparini, Menotti, Manaco, Valasek & Bayles, 2005) Iraqi Iraq was also attacked by US coalition forces for having weapons of mass destruction during March 2003.

A great amount of coverage was given to the incident of 9/11 during the early hours of the incident by many US channels (Amy & Barnett, 2003). During this situation US channels mostly used loyal themes, reporting events in the context of the dramatic presentation of happenings, reproaching Taliban and overlooking historical orientations (Eisman, 2003). In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, Afghanistan and Iraq were given substantial coverage by the international media.

Since her creation, Pakistan's relationship with the United States has always remained a very prominent part of Pakistan's foreign policy. But it was changed drastically after attacks of September 11th. In the wake of the 9/11 terrorist incident, the US government changed its policies towards Pakistan and Pak-US coalition

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developed to fight a war against terrorism. President Musharraf of Pakistan provided “full support” to US authorities in war on terror ([Kundi, 2007](#)). The US authorities were given airbases within Pakistani territory to launch combat ([Kapila, 2002](#)). All types of logistics were provided without official settlements initially (Fair, 2004). Musharraf declared these decisions as based on “principles andnational interest...” ([Musharraf, 2002](#)). The then Foreign Minister of Pakistan fully endorsed these decisions and said that this war against terrorism will not stop until “the evil of terrorism is completely eliminated” ([Kasuri, 2003](#)).

The case of the Iraq war 2003 remained quite different as Pakistani authorities decided against war and supported peaceful strategies. The then PM said on one occasion “the matter should be resolved peacefully” ([Jamali, 2003](#)). Pakistani authorities even consulted with international forums like the Arab League, UNO, NAM, and OIC to avoid this war. The PM of Pakistan said that war would only increase the problems of Iraqi people ([Jamali, 2003b](#)).

The above discussion indicates that the Pakistani Government reinforced US actions not only on ‘War on Terror’ but also on launching combat against Afghanistan in the year 2001. Pakistani authorities arranged logistic support for the US authorities to initiate this war in Afghanistan. But the situation did not remain the same for the US government when they imposed the war against Iraq in the year 2003. Pakistani Government did not back up US decision against Iraq and adopted an anti-war policy.

It was explored through the present article that how Pakistani press framed the war on terror and how much it followed Pakistan’s foreign policy guideline on the crisis. As the press usually provides the stance of the people of a country but also presents the decisions and actions of the government so it was finding out how much media coverage regarding war against terrorism was according to the guidelines of Pakistani government’s foreign policy stance.

Media Conformity to Foreign Policy

A review of previous literature was conducted to know either the media of different countries conformed their foreign policy stance in the presentation of international issues or not ([Bennett, 1990](#); [Gurevitch, Levy & Roeh, 1991](#), [Entman, 2004](#)). In the US it was noted that their media mostly conformed the Presidential frame relating to the issues of International or National politics. After the September 11 attacks, Bush’s speeches framed media coverage about War on Terror and journalists consciously compromised on the principles of impartiality ([Frenssley, 2002](#)).

Generally, it was expected from the media that in democratic countries, the media was free and impartial. They were independent to report the issues of national and international perspectives. However, it was found that in America and Britain during international crisis mostly media supported their government policy guidelines ([Reese & Lewis, 2009](#), [Bennet, 1993](#); [Friel & Falk, 2004](#); [Largio et. al., 2004](#); [Carpenter, 1995](#); [Kumar, 2006](#)). Likewise, from the Afghanistan invasion 2001 to Iraq war 2003, the US media mostly adopted militarists themes in their coverage. Frames like “America’s New War”, “America Strikes Back” were adopted ([Kellner, 2007](#)). It was also confirmed that after the September 11 attacks media strengthened the American stance against Iraq (Kaufmann, 2004). It was propagated that WMD of Iraq could be dangerous for the US or other countries in coming future ([Zheng, 2006](#)). During the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, the American press embarked one sided coverage to the crisis and continuously supported US political policies ([Ali, 2002](#)).

Likewise, [Khan \(2008\)](#) studied portrayal of Pakistan image and noted that after the September 11 attacks, American government modified its strategy to deal with Pakistan and showed favorable signs to the country but the American media did not express the same policy. Correspondingly, [Khan and Safdar \(2010\)](#) noted that during the War on Terror although the Pakistani government supported America but Pakistani newspapers did not support its government in this regard. Anti-American themes were observed from Pakistani newspapers.

