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# Making Policy on the Front Page: How the National Media Shape Indian Foreign Policy Toward Pakistan

Sehr Taneja

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# **Making Policy on the Front Page**

*How the National Media Shape Indian Foreign Policy Toward Pakistan*



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## Abstract

This thesis explains how national media shape Indian foreign policy toward Pakistan. I use empirical research to explore the contribution of national media to the formulation of policy during the 1999 Kargil War and 2001 Agra Summit between India and Pakistan. I created a database of news articles in the leading national English newspapers—*The Times of India* and *Hindustan Times* and then coded and analyzed them. I analyze the media's role by identifying trends in media strategies such as framing, agenda setting, and manufacturing consent. In addition, I analyze government documents and parliamentary debates to gather information on the policy processes and on government-media relations. I suggest that the media's role in shaping policy depends on the level of internal dissent, understood as disagreement between the government and the opposition parties. I argue that national dissent allows the media to emerge as an independent actor, influencing the formulation of foreign policy by presenting their own opinions and policy suggestions. This was the case during the Agra Summit. On the other hand, as seen in the case of the Kargil War, during times of national consensus, the media echo the government's voice and garner public support for the government's actions. As such, this thesis contributes to existing scholarship and primary fieldwork by providing an original analysis of the intersection of media and foreign policy.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

BBC	British Broadcasting Company
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
CFL	Ceasefire Line
HT	Hindustan Times
INC	Indian National Congress
J&K	Jammu and Kashmir
LoC	Line of Control
LS	Lok Sabha
MEA	Ministry of External Affairs
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement
NDA	National Democratic Alliance
NSAB	National Security Advisory Board
NSC	National Security Council
RS	Rajya Sabha
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
TOI	The Times of India
UN	United Nations
UNCIP	United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan
UNSC	United Nations Security Council

## Introduction

*“We have to give credit to the media. They play a role in defining the atmosphere in which India-Pakistan relations exist.” - Ambassador Cameron Munter (2016)*

On December 16, 2012, the gangrape of an innocent girl<sup>1</sup> galvanized the media and public opinion, and generated a national debate. Both cable news and print media offered non-stop coverage of the debate and of the widespread protests. The government was forced to respond to the growing anxiety and public outrage, expressed across a wide variety of media sources and outlets. In response, the government modified the Indian Penal Code<sup>2</sup>, to incorporate stringent punitive measures for those accused of sexual offences. This modification was a result of the combined effect of public outrage and impactful journalism. In this case, the national media brought the nation together to ensure that the government amend the law to reflect stronger measures of justice for sexual offences. Here, investigative journalism brought to light the nation’s changing societal norms. Along with the public, the media demanded legislative amendments and played an important role in leading to policy change (Hukil 2013). The “Nirbhaya” case is not the only testament to the media’s role in the formulation of policy in India. Another important incident took place on February 2016, when the government indicted a student of Jawaharlal Nehru College, Kanhaiya Kumari<sup>3</sup> for sedition. At this time, news anchor

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<sup>1</sup> Popularly known as the “Nirbhaya” gangrape case.

<sup>2</sup> The changes to the penal code are reflected in the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act of 2013 that provides more stringent justice measures for sexual offenders (The Indian Express).

<sup>3</sup> This incident came to be known as the “JNU Row.” President of JNU students’ union, Kanhaiya Kumari,

of the most watched English news channel TIMES NOW<sup>4</sup>, Arnab Goswami led the anti-national lobby against JNU students. In doing so, Goswami drew the entire nation into a debate on India's sedition charges, engaging the government and the people in a conversation about the country's laws and legislative abilities (Mishra 2016; Ganguly 2016). Here, the media incited impactful debates on matters of national importance. These cases have offered insight into the media's role in shaping India's domestic policies.

While the national media's role in domestic issues is documented and discussed, their contribution to foreign policy is more complex and less researched. In this thesis, I endeavor to tap into this lacuna, extending the research on the media's role in policy-making from the domestic to foreign realm. I suggest that the news media help shape foreign policy toward Pakistan, and argue that the nature of the media's contribution is dependent on the national political atmosphere. During times of internal dissent, the media emerge as an independent actor, offering their opinions on the policy matter. On the other hand, in cases of national consensus, the media echo the government's voice and garner public support for the government's decisions. Here, it is crucial to note that the media serve as the link between the public, government and opposition parties (Soroka 2003, 29). This highlights the role of the media as the interlocutor without which it would be difficult for the various actors to communicate with each other.

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was arrested by the Indian government on sedition charges, based on his involvement on campus with a demonstration to pay homage to the Kashmiri separatist Afzal Guru, who partook in the attack on the Indian parliament in 2001. Kumari was charged as being anti-national (Sugden 2016).

<sup>4</sup> Selected from 2016 week 47 listings of weekly impressions (Television Viewership in Thousands) provided by Broadcast Audience Research Council India, <http://www.barcindia.co.in/statistic.aspx>. Accessed on Dec. 3, 2016.

As the most prominent form of mass communication within the country, the media are able to determine the information that reaches the public, influencing their consumption and perception of this information. Here, Baru notes that in this age of information technology, broadcast media turn foreign policy matters into sensational debates aired on national television that capture the attention of viewers and increase “the role of media in shaping political thinking” (Baru 2009, 279). This points to the role of the media as an arbitrator between the government and the people, emphasizing the media’s crucial role within a democracy. This is especially important in the case of foreign policy since most people are only able to gain access to information on these matters through the media.

This thesis combines a review of existing scholarship with empirical analysis to explore how national media shape Indian foreign policy toward Pakistan. To do so, I analyze the media coverage, parliamentary debates, and government statements during the India-Pakistan war of 1999 and the bilateral summit of 2001. I explain the rationale for this selection in the “Research Methods” section of this chapter. Before that, I review the literature on media strategies and role in a policy context, and on news media in India. In the following chapter, I discuss the evolution of foreign policy in India, before proceeding to empirical analysis of the selected cases. In this thesis, I explore the role of the media, taking into account how this role is contingent on the degree of internal dissent. This suggests that media both influence and are impacted by the political climate of the nation. In this regard, I analyze how the media’s contribution varies depending on the level of national discord on the issue.

I then look at how the media shape policy discussions through media strategies

such as framing, agenda setting, and manufacturing consent. To briefly explain these phenomena, the media uses the framing strategy to create “interpretive frames” (Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993), consequently using specific lenses, stereotypes, and symbols to present news (Entman 1991). Further, the media use the agenda setting strategy to determine the salience of issues on public and governmental agendas (McCombs & Shaw 1972); and the manufacturing consent strategy to artificially generate support for the elite and the government (Chomsky and Herman 1988). I will discuss these strategies in detail later in this chapter. This two-step method, based on the level of internal dissent<sup>5</sup> and media strategies, allows me to thoroughly examine the role of the media in the formulation of foreign policy.

This foundation of internal disagreement warrants a brief discussion on the role of dissent. Within this scope, dissent is understood as a clear expression of discontent or disagreement with government policy as expressed by the opposition political parties. For this thesis, I accept Matthew Baum and Philip Potter’s emphasis on opposition as the “whistleblowers.” They present the opposition parties as “heterogeneous and autonomous political elites in positions of power that have independent access to foreign policy information and the incentive to reliably alter the public when their leaders stray too far from their preferred policies” (Baum and Potter 2015, 21). In the Indian parliamentary system, the opposition parties become privy to foreign policy information primarily through debates in the houses of parliaments. These parties are then able to analyze policies and express disagreement where necessary. I understand the opposition as the

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<sup>5</sup> I first developed this idea of media’s role as a function of internal dissent from Dr. Sanjaya Baru’s research. Dr. Baru finds that the influence of media on the formulation of foreign policy depends on “the extent of domestic political disagreement or consensus on foreign policy issues” (Baru 2009, 278). In this thesis, I test this argument through empirical analysis.

foremost expression of dissent, fulfilling its role to check the ruling government. For this reason, I analyze parliamentary debates to note the reactions and concerns brought up by the opposition. In addition, I acknowledge that this dissent then carries through society and is represented in the voice of the people and the media. As such, I look at the disagreement expressed in the media. In this regard, I see the opposition and the media as the driving force for dissent. Primit Pal Chaudhuri reiterated this understanding, explaining that the media and the opposition often inform and follow each other's take on policy matters, especially when taking a stand against the government (Chaudhuri 2017).

In such cases where the opposition outrightly states discontent with a government policy, it makes room for the media to contribute to policy formulation, as illustrated in Baru's focus on dissent as a crucial factor for media's role (Baru 2009, 279). This indicates that national media are able to arbitrate between opposing sides and stand as an independent actor. However, their role is largely dependent on the nation's political atmosphere, owing to the level of national dissent. Baru identifies internal political dissent as a crucial factor leading to a "turning point" in media's role in foreign policy making. In this regard, he offers the following reason: "the gradual erosion of the domestic political consensus on foreign policy, [gives] the media the role of an arbiter and independent analyst of contending political views" (Baru 2009, 279). This suggests that the cases of national dissent and consensus are likely to have different outcomes. Based on this understanding, it is important to analyze media strategies and roles in conjunction with the varying levels of national disagreement. By placing media coverage in tandem with government statements and policy discussions, I trace the role of the media in the government's foreign policy-making processes. The focus on national

dissent is especially important in the case of India-Pakistan relations given that Pakistan is as much a domestic matter as a foreign policy one (Pandalai 2017). Due to the history of bloodshed and disagreement between the two nations, people in India take keen interest in India-Pakistan affairs, therefore involving national sentiments (Pandalai 2017). In order to understand these driving sentiments and their impact on media coverage and bilateral relations, we must briefly explore the history of India-Pakistan relations.

India and Pakistan were jointly administered under British rule until 1947. It was only after the end of British rule in 1947 that the two partitioned over religious feuds between Hindus and Muslims causing an estimated three million deaths and 15 million displacements (Malone 2011, 54). In 1971, East Pakistan separated from its Western counterpart to form a new nation — Bangladesh. During the Bangladesh Liberation War, India assisted in the formation of the separate nation, straining the already tense relations between India and Pakistan (Pant 2016, 83-84). Since 1947, India and Pakistan have gone to war four times; three of these wars were due to the territorial conflict over Kashmir (Pant 2016, 82). This history of conflict has led to continual hostilities between the countries, consequently sensitizing their bilateral foreign policy decisions. Rajiv Sikri emphasizes the complexities of the relationship and distinguishes Pakistan from India's other neighbors by noting:

Pakistan is India's most difficult neighbour and cannot be dealt with like India's other South Asian neighbours for a number of reasons -- its mindset; its strategic significance for outside powers, nuclear and missile capabilities and its territorial dispute with India over Kashmir. However, the most important difference between Pakistan and India's other neighbours is that for India the relationship with Pakistan is as much a domestic as a foreign policy issue (2009, 38).

The special position of Pakistan makes bilateral relations a matter of national interest.

This is especially important since the public's appetite for news is primarily for domestic

issues (Hook 2016, 270). Placing Pakistan within the realm of India's domestic interests speaks to the public's attentiveness and discussions on matters of bilateral importance. Baru highlights that news related to Pakistan always finds its way to the front page of Indian newspapers (Baru 2009, 282). Thus, India-Pakistan affairs arouse national discourse, allowing the media to capitalize on the public's interest.

India boasts a vast news media network. Largely privatized, the media most often play an important role by contributing to controversial domestic and international matters. They do so by presenting a view independent of the government's stand. This is especially so in cases of national dissent, since internal disagreement creates a vacuum in policy debates, making room for the media to enter the discourse. It is then important to note that internal disagreement has been on the rise since Jawaharlal Nehru's leadership in India.

Over time, India has become more prone to internal dissent, especially in matters of foreign policy. It can be said that "the largely consensual style of foreign policy has been replaced by approaches that vary from being simply different, to being partisan and ideological" (Malone et al. 2015). Sanjaya Baru reiterates this idea, finding that few disagreed with the foreign policy of India's first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru. With India's non-aligned position during the Cold War, the national media and the public accepted Nehru's policies as acting in national interest. In this context, Baru highlights that the media had a minimal role to play (Baru 2009). I will discuss this in detail in chapter 1, which focuses on the evolution of Indian foreign policy. In the present scenario, following the decline of this consensual era, that media play the role of an "arbitrator" between the various actors (Malone et al. 2015, 6). This shift from domestic



consensus to dissent has given the national media the opportunity to enter foreign policy discussions. In this position, the media are able to help shape policy by expressing an independent opinion, guiding public perception, and engaging with the government. The collaborative role of the media and the opposition can be illustrated using the following examples.

In times when the opposition and the government are in disagreement, the media are able to emerge as an independent actor. In the time following the 2008 November 11 attacks in Mumbai (hereafter referred to as 26/11) there was national outrage against Pakistani authorities that allowed proliferation and outsourcing of terror. At this time, a series of events took place in which the media were an active player. In July 2009 after the Non-aligned Movement<sup>6</sup> summit in Egypt. Prime Minister Singh got caught in the infamous Shark el-Sheikh incident for engaging in conversation with his counterpart in Pakistan and discussing Balochistan<sup>7</sup> despite the tremors of 26/11 in India. The leading opposition, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) denounced this by stating, “the waters of the seven seas will not be able to wash the shame” that had come upon India by “compromising” its position on Pakistan (Hindustan Times). Simultaneously, national broadcast media debated on the topic “Is the PM facing nation’s trust deficit?” (quoted in Pandalai 2013, 37). In this situation, the government and opposition were in clear disagreement; consequently, the media were able to enter the discussion and analyze the

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<sup>6</sup> NAM was conceived during the Cold War to bring together states that did not align with any major power. It was primarily a measure to ensure sovereignty and counter imperialism (Grant 1995).

<sup>7</sup> Balochistan is a province is one of Pakistan’s four provinces. It is of strategic and economic importance to the country. However, the recent years have seen a rise of Baloch nationalism, and Pakistan has been blaming the Indian Intelligence for helping these nationalists. As such, it has been an issue of contention between India and Pakistan (Nauman 2016).

various arguments. Here, the media joined the opposition in taking a stand against government actions (Malone et al. 2015). Headlines ranged from India Today's "Manmohan Singh's Balochistan Blunder" (Bhushan 2009) to Hindu's "Sell-out at Sharm-el Sheikh." These opinionated articles suggest that the media were able to offer their own views and analysis of the incident, indicating that media emerged as an independent and influential actor. Within this scope, South Asia researcher, Shruti Pandalai underlines the media's efforts to drive the government to take stringent action, highlighting the nation's rising anger at the government's willingness to engage with Pakistan (Pandalai 2013, 39). Resultantly, the media were able to elicit an explanation from the leaders. Compelled to respond, Prime Minister Singh, on returning from Egypt, said in the Parliament:

Despite the best of intentions, we cannot move forward if terrorist attacks launched from Pakistani soil continue to kill and injure our citizens, here and abroad. That is the national position and I stand by that. . . . I wish to reiterate that the President and the PM of Pakistan know, after our recent meetings, that we can have a meaningful dialogue with Pakistan only if they fulfil their commitment, in letter and spirit, not to allow their territory to be used in any manner for terrorist activities against India (Ministry of External Affairs 2009).

This suggests that Dr. Singh recognized the importance of responding to the questions and concerns raised in national media. As such, the media coverage was able to get a response directly for the government, encouraging the government to reconsider its interaction with Pakistan. However, the media's role is different during times of internal consensus.

On the other hand, in times of consensus, such as in the case of the Sino-Indian border dispute of 2009, the media did not play a significant role since there was domestic agreement on the matter (Pandalai 2013). In this case, I note two contributing factors:

India's concrete policy toward China and a high level of internal consensus. Here, it is important to acknowledge that since China and India have signed a number of treaties regarding border issues, they follow standard operating procedures when an issue does arise (Malone et al. 2013). This indicates that the border issue is governed by stringent, cautious laws that leave little room for outside influence. In this situation, while discussing government policy toward China, national media offered intermittent coverage and mostly supported government action (Pandalai 2013, 59). Contrary to the case with China, Indian policy toward Pakistan is ambivalent and lacks any clear structure or long-term strategy (Pant 2016, 13), creating a vacuum that then allows the media to help shape the policy. This indicates that internal dissent makes room for the media to enter the debate and contribute to policy, while national consensus encourages the media to lend their support to government decisions. Based on this analysis, I present the following hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 1:** News media emerge as a more important actor in cases of national dissent than in cases of consensus.

**Hypothesis 2:** During times of internal consensus, the media garner public support for government policy by echoing the government's voice and reiterating its decisions.

In this thesis, I suggest that the contribution of national media to the formulation of foreign policy is contingent on the level of domestic discord. When there is national dissent, the media emerge as a crucial independent actor, arbitrating between the government, opposition and public. In such situations, the media are able to shape policy by presenting an independent stand, motivating the government to respond to their concerns. On the other hand, in situations of domestic consensus, the media play an

important role in drawing public support for government policy. In order to understand this distinction better, it is important to explore the general debates on media and their reporting strategies, detailed in the following section.

### **Media Strategies and Role in a Policy Context**

To a large extent, the media's role is determined by the political climate in the nation. In some instances, the media serve as an independent actor voicing their own opinion, while in others they reiterate the government's stand. This indicates that the media have the ability to function both in favor of and in opposition to the government. As a result, the media have a hand in shaping foreign policy. Within this scope, one must understand the intention of the media. Foreign editor of the Hindustan Times, Pramit Pal Chaudhuri clarified that the newspapers assume that they do not have an impact by themselves on government decisions. Rather, they understand an issue, comment on it, take a stand when necessary, and then proceed to the latest news (Chaudhuri 2017). This indicates that the media are not actively working toward an impact; rather, they are presenting an independent view. Here, one must acknowledge that even within the media, there exists a diversity of opinions — different news agencies offer different opinions and analyzes. It is crucial to note that others disagree with this belief and argue that the media report with the specific aim of influencing government decisions (Pandalai 2017; Healey 2017). Irrespective of the media's intention, they are able to weigh in on foreign policy debates as a result of the strategies described in this section.

Then, it is essential to consider how national leaders perceive information and

opinions disseminated through the media. “Decision makers act upon and respond to conditions and factors that exist outside them and the governmental organization of which they are a part” (Synder et. al 2002, 60). National media act as one such actor that draws a response from the government. In this context, media can act both as an internal and external variable (Brecher 1972, 183-207). As for the internal role, Brecher highlights media’s role as “the communication network within the political system” (1972, 183-207). This reflects the mediation function of the media—as the arbitrator between the government and the opposition. As an external variable, the media present themselves as an input, influencing decisions of elites through agenda-setting and by manufacturing consent (Synder et. al 2002). Here, they serve as an outside voice analyzing policies and offering an independent view, as noted during times of internal dissent. The internal and external roles of the media are not mutually exclusive. In most situations, the media serve as the internal communication link and simultaneously carry out their external role of analysis and influence. To carry out these functions, the media use three important strategies to contribute to policy discussions—agenda setting, framing and manufacturing consent.

