

Portrayal of United States in Pakistani Print Media after Osama Bin Laden's Killing (May - July 2011)

Savera Shami

Assistant Professor in Communication
Studies at University of the Punjab, Lahore.

Abstract

Pakistan is a 'front line ally' in U.S. led 'war on terror' in Afghanistan. The second and unannounced phase of this 'war on terror' is rapidly at dispersal in Pakistan due to detection and killing of some important Al-Qaida leaders in Pakistan. Since long, United State is indulging Pakistan into the state of war by exploiting through various financial aid packages and magnifying the intended terrorist threats from Al-Qaida. Though, the public opinion is anti-American, but the leadership of Pakistan seems under immense pressure of United States. American Drone attacks to kill undercover Afghan terrorists and undue interference in the sovereignty of Pakistan are major points of conflict. The tension between U.S. and Pakistan peaked up when U.S. Navy Seals killed Osama Bin Laden in a secret operation at Abottabad on May 2, 2011. The conduct of 'Operation Abottabad' raised many questions on Americans as well as Pakistani Forces. As, in this situation Media can change or reinforce public perception so it has been observed that after this operation, media has portrayed America negatively, considering that this kind of activity cannot be conducted by any friendly country or ally. Thus, present study is an attempt to gauge the portrayal of U.S. in Pakistani newspapers The News and Dawn, by applying 'Content Analysis' to examine the news and editorial content from May 3, 2011 to July 2011. The findings have revealed that both the newspapers published more unfavorable or negative news and editorials regarding U.S. than favorable or positive. Both newspapers were found critical towards American policies and actions in the region and portrayed United States in anti-American tone. This pattern of anti-American framing of news and editorial seems to be the reflection of wide spread protests and anti-war aggression by the general masses and political parties across the nation during the post Osama period understudy. The newspapers, resultantly, exerted pressures on foreign policy making, Pakistan government and army by representing anti-war and anti-American public sentiments.

Keywords: United States, Pakistan, Abbotabad Operation, Osama Bin Laden, Framing, Print Media

Introduction

United States of America has deep rooted strategic bilateral relationship with Pakistan. Such relationship continued throughout the courses of democracy and dictatorship in Pakistan from its birth. America has political, economic and defence influence on Pakistan in order to meet her strategic agenda in the region. Pakistan has been supporting America in Afghan-Russia war as well as in the currently ongoing Afghan-America war on terror initiated after 9/11 incident. In return to such support to U.S., Pakistan receives financial and political benefits. United States intervention into Pakistan's political and sovereign identities has sown the seeds of anti-Americanism among the public of Pakistan from decades. The people of Pakistan consider the obeying role of army and politicians towards American policies negative and show their resentment in the form of protests and agitations. So, America could never win the heart of Pakistanis despite her mega financial supports for Pakistan.

Afghan-US war turned the strategic position of Pakistan more important for America. Pakistan's support to US and NATO forces fighting against Taliban in Afghanistan helped to survive for few years in the war. Being American ally in war on terror, Pakistan was also engaged by Taliban. The wave of terrorist activities in Pakistan also created more anti-Americanism among public and right-minded political parties. The operation Abbotabad, conducted by US navy Seals, killing Osama bin Laden inside Pakistani borders sprinkled oil on the anti-American fire across the country. The public protests and aggression against the violation of Pakistani borders by United States heavily influenced media as well to represent public sentiments and criticize politicians and army.

The study in hands explores the news and editorial coverage of leading English dailies of Pakistan regarding US portrayal in post Osama scenario.

The content analysis of news stories and editorials of daily Dawn and The News compares the frequency, stance and editorial policy of the said newspapers during May – July 2011. It considers the theoretical framework of agenda setting and framing to elaborate the variables and results of the study.

Rationale for Selecting U.S. Portrayal in Pakistani Press as Research Issue

The relationship and foreign policy between Pakistan and United States has always been controversial some times because of Russian-Afghan war, American-Afghan war or U.S. backed dictatorship rulers of Pakistan. United States, as so called world leader, has deep and long dated interests in this region. America also has history of relationship twists between India and Pakistan due to fear of Russian or Chinese dominance in the region. United State's power game in the region, especially inside Afghanistan and Pakistan, has always been under press discussion and criticism.