Coverage of War on Terror from National & International Media

Generally, American media framed the war on terror from the perspective of the government's guidelines. It appeared more supportive of government stance and provided positive coverage to the war. [Ryan \(2004\)](#) argued that the US media frequently used the frame of "war on terror" in its coverage and provided unprecedented support to the US attack. The press consciously picked stories, official sources and relative statements to strengthen government viewpoint. The alternative statements and arguments were avoided.

Likewise, the countries that supported war on terror, their media also adopted a supportive stance to the war. [Ottosen \(2005\)](#) explored the coverage of Norwegian media relating to the war on terror. It was noted that their military was participating in Afghanistan attack. Correspondingly, Norwegian media supported their military presence in Afghanistan and projected the US war on terror. Its media discussed official sources and expressed concerns for expanding terrorism. It did not stress on anti-war aspects and arguments.

On the other hand, [Jasperson and El-Kikhia \(2002\)](#) discussed Middle Eastern media. They found that in the coverage of Afghanistan war 2001, American media was focused on military advancements, bombardment by the allied forces on Alqeda and statements by the military experts. However, Aljazeera discussed the crisis differently. It stressed on terrible effects of war on the people of Afghanistan. Aljazeera criticised US standpoint on the Afghanistan crisis or Al-Qaida.

As far as the Arab media was concerned, it adopted an anti-war stance in the coverage of Afghanistan war 2001. It highlighted the statements of Taliban leaders and provided excessive coverage over physical and property losses caused by US bombing. The Arab channels mostly used Pakistan-based Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) as a major source that gave reports about Afghan and Taliban casualties ([Lee, 2002](#)). Likewise, the Arab media emphasized the US government to solve the Israel-Palestine conflict because the continuous support for the Israel government could be a significant reason for the September 11 attacks ([Lee, 2002](#)).

[Singh \(2003\)](#) while exploring the coverage of Pakistani media about WOT, observed that Pakistani media did not favoured Pakistani government's involvement in WOT and in some instances it criticised President Musharraf's policies' regarding this. Even Pakistan media expressed its concerns about US policies towards Pakistan in the future. Particularly, the local language press in Pakistan was more critical towards the war on terror. Pakistani journalists framed America as "biggest evil" and "the real terrorist". Although the American government tried to correct its image in Pakistan by giving billions of dollars and public relations measures, due to US opinion towards Pakistani government's strategies towards WOT and US drone strikes in Pakistan, the US image remained unfavourable in the country ([Shah, 2010](#)).

[Terradellas \(2008\)](#) stated that Pakistan's media did not support its government for participating in the war on terror. It was stressed that America had its interest in this geographical area and WOT was framed in this context. One of the local newspapers Nawa-e-Waqt narrated that US President wanted to directly target Pakistan. Dawn was of the opinion that "we do not wish to become an enemy of the United States, but neither are we prepared to be the target of an enemy dressed as a friend" (Terradellas, 2008). The newspapers expressed their concerns regarding cross border attacks by the forces in Pakistani areas. It was argued that such incidents would worsen Pak-US relations in the future.

At the same time, another aspect was noted by Malik and Iqbal (2010). It was observed that although Pakistani media did not support American policies towards Pakistan but at the same time, the Pakistani press did not support Taliban and their influence in the country. Taliban were framed as butchers, Taliban animal, 'extremist', 'terrorists' and 'ultra-orthodox' in Pakistani English dailies.

By exploring the literature, it was observed that Western media mostly supported War on terror and especially those countries whose forces were participating in Afghanistan and Iraq wars, their media framed it in a positive stance. However, the Arab and Muslim countries expressed their concerns regarding the war and they stressed anti-war aspects such as casualties, destructions and world public opinion. The

present study explored the editorial coverage of two Pakistani newspapers (The Dawn and the Nation) during WOT. The present research answered the following research question:

To what extent the Pakistani newspapers (*the Dawn*, and *The Nation*) tracked the foreign policy stance of Pakistani government in the presentation of War on Terror incidents?

Methodology

The current research design is based on qualitative approach. Thematic analysis technique was employed to critically analyse the editorials of *Dawn* and *The Nation*. For analysing the text of newspaper editorials, the study used the technique of thematic analysis. As identified by [Popping \(2000\)](#), 'what' and 'how' was identified during the present research with the help of "vigilant analysis and re-reading of content" ([Rice & Ezzy, 1999](#), p.258).

