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# Media Focus in Afghanistan News Coverage

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## **MEDIA FOCUS IN AFGHANISTAN NEWS COVERAGE**

MEDIA FOCUS IN AFGHANISTAN NEWS COVERAGE

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Journalism

By

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Kabul University  
Bachelor of Arts in Journalism, 2004

May 2013  
University of Arkansas

## ABSTRACT

This study explored the *Media Focus in Afghanistan News Coverage* to examine what categories of Afghanistan-related news received the largest amount of coverage during periods from 2010 to 2012. This study covered reports in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *USA Today*, and *The Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, a national Afghan news outlet, as a sample within a period of three months over three years (June 2010, July 2011, and August 2012). The 147 news stories' headlines of the four news organizations were studied to find what categories (*process: peace talks, negotiation, and economic development; conflict: violence and military action; and politics and policy: USA, Afghanistan, and NATO*) received the most coverage on Afghanistan. The purpose of this study was to examine focal points in media coverage on Afghanistan. The findings of the study indicated that the category of *politics and policy*, received the highest media coverage with 55% both at the U.S.-based news organizations, including the *New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *USA Today*, and also the Afghan paper, *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, while the other two categories including *process: peace talks, negotiation, and economic development* with 22% and *conflict: violence and military* with 23% of the news coverage. Although peace talks and negotiation in Afghanistan have been extensively discussed by the Afghan government, the international community, and particularly by the U.S. government, the media did not cover them that much. In fact, media coverage on this subject (*negotiation and peace talks, and economic development*) is considered very critical to Afghanistan, and the more positive frame and frequent coverage the better effect it will have on the issues.

This thesis is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

Thesis Director:

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*Professor Hoyt Purvis*

Thesis Committee:

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## **DEDICATION**

This study is dedicated to Allah/ God who generously enabled human being to learn:

*The Holy Quran, Chapter 30<sup>th</sup>, Surah Al-Alaq, 96*

(1) Recite in the name of your Lord who created -

(2) Created man from a clinging substance

(3) Recite, and your Lord is the most Generous -

(4) Who taught by the pen -

(5) Taught man that which he knew not

This is the blessing and grace of the almighty God who made me capable of this success over all.



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## Chapter One

### I. INTRODUCTION

Although 11 years have passed since the international military intervention led-by the United States to topple the rule of the Taliban (1996 -2001) in Afghanistan, there is still insurgency in the area. The prime reason for the U.S. military action against the Taliban stemmed from the September 11, 2001 attack on the Twin Towers in New York City. U.S. President George W. Bush demanded the surrender of Osama Bin Laden by the Taliban after the 9/11 attack, but the Taliban refused to respond. As Farah (2007) noted “President Bush said that the rest of the world had to decide whether it was with us or against us” (p.1). Consequently, the United States took action to overthrow the Taliban, and it did not take much time for the United States to prevail initially in the war against the Taliban in October 2001.

After the overthrow of the Taliban regime, the U.S.-led coalition has been engaged in helping to establish the new government to practice good governance in the country and defeating the momentum of the insurgency. Given the situation, the Bonn agreement in December 2001 spelled out establishment of an interim government under Hamid Karzai, the current elected president of Afghanistan. The prime task of the interim administration was to prepare the country for the transitional period, and then for the first presidential election, which took place in October-November 2004 in the light of the newly enshrined Afghan constitution, approved earlier that year. This process was widely supported by the international community. As a result, some tangible progress was made in the war-torn country after decades. This rehabilitation process has been strongly supported by the international community; the U.S.

contribution has been the greatest among the donors, including military and financial assistance. For example, Rashid (2006) demonstrated that unexpectedly about five million children found the opportunity of going to school, while the record of enrollment was about zero in Afghanistan before 2001; moreover, the newly established system provided both boys and girls with democratic education in an Islamic country. In fact, this progress is a great long-term support for the nation-building process in the country. Furthermore, Afghan women have been enabled to practice their rights in different aspects of life including education, socio-economic, and political matters. More than a million children have been provided with the opportunity to attend school. Afghanistan became significantly open-market-oriented to address its needs under a globalized market.

Media growth has also been an important factor in Afghanistan for the first time in its history.

Afghanistan represents a unique case of media sector development. It is a country where, under Taliban rule, television was prohibited, antennas and transmitters were destroyed and the only radio station allowed was Shariat. Since broadcasting in the capital restarted (November 2001), the media landscape has experienced incredible growth; from one non-governmental radio station in 2002 (Sulh) to over 75 terrestrial television channels, 175 FM radio stations and 800 publications as of September 2010. The Afghan Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (ATRA), in charge of issuing frequency permits to radio and television stations, has recently run out of licenses issuable for Kabul... This also seems to be driving a significant amount of competition in the media job market, making retention of trained personnel a challenge for a number of outlet managers (altai, 2010).

Meanwhile, issues within the country came under the hot spotlight of international news coverage. The U.S.-based news organizations extensively covered Afghanistan related events, presumably with far more positive framing in the coverage. International news coverage of Afghanistan was mushrooming on issues such as politics, socio-economic conditions, reconstruction, governance, democracy, and the U.S. and international roles in Afghanistan.

Many international news organizations including *the New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *USA Today*, *Wall Street Journal*, and other U.S. news outlets devoted major coverage to issues in and related to Afghanistan.

This tendency primarily continued until 2008, with generally consistent positive framing. Since then, not only has the quantity of Afghanistan coverage gradually declined in the U.S. news organizations, roughly more than 50 percent as the data analysis of my study indicated (see chapter three), but the frame of the coverage also skewed from a narrative generally favorable to the Afghan government to critical coverage, challenging or raising questions about the Afghan government possibly because of the skyrocketing corruption, lack of good governance, fraudulent presidential election of 2009, and rising tensions between the U.S. and Afghan governments. For example, Alfaisal (2010) argued that a special fact-finding delegation on the issue of the fraud-marred presidential election of 2009 in Afghanistan concluded that the U.S. government should focus on establishing standards for President Karzai, particularly on developmental projects. There may be a positive association between the skewing in the western media and the scandal surrounding President Karzai's election in the presidential race. Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, the leader of the former Hope and Change Party, declined to participate in a run off. President Karzai claimed that foreign countries interfered in the election process and they escalated the issue that made the result appear scandalous.

Even now, one of the sources of current tensions between the Afghan governments with the international community is on the role of two United Nations foreign envoys in the framework of the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC), a panel backed by the U.N. The Reuters news agency (2012) reported, "The meddling by some foreign countries and embassies in the 2009 presidential election was a good lesson for Afghanistan," Karzai's chief spokesman Aimal Faizi

said. "The presence of foreigners in the Electoral Complaints Commission is against the sovereignty of Afghanistan. Foreign observers can still come to monitor the transparency or non-transparency of the election, but their interference in the election process is against Afghanistan's sovereignty," Karzai told a news conference alongside NATO chief Anders Fogh Rasmussen in the capital, Kabul (Reuters, 2012).

When Barack Obama, the successor of President George W. Bush assumed the office, he announced that the time to give a "blank check" to the Afghan government had ended. The Obama administration required more accountability and better governance from the Kabul government. However, Hamid Karzai, the Afghan president also took a defensive stance by saying for the first time in February 2009 that he had started a kind of "*gentle wrestling*" with the West and he hinted particularly to the United States.

The critical comments coming from the new administration signal an end to the era of special relationship that the Afghan leader enjoyed with former President George W. Bush. A new tension is evident. In a news conference Tuesday, Karzai said the discord is like a "gentle wrestling" match -- and he hopes Afghanistan ends up on top (Meyer & Dealer, 2009, p. 1).

The mass media reported on the political tension, particularly the U.S.-based international outlets. The media began to describe the situation in a different narrative, which meant more critical reporting on the weakness of the Afghan government.

In short, in recent years, the Taliban has managed something of resurgence, at the same time that Karzai government has lost some credibility. Karzai acknowledged "I have been in government for seven years and it is natural that I will not be as popular as I was seven years ago." (Meyer & Dealer, 2009, p. 1). Furthermore, the war in Afghanistan has become America's longest war. American and NATO troops are still in Afghanistan fighting the resurgent Taliban.

President Obama said in his 2008 campaign that he would re-focus U.S. attention on Afghanistan after the previous administration had turned attention to Iraq.

In May 2012, NATO and the United States announced a plan to withdraw their combat troops from Afghanistan by the end of 2014. At that time, the scheduled withdrawal of most troops, down to level of about 20,000, would be completed, as would the transition to Afghan responsibility for security.

The scheduled withdrawal has been criticized by some in the United States, including Senator John McCain, former Republican presidential candidate. Obama's 2012 opponent, Mitt Romney, also criticized the announced withdrawal date, but in the final 2012 presidential debate, Romney did not disagree with the plan.

This study examines the media focus on Afghanistan to find what issues received the most coverage and what are the trends within the media in covering those issues since 2010. Furthermore, the study explores the negotiation and peace talks' issues through media coverage on Afghanistan and a review of relevant literature. Since late 2011 there have been plans to open a political office for the Taliban in Qatar to facilitate the negotiation process with the U.S. and Afghan governments. Therefore, this study includes examination of the role and coverage of peace talks and negotiation as well. In fact, the international community through the United Nations has supported the purposed peace talks.