### Agenda Setting

This strategy represents news media’s ability to determine the salience of issues on the public agenda. Through this, the media are to serve as priming mechanism, drawing the government’s attention to matters that are important to the public, and priming them for the government’s focus and response. Bernard Cohen first discussed agenda setting in *The Press and Foreign Policy*, stating, “The Press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful

in telling its readers what to think about” (Cohen 1965, 13). This suggests that the media are able to direct the attention of the government and public to specific issues. McCombs and Shaw (1972) then explained the agenda-setting theory during their study wherein they studied the relation between issues covered by media and those that the public considered salient during the 1968 presidential election in the United States. They observed the matters that the media focused their coverage on, and then placed these in context of the level of public interest in various issues, as determined by a range of surveys. Finding that the public generally shared the media’s view of what is important, they were able to emphasize the agenda-setting role of media (McCombs & Shaw 1972). Chanan Naveh emphasizes that this representation of foreign policy events through the media influences elite decision-makers to respond to the agenda items (Naveh 2002, 10). In a personal interview, former US ambassador to Pakistan, Cameron Munter presented the following view of decision-makers: “[the] role of press was very much on the mind of the leaders. Leaders pay very close attention to what the news said” (Munter 2016). This suggests that government decision-makers take note of the issues highlighted by the press, reiterating the media’s agenda-setting role and their influence on the government.

This agenda-setting function of the media is prominent in the case of China’s foreign policy. James Reilly highlights that by deciding news coverage of events and reflecting nationalist opinions, news media play a role in setting the Chinese foreign policy agenda, exerting pressure on the government to act urgently and carefully on these matters (Reilly 2012, 40). Discussing the case of Chinese media coverage of protests in China against the possibility of Japan’s seat in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), Wang and Wang observe the impact of the media that set the policy agenda,

narrow policy options, create urgency and influence the final decision (Wang & Wang 2014, 216).

In the case of Indian media, I turn to the coverage of the 26/11 terror attacks in Mumbai. Pandalai highlights that during this time, encouraging the government to act urgently and pushing for severe measures against Pakistan, Indian media set out an array of policies for the government, eventually playing an active role in influencing the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), by proposing that the government should consider suspending talks with Pakistan and debate military strategy moving forward (Pandalai 2013, 41). While leading journalist of TIMES NOW, Arnab Goswami led a debate on the option of a surgical strike in retaliation, titled “Will striking Pakistan solve things?” (2008), CNN IBN’s discussion was called “Public anger against inaction. What are India’s military options?” (2009). These debates that took place in the wake of the incident suggest that the media began discussing options the government had not yet proposed or confirmed. This indicates their agenda-setting role that allowed them to suggest and encourage specific actions on the part of the government. My analysis of the Agra Summit reaffirms this role of the media, revealing that the government was forced to respond to the media’s concerns about discussions with Pakistan despite border incursions. In addition, the government made note of and apologized for its lack of engagement with the media during the summit. Debates on these issues took place during the parliamentary sessions that followed the summit and referenced media coverage of these setbacks confirm the agenda-setting role of the media. However, this is not the only media strategy at play, the media also engage in frame the news stories to direct the public and government’s interpretation of events.

## Framing

The strategy of “media framing” represents the lens or angle that news media take to present a story. This gives the media the power to create “interpretive frames” (Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993), consequently using specific lenses, stereotypes and symbols to present news (Entman 1991). This highlights that the media retain the power to drive the interpretation and perception of incidents. Shanto Iyengar analyzed the role of media framing in context of coverage of poverty in America. “Political issues are defined primarily through news reports, and since news coverage is inevitably expressed in particular frames, the influence of the media on public opinion can be significant,” explained Iyengar (1991). This is especially important in the case of foreign policy news, since the public does not have direct access to details of these events and thus learn about them primarily through the media.

In this regard, Steven Hook explains that news agencies tend to frame coverage on foreign policy issues to simplify the issue for the U.S. population (Hook 2016, 270). Naveh understands this framing process as one through which the media “create the images that reflect and filter reality” as part of the foreign policy dialogue (Naveh 2002, 8). While media agencies in every country may not take the same path, it appears that media, by determining how to present information—whether by simplifying or creating a particular image—retain the power to frame reality in a particular way. As such, they choose how the message reaches the audiences. Here, it is important to reiterate that depending on the circumstances, the media are able to present an independent voice or serve as the mouthpiece of the government. On all accounts, they play the mediating role between the government, opposition and the public. In the post-26/11 situation, it appears



that the media were presenting public opinion in iterating that India was angry about the government's "inaction" (CNN-IBN), while simultaneously offering an independent opinion through policy options. On the other hand, during the India-Pakistan war of 1999, the media echoed the voice of the government (Singh 1999). These situations emphasize that the media use myriad frames to present a story. This was evident in the empirical analysis of both events I identified—Agra Summit and Kargil War. While the media took an anti-government and an anti-Pakistan path during the Agra Summit, they reported on Kargil by explicitly displaying Pakistan in negative light. The Kargil case was marked by the media's broad support for government action during the war, drawing public affirmation for government decisions. This indicates that in most, if not all cases, the media consciously choose a certain outlook and view with which they present a story. In some situations, these frames are selected so as to garner support for elite decisions. This is known as the "manufacturing consent" function of the media, described as follows.

#### Manufacturing Consent

This strategy focuses on the media's inclination to stand in support of government policy and elite institutions. Manufacturing consent was first presented by Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman who note that "mass media of the United States are effective and powerful ideological institutions that carry out a system-supportive propaganda function" (Chomsky and Herman 1988, 306). Further, Piers Robison argues that media are driven to represent and support the view of the executive and elite (the government) — thus artificially manufacturing support for a particular policy (Robison 2001, 525). This suggests that the media do not always present an independent voice; instead, under certain circumstances, the media act a government mouthpiece.

In times of national consensus, one sees the media as the voice of the government rather than the voice of the people as in the case of the Kargil war. I analyze the situations under which this stands true. This thesis suggests that these are the conditions that prompt the media to artificially manufacture public consent for government policy in India. Owing to the rising dissent in the country, this role of the media has been in decline. In the past, the media and public rarely disagreed with the foreign policy presented by India's first PM Nehru (Baru 2009). As understood by this research, the media tend to manufacture consent when there is no dissent from the opposition, as was the case in the Cold War era under Nehru. Through empirical analysis, I observed that this strategy was also at play during the Kargil war when the media came together in support of the government, promoting a nationalist rhetoric and focusing on an anti-Pakistan interpretive frame. In this way, the national media garnered national support for government action in Pakistan. For further analysis of these strategies in the case of India, it is essential to understand how national news media have evolved in the country.

### **News Media in India**

Over the years, media in India have evolved as a significant part of the daily dialogue on matters of importance. When discussing the evolution of media in India, it is important to understand its privatization. The evolution of the media in India can be divided into two phases: the first was from 1947 till 1991 when broadcast media was controlled by the government, giving the government autonomy over all informational revealed through the media. At this time, India had only one TV channel—state-run

*Doordarshan*. In 1991, however, a range of private channels gained importance, leading to the diminishing role of *Doordarshan* (Malone et. al 2010). So, the second phase of the media came after the 1991 privatization and proliferation of broadcast media, when the government lost its control (Malone et. al 2010). Today, India has more than 80 satellite news channels (Thussu 2002, 208) and 14,000 newspapers (Registrar of Newspapers for India). Then, in 1999, during the Kargil War between India and Pakistan, news channels offered non-stop coverage of the war, setting in motion the CNN effect<sup>8</sup>. This highlights the importance of news media in the country (Malone et. al 2010).

Privatization made for a new era of media coverage, presenting the media as an actor independent of the government and giving them control over the information presented to the public. Moreover, this has meant that the media the government are now less likely to exert their influence on or try to sway media coverage (Baru 2009). In addition, these private channels were considered more credible than *Doordarshan* in the country as they are seen to represent independent voices (Thussu 2002, 208). Despite the expansion of private media, India still ranks 133 on the 2016 World Press Freedom Index due to the existing violence against journalists (Reporters Without Borders). Nonetheless, the organization considers Indian media capable of carrying out its journalistic functions. It finds that “although its [India’s] media are dynamic and much more capable of playing the role of democracy’s watchdog than the media in most other countries in last third of

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<sup>8</sup>The following explains the CNN effect with regards to Western governments. With the vast media network in India, the same understanding can be extended to the Indian case as well. “The causal mechanism of the CNN effect is usually conceived in the following way: Media coverage (printed and televised) of suffering and atrocities → journalists and opinion leaders demand that Western governments 'do something' → the (public) pressure becomes unbearable → Western governments do something” (Jakobsen 2000, 132).

the Index” (Reporters Without Borders 2016). This becomes evident in the case of reporting on Pakistan. Since Pakistan presents a sensitive topic, given terrorism problems and border disputes, reporting on these matters can be challenging; regardless, the Indian media raise a voice of dissent and openly discuss these matters. For instance, in a recent case, reporter Arnab Goswami was threatened by a Pakistani terror group due to his coverage of border skirmishes; the government then allotted personal security for Arnab (The Indian Express 2016). Thus, despite the low ranking and violence against journalists, Indian media are reporting on sensitive matters, carrying out their journalistic duties, and expressing their independent voice, even on sensitive foreign policy matters such as issues relating to Pakistan.

## **Research Methods and Case Studies**

In this thesis, I explore how national media shape Indian foreign policy toward Pakistan. I analyze this in context of the national political atmosphere—the level of internal dissent. To measure the extent of dissent, I focus on the statements made by the opposition in the parliament and on dissent expressed in the news media. In addition, I examine the effect of the various media strategies that I have discussed in this chapter. For this, I looked closely at media coverage, parliamentary debates and government statements during two major events in India-Pakistan relations—the Kargil War and the Agra Summit. For the media coverage, I focused on articles in the *The Times of India* and the *Hindustan Times*, India’s leading English-language newspapers. In this section, I explain the rationale for my case selection and the methods I use to carry out my analysis.

## Identified Cases for Analysis

I identify the following important events for analysis:

1. **1999:** Kargil War along the Line of Control (LoC)
2. **2001:** India-Pakistan Agra Summit

These cases—a war and a bilateral summit—have been strategically selected to represent two crucial aspects of the India-Pakistan relationship and challenges to reconciliation. In 1999, India and Pakistan engaged in their last bilateral war; this war was fought in the Kargil district of the conflicted region of Jammu & Kashmir after Pakistani troops crossed the Line of Control (LoC) to enter India. It came to be known as the Kargil War (Chen 2015). This is a particularly important war for media analysis since it was the first time that privatized broadcast media in India offered full-time coverage of the events (Malone et. al 2010; Thussu 2002, 208). As such, it lends itself for scrutiny for media analysis.

Following this war, an India-Pakistan summit took place in Agra in 2001 with the mission of discussing long-standing issues between the countries and working toward their resolution. This was a historic event between the two as they sought to strengthen bilateral ties. However, the peace talks were not successful and the leaders did not sign any treaty (Chaudhuri 2016) . Ambassador Nirupama Rao, the then spokesperson for the Ministry of External Affairs of India, identified the media's role in the failure of these talks. She held that the media responsible for sensationalising the subject matter of the negotiations, especially with regards to Kashmir, and found that the media prevented resolution and normalization of India-Pakistan affairs (Rao 2016). Hence, this summit is especially important in the history of bilateral relations and for media analysis, as

political leaders held the media responsible for driving the nations to an impasse and preventing normalization.

These two events have been pivotal moments in India-Pakistan relations—the latest war and then an attempt to reconcile. While there have been border skirmishes since, these have not been of the scale or consequence as the mentioned cross-border war. As for the present moment, India and Pakistan have been involved in serious border conflict in 2016, following death of Burhan Wani in July 2016, a renowned separatist leader in Kashmir. However, since these events are ongoing and are constantly marked by changing policies and decisions, it is difficult to analyze them accurately. Thus, this thesis covers the time period from 1999 to 2001, leaving room for analysis of more current events once final decisions are made.

### Methodology

This thesis consists of two sections—literature review and empirical analysis. The former presents an analysis of the existing scholarship on the Indian foreign policy, media strategies and their intersection. It also contains detailed evaluations of India-Pakistan relations and of the Kargil war and the Agra Summit. The empirical analysis tests the validity of the hypotheses present for these specific cases. It is divided into three parts: (1) coding of news articles, government statements and parliamentary debates to understand trends in the reporting, (2) evaluation of news reporting in context of the series of events and government decisions, and (3) interviews with top-thinkers in the field.

For each case, I first consolidated all information on the incident to construct a detailed frame of reference of the real-time events. I then placed this in historical context.

For the Kargil War, I analyzed former India-Pakistan wars and the history of the demarcation of national borders. For the Agra summit, I placed the events in context of previous attempts to strengthen bilateral relations. Further, personal interviews with renowned journalists, researchers and government officials supplemented the information gained from secondary research sources. Following this, I used the empirical analysis to estimate the level of internal discord surrounding the incident in India—consensus or dissent. Having understood the domestic climate, I scrutinized media strategies including framing, agenda setting and manufacturing consent<sup>9</sup> for each event, analyzing how they work in relation to the level of national dissent. Based on this, I drew conclusions about the contribution of national media in various circumstances.

### Coding

I coded a range of materials including newspaper articles, government statements and parliamentary debates. This allowed me to identify and examine trends in the media's coverage of these events. In order to code the data, I separated the articles into seven categories for the Kargil War—Consensus, Dissent, Government Mention of Media, Agenda Setting, Media Framing, Unbiased News, and Anti-Pakistan. I explain these categories in detail in chapter 2 and 3 that focus on the empirical analysis of these events. This process consolidated various references and helped me identify trends in reporting. This made for both qualitative analysis drawing from content of the articles and quantitative conclusions based on statistical findings that were derived from the number of references.

I analyzed content from the leading national English-language newspapers. I

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<sup>9</sup> These terms are explained on page 2 of this thesis.

chose to focus on newspapers for two main reasons — relationship with the government and access to resources. As for government-media relations, I turn to Chaudhuri's justification who explains that the credibility of a story depends on the print media. He finds that broadcast media retain the advantage of a shorter news cycle, allowing them to raise issues; however, the story gains credibility only when the print backs it the following morning. If the press chooses not to support a story, then the news dies out. Here, he emphasizes that the government is aware of the print's credibility. As a result, government leaders engage more with members of the print media than with broadcast journalists<sup>10</sup> (Chaudhuri 2016). This highlights the importance of the print media, especially with their longer news cycle that allows them to determine credibility of a story by rigorously checking facts, an aspect that is crucial for a subject as intricate and complex as foreign policy. Further, I chose to analyze English-language newspapers since foreign policy is broadly accepted as an elite discourse. Chaudhuri highlights that the broader mass of the population is only concerned that India is not humiliated, without having any real understanding of what national interest is. Here, he emphasizes that the government rely on the English media for their news, giving them more power to shape policy than the media in vernacular languages (Chaudhuri 2016). As such, it is viable to focus on the English press since most elites in India are among the English-speaking society. This is evident even in the case of the Kargil War since the media focused on building consensus among the elites of the country at this time, since these were the people who had the ability to influence foreign policy (Seshu 1999). So, even if the

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<sup>10</sup> Chaudhuri draws from his experience as a long-term journalist and from his frequent interactions with the prime minister's office. He confirmed that government officials had informed him that leaders are more likely to talk to print media about foreign policy matters.



masses are interested in India-Pakistan affairs, the understanding and influence lies primarily with English-speaking elites (Baru 2009, 281). As for the access to resources, since my research dates back to 1999, it is difficult to procure news channel shows from the time. On the other hand, I was able to access to print coverage of the events from online archives and from the Indian Parliament Library. For my coding, I used articles from the following English-language newspapers with the largest audience<sup>11</sup> :

*The Times of India* (highest readership – 7.6 million)

*Hindustan Times* (second highest readership - 4.5 million)

I coded 112 articles on the Agra Summit and 13 articles on the Kargil war. These were selected from online newspaper archives of Times of India (TOI) and Hindustan Times (HT) that date back to 2000. In addition, I procured materials from the archives of the press clippings department of the Indian Parliament Library. Through the library, I procured files on the various events I covered that include clippings on the real-time coverage of these incidents from various newspapers. These folders are especially important since they are used to brief the decision-makers on the issue. Thus, these are the news articles that most parliamentarians would get their information on the event from. I analyzed all the articles from TOI and HT in these files. This covers the duration of the event and post-event reactions. The selection includes opinion pieces, news articles and a few editorials. Here, it is important to note that there were significantly lower number of articles for the Kargil case due to limited access. While I analyzed all articles available in the parliament library compilation, I could not use articles from online newspaper archives since these only date back to 2000. Nevertheless, there were certain

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<sup>11</sup> Selected from from Indian Readership Survey 2014, taking into account language, circulation, and sales Language wise certified circulation figures for the audit period Jan-Jun 2016.

trends visible from these articles, supplemented and confirmed by government statements and parliamentary debates.

As mentioned earlier, I coded the content of these articles into various categories and then placed these findings in context of real-time events and government decisions.

#### Real-time Events: Contextualizing the findings

In addition to the news articles, I analyzed parliamentary debates from the sessions immediately following the incidents to identify trends in opposition questions and in the government's defense of its actions. This was especially important to note when and in what context the decision-makers make references to the media and its coverage within policy debates.

Further, I took into account government statements and press releases including speeches by the prime minister and minister of external affairs, offering insight into the interaction between the government's perception of the event and of the media's contribution to it. In case of the Kargil War, this also included the report prepared by the Kargil Review Committee, a board constituted by the Indian government to review and study the faults during the war. I used these resources to analyze the detailed series of real-time events and the media's coverage in context of government decisions. Thus, these strengthened the analysis by creating a broader and more concrete framework for media analysis. This was then supported by information from personal interviews with top-thinkers.

#### Personal Interviews

In addition to analysis of primary and secondary materials, I supported my empirical analysis with information from personal interviews with leading journalists, scholars and

government officials, both national and international. The following is a list of the interviewees:

1. Ambassador Nirupama Rao: Former Indian Minister of External Affairs, former Spokesperson for the Ministry of External Affairs
2. Ambassador Cameron Munter: CEO of the EastWest Institute (international non-profit think tank) and former U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan
3. Pramit Pal Chaudhuri: Foreign Editor at Hindustan Times, Senior Associate and Head of the India division of the Rhodium Group (Global Policy Consulting), and former Board Member of India's National Security Advisory Board
4. Bhaskar Hegde: Chief of Bureau, Deccan Herald, Bangalore
5. Jon Healey: Deputy Editorial Page Editor, Los Angeles Times
6. Shashank Bengali: South Asia Bureau Chief, Los Angeles Times
7. Shruti Pandalai: Associate Fellow at the Indian Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis. with expertise in Media and Strategic Communication
8. Smruti Pattanaik: Senior Research Fellow at the Indian Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis, with expertise in India's neighbourhood policy, and author of "Elite Perceptions in Foreign Policy: Role of Print Media in Influencing India Pakistan Relations, 1989-1999"
9. Dr. Rina Kashyap: Associate Professor and Chair in the Department of Political Science, Lady Shri Ram College, New Delhi, specializing in Indian politics and international relations
10. Meenakshi Ganguly: South Asia Director, Human Rights Watch

The interviewees, with their notable experience and varying backgrounds, offered

valuable insights to guide, support and strengthen my findings. Along with the coding of newspaper articles, and analysis of government documents and parliamentary debates, the interviews make for a comprehensive empirical research.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have provided the framework for analysis through a discussion on the global discourse on media strategies in relation to public policy. Given the various factors acting in a country—from electoral motivation to the influence of the elites—it is difficult to completely isolate the effect of the media. However, given the rising importance of public opinion and the expansion of the network of media, it is crucial to analyze the contribution of the media to foreign policy by understanding the media in context of the other actors. There is a growing body of scholarship on media strategies and one on the influence of public opinion on foreign policy. However, there is a lack of research on the intersection of foreign policy and media, especially in South Asian studies. This thesis seeks to fill this vacuum by presenting a case study-based analysis of the contribution of media to Indian foreign policy. In the following chapters, I present my empirical research. I begin by looking at the evolution of Indian foreign policy in context of public opinion, and then present detailed analysis of the role of the media during the Agra Summit and the Kargil War. I suggest that the media emerge as an independent actor in case of national dissent as seen during the Agra Summit, and as a public support-system for the government in times of national consensus as seen in Kargil.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Foreign Policy in India: Theory and Evolution**

#### **Public Opinion and the Media in Foreign Policy Theories**

Foreign policy is often differentiated from other policies that govern a country due to the exclusive way in which it combines national interests with national security. Bernard Cohen captures this emphasis on foreign policy by finding that these concerns of “national interests, rather than special interests, and more fundamental values,” and make foreign policy “more important than other domestic policies of a nation (Cohen, 1968, 530). This distinguishes foreign policy from other policy areas, especially in context of the influence of outside factors such as the media and public opinion. Decision-making elites then hold that foreign policy is beyond the realm of “democratic control and public scrutiny” (Peters and Pierre 2005, 341). Since the national media serve as the link between the government and the public, they are restricted by democratic constraints. To this end, foreign policy elites would consider the media outside the influential factors in policy-making processes, since they work within national boundaries.

