



Centre for Peace Studies

## Conflict Coverage in India and Pakistan of the Taliban Takeover in 2021

A Study of English-language Newspapers' Reporting in Light of the Security Competition between India and Pakistan and the Enduring Rivalry at its Core

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*“Ultimately, the US fought and left, and if you see some of Donald Trump’s speeches throughout his presidency, he said like, we are 8000 miles away, so why are we still in Afghanistan? For India and Pakistan, you can’t get up and leave. So, dealing with the Taliban is a reality. And the Pakistanis deal with the Taliban from an anti-India mindset, and the Indians deal with the Taliban from an anti-Pakistan mindset.”*

**Kabir Taneja** (interview with the author, Sep 13, 2022)

*“And I’m constantly surprised for example to see even quite good Indian media analysis and coverage refer sometimes to Afghanistan as a neighbour, which it is not. (...) It’s almost as if Afghanistan is only interesting in as much as it is part of this India-Pakistan contesting, not as a place in itself.”*

**Praveen Swami** (interview with the author, Oct 10, 2022)

*“So, coverage of what went on in Afghanistan in the Pakistani press was less than completely honest. They relayed the Pakistani government’s view that it wanted a political solution. I don’t see any real evidence that it ever wanted a political solution. And they do not talk about the reality of the ISI’s role. Pakistani journalists who talked about the reality of the ISI’s roll are usually either arrested or dead.”*

**Bruce Riedel** (interview with the author, Sep 15, 2022)

*“I find my Pakistani colleagues are generally even better at this than us because they face these periodic pressures from military governments, but they’ve always found ways to push back, to look for space, to contest the establishment and I think we are learning some of these skills over here [in India] as well.”*

**Praveen Swami** (interview with the author, Oct 10, 2022)

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## Abstract

After twenty years of war, in August 2021, the United States withdrew from Afghanistan, the Afghan forces surrendered, and the Taliban regained power over Afghanistan (Yousaf and Jabarkhail 2021, 1). The resulting security risks extend beyond the borders of Afghanistan (Verma 2022, 152). Consequently, the events received extensive attention in the media outlets in the region. This research analyses the coverage of the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan in 2021 in Pakistani and Indian English-language media and explores essential factors influencing the conflict coverage. The findings serve as a critical component in understanding the complexities of the mediascapes in India and Pakistan and the overarching implications for the broader context of conflict dynamics, as such, also giving insight into the geopolitical situation.

The study draws upon the existing theoretical concept of peace journalism, its criticisms and adaptations, thereby questioning its applicability in a real-world context. The study utilises critical discourse analysis to comparatively examine news articles in *The Times of India* and *Dawn* (Pakistan) concerning the discursive features of the coverage. Through the thematic analysis of 17 semi-structured interviews with experts and Indian and Pakistani journalists, the analysis of the news articles is complemented by linking the findings to the factors connected to the security competition and enduring rivalry between India and Pakistan which influence the conflict coverage. Key findings suggest that while the interviews revealed that the Indian and Pakistani mediascapes were largely compromised by the establishments and experienced heavy restrictions, the news articles only partly mirrored this. There was no explicit bias towards negative reporting on matters connected to the Indo-Pak relations in *TOI* and *Dawn*.

**Keywords:** Pakistan, India, Enduring Rivalry, Afghanistan War, Taliban Takeover, Conflict Coverage, Peace Journalism

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# 1 Introduction

*“Afghan officials say Taliban have entered outskirts of Kabul.” – The Times of India – Aug 15, 2021 / “Region can’t afford continued instability in Afghanistan: FM.” – Dawn – Aug 17, 2021 / “Afghanistan crisis: Regional power shift comes as a worry.” – The Times of India – Aug 18, 2021 / “Pakistan PM Imran Khan feels US has ‘decided on India for strategic partner.’” – The Times of India – Aug 13, 2021 / “US reaches out to Pakistan, India, China and Russia on Afghanistan situation.” – Dawn – Aug 17, 2021*

(Headlines from the Times of India and Dawn in August 2021 in light of the Taliban taking over Afghanistan).

In August 2021, after 20 years of war, the United States (US) withdrew from Afghanistan, the Afghan forces surrendered, and the Taliban came back into control (Yousaf and Jabarkhail 2021, 1). The Taliban takeover poses security threats beyond the borders of Afghanistan (Verma 2022, 152). Consequently, the events received extensive attention in the media outlets in the region, especially in August 2021 during the capturing of key Afghan provinces and cities, most importantly Kabul on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August (Mellen 2021). In this research, I examine how the Taliban takeover was covered in India and Pakistan, two significant regional powers, in light of influencing factors, specifically those related to the security competition and enduring rivalry between the two countries, which extend into their proceedings in Afghanistan (Mitton 2014).

The rivalry between India and Pakistan continues to be one of the longest-lasting, unresolved conflicts in world history, with periodic wars and frequent outbreaks of crises between the two adversaries (Paul 2005, 3). “The India–Pakistan conflict is simultaneously over territory, national identity, and power position in the region” (Paul 2005, 8). After the early 1990s, the power balance between the two countries concerning economic and conventional military strength began to shift in India’s favour, which was steadily gaining power in these areas. Pakistan increasingly turned to asymmetric strategies, including supporting insurgencies and proxy wars (Paul 2005, 12). Afghanistan had become a scene of one of these proxy wars between India and Pakistan in their regional power and security competition. Both their approaches in Afghanistan have been driven by their (enduring) rivalry (Mitton 2014).

Concerning coverage of the Taliban takeover in international media, prior research indicates that the English-language press in both India and Pakistan predominantly supported their governments’ stances during this time (see for example, Hussain and Jehangir 2023, 16). My

research builds on these findings and aims to look specifically at the relevance of the Indo-Pak conflict dynamics for conflict coverage. The focus of this study lies on English-language print media in India and Pakistan, which in both countries can claim a large national readership (Bansal 2003, 32). I examine how the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan was covered in light of influencing factors, specifically those related to the earlier described security competition and enduring rivalry between the two countries. I particularly look at the coverage of Dawn (Pakistani daily) and The Times of India (Indian daily) during the days of the takeover, as both are the largest circulated English-language dailies in their respective countries and hold as such an important role concerning the general agenda of the media (Hussain et al. 2022, 8; Narayana and Kapur 2011).

## **1.1 Setting the Stage – Short Overview of the Indo-Pak Conflict**

To understand the importance and the focus of this research it is important first to give an overview of the broader conflict between India and Pakistan and the enduring rivalry, as well as the Kashmir dispute which lies at the heart of the conflict (Mitton 2014, 361). Shortly after the countries became independent in 1947, both asserted a claim on the princely state Jammu and Kashmir. Pakistan, established on the basis of being the homeland to South Asian Muslims, claims the territory on the basis of the Muslim majority in the state. India argued that the state could bloom in the realms of the secular political system of the country (Ganguly 2008, 32-33). “The India–Pakistan power asymmetry is affected by perceptions that each side holds of the other” (Paul 2005, 17).

Pakistan, which shares a contested border with Afghanistan, has a long history of involvement in Afghanistan’s politics. It has held close ties to the Taliban, which emerged from an Afghan refugee camp in Pakistan during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, even during their strategic cooperation with the US in the war on terror. Ever since, Pakistani governments have followed the goal of installing a Pakistani-friendly government in Afghanistan and to keep India at bay, to be able to pursue their idea of ‘strategic depth’ which entails the possibility of “moving vital strategic assets into Afghanistan and regrouping its forces” in case of another war with India (Ganguly 2022, 60). During the US-led war on terror, Pakistan, while cooperating with the US, utilised militant groups, including the Afghan Taliban, to keep control of India’s territorial power and influence, while India supported the US-backed Afghan system (Constantino 2020, 7; Ganguly 2022, 60; Hussain 2016, 42).

India held an important role in Afghanistan when first the government led by Karzai (2004-14) and later by Ghani (2014-21) were in power. The collapse of the Ghani government in relation to the US withdrawal led to a huge loss of India's power inside Afghanistan, as the country had no previous relationship with the Taliban (Bobkin 2022, 336). "Without the security cover that the American presence had afforded, it became all but impossible for New Delhi to maintain any kind of a presence in Afghanistan." (Ganguly 2022, 63). Still, India tries to keep a certain amount of sway, especially monitoring Pakistan's influence is highly relevant for India, which is concerned that members of the Haqqani network, that has long-standing connections with Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate, are now members of the new Taliban regime (Ganguly 2022, 63). A lack of control makes Afghanistan a safe haven for international terrorist organisations, posing a severe transnational terrorism threat to the entire region, especially for Kashmir, together with issues like narcotics trade and migration flows. Furthermore, Afghanistan's social and political instability could spread to its neighbours (Bobkin 2022, 336-337; Verma 2022, 154).

## **1.2 Scope and Focus of this Research**

This study focuses on English-language newspapers in India and Pakistan. It places the question of media discourses in the context of the security competition and the rivalry between the two countries while including the triangular relationship with Afghanistan. The news articles are analysed comparatively and connected to their political context and factors of influence which are discovered through interviews with experts and journalists.

Burkhard Bläsi (2004, 1) suggests that theoretical models of conflict journalism, like peace journalism, as introduced by Galtung (2003), remain irrelevant for practical journalistic work if they are not brought into relation with the reality of the production process and conditions surrounding this. The question of determining factors for creating journalistic content in times of conflict and crisis is simultaneously the query of the actual preconditions for any attempt at 'good journalism,' even if it is contested which journalistic goals this entails. The security competition based on the enduring rivalry between India and Pakistan generates a certain political climate in both countries concerning the conflict. The focus lies in this study on exploring the main discursive feature and analysing why the discursive event was covered in a certain manner, against the backdrop of this political climate, as well as the main lobbies (policy makers, military in both countries) and additional factors of importance in the context, like the situation on-site and the journalists' personal beliefs. By empirically investigating how the Taliban conflict is reported and looking into which factors influence the coverage in light of



the security competition between India and Pakistan, conclusions can be drawn concerning the relevance of the Indo-Pak rivalry for the conflict coverage in the two countries. Furthermore, rich insight is given into the setting in which conflict coverage is produced in India and Pakistan, especially concerning restrictions and censorship.

I consider news articles from two English-language dailies, one Indian (The Times of India) and one Pakistani (Dawn), as news articles are considered the most neutral form of reporting. The focus is those published between Aug 10 and Aug 18, 2021, as this was the crunch time during which the takeover evolved. The event in focus which sets the framework is the capturing of Kabul on Aug 15, 2021 (Mellen 2021). The days around the event are included, as this was when public responses were pronounced, and the media covered the developments. The study focuses on sections important to understanding the depiction of the Indo-Pak conflict and extensively concentrates on the discursive features applied in headlines to convey a particular perspective, which are crucial because they significantly affect how news are perceived (Ecker et al. 2014, 332).

### **1.3 Relevance and Significance of the Research**

This research holds profound significance as it is a substantive and distinctive contribution to the academic discourse. The study addresses a discernible gap in the existing body of literature by delving into this subject with depth and drawing insights directly from media content creators from the Pakistani and Indian realms. Furthermore, the research, explicitly compares findings from the two media realms which is important as characteristics of one phenomenon are always defined and evaluated in relation to each other or relative to others in the same class (Landman and Carvalho 2003, 4). As such, I attempt a comparison across space, to understand the differences and similarities in the media coverage and the factors that influence the characteristics of the coverage in the two countries, which are also the parties to the conflict.

The findings also serve as a critical component in comprehending the complexities of the media landscapes in India and Pakistan and the overarching implications for the wider context of conflict dynamics, as such also giving insight into the geopolitical situation in the context, especially the security competition. Additionally, theories of peace journalism, critical models of peace journalism and adaptations are questioned in their application to the context of this study, as such contributing to the further development of this academic theoretical field.

## 1.4 Research Questions and Hypotheses

The key research questions of this study are:

- RQ1: How is the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan (2021) reported in Pakistani and Indian English-language print media, regarding main discursive features and considering the security competition and the enduring rivalry between the two countries?
- RQ2: What important factors in regard to the security competition and enduring rivalry at its core influence the conflict coverage?

Based upon existing research and on theoretical grounds, which I discuss in chapter two and three, the following research hypotheses can be formulated prior to the research process:

- RH1: There is a bias towards negative reporting on matters connected to the Indo-Pak relations in Indian and Pakistani media.
- RH2: The coverage in both newspapers focuses on elite actors.
- RH3: Both Indian and Pakistani media rely overly on official sources when reporting on the Taliban conflict, while considering the security competition and the enduring rivalry between the two countries.
- RH4: Both newspapers align their coverage with their respective establishment's perspective.
- RH5: The conflict coverage in both countries is influenced by restrictions and pressure imposed on the media houses and the journalists.
- RH6: Both newspapers follow a strong escalatory and weak de-escalatory coverage when covering issues concerning the Taliban takeover connected to the Indo-Pak conflict.

To answer the research questions and test the hypotheses, news articles from the newspaper Dawn and The Times of India (TOI) are analysed, applying critical discourse analysis (CDA). Interviews were conducted with policy experts specialised in the India-Pakistan (and Afghanistan) conundrum and journalists from India and Pakistan. These are analysed applying thematic analysis (TA) to complement the findings from CDA, as such also broadening the understanding of this 'snapshot' of the coverage in connection to the understanding of the wider mediascape and general conflict coverage in Indian and Pakistani media.

## 1.5 Overview Structure

This thesis is structured into seven chapters. The introduction is followed by a thematically structured review of the existing literature on the topic, specifically focusing on the factors of influence for conflict coverage in India and Pakistan and the relevance of the threat to national security for the conflict coverage in the context of reporting. Additionally, findings from existing research concerning reporting of the India-Pakistan conflict in English-language newspapers are discussed, as well as recommendations previous authors have offered for coverage of the issues. Furthermore, I define the gap in the existing literature and therefore also extend on the purpose of this research in filling this gap.

In the third chapter, I construct the conceptual framework, which is the basis of this research. Theories and concepts from international relations are combined with concepts from media studies. The interdisciplinary combination is instrumental in understanding conflict reporting in the context of Indian and Pakistani media. The conceptual framework is specifically adapted to the South-Asian context and the conflict situation between India and Pakistan, and I apply this framework to the example of the coverage of the Taliban takeover in 2021 in the following thematic chapters. Chapter four extensively explains all methodological considerations and choices I had to attend to in the realm of this study. In this chapter I examine the epistemological and ontological foundations, as well as lay out the whole research process, research strategy and design, including the sampling strategy, the methods of data collection and data analysis. I furthermore include considerations of reflexivity and ethics and highlight the limits of this research.

Chapter five investigates the view of journalists on the Indian and Pakistani English-language media and lays out the findings from the analysis of the news articles in Dawn and TOI. I describe and analyse how the Taliban takeover was reported. The findings are mainly derived from an analysis of the dominant themes in the news articles, a critical discourse analysis of the headlines and the sections which focus on either India (in Dawn) or Pakistan (in TOI), while also taking note of the general statements journalists and experts gave concerning their view on the coverage. In chapter six I analyse the factors influencing conflict coverage in India and Pakistan. This part empirically draws on the interviews with journalists and experts. Lastly, in chapter seven, in a concluding manner, I discuss the findings, drawing on all previous chapters. The chapter is structured along the lines of examining the hypotheses, while referring to previous research. I also look into issues which future research should address.

## **2 Review of the Literature**

This chapter gives an overview of existing research in the field of media studies in connection to conflict journalism in South Asia and leads to the aim of this research. Research was considered, which examines Indian and Pakistani print media coverage of national security and foreign policy issues. The sources were chosen through a keyword search (Pakistan AND media; India AND media; Pakistan AND reporting; India AND reporting; Pakistan AND journalism; India AND journalism) in the library database of the Arctic University of Norway (UiT), and on the most common databases for academic research, such as Sage Journals, Wiley Online Library and JSTOR. Not all sources matching the search terms were included, but their relevance to this study was assessed based on my analytical judgement. I evaluated the sources concerning their credibility and in relation to their currency and relevance. While research also exists on TV and radio broadcasts in relation to political journalism in India and Pakistan and social media as one of the main sources of information, the detailed examination of research concerning this would not be conducive in relation to my study.