Generally and largely the public of Pakistan is anti-American in their views and reactions to American world policies and politics. The U.S. intervention in the region, either through financial loans or wars, has been considered negative by the masses. The media outlets of Pakistan, by and large, represent the anti-American public sentiments of general public of Pakistan in their contents. The politics and foreign policy of Pakistan has also been under strong U.S. influence throughout the history of Pakistan. Due to poor economic conditions of Pakistan and political un-stability, both democratic and dictatorship governments frequently called for American help and aid to support the country and prolong their rules. So, the public and media also consider politicians as American puppets in the country. Unfortunately, Pakistan Army carries the similar image due to being heavy recipient of American defence aid and war technology.

After the 9/11 terrorist attacks in United States, Pakistan played important role in U.S. led war on terror against Al-Qaida and Taliban in Afghanistan. General Pervaiz Musharraf's dictatorship government facilitated NATO and American forces to overcome Taliban in Afghanistan, despite strong public reaction in the country. Such partnership in Afghan-America war continued even after Musharraf's decade long rule in Pakistan. The killing of Al-Qaida leader, Osama Bin Laden, in a secret U.S. operation in Abbotabad, made United States more controversial among media and public in Pakistan. As America intervened into the sovereign borders of Pakistan to conduct the said operation, so, the anti-American public and media sentiments pushed up to climax. The post Osama scenario of Pak-U.S. relations and foreign policy was critical, important and controversial. The nationwide wave of anti-Americanism and defending sovereignty of Pakistan was peaked up. The researcher has selected the issue of portrayal of United States in leading Pakistani English newspapers in post Osama period because of the importance of United States in Pakistani politics, defence and economics as well as due to anti-American public sentiments. The study explores how print media of Pakistan depicted such image of United States in the country.

Rationale for Selecting post Osama Bin Laden Period (May - July 2011)

The U.S. Navy Seals in a highly sophisticated hidden operation killed 'the most wanted' criminal of 9/11 incident at Abbotabad-Pakistan on 2nd May 2011. At midnight, the Al-Qaida leader, the fundamental reason for Afghan-U.S. war, Osama Bin Laden along with few of his guards and family was attacked in a well architected compound. The operation went successful except the loss of a black hawk U.S. helicopter. U.S. commandos carried with them the dead body of Osama along with many secret documents and digital records found in the compound. The city of Abbotabad is considered highly sensitive because of Pakistan Army Training Academy in the suburban locality. Both the military intelligence agencies of Pakistan as well as the sitting government declared that they were unaware of this secret American operation very inside the defense territory of Pakistan.

This incident not only flared up the general public against Pakistan government but also added up into the anti-American sentiments considering the illegal intervention of America inside Pakistan's sovereign borders. Both Army and Pakistan government were defensive in their stance because of countrywide aggression and heavy media trails of such negligence on the part of them. Pakistan's foreign policy and support for war on terror was highly under criticism during this period. Public was demanding clear withdrawal from American and NATO support in Afghanistan. Press was active in covering nationwide public protests and agitations by various religious and right-minded political parties. During the same time Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan and many other militant groups were executing brutal terrorist activities across the state. Indian and Russian involvement in the region was also multiplying during this period. The selected three months just after the killing of Osama Bin

Laden were a time of confusions and mistrust in Pak-American relations. This time was also an important phase in the history of Pakistan's foreign policy towards America.

Rationale for Selecting English Newspapers of Pakistan (Daily Dawn & The News)

The researcher has selected two leading English dailies "Dawn" and "The News" to study their front and back page news stories and editorials regarding U.S. published from May 3, 2011 to July 31, 2011. Both the newspapers are ranked as top English newspapers of Pakistan. Both the newspapers have strong editorial policy and belong to known groups of publications. Daily Dawn is considered as the serious newspaper and being highly read in Government offices, foreign offices, thus helps in Policy making where as "The News" is highly circulated English daily among the masses and more of a commercial newspaper. The motive behind the selection of these said newspapers is to hold a comparative analysis to study their editorial policies regarding the U.S. depiction in news stories and editorials during the post Osama Bin laden scenario.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for the study in hands to explain the concepts, variables and organize the research questions, collect and analyze data, is based on the theory of 'agenda-setting' and the concept of 'framing'. Agenda setting theory claims that the media by portraying the certain messages, determine what the public thinks about and talks about. Cohen (1963) states that it 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" (cited in Tankard, 1992). Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw (1972) also focus on the power of the media to make public to think about and talk about from the messages they receive. When we say that media has an impact on agenda setting, we mean that they have ability to choose and emphasize certain topics, thereby causing the public to perceive these issues as important. (Dominick, 2002: 543). So, the concept of agenda setting relies on the transfer of issues from the media to the public.