While there is a range of scholarly work on the connection between public opinion and foreign policy, that on media and foreign policy is still limited, especially in South Asia. My thesis seeks to fill this vacuum of information by tracking the role that the media have played in important foreign policy decisions. This section will discuss the dominant strands of foreign policy theories and the influence of public opinion on foreign policy. It will then place these theories in context of the Indian case. Drawing from

existing scholarly works, I suggest that public opinion plays an important role in foreign policy decisions. Based on this theoretical analysis, I argue that as the link between the public and the decision makers, the media emerge as an important mediating actor in the discourse on foreign policy.

Foreign policy theory is severely restricted by the conflicting arguments that have persisted through the years. Commenting on this chaos in foreign policy studies, James Rosenau found that “foreign policy analysis is devoid of general theory” (Rosenau 2011, 145). Nonetheless, I will try to briefly explain the opposing strands of policy arguments that are relevant to this research. Walter Carlsnaes presents two opposing views of leading thinkers in the field: the realist and the behavioralist. The two offer fundamentally different views of the formulation of foreign policy. While foreign policy realists, pioneered by Hans Morgenthau focus on the definitive actions by states as the basis for policy, the behavioralist thinkers approach the argument from the lens of the “discrete acts of ‘behavior.’” Within this behavioralist view, the ‘vote’ becomes the “fundamental unit of analysis,” driving the decisions made by foreign policy elites (Carlsnaes 2012, 432-434). This argument suggests that policy-makers work toward gaining public votes, and this ambition guides their foreign policy related decisions. These arguments reiterate the starkly different understandings of policy-making that exist within scholars studying inter-state affairs. However, this isn’t the only dimension of difference. A second difference analyzes the influence of domestic factors on the formulation of foreign policy. In this case, Carlsnaes also divides the traditions of foreign policy theories into *Innepolitik* and *Realpolitik*. *Innepolitik* implies that foreign policy is dependent on a range of domestic factors. Editor of Foreign Affairs magazine and member of the Council

of Foreign Relations, Gideon Rose supported this analysis of the influence of domestic factors by stating that there “are many variants of this approach, each favouring a different specific domestic independent variable ... they all share a common assumption – that foreign policy is best understood as the product of a country's internal dynamics” (Rose 1998, 148). On the other hand, believers of *Realpolitik* disagree with this analysis and suggest instead that foreign policy is determined by “material systemic-level factors,” such as geopolitics and interstate relations (Carlsnaes 2012, 434-435). Thus, while *Innepolitik* supporters view foreign policy as flexible given its dependence on internal political and nonpolitical factors, supporters of the *Realpolitik* offer a more rigid perception of the policy-making process. Within this scope, it is the *Innepolitik* and behavioralist strands of belief that recognize the role of national media and the public in shaping foreign policy. Accepting the media as the segway between decision-makers and the public, this argument can be further understood in context of the scholarship that links foreign policy with public opinion.

To understand the current scholarship on public opinion and foreign policy, one must engage with both the realist and liberal democratic perspectives. These present the dominant debate on the topic (Holsti 1992, 440). Realists view public opinion as a “barrier to thoughtful and coherent diplomacy, hindering efforts to promote national interests that transcend the moods and passions of the moment” (Holsti 1992, 440). This captures the realist understanding of public opinion and foreign policy as an intersection between the emotional and rational. However, liberal democrats adopt a starkly different view of the situation, finding that foreign policy is made more “peaceful” because public involvement is able to constrain government action (Holsti 1992, 440). Thus, public

opinion finds a more dominant space within the liberal democratic take on foreign policy that acknowledges the power of the voice of the people in a democratic setting.

It is then important to consider and evaluate consistency in public opinion.

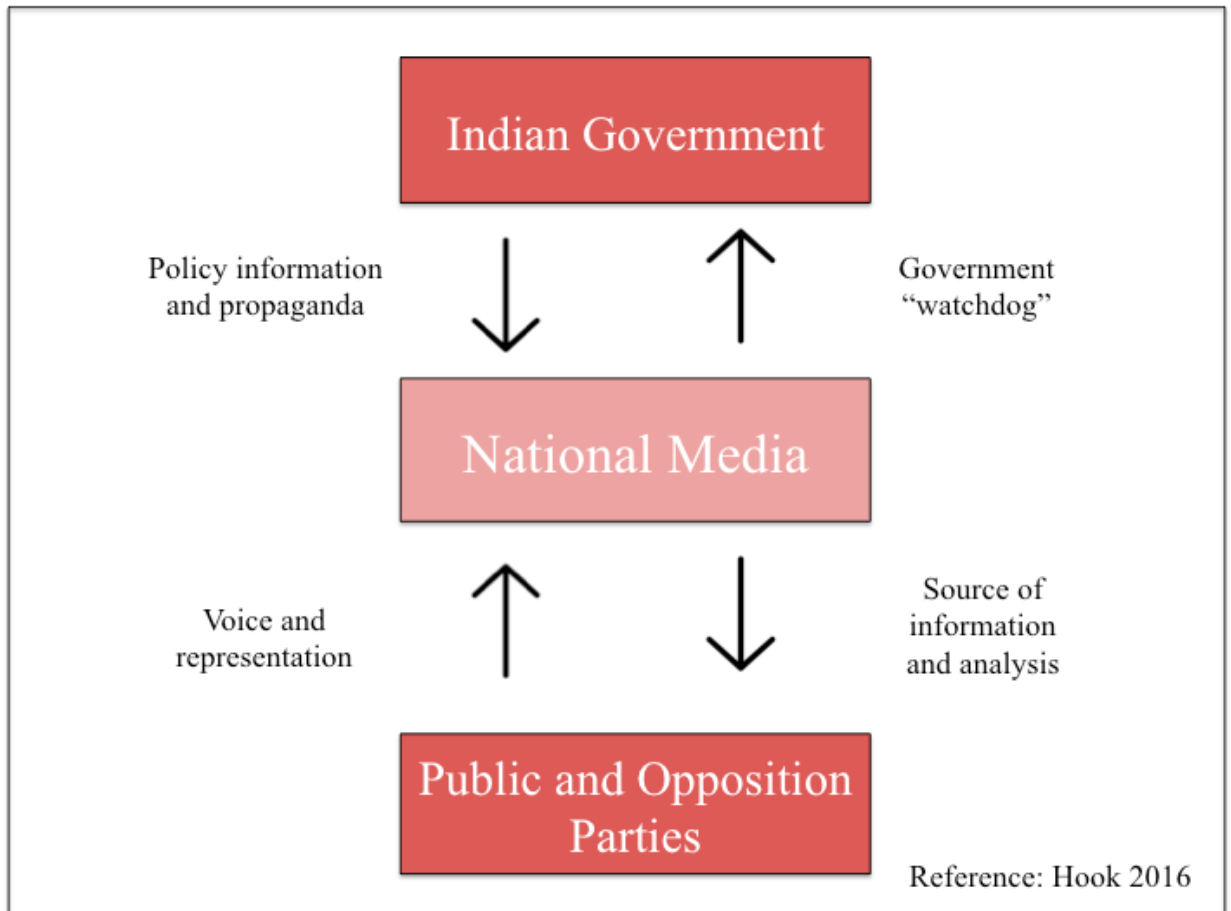
Following World War II, the Almond-Lippmann consensus declared that public opinion is unsuited for foreign policy decisions due to its “volatile and irrational” nature (Holsti 1992, 442). However, many scholars have challenged this consensus in recent years, laying emphasis on the contribution of public opinion. Among them, professors Benjamin Page and Robert Shapiro carried out an extensive survey with 6,000 questions to test the public’s vulnerability to inconsistent decision-making. Contrary to former assumptions, they found that public opinion is fairly stable and rational on both domestic and foreign policy matters (Page and Shapiro 1998). In addition to this study, a broad range of scholarship since the 1970s suggests that public opinion is stable and reasonable, and acknowledges its impact on foreign policy decisions (Soroka 2003, 27). However, this stability does not indicate that the public is well-informed about matters of national importance, such as treaties and interstate relations. Nonetheless, this lack of information does not preclude them from contributing to the discourse or from maintaining a stable position (Holsti 1992, 447-449). In a personal interview, South Asia Bureau Chief of the Los Angeles Times, Shashank Bengali put the importance of public opinion into perspective in the case of India. Bengali highlighted that the current government in India, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has been adept at controlling the message reaching the public. As a result, he has thus been able to garner public support for the nation’s foreign policy decisions, leaving little room for the media to dominate the public’s access to information on such issues (Bengali 2017). Here, Bengali emphasizes



that public support is central to government decisions in this realm, since the government focuses on managing the information that reaches the public and seeks comfort in national support. While there is extensive research on the link between public opinion and the government, this research often omits the role of the media, which is what I aim to analyze in this thesis.

Over the years, few have commented on how the media moderates the discussion between the government and the nation on matters of foreign policy. As previously mentioned, former Ambassador Munter highlighted that the media are as an important source of information for the leaders of a nation who are concerned with the reports presented in the media. Professor Stuart Soroka reiterated this role of the media, stating:

Mass media content is the most likely source of over-time changes in individuals' foreign policy preferences. On one hand, the mass media are the primary conduit between the public and policymakers. Policymakers follow media reports on public opinion, and the media are the public's chief source of information on what policymakers are doing. In addition, the media are the principal means by which the vast majority of individuals receive information about foreign affairs, an issue for which personal experience is unlikely to provide much useful information (Soroka 2003, 28).



**Figure 1:** National media’s bidirectional impact

Establishing this crucial link between the media, the people and the government allows us to understand that the media play a double role, informing both the government and the people. In this way, the media are pivotal to the influence of public opinion on foreign policy decisions. This leads us to the major media strategies previously detailed: agenda setting, framing, and manufacturing consent<sup>12</sup>. Soroka highlights that these media studies have rarely been analyzed in tandem with foreign policy decisions (Soroka 2003, 29), as this research endeavors to do. However, some studies have indicated important links between the two, suggesting the influence of these media strategies on decision-

<sup>12</sup> For definitions, refer to the introduction.

makers and on public opinion. Such research has suggested that “by calling attention to some matters while ignoring others, television [or print] news influences the standards by which governments, presidents, policies, and candidates for public office are judged” (Iyengar and Kinder 1987, 63). It is important to note that decisions related to foreign affairs are outside the realm of immediate tangibility for the common man, since most of these decisions do not directly affect everyday lives of citizens, as suggested by Soroka (2003, 29). This makes the media’s role more important as an informant for the public. However, as is evident from this discussion, different strands of foreign policy connect differently with the role of public opinion and the media. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate the dynamics of the making of foreign policy within a country to be able to understand how the public and the media fit within this context. In the following section, I do this for the case of Indian foreign policy.

### **Evolution of Indian Foreign Policy**

Seven decades after independence, Indian foreign policy still lies on the foundation of an ambiguous framework lacking long-term strategy. Professor of International Relations, Harsh Pant finds that “A nation’s foreign policy flows from several sources: from the international system to its domestic political imperatives to the cultural factors that underlie its society to the personal characteristics and perceptions of individual decision-makers” (Pant 2016, 3). The existence and influence of these factors is evident in the case of India. These various determinants have led to a situation in which India has struggled to identify its national interests that could then guide its foreign policy

(Pant 2016, 4). This lack of strategy, along with an inability to use military force effectively, has prevented India from achieving its potential as a global power (Pant 2016, 8-9). As such, India has failed to formulate a concrete foreign policy to guide its relations with international actors impacting its relations with other nations.

This incoherent structure of foreign policy has caused fluctuations in India's international approach and interactions over the years. Ganguly and Pardesi identify three distinct phases of Indian foreign policy: the Nehruvian era from 1947-1962, the time following the defeat by China from 1962-1991, and the post-Cold War phase from 1991 (Ganguly and Pardesi 2009, 4). One may safely add the latest Modi era of foreign policy, beginning in 2014, to this list (Bengali 2017; Pandalai 2017). Immediately following independence, much of India's foreign policy was determined by its first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru who sought to distinguish the nation's policy from that of its colonial rulers (Pant 2016, 4; Ganguly and Pardesi 2009, 5). With this, Nehru came to be known as the "architect of Indian foreign policy" (Ganguly and Pardesi 2009, 5). During this time, Nehru made a conscious effort to separate diplomatic and political decisions from ones related to the military. He remained reluctant with regards to military spending, weakening India's power to defend itself. Simultaneously, with the tensions of the Cold War peaking, Nehru drove India to join other third world countries in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), reiterating India's culture of national autonomy in decision-making (Pant 2016, 3). However, this non-militaristic framework for policy lasted only till the battle with China in 1962 (Ganguly and Pardesi 2009), following which India reconsidered the links between the military and foreign policy.

The 1962 war marked the beginning of the second era of foreign policy for India

that better integrated foreign and military policies. Pant observes the defeat at the hands of China as the point at which India's realized that "divorcing foreign policy from military policy was a recipe for disaster" (Pant 2016, 9). This war marked the end of Nehruvian politics. The following phase of foreign policy was marked by two major events: India's first nuclear weapon and the India's role in the creation of Bangladesh. As for the former, India tested its first nuclear weapon in what came to be known as the "Peaceful Nuclear Explosion" of 1974 (Pant 2016, 6). A few years before that, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi considered using military force to free Bangladesh from Pakistan. India also reached out to the Soviet Union for support during the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971, leading to the creation of Bangladesh (Pant 2016, 5). Thus, this phase witnessed a closer relation between the foreign and military strategies of India. Later, with the end of the Cold War in 1991, India foreign policy took another turn toward pragmatism (Pant 2016, 4). Even as India entered its third foreign policy era, it continued to remain ambiguous about its objectives.

In 1999, Indian National Congress (INC) domination over Indian politics came to an end with the rise of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). With this, the BJP set up the National Security Council (NSC) in 1999 to advise the government on foreign policy matters. However, institutionalization of policy-making was still limited and the NSC offered suggestions without consulting the Cabinet Committee on Security, strategic policy groups or the National Security Advisory Board (Pant 2016, 11). This indicates that the institutions only existed as symbolic structures with little influence on policy decisions. As such, they were unable to formalize the system of policy-making or lead to any long-term strategy for India. Thus,

despite the various phases of foreign policy under two different governments, India continued to lack a concrete structure or long-term strategy for its policy. Chaudhuri reiterated this lack of planning, emphasizing that NSAB works on putting together long-term strategies for India that serve a limited function in a country that works on a structure of ad hoc policy-making (Chaudhuri 2016). Thus, the latest chapter of foreign policy under Modi launched within this obscure, short-term framework.

In the latest phase, since the rise of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the government has tried to dismantle the legacy of non-alignment, reinvigorate regional discourse, and develop stronger ties with the U.S., Australia and Japan, among others. This new phase of foreign policy under Narendra Modi is often referred to as the “Modi Doctrine” (Hall 2015). This suggests another significant shift in the policy structure of the country. Such discussions on and changes to foreign policy strategy are subject to the increasing disagreement among the political actors in the nation.

With its multi-party framework, the Indian political system is made of strong opposition parties constantly questioning and disagreeing with policies established by the incumbent government. Pant notes the existence of discord on policy matters, stating, “For long, there has been a myth propagated by the political elites in the country that there has been a general consensus across political parties on major foreign policy issues” (Pant 2016,11). This reiterates the idea that agreement on such matters is a “myth,” calling attention to the increasing discord within political leaders on matters of foreign policy. Sanjaya Baru reaffirms this in his understanding of the growing trend of dissent within India; Baru notes that while Nehruvian foreign policy was marked by broad consensus in the government, the following years have witnessed increasing

disagreement and opposition (Baru 2009). Pant emphasizes that the BJP has brought a new Hindu-focused voice within the realm of Indian foreign policy, significantly different from that of the INC (Pant 2016, 12). Further, Pant notes that the only policy matter that has been received with consensus across the country is the national stand on nuclear powers and the joint agreement to give up India's nuclear status only in case of a global disarmament (Pant 2016, 6). This lack of consensus has also restricted progress of India's relations with its neighboring countries.

India, as the leading power in South Asia, has failed to establish its role within the region. Sikri highlights that boundaries in South Asia are colonial demarcations rather than natural ones, leading to intensified cultural differences in the region and a past of violence and bloodshed (Sikri 2009, 18-21). Within this tense atmosphere, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was unable to establish itself as a powerful organization for regional progress and cooperation (Sikri 2009, 25). Due to the inadequacy of SAARC and the severe tensions in the region, policy dynamics in South Asia are unstable. Within this scope, the instability of India-Pakistan relations has repercussions for the security of the broader South Asian region (Sikri 2009, 38). Thus, it is crucial to discuss India's foreign policy toward Pakistan.

Pakistan presents the greatest challenge to Indian policy makers, especially due to the territorial issue of Kashmir that has long been a problem for bilateral relations (Sikri 2009, 28; Pant 2016, 4). Here, Pant notes that in addition to a lack of domestic consensus on the Kashmir issue within India, the two countries have significantly different approaches to peace reconciliation. Harsh Pant observes these differences in stating, "At its foundation, these are irreconcilable differences and no confidence-building measures

are likely to alter this situation ... (they have) different strategies for peace” (Pant 2016, 91). Sikri reiterated this view by acknowledging that Pakistan does not yet have a solid democratic structure, making it difficult to reach a solution to the Kashmir issue (Pant 2016, 25). In this situation where both countries have nuclear abilities, wars are avoided and limited by nuclear deterrence (Sikri 2009, 47). Sikri and Pant agree that India needs internal political consensus to approach the challenge of Pakistan with any success (Pant 2016, 25; Sikri 2009, 44). However, the current state of affairs within and between the two countries prevents such reconciliation. It is then apt to end this discussion on the evolution of Indian foreign policy and the lacuna of strategic culture with the following quote: “India does not have a foreign policy. Period” (Pant 2016, 13). Here, I return to the role of the media, noting that the lack of a concrete foreign policy, as in the case of India, makes way for the media to contribute to these discussions. Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan highlighted the inverse relation between policy and media influence, explaining that the media are able to have a stronger impact when government policy is not stringent or clear, since this ambiguity in policy makes room for the media to maneuver government decisions (quoted in Hook 2008, 305). This lack of concrete policy allows for an analysis of media’s contribution to India’s policy decisions on a case-by-case basis and calls for a historic exploration of India’s relations with Pakistan.