The review narratively portrays the preconditions for conflict coverage in Indian and Pakistani English-language print media, as discussed in previous research and based on the theoretical model introduced by Bläsi (2004), as he presents a context-independent theoretical overview, which helps to highlight the findings in existing literature in a structured manner. An overview of Bläsi's (2004) model can be found in Figure 1, in chapter three. Only the factors are addressed which are relevant in the context of this research. Furthermore, I examine findings on the manner of conflict coverage and the reasons behind the way conflict is reported. Lastly, I consider existing research's outlook on possible ways of improvement of conflict coverage. The chapter concludes with a summary thereby also highlighting how this study aims to close the gaps in the existing body of research.

### **2.1 Preconditions - Lobby Groups and Political Climate**

In both countries, the political environment in which media is produced, heavily influences the media discourses on Pakistan-India relations (Saffee 2016, 112). "In international conflicts, the main lobbying groups are typically policymakers and the military" (Bläsi 2004, 4). This is true for Indian and Pakistani media, while there is a trend in findings showing the main lobbying group in India are policymakers, while in Pakistan, it is the military establishment (Anwar 2018; Hussain 2022; Neog 2018).

Coverage of national security issues in India is primarily determined by government influence and imposed constraints. The Indian media is in a 'crisis of credibility,' especially concerning the Indo-Pak conflict (Neog 2018, 117-120). Ruhee Neog (2018) explores the interaction of Indian English-language media with the government and public opinion in framing news connected to the India-Pakistan crises. She suggests a 'top-down' model of how government and media collude to form an agenda-driven setting in which public opinion gets influenced in favour of the views of state elite. The government can try to use media as an intermediary which only transmits information congruent with its agenda (Neog 2018, 127-133). The government has found more subtle ways to influence the media, and the relationship between the government and media is more transactional than the public believes (Neog 2018, 120). But since his election as Indian Prime Minister in 2014, Modi has been bypassing the media, which no longer gets clear explanations of policy decisions (Neog 2018, 139).

In international conflicts, policymakers and the military are the main lobbying groups, aiming to be portrayed in a positive light in the coverage (Bläsi 2004, 4). In the case of Pakistan, the military establishment, as a lobby, imposes severe restrictions and discourages any critical coverage of its part and influence in the conflicts with India, Afghanistan, and the Taliban (Anwar 2018; Hussain 2022, 1772; Jehangir 2023, 5). As such, in national security cases where there is policy ambiguity and the military is not or less involved, the media might be able to exhibit independence (Hussain 2022, 1784). Oftentimes Pakistani newspapers uncritically accept the army's story without conducting thorough investigations (Pandey 2017, 1). "It needs a lot of creativity and sensitivity on the part of journalists to do constructive reporting during high-level security conflicts" (Hussain 2020, 13). Concerning Indian media, Neog (2018, 115-16) finds the opposite to be true: In cases where there is policy uncertainty, the media supported the government's stance.

In general, according to Bläsi (2004, 4), "the political climate depends strongly on the degree of involvement of the country in terms of current policies, current interests, economic, historic and cultural relationships." In the case of India-Pakistan relations, the degree of involvement of both countries is high, as both are parties to the conflict. Existing research does not explore the different realms of the political climate as influencing factors for conflict coverage in depth. Nonetheless, Zaheer (2016, 713), in his study, examined the media coverage of the Kashmir conflict in Urdu and English-language newspapers in Pakistan and concludes "that increased war-oriented coverage might be attributed to the historical background and state policy towards Kashmir issue, which seem difficult to be disregarded in reporting."

One of the most determining factors for coverage in Indian and Pakistani newspapers is the national security relevance of conflicts. Shabir Hussain (2020, 12) examines six conflicts of different natures in Pakistan concerning their intensity level and their coverage in news stories in Dawn and The Nation. He divides reporting scenarios in Pakistan into reports on low-level, medium-level, and high-level security conflicts, finding that de-escalatory coverage seems inversely related to a conflict's intensity level. With a rising security level, the balance in reporting fades, with self-censorship by journalists being normal and high-security conflicts reported in a patriotic and nationalistic manner (Hussain 2016; Hussain 2020). Self-censorship, as such, is an interesting and important concept to look at. While it seems to be self-inflicted, this notion must be questioned on the grounds of what cause lies behind the decision and what kind of pressure journalists are under.

Security matters connected to India, Afghanistan or the Taliban are seen as high-security threats and, as such, covered in news stories in a high-escalatory manner (Hussain 2020, 5-8). "The journalists openly supported the official perspectives and agreed that they did not care about professional ethos when dealing with enemy groups" (Hussain 2020, 9). Ruqiya Anwar (2018) finds that especially the editors' perception of the threat to national interest influences the coverage, with the personal opinions of journalists also factoring in. Anwar (2018) finds that the media most often views itself as a national institution and aims to demonstrate that in case national security gets challenged, which results in nationalistic coverage.

## **2.2 Preconditions – Situation On-Site – Sources**

The secretive nature of security matters limits journalists' access to credible sources and information. Existing literature looks into the nature of sources consulted by Indian and Pakistani elite English-language print media in reporting on conflicts and security-related events connected to their respective countries. "The term 'news source' refers to *any person, organization, document, or object that provides information to journalists*" (Zamith 2022, 159). The factor of availability, accessibility and choices of different sources heavily influences the outcome of a news story (Zamith 2022, 159-162).

Recent studies indicate that the Indian English-language media relies heavily on official sources, particularly government sources when reporting on conflicts and security-related events (Hussain and Jehangir 2023; Rasul et al. 2016; Sreedharan 2009). Neog (2018, 115) finds that especially during crises the government becomes the only source. Previous research shows that Pakistani English-language media, in comparison to its Indian counterparts, while

also relying mainly on official sources, is more heavily reliant on military sources (Anwar 2018; Hussain 2022). This connects to the mentioned dominating lobbying groups. As such, it makes sense that this also leads to their overrepresentation concerning sources. Hussain (2022, 1779) suggests that heavy reliance on military sources is also substantiated in the Pakistani context, as the military tightly controls, for example, all issues connected to the war on terror. Journalists are, therefore, reliant on the, by the military, published press releases as sources for their news stories (Hussain 2022, 1779).

The research reveals that security-related occurrences in the Afghan conflict are predominantly reported through official sources (over 80%), as compared to non-official and foreign sources (Hussain and Jehangir 2023, 13). Furthermore, a non-authoritative source can be seen as less credible, which is a significant factor concerning the one-source reliance found by Hussain and Jehangir (2023, 3). This again highlights the challenges journalists encounter in providing accurate and comprehensive coverage of critical events, often leaving only one option for journalists to rely on official sources, potentially presenting a biased image. The research uncovers that “half of the news stories and articles in the corpus (51%) drew heavily on the political and military elite as the primary or only source” (Jehangir 2023, 11). Additionally, Jehangir (2023, 11) finds that when these were not consulted, sources were more likely missing entirely. Hussain (2020, 8) finds that “Pakistani news media usually rely on AFP and Reuters for information on India and Afghanistan” (Hussain 2020, 8). This would mean that international press agencies are consulted, possibly due to a lack of access to information through other channels or reporters on the ground.

Hussain and Jehangir (2023, 10), discover that *The Hindu* (India), compared to *Dawn* (Pakistan), was more heavily dependent on national sources. Chindu Sreedharan (2009) looks into the nature of the coverage of the Kashmir conflict in the Indian and Pakistani press by analysing the news coverage of ten significant events. He, on the other hand, finds that a predominant reliance on political sources within their respective government is also true for Pakistani newspapers (Sreedharan 2009, 200-201). This reflects a state-led tendency in conflict journalism. Still, the second-most consulted source in Indian, and Pakistani media was information emanating from the other state’s establishment, mostly government members. However, this was primarily during peacetime (Sreedharan 2009, 200-201).

Overall, Indian media sources have been less extensively researched than Pakistani media sources. Nonetheless, it can be concluded from several studies that there is a lack of cross-

checking and verification with a prevalence of single-source reporting in Indian and Pakistani media. The predominant reliance on official sources leads to the overrepresentation of their perspective while other views stay entirely unexplored. As such, there is the danger of potentially biased coverage of conflicts and security-related events, which raises concerns about media freedom, the possible politicisation of reporting, and the diversity and credibility of information presented in the media. Jehangir (2023, 11) suggests that this can lead to the media “progressing the political agenda, either by choice or through pressure.” The questions remain if there is a way around this single-source dilemma.

## **2.3 Conflict Coverage in Indian and Pakistani media**

In this part I continue to discuss the findings of existing research concerning the manner of coverage. This broad overview is focused on the actual news content and structure of reporting. It must be understood against the backdrop of all that has been discussed so far.

Various studies consider the lens of peace journalism, to understand conflict reporting in Indian and Pakistani newspapers (Anwar 2018; Hussain 2016; Hussain 2020; Hussain and Siraj 2019; Hussain 2022; Jehangir 2023; Mahmood Khan et al. 2021; Sreedharan 2009; Zaheer 2016). According to Johan Galtung (2003, 178), peace journalism is peace/conflict-oriented, truth-oriented, people-oriented, and solution-oriented. War journalism, on the other hand, is war/violence-oriented, propaganda-oriented, elite-oriented, and victory-oriented. An overview of the attributes can be found in Table 1 in chapter three. During times of crisis, the threat to national security is often perceived as extraordinarily high, leading to high-escalatory coverage, related to the war journalism perspective. Additionally, coverage is often framed in a nationalistic manner, most likely to gain public support (Saffee 2016, 107-108). In conflict and critical periods connected to the Indo-Pak relations, Indian and Pakistani media align with their state’s official standpoint, defending their respective government’s claims and state policies start to heavily influence media coverage (Adnan et al. 2019, 211; Pandey 2017, 2; Saffee 2016, 107-108).

### **2.3.1 Reporting Pak-Indo Relations**

Existing research finds that there seems to be a bias towards negative reporting on matters concerning India-Pakistan relations in Indian and Pakistani newspapers (Adnan et al. 2019; Pandey 2017; Akbar and Adnan 2018; Anand and Pandey 2022; Rasul et al. 2016). More specifically, the research reveals a discernible bias in the media coverage, with each side favouring its own nation’s interests and presenting the opposing country negatively (Pandey 2017,



2). Interestingly, TOI was the newspaper with the most neutral portrayal of Pak-Indo relations among four prominent Indian newspapers (Akbar and Adnan 2018, 243).

Regarding reporting on the foreign policy discourses concerning Indo-Pak relations, Indian print media frames are communally charged, and the media quickly alleges any terrorist attack in India on Pakistan (Saffee 2016, 110-113). Malik Adnan, Saiful Islam, and Abdul Wajid Khan (2019) analyse the coverage of India-Pakistan relations and foreign policy in two English-language newspapers: *The Hindu* (India) and *The Nation* (Pakistan). The study by Adnan et al. (2019, 207) finds that the *The Nation* published more editorials on India-Pakistan relations than the *The Hindu*. This suggests a higher level of interest or focus on the subject of India-Pakistan relations within the *The Nation*. Overall, the Pakistani press tilted towards conflict framing, and the Indian press presents even more coverage in that direction. Both countries' media seem to allocate less coverage to peace framing, which might result in an imbalance in the portrayal of Pakistan-India relations (Mahmood Khan et al. 2021, 60).

Additionally, disassociating personal from professional often becomes impossible during conflicts (Sreedharan 2009, 79). Neog (2018, 130) describes that during crisis situations notions of patriotism and journalistic objectivity collide as competing impulses. He finds that, especially in the Indian case, the history and culture concerning the conflict with Pakistan play into the journalist's equation. As mentioned earlier, "nationalist media fortifies clear policy action," while in the case of an absence of policy certainty, the media frames news to support the government's stance (Neog 2018, 115-116). As such, the government's perspective is supported by the media during crises, no matter if their policy goals are clear or uncertain, and the press takes its cues from the government.

The media frequently portrays the tense relations between Pakistan and India as "something that can lead to a disaster in the region" (Saffee 2016, 111). The Kashmir conflict is mostly reported in Indian and Pakistani media from a war journalism perspective (Zaheer 2016; Neog 2018; Hussain 2022). Concerning Indian media reporting, Neog (2018, 126) attributes this to limited access to conflict areas or sources, which leads to intent repetition of the exact information and narratives of violence during periods of crisis. Zaheer (2016, 717), for Pakistani newspapers' coverage of the Kashmir issue, finds that "all the selected newspapers published more numbers of news reports tilted towards war frames compared to peace frames," both vernacular and English-language media, including *Dawn*. However, *Dawn* was closer to a balanced framing. Hussain (2022, 1783-1784) finds that it was due to the broader societal and

political consensus that coverage was mainly supportive of government policies. “In the case of the Kashmir conflict, the government was able to create elitist consensus as well as controlling the flow of information. This resulted in an overwhelming amount of pro-government coverage” (Hussain 2022, 1785).

### **2.3.2 Reporting the Taliban Conflict (in connection to Afghanistan)**

Due to its high-security nature, the conflict between Afghanistan and Pakistan has been reported in Pakistani media mostly from a war journalism perspective (Hussain et al. 2022, 3; Hussain and Siraj 2019). Additionally, more war journalism is produced during bilateral tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan, compared to peace times, including in the newspaper Dawn (Hussain and Siraj 2019, 312). As is typical for war journalism framing, the press in Pakistan fails to provide alternative perspectives concerning the Taliban problem and relied mainly on elitist and nationalistic frames (Hussain and Siraj 2019, 322). The Pakistani media’s reporting is characterised as escalatory and elitist, underscoring the security aspects of the conflict. The perspective of victims gets neglected, and national security concerns are emphasised (Hussain 2016, 38). Hussain (2022, 1783), concerning reporting on policy issues in general, notes that “the pro-government coverage is due to pressure from military that disallows criticism to its policies in Pakistan.”

In their research on reporting of the Taliban conflict, Rasul et al. (2016) find that Dawn, while overwhelmingly supportive of official strategies, still has a liberal position and criticised the government for “its inability to protect the life and property of its citizens” (Rasul et al. 2016, 287) and the alleged support of some of the Jihadi groups (Rasul et al. 2016, 288). Rasul et al. (2016, 289) discover that Dawn was more focused on internal issues and terrorism, thereby not excessively concerned with India, while the Indian newspaper The Hindu was more externally focused while covering Indian and Pakistani foreign policies regarding the Taliban, implying that Pakistan should follow India’s strategy and emphasising Pakistan’s failure to adhere to agreements. “The Indian elite newspaper implicated Pakistani intelligence agencies in sabotage activities in Afghanistan” (Rasul et al. 2016, 284).

### **2.3.3 Reporting the Taliban Takeover**

Hussain and Jehangir (2023, 12) find that the Indian and Pakistani press predominantly gave favourable coverage to their governments while reporting on issues concerning national security. As such, the press of both countries supported their governments during the fall of Kabul (Hussain and Jehangir 2023, 16). The Hindu, an elitist and progressive newspaper in India,

unexpectedly produced the least critical coverage, even compared to the press in authoritarian regimes. Dawn, on the other hand, produced a severe amount of criticism of government policies. However, 47% of the analysed news reports were still supportive of government policies, while only 19% were unfavourable (Hussain and Jehangir 2023, 9-10). Abhijit Anand and Tanya Pandey (2022) focus on Indian mainstream newspapers and their coverage of the implications of the Taliban takeover for India's investments in Afghanistan. They highlight that the media has predominantly portrayed Indian investments in Afghanistan as lost following the Taliban's rise to power. They find that while the Indian mainstream newspapers "have been vocal about the challenges India may face after the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan" and the way it will affect India-Afghan relations, there has been a lack of attention to the reactions of Indian political leaders and parties (Anand and Pandey 2022, 287).

Hussain and Jehangir (2023, 12) find, concerning favourable coverage by the international press, including the Indian and Pakistani press, "a sudden increase in support for the new de-facto government (...) when the Taliban had entered Kabul (...). This was a crunch time in the conflict where the media aligned their reportage with their respective governments' stance" (Hussain and Jehangir 2023, 12). In accordance with that Zaeem Yasin, Farah Saleem Qureshi, and Menahil Farrukh (2022, 294-295), who looked at the framing in Pakistani print media concerning the Afghan Taliban, find that in Pakistani newspapers through June and July positive and neutral editorials increased. During and after August, negative editorials were published significantly less, and the Taliban were mostly portrayed positively or neutral. "The change in media's tone (...) correlated to the change in the Pakistan government's stance" (Yasin et al. 2022, 297). During July 2021 Dawn published the same amount of neutral and negative and no positive editorials. The findings were identical for August. During September the editorials were mostly neutrally portraying the Taliban and the positive and negative editorials were the same. Dawn adapted their approach the least to the government's stance among the three newspapers compared in the study by Yasin et al. (2022, 295).