## **A. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Although more than 11 years have passed since the beginning of the military intervention by the United States and North Atlantic Treaty Organization in Afghanistan, there is still a lack of extensive study of media coverage of Afghanistan and of related development during this period. There are several important aspects of developments related to Afghanistan which

should be considered, including military action, as well as internal politics and policy, and negotiation and peace talks concerned with the future of Afghanistan.

This project is intended to analyze some of the national and international media coverage in recent years and to determine what subjects have been the focus of that coverage, and what trends are evident in that coverage.

Among the questions to be explored in this research are:

RQ1. What categories of news have received the largest amount of coverage?

RQ2. What trends are evident in the media coverage since 2010?

RQ3. What insight do the current media trends offer with regard to negotiations, peace talks, and the roles of the governments of Afghanistan and the United States and of the Taliban?

## **B. METHOD**

This study explores the *Media Focus in Afghanistan News Coverage* to examine what categories of Afghanistan-related news received the largest amount of coverage during selected periods of from 2010-2012. This project covered reports in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *USA Today*, and *The Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, a national Afghan news outlet, as a sample within a period of three months over three years (June 2010, July 2011, and August 2012). A total of 147 news stories were retrieved from the Lexis Nexis Academic search engine. For collecting literature the search engines such as Ebsco, ProQuest, and Google Scholar were used at the library of the University of Arkansas.

The purpose of this project is to examine focal points in media coverage on Afghanistan, including these categories: *Process*, which may cover peace talks, negotiation, and economic development; *conflict*, which includes violence and military action; and *politics and policy*,



which includes developments in the United States, Afghanistan, and North Atlantic Treaty Organization. In addition, research was conducted to illustrate the categories to provide effective insight on the current situation of Afghanistan both from the media perspective and the academic literature. The online headlines of the four news organizations (NYT, USA Today, TWP, and DOA) were selected to find coverage within the relevant categories (*process: peace talks, negotiation, and economic development; conflict: violence and military action; and politics and policy: USA, Afghanistan, and NATO*).

The time periods chosen for study are from the past three years, with a sample of one month each year (June, 2010; July 2011; and August, 2012). The past three years and particularly the summer time was picked because of two rationales. First, to explore the accurate situation of the country that has a situational correlation with the climate. Afghanistan is a seasonal country with the four seasons; therefore, summer is the peak of most activities. In this time of the year usually many infrastructural projects are implemented, while insurgency and insecurity tend to be at a higher level. Successive months of the years were elected to represent a whole summer. Second, during these three years the political tensions between the U.S. and Afghan governments have gradually increased. The researcher intended to examine the media coverage both in terms of focus and frequency on Afghanistan issues. To this end, the news coverage of four organizations was selected: *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *USA Today*, and *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, which is an Afghan newspaper.

*The New York Times* is a highly respected newspaper organization both nationally and internationally. The agenda-setting and framing of this respected organization is important. *The New York Times* is one of the few popular newspapers along with the *Wall Street Journal* and *USA Today* in the United States with daily circulation across the country. Fosu (2008) noted that

“*The New York Times* plays a very important role in setting the media agenda on national issues”, (p. 4). Therefore, the coverage of the *Times* is considered critical and profound on the Afghanistan issues as well.

*The Washington Post* is another respected news organization with focus on the U.S. policy and politics. Hoyt Purvis who is an international mass media expert and professor at the University of Arkansas, lecturing on the influence and effectiveness of the U.S. news organizations, in spring 2012 class session, said, “*The Washington Post* covers policy and politics of the U.S. Congress and the paper is effective in reflecting and influencing politics and policy.” In addition, Everbach (2011) argued that *Washington Post* has gained credibility in journalistic excellence in the U.S. capital, Washington D.C. Thus, the coverage of this newspaper might contribute to drawing the attention of the U.S. politicians on Afghanistan.

The third U.S. newspaper was selected the *USA Today*, which extensively covers national and international events with a broad daily distribution nationwide. *USA Today* is another nationally respected paper in the country. Everbach (2011) noted that *USA Today* is a “general-interest national newspaper”. However, because of its wide readership in the United States, its coverage on Afghanistan could play significant role in informing both U.S. people and the policy makers about the ongoing events in Afghanistan.

*The Daily Outlook Afghanistan* is a national newspaper. The *Daily* is published into three languages including English and the two official languages of the country (Dari and Pashto). This paper covers national stories to a large extent, while its regional and international news stories are contributed by other news agencies. The *Daily* is offered both in print and online version (<http://outlookafghanistan.net>).

The newspaper covers national, regional and international developments with daily editorials and articles on important issues. On Sundays, the paper publishes an additional

«Weekend Special» covering political, health, science, politics, culture, and cross-cutting issues like gender, HIV/AIDS, environment, youth affairs, sports and showbiz. (Daily Outlook Afghanistan, 2012/ retrieved online: <http://outlookafghanistan.net> ).

As Lexis Nexis Academic is a comprehensive engine with a great number of news story collections from the different news organizations around the world, I chose to pick the relevant news stories of the four above-mentioned news organizations through this engine. Having located each news organization, I entered the keyword Afghanistan along with different other words (i.e., peace talks, negotiation, war, policy and politics), and as a result I received the related Afghanistan news in date order of publications.

### C. CODING AND CATEGORY

The methodology of coding and category of Pew Research Center under *Pew Excellence Journalism News Coverage Index* was used for this study. In fact, the Pew News Index method generally categorizes coverage of the news organizations to determine what events or issues receive the most coverage within a week in different U.S. mass media, including radio, television, newspapers, online news, and social media (Twitter and Facebook). However, in this study the time scope set for three one-month periods within the past three years focusing only on the mentioned newspapers coverage on Afghanistan.

These categories are included: *politics and policy* of (The U.S. and Afghan governments, and NATO) for which a broader context has been coded as interconnected variables (i.e., *strategic and diplomatic relations between U.S. and Afghan governments, U.S. troops pullout from Afghanistan, war evaluation, security concerns, and negotiations to settle some disagreements between the two governments*). The category of *politics and policy* received the highest media coverage at the U.S.-based news organizations, including the *New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *USA Today*, and also the Afghan paper, *Daily outlook Afghanistan*. It

received more news coverage than the other variables such as *negotiation* and *peace talks*, or *economic development*. In fact, *politics and policy* are abstract terms; therefore, they can cover huge areas of relations, depending on the situation and the context of the communication. For sure, Afghanistan issues in this category dealt predominantly with war and international troops and their function within the country, particularly the U.S. troop presence and commitments. For instance, news headlines such as, “Both houses of Congress to debate Afghanistan war”, and “Why the candidates ignore Afghanistan”, (*The Washington Post, see the index A*) are coded as reflection of policy and politics.

However, in contrast, the category of *conflict: violence and military action* was coded explicitly. When the headlines covered such topics as bombs, drones, military offense, roadside mines, suicide attacks in Afghanistan, the news stories were categorized under *violence* or *military action*. For example, “U.N. report on Afghanistan notes surge in attacks and killings” (*The Washington Post, see index A*). “Afghan Bodyguard Kills Two from NATO Coalition” (*The New York Times, see index A*). This kind of news headlines were categorized under the conflict nominal.

The category of *process* included *negotiation, peace talks, and economic development*. The articles in this category were chosen through reading the headlines such as “U.S. says Afghan peace deal must ensure women rights”, (*USA TODAY, see index A*) or “*Peace Jirga; a Boost to Credibility or Mechanism for Peace*”, (*Daily Outlook Afghanistan, see index A*). An example of economic development, “*Averting a Post-2014 Economic Downfall*”, (*Daily Outlook Afghanistan, see index A*).

## CHAPTER TWO

### II. LITERATURE REVIEW

#### A. NEGOTIATION

Human beings are interested in achieving their goals through various possible means or approaches. Given the interconnections of contemporary life, to address essentially the needs and goals of one party is to affect the goals of other; hence, international negotiation is increasingly common. Chih (2011) suggests that global negotiation has been rapidly increasing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century because of the free-enterprise global market. When the issue of incompatible goals is raised as a conflict among people, whether in relationships, societies or in a broader scope among countries, then a potential instrument to address conflict is by using the concept of negotiation. However, the negotiation process is complex; it can work among some parties and societies while failing among others.

Negotiation can be defined as a strategic process to achieve goals by framing an operational map; a mutual problem(s) might be solved among parties through establishing an “instrumental goal” in a bargaining-oriented situation to achieve the agreement of all parties on how to address an issue (Putman, 1990; Shelling, 1960). The contextual description as a cornerstone of negotiation indicates the importance of having goals to reach a mutual agreement on dealing with problems. Putman (1990) noted that negotiation will be possible through an interactive communication such as “give and take” resolution. In fact, negotiation is conceived as a social phenomenon to respond mainly to the socio-economic and socio-political needs and problems of a society. Parties interact to reach an acceptable resolution through reciprocal discussion and communication in the broadest scope of negotiation (Chih, 2011; Gulbro and Hebig 1994; Foroughi 1998). When people cannot address a problem caused by other

individuals or groups, then they want to raise the issue to find a solution through an interactive communication of give-and-take, called bargaining. Bargaining is defined as “a process of developing tactical action from motives and intentions...Bargaining is goal-directed behavior” (Putman 1990, p. 375; Bacharach & Lawler, 1981, p.41). This description indicates that bargaining is the core element of negotiation, highlighting the course of action in a conceivable approach to meeting the goals of both parties.