Owing to historical conflicts, India-Pakistan relations are exceptionally problematic. They involve public sensitivities and thus invoke widespread national interest. That said, Pakistan-related topics lead to non-stop media coverage and front page news (Baru 2009, 278). Thus, in this case, the media play an important role. Based on this, India-Pakistan is a crucial test-case for the role of media in the formulation of



foreign policy. This case allows us to test the applicability of general foreign policy and media theories in India. However, to understand the media's contribution to foreign policy, it is necessary to be familiar with the details of bilateral relations that form the foundation on which the role of the media is carried out.

### **Bilateral Relations with Pakistan**

Interstate dynamics within South Asia are strained by the strife-ridden India-Pakistan relations. In this section, I explore the bilateral relations between India and Pakistan, and their broader implications for South Asia. Noting that the events that I have identified the Kargil War and the Agra Summit for empirical analysis in this thesis, I delineate the history of cross-border confrontations and diplomatic negotiations between the nations in this section. Within this scope, it is important to begin by acknowledging that India is the most powerful nation in South Asia and faces the specific challenge of maintaining peace and cooperation in the region (Sikri 2009). However, over time, neighboring countries have begun to see India as a threat rather than an opportunity for growth (Malone 2011, 105). Pakistan, India's neighbour in the North-West, has long harbored a hostile perception of India. Further, David Malone highlights that India-Pakistan relations have been "fraught" since independence from British rule (Malone 2011, 107). On this, Stephen Cohen cites the words of G. Parthasarathy, former advisor to Indira Gandhi, stating that "India-Pakistan reconciliation is like trying to treat two patients whose only disease is an allergy to each other" (Cohen 2004, 61). To gain an in-depth understanding of this current situation, it is essential to explore the historical

relations of these countries.

As previously mentioned, India and Pakistan have been at war with each other four times since their partition in 1947. The first India-Pakistan war was fought soon after the 1947 partition, over the territory of Kashmir in the northern region of India. The conflict was brought on by Pakistani military invaders who entered the region of Muzaffarabad in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) on October 22, 1947, and then found their way to Srinagar, the capital of Kashmir. Although this was before J&K officially ceded to the Republic of India, Maharaja Hari Singh reached out to the Indian government for assistance. Despite aid from India, the military was unable to free the region following infiltration and the conflict continued into 1948. On January 1, 1948, the United Nations (UN) stepped in to mediate the war, and eventually ended hostilities (Ganguly 1995, 171). This became the most prolonged India-Pakistan, war resulting in approximately 1500 military casualties (Singer and Small 1972, 75). Following this war, the UN established the United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan (UNCIP) in United Nations Security Council Resolution 29 on January 20, 1948 to mediate the conflict through a “ceasefire, truce agreement and plebiscite” (Rao 2016, 107). This was the first war fought over Kashmir. It lay the foundation for the conflicts that followed.

Almost 20 years later, in 1965, India and Pakistan went to war over Kashmir once again. On August 5, 1965, Pakistani soldiers crossed the UN-established cease-fire line (CFL) between the two countries in an attempt to seize Kashmir. The people of Kashmir informed the Indian government of the incursion and cross-border action continued as India tried to push back the Pakistani troops. On September 20, when they reached a deadlock, the UNSC passed a cease-fire resolution. Following this, the countries engaged

in bilateral talks in Tashkent, Soviet Union in January 1966 and India ceded a portion of its territory in Kashmir to Pakistan (Ganguly 1995, 173).



Current  
Borders



India's  
Claim



Pakistan's  
Claim

Source: The Economist: Fantasy Frontiers

**Image 1:** India-Pakistan dispute over Kashmir

The third war followed in 1971, when East Pakistan separated from its Western counterpart to form a new nation — Bangladesh. This was the first war that was not directly linked to Kashmir (Pant 2016, 83). During the Bangladesh Liberation War, India supported the formation of the separate land. This further strained India-Pakistan relations (Palit 1972, 36). Bengali East Pakistanis felt isolated by the larger nation in the West, calling for independence and leading to large-scale exodus of eastern Pakistanis into India. As a result, India considered engaging in military action in support of Bangladesh. At this time, West Pakistan launched pre-emptive strikes against India. This led to a war between the two countries, resulting in the loss of 10,000 lives and the creation of Bangladesh (Pant 2016, 83-84). Following this war, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi met her counterpart Zulfikar Ali Bhutto of Pakistan to reach the political decision that the nations would keep the newly acquired land and sketch a new territorial demarcation. This came to be known as the Line of Control (LoC) and was embedded in the bilateral Simla Agreement (Kargil Review Committee 1999, 2.46). The LoC encouraged military personnel to stay within their territory. Yet, Pakistan is still in search of ‘revenge’ for India’s role in 1971, continuing its aggression and hostility toward India (Sikri 2009, 39). This became evident when the agreement collapsed in 1999 with Pakistani incursions into Kargil (Rao 2016, 114). Less than three decades later, Pakistan expressed its rage again by infiltrating into Kargil in 1999, leading to the Kargil War.

This war grew from Pakistan’s attempt to capture part of the territory in Kashmir (Kargil Review Committee Report 1999, 5.3-5.4). Indian military responded by attacking the invaders and recapturing their land. Kargil was the third war fought over the disputed land, speaking to the centrality of the Kashmir issue to hostile relations between the two

countries.

Despite the cross-border confrontations, India and Pakistan have repeatedly tried to attain bilateral peace through negotiations and summits. There were five such bilateral summits between 1966 and 2001. The following table presents a list of these summits:

**Table 1:** India-Pakistan bilateral summits

<b>Year</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
1966	Tashkent, Uzbekistan	Tashkent Declaration
1972	Simla, India	Shimla Agreement
1989	Islamabad, Pakistan	Joint Statement on desire to work toward mitigation of conflict and use of force
1999	Lahore, Pakistan	Lahore Declaration
2001	Agra, India	No declaration

The first two summits were held after the end of the India-Pakistan wars of 1965 and 1971 respectively. As previously mentioned, Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin invited Indian Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri and Pakistani president Ayub Khan to Tashkent, Uzbekistan to negotiate a peace arrangement in January 1966. The countries decided to withdraw armed forces involved in the 1961 war and to discuss diplomatic bilateral relations and issues. However, the agreement was criticized since both sides entered the discussions with starkly different agendas — India was looking for an agreement on a “no-war pact” and on discouraging Pakistan from launching any “pre-emptive strikes” against India; meanwhile, Pakistan viewed this as platform to discuss Kashmir. Despite a major push for a “no-war pact” by Prime Minister Shastri, Pakistan

said this would only be possible once the Kashmir issue was resolved (Bajwa 2013, 346-347). This highlights that India was looking for all-inclusive progress in the relationship that would prevent hostile action between the nations. India maintained similar ambitions during other summits, including the summit in Agra that is of particular importance in this thesis.

In the aftermath of the 1971 war, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto came together in Simla in July 1972 to create a comprehensive treaty for bilateral relations that would establish long-lasting peace and collaboration between the neighbors. The countries decided to “reverse the consequences of the 1971 war (i.e. to bring about withdrawals of troops and an exchange of PoWs)” and to “prevent hostile propaganda directed at each other” (Ministry of External Affairs 1972). The Simla agreement contained multiple clauses relating to peace in J&K, encouraging both sides to respect the LoC that demarcates the Indian and Pakistani controlled parts of Kashmir. In the years following this, both countries built their nuclear powers and finally signed the Nuclear Non-Aggression Agreement in December 1988 (International Relations Insights and Analysis). The nuclear armament of both nations brought on an added dimension to the bilateral relations by further threatening the stability of the region and leading to nuclear deterrence.

Within this scope, the next India-Pakistan summit followed after 17 years in July 1989 in Islamabad. In the end of 1988, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi visited Islamabad to attend the SAARC meeting and negotiated three bilateral settlements with Pakistani leader Benazir Bhutto: cultural co-operation, prohibition of attacks on nuclear facilities and avoidance of double taxation on civil aviation transactions. Six months later, Rajiv

Gandhi went to Islamabad for a bilateral summit. Both Gandhi and Bhutto discussed settlements to reduce conflict; however, there were no major breakthroughs at this summit (Chandran 2001). Here, I note that national broadcast media was under the government's control till during all these summits. This meant that the government had the power to determine how information would reach the public. However, this changed in the following summits when the media became privatized, as discussed in the previous chapter.

The last summit, before the meeting in Agra, took place in February 1999 in Lahore between Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and President Nawaz Sharif. During this summit, the leaders reiterated their desire to work toward stronger bilateral ties by reducing violence, resolving the Kashmir issue and meeting periodically to strengthen relations. This came to be known as the "Lahore Declaration." As with former summits, this declaration sought to establish peace in Kashmir valley. However, merely three months later, India and Pakistan went to war in May 1999 in the Kargil district of Kashmir when Pakistani troops crossed the LoC, infiltrating into India (Swami 2006, 186). This became the last war between the two countries and ended in India's victory. Given the complex nature of India-Pakistan relations, marked by a series of significant events, it is important to study the influence of various factors on these events and on the policy-making process. One such crucial factor is the national media. In the following chapter, I explore how national media shaped foreign policy toward Pakistan during the Kargil War and the Agra summit. As is evident from the information presented in this section, these were pivotal moments in the history of these nations.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter traced the history of India-Pakistan relations, and the link between foreign policy and the media in India. Since the role of media in foreign policy finds its place within the debates surrounding public opinion and foreign policy, this chapter began with this analysis to see how different arguments in foreign policy theories view the role of public opinion. Given the importance of public opinion, the evolution of an unstable and unclear foreign policy in India, and the difficult relations with Pakistan, I suggest that the media emerge as an important independent actor. In the following chapters of this thesis, I further analyze this through case studies and empirical analysis.



## Chapter 2

### Covering Kargil: A Case of Consensus

*"When one's nation is at war, reporting becomes an extension of the war effort."*

- Max Hastings, BBC Journalist (quoted in Carruthers 2011, 129)

Hastings accurately captures the essence of being a journalist when one's country is at war. He emphasizes that the press becomes part of a national war, expressing patriotism and garnering public support for the government. This was the case during the India-Pakistan war fought in Kargil from May to July 1999, popularly known as the Kargil War. At the time, the media echoed the government's voice and fostered public support for government actions. As such, the media define the atmosphere in which India-Pakistan relations exist (Munter 2016), and one cannot deny the importance of the national political climate for foreign policy decisions. This chapter explores how national media in India contributed to the formulation of policy during the conflict in Kargil. I suggest that broad national consensus during the war positioned the media as the mouthpiece of the government. In this situation, national media were effective in using an anti-Pakistan lens to propel the public to support government actions in Kargil.

The 1999 war was fought over the disputed territory of Kashmir in the northern region of India, after Pakistani soldiers infiltrated Indian territory, crossing the LoC that demarcates Indian territory in Kashmir. As previously mentioned, this was the first India-Pakistan war following large-scale privatization of media in India in 1991. Private media channels allowed for independent opinions to emerge from within the media since the news was no longer under the direct control of the government. Thus, the news media did

not have an obligation to support government views. As such, the media played a crucial role in determining the domestic atmosphere during the war. This makes the Kargil War an especially important for analyzing the intersection of private media, warfare and foreign policy.



**Image 2:** Geographical location of Kargil. The dotted line represents the Line of Control

To gain an in-depth understanding of the media's role, I reviewed scholarly works on the Kargil war and carried out empirical analysis of media coverage and government responses. I suggest that the media helped shape policy during the Kargil War by echoing government voice and by manufacturing public consent in the nation. While the media were important, they did not necessarily present independent views; rather, they used strategies such as framing and agenda setting to manufacture consent for government

decisions during the war. In order to do so, the media promoted an anti-Pakistan narrative, driven through an Indian nationalist lens. However, to grasp the nature of the media's contribution during the war, it is essential to understand the history of India-Pakistan conflicts, the creation of the LoC, and the events and challenges in Kargil. This framework is crucial for exploring how the media covered the stories from the war. Thus, I begin the following section by briefly exploring the necessary tenets of historical relations and the Kargil War

### **The War in Kargil**

The Kargil War can only be understood when placed in context of past India-Pakistan hostilities, with knowledge of historical military tensions and aggression between the two countries. Given that bilateral relations are contentious and problematic, the India-Pakistan matter incites widespread public interest and media involvement. Moreover, as previously mentioned, the conflict-ridden nature of war easily becomes the “adrenaline” of the media (Rai 2000, 1681). This was especially important with the Kargil War since it was the first war to reach the homes of the public through broadcast media. As such, this war is a crucial test-case to explore how the media shape Indian foreign policy toward Pakistan. However, to be able to understand the role of the media, it is essential to gain an in-depth understanding of the historical context in order to grasp the intensity and sensitivity of the situation and of the media's position. This section presents a brief account of wars between the two countries, the establishment of the LoC, and the details of events in Kargil.

## Establishing the Line of Control (LoC)

The Line of Control (LoC) spans 740 km and demarcates Indian territory in Kashmir from that of Pakistan. Of these 740 km, 168 km lie in the Kargil region, infiltrated by Pakistani troops in 1999 (Kargil Review Committee Report 1999, 16). Sunil Rao states that “the development of the LoC has a complex and intricate history, commencing with the lapse of British paramountcy, followed by the first war over Jammu and Kashmir, diplomatic interplay by the United Nations (UN), a further two wars in six years and negotiated bilateral agreements” (Rao 2016, 103). Rao accurately captures the complex history of the evolution of the LoC as a journey through bilateral wars and attempts at peace. The first territorial demarcation in Kashmir came about following the India-Pakistan war of 1948. At this time, the United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan (UNCIP) established a cease-fire in the region and then went to create a mutually-agreed “ceasefire line” (CFL) in July 1949 (Rao 2016, 107-108). However, the CFL was unable to serve its purpose as India and Pakistan went to war over Kashmir again in 1965 (Rao 2016, 109). Then, as wars continued with the 1971 conflict, territory along the CFL was redistributed between India and Pakistan. The incumbent Prime Minister Indira Gandhi met her counterpart Zulfikar Ali Bhutto of Pakistan and reached the decision that the nations would keep the newly acquired territories and establish a new territorial demarcation—the Line of Control (LoC), embedded in the Simla Agreement (Kargil Review Committee 1999, 2.46). The LoC encouraged military personnel to stay within their territory; this agreement collapsed in 1999, when the Kargil incursions took place (Rao 2016, 114). Hence, this background helps us understand the importance of the LoC in preventing cross-border skirmishes between India and Pakistan.

Further, this highlights that Pakistan breached historical agreements by traversing the LoC to enter Kashmir during the Kargil War. However, before delving into the analysis of Kargil, it is crucial to understand the wars that preceded it so as to gauge the trajectory of intention and military successes of India and Pakistan.

#### Wars Before Kargil: 1947-1999<sup>13</sup>

India and Pakistan went to war three times from before Kargil—1948, 1965, and 1971. The inability to establish peace between the countries is closely connected to their difference in ideologies and ambition. Sumit Ganguly argues that a crucial factor in determining the state of conflict between the two nations has been Pakistan's quest for Kashmir (Ganguly 2001, 5). As such, the relevance of the Kashmir issue cannot be denied given the repetitive wars over the region. Two of the three wars before Kargil had to do with territorial conquests in Kashmir. In 1999, Pakistan tried to gain control over parts of the region again, leading to the Kargil war.

#### Chaos in Kargil

The Kargil region was an especially challenging place for warfare. Hostile action and difficult terrains made it difficult for soldiers to carry out military endeavors. The mountainous region of Kargil has peaks ranging from 13,000 feet to 18,000 feet, segregated by frequent depressions and crests and connected by what can best be categorized as “tracks” (Qadir 2008, 25). During the winter the Indian army vacates the Dras-Kargil sector of Kashmir and it is manned solely by an infantry brigade. Extreme weather conditions seriously limited the ability of Indian winter patrol crew of April 1999 to carry out its functions. To this point, the military had not taken the necessary measures to equip its personnel with the appropriate gear to serve in such times, making these

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<sup>13</sup> For details on the wars between 1947 and 1999, refer to chapter 1.

“hazardous posts” (Kargil Review Committee 1999, 4.5-4.9). This allowed for Pakistani intrusion into Kargil.

The Pakistani military built their conspiracy to infiltrate the LoC in November 1998 (Qadir 1999,25). Although the infiltration began in April 1999, the intrusions were first detected on May 3, 1999 by “shepherds,” employed by the Brigade Intelligence for information gathering; by 1999, the Indian military was sure that the intruders were Pakistani military personnel (Kargil Review Committee 1999, 5.27-5.30). The Kargil Review Committee identifies Pakistan’s “politico-strategic” and “military/proxy war” motives, including the effort to “give a fillip to militancy in J&K, ... to activate militancy in the Kargil and Turtok sectors and open new routes for infiltration into the valley, ... and to alter the LoC and disrupt its sanctity by capturing unheld areas in Kargil” (Kargil Review Committee 1999, 5.3-5.4). These motives draw attention to Pakistan’s intention to gain control of Kashmir, as was seen in the wars of 1948 and 1965. The following table details the military reaction of the Indian side:

**Table 2:** Indian Army reaction to Pakistani infiltration into Kargil

Date	Indian Army Action
Last week of April	Pakistani helicopters observed flying in Haneef
May 3	Intrusion detected by "shepherds" retained by Brigade Intelligence Team for forward Information gathering
May7	Presence of intruders confirmed by patrols
May 9	Two Indian Army battalions returning from Siachen concentrated in Batalik to contain the intrusion
Following days	Three more battalions moved to Kargil to counter intruders
May 24	Two more Brigades committed

May 26	Indian Air Force committed
End of May	Additional divisional HQ inducted to take over command of a portion of Kargil Sector from 3 Infantry Divisions

\* Info from Kargil Review Report 1999, 5.32 - 5.35

As the above table explains, the Indian side was quick to react to the infiltration. Eventually, Indian forces were able to recapture areas targeted by the militants, making their mission of pushing back the infiltrators successful (Qadir 1999, 27). Critics suggest that Pakistan miscalculated the condemnation it would receive from international actors and India's military response (Dixit 2001, 65). The cross-border aggression lasted seven weeks and claimed 1000 thousand lives. Eventually, India claimed victory in July 1999 (Thussu 2002, 207). Thus, Kargil presented a chaotic situation where the Pakistani military capitalized on India's decision to leave the Kargil region unmanned during the winter months. However, Pakistan was unable to accomplish its aim of altering the LoC and was eventually defeated in battle. Nonetheless, an important outside actor emerged during the war—the media. Kargil became the first televised war between India and Pakistan. Having explored the necessary context to the conflict, I now proceed to discussing the media's contribution during the Kargil War.

### **Media and the Kargil Coverage**

The Kargil war is evidence that the media function primarily as a voice for the government when the nation is at war. To understand the relation between warfare and the media, it is crucial to note the words of Ajai Rai, research fellow at the Indian Institute for Defence Studies and analyzes:

Conflict is the adrenalin of the media. Journalists are trained to look for disagreements and find war irresistible. And when it happens to be 'our war', the involvement of the media has been assessed to be much more enthusiastic and extensive. The Kargil conflict in the summer of '99 broke out at a time when the Indian media was far better equipped than ever before to project it on an unprecedented scale (Rai 2000, 1681).

Rai aptly captures the essence of media involvement in conflict — driven by the interest invoked by the war and enhanced by nationalist sentiments. Government officials reaffirmed this idea in their statements. Then Indian Minister of External Affairs Jaswant Singh called attention to the importance of national media in a speech following the Kargil War. Singh found that the media's "exuberant bordering" of the war contributed invaluable to the national challenge in Kargil, especially when it came to garnering support from the public (Singh 1999). This confirms that the media's role as a link between the government and the people of the nation was widely recognized and acknowledged.