### **2.3.4 Recommendations for Conflict Reporting**

Different authors suggest various ways to improve conflict reporting in Indian and Pakistani dailies. How realistic these are, must be questioned in light of the factors influencing conflict coverage production. Concerning conflict journalism in Pakistan, Hussain (2020, 13) opts for a journalistic practice embedded in the critical pragmatic perspective, which includes mindfulness concerning the ground realities while staying system critical. It is difficult for Pakistani media to criticise the military's role. Therefore, changing the perspective by highlighting

people's suffering could be a solution to urge to improve the situation, following good journalistic practices. Adopting a humanitarian perspective while reporting on the Taliban conflict in Pakistan could be one way of doing this Hussain (2020, 4).

“Indian media needs to refrain from negative reporting on Pakistan and the paranoia it creates with regard to terrorism. Both countries, for any durable peace, should keep a check on media narratives while highlighting the relations between the two and encourage it on advocacy of insulating trade from politics and focus on positive framing” (Saffee 2016, 113). Hussain's (2020) and Saffee's (2016) suggestions have to be questioned in line with criticism of peace journalism, concerning the goal of peace in coverage. Ankita Pandey (2017) emphasises the importance of media objectivity and the need to critically examine cases to facilitate a more balanced account of inter-state conflicts. Sreedharan (2009, 234-235) suggests that there is a need for increased media-academia exchanges. This could be a potential strategy for improving the quality and authenticity of conflict coverage in Indian and Pakistani media.

## **2.4 Conclusion, Gap in the Literature and Aim of this Research**

Existing research found a bias towards negative reporting on matters concerning Indo-Pak relations in general, both in Indian and Pakistani newspapers. Furthermore, newspapers align with their government's official standpoint in conflicts and emergency periods connected to Indo-Pak relations. Journalistic values, especially objectivity are often actively ignored when national interests come into play (Anwar 2018; Hussain 2016; Hussain 2020; Hussain and Jehangir 2023; Hussain and Siraj 2019). The reasons for this, beyond the broad explanation of their loyalty to their country are missing in existing research. I, therefore, aim through in-depth interviews with journalists to better understand their involvement when reporting. It is important to mention that existing research overwhelmingly focuses on Pakistani media. Especially the national security relevance of conflicts for conflict reporting in India has not been explored considerably. I investigate this in the Indian context as compared to the Pakistani.

None of the explored research intently investigates potential ways of avoiding the single-source dilemma in news coverage. Except for Sreedharan (2009), no author suggests alternative sources and possible ways journalists might try to bypass pressure to rely on official sources, or additional information sources they are trying to establish. The question remains if there is a way around this single-source dilemma in conflict coverage. On the same note, it also must be mentioned that it is not clear from existing findings what sanctions for dissenters (Bläsi 2004) look like in the Indian and Pakistani context. Different signal words like

‘pressure’ or ‘influence’ are often used, but it is mostly unclear what exactly this entails. I aim to understand this factor in more detail.

While I did not explicitly differentiate between findings concerning editorials, op-eds and news reports in the main section of this review, it has to be mentioned that these can differ, even if published under the same editorial policy. Pandey (2017, 2) reveals differences between news items and editorials published in the Pakistani newspaper Dawn. Findings indicate that Dawn’s editorial stance might be more aligned with the government’s narrative than the tone of news items. Existing research extensively looks into coverage in editorials, while news reports have only been examined in very few cases. Furthermore, some existing research (Adnan et al. 2019; Akbar and Adnan 2018; Anand and Pandey 2022) does not relate their findings to the current political situation and what the media coverage can tell about political advancements. Adnan et al. (2019) and Muqqarab Akbar and Malik Adnan (2018), for example, base their explanations for research findings on historical accounts. While these must be considered, solely relying on these is not helpful when aiming to produce research on a continuing conflict. My research, therefore, considers a current example (the Taliban takeover) to understand media reporting on conflict and national security issues.

“In the highly securitised, semi-democratic milieu of Pakistan, journalists have to be careful about the pressures from the military, armed groups, political environment and public opinion” (Hussain 2020, 13). Because of this, Hussain (2020, 5) notes that in the environment of Pakistan, scholarship on journalism practice developed in the US and Western Europe has only limited applicability. He suggests a critical pragmatic model for peace journalism to understand the Pakistani conflict. Additionally, media systems are influenced by culture and differ as such in their nature (Hussain 2020, 4). In the following chapter I develop a conceptual framework based on existing research findings and prominent theories and accounts to avoid sole reliance on theories developed in a Western context. Shabir Hussain and Syed Abdul Siraj (2019) call for interdisciplinary research between political communication and peace journalism scholarship to understand the media’s potential role in conflict resolution. I develop a framework looking into the political backdrop of the conflict, adapted to the South-Asian context, while also exploring different theories of conflict journalism. In some research, the results do not answer the exploratory question: Why are some issues portrayed in a certain way in a particular context? My research aims at looking into this while including the Pakistani and Indian context to the same extent, thereby also filling a gap in existent research concerning the underrepresentation of the Indian context.

### **3 Theoretical Base and Conceptual Framework**

The main political concept this research revolves around is conflict, which “is a process through which two or more actors (‘PARTIES’) try to pursue incompatible aims or GOALS while trying to stop the other(s) from pursuing their goals” (McGoldrick and Lynch 2000, 6). Conflicts are dynamic and, as such, cannot be treated as a static phenomenon, in which one rule applies to all when it comes to reporting (Hussain 2020, 12). Research on conflict reporting requires a dynamic theoretical framework which is adaptable to the specific context. Hussain and Siraj (2019) argue that academically, political communication and peace journalism should be connected to understand what influences media content during conflict and what role media can play in the resolution of conflict. In accordance with that, I decided to construct this research theoretically on a conceptual framework that explores the notion of good journalism, thereby questioning the normative stance contained in the peace journalism approach and conflating these with an approach considered of the factors which influence conflict coverage. This includes the political realm which is based in this approach on a basic exploration of the theory of (enduring) rivalry in the realms of realism, to understand the political context of the research problem in connection with the coverage.

#### **3.1 Journalism Practice – Theories of Conflict Coverage**

Regarding ‘good journalism,’ I follow, in this research, the explanation presented by Wilhelm Kempf (2007), according to whom, journalism is a method of public communication, and good journalism follows the one goal of representing reality accurately. Because of certain professional norms, journalistic practice follows, it differs from other types of public communication. These include in particular: “truthfulness, objectivity, neutrality and detachment” (Kempf 2007, 2). While truthfulness is the quintessence of representing reality accurately, the other norms are means to achieving this.

In the realms of conflict coverage this understanding of good journalism practice is discussed in connection to the role journalism ‘should’ fulfil. This academic field is largely grounded in Johan Galtung’s idea of peace journalism, first introduced in 1986. Peace journalism differs from Kempf’s (2007, 2) definition of ‘good journalism’ principally because it is a combination of journalism with the external aim of peace. Whereas good journalism according to Kempf (2007) does not strive to influence the public. The normative stance and the active role of the journalist involved in the Galtunic understanding of peace journalism are points of contention and must be considered in-depth in relation to the approach of this study.

### 3.1.1 Peace Journalism

According to Galtung (2003, 178) good reporting, prioritises peace journalism and opposes war journalism. An overview of the attributes Galtung (2003) assigns to peace and war journalism can be found in Table 1, which is an adaption from his account and Hussain and Siraj’s (2019) reproduction of his approach for a study on conflict coverage in the South Asian context. “Peace Journalism (PJ) uses conflict analysis and transformation to update the concept of balance, fairness and accuracy in reporting” (McGoldrick and Lynch 2000, 5). If journalists follow the practice of peace journalism, they focus their reporting on conflict transformation. Conflict transformation can be understood as the replacement of violent with non-violent means of settling disputes. Peace journalists in this understanding aim to change the discourse “within which something is thought, spoken of and acted upon” (Galtung 2003, 179). The classification of war and peace journalism by Galtung has been adopted by several researchers (see, for example, McGoldrick and Lynch 2000), while many others oppose the normative stance (see for example, Kempf 2007; Loyn 2007).

*Table 1 - Indicators of war and peace journalism*

Peace/conflict journalism indicators	War/violence journalism indicators
<p><b>1. Invisible effects of war:</b> Emotional trauma, damage to society, damage to property, structure and culture</p> <p><b>2. Solution/Peace-oriented:</b> Report leads to solution to the conflict, highlighting peace initiatives, also for prevention of more war; see conflict/war as problem; proactive: prevention before any violence/war occurs</p> <p><b>3. People-Oriented:</b> Focuses on common people as actors and sources of information, focus on suffering all over, giving voice to the voiceless</p> <p><b>4. Causes and consequences:</b> Reporting on the causes and future effects of the conflict, focus on aftermath: resolution, reconstruction, reconciliation; cause and outcomes anywhere, also in history/culture</p> <p><b>5. Avoid labelling of good and bad guys:</b> humanisation of all sides, giving voice to all parties, empathy</p> <p><b>6. Multi-party orientation:</b> Gives voice to many parties involved in conflict, explore conflict formation; x parties, x goals, x issues</p> <p><b>7. Non-partisan:</b> Neutral, not taking sides; expose untruths on all sides, uncover all cover-ups</p> <p><b>8. Win-win orientation:</b> Many goals and issues, solution-oriented, making conflicts transparent,</p> <p><b>9. Avoid demonizing language:</b> Report on more precise descriptions, titles or name that the people give themselves</p>	<p><b>1. Visible effects of war:</b> Casualties, dead, wounded, material damage</p> <p><b>2. Differences-oriented:</b> Report leads to the conflict; reactive: waiting for violence before reporting; closed space, closed time; causes and exits in arena, who threw the first stone</p> <p><b>3. Elite-oriented:</b> Focuses on leaders and elites as actors and sources of information); focus on ‘our’ suffering; on able-bodied elite males, being their mouthpiece</p> <p><b>4. Here and now:</b> Focus reporting on the conflict/war arena; conceal peace-initiative, before victory is at hand</p> <p><b>5. Dichotomy:</b> Good guys and bad guys or victim and villain; ‘us-them’ journalism; voice, for ‘us’</p> <p><b>6. Two-party orientation:</b> One party wins, one party loses</p> <p><b>7. Partisan, Propaganda-oriented:</b> Biased for one side in the conflict; expose ‘their’ untruths, help ‘our’ cover-ups/lies; dehumanisation of ‘them’; making wars opaque/secret</p> <p><b>8. Zero-sum orientation:</b> One goal: to win</p> <p><b>9. Uses of demonizing language:</b> Use of language such as vicious, brutal, barbaric, inhuman, tyrant, savage, ruthless, terrorist, extremist, fanatic, fundamentalist</p>

**Source:** Author’s own adaptation based on Galtung (2003, 178); Hussain and Siraj (2019, 310)

### 3.1.2 Critical Pragmatic Model of Peace Journalism

Hussain (2020, 3-4) criticises the dichotomous categories Galtung's (2003) peace journalism model proposes, which do not recognise that conflict coverage is usually positioned somewhere between war and peace journalism. Literature focusing on Pakistani media reporting on conflicts of national interest mostly suggests a classification model that considers its potential for conflict escalation and conflict de-escalation (Hussain 2020; Hussain et al. 2019; Hussain et al. 2022). According to Hussain (2020, 10), peace journalists should aim to be critically aware of their position while exerting agency from that position and compromising according to the structural setting in which they produce news, while continually adjusting their strategy to reach peace (Hussain 2020, 10). Exemplary for this, he points out that for example for journalists in Pakistan it is difficult to criticise the military, while he notes that it is however possible to shed light on the misery of ordinary people on both sides in a conflict, without directly expressing critical views of the military's approach (Hussain 2020, 13). Hussain's (2020) approach as such also contains the normative notion of Galtung's approach, which has to be critically reflected on in relation to Kempf's (2007) understanding of good journalism.

Hussain (2020, 3) considers the ground realities and grades conflicts regarding their expected threats to national security (high to low) and classifying coverage concerning their various levels of escalatory and de-escalatory qualities. His critical pragmatic model for peace journalism was developed in the Pakistani context and he found that the nature of the conflict and its perceived threat to national security are the main determinants for the manner of coverage. The stronger the intensity of a conflict, the higher the possibility of conflict escalatory coverage and the lesser the intensity of a conflict, the better the chances for strong de-escalatory coverage (Hussain 2020, 6). An overview of the indicators is shown in Table 2.

*Table 2 - Critical Pragmatic Model for Peace Journalism*

<b>Conflict Scenarios</b>	<b>Coverage of Conflicts</b>	
<b>High Security Threats</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- sharp increase in casualty rate</li> <li>- involvement of state, out-group (other country or group considered foreigners) is involved who have territorial ambitions</li> <li>- strong socio-cultural and ideological differences</li> </ul>	<b>Strong Escalatory Coverage</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- call for use of force against the enemy</li> <li>- zero-sum oriented</li> <li>- securitisation</li> </ul>	<b>Weak De-Escalatory Coverage</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- contextualisation</li> <li>- highlighting voices for peace</li> </ul>
<b>Medium Security Threats</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- usually low casualty rate</li> <li>- involvement of state, no out-group involvement, ambivalent territorial claims</li> <li>- no real ideological differences exist</li> </ul>	<b>Moderate Escalatory Coverage</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- elitist</li> <li>- uni-perspectival</li> <li>- name-calling for enemy</li> </ul>	<b>Moderate De-Escalatory Coverage</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- people-oriented</li> <li>- multi-perspective</li> <li>- neutral language</li> </ul>



<b>Low Security Threat</b>	<b>Weak Escalatory Coverage</b>	<b>Strong De-Escalatory Coverage</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- very low casualties</li> <li>- non-involvement of state, no out-group, no territorial ambitions</li> <li>- no cultural, ideological differences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- de-contextualisation</li> <li>- ignoring voices for peace</li> <li>- sensationalism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- media pressing for peace</li> <li>- win-win orientation</li> <li>- humanisation</li> </ul>

Source: Author's own depiction based on Hussain (2020, 5)

### 3.1.3 Questioning the Normative Goal of Peace Journalism

While Hussain (2020) already introduced an adapted model of peace journalism, based on the critique of the dichotomous categories and with the extension of paying particular attention to the structural setting, various other authors have extensively criticised Galtung's (2003) approach. Coming back to the earlier mentioned definition of good journalism, Kempf (2007, 2) concerning peace journalism, points out the disharmonious combination of the elements of peace and journalism, as peace entails a normative aim, which should be excluded in good journalism practice. As such there is a "goal conflict" between the truthful reporting of reality and the peace journalistic aim of actively contributing to the conflict resolution process, which elucidates the problem of crossing the lines between journalism and public relations (Hanitzsch 2007, 4; Kempf 2007, 2).

Kempf (2007) and Loyn (2007) built their critique on the perspective that peace making, and journalism are two separate roles. Nonetheless, according to Kempf (2007, 4) journalism plays a vital role in the societies' "construction of reality" and as such always has an active part in the realm of the conflict. Through the type of coverage, they choose, journalists can actively, stimulate in the direction of escalation or de-escalation of a conflict. Kempf (2007) as such does not completely denote the role journalists hold in conflict but reduces the notion of peace journalism to a demand for the responsibility of how this role is fulfilled, while the main goal remains the accurate representation of reality. According to Kempf (2007) and Loyn (2007) the attachment to a different goal, than reporting reality accurately, endangers the pursuit of the means of 'good journalism' and as such the truthfulness of the coverage. Advocacy journalism or 'journalism of attachment' comprises the journalist's own (sometimes emotional) attachment or political allegiance as the driving force of their work. When peace journalism requires an advocating stance of journalists, as such the 'attachment to peace' and conflict transformative reporting, objectivity gets lost (Kempf 2007, 7).