In addition, culture plays a significant role in negotiation, particularly when the negotiation addresses cross-culture issues. Culture in the broad context means “a set of shared values and beliefs that characterize national, ethnic, moral and other group behavior” (Chih, 2011, p. 244; Faure and Sjostedt, 1993; Craig and Douglas 2006; Adapa, 2008). Given this definition, it is reasonable to anticipate specific differences in values and norms between parties in the cross-cultural negotiation. Cultural elements may include environments, languages, ideologies, traditions which could add to the complexity of the cross-culture negotiations (Chih, 2011; Minute-Wimsatt and Gassenheimer, 2000; Hoffmann 2001). The core essence of understanding other cultures in negotiation is to gain relative success and avoid some unprecedented failures stemming from the culture differences, rather than the complexity of a problem.

Moreover Johnston (2009) and Chang (2011) noted that minimal understanding of culture may lead negotiators to unnecessary risks--damaging the relations and losing their opportunity in a negotiation process, particularly at the international level. Huang and Bedford (2009) emphasized an understanding of cross-culture differences as a core and dynamic tool that plays an active and gainful role in “public diplomacy” and “public relations” through crisis communicative strategy in the current skyrocketing globalization and this is largely conveyed

through the media. The importance of understanding the relevant cultures before beginning negotiation among parties cannot be overestimated; negotiators need to be aware of the involved parties' cultures to yield any expected outcome in negotiation. For instance, Chang's (2011) empirical study revealed that Malaysian business individuals, were more interested in using accommodation strategies than their Taiwanese counterparts who were more comfortable using collaborative strategies. The study confirms the known difference of social characterization of these two countries (i.e., Malaysia seems more an individualistic society than Taiwan). Chang (2011) also found that Malaysians use more withdrawal and competition strategies than the Taiwanese who are keen to employ consultation strategies. Intercultural knowledge may provide the negotiating parties more opportunities to employ an integrative approach in negotiation. In contrast, lack of understanding in cross-cultural context could delay discovery of an effective negotiation process. It is essential to perceive how people communicate within a culture and what communicative approaches they use (Amarasinghe, 2012; Hendon, & Herbig, 1998; Dou, William, & Clark, 1999; Taylor, 2006) to facilitate successful negotiation. Meanwhile, the media play a significant role in covering and reflecting cultural understanding. Therefore, the international coverage can contribute to better cross-cultural negotiation skills. The U.S. possibly engages a political cross-cultural negotiation with the Taliban, so intercultural understanding is necessary for both negotiating parties to achieve their goals in peace talk. At the same time, media would play a broader role in updating and informing people about any possible progress. This would influence the negotiators to engage actively for conflict resolution.

## B. NEGOTIATION AND CROSS-CULTURAL DIFFERENCE

The increasing demand for negotiation in the global arena, particularly in politics and business turned to an indispensable component of the globalized-market. “Negotiation is one of the single most important international business skills”, (Drake, 1998, p. 153, Adler 1991). Negotiators presumably gain less, if the cross-cultural norms and values are not understood in the negotiation process.

The U.S. and Japanese cross-cultural studies revealed that these two countries function differently and generally negotiation represents very different cultures. Chang (2011) indicated that there is lack of literature in cross-cultural studies of the eastern countries to provide more documentation of cultural diversity. However, in contrast, research in the Western countries, especially the United States, has focused considerable attention on cross-cultural issues, primarily in business negotiation skills. As Darke (1998) indicated, negotiation qualification is considered very important for international business at the U.S. corporations. In one survey, 74 percent of the companies significantly recognized international negotiation skills for their staff (Darke, 1998).

The cultural differences may escalate crises when negotiators do not use common language in some conditions. Apparently, for U.S. diplomacy, the word *sorry*, *apology*, and *regret* matters too much to utter it in the global politics, though sometimes it might be essential from the perspective of the other cultures. For example, Schmitt (2011) reported that in November 2011, a U.S. helicopter and jet drone killed 26 Pakistani troops on the border area with Afghanistan. The government of Pakistan demanded an apology from the United States, blocked the North Atlantic Treaty Organization supply route, and applied other restrictions on NATO operations utilizing Pakistan routes, which created a blockage of transportation for



NATO troops in Afghanistan. Nonetheless, the U.S. government declined to apologize. “The State Department dispatched a senior diplomat and South Asia specialist, Robin Raphel, to canvass a wide spectrum of Pakistanis in December. She returned with a sober assessment and the view that many Pakistanis will not move forward without a formal apology from President Obama for the airstrike, which White House aides say is not in the offing.” (p.1).

Another such incident occurred in April 2001 at Hainan Island of China’s coast when a Chinese interceptor fighter jet chased a U.S. surveillance aircraft; the Chinese jet crashed allegedly by drafting off the American aircraft, and the U.S. jet landed without the permission at a Chinese airport. The Chinese government did not allow the return of the U.S. jet and its crew, and demanded an apology for the incident, which caused the death of the pilot. However, the United States was not ready to use the words such as sorry, apology, and regret, claiming that the incident happened in international space (Hung and Bedford, 2009). However, President George W. Bush eventually expressed regret over the death of the pilot and the collision with the Chinese Jet on April 5, 2001, “I regret that Chinese pilot is missing, and I regret one of their airplanes is lost, and our prayers go out to the pilot, and his family” (Office of the Press Secretary, White House, 2001b, Hung and Bedford, 209, p. 586). Meanwhile, Yang Jeichi, Chinese Ambassador to the United States said, “This is an incident caused totally by the American side...at least you should say, ‘Sorry’” (Lehrer, 2001; Hung and Bedford, 2009, p. 586). The Chinese Government welcomed the statement of regret, but demanded full apology for the incident (U.S. Regret, 2001, Hung and Bedford, 2009). The U.S. government sent a letter to the Chinese Foreign Ministry, containing the word “sorry” two times on April 11, 2001, “Please convey to the Chinese people and to the family of pilot Wei Wang that we are very sorry for their loss” and that “the United States is very sorry for entering Chinese airspace and making an

emergency landing that did not have verbal clearance “(Letter, 2001, Hung and Bedford, 2009, p. 586). The Chinese government allowed the return of the U.S. airplane with its 24-person American crew on April 11, 2001 (Hung and Bedford, 2009).

In short, though the cultural communication of China and the United States is different, they managed to communicate with diplomatic tact to reach a resolution. For example, the U.S. ultimately sought the safe return of the crew and the aircraft, which happened. China made an effort to follow a kind of integrative communication approach to save the face of the country by demanding apology, which was obtained in its modest. The two examples above underscore the significance of communication style and illustrate the intercultural communication skill to address cross-cultural problems is necessary in the negotiation process.

However, there is no real literature to provide researchers with some background information regarding any negotiations between the United States and Afghan governments or the Afghan insurgents in the past. For sure, there was a kind of indirect one-sided distributive negotiation from the United States warning the Taliban to surrender Osama Bin Laden after the September 11, 2001 attack in the United States, which did not work. In fact, the coming negotiation between the United States and the Taliban will be the first official attempts with the international support in the history of both countries. Although the cultural difference is evident between the possible negotiators of U.S. and the Taliban, there is no documentation to reflect details of any possible negotiation and its cultural difference yet. It is difficult to point out the actual cultural barriers so far.

However, given the importance of negotiation and peace talks process, I studied media coverage in these issues as well. My data analysis indicates that both the Afghan paper, *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, and the U.S. news organizations (*NYT*, *the Washington Post*, and *USA*

*Today*) covered the current negotiation prospects in Afghanistan less than other areas. The *Daily Outlook Afghanistan* had the highest number of stories (N=72) with most focusing on the politics and policy of Afghanistan and the least military action coverage of the country. USA Today devoted the greatest number of its stories to the politics and policy of the United States on Afghanistan, while economic development and peace talks and negotiation received the least coverage, with two stories from the total of 29 stories across the sample months. *The New York Times* also covered the least stories (N=2) on peace talks and negotiation, while its politics and policy coverage of U.S. government on Afghanistan received the most with (N=11) stories. The Washington Post followed the conventional pattern of covering mostly the politics and policy, while peace talks and negotiation received the minimum coverage (N=2) stories. Analyzing the current trend of these papers one will recognize that politics and policy receive the most coverage by all these news organizations. Although peace talks and negotiation in Afghanistan have been extensively discussed by the Afghan government, the international community, and particularly by the U.S. government, the media did not cover them that much. There might be many reasons for the lack of coverage on peace talks and negotiation, but one of them seems obvious, stemming from the invisibility of the Taliban at any specific negotiation table. Allegedly, some talks were held with the Taliban outside Afghanistan, but they have not made any progress so far. Nothing was released very publicly to the media out of these so-called negotiations. However, if there was more coverage of Afghan peace talks and negotiations, especially by the international news organizations and particularly in influential U.S. media, that might contribute to the likelihood of peace building in Afghanistan.