The role of the media came under the spotlight with their coverage in Kargil as this war became India's "first televised conflict" (Thussu 2010, 207). Until 1991, Indian television media was largely centralized, marked by a single government-run channel *Doordarshan*. At this point, the media underwent a phase of large-scale privatization. The private channels were considered more credible than *Doordarshan* in the country. (Thussu 2010, 208). It is important to note that various media platforms work collaboratively—broadcast media and the press inform each other and together form the media network in the country. Thus, the expansion of broadcast networks was significant to the role of the media in the nation, especially during war when the media were able to include the public in India's actions in Kashmir. With Kargil, the government made note of how the media has a hand in shaping policy. Thussu highlights that coverage of the



Kargil incident introduced the Indian political leaders to “power of visual media to maintain the support of public opinion for the hostilities” (Thussu 2010, 207). Thus, the government realized that media support was crucial to gain national support for their actions. This indicates the strengthening and evolution of the relationship between national media and the government, emphasizing the importance of the media in political processes and actions. This relation is crucial during a war when the nation comes together to fight a common rival.

During wartime, journalists become part of the action. They are no longer on the outside of the political system; rather, the media are a part of the government’s ambition to defeat the enemy. Journalist Michael Herr who covered the Vietnam War, captured the impact of war on correspondents in stating, “I went to cover the war and the war covered me” (Herr 2009, 19). Ajai Rai highlights that the media work alongside the “political, cultural, economic structures” of the nation, finding that reporters respond to the state call for support and loyalty (Rai 2000, 1686). Max Hastings’ reiterated this in his statement on media and the nation. He views the media as an “extension” of a nation’s war (Carruthers 2011, 129). Thus, this suggests that national war consumes journalists so as to place them in a unique position to garner public support for the nation. This view of journalists as part of governmental efforts applies to the case in Kargil, where, as seen in Singh’s statement, the media played an important role in supporting national efforts during warfare (Singh 1999). The prime minister’s recognition of the media’s role highlights the ubiquitous nature of the media’s coverage and the extent of their contribution.

Within the scope of media support, Geeta Seshu points out that major newspapers including TOI and Asian Age built a narrative that would engulf the public in the stories of war—making the conflict a matter for every individual within the country. While Asian Age launched a game called “I Love India” that allowed players to cross the border to attack Lahore, TOI’s Kargil project was titled “Zara Yaad Karo Qurbani” (Recall the martyrdom). These newspapers framed stories to provide a humanistic aspect that readers could easily sympathize with, presenting the suffering of soldiers’ families and sharing pictures of soldiers’ bodies. Through this, the press called for consensus from elites across the country, asking them to support Indian efforts in Kargil (Seshu 1999)<sup>14</sup>. Seshu suggests that the media became doubtlessly engrossed in the national mission, no longer questioning the lacuna in government activity and measures. This suggests that the media are not only part of this consensus, but also its driving force, in so far as they help the government garner public support for its action. Here, Seshu notes that the media evoke nationalist sentiments through their stories, but fail to question the intelligence and administration of the government during the war. She identifies government’s lapses such as lack of patrols in the Dras-Kargil region and inability of the intelligence community to identify the threat when Pakistan ordered snow-wear for the military personnel from Austrian agencies. Few in the media spoke of these issues on the part of the government. My empirical analysis suggests that the media acted in support of the government during the war. Using their power to control the dissemination of information in the national, the media manufactured public consent for government action by building an anti-Pakistan narrative through their stories. Nonetheless, I also acknowledge the few expert opinions

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<sup>14</sup> The details presented in this paragraph are from Geeta Seshu’s article in *Economic and Political Weekly*, 1999.

presented in the media that questioned government action. The following section uses empirical analysis to suggest that the media helped shape government policies during Kargil by urging manufacturing public support for the government decisions.

## **Empirical Analysis: Creating Consensus**

### Selection of Media Sources

I analyzed 13 articles on the Kargil War from TOI and HT. The articles were from June 1999 to November 1999. As previously mentioned, this was the selection of news coverage on the the war that was compiled by the Indian Parliament Library. Although a larger database of articles could have added to and strengthened the analysis, these were the only clippings from these two newspapers in the collection. Of the 13, eight were from TOI and five from HT. There were six news articles, six opinion pieces and one TOI editorial. Despite the limited number of articles, there were noticeable trends in the coverage.

I also analyzed the statement by Minister of External Affairs Jaswant Singh following the war, the second session of the 13th Lok Sabha (parliamentary) debate that discussed the Kargil incident, and the Kargil Review Committee Report of December 1999<sup>15</sup>. Before presenting the findings of the empirical analysis, it is important to understand the categories that I used for coding, detailed as follows.

### Coding of Articles

By segregating these articles and government statements into various categories through coding, I was able to identify trends in the media's coverage and in the other

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<sup>15</sup> This report was compiled by experts including distinguished international affairs analyst K. Subrahmanyam and former Secretary of the National Security Council Secretariat Satish Chandra.

selected materials. This allowed me to combine quantitative and qualitative findings to study the role of the media in the summit, by examining how the media reported the various events and simultaneously tracking responses and policy decisions by the government.

I analyzed the selected materials by coding them into the following seven categories:

1. Consensus: Cases where opposition parties and the media expressed agreement with the government's policy decisions and actions. This includes opinion articles and expression of agreement in parliamentary debates and statements.
2. Dissent: Cases where opposition parties and the media expressed disagreement with the government's policy decisions and actions. This includes opinion articles and expression of disagreement in parliamentary debates and statements.
3. Government Mention of Media: All references by the government to the role of the media during the Kargil War in parliamentary debates, press releases and as reported in media articles.
4. Agenda Setting: References in articles that urge the government to adopt a specific policy or highlight specific issues that the government should focus on. This includes all articles that attempt to set the agenda for the government.
5. Media Framing<sup>16</sup>: References the editorial and opinion articles in the newspapers that offer a particular viewpoint (negative or positive) of the Kargil War, framing their analysis through "interpretive frames" and determining the public's perception of the incident.

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<sup>16</sup> For definitions of media framing and agenda setting, refer to the section on media strategies in the introduction.

6. Anti-Pakistan: Articles that display a negative bias toward Pakistan by constructing the story with a negative stance or perspective. This is a specific case of framing that is important in this analysis.
7. Unbiased News: All news articles that were comprised primarily of quotes and showed no internal bias toward Pakistan.

Based on this framework for coding, I present the analysis of how media shaped the Indian government's policies during Kargil.

#### Media's Contribution in Kargil

The analysis I present indicates that there was broad political consensus among the public, media and political parties during the Kargil war. Based on these findings, I suggest that the media emerged as an important actor, but not as an independent actor. In this case, they echoed the voice of the government, using their agenda-setting and framing strategies to gain public support for government action. As such, the media manufactured consent for the government by inciting nationalist dialogues. Within this scope, an important indicator of the media's contribution is the government's recognition of their role, discussed in the following section.

#### Government-Media Connection

If one is to measure the media's contribution to the formulation of policies, an important way to gauge this is through the government's statements. As previously mentioned, the media serve as the interlocutor between the government, the opposition and the public. They control the dissemination of information, making it important for the government to interact with members of the media. Hence, in this section, I explore the connections between the government and the media and note the government's mention

of media's involvement during the Kargil War. The government acknowledged the contribution of national media, embedded in Jaswant Singh's statement following the Kargil war:

There was an added dimension to our total national endeavour. It was the role of our media during Kargil operations. It was marked by exuberant enthusiasm bordering, at times, on the reckless. These young men and women of the media, who were in Kargil brought the valour of our troops, in the face of great odds, directly into the homes of our citizens. They touched our hearts and eyes with the tales of the bereaved and the families of the fallen. This was our first experience of conflict in the TV/information age. We learnt as we went along. It would be no exaggeration, therefore, to say that the role of the electronic and the print media, in fully informing and mobilizing public opinion, was an invaluable part of the total national effort to meet the challenge of Kargil (Singh 1999).

In this statement, Singh captures the essence of the government-media interaction in the age of information, highlighting that both forms of traditional media, broadcast and the press, were pivotal in driving public opinion in support of government action. It is important to note that Singh chooses the words "mobilizing public opinion" to discuss the role of the media. This suggests that he acknowledged that the government needed the media to gain adequate support from the public. The Kargil Review Committee Report reiterated this by noting that the media play the role of the informant, keeping national public apprized about government action on the forefront and thus ensuring that the masses are not "misled by rumour, propaganda and disinformation. ...[since this] is essential for building national morale, winning popular support and understanding" (1999, 11.2). Herein, the report emphasizes the government's understanding of the media's role—bringing the nation together in support of the policy decisions. The media create consensus for government action. However, the report suggests that the government-media relation should be strengthened by supplementing routine briefings by the Ministry of Defence with more "high-level background briefings to editors, senior

reporters and military commentators” during future wars (1999, 11.9). This recommendation suggests that the committee, largely representing government voice, is aware of the importance of the media and believes that better cooperation can be beneficial for the government. It is then crucial to understand how the media form the communication channel between the government and the opposition.

The media are also able to provide information to the members of the opposition party who can then hold the government accountable in parliament (Baum & Potter 2015, 21). As such, the media act as the link between various political actors; they serve as the opposition’s information on government actions and thus retain their importance as the arbitrator. This is evident in the opposition’s references to the media during parliamentary debates. In the parliamentary session of December 22, following the Kargil war, Priya Dasmunsi of the INC referenced the media in two important critiques of the government: media reports about the “lapse on the part of Intelligence” and the delay in the submission of the Kargil Review Committee Report. Dasmunsi observed that the media reported that the Chairman of the Kargil Review Committee, Shri Subramaniam was to meet the Prime Minister before the parliamentary session and requested information on the status of the report (Thirteenth Lok Sabha Debates, Session II, 1999). In so referencing the media, Dasmunsi credited the media as his source of information. This establishes that the media find their way into parliamentary debates as the acting mediator and informant. My empirical analysis indicates that the government made references to the media in all government documents and parliamentary debates that were selected for analysis. Thus, the media play a role not only in building consensus in the nation during war, but also in providing information to parliamentarians and to the

public. In so doing, they contribute significantly to the dialogue surrounding war in the nation and help the government sell its policy. However, the media's role is largely dependent on the degree of political harmony in the nation. In the case of Kargil, national consensus allowed the media to serve as the government's mouthpiece.

### Kargil: A Case of Consensus

In most cases, one expects opposition parties to disagree with government decisions so as to garner more support for themselves and demean the acting government in public eye. So, when the opposition expresses consensus, one is able to fathom the extent of the unity in a country. This was the case during Kargil. Priya Dasmunsi of the leading opposition party, the INC stated during a parliamentary session:

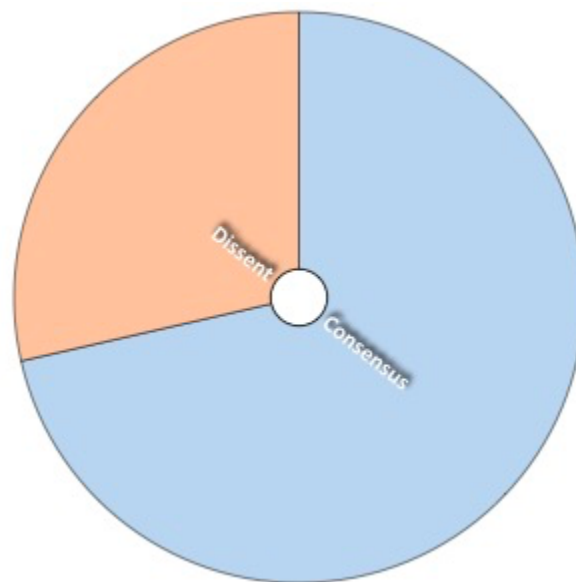
I would like to draw the attention of the Government and point out that the entire nation irrespective of caste, creed or religion stood by the Government like a rock in the hour of crisis when our brave jawans tried to defend the country in Kargil. The entire nation, the Government and all the political parties paid tributes to the jawans of the Armed Forces, Air Forces, Paramilitary Forces and the Civilians, who laid down their lives in Kargil (Thirteenth Lok Sabha Debates, Session II, 1999).

Dasmunsi highlights the domestic state during the war. The nation—political parties, the public and the media—came together in nationalist ambitions, building on their anti-Pakistan perceptions. Jaswant Singh acknowledged this consensus in his speech and further emphasized the consensus within the various government departments acting in unison to defeat the forces from Pakistan:

It is noteworthy that under the leadership of the Prime Minister the Ministries of External Affairs and the Ministry of Defence worked as one, the combined synergy of which demonstrated the true power and effectiveness of the Indian State. This is, of course, how it should be. But it is a matter of satisfaction nevertheless, that this was achieved at a time of trial, a time which tests the mettle of any Government's machinery (Singh 1999).



The internal consensus within the government, supported by the external agreement from the people of the nation led to a broad national consensus surrounding the Kargil War. Quantitative and qualitative analysis of the media sources indicate similar results. Quantitatively, the following pie chart displays a greater share of consensus expressed in news articles and government speeches as compared to dissent, supporting the above statements with statistical results. Of the 16 items analyzed and coded for this analysis, five articles (31% of the total) indicated consensus, while only two (13% of the total) indicated dissent, i.e. there was more than twice the evidence for consensus. As seen in the parliamentary and government statements, it is difficult to refute the existence of domestic consensus during the Kargil War.



**Figure 2:** Consensus during Kargil

**Table 3:** Summary of coding on consensus during Kargil

<b>Nodes</b>	<b>Number of items coded</b>	<b>Per cent of total items coded</b>
Dissent (Orange)	5	31%
Consensus (Blue)	2	13%

\*Colors in brackets indicate the corresponding colors in the pie chart

The media articulated this national consensus, both expressing it and encouraging it. In an article in TOI on July 26, 1999, K. Subrahmanyam, chairman of the Kargil Review Committee, wrote, “Never before has the country felt so united as in the last eight weeks” (Subrahmanyam 1999). While the media expressed agreement, journalist Sumir Lal wrote, “We are being told not to cross-examine the government ... because we all must stand together lest we demoralise the troops” (Lal, 1999). With this, Lal is among the few journalists who questioned government’s intelligence and administration during the war. Although this calls attention to the question of the motivation for the journalists to support the government and promote unity within the country, it continues to emphasize that most journalists did indeed express consensus, regardless of the driving factor. Here, I return to Rai’s categorization of journalists during war: Rai finds that most journalists respond promptly to the state’s “appeal for loyalty, as responsible citizens of their country at war,” however, a few struggled to maintain objectivity and refrain attachment (Rai 2000, 1686). By this measure, Lal was one of the select few who did not immediately accept the government’s call for consensus. By and large, however, national consensus united the nation in the mission to defeat Pakistan in Kargil. As previously noted, the media helped manufacture consent among the public just as they expressed the

consensus among political actors. It is then crucial to discuss the uniting motion for the consensus—media framing and the anti-Pakistan narrative.

### Framing the Story: The Anti-Pakistan Agenda

As the source of information for the public, the media retain the authority to determine the amount and composition of news they present. This control over information allows them to determine the angle they use to deliver this news, driving public perception by presenting the news from a specific standpoint. This gives the media the power to create “interpretive frames” (Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993). In the case of the Kargil war, this frame was an anti-Pakistan narrative, used as the tool to bring together the nation against a common enemy.

Of the 16 sources used for coding, six (38%) had explicit anti-Pakistan references. This includes both government statements and news articles. Calling the infiltration into Kargil an “ill-conceived misadventure” on the part of Pakistan, Jaswant Singh articulated that “a firm signal [had] to be conveyed to Pakistan” with regards to cross-border terrorism and the frontline aggression (Singh 1999). Singh effectively placed the entire burden of the Kargil conflict on Pakistan. Further, the opposition supported the government in this claim, as Priya Dasmunsi of the INC termed it the “grave threat of Pakistan” (Thirteenth Lok Sabha Debates, Session II, 1999). Although it has been factually proven that Pakistan began the conflict through infiltration, the representation of Pakistan as “ill-conceived” and struck by a “disorder syndrome” engaged the Indian public in an anti-Pakistan discourse as the driving force for national consensus.

The media lent their support to political leaders to build this anti-Pakistan narrative by supporting their actions and publishing stories that would evoke nationalist

sentiments. In an article titled “The defense of India,” public intellectual Brahma Chellaney presented India as a “tolerant, peace-loving society,” driven to security by its neighbors. He wrote, “With two [Pakistan and China] strong, collusive regional adversaries, India has to harness the ongoing revolution in military affairs (RMA) to build a distinct technological edge” (Chellaney 1999). Effectively portraying India as a victim of Pakistan’s cross-border military endeavors, Chellaney proposed to the public that India is a naive nation, thus presenting India as the victim and propelling public sentiment against Pakistan. Contributing to this narrative, former Indian ambassador to Pakistan, K. Shankar Bajpai, wrote an article in TOI titled “Dealing with Pakistan.” Here, he emphasized that the Indian government must take away from the Kargil incident that “Pakistan can be fatal” and that it is unlikely that Pakistan’s aggressive behavior will change in the near future. Framing the anti-Pakistan story, he too presented India as a sufferer of this aggression, stating that “India had done nothing adverse to Pakistan” (Bajpai 1999). A TOI editorial called out Pakistan’s action as “Pak’s perfidy” (TOI 1999). Other stories recalled past Pakistani aggressions in Kashmir and the 1971 war in Bangladesh, going along with the anti-Pakistan framing structure. Beyond this, media framing extended to stories of human suffering, so as to gain public sympathy and resultantly include the people in the conversation on war. This call for sympathy contributed to consensus-building efforts across elites in the country (Seshu 1999). An article in TOI read “Army battles with problems of widows and wounded soldiers” (Kumar 1999) drawing attention to the plight of soldiers’ families. Through this interpretive framework for reporting, the media guided public perception of Kargil in

favor of the government. In addition to their framing function, the media also took steps to guide the government's agenda.

Even in this unity, the media took on the role of agenda setting, encouraging the government and the public to focus on certain tenets of warfare and its outcomes, and providing policy suggestions. Rai suggests that such coverage reduces the government's response time; in this, it point out issues in policy, but fail to resolve them (Rai 2000, 1681). Seshu notes one example where TOI cautioned the government against the nuclear option, pursuing the "no first strike" policy, and thus presenting a policy suggestion (Seshu 1999). Indian academic Madhav Das Nalapat presented policy options in an article titled "Military needs should dictate policy," criticizing the diplomatic track of interaction, and pressurizing the government by stating, "Time is running out for the Vajpayee government. ... Unless the costs of intervention are made prohibitive, Pakistan is likely to keep testing Indian resolve" (Nalapat 1999). In another article, K. Subrahmanyam called for a "total revamp" of the Indian security structure to build a strong front and discourage Pakistan from such invasions (Subrahmanyam 1999). These articles in top-tier newspapers highlight the media's role in calling attention to specific issues and pointing out governmental flaws. However, one must note that these are fewer in number and secondary to the articles that focused on building consensus, as noted by Sumir Lal (Lal 1999). Empirical analysis indicates similar trends of media's role in garnering public support through strategies including manufacturing consent, framing and agenda setting. Here, the media act in support of the executives of the government.