Editorials of *The Dawn* and *The Nation* were retrieved from newspaper web sites. The following key terms were used to identify the population "war on terror", "Al Qaeda", "Taliban", "Iraq war 2003", "Saddam Hussain", "WMD", "Iraq", or "Iraq invasion", "Afghanistan attack 2001" in the name of the editorial or the first paragraph from September 12, 2001, to September 11, 2003.

Data Analysis

In this research, grounded theory data analysis approach was used. According to [Strauss and Corbin \(1998\)](#), there are three steps of coding namely; open, axial and selective coding. During the first step of coding, open codes were generated from the data which labelled the phenomenon from the data. At this stage, the data was not meaningful ([Charmaz, 2006](#)). In the second step, the researcher started to create relationships among different codes and categories. However, in the last stage, the researcher merged categories to formulate different themes. The themes which emerged from the data explained the phenomenon embedded in it ([Strauss & Corbin, 1998](#)). For qualitative coding, NVIVO 10 was utilized that helped the researcher to generate codes, themes and models. By analyzing the data, core themes were developed from Pakistani newspapers about wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Results

Analysis of Pakistani Newspapers' Editorials Regarding Afghanistan War 2001

The following themes emerged from the data.

Opposition against 'War on Terror'

There are a number of editorials from the Dawn and the Nation opposed the terrorism war. *The Dawn* argued that the War was started to bring justice to the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks but senseless revenge would kill thousands of innocent people in Afghanistan. The United States should be very careful in its campaign against terrorism; the War on Terror should not become the 'war of terror'. The decision to punish the perpetrators of 9/11 should be under the United Nations.

In many editorials, *The Nation* and *The Dawn* revealed the opposition against the War on Terror by Pakistani political parties, religious parties and the general public. There were protests and rallies in the country. Major political parties in Pakistan did not support the government's policy on the Afghanistan war. With the start of the Afghanistan war, *The Nation* discussed public protests by the religious and political parties of Pakistan. There were rallies in Lahore, Peshawar, Islamabad and Karachi. The Pakistan Government was disturbed due to these protests.

Criticism on Pakistan's Policy Towards 'War on Terror'

Later on, *The Nation* commented that Pakistan made a wrong policy after 9/11. By supporting the War on

Terror, the Pakistan Government had to face opposition within the country. Pakistan's forces had to fight against the extremist factions and these Taliban had also threatened Pakistan's integrity. In response to the support, Pakistan had to face a slim chance for its economic revival. There was no surety that Pakistan could have a debt write-off. Already the country had suffered losses of commercial dealings worth \$1.4 billion. The domestic and political front was not easy for the Government and increasing killings in Afghanistan added problems for Pakistan. On the issue of Pakistan air bases, Pakistan's population was much concerned. The people demanded that the Government should clarify to what extent Pakistan had backed the American policies. *The Nation* commented on December 31, 2001, that after denouncing support to the Taliban after September 11, Musharraf became the darling of the West. The country got some economic relief and Musharraf got a chance to crack down on religious extremists in Pakistan. Such actions might save the country from Indian attack but from the negative perspective, Pakistan had to revise its Kashmir policy.

Musharraf's Approach Towards War on Terror

During September 2001, *The Nation* mentioned certain statements of President Musharraf in which he stressed Pakistan's support for the War on Terror. He argued that for fighting terrorism, a concentrated international effort was required. He further said that the United States wanted Pakistan's full support for its war against terrorism. He was of the opinion that Pakistan had to support the War on Terror, otherwise the country could face repercussions on its strategic interests. *The Nation* stated that:

"One could not disagree with him when he said that acting otherwise would entail repercussions, for, in the face of the sense of outrage and vengeance in the USA, our reluctance to cooperate may indeed have put the very security and integrity of the country and the preservation of the strategic interests at stake. The truth is that having grievously suffered at the hands of terrorists for such a long time, joining the battle against them should have been, even without the compulsions inherent in the present case, but natural reaction for Islamabad" (*The Nation*, September 21, 2001, p. 6).

The Nation hoped that the cooperation might lead to better results for Pakistan and Afghanistan. There would be no harm to the civilians and inside Pakistan law and order would be intact. On October 24, 2001, *The Nation* mentioned President Musharraf's statement in which he argued that Pakistan supported War on Terror in its national interests. If Pakistan did not support the war, India was waiting for the opportunity and it could use this war against Pakistan. *The Nation* was much agreed with the President. It argued that growing casualties in Afghanistan were causing security problems. As a result of the Taliban issue, the West had pointed fingers at Pakistan's nuclear assets. On the Kashmir cause, India had strengthened its stance that Kashmir was an integral part of India. From the economic perspective too, the situation was not much optimistic. *The Nation* remarked that the realization of national objectives in the context of the War on Terror remained elusive.