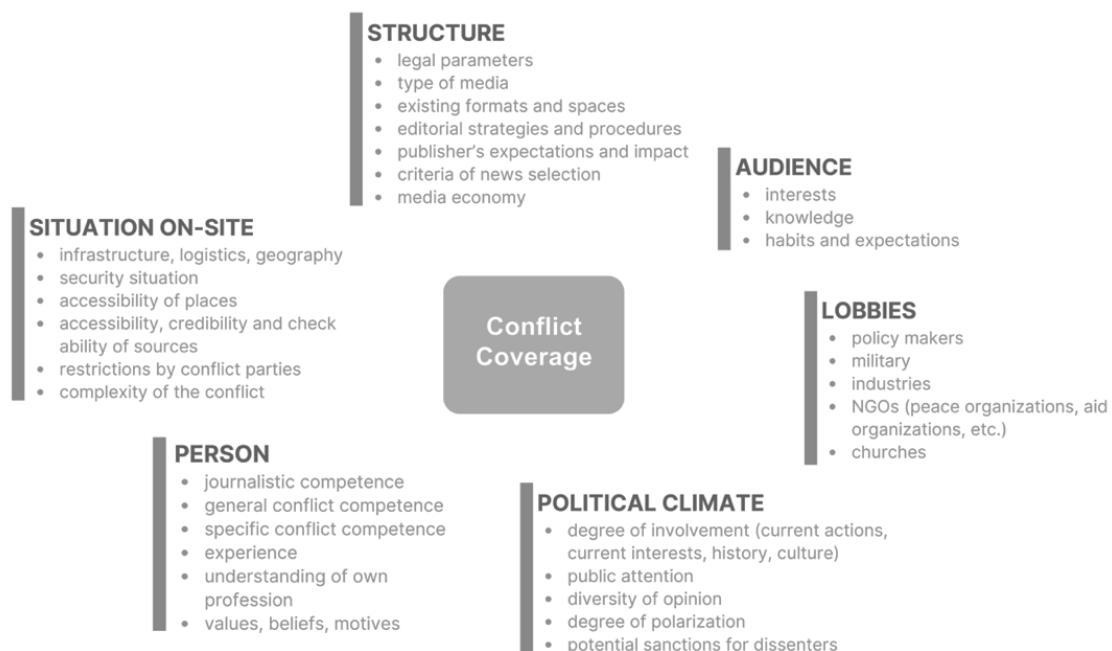
Kempf (2007) and Hussain (2020) advocate different goals journalists covering conflict should pursue. They are nonetheless in agreement regarding the critique on the Galtunic model concerning the ignorance of ground realities when assessing coverage in accordance

with the dichotomous peace journalism categories. Hanitzsch (2007, 1) indicates also in accordance with this that peace journalism is based on an exaggeratedly individualistic viewpoint, which ignores that “media structures and professional routines cannot be modified from the position of the individual journalist.” Therefore, I introduce the concept by Bläsi (2004), looking at the factors that influence newspaper coverage production, as the guiding concept for this research.

### 3.1.4 Conditions for Constructive Conflict Coverage

Peace journalism, or constructive conflict reporting, as Bläsi (2004) calls it, as a theoretical model, can only be evaluated in its application when the surrounding real-world conditions are considered as well. Bläsi (2004, 1) developed a model for factors influencing conflict coverage production, bringing the theoretical approach into relation to the reality of today’s media. The question of which factors influence the production of journalistic content in times of conflict and crisis is simultaneously the question of the factual starting conditions for any attempt at constructive conflict reporting. Bläsi (2004, 5) suggests six main factors which influence conflict coverage: Structure, audience, lobbies, political climate, person and situation on-site (overview in Figure 1). This study focuses on factors which are important for understanding the influence of the security competition and the enduring rivalry on the coverage of the conflict. The decisions concerning these factors were drawn based on existing literature. Special focus lies on comparing the Indian and Pakistani political context equally.

*Figure 1 - Factors influencing the production of conflict coverage*



**Source:** Author’s own presentation based on Bläsi (2004, 5)

### 3.2 Realism and the Theory of Enduring Rivalry

To better understand the political context, in which the conflict coverage, under examination in this research, is produced, a short theoretical exploration is needed. I focus in this study on the relevance of the security competition between India and Pakistan, which is grounded in the enduring rivalry between the two countries, which influences their national security approaches. As such, I briefly introduce the theory of realism, as a setting of the security competition and focus then in relation to this on the enduring rivalry theory.

National security is often seen as the capability of a state to resist traditional security threats, meaning its capacity to mobilise military forces for the defence of borders. In this case, national security is reduced to physical threats by state and non-state actors (including terrorism). Realists see politics in international relations as a fight for material power among sovereign states (Reus-Smit 2004, 15). Structural realism focuses on the concept of power in international relations, which is seen as the most essential factor (Mearsheimer 2013, 77). Security is assumed to be a relative concept, and the zero-sum understanding makes security and, as such, the system competitive. The structure of the international system, anarchic – with no higher authority – forces states to always seek structural security and (more) power (Bloor 2022, 28-35). This is “especially evident in those scenarios in which two or more states are implacable rivals” (Bloor 2022, 13) and especially between neighbouring states (Bloor 2022, 31).

This realist understanding is relevant in explaining the conflict situation in a rival relationship and even more so between neighbouring states. Based on this, to better understand the India-Pakistan-Afghanistan conundrum as a precondition for the conflict coverage of the Taliban takeover, this conceptual approach looks further into the rivalry approach. A rivalry, according to Paul F. Diehl and Gary Goertz (2000, 25-28), is a militarised competition. When states are in a rivalry relationship, they have conflicting goals regarding the distribution of limited resources. However, this may not entail the competitors’ preferences being incompatible or the competition being entirely zero-sum. These goods, such as political sway or ideological/religious supremacy, could be intangible, yet states may also fight for more material assets like territory or natural resources. In reality, most rivalries are a mix of sources of competition (Diehl and Goertz 2000, 23). Enduring rivalries “are severe and repeated conflicts between the same states over an extended period of time” (Diehl and Goertz 2000, 22). The duration of enduring rivalries generally leads to national security decisions which are caused by the competition.

Conflict and confrontations between rivals work differently than between non-rivals (Thompson 1995, 215). The duration of a rivalry predominantly affects, at any given time, the relative influence of the past on current and forthcoming exchanges (Diehl and Goertz 2000, 21). As such, applying the approach of enduring rivalries allows for considering how the significance of the past and the prospect of the future can influence the wider conflict (Goertz and Diehl 1993, 169). It furthermore helps determine the nature of future hostile interactions (Diehl and Goertz 2000, 21). In a rival relationship, all disputes between the involved states are related (Mitton 2014, 359). As conflict recurs, contestants' concerns about hurting or depriving their rival overshadow their own immediate satisfaction, and as a result, hostility deepens and transcends that of typical conflict (Vasquez 1996, 532).

### **3.3 Conclusion**

While I agree with the critique of the normative dimension of peace journalism, the approach is nonetheless crucial for this research, as it introduces possible attributes of conflict coverage and opens up the possibility of discerning different forms of coverage. As such, the focus lies more on applying peace journalism to discern different elements of the coverage rather than assessing its application in aiming for conflict transformation. Especially in regard to the journalist's own understanding of their profession and the following values, beliefs and motives, which are looked at as influencing factors for the coverage, the discussion is based on questioning the contrasts between Kempf's (2007) understanding of good journalism and the approach to peace journalism based on Galtung (2003).

Furthermore, I focus on the factor of the political climate, precisely the degree of involvement and the potential sanctions for dissenters as influencing factors for the coverage. "Each country has a certain political and societal climate regarding a conflict in another country" (Bläsi 2004, 4). As such, this must be understood in connection to the theory of enduring rivalry. The relative influence of the past on present and future exchanges, which persists in rivalry relations, attributes high importance to the history of the conflict and is also an influencing factor for the coverage. When all disputes between the involved states stand in relation to their rival relationship, it can be assumed that these are understood as high-intensity conflicts, with both states being involved in a manner surpassing typical conflicts. In turn, the coverage of any conflict connected to the enduring rivalry can be assumed to be mainly concentrated in the converged category of high-escalatory and low-de-escalatory reporting, when the nature of the conflict and its perceived threat to national security are the primary determinants of the manner of coverage. The security competition between India and Pakistan, including their

enduring rivalry, is the political basis of the conflict, while the extension into Afghanistan in relation to the rivalry is considered. The Taliban takeover is taken here as an incident of importance for both Indian and Pakistani national security in their rivalry relationship and, as such, a discursive event of importance covered in the media.

Regarding lobbies, I therefore, focus on the military and policymakers as influencing the coverage. In connection to the enduring rivalry, it is essential to consider the stakeholders (rivals) in the conflict. Furthermore, the parties to the conflict are also essential in connection to my consideration of the situation on-site, involving the accessibility, credibility and checkability of sources and the restrictions by conflict parties. Conflict parties can impose restrictions, deny, or limit access to information sources or use more rigid methods like censorship, “the threat of expulsion, or other harsh consequences in the case of ‘uncooperativeness,’” leading directly to the factor of sanctions for dissenters (Bläsi 2004, 3). The potential sanctions which dissenters might face are part of the political climate. In this notion, self-censorship has to be mentioned as an outcome of a tightly controlled environment, directly influencing the actual manner of coverage.

The conceptual framework is applied in this research by deducing parts of the coding scheme both for the interviews and the analysis of the news articles from it and by organising the main analysis around the different variables. The findings from expert interviews are viewed inside the frame of the enduring rivalry theory and in combination with the approach introduced by Hussain (2020). His approach of high-/low-escalatory coverage against the backdrop of the perceived threat to national security is applied by analysing how the Taliban takeover and the rivalry relationship are understood in terms of national security threats by experts and journalists and by looking at how the coverage in Dawn and TOI can be classed in the model. Furthermore, the findings from the interviews with journalists are analysed against the backdrop of peace journalism and in relation to the criticism of its normative stance and the requirements it sets for journalists. This can in turn be used to connect the findings from the analysis of the news articles to the conditions under which they were produced. The chosen factors of influence this study is focused on are extensively explored to connect the findings from the interviews and the news article analysis.

## **4 Methodological Framework**

In this chapter, I aim to amplify the methodological choices this research is based on and how these are applied to determine the methods I use. As the research is subjective and interpretive, the researcher's rationality and perceptions, which are employed in all decision-making phases throughout the research process, are vital to lay out clearly (Sikes 2004, 17)

### **4.1 My Positionality, Reflexivity and Philosophical Premises**

Joe Kincheloe and Kathleen Berry (2004, 2) argue that the researcher should be conscious of the way they see and their social location in order to clarify their position concerning ontology and epistemology. Therefore, this part combines my positionality concerning the aims of this research with the resulting philosophical premises, which define the way this research is conducted. Ontology is the study of being, or the nature of reality aiming to explain what can be studied. Specifically, the ontological framework determines whether social entities can and should be seen as objective entities that have a reality external to the reality of social actors or if they can and should be considered social constructions built up from the perceptions and actions of social actors (Jackson 2013, 52). Epistemology is the study of the nature of knowledge. An epistemological framework determines what is or should be regarded as acceptable or justifiable knowledge in research in a specific discipline (Bryman 2012, 27).

As I aim at taking an individual's viewpoint to comprehend phenomena, my research is built on an interpretivist and constructivist methodology. Interpretivism and constructivism as research strategies are two segments of the same entity. As such, the combination of an interpretivist epistemology and a constructivist ontology comes naturally (Van der Walt 2020, 59). The world exists in and through our cognition and interpretation. Social facts have to be included in the research, as the context which I study is not independent of me as a researcher. Constructivism assumes that the categories through which social reality is understood are social products. The meaning of categories and the social world around them are constructed and comprehended through interaction. Social order is in a continuous state of adaptation, which means that there is incessant reconstruction of social order and culture. I, therefore, examine how the social world is constructed and see social reality as part of ongoing construction, which is accomplished by social actors (Bryman 2012, 33-36).

This means that my position had to be reflected upon during the research process as well as that an understanding of the context is only possible when I considered the viewpoint of those

involved. According to interpretivism, knowledge is culturally bound and relative. Observations and experiences depend on the perspective of the investigator and are, as such, not neutral and not necessarily consistent across different investigators. Interpretivist epistemology sees the world as existent in relation to human knowledge. Moreover, the social context develops and transmits this construction. “Interpretivism aims to bring into consciousness hidden social forces and structures” (Scotland 2012, 12). This research took an interpretivist ontological position and reality as a subjective construct (relativism). Human cognition is needed to give meaning to the world. In return, human cognition also influences how humans understand the world. Language is, therefore, actively forming reality. “Thus, reality is constructed through the interaction between language and aspects of an independent world” (Scotland 2012, 11).

I recognise that values can intrude at any given point during the research process. I have grown up in a ‘Western’ culture (specifically Germany), which influences my perspective. Furthermore, I have learned to conduct research in a ‘Western’ context, which influences my way of doing research. As such, certain interpretations may be a product of these values, and therefore, I have stayed self-reflective throughout the whole research process, questioning my own thoughts, emotions and interpretations in connection to an understanding of my own position (Bryman 2012, 39-40). On the one hand, I believe that my outsider position can be helpful, as I might be able to be more unbiased than somebody who has grown up in the cultural context. In some studies (for example Pandey, 2017) I felt a certain bias towards favouring the country of origin of the researcher when analysing and evaluating the findings. As such, an outsider’s perspective can be helpful. On the other hand, it comes with limitations, as just mentioned, which I have attended to by utilising sources, especially in my conceptual framework originated from the context.

## **4.2 Methodology and Research Design**

“The methodology is the approach taken to the research design as a whole in relation to reaching answers to the research question(s)” (Jackson 2013, 55). The choice of a research design reflects the priority which is given to certain aspects in the collection and analysis of the data (Bryman 2012, 45-46). This part establishes which methods are adequate to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses and how these were applied in this research. I applied a comparative research design. Furthermore, the methods, i.e., the data-gathering and analysing tools and techniques applied to acquire evidence for the knowledge constructed in this research were directly derived from the methodological choices (Jackson 2013, 55-57). This

research descriptively and interpretively explores a phenomenon in depth which has not been investigated from this vantage point. A qualitative research design is appropriate in this case because it seeks to deepen the understanding of a phenomenon in a particular context rather than to generalise findings (Bryman, 2012). Acquiring knowledge in this research required interaction with those who are involved in the context which is studied here to understand their perspective.

Max Weber's concept of 'Verstehen' elaborates on the notion that sociology should aim for an interpretive understanding of social actors' interaction and the context surrounding them to accomplish a causal explanation for social actions (Bryman 2012, 29-30). Phenomenology is the basis for the concept of 'Verstehen,' which calls for an epistemological stance that encloses that the researcher gives their interpretation of other people's interpretations. The goal is to place these interpretations by others in a social scientific frame. My interpretations in this study were interpreted again in the context of existing literature on the topic and relevant concepts and theories (Bryman 2012, 30). It is important to mention that hermeneutics and the concept of 'Verstehen' contributed to the approach in this study. Hermeneutics as a methodology means acquiring concealed meaning from language. Hermeneutical research is characterised by interpretive methods, in contrast to aiming purely for descriptive results (Scotland 2012, 12). This understanding results directly in the appliance of critical discourse analysis as a method, which allowed a clear exploration of the usage of language and the resulting interpretations.

A case can be defined as the object of study. As such, it constitutes the unit of analysis around which details are collected and conclusions are deduced. A case can, for example, be constituted of a person, a place, an event or a time period (De Vaus 2001, 18). In my research, the coverage of the Taliban takeover in relation to the India-Pakistan conflict is taken as a case requiring detailed inquiry. The case in question entails two cases, one is the coverage in India, the other is the coverage in Pakistan, which were chosen based on the interest in the conflict between the two nations. Therefore, this research will follow a comparative multiple-case study design, which will be valuable as to reveal similarities, differences, and patterns across the two cases, the reporting in Pakistani English-language newspapers and the reporting in Indian English-language newspapers, to see the extent to which these are congruent with the national security interest of Islamabad on the one hand and New Delhi on the other hand and the factors of influence which lead to this specific reporting.