The Afghan government and international forces have used major military attacks in an effort to eliminate the Taliban and other militant groups, but this has not led to stability in the

country in the past 11 years, according to media reports, and 2009 both the Afghan authorities and the international community have agreed on the concept of negotiation and peace talks with the Taliban.

Marsden (2008) argues that military resolution could not put an end to the war in Afghanistan. In the meantime there is ambiguity in knowing a clear way of political settlement with the Taliban. Apparently, the Taliban showed reluctance as long as the international force continues their presence and Hamid Karzai's government remains in power. Although the Taliban has not been defined in a understandable context yet, some dictionaries provided definition such as "Taliban is defined as a fundamentalist Islamic army in Afghanistan; in 1996 it defeated the ruling Mujahidin factions and seized control of the country; and they were overthrown in 2001 by US-led forces", (<http://dictionary.reference.com> ). Although the Afghan government consistently offered to take the lead in any negotiation or peace talks with the insurgent groups, including the Taliban, the Taliban refused to enter any negotiation process with the Kabul government; instead they wanted to negotiate with the international community, particularly with the U.S. government. But this demand cannot be as smooth as it seems because of the predominant cross-cultural effects, let alone the current tension between the U.S. troops and the Taliban.

The cultural difference is extremely large between the U.S. negotiators and the Taliban in many aspects, and this might affect the overall negotiation process of peace talks. These barriers have not been expressed or reflected in the media coverage. First, language is a barrier; particularly, the negotiation terms might add much more to the complexity of the process through translation. Furthermore, the Taliban negotiators might have modest negotiation literacy. Second, U.S. troops and the Taliban fought fiercely for the past 11 years, consequently, trust

building between the negotiators will be very tough and this mistrust may proliferate due to the existing imbalance of power. For example, the United States is recognized a huge power of the world, while the Taliban has little influence on their corner with obvious controlling of the U.S. troops. Therefore, the Taliban might be afraid that some promises will not be fulfilled after the negotiation process. This group has already complained that the U.S. negotiators had not stood on their promises and commitments in the preliminary negotiation happened so far. The Taliban announced their preconditions as the total withdrawal of the foreign troops from Afghanistan, release of their five key figures from the Guantanamo prison, along with other demands. The most promising stage for them was to see the release of the five imprisoned commanders in exchange for an American soldier, which has not taken place yet.

Meanwhile, the U.S. negotiators have to be careful for any possible consequences or ramifications both domestically and internationally. The U.S. negotiators will not be the ultimate decision makers for any agreements. Although they might listen to all demands of the Taliban, but this doesn't mean that they have the authority to respond to every single one. The complex hierarchy of the U.S. government imposes certain limitations on the political negotiators that other party of the negotiation may not well realize. Another ambiguity of the negotiation stemmed from the avoidance of the public release, or in other words, media avoidance. This might be one of the prime reasons for there not being much coverage on the negotiation process on Afghanistan. Very little news has been released about the result of negotiation with the Taliban so far. The prime goal of these negotiations is to bring peace and stability to Afghanistan, which is the goal of both the Afghan and U.S. governments.

### C. PEACE TALKS IN AFGHANISTAN

“War and peace are complex phenomena, each with many causes, such as geography, politics, population growth, economic rivalry, arm races, alliance structures and leaders’ crisis management styles and skills, as well as a variety of historically specific factors” (Winter, 2007, p. 920). Apparently, it is difficult to predict the percentage of coverage of war compared to peace talks, because there is lack of academic studies to show war and peace talk coverage in a compared way. Dimitrova (2007) suggested that there are some motives that encourage a struggle for power (attempt to gain influence, social status and dignity) and also partnership (to build close connection and alliance with others ) these two motives always have been erupting from different cultures. “Researchers have studied news framing from three different perspectives: cognitive, constructive, and critical, (d, Angelo, 2002)”. Dimitrova also wrote that framing includes choosing and signifying to communicate a message.

However, in the past three decades the Afghan people were witness to some failed peace talks attempts among hostile groups in the country. Although in one case the United Nations intervened between the then procommunist regime and Mujahidin groups who were fighting against the regime to establish Islamic government, it failed to meet the goals of peace building in the country. Finally, Najibullah’s government was toppled by the Mujahidin groups in 1992 and UN peace intervention under Benon Sevan, the UN Special Envoy to Afghanistan failed.

In 1989, after the completion of the Soviet withdrawal, Benon Sevan, the UN Special Envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan and head of the UN Good Offices Mission in Afghanistan and Pakistan (UNMOGAP), and the office headed by him, the Office of the Secretary General for Afghanistan and Pakistan (OSGAP), brokered a peace deal between the Afghan mujahedin groups based in Pakistan and the government of Dr. Najibullah. The process was about the peaceful transfer of the power to the mujahedin groups. This policy of transfer of power failed mainly because there was (a) a lack of clear mechanisms for how the transfer of power should be. (Mosadiq 2010, p.1).

The learned lessons from the past peace talks and negotiation in Afghanistan reminds us to build effective mechanism of peace building in this country, otherwise another failure would happen. Furthermore, media coverage focus and framing plays a significant role on peace talks and negotiation. In fact, the current coverage of negotiation and peace talks with the insurgent groups in Afghanistan is not adequately covered--as the three months of sample coverage suggested. The data showed (*see chap. 3*) that peace talks and negotiation received the least coverage both in the U.S. news organizations (NYT, USA Today, and The Washington Post) and the Afghan news outlet (Daily Outlook Afghanistan). Both the frequency of coverage and framing of peace talks could contribute to the peace building process in the country. For example, Dimitrova (2007) argued that the framework of journalism “transforms the conflict creatively so that opportunities take the upper hand-without violence” and peace journalism, “is an advocacy, interpretative approach to highlight peace initiatives, tone down ethnic and religious differences, prevent further conflict, focus on the structure of society, and promote conflict resolution and reconciliation”,(Ting Lee, 2010, p. 362). For more elaboration on the framing and coverage, another example is given when Dimitrova examined the language of Aljazeera in contrast to some western media on Iraq war coverage. Dimitrova (2007) found that Aljazeera was much more critical through using negative terms in covering the Iraq War; for example, a March 29, 2003 headline said: “Americans massacre Iraqis in Baghdad and use banned weapons, killing 96.” (p. 162). Dimitrova also indicated the Coalition media was more objective than the Arab media. The western media, particularly that of the United States and United Kingdom, often framed the Iraq War on the long-term benefits such as establishing democracy in Iraq. For instance, *the New York Times* online on April 28, 2003 posted this headline: “Bush vows to stand by Iraq until democracy flourishes” (Dimitrova, 2007, p. 163). In

fact, not only the frequency of coverage of issues may help form perceptions, but the way media frame news and use terms can affect public opinion.

President Karzai frequently announced the concept of talking with the Taliban since 2007, but there have not been effective formal peace talks with the Taliban so far. The fledgling peace talk's process has gone through many ups and downs so far. The Afghan government established the High Peace Council to facilitate peace talks and reintegration of the insurgents in Afghanistan. HPC announced that they would bring the insurgents to the negotiation table to facilitate their reintegration to the civilian life. Although recently HPC has managed to find a specific channel or venue for the Taliban leaders to contact, this has not led to a practical peace talks. Moreover, the fragile peace talks faced a new wave of disappointment following the killing of the HPC chairman, former president Burhanuddin Rabani, who was assassinated by suicide bomber at his residential property in the capital Kabul on September 20, 2011.

In addition, the Taliban suspended the negotiation process in Qatar when their demand regarding the release of their five imprisoned men from Guantanamo was not met in March 2012. The U.S. Congress had heated debate about not releasing the Taliban figures because of resumption of the insurgency against Americans in Afghanistan. The Guardian online reported, "Peace talks between the US and the Taliban broke down in March {2012} mainly because the Afghan insurgents refused to agree to a deal by which guerrilla commanders released from Guantánamo Bay would remain under Qatari government supervision in Doha, a senior US administration official said," (Broger, 2012,p. 1). Meanwhile, the Obama administration had the U.S. election campaign ahead, so it was very cautious about negotiation with the Taliban so as not to create some consequential effect on the campaign.



But President Barack Obama may elevate the likelihood of resumption of peace talks as he promised during his presidential debate that he wanted a responsible transition in Afghanistan, President Obama said, “We’re now able to transition out of Afghanistan in a responsible way, making sure that Afghans take responsibility for their own security. And that allows us also to rebuild alliances and make friends around the world to combat future threats”, (ABC News, 2012, p.1). The success of peace talks will benefit both the U.S. and Afghan governments by extending stability in the country. The U.S. government may focus on the withdrawal of its troops from Afghanistan, while the success of transition matters for the U.S. government, as Obama has hinted. At the same time, the Afghan government might enjoy some relative stability as well. Although the current peace talks are not in the spotlight of the international news organizations, as the analyzed data suggested, in the course of time the peace talks coverage may increase, when some practical steps are taken. Currently, the coverage of peace talks depends on occasional statements, which are given either by the Afghan government or U.S. authorities. However, the likelihood of more coverage will increase if a series of tangible talks take place with the Taliban through its political office in Qatar or anywhere else in the future.