According to McQuail and Windahl (1993) agenda setting is a threefold concept comprised of the media agenda (policy ranking by importance in media contents), the public agenda (ranking in opinion surveys) and the policy agenda (rankings in the legislative bodies). This study is mainly discussing the media agenda regarding U.S. portrayal in post Osama Bin Laden scenario. By using quantitative approach, it attempts to explore the frequency of news and editorial coverage in the selected newspapers. This frequency measurement will show the salience of the selected issue given by daily Dawn and The News in their news stories and editorials. Many agenda setting researchers discuss two basic assumptions under the subject of agenda setting; 1) the media rather reflecting the reality, filters and shapes it; 2) media concentration on a few topics guides public to rank those issues more important than the others. Shaping and presenting the filtered reality through media contents brings the 'concept of framing' into discussion.

Framing of media contents is to present them in a desired way as to guide its interpretations along certain directions. The claim of this concept of framing is that the media focuses on some events and reflects them within a field of meaning (Chyi & McCombs, 2004). Another known frame analyst Goffman (1974) explains the frame as cognitive structures which unconsciously lead the individual to what is to be noticed and which defines that situation for the individual. In the same lines, Fairhurst and Saar (1996) also claim that the art of framing consists of 'language', thought and 'forethought'. This art empowers the journalists as well as the editorial writers to present the contents in a certain way to guide their interpretations. This, framing is interpretive package that gives meanings to an issue (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989). So, the present study also attempts to imply qualitative approach to find out what was the framing tilt to reflect US portrayal in post Osama Bin Laden period. The researcher has built three framing directions (Favorable, Unfavorable and Neutral) in order to measure the phenomenon. These framing directions attempt to show whether the news stories and editorials of the selected dailies of Pakistan have framed their contents in favor or against U.S. or stand neutral.

Statement of Problem

This paper intends to compare that how much frequent and what type of news and editorial coverage (favorable, unfavorable or neutral) was given by daily Dawn and The News regarding U.S. portrayal during post Osama Bin Laden scenario?

Research Questions

- 1- Is there any difference in the portrayal of United States in the *news coverage* of Daily Dawn and The News after Abbotabad Operation (May – July 2011)?
- 2- Is there any difference in the portrayal of United States in the *editorials* of Daily Dawn and The News after Abbotabad Operation (May – July 2011)?

Methodology

To answer the above mentioned research questions constructed after conducting preliminary study, this paper is based on content analysis. Two English daily newspapers Dawn and The News are selected in this study considering their diverse ownership, readership and editorial policies as well as large circulation. As unit of analysis and sample under study, the study comprises of all news stories published on front and back pages and the editorials of daily Dawn and The News during post Osama Bin Laden (May – July 2011). Researcher has selected all the news stories and editorials containing the word ‘United States’ or ‘Osama Bin Laden’ or ‘Abbotabad Operation’ or ‘Pak-U.S. relations’ in the headlines/titles/lead or in intro.

Researcher has used three frames to examine the news and editorial coverage stance of the selected newspapers regarding United State’s depiction during post Osama Bin Laden period. These frames are;

- The news or editorial is considered **Favorable** to U.S. if it presents any information supportive for U.S. and creates a positive image.
- Any news or editorial is considered **Unfavorable** if it gives any information against U.S. policies and damage the image of U.S. in Pakistan.
- Any news or editorial is considered **Neutral** in this study, if it just gives information free of any twist, opinion or tilt.

Findings and Interpretations

A: Image of United States: Comparison of News Coverage by Daily Dawn & The News

Following are the findings and discussion regarding Research Question No. 1 stated as, “is there any difference in the portrayal of United States in the *news coverage* of Daily Dawn and The News after Abbotabad Operation (May – July 2011)?”

Regarding the image of United States depicted by the news stories of front and back pages of the selected newspapers, Table 1 shows the frequency of new stories along with percentage during May to July 2011. According to the findings revealed by **Table 1**, daily Dawn published 170 and daily The News published 199 news stories in total during the selected time period. Considering the overall news coverage individually by both the newspapers, daily The News was found more vocal than daily Dawn. It was observed that daily The News even covered those newsworthy incidents regarding the selected issue that daily Dawn decided to ignore.