Consequences for Pakistan in Supporting War on Terror

The Nation commented that after 9/11, Pakistan had a crucial role in the War on Terror. It changed its strategies related to Al-Qaida and gave substantial backing to America. Because of this war, the country paid a heavy price. It faced political, social and economic costs for its support. The Taliban threatened the security of Pakistan and killed many innocent people. Militancy increased in the country which affected the lives of common people. Pakistan gave air bases to the United States forces and did alternative arrangements for its own requirements. There were 45000 troops deployed on Durand line to control the situation. From Kashmir's perspective, Pakistan had to change its stance over this issue. But during this process, India became closer to the United States; it received military technology, not Pakistan. Attempts were also made to change policy on Israel. Pakistan had to compromise its sovereignty and FBI agents got easy access inside Pakistan. Overall, the War on Terror affected the national interests of Pakistan.

Pakistan Relations with America and Afghanistan after 9/11 Attacks

The discussion so far has indicated how the Pakistani press criticized its foreign policy approach relating to the Afghanistan war. *The Nation* was completely against Pakistan's approach to the Afghanistan war but *The Dawn* to some extent backed government policy relating to Afghanistan crisis. There were a few editorials from *The Dawn* which supported Pakistan's role in the War on Terror and discussed improved Pakistan US relations after 9/11.

The Dawn stated that through this approach, Pakistan got certain financial, political and military advantages. Due to Pakistan's pro-US policies, the United States resumed military sales for Pakistan that would help the country to improve its defense mechanism.

Moreover, the Dawn discussed the nature of Pakistan–Afghanistan relations as well. *The Dawn* wrote that the frequent visits to Pakistan by the high-ranking Afghan visitors indicated that Islamabad and Kabul had moved towards closer ties. It seemed that Pakistan and Afghanistan were supportive of the United States' policy of War on Terror. It was a positive note. Pakistan and Afghanistan should forget about the previous bitterness and should move on towards the way of prosperity and peace.

Victories of Allied Forces

There were very few editorials observed from *The Dawn* highlighted allies' victories in Afghanistan and stressed better relations with Afghanistan's new Government. After the fall of the Taliban Government, *The Dawn* stressed the importance of a broad-band and neutral Government in Afghanistan. Pakistan wanted the presence of international forces inside Afghanistan for peacekeeping and the Government-making process. Both the newspapers were concerned that Pakistan should support post-war activities in Afghanistan and stable Afghan government was in the best interests of the region.

Analysis of Pakistani Newspapers' Editorials Regarding Iraq War 2003

By analyzing the data from both the newspapers the following themes developed.

Criticism against Iraq Attack

The first theme that appeared from data was the criticism against the Iraq attack. *The Nation* commented that the Iraqi attack would be widely condemned by Pakistan and the world. It was suggested that Pakistan should not only oppose the action but also under OIC to make a united Muslim stand against the aggressive action. *The Nation* stressed that Pakistan should activate OIC to restrain America from attacking Iraq. The newspaper argued that Pakistani Government should play an active role in preventing the war; otherwise the prevailing situation would lead to chaos and anarchy in the region. A statement by the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Mr. Jamali, indicated Pakistan's policy on the Iraqi attack. *The Nation* wrote that:

In a long-awaited policy statement, Mr. Jamali finally revealed "our party and allies have decided unanimously that Pakistan will not support any war intentions against Iraq and its people" (*The Nation*, March 03, 2003, p. 6)

Pakistan Policy to Iraq War

The other theme was Pakistan's policy towards the Iraq war. It was enormously discussed by both newspapers. *The Nation* argued that although the policy statement was clear that the government of Pakistan was not willing to support the United States' action against Iraq, some of the opposition parties were still not satisfied with the statement. They framed it as an unclear and ambiguous stance. The Pakistan Government had decided to abstain from voting in the United Nations on the Iraqi issue to avoid public anger. Although it was a passive resistance and below public expectations but the newspaper welcomed the Government's decision.