## **4.2.1 Methods of Data Collection**

This research draws on two approaches for data collection, to enhance a comprehensive understanding. First, data was collected in the form of textual documents, specifically news articles from English-language newspapers in India and Pakistan. This was supplemented by 17 in-depth interviews, each between one and two hours, with media content creators connected to the media landscape in either India or Pakistan and policy experts. As such, the research was not dependent on the immanent limitations of a singular data collection approach and can elucidate the existing discourse in politics and media (Thorne 2020, 156).

### **4.2.1.1 News Articles**

As a uniform definition of different types of articles is not given in the literature, I decided to apply the term ‘news article’ continuously in this research, which I define as follows. News articles are texts published in a daily newspaper which inform the readers about current events. The journalist reports crucial information, answering commonly the main questions (who/what/where/when/why/how) (Photinos, n.d.). As such, news articles are part of the category of factual articles, as such “restricted to or based on fact” (Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary) which predominantly inform the reader about the current event in focus, mainly refraining from commenting on the events or the broader situation or following an explicitly narrative style. For a text in the newspapers to qualify as a news article under my definition, it could also not contain explicit extensive analysis, to be considered for the data collection. Both shorter and longer news articles were included in the data corpus of this study. I focus in this study on news articles because they have the highest requirement for neutrality and the journalists therefore ‘should’ aspire to be as unbiased as humanly possible. According to Teun A. Van Dijk (1988, 124-128), it is not possible to describe news events entirely value-free. As such, although editorials and opinion pieces, which represent the stance of the paper or writer, are commonly the place for voicing opinions, even news analysis and the most factual news articles can contain, at a minimum, implicit opinions or points of view. I aim to understand those implicit points of view which the journalists cannot oppress or are pressured to portray.

As the research questions are focused on a particular topic, and the goal was not a generalisation to a broader population, samples were found through purposive sampling, following a non-probability procedure (Bryman 2012, 418). The English-language press in India and Pakistan is influential concerning policy issues, even in comparison to the bigger vernacular press landscape. This significance can be traced back to the colonial era and the fact that ever

since both Indian and Pakistani rulers have ensured that English remains the primary language for acquiring power. English language media link the elite and middle classes, who speak various regional languages, into a joint national public audience (Sreedharan 2009, 90). Furthermore, looking at print media (epaper versions) in archived form ensures that all articles, the paper published, were included, as with online articles there is the risk that articles had to be removed later on, especially those expressing critical views, which the paper might have been pressured into taking down. Moreover, the Indian and Pakistani print media continue to be of importance because of their historical setting and the fact that these continue to be public ‘spokespersons.’ They are considered more credible compared to social media and essential for preserving press freedom (Adnan et al. 2019, 202-203).

I considered news articles from two English-language dailies, one Indian (TOI) and one Pakistani (Dawn). Because of the size of the Indian state, no newspaper can claim a national reach, but the mainstream English press can claim a large readership nationally (Bansal 2003, 32). TOI is part of The Times Group, a privately held media corporation seen as a ‘global brand’ (Udupa and Chakravartty 2012, 492). Bansal (2003, 33) notes that “The Times of India (TOI) is the largest circulated multi-edition daily in English.” Therefore, the TOI, as a national newspaper and one of the leading dailies was selected for this study (Narayana and Kapur 2011, 156). Pakistani media are dominated by three groups: the Pakistan Herald Publications, which publishes Dawn; Jang, which publishes The News International; and Nawa-i-Waqt, which owns The Nation (Sreedharan 2009). Hussain et al. (2022, 8) state that Dawn is Pakistan’s largest English daily and describe it as an elite newspaper focused on policy-level issues. Dawn was selected because it has an agenda-setting role for other media houses and elucidates the broader mediascape in Pakistan (Hussain et al. 2022, 8).

All news articles were collected in the database Gale OneFile: News, because it had the entire print publications (epaper versions) of both papers for the required time frame. As this is not a longitudinal study, but an in-depth analysis I chose to apply a short time frame, with the main analysis focused on the discursive event of the Taliban takeover. On Aug 10, 2021 the fast takeover of the Taliban became irrefutable. US intelligence officials, who originally had warned of a possible fall of Kabul within twelve months, predicted that the Taliban could capture the capital within a month. The following days showed that it took them less than a week when they entered Kabul on Aug 15 (Mellen 2021). I decided therefore, to collect news articles published between Aug 10 and Aug 18, 2021. For TOI, the following search string was applied in the database Gale OneFile: News - “Publication Title: ‘The Times of India’ NOT

‘e-paper’ NOT ‘Online Edition’ AND Entire Document: afghan\* Date: 10/8/2021-18/8/2021.” For Dawn - “Publication Title: ‘Dawn (Karachi, Pakistan)’ AND Entire Document: afghan\* Date: 10/8/2021-18/8/2021.” Such a broad search string was applied as relevant articles were excluded in a more detailed search string. News articles which included the keywords “afghan\*” AND “taliban” were included, while news articles which only incorporated the keyword “afghan\*” were included based on my analytical judgement regarding their relevance. Based on this I collected 60 news articles from TOI and 55 from Dawn.

As this is a qualitative study and the applied data analysis method (critical discourse analysis) requires a rigorous, in-depth analysis of each article concerning different aspects, this number was not feasible and an analysis of all articles this thoroughly would have exceeded the available space by far. Therefore, I decided to focus on news articles in which the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan was the primary theme of the news story. Thus, I excluded those news articles, which did not mention the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan at least once in the headline, the lead paragraph or the two subsequent paragraphs of the text (following the approach by Hussain and Jehangir 2023, 7). Based on these premisses, I reduced the data corpus to 52 TOI news articles and 32 Dawn news articles (overview in Appendix 1).

To narrow down the number of articles further and ensure that there was an explicit reference to India in the Dawn articles and to Pakistan in TOI articles, I did a keyword search and excluded all articles for TOI which did not mention “Pakistan” and all articles for Dawn which did not include “India.” This left me with 16 articles for TOI and ten articles for Dawn. As the amount of data would still not have been feasible in the realms of this research project, I decided to focus the thorough analysis on the 26 headlines, and partly on specific sections which gives specific insights. These and my exact proceeding concerning this is explained later.

The selection of news articles as the only type of article included in the data corpus and the focus on headlines has consequences for the results as for example the omittance of feature articles means that there are probably fewer perspectives on the conflict represented. Nonetheless, it is possible to have for example sources who talk about the on-the-ground situation (victims, bystanders, families etc.). As such, while I am not able to draw conclusions about perspectives that are represented in the whole newspaper or sources which are drawn on in the Indian or Pakistani media, I am able to make statements concerning this in relation to news articles, which is still valuable in itself for the earlier stated reasons. A more general view on the Indian and Pakistani mediascapes is provided through the interviews. Furthermore, I am

aware that the exclusion of articles which did not mention the other respective country means that I might miss indirect references to India or Pakistan or the rivalry. But I saw this step as helpful to ensure that the research focus actually stayed on the media coverage against the backdrop of the Indo-Pak security competition.

#### **4.2.1.2 Interviews**

For the collection of the primary data, a snowball sampling method was applied for the recruitment of interviewees (Bryman 2012, 424). Still, an a priori sampling approach was applied as well. Necessary criteria were set to be that the participant was either actively working for an Indian or Pakistani news mediascape or had worked in this context. Additionally, a special focus was set on recruiting journalists and editors who were working or had worked for an English-language news media outlet. Furthermore, preference was set on media content creators working for newspapers, especially print. Still, these were not necessary criteria, and based on my judgement, participants were included who solely fulfilled the necessary criteria and were regarded as being able to provide an insightful perspective for the research.

In this research I utilized semi-structured interviews, with a pre-set interview guide. This provided first-hand guidance during the interviews but also left enough space for the researcher to vary in the sequence of questions and adapt the questions throughout the interview (Bryman 2012, 201). This combination of structure and flexibility is essential for the study as the focus of the analysis is quite narrow, which means that a frame of questions is needed to answer the research question and stay focused. Nevertheless, the possibility had to be left of adjusting the interview to unforeseen topics that might be of interest and for the researcher to be able to respond to what is significant with further questions. By interviewing media content creators, I was able to get their perspective on the issues in question, as such enriching my research with a personal component.

All interviews were conducted remotely for reasons of my personal preferences, mainly because of logistics, security reasons and time issues, as the interviewees were residing in places across the entire globe. Zoom was used as a platform for video calls and WhatsApp for audio calls and transmission of voice notes. The interviews were recorded using a separate recording device. Most of the interviews took place in September and October 2022. Due to time issues both on the researcher's and on the respondents' end, one interview was postponed. An overview of the research participants can be found in Table A2 in Appendix A.

As qualitative research comes with the challenge that interviewees might provide inaccurate information or exaggerate in their stories, data triangulation is a common technique to avoid this (Fujii 2009, 151). In this study, I applied data triangulation concerning the interviews insofar as I compared the information that interviewees presented with other interviews, extracting as such dominant themes. I also compared these with other credible data sources, like journal articles, scientific books, mainstream newspapers, and reports. Nonetheless, data triangulation was only employed concerning what was emphasised as facts because I aimed to gain information predominantly concerning the respondents' perspectives. In this context, the value of people's narration lies in their subjective understanding (Fujii 2009, 151).

#### 4.2.2 Methods of Data Analysis

The analysis of the content (only text) of the news articles was done by employing critical discourse analysis (CDA). Additionally, Thematic Analysis (TA) was applied to make sense of the interview data. To get a broad understanding, I included both analyses in an overview of the macro structures, as can be seen in Table 3. This was done to get acquainted with the newspapers, for better comprehension of the individual articles. Furthermore, I wanted to gain insight into the main themes which the articles discuss and the prominent topics of the headlines to broadly sort the data into thematic categories.

*Table 3 - Approach to analysis – preliminary analysis*

Analysis Gross Structure	
1. Description of the newspapers	How did the interviewees describe each newspaper?
2. Main topics of the news articles	What are the main topics the headlines suggest? Which main topics does each news article discuss?
3. Features of the articles	e.g.: length, author (or missing), source (press agency)

**Source:** Author's own representation based on Fairclough (1995), Carvalho (2008) and Braun and Clarke (2006)

##### 4.2.2.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

Discourses are “constructions of significations of some domain of social practice from a particular perspective” (Fairclough 1995, 94). Fairclough (1995, 187) points out a specifically important opposition in mediatised political discourse, which is the professional political discourse, stemming from the field of politics and the lifeworld discourses, coming from ordinary experiences. I applied this in my research by examining the representation of the narrative held by policymakers and exploring which other narratives were represented.

There are three sets of questions concerning the media output, which, according to Fairclough (1995, 5), every analysis of media text can illuminate. They can be summarised as representations, identities, and relations. A detailed overview is given in Table 4. Table 5 and 6 give an

overview concerning my approach to the analysis of the news articles based on Fairclough (1995) and Carvalho (2008), which both focus on CDA in media studies. I adapted their ideas into an approach which applied to my requirements. As I focused on news articles, specifically certain sections and headlines, some aspects were omitted which did not seem relevant in the context. The three aspects (representations, identities and relations) lay at the heart of the analysis and were addressed in the various steps. In this context it was important not to solely look for what was present at each level of analysis, but also to identify what was absent in the texts (Carvalho 2008, 171).

**Table 4 - Approach to analysis - final media output**

Analysing the Media Output	
Representations	How is the world (events, relationships, etc.) represented?
Identities	What identities are set up for those involved in the coverage (reporters, audiences, 'third parties' referred to or interviewed)?
Relations	What relationships are set up between those involved (e.g., reporter-audience, politician-audience relationship, source-audience, subject of coverage-audience)?

**Source:** Author's own representation based on Fairclough (1995)

**Table 5 - Approach to analysis – CDA (textual analysis)**

I. Textual analysis	
Language	
	- Key concepts, signal words, connotative meaning of words
Grammar	
	- Lexical choices + implications - Vocabulary used for representing a certain reality (verbs, adjectives, adverbs)
Rhetoric and Linguistic Devices	
	- Imagery of language - + possible hidden meaning (metaphors, symbols, vivid language, simile) - Negation (How is negation or denial used to frame issues?) - Persuasive techniques (e.g.: appeals to emotion, hyperbole, sensationalism, repetition)
Tone and Style	
	- The overall tone (e.g., objective, subjective, biased, positive, negative) - Escalatory or de-escalatory style
Themes and Topics (Context)	
	- What are the main themes and which topics are discussed? How are they discussed? - What events/specific issues are associated with the broader issue under consideration?
Intertextuality and Objects	
	- What genres, voices and discourses are drawn upon and how are they articulated together? - Who (people, countries, organisations etc.) are mentioned? - Whose perspective seems to dominate?
Power Relations	
	- Who of the actors involved holds power in the discourse, and how is it represented? - What is the 'framing power' of social actors in relation to the media?
Discursive Strategies	
	- How does the journalist 'intervene' to form a certain perspective? (How is reality framed?) - How are the discursive strategies of (relevant) social actors reproduced, challenged or excluded? - How are different actors involved in the discursive strategies of others (and constructed by others)?
Ideological Standpoint	
	- What underlying ideologies or worldviews are present in the discourse? - Whose ideologies or worldviews are presented? - How do the findings from language, grammar, rhetoric relate to the wider ideological framework?

**Source:** Author's own representation based on Fairclough (1995) and Carvalho (2008)

As mentioned, CDA was conducted on all headlines of the 26 articles included in the final data corpus. Headlines are important because they significantly impact how news are communicated. They usually provide a summary of the main idea of an article, allowing readers to quickly scan through many news items and choose which ones to read. Headlines also grab attention and generate interest in the article (Ecker et al. 2014, 324). Editors can use headlines to influence public opinion and even impact individual behaviour strategically (Ecker et al. 2014, 332). To have the maximum impact, headlines are often more negative in tone than the article itself or place a disproportionate emphasis on conflict (Ecker et al. 2014, 325). This means that headlines were a useful source to ascertain discursive elements. It could be assumed that the headlines were more negative in tone and emphasised the Indo-Pak conflict more than the articles. As such the findings from the headlines also revealed something on the content of the articles which could be expected to be more moderate.

Additionally, it has to be mentioned that the way a headline is worded can cause readers to remember specific details of the news article based on what they anticipated because of the headline. As such, headlines which do not convey the central message of the news article influence how the article is read and can, as such, impact how the main message is understood, even though they do not explicitly mention it (Ecker et al. 2014, 332-333). Therefore, I contrasted the main topics of the articles with the main topics of the headlines to detect how the headlines focus might have been used by TOI or Dawn to make the reader comprehend the article from a specific perspective. This comparison was again based on CDA to understand how discursive features were used in the context.

#### **4.2.2.2 Thematic Analysis**

For the TA I followed the six-step model, based on Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2006). An overview can be found in Table A3 in Appendix A. Concerning the interviews, I dealt with a large body of data. Qualitative content analysis, which might otherwise have been considered, would have been not feasible. Since I conducted the interviews before I collected the news articles to avoid any kind of bias as best as possible a lot of the interviews were extensive and included large side notes. As such exploring the data in relation to themes was helpful to extract the relevant parts. TA was applied so that the final presentation of findings only describes the findings in-depth which are most relevant in connection to the research questions. With TA I was flexible and capable of summarising the main features of the large body of data while still delivering in-depth descriptions of the data sets. I decided for this descriptive approach, and against a more critical one, as I wanted to capture the interviewee's

statements as close as possible, thereby adding the critical variable by contrasting the different opinions of the interviewees and connecting and contrasting the various themes. I was interested in the participants' explicitly expressed opinions and therefore I applied a semantic approach to examine the clear content of the data. A latent thematic practice was also considered to read into the subtext of the data. The idea was not to describe themes which reflected the content of the entire data set but to focus on those parts relevant to my research focus (Braun and Clarke 2006, 83).

The analysis had both inductive and deductive elements. I started by brainstorming expected themes based on existing research findings and my conceptual framework. I identified and labelled meaningful parts of the interviews and organised these into preliminary themes based on their content and similarities. I reviewed and refined these themes and then defined and named them clearly. From this, I created a codebook, which was in turn applied to all interviews. The findings from the TA of the interviews are used mainly to examine the conditions under which conflict coverage is produced and to establish the political setting concerning the conflict, while the focus is always put on those factors and aspects relevant in connection to the conflict. Nonetheless, the importance of the Indo-Pak rivalry was viewed critically as well in light of the findings from the news articles and the interviews (Braun and Clarke 2006).