For the individual case of daily Dawn, the Table 1 reveals that out of total 170 news stories published on the front and back pages regarding United States, maximum 104 (61.17%) were unfavorable, 38 (23.35%) favorable and only 28 (16.47%) were neutral in tone. This means that daily Dawn published maximum anti-American content. In 23% of news stories, this newspaper was found favorable for the image of United States. On the other hand, widely considered as an objective faced newspaper, daily Dawn was only 16% neutral in tone.

While considering the case of daily The News, it was observed that out of total 199 news stories, maximum 137 (68.84%) were anti-American in stance. 37 (18.59%) news stories attempt to negatively frame U.S. policies and strategies in the region. Only 25 (12.56%) news items were found neutral. In totality, Table 1 shows that both the selected newspaper during May to July 2011 frequently attempted to degrade and distort the image of United States in their published news stories. This might be due to contemporary discourse based newspaper policy, governmental or public pressure. The widespread public reaction on U.S. attack to kill her prime suspect hidden at Abbotabad could affect the newspaper policy to cater the public sentiments while framing news about United States. By doing so, the newspapers might have painted their faces as defenders of national sovereignty.

Combing the findings to analyze overall news coverage by daily Dawn and The News (**Table 2**) regarding the image depiction of United States during May-July 2011, it was found that 369 total news stories were published.

Out of these 369 news stories maximum 241 (65.31%) were published against United States. The number of favorable news stories were 75 (20.32%) and only 53 (14.36%) were found without any framing tilt or stance. So, the results clearly show that the selected dailies remained heavily anti-American in their news coverage and due to many hidden factors and pressures distorted the image of United States among their readers.

Although the news items in an ideal journalistic practice are tend to be objective, balanced and neutral, but here the results prove that regarding the issue under study during the selected period of time, the newspapers framed maximum news stories as anti-American in tone, hence, tried to portray negative image of United States.

B: Image of United States: Comparison of Editorial Coverage by Daily Dawn & The News

Following are the findings and discussion regarding Research Question No. 2 stated as, “is there any difference in the portrayal of United States in the *editorials* of Daily Dawn and The News after Abbotabad Operation (May – July 2011)?”

Editorials are considered as show window of a newspaper reflecting its policy, hence, carry serious weight-age and attention of its readers. Editorials are also considered as more seriously designed newspaper contents than any other piece of writing. Editorials published by daily Dawn and The News are considerably acknowledged both by policy makers and general public of Pakistan.

As shown in **Table 3**, daily The News published 29 total editorials regarding United States and Abbotabad operation, while daily Dawn published 17 editorials. Likewise news coverage, in daily The News remained more expressive in its editorials regarding United States than daily Dawn. Symmetry between frequency of news coverage and editorial coverage by each newspaper under study has been noticed. Daily the News was found heavily expressive in news stories and editorials than daily Dawn.

Considering the individual case of daily The News, it published maximum 18 (62.06%) editorials against the image of United States. Only 4 (13.79%) editorials were found favorable and 7 (24.13%) were neutral in tone. Daily The News has clearly observable harmony between editorial and news coverage policy. It remained more vocal than daily Dawn and also published more anti-American news and editorial contents. While analyzing the editorial coverage of daily Dawn regarding portraying the image of United States during post Osama Bin Laden period, the newspaper was found far less vocal than The News. It published only 17 editorials, out of which maximum 13 (76.46%) were anti-American in tone and only 4 (23.52%) were favorable for American image. Interestingly researcher found no neutral editorial written by the said newspaper.

In order to represent overall picture of editorial coverage on selected issue, **Table 4** indicates that both newspapers collectively published 46 editorials. From these 46 editorials maximum 31 (67.39%) were anti-American in tone, 8 (17.39%) were favorable and 7 (15.21%) were neutral. Likewise overall news coverage by daily Dawn and The News, the editorial coverage is also anti-American.

It was observed that the selected newspaper heavily criticized American hidden operation Killing Osama at Abbotabad by saying it an attack on the sovereignty of Pakistan. Their editorials also discussed international laws and United Nations resolutions in favor of respecting geographical borders of a country. The newspaper editorials many times mentioned the sacrifices extended by Pakistan during war on terror in Afghanistan. The newspapers also criticized the unnecessary obedient behavior of intelligence agencies, army and government of Pakistan for America and her imposed agenda in the region.