In this case, the media's voice is not necessarily independent. While the media try to garner elite support for the government, critics including Seshu suggest that these elites

not only support the media, but also guide their agenda, especially since the owners of these media houses are themselves among the elites (Seshu 1999). For instance, the owner of *Hindustan Times*, Shobhana Bhartia is a former member of parliament in the upper house for the opposition party INC, indicating her strong political inclinations and involvement. This supports the idea of “manufacturing consent,” as proposed by Noam Chomsky. He explained that the media work under the “propaganda model,” serving as a mouthpiece for the elites and for the government, by helping them gain support and build consensus (Chomsky and Herman 1988, 306). In the case of the Kargil War, analysis suggests that the media were manufacturing consent for government action by creating campaigns such as Asian Age’s “I Love India” game and TOI’s “Zara yaad karo qurbani,” to synthesize public engagement and involvement and by promoting a negative image of Pakistan. In this way, the media were serving as the government’s delegates as they tried to draw the nation’s elites to consensus.

Thus, even though I had access to a limited number of articles, these displayed clear trends in reporting. Read alongside government’s statements and parliamentary debates, one can note that the media both expressed the consensus that existed within political actors and manufactured consent among the public. Here, they acted as the essential interlocutor between the government, the public and the opposition. The media strengthened domestic consensus by evoking nationalist sentiment and dialogues, by defining the nation’s political atmosphere, and by garnering public support for the government’s policy toward Pakistan during the war. As such, they emerged not as an independent actor, but as a crucial support-system for the government.

## **Conclusion**

The Kargil war was marked by large-scale national consensus in India, bringing together the people in a battle against the common adversary, Pakistan. In addition to discussing the media, this chapter outlined the history of bilateral relations and the real time events in Kargil that form an essential foundation to understand the role of the media. Within the India-Pakistan rivalry, the media played a crucial role, emerging as an important actor to support government action by expressing consensus and manufacturing consent in the public. While a handful of experts used the media to express concern about government policies, most joined in the national consensus, echoing the voice of the government and propagating an anti-Pakistan narrative. It appears that the war gave the media an opportunity to emerge as a crucial wing among the political actors of the nation, but not necessarily as an independent one. Nonetheless, as mentioned by the leaders of the government and by the opposition, the media played a significant role in shaping foreign policy during the Kargil War.

## **Chapter 3**

### **The Agra Summit: A Retreat with the Media**

Summits demonstrate the intention of two nations to improve bilateral ties by engaging in dialogue and negotiation. As such, bilateral summits serve as a crucial point of contact and development in relationships, where decision-makers come together to build a collaborative forward-looking policy. In the case of India and Pakistan, bilateral summits are extremely important as they have symbolised moments of peace after warfare. To this end, India-Pakistan summits are especially sensitive, suggesting that any uproar or sensationalization caused by the media can be problematic. This was the case during the 2001 summit. The Agra Summit, a retreat to strengthen bilateral relations between India and Pakistan, took place from July 14-16, 2001. The summit followed a period of non-communication between the two nations and came as an unexpected change in Indian policy toward Pakistan. Since the Kargil war in 1999, India maintained the position that it would not engage in talks with Pakistan till the latter mitigated cross-border terrorism and incursions from its end (Bhat 2001, 194; Singh, Thirteenth Lok Sabha Debates, Session VII, 2001). Against this backdrop of antagonism, the Agra Summit was an attempt to engage in a comprehensive dialogue with Pakistan on bilateral ties ranging from people-to-people contact to issues of terrorism. However, it was widely acknowledged as a failed summit. It is then important to understand the immediate outcome of the summit before exploring the role of the media.

Critics were quick to declare the summit a failure, taking into account that no agreement came from the summit. They noted that Musharraf was unhappy with the draft



declaration, stated that he wanted to “walk out” of the summit, but was dissuaded by his senior officials (Hindu 2009). Eventually, Musharraf left the summit “grim-faced” at midnight on July 16 (Dixit 2001, 138). J.N. Dixit analyzed the reasons for the failure of the summit, finding that the primary challenge was the difference in the agendas of the two countries. While Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee focused on normalising India-Pakistan relations, the only agenda for Musharraf was resolving the Kashmir dispute (Dixit 2001, 140). As evident, the motivations of the two leaders did not align leading to India’s unreal expectations.

Many observed this loophole in the government’s plan. Chaudhuri, who was among the media personnel in Agra at the time, found that the Indian government “fooled itself” in this case. Chaudhuri explained that “they [the Indian government] went into the summit with assumptions, partly because of incorrect briefings within the government, that Musharraf wants to cut a deal. They believed Musharraf is interest in coming to some sort of a forward movement.” However, the Vajpayee government soon realized that this was not the case and then tried to spin the story, rather unsuccessfully, to make it seem like the summit had not been a complete failure (Chaudhuri 2017). This discussion extended to parliamentary debates, where members of the opposition party, the INC, declared that the summit was a “miserable failure.” Bhati strongly criticized the government’s decision to ignore history, abruptly change government policy and hold talks with Pakistan (Thirteenth Lok Sabha Debates, Session VII, 2001). It is important to note that to this point, India had maintained that it would not engage with military leaders in Pakistan who undemocratically gained control of the country in October 1999. This was the case with General Musharraf who had overthrown the elected leader, Nawaz

Sharif, in a military coup (Dixit 2001, 136). As a result, Vajpayee's decision to ignore the policy of non-communication, invited poignant criticisms in parliament and led to widespread disagreement between the nation's political actors. Within this scope of dissent and failure, we can now explore how the media contributed to the government's decisions.

Rao, who was the Spokesperson of the MEA during the Agra Summit, holds that media from both nations had a significant role in the limited outcome of the summit. Blaming media for the failure of the summit, Ambassador Rao said that when it comes to bilateral affairs, "It's like you're conducting foreign policy in an amphitheatre" (Rao 2016). This suggests that the media play a role in determining the atmosphere in which bilateral relations exist. This speaks to the centrality of the media in policy-making. Analysis of media coverage and parliamentary debates indicates the importance of government interaction with the media during such events. To this end, it is then important to analyze the role of the media in foreign policy decisions in the scope of the Agra Summit. In this chapter, I discuss the following:

1. How national dissent made room for the media to enter the dialogue on the summit
2. The media's role in the formulation of foreign policy strategy. Here, I address how the media emerge as a crucial independent actor

I first discuss the motivations for the summit in India and the agenda of the summit. Then, I use primary analytical research of newspaper articles and parliamentary debates in context of real-time events to highlight the role of national media during the Agra Summit.

In context of the Agra Summit, I suggest that national dissent allows the media to contribute to the debate as an arbitrator and as an independent actor expressing their opinion and controlling the dissemination of information. While the government tries to use the media as a marketing agent for its policies, the opposition uses the media to express disagreement, and as an unintended consequence, the media emerge as a powerful political actor. I analyze how the failure of the summit was linked to the government's inadequate interaction with the media. This left the country uninformed about the progress during the summit, and the government failing to gain the needed support for their policy decisions. This draws our attention to the role of the media as the acting network of communication in the country. Due to its lack of engagement with the media, the government was unable to garner the necessary national support, driving the country to a state of widespread dissent. This suggests that the government may have been able to tackle this issue by adequately interacting with and informing the media of its decisions and actions. Here, as the interlocutor, the media may have been able to garner support for the government among the public. To better understand the role of the media, one must grasp the history of India-Pakistan summits, the motivations for the Agra Summit, and the agenda in Agra.

Prior to the Agra Summit India and Pakistan had only four bilateral summits, beginning in 1966. As discussed earlier, India and Pakistan have not had a smooth relationship since their partition in 1947<sup>17</sup>. These summits took place in 1966, 1972, 1989, and 1999. Analysis of these summits, presented in chapter two, suggests that there was a trend in agendas of the two countries. While India sought to establish better holistic relations with Pakistan, the latter continually used summits as a way to further its agenda

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<sup>17</sup> For more information on bilateral relations and former summits, please refer to chapter 1.

in Kashmir. As previously mentioned, following the last summit in February 1999, Pakistani troops infiltrated the LoC that led to the Kargil War. Noting that the government had pursued a non-communication policy toward Pakistan after this war, I begin by exploring the motivations behind the summit.

### **Motivations for the Agra Summit**

Acknowledging that India and Pakistan had no bilateral communication between 1999 and 2001, it is then important to understand what encouraged the Vajpayee government to hold the Agra Summit in 2001. Dixit explains that India had refused to collaborate or even speak with any military ruler in Pakistan who had come to power through “unconstitutional means” (Dixit 2001, 136), as had Musharraf. Thus, although Musharraf had earlier stated that he was open to discussions with his neighboring country, India had turned down the possibility. However, on May 24, 2001, the Vajpayee government invited Musharraf to India for the summit. Drawing from conversations with “people in the highest political levels in the Government of India” (Dixit 2001, 136), Dixit explains that Vajpayee himself was apprehensive of hosting such a summit and was more keen on meeting Musharraf at multilateral gatherings such as SAARC. Minister of Home Affairs, L.K. Advani, along with other BJP cabinet ministers, recommended that Vajpayee take “drastic” measures to “break out of the logjam of the complete breakdown in bilateral communications which had occurred since the Kargil war in 1999.” BJP leaders made the final decision regarding the summit at Mr. Advani’s house in April 2001 (Dixit 2001, 137).

In addition, J.K. Baral cites two major reasons for the summit: (1) India's "despair and frustration" (Baral 2002, 290); and (2) international pressure, especially that from the United States. As for India's frustration, the invitation to Agra followed the failure of cease-fire treaties to maintain peace in Kashmir. This suggests that Vajpayee extended the invitation with hopes that this might help in "tackling [cross-border] terrorism" (Baral 2002, 291). Secondly, Baral highlights that the Indian State Department asserted that the US had suggested they enter talks with Pakistan. He further notes that two months before the Agra Summit, both India and Pakistan had dialogues with the United States, implying that there could be a link between the two. Dixit too identifies pressure from the international community as a major factor in the decision to hold the summit (Dixit 2001, 136). Thus, there are a range of factors that influenced Vajpayee's decision to invite Musharraf for summit. These were premised on the hope that the summit would lead to improved bilateral relations. Having explored the motivations that led to the summit, it is now feasible to detail the agenda that the countries pursued during the summit.

### **The Agenda in Agra**

Pakistan and India had starkly different political agendas for Agra. This made for colliding ideas and intentions, especially since the Indian government held false expectations that Musharraf wanted to heal relations at large, when Musharraf primarily wanted to discuss the Kashmir dispute (Chaudhuri 2017). This difference in agendas dictated how the countries approached the events of the summit. The following table lists

the series of events as they occurred during the Agra Summit. It provides details on the interactions between the government and the media.

**Table 4:** Detailed agenda of the Agra Summit

Date	Event	Notes
Pre-Summit	Non-communication	There was no political communication between the countries from May 1999 (after the Kargil War) to July 2001, when the Agra summit took place (Dixit 2001).
May 24, 2001	Vajpayee government extends invitation for summit to General Musharraf	The motivations for the invitations are discussed in the previous section (Dixit 2001, 138)
May 27, 2001	Musharraf accepts invitation for Agra Summit	(Dixit 2001, 138)
May 28, 2001	Jaswant Singh announces Musharraf's visit in a press conference	Over 250 media persons and 20 camera teams attended this conference in Delhi (Bhat 2001, 193)
July 9, 2001	Indian government takes measures to express goodwill and increase people-to-people contact	They did this by lifting barriers along LOC to allow Pakistani citizens to travel to Jammu and Kashmir. They also announced 25 scholarships for Pakistani students to pursue higher education and research in India. In addition, they released Pakistani civilian prisoners (Baral 2002, 293).
Approximately five days before the summit	Interaction with the national media in India	Foreign Secretary Chokila Iyer interacted with the national media regarding the Agra Summit (Bhat 2001, 196)
July 12, 2001	Press Conference in India	External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh held a press conference to address the questions brought up in the media regarding Musharraf's visit (Bhat 2001, 196).
July 14, 2001	Tea Party at Pakistani High Commissioner's Residence	Musharraf and his team invited Hurriyat leaders (Kashmiri separatists) for a tea party upon the arrival of the President, although India expressed reluctance to such an event. The Pakistani

		leaders had a “closed door meeting” with Hurriyat where Pakistan reiterated their moral support. The ruling NDA government boycotted this event and the government and INC sent only “token representatives” (Baral 2002, 294).
July 15, 2001	Second one-on-one meeting between Vajpayee and Musharraf	At this meeting, Musharraf presented a draft accord prepared by Pakistan, which highlighted Kashmir as the core issue and failed to acknowledge the matter of cross-border terrorism. It stated the following: "The process of normalization of Indo-Pak relations is dependent upon the solution of the Kashmir dispute" (Baral 2002, 294).
July 15, 2001	Minister of Information and Broadcasting makes statement to the Press about the discussions at the summit, which causes a controversial uproar in Pakistan.	Minister of Information and Broadcasting, Sushma Swaraj held a press briefing in the evening and listed subjects of discussions during the summit: cross-border terrorism, nuclear issue, prisoners-of-war, and trade. However, she did not mention Kashmir in her list. On the Pakistani side, the media and the government criticized Swaraj for this as they worried that this would lead the people in Pakistan to think that Musharraf had ignored the matter of Kashmir at the summit. They then held Swaraj responsible for the failure of the summit (Baral 2002, 298).
July 16, 2001	Musharraf holds breakfast meeting with Indian editors	The Indian editors did not know this meeting was to be filmed by Pakistani TV. They were told it was off-the-record, and only discovered that it was telecast live at the end when the Pakistani side gave a copy of the tape to the editor of NDTV, Pranoy Roy. It came as a shock to the editors and to the government when NDTV broadcasted the film from this meeting (Bhat 2001, 197; Baral 2002, 298).
July 16, 2001	Summit ends and Musharraf leaves	No conclusion was reached and no declaration came from the summit. Musharraf left the summit “grim-faced” at midnight (Dixit 200, 138). Pakistan extended an invitation to continue negotiations in Islamabad. The Vajpayee

		government accepted (Baral 2002, 302).
July 17, 2001	Indian Minister of External Affairs Jaswant Singh and Pakistani Foreign Minister Abdul Sattar hold press conferences in their respective nations.	Sattar stated that the summit ended “inconclusively.” However, both leaders affirmed that the two sides had decided to continue talks and summits. (Dixit 2001, 138-140)
July 20, 2001	Musharraf holds press conference in Islamabad	At this meeting, Pakistani journalists only asked questions that would allow the government reassert its view and further its agenda, suggesting that the media were helping the government gain support in Pakistan (Baral 2002, 297).

Multiple factors came together to make the Agra Summit a failure. As previously mentioned, the difference in Indian and Pakistani agendas for the summit led to an undeniable impasse. In addition, it is important to acknowledge the central role of media in the turn of events that led to a deadlock between India and Pakistan. As noted in the above table, there were two major issues arising from the government’s interaction with the media: (1) Sushma Swaraj’s statement to the Press, and (2) Musharraf’s breakfast meeting with the editors.

As for the former, Sushma Swaraj, Minister of Information and Broadcasting, arrived at the conference on the 15th of July and held a press briefing. Ambassador Nirupama Rao, then spokesperson for the MEA, explained that Swaraj listed subjects that had been discussed during the summit, but omitted Kashmir from the list. Acting in defense, Swaraj claimed that it was rather obvious that the two sides discussed Kashmir. However, the Pakistani side did not buy this argument for the fear that the people of Pakistan would think that Musharraf ignored the Pakistani agenda (Rao 2016). As a



result, the Pakistani media targeted Swaraj because of her statement, leading to discord between the two parties. Eventually, Pakistan blamed Swaraj for the inconclusive outcome of the summit (Baral 2002, 298). Here, it is important to note that this issue was aggravated by the media (Rao 2016). Thus, the media were able to report Swaraj's statement so as to sensationalize it and create a controversy. This suggests that the media played a major role in the impasse that occurred between India and Pakistan.

In another instance, President Musharraf held a breakfast meeting with the Indian editors on the last day of the summit. As explained in the table 3, members of the media were unaware that this meeting was filmed and telecast live in Pakistan. Rather, they were under the impression that it was off the record. However, after the meeting, the Pakistani side gave NDTV a copy of the tape which was eventually broadcast in India (Bhat 2001, 197). As a result of this incident, the Indian government was criticized at home for mismanaging the media, allowing Musharraf to use the media for his benefit (Dixit 2001, 139). Further, the government was condemned for not adequately engaging with the media. The Indian government responded to such criticism during parliamentary debates and press briefings. Jaswant Singh stated the following during a press conference on the 20th of July :

On the second aspect relating to 'why was Prime Minister Vajpayee's opening statement in the plenary held back', it was done for the obvious reason which I have specified. India does not believe that discussions or negotiations between two Heads of Government are ever or can ever be conducted in public or through the press. We abided by that impeccably. However, when we found that there was a kind of approach from the other side of engaging with the media as an additionality to discussion (Bhat 2001, 200).

This highlights that while Pakistan used the media to make the summit a matter of public knowledge and interest and to sell its case, India wanted to conduct the negotiations in a

private sphere. This brings to light the role of the media as a “marketing agent”: one that sells government policy and decision to those at home in order to garner public support. Simultaneously, the opposition used the media as a tool to express dissent. This is evident in the media’s wide coverage of disagreement voiced by the opposition parties. I discuss this through primary research in the following section.

Empirical analysis emphasizes the existence of national dissent surrounding the summit and confirms the role of the media as a mediator and as an independent actor, framing the story of the summit using a lens that is critical of Pakistan and of government policy. In this way, the media presented the opinions and news frames that did not directly draw from the government or the opposition. This emphasizes their existence as an independent actor within the political system. For the purpose of this research, I carried out extensive research by coding 112 articles of the summit, analyzing parliamentary debates, and conducting a series of interviews with government officials, renowned journalists, and distinguished scholars. The results from this research are presented in the following section.

### **Empirical Analysis: Dissent and the Media**

#### **1. Selection of Media Sources**

I analyzed 112 articles on the Agra Summit from TOI. These articles were from July 13, 2001 to August 30, 2001. For the month of July, I analyzed all articles on the Agra Summit available in the TOI digital archives. For the month of August, I analyzed all TOI articles selected by the Indian Parliament Library media clippings on the Agra Summit. Since this file of media clippings from the library was only available for August 2001, I was unable to use this method of selection for July. The final collection included

13 editorials, 42 opinion pieces and 57 news articles. In addition, I analyzed two relevant government statements about the summit and the seventh session of the 13th Lok Sabha (parliamentary) debate that discussed the Agra Summit. The following section details the categories of coding.

## 2. Coding of Articles

Segregating the news articles and other materials into various categories through coding allowed me to determine the trends in reporting. This allowed me to combine statistical and qualitative findings to explore the role of media during the summit. I did this by examining how the media covered the various events and by simultaneously tracking the government's responses and policy decisions.

I analyzed the selected materials by coding them into the following seven categories:

1. Consensus: Cases where opposition parties and the media expressed agreement with the government's policy decisions and actions. This includes opinion articles and expression of agreement in parliamentary debates and statements.
2. Dissent: Cases where opposition parties and the media expressed disagreement with the government's policy decisions and actions. This includes opinion articles and expression of disagreement in parliamentary debates and statements.
3. Government Mention of Media: All references by the government to the role of the media during the Agra Summit in parliamentary debates, press releases and as reported in media articles.

4. Agenda Setting: References in articles that urge the government to adopt a specific policy or highlight specific issues that the government should focus on. This includes all articles that attempt to set the agenda for the government.
5. Media Framing<sup>18</sup>: References the editorial and opinion articles in the newspapers that offer a particular viewpoint (negative or positive) of the Agra Summit, framing their analysis through “interpretive frames” and determining the public’s perception of the incident.
6. Anti-Pakistan: Articles that display a negative bias toward Pakistan by constructing the story with a negative stance or perspective. This is a specific case of framing that is important in this analysis.
7. Unbiased News: All news articles that were comprised primarily of quotes and showed no internal bias toward Pakistan.

