



# U.S. Military Withdrawal from Afghanistan: War and Peace Journalism in Pakistani Media

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## Abstract

*When it comes to reporting on war and conflict, according to Galtung (1986, 1998), there are two conflicting frames, war journalism and peace journalism. War journalists cover conflict by reporting it in a way that promotes violence, dominance, and an elitist viewpoint. Peace journalists, on the other hand, report proactively on the reasons and solutions to conflicts, providing all sides with a voice via responsible Media. The present study analyzes how Dawn and the Nation depict U.S. Military Withdrawal from Afghanistan. This study focuses on the war and peace inclination of the Pakistani print media. The war and peace journalism model proposed by Johan Galtung is used to guide this research (1986). Peace journalism strives to de-escalate war and violence, promote peace, and offer opportunities for dispute resolution. A quantitative content analysis was used to examine the two newspapers' coverage for one month, from August 01, 2021, to August 31, 2021. The findings of the study revealed that the coverage of the Nation was heavily war-oriented, with a percentage of 69.2%, while Dawn's coverage was peace-oriented, with 53.7% of its contents falling in that category.*

**Keywords:** War Journalism, Peace Journalism, U.S. Withdrawal, Afghanistan, Taliban, Content Analysis

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## INTRODUCTION

The United States has completed its military withdrawal from Afghanistan, ending a nearly two-decade military mission that began shortly after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001. The United States has called an end to its military operations in Afghanistan. Over 123,000 civilians were flown out of the country, including over 6,000 Americans.

Since 1978, Afghanistan has been engulfed in conflict. Although the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan has taken many forms over the past four decades, the ‘Saur Revolution’ and subsequent invasion by the United Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) marked the start of a long period of military violence and instability in the country that is still wreaking havoc (Elham, Haand & Sadiq, 2021).

Over the last few years, Peace journalism has attracted the attention of communication experts, especially those concerned about journalists’ over-reliance on war as a source of information. As a result, journalists covering conflicts must concentrate on maintaining the journalistic standard of impartiality.

Peace journalism is defined as “when editors and reporters make decisions about what to report as well as how to report it in ways that allow society at large to recognize and value nonviolent conflict resolution” (Lynch, 2015).

According to media scholars, War coverage in the Media is prone to sensationalism, allegiance to one side, and an overemphasis on physical destruction and human loss (Allen & Seaton, 1999; Cohen, Toffler & Toffler, 1994). By expanding Galtung’s (1998) initial war/peace journalism category, McGoldrick and Lynch (2006) defined peace journalism and described how it might be used.

Traditional media becomes nationalistic, sensationalistic, escalatory, and elite-oriented during wars and conflicts. The vast amount of literature on the relationship between media and conflict has significantly contributed to identifying a wide range of factors such as strategic interests, patriotism, and the dominance of elite discourse that contribute to making media weapons of war rather than impartially reporting on conflicts (Jan & Hussain, 2020).

Many mass communication scholars feel that during times of war, people become more reliant on the media, resulting in higher media effects on audiences. However, according to critical conflict communication research, the mainstream media is often accused of producing propaganda and fanning the fires of nationalism in ways that mislead viewers about what is happening in war zones. The media’s predisposition for sensationalism and embellishment of genuine events during wars has been studied by academics such as Jake Lynch and Annabel McGoldrick. (Hussain, 2020)

The concern that media may worsen conflicts is as old as the understanding that it could be used to promote peace. In the early twentieth century, the League of Nations developed Nation Radio to spread peace and harmony across Europe.

The U.N. established crisis radios to foster peace in Africa's problematic region (Becker, 2007). Currently, hundreds of peace media sources exist to promote peace in turbulent areas of Africa, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and South Asia

Since the media are key institutions that may help people understand one another while also having the capacity to inflame conflicts (Galtung, 2006), this research has analyzed how Dawn and the Nation portray the U.S. military withdrawal from Afghanistan. The study examined whether coverage of Pakistani print media in the selected time period is war-oriented or peace-oriented and ascertained the level of their war and peace inclination.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

McGoldrick and Lynch (2000) proposed 17 journalism-based practices, including depicting the conflict as involving more than two parties, focusing on remedies rather than differences, reporting on the consequences of mental trauma rather than just addressing visible effects, and using language that empowers rather than victimizes individuals. "Peace journalism," according to Lynch (2008), "is when editors and reporters make decisions – about what to cover and how to tell it – that allows society at large to contemplate and value nonviolent conflict resolution."