#### **4.2.3 Discussing the whole Data Corpus - Combining CDA and TA**

Essentially a good application of CDA to conflict coverage can mean to make clear the alignment of news media with a particular side of the conflict and to raise attention to the plurality of views and biases in the media and in actors' discourses (Carvalho 2008, 164-165). To account for this and to comprehensively address features concerning representations, identities and relations (Fairclough, 1995) a further contextual discussion was necessary, which built on CDA, but included the findings from the interviews. This was the base for the chapter seven which extensively discusses the findings in connection to the hypotheses.

Carvalho (2008, 171) suggests a comparative-synchronic analysis and a historical-diachronic analysis. This means first to "compare one text with other representation of the issue." The main focus here was put on the comparative analysis of the representation in the Indian (TOI) and Pakistani (Dawn) newspapers. Like Carvalho (2008, 172) suggests I followed an interdisciplinary approach, drawing on my expert interviews to examine the political context in which the texts were produced. Building on the conceptual framework the different dimensions



influencing the news coverage production process connected to the context of the India-Pakistan conflict were considered.

**Table 6 - Approach to analysis – CDA (context)**

<b>II. Contextual analysis (Third Dimension)</b>	
<b>1. Comparative-synchronic analysis</b>	
	Alternative depictions of reality
	- confrontation of alternative depictions of reality and critical reading of news discourse - identification of the particular discursive traits of the newspaper - looking at different representations of the issue
	News article production (process)
	- What are the different conditions under which news articles are produced in comparison to the other respective newspaper which shows other/similar representations of specific issues?
<b>2. Historical-diachronic analysis</b>	
	- examining the development of the conflict and its wider political context - What are the news articles' wider political conditions?

**Source:** Author’s own representation based on Fairclough (1995) and Carvalho (2008)

### 4.3 Ethical Considerations

For the study, the processing of personal data was necessary to ensure an in-depth analysis. Furthermore, the study gives some information about the interviewees for credibility reasons and as the research is a task in the public interest, which justifies the processing of general categories of personal data. Most of my interviewees are known for their views in the public domain as they publish either journalistic or academic pieces under their name. Nonetheless, I am aware of the risks involved and informed the participants in detail and obtained informed written consent from all participants (Traianou 2020, 87-88). The precautionary regulation used here is confidentiality, which was ensured through anonymisation (Traianou 2020, 91). Anonymity in the final thesis was assured if interviewees asked for it or if I personally deemed it too high a risk for certain participants. Participants were informed that their participation in the project was voluntary and that they could withdraw their consent at any time. To avoid any psychological harm, I offered to send the participants an overview of the topics beforehand so that they could accommodate themselves with these and mention if they wanted to avoid a topic (Traianou 2020, 87-88).

Personal data was only used for the purpose specified in the information letter participants signed. Data was processed confidentially and in accordance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation and Personal Data Act). The sound recordings were stored in the cloud service provided by UiT. Digital sound recordings will be deleted at the end of the project. If participants agreed to it, an anonymised written version of the interview is stored indefinitely for potential follow-up studies within the field of peace and conflict

studies. Based on an agreement with UiT, Data Protection Services Sikt has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with data protection legislation.

#### **4.4 Limitations and Challenges**

One limitation of this study is the sole focus on English-language news. I lack proficiency in Hindi and Urdu, as such an inclusion of local newspapers in the analysis had to be excluded. The comparison between English-language and Urdu/Hindi/vernacular language press would certainly give rich insights, still a focus on English-language newspapers to compare Indian and Pakistani coverage serves the purpose of this research. Nonetheless future research should explore local news, as well as the bigger Hindi and Urdu news to broaden the understanding and see the findings from this study in a broader context. Similarly, the focus on print media, which is gradually becoming less important is also a limitation. While it continues to hold a certain status in India and Pakistan, especially TV, social media and online editions of papers are important to understand the broader mediascape. A further limitation is the short time frame I examine. A longitudinal study would be interesting as well, especially to examine in the frame of CDA, for an understanding of how the discourse evolved in connection to different key dates, as suggested by Carvalho (2008). These points have to be recognised as limitations of this study and should also be addressed in future research.

I had to deal with various challenges throughout the research process. One main challenge was the acquisition of participants, which proved to be difficult, as especially for journalists, it was challenging to get their contact details. Furthermore, journalists who report on sensitive topics must be careful concerning their public image, which makes it even harder to get into contact and decreases the chances of them replying to interview requests. I mainly dealt with this problem by asking each participant for contact details of other journalists or experts. The final selection of participants also is a limitation to this study, as it is not representative. Nonetheless, the individual accounts are insightful.

Concerning the data collection of the news articles I had originally planned to collect the data for Dawn from their online archive of print articles and for TOI archived versions of the paper were available on PressReader. Unfortunately, TOI cancelled their contract with PressReader and is permanently suspended from the platform, as I was told after contacting the support at PressReader. The TOI online archive does not go back until August 2021 and does not differentiate between different editions of the paper and print or online. I contacted several people in administrative jobs at TOI but did not get any further. In the end I found out

that the database Gale OneFile: News stores the epaper versions of both Dawn and TOI for the time frame I needed. The library at UiT arranged for me to access the database and I decided to use it as well for Dawn, because in their own archive some articles might have been deleted on request of, for example, stakeholders such as the military or the government.

One significant limitation that must be acknowledged is that the study participants could choose what to tell and what to keep to themselves in the interview context (Thorne 2020, 157). This ingrained subjectivity can pose challenges for gathering thorough and accurate data. I employed several strategies to address this limitation. By offering written clarity of my intentions and answering questions concerning this, together with the possibility for confidentiality and anonymity, I offered transparency and built a relationship based on trust and rapport, to make the participants feel more comfortable to share their thoughts and experiences. The open-ended and non-leading interview questions allowed participants to provide more detailed responses, while I asked follow-up questions to encourage elaboration. After transcribing the interviews, the participants could read and clarify or expand their responses and choose to anonymise or retract information. This ensured a higher degree of reliability. As happens with most qualitative approaches, this research dealt with many unconnected data especially emanating from the interviews. Concerning the analysis of interpretive data, the challenge was to immerse myself in the data to be able to identify options for its ordering and organisation, ensuring that the final presentation represents the most significant meanings in the data the best way possible (Thorne 2020, 157). Furthermore, I adapted my interview questions as I gained more insight into the topic.

The aims, assumptions and attitudes that I carried to the field had to be acknowledged, as they influence how I perceive things and what I am able to see in the first place. I urge the reader to be reflective to be able to realise the manner in which my standpoint might have influenced the research (Bryman 2012, 39-40). My active part when discovering themes in the data and selecting those of interest succumbs to a high amount of subjectivity (Braun and Clarke 2006, 80). Additionally, the involvement of respondents in an open interview setting means that it is easy for participants to choose what to tell and what to hide. Therefore, increased reflexivity is needed. I tried to be as transparent as possible, with the just described clear outline of how I conducted my research and how the methods are applied, so that readers can evaluate them. This is also necessary to ensure replicability. To be transparent about my interpretations, I used as much evidence as possible, and included the wording from the interviews so that the reader themselves can judge my interpretations (Braun and Clarke 2006, 80).

## 5 Conflict Coverage in Pakistan and India

After introducing existing research on the topic, establishing a conceptual framework for the data analysis and describing and discussing the methodological choices, the following chapters set out to present the key findings.

### 5.1 The English Language Press in Pakistan (and Dawn)

The topic of Afghanistan and the conflict with India is a matter in both English-language and local news. “Everyone keeps talking about the situation in Afghanistan and the situation with India and Kashmir because these are like our constant challenges as a nation.” (Ahmed, interview with the author, Sep 16, 2021). The manner of the coverage though shows significant differences (Shahid, interview with the author, Sep 20, 2022). Sabookh Syed (interview with the author, Oct 27, 2022) noted that “the Urdu media is very emotional” and “they are more right-wing supportive,” while he described the English media as more rational and logical and also featuring “discussion, which is not in the favour of our [the Pakistani] state.”

The fact that the English-language press also caters to an international audience seems to have a visible effect on their reporting style. “You want the people to have a certain image of Pakistan, so that’s why it’s more subtle, it’s more objective and closer to the truth” (Ahmed, interview with the author, Sep 16, 2022). Kunwar Khuldune Shahid (interview with the author, Sep 20, 2022) expressed a similar view, stating that the international audience looks at Pakistani English-language newspapers to understand the discussions happening in Pakistan. “So, newspapers like Dawn, The News, they’ve been at the forefront of building (...) a progressive view, especially Dawn” (Shahid, interview with the author, Sep 20, 2022). For Urdu media, Remshay Ahmed (interview with the author, Sep 16, 2022) stated that “it promotes sensationalism, it fabricates the truth a lot, they have very weak fact-checking mechanisms in place, if at all.” Beena Sarwar (interview with the author, Sep 23, 2022) expressed a similar feeling but stated that “there’s a lot of sensationalism on both sides.”

Amongst the English-language media, Dawn is more sensible and reasonable. In contrast, others, like The News, were perceived as government mouthpieces, as Dr. Sumit Ganguly described in an interview with the author on Sep 14, 2022. Dawn is widely regarded as the most liberal newspaper in Pakistan, with a history of voicing concerns about potential problems posed by the Afghan Taliban (Baig, interview with the author, Sep 19, 2022). Nonetheless, censorship has also affected Dawn’s content. Over the years, financial constraints by the state

and interference have transformed the publication. The newspaper has had to remove stories due to the offence taken by influential individuals, even when such objections lacked valid grounds (Shahid, interview with the author, Sep 20, 2022). This also means that when it comes to reporting on sensitive issues like matters related to the military, even publications like Dawn, which follow certain ethical standards, have to rely on the official statements of the military. While other media outlets tend to present these statements as facts, Dawn typically qualifies them by stating, “this is what the military is saying,” without being able to independently verify the news (Shahid, interview with the author, Sep 20, 2022). Syed Talat Hussain was the only interviewee who expressed concern and criticism regarding Dawn. He experienced editorial censorship when working at Dawn, because his articles were not aligned with Dawn’s strong emphasis on Pakistan-India peace. “I was censored by Dawn because they believe that my articles were promoting friction in South Asia” (Hussain, interview with the author, Oct 24, 2022). He also pointed out that he perceived Dawn as elitist and not open to fresh voices.

## **5.2 The English Language Press in India and the TOI**

Similarly, to the Pakistani case, “if the international audience wants to learn something about India, they come to the English language media, predominantly. So, it has a very lopsided influence” (Taneja, interview with the author, Sep 13, 2022). This amplifies its global impact; from this perspective, it can be seen as more influential than vernacular or Hindi media. Although catering to a smaller audience in India, English media’s advertising revenues have been higher due to its influential readership, particularly among those in power. “They [the English-language media] continue to have a lot of influence, but most of them have become very careful in reporting, especially when it comes to government and government-related policies” (Joshi, interview with the author, Oct 26, 2022).

The Hindi and vernacular press are primarily centre-right, while the English press is largely centre-left. Taneja (interview with the author, Oct 20, 2022) stated that this means that “if the government is, pushing a pro-Hindu policy (...), that is going to be beneficial for Hindus, they know that they’re going to get support from the Hindi press. And they know that if they are largely promoting majoritarian policies (...) the English press is going to push back.”

Compared to vernacular, the English press is considered more moderate, and they “carry a lot of debate and discussion” even concerning foreign policy issues (Joshi, interview with the author, Oct 26, 2022). Nonetheless, also English language media has been compromised by censorship (Rajagopalan, interview with the author, Oct 20, 2022).

Compared to Dawn in interviews with Pakistani journalists, TOI came up far less, close to not at all, in the interviews with journalists of Indian origin. To some extent, this also is a marker concerning the importance (or lack thereof) the paper holds in the view of journalists compared to Dawn in Pakistan. One interviewee who wanted to stay anonymous concerning these comments noted that there have been changes in the paper over the last two decades: “The Times of India has become much more anonymous now. No one knows who the editor is.”

### **5.3 Features of the Coverage – Findings from Interviews**

This section will lay out the findings from the interviews of how the Taliban takeover was covered, as comprehended by the journalists and experts. Consequently, it can be said that both the Indian and Pakistani media largely followed official lines and, as such, the narrative of policymakers. While in Pakistani media, there was a celebrative tone, there was no positive reporting in India. On both sides, there was few criticisms of their respective establishments.

#### **5.3.1 Coverage in Pakistani media**

Examining the view on Pakistani media coverage of the Taliban takeover, various themes occurred in the interviews. Most dominantly, it was expressed that during the period of the takeover, the media mainly followed the narrative portrayed by policymakers (Baig, interview with the author, Sep 19, 2022; Riedel, interview with the author, Sep 15, 2022; Salam, voice messages to the author, Mar 9, 2023; Sarwar, interview with the author Sep 23, 2022; Shahid, interview with the author, Sep 20, 2022). Shahid (interview with the author, Sep 20, 2022), for example, noted that the main narrative was “this festive tone” concerning the defeat of the US, “all the concerns about what human rights and women’s rights, even if it did feature, would have been a small fraction of what was reported. It was largely about the Taliban coming to power, defeating [the US].” Bruce Riedel (interview with the author, Sep 15, 2022) goes even further: “So, coverage of what went on in Afghanistan in the Pakistani press was less than completely honest. They relayed the Pakistani government’s view that it wanted a political solution. I don’t see any real evidence that it ever wanted a political solution.” Sarwar (interview with the author Sep 23, 2022) furthermore pointed out that “in Pakistan, there was also a lot of dismay, but it didn’t get reflected that much in the mainstream media,” which primarily conveyed “a sense of celebration.” Shahid (interview with the author, 20/09/2022) noted that some columns published in the coverage also contained criticism of the Pakistani establishment’s approach, “but that was still a minority of the opinion.”

### 5.3.2 Coverage in Indian media

Concerning the view on Indian media coverage of the Taliban takeover, different themes emerged from the interviews. The coverage was described predominantly as having followed and being guided by official lines (Hussain, interview with the author, Oct 24, 2022; Swami interview with the author, Oct 10, 2022) Hussain (interview with the author, Oct 24, 2022) noted that “if the official line is to make Taliban and Pakistan army look like two peas in a pod, they [the Indian media] will make them look like two peas in a pod.”

“But also, there was criticism [in Indian media] for India as well. That okay fine, this has happened, but what’s your answer to it?” (Taneja, interview with the author, Sep 13, 2022). Nevertheless, the same as in the Pakistani case, the Indian media was also struggling to “write anything nuanced about Afghanistan” because of the involvement of the security agencies (Sarwar, interview with the author Sep 23, 2022). Taneja (interview with the author, Sep 13, 2022) also noted that “there was no positive reporting” and a strong focus on criticism of the US: “A lot of questions asked of the US, almost asking for culpability of what were you doing for the 20 years? Why are you leaving the country in this state, which is adversarial to Indian interests, if you consider India as a close partner.” The Taliban takeover was also portrayed mainly as a win for Pakistan or a defeat for India, being seen as “undoing whatever India had tried to do in Afghanistan” (Swami, interview with the author, Oct 10, 2022).

Nonetheless, Shahid (interview with the author, Sep 20, 2022) recalled that there was also some coverage focusing on the possibility of having good relations with the Taliban, while different respondents mentioned that the media was struggling to report on the government’s outreach to the Taliban (Swami, interview with the author, Oct 10, 2022). In India, with “a Hindu nationalist government in power,” the media was struggling with the question: “How do you sell an outreach to a jihadist group, even if it strategically makes complete sense for you?” (Taneja, interview with the author, Sep 13, 2022).

Overall, the narrative portrayed in the Indian media compared to Western media was not very different. The takeover was portrayed as “a huge setback, and that Afghanistan has once again become a haven for terrorists and terrorism” (Joshi, interview with the author, Oct 26, 2022). He stated that one reason for that was the fact that the Indian press was “not physically present” the information came from either “the Western news agencies or from Pakistan.” Taneja (interview with the author, Sep 13, 2022) agreed, and Swami (interview with the author, Oct

10, 2022) added that “some of this might be the consequence (...) of the fact that Indian newsrooms are facing very tight financial constraints.”