#### **D. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

Afghanistan’s economy shifted from a closed market system to an open market-oriented system since 2001. In fact, the economic infrastructures of the country sustained heavy damage during the past three decades of war and turmoil, beginning from the invasion of the Soviet troops in 1979; however, it fell down to the ground during (the 1992) as a result of the successive civil wars first among some of the Afghan Islamic groups “*mujahidin*” who fought against the Soviet invasion and toppled the procommunist regime finally in 1992. Then, the late war between the Taliban and mujahidin groups also affected the economical infrastructures heavily.

However, in contrast, after the international intervention in Afghanistan, the country found a ray of hope to initiate restoration of its economy in the long run. Afghanistan is a landlocked country that heavily depends on the ground transportation. The open market system provided the country with some advantages and disadvantages because the country highly relies on import items rather than to export and the rare local products could not compete with the regional market.

But in terms of media coverage, Afghanistan's economy received both national and international media focus when a large number of Western countries directly intervened for change in Afghanistan. Both national and international media relatively covered economic developments, which have been made particularly in the telecommunication, IT, construction, media, banking agriculture...and some other areas. Although the private sector was provided with good opportunity to invest, the insecurity created hazards to the investors so far. The national and international media began to reflect the economic situation of the country, which has been heavily depending on the international aid. Although some considerable amounts of investments have been made in the country, they are still in mostly in the service sector rather than the product companies.

The 1979 Soviet invasion and ensuing civil war destroyed much of the underdeveloped country's limited infrastructure and disrupted normal patterns of economic activity. Gross domestic product had fallen substantially over the preceding 23 years because of loss of labor and capital and disruption of trade and transport. Continuing internal strife hampered both domestic efforts at reconstruction as well as international aid efforts. However, Afghanistan's economy has been growing at a fast pace since the 2001 fall of the Taliban, albeit from a low base. In 2003, growth was estimated at close to 30%; although final figures are not yet available, the growth rate is expected to be over 20% for 2004 (Economy index, 2005).

The present media coverage on Afghanistan's economy focuses on the Afghanistan mines, which have attracted the attention of investors from the regional countries, particularly Chinese investors, who have already been awarded some contracts. *Mis-Ainak* copper mine was

awarded to a Chinese state-run company- In November 2007, a 30-year lease was granted for the copper mine to the China Metallurgical Group (MCC) for \$3 billion. The mine located in Logar province 25 miles to the South East of Kabul. Most of the current economic development news stories of the news organizations focused on the Afghanistan's mines (see appendix A). For example, the *New York Times* published the story of a new discovery of U.S. team on Afghanistan mines with value of \$1trillion.

The United States has discovered nearly \$1 trillion in untapped mineral deposits in Afghanistan, far beyond any previously known reserves and enough to fundamentally alter the Afghan economy. The previously unknown deposits -- including huge veins of iron, copper, cobalt, gold and critical industrial metals like lithium -- are so big and include so many minerals that are essential to modern industry that Afghanistan could eventually be transformed into one of the most important mining centers in the world, the United States officials believe. An internal Pentagon memo, for example, states that Afghanistan could become the "Saudi Arabia of lithium," a key raw material in the manufacture of batteries for laptops and BlackBerrys. The vast scale of Afghanistan's mineral wealth was discovered by a small team of Pentagon officials and American geologists. The Afghan government and President Hamid Karzai were recently briefed, American officials said (Risen, 2010).

In fact, the coverage of these stories might instill global interest toward the mineral resources of Afghanistan in the future. It shows this country is potentially rich enough to make sure progress and prosperity in the future if security of the country becomes stabilized. Furthermore, the coverage of economic development of the country will change some of the current stereotypes (terror, bomb, war, and violence ...). The frequency of positive economic development coverage may create different perception out of the country. Ultimately, some investors will show interest to invest in Afghanistan in the long-run, though the insecurity is still a discouraging factor to the international business people.

## E. CONFLICT IN AFGHANISTAN

The phenomenon of violence increased heavily in the Afghan society due to the past three decades of war and turmoil across the country. When the then Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979-1989, the country was virtually divided mainly in two political ideologies, *the right and left wings*: the procommunist mentality with heavy support of Russia was attributed to the left, while the Islamic groups under the name of *Mujahidin (the holy warriors)* was recognized as the right wing, and were supported by the Western countries, particularly by the United States. Severe wars occurred between the Mujahidin and Soviet troops with their Afghan alliance and as a result more than two millions were killed and injured. Sidky noted, “Referred to in Western sources as the Afghan *jihad*, the war resulted in one and-a-half to two million fatalities and the displacement of millions of people as refugees,” (2007, p.849).

When the Islamic groups toppled the Kabul government of Dr. Najibullah in 1992, they established a fragile government. But the security and instability of the newly government was fiercely undermined due to severe factional fighting mostly in the capital Kabul from 1992-1996. During the civil war the violence badly increased. Moreover, violence was exacerbated when the Taliban were fighting in the Northern part of the country against the Northern Coalition forces, whom were expelled from Kabul in 1996. However, on the *Mujahidin* time there was only state-run TV, Radio and a few newspapers to cover the news stories at national level, but there was lack of international media on Afghanistan coverage, though fierce violence was going on. Moreover, the state-run media declined during the Taliban as the TV broadcasting was totally banned by the regime. Meanwhile, the international media coverage was very less during the civil wars, probably because of the lack intervention of their related governments in Afghanistan, particularly the United States.

However, the media coverage on Afghanistan issues rapidly increased when the international coalition forces led by the United States intervened in Afghanistan to fight against the Taliban in 2001. Since then both national and international media have covered the issues in Afghanistan widely. The result of the research indicates that conflict, including violence military action, received less coverage than the policy and politics in all four media organizations. The coverage of violence provides broader awareness both at national and international levels to Afghanistan that the international community and the Afghan authorities should do further attempt to find a solution for the issues.

Although there have been some media coverage of military action into Afghanistan war , the main problem was the embedded coverage with the international forces, that some journalists are frustrated because of the “balance” of the news stories. For example, Keeble and Mair(2010) argued that the embedded reporting with the Coalition forces might affect the balance of news stories where there is lack of voice from other side of the war, “Britain’s Sky News’s Alex Crawford says how she manages to combine embedded reporting from both sides of the Afghan conflict. And while a general picture of the conflict may be possible based on time spent with either of the fighting forces, she says much of the truth about how the war is going will be filled in by the civilians at the center it all”,(p.5).

## **F. POLITICS AND POLICY**

Economic dependency of the Afghan government on international aid, providing over 80 percent for the annual budget of the country, made the policies and politics of Afghanistan more subordinate to or, in other words, in line with the wants of the donor countries. Although in many areas the policies and politics of the Afghan government are acceptable for the donor countries, there are some areas that particularly the U.S. government has to negotiate with its Afghan partner. To this end, the Afghan government has begun bargaining over issues of policies and politics with other countries for years now. This approach was enforced primarily with the United States after President Barack Obama assumed office for the first time in 2009. As the United States shoulders a huge burden of the financial and human resources of the war in Afghanistan, then the policy and politics of the U.S. and the Afghan governments on many issues have to be consistent as they are strategic military and security partners.

At the beginning of the intervention in Afghanistan, the newly established government had a more subordinated approach to the international demands, with less opportunity for bargaining. President Hamed Karzai hinted that Afghanistan reached a point at which it could bargain with its international partners on behalf of its national interest, although good governance, corruption, insecurity, and lack of economic development have been concerns about the Afghan government. Obviously, when the policy and politics of the United States and the Afghan governments do not match, some tensions can erupt. There are many political issues unsolved between the U.S. and the Afghan governments and negotiation is going on to settle the problems. For example, the Afghan government wants the full handover of Bagram prison, where hundreds of Afghan citizens alleged to be Taliban members, are imprisoned. The Afghan officials usually express concerns about this political inconsistency among the two countries. In

fact, media coverage is very focused on these issues, nationally and internationally. Media coverage is high in reflecting this political tension. Probably, this political tension is a big factor in policies and politics receiving the most coverage, as the data indicate in chapter three of this study. Regarding the tension over the Bagram prison, spokesman for National Defence Ministry, Zaher Azemi said.

Our national sovereignty has been undermined because Afghan nationals have been detained in Afghanistan and we have not known on what charges and where they have been kept. Their [the inmates'] civil rights will be preserved in this prison by the time the responsibility is handed over to us in the future. They will be able to have a lawyer and will be prosecuted based on Afghan laws”, (BBC monitoring, 2010, p. 1).