Johan Galtung used the term "peace journalism" to distinguish it from "war journalism" (Galtung & Fischer, 2013). Peace journalism aims to change the way conflict is represented to support conflict transformation by focusing on potential solutions and peacebuilding initiatives, specifying the root causes of conflict, and attempting to avoid seeing conflict in black-and-white terms rather than putting the focus on violence and losers and winners (Demarest & Langer, 2021).

The primary goal of peace journalism is to allow all parties involved in a dispute to express opinions (Kemp, 2007; Shinar, 2004; Ottosen, 2011). Spencer (2005), a peace journalism scholar, argues that it follows a humane path and offers alternatives to violence. However, peace journalism has also been criticized as akin to public relations (Hanitzsch, 2007). According to Loyn (2007), peace journalism is counterproductive since it thinks that "preventing conflict is everyone's task". Similarly, Wolsfeld (1997) believes peace journalism is hampered by the inherent conflict between the peace process and journalistic standards.

Whereas, Peace journalism proponents (Shinar, 2007; Kempf, 2012; Lynch, 2013 & 2014; Hussain, 2017) feel it is high-quality reporting at times of conflict. Peace journalism scholars have done a slew of analytical and empirical research to look at conflict reporting, factors that impact the production process, and the consequences on people while devising practical techniques to train journalists for conflict reporting. According to scholars such as Dov Shinar, Wilhelm Kempf, and Jake Lynch, the transition to peace journalism does not entail a full departure from traditional journalism, but rather a modest shift toward a focus on peace while demonstrating accountability (Hussain & MZ Iqbal, 2017).

As a result, proponents of peace journalism argue that adhering to and diligently implementing peace journalism principles not only tries to steer the opportunities to better reform the traditional journalistic practice but also aims to empower individual journalists by influencing changes in the environmental circumstances that steer their reportage (Peleg 2007, Lynch & Galtung 2010; Lynch 2013).

According to Lee and Maslog's (2005) study of 10 English newspapers in five Asian nations (India, Pakistan, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka) interpreting regional disputes, "peace journalism is a concept whose time has not come." Furthermore, in 1,973 stories from 16 daily newspapers from four Asian countries, Lee revealed a significant relationship between war/peace journalism framing and language. Finally, as an alternative to traditional war reporting, Lee argues that peace journalism has some structural faults that have yet to be addressed.

Similarly, in another study, Lee & Maslog (2005) found that five Asian newspapers used war Journalism framing to cover regional conflicts but Peace Journalism framing to cover the Iraq war. Significantly, researchers are particularly interested in the impact of a country's dominant public opinion, geopolitics, and foreign policy on adopting certain framing and tone in the media when it is not directly involved as a war side (Stromback & Dimitrova, 2005; Dimitrova & Ahern, 2007).

Batool, Yasin, and Khurshid (2015) investigated whether either government process influenced Aman ki Asha, a campaign initiated by two media organizations in 2010 to encourage peace and mutual growth of India-Pakistan diplomatic and cultural ties, coverage in the media. Researchers examined how Aman ki Asha was covered in Pakistani and Indian print media. They concluded that media coverage of Aman ki Asha in both countries is positive and helpful, as it promotes peace and attempts to provide the groundwork for peace.

According to the Norwegian scholar, the mainstream media take the 'low road' in presenting conflict, describing it as a violent collision between two adversaries within enclosed space and time, choosing to suppress peace initiatives, and adopting a zero-sum approach. This is what he refers to as war reporting. On the other hand, Galtung (1986, 2002) promotes a "high road" approach to peace journalism that focuses on conflict change. According to Galtung (2002), peace journalism aims to move beyond shallow reflections of violence in war zones, revealing the core causes of conflicts and demonstrating prospects for peace without violence.