In addition, I made note of all articles and references that suggested that India and Pakistan had different political agendas in Agra. Within this scope of coding, I present the analysis of how media contributed to the Indian government’s policy-making during the Agra Summit.

### **Role of the Media: Marketing and Mediating**

#### Analysis of Sources

Critics, including opposition leaders and journalists, recognized the government’s failure in Agra. To explain this failure, they identified the government’s inability to interact effectively with the media as an important cause for this failure (Thirteenth Lok

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<sup>18</sup> For definitions of media framing and agenda setting, refer to the section on media strategies in the introduction.

Sabha Debates, Session VII, 2001). Rao complained that too much media came for the retreat emphasizing that the media wanted to know the progress “after every breath” (Rao 2016). On the other hand, Chaudhuri pointed out that the government itself notified the media about the Agra Summit (Chaudhuri 2017). Evidence from the news, scholarly work and parliamentary debates suggests that the summit was unsuccessful in its aim to strengthen India-Pakistan relations through a comprehensive dialogue. There are numerous references to the government’s mismanagement of and lack of interaction with the press. As a result, the country was not informed about progress and decisions at the summit. This suggests that the media play an essential role in bilateral diplomacy and foreign policy as a messenger for the government, helping the policy-makers gain national support for their decisions. In this position, the media serve as a marketing agent for the government. To establish this further, I discuss national dissent on the issue to demonstrate the environment in which media emerged as an important and independent contributor that helped shape the government’s policy. I then address the role of media in this atmosphere of widespread political disagreement. I draw from primary research by analyzing selected materials and then placing this analysis in context of the real time events, parliamentary debates and responses from the government. Based on these findings, I suggest that there was significant national dissent in India on the topic of the Agra Summit.

### Dissent

The Agra Summit took place within a national political atmosphere of dissent. Through this summit, the government switched from its policy of non-communication toward Pakistan to an attempt to strengthen bilateral ties. As a result, the Indian leaders

were subject to significant backlash from the opposition and other critics. While the summit was organized primarily by the MEA, the opposition party (INC) voiced its critiques through the media and in Parliament. Member of the INC, Bhatia raised the following concern:

Sir, I would say that talks had miserably failed. It ignored the history. There was no compulsion for you to go ahead and jump for talks while the situation in Pakistan was not stable. ... You have always been saying that there will be no dialogue with Pakistan unless cross-border terrorism is stopped. Prime Minister said it; you said it a number of times and the Home Minister also said it. What happened then that immediately, there was a U-turn in your foreign policy and you went for talks? (Thirteenth Lok Sabha Debates, Session VII, 2001).

Bhatia pointed out that the independent national media had brought up this matter of policy change multiple times, but the government chose to stay silent (Thirteenth Lok Sabha Debates, Session VII, 2001). This suggests that the opposition paid attention to the media's reports. Given that parliamentary debates are top-level discussions that inform policy, it is crucial to recognize the importance of the media when used as a reference during these debates. This suggests that the opposition expected the government to respond to policy issues flagged by the media, bringing the media into the policy dialogue. Herein, we see the role of the media as an arbitrator between the government and the opposition. Holding the government responsible for poor preparation for the conference and for mismanagement of the media, the Samajwadi party and the INC came together in their criticisms of the BJP-led NDA government (TOI 2001a). This highlights that it wasn't just the leading opposition that stood against the government's actions, but also other regional and national parties. The other parties of the NDA too questioned BJP's decision to engage with Pakistan. This issue exacerbated the alliance's internal

issues to the point that Shiv Sena<sup>19</sup> considered breaking ties with the NDA in response to BJP's Pakistan-strategy (Mishra 2001). These reports suggest that various opposition parties came together in the aftermath of Agra to voice their concerns about the government's decision to change India's policy toward Pakistan, expressing their disagreement both in Parliament and through the media. Former senior editor of TOI, Shastri Ramachandran found that "had it not been for the Musharraf visit, the opposition would neither have united against the Vajpayee government nor had an issue on which they could speak in one voice" (Ramachandran 2001). This suggests that there was disagreement on various levels in the country—within the NDA, between political parties, and between the media and the government. Amid this atmosphere of disagreement, the various actors only agreed on the stand on Kashmir.

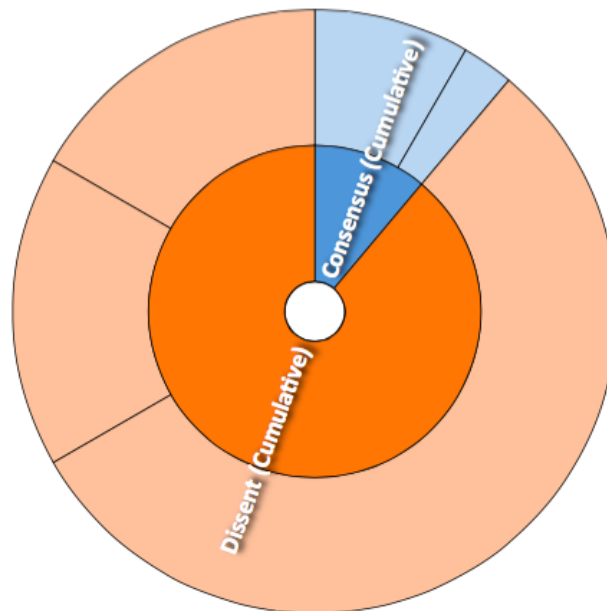
Vajpayee observed that the country and Parliament unanimously agreed that future talks with Pakistan had to focus on a broader spectrum of bilateral improvements and could not be limited to the conflict of Kashmir (Thirteenth Lok Sabha Debates, Session VII, 2001). However, this consensus did not diminish the power of the disagreement in the country that premised on change in government policy toward Pakistan, ill-preparedness for the summit and poor management of the media. Nonetheless, the following data illustrates that there was significant disagreement in India.

The following pie chart and data exhibit national dissent, highlighting clear opposition to the government's actions. Among the 116 coded materials, there were 23 references to disagreement expressed in the country. Here, "dissent (cumulative)" includes dissent from the opposition, critics and media. Similarly, "consensus

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<sup>19</sup> Shiv Sena is a far-right regional political party in India.

(cumulative)” represents agreement on policy decisions expressed in parliament and in the media. Among these, there were seven references (articles and parliamentary debates) that expressed clear dissent from the opposition, while only one suggested opposition support or consensus. The disagreement in the nation is evident in the pie chart that spatially demonstrates the ratio of dissent (23 references) to consensus (3 references) in the coded data. As this suggests, dissent was expressed more than five times as compared to consensus. The cases of dissent, which are collectively drawn from 23 sources clearly occupy significantly more space on the pie chart (orange) than the consensus nodes which are referenced from only three sources. This confirms that there was widespread disagreement between the various political actors in the nation.



**Figure 3:** National dissent during the Agra Summit



**Table 5:** Summary of coding on national dissent during the Agra Summit

<b>Nodes</b>	<b>Number of items coded</b>
Dissent (Orange)	23
Consensus (Blue)	3

\*Colors in brackets indicate the corresponding colors in the pie chart

This data and pie chart confirm that dissent was prevalent with regards to the Agra. As previously mentioned, at this time, “India’s media management came in for sharp criticism” (Baral 2002, 297). The summit led not only to widespread dissent from the opposition, but also to a breakdown within the government’s alliance. As different arguments surfaced from various political actors such as the Shiv Sena and the INC, the media to emerged as an independent actor.

It is when there is such disagreement in the country that the media are able to enter the debate on foreign policy with an independent stand. Chaudhuri explained that opposition usually tries to look for issues that will create media hype. Especially in the case of foreign policy, Chaudhuri finds that the government tend to keep the opposition uniformed and outside the policy-making process. In such situations, the media step in as an informant and arbitrator between the two actors (Chaudhuri 2017). We see this in the case of the Agra Summit, demonstrated during the parliamentary debates. Member of the INC, Priya Ranjan Dasmunsi raised the following question to Jaswant Singh in parliament:

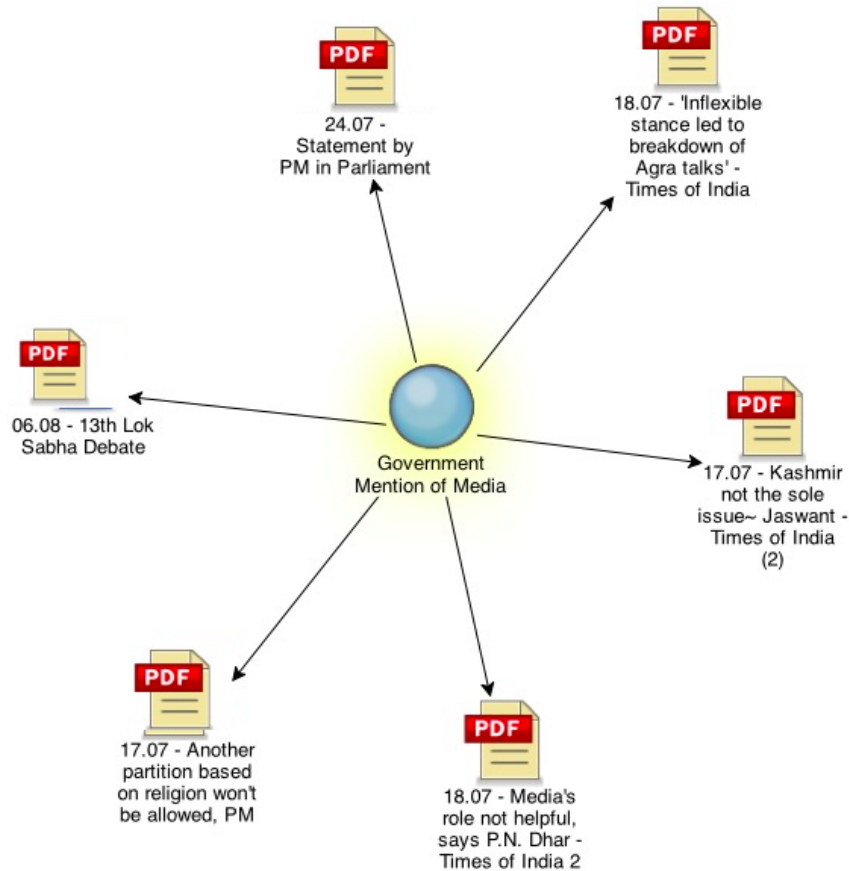
We were told by the media – we may be totally wrong – that at one stage, your meeting with the Foreign Minister of Pakistan during the Summit almost clinched the issue and finalised the draft but later on, it could not get through. Is it because of the word, cross-border terrorism that they were not accepting or something else? Could you just elaborate as to why after your understanding with their Foreign Minister and the draft was ready, it could not get through? (Singh 2001)

In stating that they were informed through the media, Munsif lays out the role of the media as the arbitrator between the government and opposition in such foreign policy matters. Here, the press serve as an expression of dissent—the platform that informs the public and the government of the disagreement and concerns voiced by the critics and the opposition. This analysis suggests that in cases of national disagreement and lack of information, the media step in as a mediator between the government and the opposition. As the government tries to sell its policy to the public through the media and the opposition expresses disagreement through mass media, the media are able to develop an important independent role, allowing them to frame the argument. This framing gives the media the power to guide the public's perception of the news. As previously discussed, Baru identifies internal political dissent as a crucial factor leading to a “turning point” in media's role in foreign policy making. He identifies the following reason: “the gradual erosion of the domestic political consensus on foreign policy, [gives] the media the role of an arbiter and independent analyst of contending political views” (Baru 2009). Here, one must note that Baru highlights the role of the media as an “independent analyst,” suggesting that their function are able to emerge as a separate political actor on such matters. Within this context, it is important to understand the capacity in which the national media acts.

#### The Government and the Media

Both the government and the opposition acknowledged the media's contribution to and importance during the summit. Jaswant Singh recognized the issues brought up in parliament, stating, “I had said that ... there were three or four broad issues: preparation, agenda and also the media” (Thirteenth Lok Sabha Debates, Session VII, 2001). By

noting the importance of media management at the bilateral summit, Singh acknowledged the role the media play within the governmental and policy-making system. He accepted that the government had not been “perfect” in its management of the media (Thirteenth Lok Sabha Debates, Session VII, 2001). This analysis suggests that the government viewed the media as a tool to deliver their message to the country. In this, the government credited the media with the role of the mediator. Here, it is important to recognize that foreign policy is not limited to decisions made between the two governments. It extends to the parliament, where the government must justify its actions to the opposition parties and to the public. Within this scope, the government must maintain close ties with the national media. Especially in the case of Pakistan that serves as much as a domestic matter as a foreign one (Chaudhuri 2016; Sikri 2009, 38), the media is crucial due to the interest of the public. In the post-summit materials, the government referred to the media at least 16 times when discussing the Agra Summit. These references came up in six different materials, detailed in the following image:



**Image 3:** Government mention of the media in Parliamentary debates and news articles

Ten of these references appeared in the Lok Sabha debate, where the role of media and the government's inability to manage it were discussed extensively. This suggests that the opposition and the government brought up the media multiple times during one Lok Sabha debate, drawing attention to the importance of the media's contribution. This suggests that the policy-makers consider the media an important political actor, worthy of discussion and deliberation. In addition, Prime Minister Vajpayee mentioned in his statement in the Parliament that he had had discussed bilateral relations with various leaders prior to Musharraf's visit:

In the days and weeks before his visit, I had occasion to exchange views and perspectives – individually and collectively – with leaders of political parties, eminent personalities, media representatives and intellectuals, on the future prospects for India-Pakistan relations (PM speech 2001).

Here, Vajpayee highlights that media representatives were part of these policy discussions. This confirms that they had a seat at the foreign-policy making table and acknowledging their importance in this sphere. In addition, four news articles reported the government's take on media during the conference. One news article reported Vajpayee as stating that there "should have been more contact with the media" (TOI 2001b). Others expressed a similar view. Yet again, this indicates that the government acknowledged the need to regularly engage with the media regularly and to keep the media informed. In another case, P.N. Dhar stated, "One thing that was new in this summit was an element of negotiation through the media. The media played that role too enthusiastically, which was not very helpful" (Khan 2001). Here, Dhar emphasizes that Musharraf began a dialogue through the media, that put the media in the center of the discussion. Musharraf used the media as a tool for garnering support among the public in order to portray a positive image of Pakistan. With such power, the media retained the power to frame the discussion surrounding the Agra Summit.

### Role of the Media

The media extensively used framing and agenda setting strategies to emerge as an independent actor amid the disagreement in the nation. The strategy of framing allows the media to choose the lens or angle taken to present a story. This gives the media the power to create "interpretive frames" (Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993), consequently using specific lenses, stereotypes and symbols to present news (Entman 1991). I identified 30 references to media framing in my empirical analysis of 112 news articles, indicating that 30 articles explicitly framed the story on Agra, presenting it through an anti-Pakistan lens or an anti-BJP government one. I discuss how multiple articles presented the story from

an angle tilted against the government's judgement, suggesting that the BJP's decisions were immature. TOI journalist Ashish Ray said about BJP's expectations from Pakistan at the summit: "Without adequate preparation, five years of hostility had even less of a chance of being undone in five hours of dialogue. It was surprising some (BJP leaders) were gullible enough to think otherwise" (Ray 2001). Along similar lines, Manoj Joshi wrote, "The government has not been able to synchronise its military policy with its political goals. As a result the Indian effort looks whimsical and fitful" (Joshi 2001). Ray and Joshi, along with others, framed their representation and analysis of the summit in the media on the note of BJP's immature decisions, thus directing how the public perceived the summit and its outcomes.

In addition, some presented an anti-Pakistan lens in their articles, blaming Musharraf's restriction to the Kashmir issue for the breakdown in Agra and presenting Pakistan in the light of its cross-border terrorism and incursions. Titles of articles read "Hurriyat sings Musharraf's tune" (TOI 2001c) and "Dawood leaves Pakistan to avoid embarrassing Musharraf" (Balakrishnan 2001). Meanwhile, TOI editorials presented an anti-Pakistan frame, heightened by their focus on a humanistic approach stressing that the Kashmiris, prisoners of war and families of martyrs were forgotten in this dialogue. In one editorial, TOI began, "Family members of the martyrs who made supreme sacrifice while defending the nation against Pakistan are hurt and angry over the failure of Agra Summit" (TOI 2001d). Here, they call attention to the personal aspect of the summit, encouraging readers to associate the summit with these ideas presented in the news. In another editorial, TOI highlighted that the "Agra Summit is a good step, but no more than a step," (TOI 2001e). Noting that editorials are considered the voice of the newspaper,

this analysis suggests that TOI too was driven to frame the story to incite public emotion through a humanistic aspect. Further, they were hesitant about the summit and fostered a pessimistic view of the summit among the public. In addition to this framing mechanism, the news media flagged issues for the government's attention and set out policy options through their agenda setting function.

As for agenda setting, there are five references to such cases in news articles where the media are calling the government's attention to certain aspects of the India-Pakistan relationship and setting out policy options for the government. In one article, Joshi wrote, "A new strategy of operations *must emphasize* the use of well-equipped, highly trained and disciplined forces to deal with militancy" (Joshi 2001). In another, Ray suggested that "The best chance of a deal is with the Pakistan army. ... army rule in Pakistan is India's best opportunity, as is BJP being in office for Pakistan" (Ray 2001). Along similar lines, Kanak Mani Dixit wrote an opinion piece subtitled "Focus on Cultural Affinity, Not Borders". He laid out clear policy options, stating that at future summits, the governments "*must proceed* with the work of future-building in South Asia. For example, convert the killing glaciers of Siachen into an international peace park" (Dixit 2001). In this manner, news articles, mostly opinion pieces set out certain policy options for the government, encouraging them to focus on specific aspects of the issue—setting the agenda.

Thus, media framing and agenda setting played an important role in the representation of the Agra summit through an anti-Pakistan and an anti-BJP lens, influencing the public and opposition's perception of the summit. for the broader public

and within the media-government engagement. This highlights the independent role of the media in shaping the discourse surrounding the Agra Summit.

## **Conclusion**

The Agra Summit, intended to strengthen bilateral ties between India and Pakistan, resulted in a diplomatic impasse and was broadly deemed a failure. This made room for extensive government criticism in India by the media and the opposition, leading to internal dissent. Empirical analysis shows that this dissent in the nation allowed the media to enter the dialogue as an important independent actor. As the government tried to use the media to gain public support for its policy and the opposition tried to employ the media to express disagreement, the media unintentionally emerged as an independent actor arbitrating between the two sides. As such, they were able to express their own opinions and guide the public and government agendas through framing and agenda setting. Further, the media was able to frame the coverage of the summit through interpretive lenses, primarily ones that were anti-Pakistan and critical of the BJP. In addition, the media resorted to agenda setting, encouraging the government to focus on certain aspects of the issue. Resultantly, the media came through as a crucial independent actor during the Agra Summit and in its aftermath. Thus, the media helped shape Indian foreign policy toward Pakistan by emphasizing the anti-Pakistan and anti-BJP narrative, by offering policy options, and resultantly dictating the political climate within which bilateral discussions were held. The case of the Agra Summit highlights that national dissent allows the media to emerge as an independent political actor that helps



shape foreign policy by mediating discussions, framing the news, and keeping the public and the opposition apprized.