Despite the fact that there has been discussion over handing over the responsibility of the Bagram prison to the Afghan government for three years, the U.S. forces have not handed over the responsibility to their Afghan partner yet. This issue repeatedly arose as a sign of protest from the Afghan government through national and internal media, but the process has not yielded good progress yet. The Afghan officials expressed concern that sovereignty of the country is undermined and say that the United States should respect the Afghan government's demands. Moreover, the gap is to the extent that the Afghan government has already processed some cases of the imprisoned inmates, granting them acquittal, but U.S. officials have not taken action to respond to the demand. BBC monitoring (2012) reported that the presidential spokesman, Email Faizy said, thirty-three inmates were to be released from Bagram prison. “The detainees being held by the Americans have already secured acquittal from the Afghan courts. But, they are still being held by the Americans. Our objective is that the control of the Bagram prison must fully be transferred to the Afghan side”. (p.1).

Moreover, *the New York Times* also reported about the issue of Bagram prison recently, quoting the Afghan Presidential Office spokesman, Email Faizy, "We expect the Americans to respect the agreement according to the memorandum of understanding signed between the two countries," It reported that U.S. officials have not talked about issue in the United States.

American military did not respond to specific Afghan complaints, but United States Forces-Afghanistan released a statement saying, "The United States fully respects the sovereignty of Afghanistan, and we are committed to fulfilling the mutual obligations incurred under the Memorandum of Understanding on Detentions." (*Nordland, 2012, p. 4*).

It seems that the rights advocates also have concern over the delay of the handover of the Bagram prison to the Afghan government. *The New York Times* reported that more than 3000 detainees, are within Bagram Air Base. The Bagram prison is surrounded by American checkpoints, and is heavily staffed by American guards. However, human rights advocates welcomed Mr. Karzai's move according to the *New York Times report*.

Tina Foster, the executive director of the International Justice Network, who represents some Bagram detainees, met recently with Afghan officials to try to visit her clients in the prison. The Afghans approved the visits, but the United States military blocked them, she said. "When we met with Karzai's staff it was clear that the Afghans are tired of being treated like servants in their own country," Ms. Foster said. "Symbolic gestures are not going to cut it anymore. They want the keys to the prison, and the ability to determine the fates of the prisoners held there." (*Nordland, 2012, p.4*).

However, there is agreement on the security responsibility transition to the Afghan government, which is being implemented in different phases, and the process is going relatively smoothly among NATO, U.S. and Afghan officials. This is the very smooth process in terms of mutual agreement and implementation, though the long-term implications created some concerns for critics both in Afghanistan and the United States.



Moreover, the U.S. and Afghan authorities are currently negotiating to reach an agreement over a long-term security partnership to accommodate the presence of some U.S. forces after 2014. Although the actual problem is not clear in this negotiation process, some analysts assume that the Afghan government is insisting on not to granting immunity from persecution in Afghan courts to remaining U.S. forces. President Karzai publicly said last week (at the beginning of December, 2012) the negotiation is going on over the security partnership with some bargaining from both sides. Metaphorically, he said that the Afghan side is pulling the national interest toward themselves and the U.S. authorities toward them; however, Karzai said that they won't touch the "sensitive points" of the U.S. side in this negotiation while the Afghan government will make sure to protect the national interest of the country within the long-term security partnership. Regarding the issue of U.S. troops' immunity in Afghanistan, the Afghan government is lobbying for its sovereignty. An editorial in the Washington Post reflected the issue this way.

According to the strategic partnership agreement that Mr. Obama and Mr. Karzai signed in May, the two countries have until next October to agree on a post-2014 military arrangement. But a much earlier deal is needed in order to plan and carry out the withdrawal of the 66,000 U.S. troops currently in the country. To get there, an infusion of political courage is needed on both sides.

The government of President Hamid Karzai, for its part, is making its own troubling noises. Mr. Karzai has been suggesting that he will refuse to grant U.S. troops immunity from the Afghan courts after 2014 - crossing what he knows is a Pentagon red line. (Board editorial of *the Washington Post*, 2012, p. 26).

Although political tension is unavoidable in political partnership among the countries, the Afghan government is overwhelmingly under pressure from the political and civil society to not compromise on the sovereignty of the country. For example, a U.S. soldier walked out of his base and started shooting civilians in their homes in the Southern province of Kandahar. As a

result dozens were killed including children, women and elders in 2012, but due to the current immunity of U.S. troops, and the Afghan government could not prosecute him, although he faced legal prosecution in the United States. This brought about a wave of protest and criticism against the Afghan government over why international forces are granted immunity in the country.

Plausibly, from now on the Afghan government would like to take some careful steps to secure more the rights of its citizens, too. In short, these were a few examples of the current political dialogue between the Afghan and U.S. government that both national and international media, particularly the U.S. media, have covered. Again this might be the prime reason that policy and politics received the most coverage of the relevant Afghan-U.S. issues in the study.

## CHAPTER THREE

### III. DATA ANALYSIS OF THE NEWS MEDIA COVERAGE

**Table1** shows the number of stories that *New York Times* covered on Afghanistan within the three months of the past three years that were subject of the study. *Politics and policy* of the United States received the highest coverage with 69%, whereas negotiation and peace talks received the lowest coverage with 14%. The total number of stories was declined by more than 30 percent from June 2010 to August 2012. *The New York Times* might have focused on the politics and policy of the United States in relations with the Afghan government because of its national and international significance. The decline probably is because of the eruption of some controversial issues between the U.S. and Afghan governments some financial twist due to the economic recession in the United States as well. However, negotiation and peace talks of the U.S. and Afghan governments with the Taliban have not received much coverage. Although the success of the negotiation and peace talks may benefit both the Afghans and the international community, particularly the United States, it seems that has not been especially newsworthy for the New York Times . If this respected international news organization focused more on peace talks and negotiation, it might have greater impact on the issue.

**A. TABLE.1 THE NEW YORK TIMES**

NYT	The types of coverage (News Stories)											Grand total
	Process			%age	Conflict		%age	Politics/Policy			%age	
	Peace talks	Nego.	Econ. Dev.		Vio.	Mil. Action		US	Afg.	NATO		
<b>(June 2010)</b>	1	1	3	<b>42%</b>	1	0	<b>8%</b>	3	2	1	<b>50%</b>	12
<b>(July 2011)</b>	0	0	1	<b>14%</b>	2	0	<b>29%</b>	3	1	0	<b>57%</b>	7
<b>(August 2012)</b>	0	0	1	<b>13%</b>	1	0	<b>13%</b>	5	0	1	<b>75%</b>	8

*Table Index abb.: Nego=Negotiation/ Econ. Dev. = Economic Development/ Mil. = military/ %age = percentage/ US= the United States/ Afg. = Afghanistan/ NATO = North Atlantic Treaty Organization*

**B. TABLE.2 TABLE BASED ON THE PERCENTAGE**

NYT	Process			Conflict		Politics/Policy		
	Peace talk	Nego.	Econ. Dev.	Violence	Mil. Action	US	Afg.	NATO
<b>(June 2010)</b>	20%	20%	60%	100%	0%	50%	33%	17%
<b>(July 2011)</b>	0%	0%	100%	100%	0%	75%	25%	0%
<b>(August 2012)</b>	0%	0%	100%	100%	0%	83%	0%	17%

**C. TABLE.3 THE DAILY OUTLOOK AFGHANISTAN**

Daily Outlook Afghanistan	The types of coverage (News Stories)											Grand total
	Process			%age	Conflict		%age	Politics/Policy			%age	
	Peace talk	Nego.	Econ. Dev.		Viol.	Mil. Action		US	Afg.	NATO		
<b>(June 2010)</b>	2	2	3	<b>30%</b>	5	2	<b>30%</b>	0	7	2	<b>39%</b>	23
<b>(July 2011)</b>	4	4	7	<b>38%</b>	5	2	<b>18%</b>	6	11	1	<b>45%</b>	40
<b>(August 2012)</b>	0	0	3	<b>33%</b>	1	0	<b>11%</b>	1	4	0	<b>56%</b>	9

**Table 3** shows the number of stories that the Daily Outlook Afghanistan covered on Afghanistan within the three months of the past three years. The data indicates that politics and policy of the Afghan government received the most coverage with 69 percent, whereas peace talks and negotiation received 24 percent, which is a comparatively good rate. The total number of stories declined dramatically by 2012, which shows consistency with the decline in coverage of the U.S. news organizations on Afghanistan. Apparently, there might be an association on the decline of coverage between the *Daily Afghanistan Outlook* and the U.S. news outlets because this national paper republishes some news stories from the Western media. This news organization moderately published on the Afghan conflict including violence and military action. Its publication could be considered effective, as this one of the most consistent and active papers in English language in Afghanistan printed on daily basis. However, its peace talks and negotiation news coverage could be more in the local languages (Dari and Pashto).