Media scholars (Galtung, 1998, 2013; Lee & Maslog, 2005; Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005) believe that Peace journalism is a better solution to more traditional war reporting that gives voice to people rather than elites to make conflicts more transparent and, as a result, open the door for the war resolution.

Jan & Hussain (2020) investigated various factors that influence the reporting of Taliban and Karachi's ethnopolitical conflicts in Pakistan and identified peace-oriented strategies for helping in the resolution of these conflicts. The researchers have found that the nature of a conflict and threats from stakeholders are important factors shaping conflict news.

Moreover, according to McGoldrick and Lynch (2006), reporting on violence without including background information results in not only a distorted discourse but also a deliberate distortion of the conflict, especially because the news media shapes public opinion and strengthens the public's interpretation of what is going on (Ogenga 2012).

Peace journalism, on the other hand, has its opponents. Critics say that the idea violates the professional standard of objectivity (Loyn, 2007) and ignores the institutional restrictions that govern journalists' work (Hanitzsch, 2007). In addition, opponents of Peace journalism argue that it provides a solid theoretical base for research since it was systematically constructed in terms of theoretical framework (Galtung, 1986, 2002) and practical direction (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005).

In their measurement of war/peace performance, Neumann and Fahmy (2016) proposed an index of conflict reporting that combined several practices associated with war/peace journalism.

In this way, the researchers identified 18 war/peace journalism practices. Items from peace and war journalism are frequently used in content analytic studies. Eventually, the study mentioned that journalistic values and norms differ across nations, which suggests the need for research into how peace and war are conceptualized.

According to studies on state-press relations, the Media follows the official foreign policies of their respective countries and is significantly affected to a great extent by those in power (Rasul, Robinson & McDowell, 2017).

To conclude, most earlier studies on media coverage of war/conflict in Afghanistan were conducted exclusively in the West. Given US military withdrawal relevance and importance for Pakistan and its foreign policy, the study examines how the Pakistani media framed the U.S. military withdrawal from Afghanistan.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:**

This study's theoretical framework is based on the war and peace journalism model. This study was guided by the war and peace journalism model proposed by Johan Galtung (1986). Peace journalism aims to de-escalate violence, promote peace, and present possibilities through a distinctive manner of covering conflicts in favour of peace (Siraj, 2010). Since the 1970s, Johan Galtung has used the concept of peace journalism to create two competing forms of war reporting, War and peace Journalism (Galtung, 1986, 2002). Lynch and McGoldrick (2005) developed Galtung's (1986, 2002) peace journalism model into a 17-point plan that lays forth practical criteria for more fair conflict reporting.

## **RESEARCH QUESTION**

**RQ1:** To what extent did the Nation and Dawn's coverage of U.S. military withdrawal from Afghanistan was war-oriented/peace-oriented?

## METHODOLOGY

This study employs the content analysis technique to analyze how Dawn and the Nation depict U.S. Military withdrawal from Afghanistan. In addition, this research examined whether coverage of Pakistani print media in the selected time period, from August 01, 2021, to August 31, 2021, is war-oriented or peace-oriented and also ascertained the level of their war and peace inclination.

This study is a content analysis and employs Galtung's model of war and peace journalism (1986) to understand the frequency of war and peace orientations in The Nation and Dawn's coverage. To find out the answer to the question, the study considers the news stories in the newspapers. Content analysis, according to Riffe, Lacy, and Fico (1998), is a "systematic and replicable" text analysis that is often used to investigate media messages. While communication scholars primarily used this research approach, it has increased in popularity and is now widely used in scholarly publications on various subjects.

In this study, the content analysis approach is used, which according to Lynch (2014) and Youngblood (2012), is the most often employed approach for examining content aspects in peace journalism research. The whole news story was taken as a unit of analysis for the study. The systematic sampling technique has been applied to get the sample from the universe of the study. Total of 73 news stories from both newspapers were selected to analyze the data. The data was gathered using Lee and Maslog's (2005) war and peace journalism metrics.