The Dawn commented that Pakistan supported America in the Afghanistan war but its negative response to the Iraqi war could complicate matters but the government had taken the right decision. Pakistan should not support any move that vindicates action against Iraq. The statements by the President and Prime Minister of Pakistan indicated that Pakistan did not support the American attack against Iraq. However, in certain editorials, *The Nation* remarked that Pakistan did not adopt a proactive approach to denounce the policies of the United States against Iraq. Although Pakistan wanted to see a peaceful resolution of the Iraqi crisis its reaction was not very much strong and confident. *The Nation* adopted an aggressive approach against the Iraqi attack and urged the Pakistani government to be more oppositional against the Iraqi war. By analysing the coverage of the Iraqi war, it was observed that the Pakistani press complied with Pakistan's foreign policy on Iraq and gave negative coverage on this issue.

UN and Iraq Attack

The Pakistani press argued that unilateral action against Iraq was a dangerous option. America's single-minded obsession with Iraq was massively condemned by many of the countries. The Bush administration did not succeed in convincing public opinion against Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. Muslim public opinion was outraged due to the double standards of the United States' policies on Israel and the Muslim countries.

Moreover, the Pakistani press criticized the Iraqi attack because it was not endorsed by the United Nations. Pakistani newspapers stressed that the United States should comply with the United Nations on the weapons of mass destruction issue. There were a number of editorials that condemned America for its dealing with the United Nations on the Iraqi crisis. *The Dawn* stated that without the United Nations' authorization, the attack on Iraq would not be justified. *The Dawn* also argued that the action of the United States in Iraq had undermined the idea of the United Nations. The UN had lost its credibility as the sole arbitrator of international conflicts. It was the triumph of the principles of unilateralism and the defeat of diplomacy and dialogue.

Civilian Casualties in Iraq

The Pakistani press wrote about many incidents of civilian killings in Iraq. *The Nation* argued that aerial bombing caused a humanitarian disaster in Iraq. There was an enormous number of people killed and injured in Iraq. The infrastructure was devastated and there was an acute shortage of medical facilities for the injured people. On August 13, 2003, *The Nation* estimated that approximately 6000 Iraqi had died in the war. There was a likelihood of an increase in this number. A prolonged stay of the United States forces in Iraq would cause more problems for the civilians; there was an urgent need of United Nations forces to restore the situation. The newspaper criticized the United States-backed government in Iraq. It was argued that the Government could not control the deteriorating situation in Iraq. Iraq wanted neither Saddam nor the United States rule; they wanted self-Government. The United Nations should play a central role in Iraq and should hand over power to the Iraqi Government.

Discussion and Conclusion

The data was analyzed through the media conformity approach. The study explored Pakistan media's compliance with the country's foreign policy. It was noted that at the start, Pakistan backed America on the War on Terror. During the Afghanistan war of 2001, Pakistan gave enormous support and facilitated the US attack. Though, during the Iraq crisis, the Pakistan Government did not express its policy on the crisis. It was more silent on the issue. Being a part of War on Terror, it was difficult for the government to take any decision when public opinion was very strong against the Iraqi crisis and demanded the Pakistani government to withdraw its support from the War on Terror. Correspondingly, the Pakistani government

decided not to support the war against Iraq. The Pakistani media discussed the statements by Pakistan's President and Prime Minister in which they did not endorse the Iraqi attack 2003.

According to the previous literature, the media generally reinforced the government policies during international conflicts ([Bennett, 1990](#); [Reese & Lewis, 2009](#) [Frenssley, 2002](#); [Grundmann, Smith, & Wright, 2000](#); [Kumar, 2006](#)). However, the Pakistani newspapers did not support official policy on the Afghanistan war 2001. It highlighted more oppositional statements and criticized the Government policies on the issue concerned. However, on the Iraqi crisis, the Pakistani government did not support the war and Pakistani press too disapproved Iraqi attack. In this case, Pakistani press criticized the Pakistani government for not taking proactive action against the Iraqi attack. In this crisis, the Pakistani press criticized Pakistan's foreign policy for having a weak opposition against the Iraqi attack. It was suggested that Pakistan should be at the forefront opposing the aggression against Iraq.

Overall, the Pakistani newspapers did not back Government policy on the Afghanistan war 2001. It adopted a critical stance against the war and generally criticized the Government for supporting the War on Terror but on the Iraqi crisis of 2003, the press partially supported the policy of Pakistani government despite being not much satisfied with its approach. Likewise, previous literature on the Pakistani media related to the coverage of the War on Terror indicated that the Pakistani media did not conform government policies on the War on Terror and condemned Pakistan's support for the war ([Singh, 2003](#); [Shah, 2010](#); [Khan & Safdar, 2010](#); [Khan & Imran, 2011](#); Paracha, Imran & Khan, 2012; [Terradellas, 2008](#)).

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