Interestingly, as Swami (interview with the author, Oct 10, 2022) also pointed out, there was no “work with local writers and stringers, which we’ve always done, historically, with other countries.” He brought up the argument of Indian public disinterest in the issue, saying that this “reflects the fact that this is a story about Muslims, which we don’t really want to know about, beyond a point.” He added that the ‘disinterest’ “in the voices of Afghans say who were clamouring to leave Afghanistan and come to India” reflects the reality that “the story was worth something as long as it was a story of, if you like, ‘Pakistani defeat’. As a story of a Pakistani envy, there was just shock, despair and then disinterest. It was over, and that was that” (Swami, interview with the author, Oct 10, 2022). As such the coverage of the Taliban takeover would have been in line with the general sentiment in Indian media, that “Afghanistan is only interesting in as much as it is part of this India-Pakistan contesting, not as a place in itself” (Swami, interview with the author, Oct 10, 2022).

#### **5.4 Overview Data Corpus – Findings News Articles**

A summary of the main topics discussed both in headlines and in the entire article can be found in Table 7. The table gives an overview of the main themes which news articles that included either the mentioning of Pakistan (in TOI) or India (in Dawn) covered from the Aug 10 until Aug 18, 2021 concerning the Taliban takeover. It also shows the author of the article and the press agency used as a source. On the database (Gale OneFile: News), sometimes the byline or the primary source (press agency) was missing. In those cases, I tried to find the article in the online archive of the two newspapers. I added the byline or press agency accordingly.

Furthermore, Table 8 shows the key to the topics in which the articles were divided and gives an overview of the topics covered in the articles. It shows the number of articles which mentioned the topic and the number of articles in which the topic was a central. A topic was seen as the main topic in an article if at least 50% of the sections covered it. Therefore, an article could have a maximum of two main topics if precisely the same number of sections covered two different topics. As such, it was visible which topics were given the most space in the articles. A section was understood as a unit of meaning (most often one or two sentences), which I established according to my understanding in cases where it was not always visibly divided due to the format of the text on the database.



**Table 7 - News articles sorted according to main topic of their headline**

Key	Author/Source	Headline & main headline topic (topic key - see Table 8)	Topics	Main topic	Words	
<b>A) Political developments and Taliban's military offensive in Afghanistan</b>						
TOI_15_08_2021_(2)	Omer Farooq Khan/TNN	Taliban 11 km from Kabul, Mazar-e-Sharif under multi-pronged attack.	A	A, C, D, F, J	A	835
TOI_16_08_2021	<i>unknown/unknown</i>	Afghan officials say Taliban have entered outskirts of Kabul.	A	A, D, E, F	A	1057
TOI_18_08_2021_(3)	Omer Farooq Khan/TNN	Taliban vow to respect women's rights within Sharia, and to seek no vengeance.	A, D	A, B, D, F, I	B, D, F	727
<b>B) Taliban installed Afghan government</b>						
TOI_14_08_2021_(2)	Sachin Parashar/TNN	Won't recognise any Afghan government imposed by force: India.	B	A, B, C, D, F, G, J	B	427
TOI_18_08_2021_(4)	Rajeev Deshpande/TNN	On recognising Taliban regime, India to align itself with democratic bloc of countries.	B	A, B, D, G, J	B	513
<b>E) Evacuation of people from Afghanistan</b>						
TOI_17_08_2021_(2)	Indrani Bagchi/TNN	India plans to finish evacuation in 48hours.	E	A, C, E, J	E	539
<b>G) Security and stability in the region</b>						
Dawn_17_08_2021	Iftikhar A. Khan/ <i>unknown</i>	Region can't afford continued instability in Afghanistan: FM.	G	E, F, G, J	F	693
TOI_18_08_2021	Indrani Bagchi/TNN	Afghanistan crisis: Regional power shift comes as a worry.	G	A, B, D, E, F, G, I, L	B, G, L	422
<b>H) Inner country (outside Afghanistan) discussion on the Afghanistan situation</b>						
TOI_14_08_2021	<i>unknown/TNN</i>	Closely monitoring safety of Afghan Hindus, Sikhs: Government.	H	A, C, D, E, F, H	E	292
Dawn_16_08_2021	Shakeel Ahmed & Iftikhar A. Khan/ <i>unknown</i>	NSC meets today to deliberate on situation.	H	A, B, E, F, G, H, I, J	F	1078
<b>I) (Report of) Public voices concerning Taliban's return to power</b>						
Dawn_17_08_2021_(2)	Bureau Report/ <i>unknown</i>	Religious parties hail Afghan Taliban's reconciliation policy.	I	I	I	562
TOI_17_08_2021	Omer Farooq Khan/TNN	Imran Khan endorses take-over of Afghanistan.	I	C, E, F, G, H, I	I	496
TOI_17_08_2021_(3)	Mohammed Wajidhuddin/TNN	International Sufi Caravan head Mufti Manzoor Ziaee denounces Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan.	I	A, D, G, I	I	359
<b>J) International cooperation, meetings, regional conferences, or bilateral efforts</b>						
TOI_13_08_2021	Sachin Parashar/TNN	Afghanistan: India looks to play 'constructive' role in Doha for political outcome.	J/F	A, B, C, D, F, G, H, J, K	F	442

<b>K) US outreach to the international community (or for strategic partnership with one country)</b>						
Dawn_10_08_2021_(2)	<i>unknown/unknown</i>	US in talks with Pakistan over 'terrorist safe havens' along Afghan border: Pentagon.	K	A, C, F, G, K	G, A	310
Dawn_11_08_2021	Anwar Iqbal/ <i>unknown</i>	US wants to continue improving ties, Austin tells Bajwa.	K	C, F, G, K	K	292
TOI_13_08_2021_(2)	Omer Farooq Khan/TNN	Pakistan PM Imran Khan feels US has 'decided on India for strategic partner'.	K	F, G, K	K	500
Dawn_17_08_2021_(3)	Anwar Iqbal/ <i>unknown</i>	US reaches out to Pakistan, India, China and Russia on Afghanistan situation.	K	C, F, J, K	K	851
Dawn_18_08_2021	<i>unknown/unknown</i>	US reaches out to Pakistan, China on Afghan situation.	K	E, F, G, K	K	409
<b>L) Outreach or engagement with the Taliban</b>						
TOI_18_08_2021_(2)	Roushan Ali/ <i>unknown</i>	Centre must hold talks with Taliban: Owaisi.	L	A, H, I, L	L	214
<b>M) Responsibility for failures in Afghanistan (Who is being blamed?)</b>						
Dawn_10_08_2021	<i>unknown/unknown</i>	'Afghan govt should own its failures': Ministers refute allegations of Pakistan supporting Taliban.	M	C, F, J, M, N	M	888
Dawn_10_08_2021_(3)	The Newspaper's Staff Reporter/ <i>unknown</i>	World must not scapegoat Islamabad for Afghan fiasco: FM.	M	A, M	M	452
TOI_15_08_2021	Chidanand Rajghatta / TNN	Biden slammed for colossal US failure that is bringing Taliban to gates of Kabul.	M	A, D, G, M	M	453
TOI_17_08_2021_(4)	Chidanand Rajghatta /TNN	Facing backlash, Biden cuts short vacation; aides blame Afghan govt for collapse.	M	A, E, I, M	M	514
<b>N) Afghan or/and Indian propagation of disinformation about Pakistan</b>						
Dawn_11_08_2021_(2)	<i>unknown/unknown</i>	Afghan, Indian social media accounts being used to malign Pakistan: NSA Yusuf.	N	M, N	N	1237
TOI_12_08_2021	Omer Farooq Khan/TNN	Pakistan NSA blames Indian, Afghan social media accounts for anti-Pakistan propaganda.	N	A, M, N	N	293

Source: Author's own depiction of findings

**Table 8 - Overview topics covered in headlines**

Key	Topic	Number of headlines covering the topic			Number of Articles covering the topic			Number of Articles – topic main focus		
		TOI	Dawn	Sum	TOI	Dawn	Sum	TOI	Dawn	Sum
A	Political developments and Taliban's military offensive in Afghanistan	3	0	3	14	3	17	2	1	3
B	Taliban installed Afghan government	2	0	2	5	1	6	4	0	4

C	Deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan	0	0	0	6	4	10	0	0	0
D	Human rights issues in Afghanistan	1	0	1	10	0	10	1	0	1
E	Evacuation of people from Afghanistan	1	0	1	6	3	9	2	0	2
F	Political solution or peace process for/in Afghanistan	1	0	1	9	7	16	2	2	4
G	Security and stability in the region	1	1	2	8	5	13	1	1	2
H	Inner country (outside Afghanistan) discussion on Afghanistan situation	1	1	2	4	1	5	0	0	0
I	(Report of) Public voices concerning Taliban's return to power	2	1	3	6	2	8	2	1	3
J	International cooperation, meetings, regional conferences or bilateral efforts	1	0	1	5	4	9	0	0	0
K	US outreach to the international community (or for strategic partnership with one)	1	4	5	2	4	6	1	3	4
L	Outreach or engagement with the Taliban	1	0	1	2	0	2	2	0	2
M	Responsibility for failures in Afghanistan (Who is being blamed?)	2	2	4	3	3	6	2	2	4
N	Afghan or/and Indian allegations against or propagation of disinformation about Pakistan	1	1	2	1	2	3	1	1	2

**Source:** Author's own depiction of findings

Looking at the number of articles which covered the topics in TOI reveals that topics mentioned in most articles were the political developments and the Taliban's military offensive (mentioned in 87,5% of the articles). Furthermore, human rights issues in Afghanistan (mentioned in 62,5% of the articles), issues concerning the political solution or the peace process for Afghanistan (mentioned in 56,25% of the articles) and the security and stability in the region (mentioned in 50% of the articles) were dominant in the coverage. Looking at the number of articles which covered the topics in Dawn reveals that topics which were mentioned in most articles were issues concerning the political solution or the peace process for Afghanistan (mentioned in 70% of the articles), security and stability in the region (mentioned in 50% of the articles), the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan (mentioned in 40% of the articles), as well as issues concerning international cooperation, meetings, regional conferences or bilateral efforts (mentioned in 40% of the articles) and the US's outreach to international community or for specific countries for strategic partnerships (mentioned in 40% of the articles).

## 5.5 Headlines - Findings

As shown in Table 8 most headlines of TOI news articles focused on the political developments and Taliban's military offensive in Afghanistan (18,75%), all associated with the Taliban-installed Afghan government (or the possibility) (12,5%), and the (report of) public voices concerning the Taliban's return to power (12,5%). Dawn, on the other hand, focused its headlines overly on the US outreach to the international community or for bilateral talks concerning a strategic partnership with one country (40%). Both newspapers had headlines concerning the responsibility for failures in Afghanistan, concerning the question of who was being blamed for the failure (TOI – 12,5%; Dawn – 20%). Two conclusions can be drawn from this: One, in news articles on the Taliban takeover where Pakistan is mentioned, TOI seems to have seen the developments in connection to the Taliban offensive in Afghanistan and public voices concerning this as attention-grabbing topics for their headlines. On the other hand, Dawn seems to have viewed their readers as being drawn in by headlines focusing on the US's role in the matters. Two, for both South Asian newspapers, it seems to be true that the responsibility for failures in Afghanistan and the question of blaming a specific actor seems to have been seen as drawing in readers. Table 9 gives an overview of the findings in the following two sections, structured to contrast the headlines in TOI and Dawn directly.

**Table 9 - Comparative findings - headlines**

Features	Headlines TOI	Headlines Dawn
Perspective holding discursive power	- policymakers	- policymakers - Pakistani and American officials
Sources referred to / direct quotes	- almost exclusively official sources (policymakers or country as entity) - 2x direct quote (12,5% of headlines)	- only official sources (policymakers, ministries or country as entity) - 4x Pakistani, 2x American officials - 2x direct quote (20% of headlines)
Actors mentioned	- actors are all part of the political realm - no ordinary people	- actors are all part of the political realm - no ordinary people
Main actors through which discourse/topic is approached	- actors connected to India and the Taliban	- mostly actors connected to Pakistan, followed by actors connected to the US
Portrayal of India	- presented rather neutrally - 1x headline containing gov. criticism	- only mentioned twice (neutral and unfairly accusing Pakistan)
Portrayal of Taliban in Afghanistan	- presented rather neutrally - wording = Taliban	- only mentioned once – presented positively - wording = Afghan Taliban
Portrayal of the US	- presented in a rather negative light	- presented as being in active role
Portrayal of Pakistan	- only mentioned 3x - presented neutrally - presented in an active role	- mentioned the most - presented as holding power and as the victim of unfair actions
Portrayal of Afghanistan	- mostly mentioned to state the topic of the news article neutrally	- country is mostly portrayed just as the place of action, not as an actor
Sentiment concerning Taliban takeover in Afghanistan	- 6x headline negative image (46,15%) - 5x headline neutral image (38,46%) - 2x headline positive image (15,38%)	- 4x headline negative image (50%) - 3x headline neutral image (37,5%) - 1x headline positive image (12,5%)

Responsibility for failures in Afghanistan	- 2x blame put on US - 1x blame put on Afghan gov.	- 1x blame put on Afghan gov - 2x blame on Pakistan rejected
Expressed intentions by actors	- variety of intentions by actors expressed (most recognition of new Afghan gov)	- two (International partnership, security for the region)
Abnormality concerning discursive features	- no extensive use of persuasive techniques	- no use of adjectives to convey a particular perspective

**Source:** Author's own depiction of findings

### 5.5.1 Headlines in TOI

When observing the discourse concerning the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan in TOI Headlines of articles mentioning Pakistan, at least two lines of arguments can be made. First, the presented discourse was led by policymakers. Second, the discourse mainly approached the subject in connection to India or by focusing on the Taliban as the leading discursive actor. The headlines clearly show that the perspective of policymakers was dominant, although these were not limited to Indian policymakers. This can be seen as the headlines only refer to official sources, either directly naming policymakers like “Pakistan PM Imran Khan” (TOI\_13\_08\_2021\_(2)), referring more broadly to the “[Indian] government” (TOI\_14\_08\_2021) or “Afghan officials” (TOI\_16\_08\_2021) or even just naming the country “Won’t recognise any Afghan government imposed by force: India” (TOI\_14\_08\_2021\_(2)). The only non-official source was a religious leader, a non-government but still an authoritative source.

Noticeably, actors connected to India and the Taliban were presented the most. India was presented in a relatively neutral way, without the use of any adjectives concerning the actors connected to India. Only one headline, “Centre must hold talks with Taliban: Owaisi” (TOI\_18\_08\_2021\_(2)), expressed criticism of the Indian establishment’s approach by quoting Owaisi, who, according to the article, is AIMIM president and Hyderabad MP. The modal verb phrase “must hold” expressed the necessity for the central government to engage with the Taliban. The Taliban similarly were presented relatively neutral, without any use of adjectives or words with positive or negative connotations, only the headline “International Sufi Caravan head Mufti Manzoor Ziaee denounces Taliban’s return to power in Afghanistan” (TOI\_17\_08\_2021\_(3)) presented a voice critical of the group, with the verb ‘denounces.’

The US was presented in a rather negative light through exaggeration, saying, “Biden slammed for,” as such dramatising and evaluating the situation, describing the US’s actions in Afghanistan as a “colossal US failure” (TOI\_15\_08\_2021). Using a similar language style, the TOI headline “Facing backlash, Biden cuts short vacation; aides blame Afghan govt for

collapse” omits the actor from whom Biden’ faces backlash’ similarly to the other headline where it stays unclear who ‘slammed’ the US. Interestingly, while the actor from whom Biden faces backlash is omitted, on the other hand, it was stated that “aides blame” the Afghan government for the situation in Afghanistan. Overall, the responsibility for the failures in Afghanistan was only addressed in three headlines: once, it was ascribed to the Afghan government, and twice, the blame was put on the US. Otherwise, Afghanistan was mainly mentioned to state the topic of the news article neutrally. Pakistan or an actor connected to it was only mentioned in three headlines, without any positive or negative connotation. In all three headlines, the actor connected to Pakistan was presented in an active role, identifying the source through verbs of attribution that ascertain the statement to the then Pakistan PM Imran Khan and in an other case by the Pakistani NSA. Interestingly, the headline referring to Khan ‘endorsing the takeover’ in TOI\_17\_08\_2021 was the only one presenting a positive picture of the Taliban having taken over Afghanistan, together with the headline of TOI\_18\_08\_2021\_(3), through the use of the verb ‘endorse.’