## FINDINGS

**RQ1:** The research question of this study was formulated to examine the coverage of both newspapers in terms of the indicators 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 inclination. The findings shown in the following table have answered the question.

**Table1: Comparison of the Nation and Dawn in terms of war/peace indicators**

The Nation War Journalism			Dawn War Journalism		
	Freq.	%		Freq.	%
Visible effects	40	10.4%	Visible effects	25	9.4%
Difference oriented	28	7.3%	Difference oriented	17	6.4%
Elite-oriented	42	10.9%	Elite-oriented	26	9.8%
Here and now	23	6.0%	Here and now	7	2.6%
Dichotomy: Good guys and bad guys	23	6.0%	Dichotomy: Good guys and bad guys	6	2.3%
Two-Party Orientation	13	3.4%	Two-Party Orientation	6	2.3%
Partisan	32	8.3%	Partisan	12	4.5%
Zero-sum Orientation	30	7.8%	Zero-sum Orientation	4	1.5%
Use of Demonizing Language	35	9.1%	Use of Demonizing Language	20	7.5%
Total	<b>266</b>	<b>69.2%</b>	Total	<b>123</b>	46.3%
The Nation Peace Journalism		<b>Dawn</b> <b>Peace Journalism</b>			
Invisible Effects of war	12	3.1%	Invisible Effects of war	3	1.1%
Solution Oriented	16	4.2%	Solution Oriented	25	9.4%
People Oriented	6	1.6%	People Oriented	6	2.3%
Causes and Conse- quences	16	4.2%	Causes and Consequences	25	9.4%
Avoid Dichotomy	26	6.8%	Avoid Dichotomy	17	6.4%
Multi-party Orienta- tion	14	3.6%	Multi-party Orientation	14	5.3%
Non-partisan	12	3.1%	Non-partisan	12	4.5%
Win-win Orientation	11	1.3%	Win-win Orientation	18	6.8%

Avoid Demonizing Language	16	4.2%	Avoid Demonizing Language	22	8.3%
Total	<b>118</b>	<b>30.8%</b>		<b>142</b>	<b>53.7%</b>

As shown in Table 1, the coverage of the Nation was heavily war-oriented with a percentage of 69.2% (266), while in Dawn, the war journalism percentage is 46.3% (123). In one representative war journalism story, the Dawn (August 10 2021) reported that 'Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi has said that irresponsible withdrawal of the U.S. and NATO forces from Afghanistan may give benefit to militants and lead to unrest in the country.'

The highest frequency of war journalism was identified in The Nation (10.9%), followed by (9.4 %) in Dawn. Leaders, government sources, and the elite as news sources were the most common war journalism indicator in coverage, with 10.9% in The Nation and 9.8% in Dawn. Reporting on the visible effects of conflict was the second most prevalent war journalism indicator in the coverage, with 10.4% in the Nation and 9.4% in Dawn. This story focused mainly on death, injuries, violent activities, and their visible effects. According to Galtung (1986), this indicator generates trauma in the audience. This dependence excluded ordinary people affected, as well as alternate perspectives from the other side, resulting in one-sided reportage that emphasized a propagandist voice for 'us.' As a result, the viewpoints of common people, who may uncover cover-ups and deception and provide an alternate perspective to elite thinking, have been marginalized.

The use of demonizing language was the third most common indicator in coverage of both the newspapers, with 9.1% in the Nation and 7.5% in Dawn. Again, demonizing phrases and labels were utilized to build an enemy image of the U.S military.

In contrast, in Dawn newspaper, 53.7% (142) stories are presented in a peace journalism manner, and in the Nation peace indicators were 30.8% (118) of its total coverage. Consider this news excerpt in Dawn to get an idea of the coverage, 'Pakistan is the victim. We had nothing to do with 9/11. We teamed up with the U.S. to fight back, and after that, there was a major backlash against Pakistan.'