**D. TABLE 4. BASED ON THE PERCENTAGE**

Daily Outlook Afghanistan	Process			Conflict		Politics/Policy		
	Peace talks	negotiation	Economic development	violence	Military action	US	Afghan	NATO
<b>(June 2010)</b>	29%	29%	43%	71%	29%	0%	78%	22%
<b>(July 2011)</b>	27%	27%	47%	71%	29%	33%	61%	6%
<b>(August 2012)</b>	0%	0%	100%	100%	0%	20%	80%	0%

**E. TABLE 5. THE WASHINGTON POST**

The Washington Post	The types of coverage (News Stories)										%age	Grand total
	Process			%age	Conflict		%age	Politics/Policy				
	Peace talk	Nego.	Econ. Dev.		Vio.	Mil. Action		U.S.	Af. g.	NATO		
<b>(June 2010)</b>	1	1	3	<b>28%</b>	3		<b>17%</b>	8	0	2	<b>56%</b>	18
<b>(July 2011)</b>	0	0	1	<b>20%</b>	2		<b>40%</b>	1	0	1	<b>40%</b>	5
<b>(August 2012)</b>	0	0	<b>0</b>	<b>0%</b>	0	3	<b>75%</b>	1			<b>25%</b>	4

**Table 5** shows the number of stories that the Washington Post covered on Afghanistan within the three months analyzed in the past three years. The highest coverage in the Washington Post was on U.S. policy and politics on Afghanistan with 77 percent in this context. Peace talks and negotiation received the lowest coverage, 17 percent. However, economic development and violence received 67 percent and 63 percent. It suggests that the Washington Post nearly has been equally interested in politics, conflict and process in Afghanistan. But it shows a very

dramatic decline of more than 60 percent in the overall coverage from 2010 to 2012. The evident tension between the U.S. and Afghan governments might be an influential factor of the coverage decline. However, this is another U.S. newspaper that can play an important role or an agenda-setting on Afghanistan through its coverage.

#### F. TABLE.6 BASED ON PERCENTAGE

The Washington Post	Process			Conflict		Politics/Policy		
	Peace talks	negotiation	Economic development	violence	Military action	US	Afghan	NATO
<b>(June 2010)</b>	20%	20%	60%	100%	0%	80%	0%	20%
<b>(July 2011)</b>	0%	0%	100%	100%	0%	50%	0%	50%
<b>(August 2012)</b>	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	100%	0%	0%

#### G. TABLE.7 THE USA TODAY

USA Today	The types of coverage (News Stories)										%age	Grand total
	Process			%age	Conflict		%age	Politics/Policy				
	Peace talk	Nego .	Econ . Dev.		Vio .	Mil. Action		U S	Afg .	NAT O		
<b>(June 2010)</b>	1	0	0	<b>6%</b>	3	2	<b>31%</b>	9	1	0	<b>63%</b>	16
<b>(July 2011)</b>	0	0	1	<b>11%</b>	0	1	<b>11%</b>	6	1	0	<b>78%</b>	9
<b>(August 2012)</b>	0	0	0	<b>0%</b>	1	0	<b>25%</b>	2	1	0	<b>75%</b>	4

**Table 6** shows the number of stories that the USA Today covered on Afghanistan within the three months of the past three years. Here the paper devoted most of its coverage to the U.S. politics and policy on Afghanistan, while the process including economic developments, peace talks, and negotiation have received the least coverage, with only two stories in the three months. The number of the stories has increasingly declined as with the three other news organizations. USA Today, as an American national paper, can also be significant in framing and agenda-setting on Afghanistan issues. If this paper focused on peace talks and economic development of Afghanistan it could significantly influence events related to Afghanistan.

#### H. TABLE.8 BASED ON THE PERCENTAGE

The Washington Post	Process			Conflict		Politics/Policy		
	Peace talks	negotiation	Economic development	violence	Military action	US	Afghan	NATO
<b>(June 2010)</b>	100%	0%	0%	60%	40%	90%	10%	0%
<b>(July 2011)</b>	0%	0%	100%	0%	100%	86%	14%	0%
<b>(August 2012)</b>	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	67%	33%	0%



**I. TABLE.9 THE INTEGRATED OF THE FOUR NEWS ORGANIZATIONS**

The News Org.	The types of coverage										%age	Grand total
	Process			%age	Conflict		%age	Politics/Policy				
	Peace talk	Nego.	Econ. Devel p.		Viol e.	Mil. Action		US	Afg.	NATO		
<b>NYT</b>	1	0	5	<b>23%</b>	4	0	<b>15%</b>	11	3	2	<b>62%</b>	26
<b>D.Outl.Afg.</b>	6	0	13	<b>29%</b>	11	4	<b>23%</b>	7	22	3	<b>48%</b>	66
<b>W.Psot</b>	1	0	4	<b>19%</b>	5	3	<b>31%</b>	10	0	3	<b>50%</b>	26
<b>USA Today</b>	1	0	1	<b>7%</b>	4	3	<b>24%</b>	17	3	0	<b>69%</b>	29
	9	0	23		24	10	<b>93%</b>	45	28	8	<b>229%</b>	
Total of Categories	32				34			81				147
Total Percentage	22%				23%			55%				100%

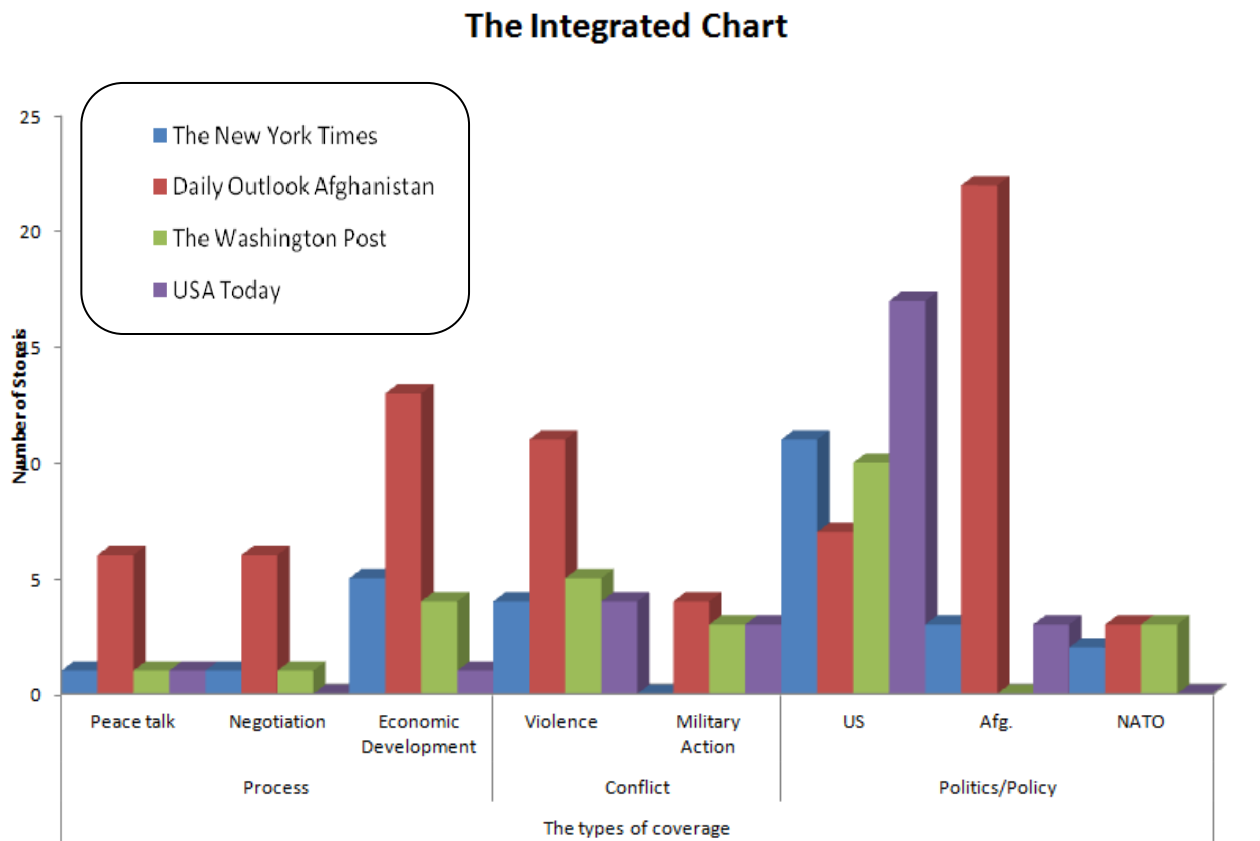
**Table 9** shows the integrated result of all four news organizations. As the Afghan paper, *Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, and the U.S. news organizations (*NYT*, *the Washington Post*, and *USA Today*) covered the current negotiation perception in Afghanistan less than other areas. The *Daily Outlook Afghanistan* had the highest number of stories (N=72), with most focusing on the politics and policy of Afghanistan and the least on military action coverage. USA Today covered the greatest number of its stories on the politics and policy of the United States on Afghanistan, while economic development and peace talks and negotiation received the least coverage, with two stories from the total of 29 stories across the sample months. *The New York Times* also had minimum stories (N=2) on peace talks and negotiation, while its politics and policy coverage of U.S. government on Afghanistan received the most with (N=11) stories. The Washington Post followed the conventional pattern of covering mostly the politics and policy, while its peace talks and negotiation received the minimum coverage (N=2) stories. Analyzing the current trend of

these papers one will recognize that politics and policy receive the most coverage by all these news organizations. Although peace talks and negotiation in Afghanistan have been extensively discussed by the Afghan government and the international community, particularly by the U.S. government, the media did not cover them that much. There might be many reasons for the lack coverage on peace talks and negotiation, but one of them seems obvious, stemming from invisibility of the Taliban at any specific negotiation table. Allegedly, some talks were held with the Taliban outside the country. There is no evidence of progress so far. Nothing was released very publicly to the media out of these so-called negotiations. However, if there was more coverage of Afghan peace talks and negotiations, especially by the international news organizations and particularly in influential U.S. media, that might contribute to the likelihood of peace building in Afghanistan.