Conclusion

The study considered the news and editorial coverage by daily Dawn and The News during post Osama period (May to July 2011) to analyze that with what frequency and how these newspaper portrayed U.S. image among their readers. It was revealed that both the newspapers remained negative and unfavorable to the image of United States during selected time period. It was further observed that there is symmetrical relationship between news coverage and editorial coverage of the selected press. Both the newspapers covered the United States with a negatively framed image regarding Abbotabd operation and American policies about ‘War on terror’ in the region. Daily The News was found more expressive as well as anti-American than daily Dawn in both news and editorial coverage of the selected issues.

Pakistani English press frequently criticized the hidden American military operation to kill Osama within Pakistani borders. The press called it a violation of sovereignty of Pakistan as well as international laws. These newspapers covered nationwide protests launched by general public and political parties against United States and sitting government of Pakistan for not resisting America to intervene sovereign borders. The selected press claimed the said operation either the negligence of Pakistan army and government or a hidden agreement with America to earn financial aid packages in return. The press also criticized intelligence agencies of Pakistan as one of the most sensitive areas of the country was being hit by America to kill Osama Bin Laden. Both newspapers wrote editorials and framed news stories in line with public sentiments and resentments against America to put Pakistan into troubles of terrorist activities in the country for being American ally against Taliban.

Although the selected newspapers did not support Osama or Taliban, but expressively criticized American violation of Pakistan’s borders. Becoming guardians of national interest and sovereignty of Pakistan, these newspapers raised loud voice to lower down the image of America, NATO and War on Terror during post Osama period. By giving negative coverage for the image of United States, press seems to be gratifying public feelings of anti-Americanism. Such behavior of media in Pakistan widened up the gap between the weakening friendship relation among America and Pakistan. The negative press coverage raised pressures on foreign policy of both countries during post Osama bin Laden period.

References

Chyi, H. I., & McCombs, M. (2004). Media salience and the process of framing: Coverage of the Columbine school shootings. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 81(1), 22-35.

Dominick, J. (2002). *The Dynamics of Mass Communication*. Boston McGraw Hill Companies.

Goffman, E. (1974). *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. New York, NY et al.: Harper & Row.

McCombs, M, E., & Donald, L. S. (1977). *The Emergence of American Political Issues*. NY: West Publishing Co.

McQuail, D., & Windahl, S. (1993). *Communication Models for the Study of Mass Communications* (2nd ed). London: Longman.

Chyi, Hsiang I. and McCombs, Max. 2004. “Media salience and the process of framing: Coverage of the Columbine school shootings.” In *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 81(1), pp. 22-35.

Fairhurst, Gail T. and Saar, Robert A. 1996. *The Art of Framing: Managing the language of leadership* (1st ed). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Gamson, William A. and Modigliani, Andre. 1989. “Media Discourse and Public Opinion on Nuclear Power: A Constructionist Approach.” In *American Journal of Sociology*, 95 (1), pp. 1-37.

Annexure:

Table 1: Comparison of News Coverage by daily The News and Dawn

Portrayal	Daily Dawn	Daily The News
Favorable	38 (23.35 %)	37 (18.59 %)
Unfavorable	104 (61.17 %)	137(68.84 %)
Neutral	28 (16.47 %)	25(12.56 %)
Total	170 (100 %)	199 (100 %)

Table 2: Overall News Coverage

Portrayal	News Frequency (%age)
Favorable	75(20.32 %)
Unfavorable	241(65.31 %)
Neutral	53(14.36 %)
Total	369 (100 %)

Table 3: Comparison of Editorial Coverage by The News and Dawn

Portrayal	Daily The News	DailyDawn
Favorable	4 (13.79%)	4 (23.52 %)
Unfavorable	18 (62.06 %)	13 (76.46 %)
Neutral	7(24.13 %)	0
Total	29 (100 %)	17 (100 %)

Table 4: Overall Editorial Coverage

Portrayal	Editorial Frequency (%age)
Favorable	8 (17.39 %)
Unfavorable	31 (67.39 %)
Neutral	7 (15.21 %)
Total	46 (100 %)