## Conclusion

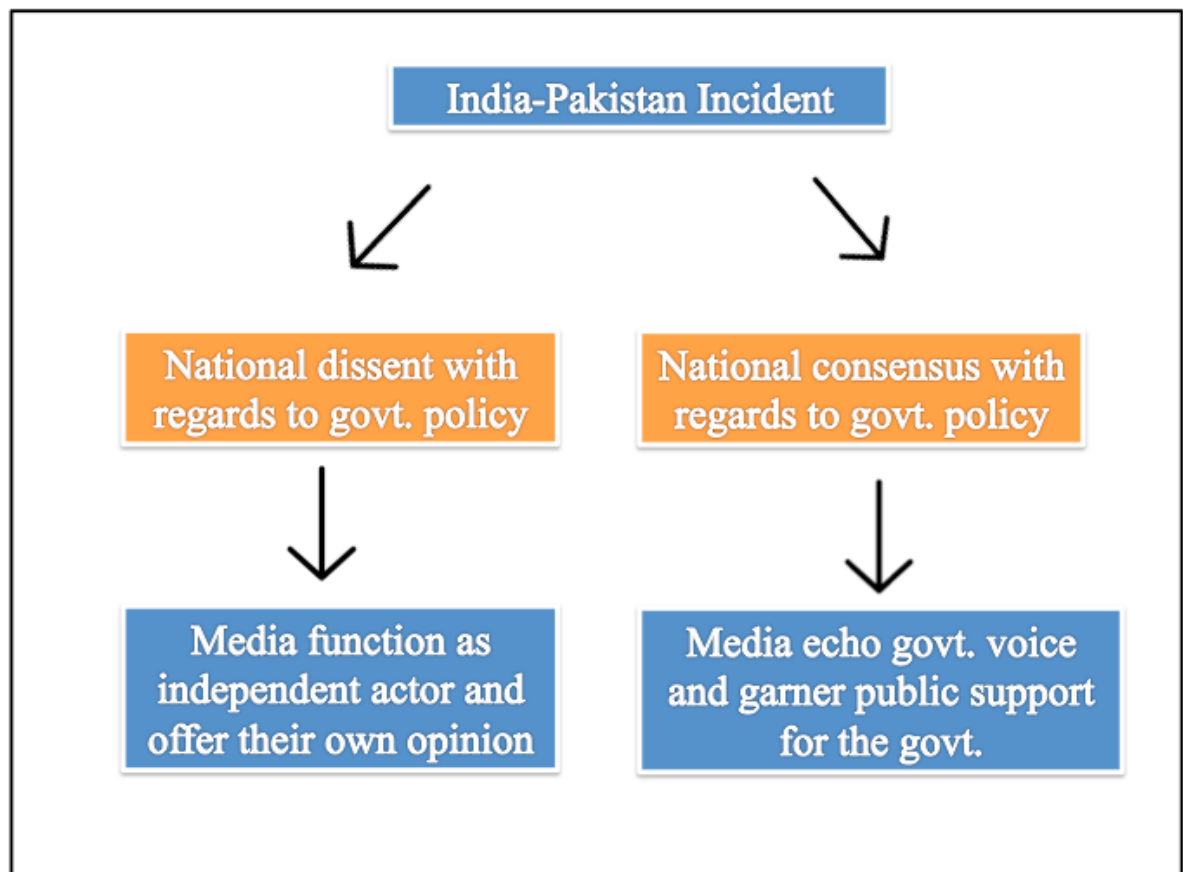
This thesis traced how national media have shaped Indian foreign policy toward Pakistan during two pivotal moments in their bilateral relations. By analyzing the role of the media during the Kargil war of 1999 and the Agra Summit of 2001, I found that the nature of the media's role in the formulation of foreign policy is largely dependent on the level of dissent on the issue among political actors in the nation. As the Kargil War was marked by widespread consensus in the nation, the media acted in tandem with the government, garnering public support for foreign policy decisions during this time. By contrast, the Agra Summit was subject to significant disagreement in the country. As a result, the media were able to emerge as an independent actor, arbitrating between the government, opposition and the people. They were further able to present their own analysis and opinion on the matter.

To date, there has been little research on this topic. Most scholars have studied media strategies and foreign policy in a mutually exclusive framework. As described in chapter 1, some have established the links between the media and public opinion within a broader policy framework. However, only a handful of scholars have directly scrutinized the links between the media and foreign policy. While Sanjaya Baru and Shruti Pandalai offer some insights into this for the specific case of India, they both study media's role in context of India's relations with a number of countries. The unique case of India-Pakistan relations does not receive its due importance, warranted by the special bilateral relations between these nations. Here, it is important to note that India's foreign policy is

especially ambiguous with regards to Pakistan, as explained in chapter 2. I note the influence of public sensitivities and interest on India's foreign policy toward Pakistan.

I return to my initial hypotheses: (1) News media emerge as a more important actor in cases of national dissent than in cases of consensus, and (2) During times of internal consensus, the media garner public support for government policy by echoing the government's voice and reiterating its decisions. To this end, the research I present refutes my first hypothesis and proves the second one. My empirical analysis indicates that the news media are not only important in times of national dissent, but also during consensus. While the media serve crucial roles in both cases, the difference lies in the nature of the media's contribution. I show that the media emerge as a crucial independent actor during times of dissent. As such, they present opinions that are not directly affiliated with other actors. Further, by controlling the dissemination of information in the country, they frame coverage so as to guide public perception of the event and determine the government's agenda. This leads me to my second hypothesis which is confirmed by the findings presented here. As this hypothesis suggests, the media unite the nation in support of the government in times of consensus. Here, as the interlocutor between the government, the opposition, and the public, the media play a pivotal role in garnering public support for the government. In this position, they both express the consensus that exists within political actors, and expand it by manufacturing consent among the public. Here, I acknowledge that the media do not work in isolation of the nation's political system; as previously mentioned, they are influenced by the elites and executives of the country, and by the owners and editors of the news agencies. Thus, they are not completely autonomous actors. However, for the purpose of this thesis, I focus on the

outcome of the media's role in the formulation of foreign policy. Hence, while more knowledge on the influence of such actors would be informative, it is unlikely to alter my findings. The following figure details the media's contribution in cases of dissent and consensus.



**Figure 4:** Role of the media depending on the extent of national consensus

Nonetheless, it is difficult to compare their level of importance in both these situations. Rather, it is safe to infer that they are significant in both situations and are able to contribute to and shape foreign policy. Hence, by offering in-depth research on the India-Pakistan case through analysis of both diplomatic negotiations during the Agra Summit and cross-border warfare in Kargil, this thesis contributes an original analysis of media and foreign policy to the existing scholarship. I used a system of categorization of

materials—news articles, government statements, and parliamentary debates—through coding, to identify trends in media’s role during these events. For this, I coded 116 items for the Agra Summit and 16 for the Kargil War. I identified the usage of media strategies such as framing, agenda setting, and manufacturing consent. I also noted the government’s interaction with the media, and built a comprehensive analysis based on these findings. In so doing, this thesis has paved the way for further research on government-media interactions.

### **Government-Media Relations: Acknowledging the Media’s Contribution**

We see foreign policy as an elite discourse, orchestrated and implemented by top-level government officials. Within the Indian context, this ranges from the prime minister to the members of the MEA. Noting that not all foreign policy information is available to the public, it is crucial to explore how the government makes note of the media’s role in the formulation and implication of its policies. Thus, when the decision-makers themselves credit the media for contributing to their work and for fabricating the domestic environment within which they create policies, one can begin to understand the relationship between the government and the media. Ambassador Cameron Munter argued that the media are responsible for determining the atmosphere within which India-Pakistan diplomacy exists (Munter 2016). This suggests that the media are able to drive public opinion and dialogue to determine how policies are made and received in the nations. Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh expressed this following the Kargil War: “It would be no exaggeration, therefore, to say that the role of the electronic and the

print media, in fully informing and mobilizing public opinion, was an invaluable part of the total national effort to meet the challenge of Kargil” (Singh 1999). Here, Singh reiterated that the media were able to share the information from Kargil with the people and unite the nation against a common rival. As such, the media extended the war to make it a national issue accessible to and involving everyone in the country. It is with this help of the media that the government was able to carry out its action during the war. This reinforces the idea that the media are able to shape policy by creating the environment within which policies are made and bilateral relations exist. Similarly, the government and opposition acknowledged the media’s role with regards to the Agra Summit as well. In this case, the government noted that they hadn’t given the media adequate attention during the summit, highlighting that they recognized the importance of the media’s role to promote their policy in the nation. Thus, as discussed in chapter 3 and 4, the government avowed the media’s contribution to the formulation of foreign policy in both situations.

This analysis indicates the importance of government-media relations. Noting that the media are responsible for taking the government’s message to the public and for garnering public support, it is crucial to accredit the media with their role as arbitrators. Further, in cases of dissent, the media’s ability to contribute independent perspectives and mobilize the public is important for engaging the public in discussions on the nation’s foreign policy. As the communication channel between the government and the public, the media also play a crucial role in determining the extent of public support for the government’s policies. The media do this through the strategies of media framing, agenda setting and manufacturing consent, detailed in the first chapter. As such, one cannot

ignore the “obvious and independent role of media” in driving public opinion in relation to foreign policy matters in a democracy (Baru 2009, 279). Hence, studying the intersection of these strategies and foreign policy allows us to better understand how the government and media cooperate with each other in a democracy like India where public opinion is important and the media are powerful. This is especially so in the case of relations with Pakistan. However, it is then important to investigate whether the role of the media is as significant in the formulation of Indian foreign policy toward countries other than Pakistan.

### **Thinking Beyond Pakistan**

As past hostilities between India and Pakistan have extended into present-day mistrust and territorial disputes, Pakistan presents a unique challenge for Indian policymakers. This calls my attention to the following question: Would the media’s role in shaping foreign policy be as significant for countries other than Pakistan? Here, it is important to reiterate two important factors. First, India-Pakistan relations are emotionally bound by widespread public interest; and second, while India lacks a long-term foreign policy strategy in general, this problem is exacerbated in the case of Pakistan (Sikri 2009, 39). This is evident in India’s unstable policies toward Pakistan. The Indian government embraced a policy of non-communication following the Kargil War in 1999 and declared that it would only engage with Pakistan once the latter mitigated issues of cross-border terrorism and incursions. However, in 2001, the Vajpayee government unexpectedly switched to high-level diplomacy leading to the Agra

Summit (Dixit 2001, 136). Then, following the 2008 terror attacks in Mumbai, the government returned to its policy of not communicating with Pakistan once again (Bhushan 2009). With reference to inconclusive policy, Ambassador Sikri wrote, “India’s policy towards Pakistan has oscillated like a pendulum” (Sikri 2009, 39). This suggests that India has been unable to establish and adhere to a concrete foreign policy toward its neighbour. However, India’s policies toward other countries are relatively more structured and less prone to ambivalence.

Unlike in the case of Pakistan, public sentiments are significantly less charged with respect to other countries, clearly removing them from the realm of domestic matters. To this end, it can be said Pakistan is both a domestic and foreign policy issue (Pandalai 2017; Sikri 2009, 38). Here, I reiterate that this is especially important since the public’s news appetite is primarily for coverage on domestic issues (Hook 2016, 270). Hence, it is likely that media would play a less conspicuous role in shaping foreign policy toward other countries. For instance, the India-China border is subject to strictly enforced laws, leaving little room for discourse by outside actors such as the media. Therefore, the media had little room to enter the debate and contribute or shape the policy. Instead, they offered intermittent coverage and primarily supported government decisions (Pandalai 2003, 59). On the other hand, during the Indo-US nuclear deal of 2008, the media were heavily involved since the public and opposition were engaged in the dialogue. Since the Indian policy was not concrete and the prime minister needed to earn the nation’s vote of confidence to ensure that he was acting in favor of the people’s desires. This indicates that the country was prone to dissent at this time, allowing the media were able to add to the ongoing debate and play the serve as an opinion-generator and feedback mechanism



(Panadali 2003, 44-50). This suggests that media's contribution is dependent on a variety of factors such as the ambivalence of government policy, domestic dissent on the issue, and public sensitivities and interest. These factors are heightened in the case of Pakistan, as noted in this thesis. Baru suggests that this means "any news about the US or Pakistan is almost always front page and headline stuff, while news about most other developing countries makes no waves" (Baru 2009, 282). However, this does not mean that the media are insignificant in cases relating to other countries. Depending on the circumstances of domestic consensus and interest, the media are still be able to contribute to Indian foreign policy toward other countries. However, the nature and level of this contribution varies from case to case. Nonetheless, no other country would fall within the realm of domestic issues as does Pakistan, so the level of interest and influence of public opinion are likely to be lower. Based on this research, I present the following recommendations to enhance the media's contribution to the policy process.

## **Recommendations**

While the government of India has acknowledged the role of the media, there remain issues that diminish the foreign policy outcomes that the two institutions could achieve by working more cohesively and cooperatively. Here, recognizing that the media serve as the main source of information and mediation between the government, opposition and public, I offer suggestions that could help strengthen consensus in the nation with regards to foreign policy. Drawing from the research on the ambiguous nature of Indian foreign policy and its impact on India's relations within South Asia, I suggest

that the government could instead better leverage the media to garner public support and build national consensus in their favor. By doing so, the government could bring the nation together on foreign policy issues that could then allow the nation to develop stronger international relations through a coherent and stable policy. Here, I acknowledge that the government-public communication network has expanded and strengthened under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi who launched the weekly radio show *Mann ki Baat* (narendramodi.in). The show airs on the national radio channel and on *Doordarshan* and is a one-hour session hosted by the prime minister in which he speaks to the people of the nation. Even so, the government's interaction with the media has not significantly improved. On the contrary, the government's engagement with the media has decreased under Modi (Pandalai 2017; Bengali 2016). Based on these findings, I present the following recommendations to strengthen government-media relations for a more cohesive foreign policy strategy.

#### *Strengthening the Government's Media Networks*

The Indian government lacks a notable government-media network comparable to the United Kingdom's *British Broadcasting Company* (BBC). Currently, there is one government-owned public TV channel *Doordarshan* and no such newspaper. Although *Doordarshan* reaches approximately 400 million viewers (BBC 2015), it is not considered nearly as credible as the private channels (Malone et. al 2010). As such, it is difficult for the government to convey its message to the public without the media's filter. Although *Lok Sabha TV (LSTV)* and *Rajya Sabha TV (RSTV)*<sup>20</sup> are parliament television channels tasked with broadcasting all parliamentary debates and procedures, they do not effectively bridge the gap in government-public communication since the

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<sup>20</sup> The information on RSTV and LSTV presented here is drawn from their official websites.

public continues to rely on private networks for the news. Thus, strengthening the government-owned media network would allow the government to tackle this problem by maintaining direct contact with the people. Simultaneously, the private media network will be able to uphold the ideals of free speech and opinion by presenting independent views. This would make for a strong structure for dissemination of information, ensuring that the nation receives unfiltered news from the government, supplemented by opinions and ideas presented by the experts of private news agencies. This is especially important for the progress of foreign policy, since the media are the only source of information for the public in this regard. Given that foreign policy does not affect the everyday lives of citizens, the masses are disconnected from its intricacies and would benefit from receiving information directly from the government.

#### *Increasing Participation of Media Personnel in Government Institutions*

Foreign editor Primit Pal Chaudhuri was invited to be a member of the National Security Advisory Board owing to his experience in foreign affairs journalism. Along the same lines, Chairperson and Editorial Director of the Hindustan Times Group, Shobhana Bhartia was nominated to the *Rajya Sabha*<sup>21</sup> as an eminent person in social service. Both these cases suggest that the government does try to involve distinguished media personnel in the decision-making processes to draw from their expertise. In addition, these experiences allow the journalists and leading media persons to gain direct experience with the government and parliamentary procedures, enhancing their understanding of the political and policy procedures. I suggest that an expansion and strengthening of such direct government-media relationships could further benefit both

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<sup>21</sup> The President nominates 12 members to the Rajya Sabha. These members are nominated based on their eminence in fields including arts, science, and social service.

institutions. The media would benefit from direct exposure to governmental insights. Simultaneously, it would work to the government's advantage to have a well-informed national news network that understands the intricacies of policy-making and works alongside the government. The journalists would be privy to the sensitivity of foreign affairs and more equipped with the necessary information to adequately present foreign news stories. Within this scope, I believe that it would be beneficial to have individuals from the media sphere more actively integrated with foreign policy-related matters from within the government.

### **Research Prospects**

This research is merely a first step, paving the way for more detailed and explorative analysis on how the national media shape India's foreign policy. Due to the time constraints and the limited access to resources, I was only able to access 13 articles from TOI and HT for the Kargil war. It would be beneficial to expand the research to a broader base of media archives. However, for the purpose of this research, this was feasible since I focused on articles available from the archives of the parliament library, accounting for my material selection.

Nonetheless, it would be beneficial to expand the research to a broader time-frame so as to build a stronger temporal study. Ideally, I would begin with the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War and end with the 2008 attacks in Mumbai. Since the 1971 war was the last India-Pakistan war before privatization of media, it would allow for a comparison with a time when the main source of information for the public was

government-owned. At this time, the public did not have access to non-stop coverage at the time. As for the 2008 attacks, these marked a pivotal point in bilateral relations. Following this incident, news media set out policy options for the government compelling it to reconsider interacting with Pakistan (Pandalai 2013, 39). This is especially important for media analysis since it marked the rise of the English news channel TIMES NOW, when reporter Arnab Goswami used the opportunity not just to evoke anti-Pakistan sentiments, but also to deconstruct the Indian government's case (Chaudhuri 2017). From then on, while there have been border skirmishes, these have not been of the scale or consequence as the mentioned events. As for the present moment, India and Pakistan have been involved in serious border conflict since the death of Burhan Wani in July 2016, a renowned separatist leader in Kashmir (Anand and Kumar 2016). However, since these events are ongoing and are constantly marked by changing policies and decisions, it is difficult to analyze them accurately. Thus, the temporal research framework ranging from 1971 to 2008 could offer greater insights, building on a temporal framework. It would then include media coverage of a terror attack as well, thus encompassing the main issues of bilateral relations--cross-border terrorism, territorial disputes, and diplomatic negotiations. There are still other ways to expand this study.

It would be valuable to build the research as a comparison of the different ruling parties in India—INC and BJP. The incidents covered in this thesis were both under the leadership of BJP's Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Extending this to include cases under the leadership of INC would be beneficial as it would allow us to analyze the links between the media and the government with relation to foreign affairs under the different leaders. Further, it would make for an interesting analysis to compare former cases with

the current scenario under the Modi government. As demonstrated in chapter 1, this is often seen as the new phase of foreign policy-making in India; under the “Modi Doctrine” the government-public interaction has also undergone serious changes (Bengali 2016). Hence, it is important to study how the media contribute to foreign policy under the Modi government. Further, a crucial extension would be a similar analysis of the case from Pakistan’s viewpoint. This would involve looking at Pakistani media and government sources to construct a similar research and to then compare the two cases. This could reveal interesting findings especially when noting if the two governments interact with their national media differently, and subsequently studying the role of the media.

Lastly, one cannot deny that the broadcast and social media play a central role in this age of information. As such, it would be beneficial to build a study that is able to look at all these different forms of media so as to both compare them and analyze them as a singular unit. Nonetheless, this thesis has established a framework for analysis of the media’s contribution to India’s foreign policy toward Pakistan. At the outset, this was a challenging task, taking into account the difficulty of isolating the role of the media and analyzing media sources. However, despite the initial issues, this thesis was able to trace the involvement of the media and has paved the way for future research on this topic that could significantly inform our perspective of government-media relations and domestic media’s contribution to the formulation of foreign policy. This could then help the Indian government to better gauge how to leverage the media for its benefit in order to strengthen the nation’s unity in matters of foreign policy.

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