Reporting on the causes and consequences of the U.S military withdrawal was the most common peace journalism indicator, 9.4% in the Nation and 4.2% in the Dawn newspaper. Instead of emphasizing the conflict's visible effects, Dawn's coverage highlighted the causes and their impacts on ordinary Afghan people. The second most common indicator of peace journalism was solution-oriented reporting, with 9.4% in Dawn and 4.2% in the nation. News stories predicted peace and harmony and the importance of agreements and talks. The third most common indicator was avoiding demonizing language, 8.3% in Dawn and 4.2% in the Nation.

Hence, the analysis of this study revealed that the coverage of the Nation was heavily war-oriented, with a percentage of 69.2%, while Dawn's coverage was

peace-oriented, with 53.7% of its contents falling in that category. Comparatively, Dawn provided the least amount of war journalism reporting.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The media play a significant role in shaping social realities and can greatly impact public perceptions. However, only a limited number of critical readers can interpret the media's genuine goals since they operate in such a nuanced and ideological manner. Additionally, most news focuses on conflicts and violence, which only represent one facet of the social reality. However, the media only covers the most visible aspects of the issue, which might exacerbate the conflict.

Although the news media cannot ignore war news by nature, according to Galtung (2013), its concentration should not be solely on depicting war and violence. Johan Galtung's War and Peace Journalism Model guided this research (1986). The focus of this study was to identify the frequency of war and peace indicators in newspaper coverage and their war and peace inclination. The media embraced the war journalism style, focusing more on the elites' point of view, as shown by the content analysis findings in the table above. The analysis of this study revealed that the coverage of the Nation was heavily war-oriented, with a percentage of 69.2%, while Dawn's coverage was peace-oriented, with 53.7% of its contents falling in that category. The quantitative content findings indicate that the war journalism narrative dominates in both newspapers.

The news media's ostensible duty can also explain the dominance of war journalism in reporting on promoting national interests and government agendas. Moreover, according to Liebes (1992), during conflicts, journalists face contradictory pressures of dedication to their community and its fate, as well as loyalty to the standards and conventions of journalism. As a result, Journalism and journalists are put to the test when covering wars, requiring them to choose between nationalistic fervour and a distanced viewpoint. Similarly, flak, the propaganda model's fourth filter (Herman and Chomsky, 1988), specifies the pressure on the media to cover subjects in certain ways.

Peace journalism may assist journalists in avoiding certain aspects of war journalism in their daily work. Similarly, journalists trained in peace journalism may use different terms and frames to avoid using accusatory, demonizing, victimizing, and emotional language. They might also broaden their sources and learn how to avoid 'us vs them' reporting by enabling voice to the other stakeholders and common people. According to Lynch & McGoldrick (2005), conflict analysis enables journalists to report conflict more precisely, restore parts of conflict stories that have been overlooked or marginalized, and accept responsibility for their inextricable involvement in the events and processes they cover (Dag, 2013).

A peace journalism approach, according to Galtung (2002), involves media coverage that seeks the resolution and de-escalation of conflicts, which is dependent on media coverage both before and after the conflict happens. Peace journalism offers journalists a legitimate set of tools for approaching conflict analytically, allowing them to project a multi-party conflict model and seek out and report on peace efforts

(Lynch, 2007).

Peace journalism emphasizes the need for journalists to be aware of the implications of their reporting, which may be accomplished by attempting to understand the political, economic, and social aspects that fuel conflicts and presenting them in a larger context. Although the media will never be able to resolve conflicts on their own, by putting issues in a larger context, they may be able to reduce tensions. Notably, if they adopt Galtung's model of peace journalism, the media may play a significant part in the resolution of conflicts. The media should give more space to the peace talks and sufferings on both ends and give the common Afghan people voices. If they adopt Galtung's model of peace reporting, the media can play a significant role in the resolution of hostilities. Peace journalism highlights journalists' potential influence in conflicts and assigns them some responsibility for reducing or preventing violence and resolving disputes via peaceful methods. Put another way; it's a different approach to doing "broader, fairer, and more accurate reporting" (Lynch, 2002).

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