**J. TABLE.10 THE INTEGRATED TABLE BASED PERCENTAGE**

The News Organization	Process			Conflict		Politics/Policy		
	Peace talks	Negotiation	Economic development	violence	Military action	US	Afghanistan	NATO
<b>NYT</b>	14%	14%	71%	100%	0%	69%	19%	13%
<b>D. Outl. Afg.</b>	24%	24%	52%	73%	27%	22%	69%	9%
<b>The W. Post</b>	17%	17%	67%	63%	38%	77%	0%	23%
<b>USA Today</b>	50%	0%	50%	57%	43%	85%	15%	0%

## K. GRAPH 1 OF THE NEWS STORIES



Graph 1 shows the scale of coverage among the four news organization on Afghanistan (refer for further explanation to table 9).

#### **IV. PEJ NEWS COVERAGE INDEX ON AFGHANISTAN**

To help assess the reliability and validity of the current research, the author evaluated the Pew Research Center's findings on Afghanistan news coverage in the U.S. media. The Pew Research Center is a highly respected American-based research organization. The Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ) has been conducting analysis of American news coverage since 2007. Its weekly News Coverage Index (NCI) examines the news agenda of 52 different outlets from five sectors of the media: print, network television, cable, radio, online, and social media (Facebook and Twitter). It is designed to provide data about what stories and topics the media are covering, the trajectories of that media narrative, and differences among news platforms. Pew (2010) found that the Afghan issues ranked fourth among the top five news stories in overall U.S. media in the second week of June 2010, particularly because the war received significant coverage when more than 40 people were killed due to a suicidal attack on wedding party. NATO forces also sustained high human casualties that week.

According to the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism, Afghanistan issues, including war, received 25 percent of news-hole in week of June 21-27, 2010. The prime news was on the replacement of General Stanley McChrystal, the top U.S. military commander in Afghanistan, whose dismissal had drawn in military and political implications on the news agenda. The media reflected different reactions on the replacement of General McChrystal. For instance, a CBS correspondent said.

It's a jaw-dropping display of disrespect and indiscretion, CBS' national security correspondent David Martin reported the day McChrystal was recalled to Washington to meet with the president. It is perhaps the worst confrontation between a president and a

battlefield commander since Harry Truman fired Douglas MacArthur for insubordination over the conduct of the Korean War (Pew, 2010).

The above example indicates that the news coverage on Afghanistan issues has positive correlation with the Washington D.C. decisions on Afghanistan, so this might be a strong reason that policy and politics received the most coverage in the U.S. media, as the findings of the current research indicate. (*Refer to the tables in chapter 3*). This researcher went through (July 2011 and August 2012) findings of the PEJ's News Index to study if these two months received any top-ten news stories in the U.S. media on Afghanistan, but there was no top- ten news story in *Pew Index* within these two months of the sample. However, this research shows the decline of up to 40 percent in the coverage of the three U.S. news organizations (*The New York Times, Washington Post, and USA Today*) on Afghanistan issues. The PEJ News Index suggested that the decrease seems generally applicable to other U.S. media organizations on Afghanistan coverage, too.

In fact, the decline of international media coverage on Afghanistan can have some consequences. When Afghanistan issues are not covered regularly, the United Nations and other international bodies will not come under pressure to take some decisive action to put an end to current unrest in Afghanistan because the war is not counted as civil war anymore, and the United Nations endorsed the international intervention led-by the United States in 2001. It is the task of the United Nations to find regional and international solution for Afghanistan, while the Afghan authorities are responsible to make sure there is good governance, eradication of corruption and justice for all and many other governing requirements. The media coverage plays significant role in national and global awareness regarding Afghanistan, particularly to reflect how severely the civilians and poor villagers in the country suffer as a result of the ongoing

insurgency. Consistent media coverage helps remind the Afghan authorities to be more effective in handling the current instability. Furthermore, it reinforces the commitment of the international community to pay more attention for the long-term solution of the country through implementing constructive benchmarks. Given the facts of PEJ News Index about the U.S. media coverage on Afghanistan, there is a positive correlation between the findings of PEJ and this study in terms of increase and decrease in the U.S. media coverage on Afghanistan issues. This consistency highlights the reliability of this study with the PEJ News Index in coverage rate on Afghanistan. However, the PEJ News Index studied the U.S. media coverage on Afghanistan's issues under the category of war in general, while this study included many variables such as peace talks, economic development, violence, military action, and policy and politics to study media coverage on Afghanistan.

## V. DISCUSSION

Afghanistan stability and security has been dependent on the international intervention in the aftermath of the September 9, 2001 attack in the United States. Although 11 years have passed since the international military action led-by the United States to topple the rule of the Taliban (1996 -2001) in Afghanistan, there is still insurgency in the area.

Following U.S.-led action, Afghanistan issues came under the hot spotlight of international news coverage. U.S.-based news organization extensively covered the events related to Afghanistan. Many international news organizations, including the *New York Times*, *the Washington Post*, *USA Today*, *Wall Street Journal*, and other U.S. news outlets began covering issues related to Afghanistan. As the data indicated, much of the coverage has focused on policies and politics relevant to the war in Afghanistan. According to Pew Research Center, Afghanistan issues, including war, received 25 percent of news-hole on June 21-27, 2012 in the

U.S. media. The prime news was on the replacement of General Stanley McChrystal, the top U.S. military commander in Afghanistan, whose dismissal had drawn in military and political implications onto the news agenda.

The findings of this study are consistent with Pew Research Centers' finding in coverage of policies and politics on Afghanistan. For example, the *Daily Outlook Afghanistan* had the highest number of stories (N=72), with most focusing on the politics and policy of Afghanistan and the least military action coverage of the country. USA Today covered the greatest number of its stories on the politics and policy of the United States on Afghanistan, while economic development and peace talks and negotiation received the least coverage, with two stories from the total of 29 stories across the sample months. *The New York Times* also covered the minimum stories (N=2) on peace talks and negotiation, while its politics and policy coverage of U.S. government on Afghanistan received the most with (N=11) stories. The Washington Post followed the conventional pattern of covering mostly politics and policy, while peace talks and negotiation received the minimum coverage (N=2) stories.

Although peace talks and negotiation in Afghanistan have been discussed by the Afghan government, the international community, and particularly by the U.S. government, the media did not cover them that much. There might be many reasons for the lack of coverage on peace talks and negotiation, but one of them seems obvious, stemming from the invisibility of the Taliban at any specific negotiation table with the U.S. or Afghan officials. Allegedly, some talks were held with the Taliban outside the country. However, the Qatar political office for the Taliban could be a new ray of hope to facilitate peace talks in Afghanistan. In fact, media coverage on this subject is considered very critical to Afghanistan, the more positive frame and

frequent coverage the better effect it will have on the issues. In short, framing and agenda setting study is recommended for further study of media coverage on Afghanistan.

### **A. FURTHER STUDY**

This study can contribute to further research of media coverage on Afghanistan. In fact, I attempted to access some similar studies to review what issues received the most coverage on Afghanistan in the past, but I could locate any specific study. Having searched through different engines (i.e., ProQuest, AbsQuo, Google Scholar, Lexis Nexis Academic), I was convinced that there was not such a specific study on Afghanistan. For sure, the Pew Research Center/PEJ News Index examines the U.S. media coverage to find what specific topics receive the most attention in the U.S. media and that would include issues of Afghanistan, but not with the categories and approach offered in this study. Although this study has provided meaningful information on media coverage on Afghanistan through examining the frequency of coverage on the given categories (*process: peace talks, negotiation, and economic development; conflict: violence and military action; and politics and policy: USA, Afghanistan, and NATO*), the sample size and time have limitations.

This researcher recommends a larger size of sample and a further time scope to not only studies the issues in terms of coverage, but also the media framing. This study explored the *Media Focus in Afghanistan News Coverage* to examine what categories of Afghanistan-related news received the largest amount of coverage during selected periods of from 2010-2012. This project covered reports in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *USA Today*, and *The Daily Outlook Afghanistan*, a national Afghan news outlet, as a sample within a period of three months over three years (June 2010, July 2011, and August 2012). A total of 147 news stories were retrieved from the Lexis Nexis Academic search engine. The findings of the study showed



that policy and politics received the most coverage on Afghanistan and also showed an overall decline in quantity of coverage. However, future research is essential to explore the media framing and agenda setting on Afghanistan issues within the U.S. media to provide greater insight.

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