There were only two direct quotes in the 16 headlines. In the headline “Pakistan PM Imran Khan feels US has ‘decided on India for strategic partner’” (TOI\_13\_08\_2021\_(2)), the statement is assigned to Khan through the verb of attribution “feels,” which also indicates that the quote expressed his emotions. In the headline “Afghanistan: India looks to play ‘constructive’ role in Doha for political outcome,” the quote is unattributed, implying that the source (probably someone in the Indian establishment) was less important than the message the quote conveyed and was omitted for keeping the headline precise. This is also the only case in which a positive evaluative adjective was used in the headlines. The headline also expressed an intention, as a few other headlines do also. Noticeable in the analysed TOI headlines is that a variety of intentions were expressed, not focusing on one specific aspect. Mostly, these were intentions of (not) recognising the new Afghan government. There were also intentions concerning the peace process for Afghanistan, international partnership, the evacuation from Afghanistan and human rights. The expression of intentions can be a hint for specific actors conveying their agenda through the media.

Furthermore, TOI did not extensively use persuasive techniques in the headlines. Besides the earlier mentioned exaggeration, only two headlines were noticeable, which used a mild appeal to fear, describing the situation in Afghanistan as ‘worrying’ for the region and a ‘safety risk’ for Afghan Hindus and Sikhs. Apparent is here also the appeal to the religious social identity (TOI\_14\_08\_2021 and TOI\_18\_08\_2021). Additionally, when looking at the sentiment

expressed, based on all the mentioned aspects, it can be noted that six headlines expressed negative images, five were neutral, and two positive. Important here is to point out that I am referring not to the way the headline is formulated generally, but to the manner in which the situation in Afghanistan was portrayed. Therefore, only those headlines were assessed which expressed a sentiment concerning the situation. As the assessment of connotations is extremely subjective, I want to exemplify my decisions. For example, headlines describing the situation as a ‘failure’ or ‘crisis’ were assessed as having a negative connotation.

### **5.5.2 Headlines in Dawn**

In the headlines of the news articles by Dawn, the discourse was presented from the perspective of policymakers, both Pakistani and American officials. The most presented actors were connected to Pakistan, closely followed by actors connected to the US. Pakistan is presented in various ways, both as holding power and being the victim of unfair actions. To express the unfair treatment of Pakistan, for example, a dramatising connotation was used in the headline “World must not scapegoat Islamabad for Afghan fiasco: FM” (Dawn\_10\_08\_2021\_(2)), the word ‘scapegoat’ paired with the modal verb phrase ‘must not,’ expressing advice or obligation, paints a picture of Pakistan as the victim of unfair judgement by the ‘world,’ concerning the situation in Afghanistan, which was described as the ‘Afghan fiasco’ (10\_08\_2021\_(3)). In connection to the US, Pakistan was portrayed as being at the receiving end of the action. While the headline reported what the foreign minister said, the wording still has to be scrutinised, as it was nonetheless a deliberate choice by the paper to use the statement in the specific wording. The same is true, even for direct quotes, as there is the possibility of choosing a different quote or wording or balancing it with a different statement.

India (or actors connected to India) were only mentioned twice, once in connection to the US’s outreach to the international community, in which India is just part of an enumeration of countries and once in connection to the accusation that Afghan and Indian social media accounts were used to spread disinformation about Pakistan. The headline reads, “Afghan, Indian social media accounts being used to malign Pakistan: NSA Yusuf” (Dawn\_11\_08\_2021\_(2)). The verb “malign” contains a victimising connotation, expressing that Pakistan was unfairly the victim of hate speech (disinformation) on social media by Indian and Afghan accounts, also painting a negative image of India.

It must be mentioned here that in almost every headline, there is a reference to Afghanistan, although the country was mainly portrayed as the place of action, not as an actor. For

example, in this headline, “US reaches out to Pakistan, China on Afghan situation”, in which Afghanistan is portrayed as a matter of discussion, not as part of it (Dawn\_18\_08\_2021). The situation was only described vividly once as the “Afghan fiasco” (Dawn\_10\_08\_2021\_(3)). This negative connotation was only visible a second time when pointing to the situation as a “failure” with the possessive adjective “its” used to assign the fault to the Afghan government, paired with the modal verb phrase “should own” expressing obligation (Dawn\_10\_08\_2021). This is also the only case in which responsibility for the situation in Afghanistan was assigned to an actor. Furthermore, there were no other adjectives used. Because adjectives are descriptive, their absence means that the headlines seem to have provided basic information without any emotional or judgmental elements added through the use of adjectives. Two more headlines could be assessed as having a negative connotation, but this is solemnly based on the topic they discuss, as the headlines refrain from evaluative adjectives or a negative connotation. One points out the problems of the ‘unstable’ situation for the region (Dawn\_17\_08\_2021). For the other one, the wording, which is ultimately value-free, leaves open if this is, from the Pakistani perspective, seen as an issue, while it seems to be a matter the US saw as having to be discussed, as it is depicted as the actor “US in talks with Pakistan over ‘terrorist safe havens’ along Afghan border: Pentagon” (Dawn\_10\_08\_2021\_(2)).

Three more headlines conveyed a neutral attitude concerning the situation in Afghanistan, simply stating the matter of fact like this headline: “NSC meets today to deliberate on situation” (Dawn\_16\_08\_2021), which does not contain any kind of judging or assessing language. Furthermore, one headline contained a positive perspective on the situation: “Religious parties hail Afghan Taliban’s reconciliation policy” (17\_08\_2021\_(2)). This is also the only instance in which the Taliban were mentioned. Noticeably, in contrast to the TOI, it is clearly pointed out that it is about the “Afghan Taliban” (Dawn\_17\_08\_2021\_(2)), which can be ascribed to the fact that Dawn sees it as necessary in the Pakistani context to clearly separate between the Afghan Taliban and the TTP.

Noticeably, when the US was mentioned, it was ascribed an active role. For example, in the following headline: “US wants to continue improving ties, Austin tells Bajwa” (Dawn\_11\_08\_2021). The US is depicted as expressing an intention through the modal verb phrase “wants to,” and the actor role is reinforced through the direction of the verb “tells,” which shows that the US Secretary of Defence led the discussion and held power in the discourse in relation to the then Pakistani Chief of Army Staff. There were only two types of intentions expressed in the articles, one concerning the international partnership, under which



the just mentioned intent of the US falls and security for the region. The fact that the actors were all connected to the establishments of different countries, as such all officials or broadly just described through the country name, goes hand in hand with the fact that the only sources referred to were also officials. Four of those were Pakistani official sources, and two were American officials. Only two verbs of attribution were used, which means that not much information was assigned to a speaker. On the one hand, this reduced the focus on the source and puts it on the information itself. On the other hand, it can also be a sign of less transparency or missing fact-checking. This must be considered together with the fact that there were only two direct quotes in the ten headlines.

### **5.5.3 The Headlines Compared to the Main Focus of the Article**

At this point a disclaimer has to be mentioned as to the fact that the categorisations were a choice by the researcher, and while the categories are explicit, they are not mutually exclusive and potentially subjective. For all the articles mentioned now, the dissonance must be seen in the light that all headlines were still closely related to the main topic of the article. There were three articles from Dawn (Dawn\_10\_08\_2021\_(2); Dawn\_16\_08\_2021; Dawn\_17\_08\_2021) and one article from TOI (TOI\_14\_08\_2021) in which the headline topic was not (one of) the main topic(s) of the article. This means that in the case of Dawn, 30% of the considered articles had a headline-main topic dissonance, while for TOI, this was valid for 5.8% of the articles. It is noticeable that this is the case for the two articles (one from TOI and one from Dawn) where the headlines were assigned to the topic ‘H) Inner country (outside Afghanistan) discussion on the Afghanistan situation.’ While the TOI article’s main topic was the evacuation of people, the main topic of Dawn’s article was the political solution or peace process. Noticeably though, both articles covered a wide variety of topics overall, which can make it hard to deliberate a fitting headline, but also means that the choice of the headline reveals something about which topic they wanted the reader to focus on or with which they aimed to capture the reader’s attention.

The TOI headline “Closely monitoring safety of Afghan Hindus, Sikhs: Government” (TOI\_14\_08\_2021) deliberately pointed out the religious background as a heightened safety risk. This could have influenced how the reader further understood the evacuation of people from Afghanistan, the main topic of the article, for example, considering Hindus and Sikhs as more in need of evacuation. The Dawn headline “NSC meets today to deliberate on situation” (Dawn\_16\_08\_2021) could also have had an influence on how the article was understood. The fact that the NSC ‘deliberates’ on the situation means that it is a matter of interest for

Pakistani national security and foreign policy, because of which a discussion on their proceeding is essential. The fact that the focus is laid on Pakistan could have led the reader to see the news article in that light and see Pakistan as an essential factor in the peace process for Afghanistan, which is the main topic of the news article. The word choice “deliberate” implies some kind of wisdom, which could mean that the reader also saw Pakistan in a similar light in the peace process for Afghanistan, as discussed in the news article. Both headlines clearly related the situation to their own country, which could show that generally, they expected the reader to be more interested in an article if it related to their respective country.

## **5.6 Sections including “Pakistan” (in TOI) or “India” (in Dawn)**

I looked at another aspect concerning the news articles, namely under which topic the other country was mentioned. As such, it became visible concerning which topics the newspaper saw it relevant to mention the other respective country. This reveals in which contexts the security competition was seen as a crucial discursive factor. Furthermore, I looked into which actors were mentioned and which sources were consulted. An overview can be found in Table 10. Table 11 shows the number of times the section containing “Pakistan” (TOI) or “India” (Dawn) was categorised under a specific topic. Many sections contained several topics.

In the TOI, Pakistan was mainly mentioned in sections which covered the political developments and the Taliban’s military offensive in Afghanistan and those talking about finding a political solution and the peace process for Afghanistan. Furthermore, Pakistan was covered often in sections looking at the security and stability in the region, the question of who was responsible for the failures in Afghanistan and lastly, those which portrayed a public opinion concerning the situation. Interestingly, TOI concerning coverage reporting Pakistan included various sources. The sections included direct and indirect quotes, mostly from Pakistani official sources (in eight cases). There was one direct quote and one reference to a tweet from an Indian official source, one Qatari official source, one quote from a Sufi religious leader and one tweet by US officials. Furthermore, one section also included a direct quote by a TTP spokesperson. This shows that issues connected to Pakistan were portrayed mainly in relation to Pakistani perspectives. This can be seen as a more unbiased portrayal than, for example, quoting an Indian official source on the topic. It can also be a sign that the Indian press, not having had ground reporters in Pakistan or Afghanistan, was reliant on Pakistani statements.

Similarly, to the findings from TOI for Pakistan, India was mentioned in Dawn, mostly in sections covering the peace process for Afghanistan, as well as in sections concerning security

and stability in the region. Furthermore, it was primarily mentioned in sections about the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan and those covering the processes of international cooperation, meetings, regional conferences or bilateral efforts. Different from TOI, Dawn relied heavily on Pakistani official sources, closely followed by American official sources when talking about India in their articles. No Indian source was referred to.

**Table 10 - Sections in the TOI and Dawn**

Key	Section topic	Sources consulted	Actors mentioned
The Times of India → “Pakistan” mentioned under topic...			
TOI_12_08_2021	A, N, M	Direct quote from Pakistani NSA Moeed Yusuf	India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Pakistani Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry, Pakistani NSA Moeed Yusuf
TOI_13_08_2021	D, F, J, M	( <i>Qatar, India</i> )	India, Indian Ministry of External Affairs, Qatar, Pakistan, Afghan government, Taliban
TOI_13_08_2021_(2)	K	Dawn (Direct quote from Pakistani PM Imran Khan)	PM Imran Khan, India, US, Pakistan, US president Joe Biden, China, Pakhtun population, Taliban
TOI_14_08_2021	A, C, F	Direct quote by Indian Ministry of external affairs spokesperson Arindam Bagchi ( <i>India</i> )	India, Afghanistan, Pakistan
TOI_14_08_2021_(2)	A, B, F, J	Direct quote from Qatar foreign minister ( <i>Qatar</i> )	China, Pakistan, Qatar, US, Uzbekistan, UN, EU, UK, Norway, Germany, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan
TOI_15_08_2021	A, G, M	<i>unknown</i>	Ghani government, India, Taliban, Pakistani establishment, US
TOI_15_08_2021_(2)	A	Direct quote from Zafarullah Khan (former police and intelligence official from Pakistan’s northwestern region along the Afghan border)	Urban non-Pahstuns, Afghan National Army, US, Nato, Taliban, Americans, Pashtuns
TOI_16_08_2021	A, E	Direct quote from Pakistan’s interior minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed (told to Geo TV)	US military, Pakistan, Afghan security forces, Taliban (militants), Pakistan’s interior minister
TOI_17_08_2021	C, E, F, G, H, I	Direct quote from PM Imran Khan, Pakistani foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi, Handout from NSC meeting	PM Imran Khan, NSC, Pakistan, Afghan ethnic groups, international community, Afghan stakeholders, delegation of Afghan leaders, Pakistan’s military establishment
TOI_17_08_2021_(2)	A, E	<i>unknown</i>	Russia, Taliban, Pakistan, China
TOI_17_08_2021_(3)	I, G	Indirect quote Sufi Caravan head Mufti Manzoor Ziaee	Indian government, China, Pakistan, Taliban
TOI_17_08_2021_(4)	M	Tweet by Republicans on the House Judiciary Committee	Joe Biden, Republicans on the House Judiciary Committee, Taliban
TOI_18_08_2021	B, I	Indirect quote: Imran Khan	China, Russia, Taliban, Pakistan, Imran Khan, Saudi Arabia, UAE
TOI_18_08_2021_(2)	L, I	Tweet from AIMIM president and Hyderabad MP Asaduddin Owaisi	Pakistan, US, Taliban, PM Modi, Indian government
TOI_18_08_2021_(3)	F, G, L	Direct quote from TTP spokesman Mohammad Khorasani	Taliban’s deputy chief Baradar, US, TTP, Afghanistan, Pakistan

TOI_18_08_2021_(4)	A, B, G	‘Sources’, <i>unknown</i>	Taliban, Pakistan, ISI, Haqqani network
Dawn →“India” mentioned under topic...			
Dawn_10_08_2021	J	<i>unknown</i>	Afghan government, Taliban, Defence Minister Bismillah Mohammadi, Afghan Foreign Minister Haneef Atmar, India’s external Affairs Minister S Jaishankar
Dawn_10_08_2021_(2)	G, C	Direct quote Pentagon spokesperson	India, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Afghanistan’s neighbouring countries
Dawn_10_08_2021_(3)	J	Direct quote Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi	[Pakistan’s] foreign minister, Pakistan, Security Council, India
Dawn_11_08_2021	C, F	Direct quote Pentagon spokesperson	India, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Afghanistan’s neighbouring countries
Dawn_11_08_2021_(2)	A, N, M	Direct quotes from National Security Adviser Moeed Yusuf	Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Pakistani government
Dawn_16_08_2021	F	Indirect and direct quote from Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi	India, Afghanistan
Dawn_17_08_2021	F, G	Indirect quote from Pakistan’s Senate Standing Committee on Defence	Regional spoilers, India, Pakistan
Dawn_17_08_2021_(2)	I	Indirect quote from Jamaat-i-Islami chief Sirajul Haq	India, Pakistan
Dawn_17_08_2021_(3)	C, F, J, K	US State Department statement; direct quote from Pakistani Ambassador to the UN Munir Akram	Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, Washington, US Secretary Blinken, Foreign ministers of Pakistan, China, Russia, India and Turkey, NATO, EU, UNSC, UN-Secretary General
Dawn_18_08_2021	G	<i>unknown</i>	Washington, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, US Secretary Blinken, Indian and Pakistani secretaries

Source: Author’s own depiction of findings

Table 11 - Keywords mentioned under topics

Key	TOI →“Pakistan” mentioned in section covering...	Dawn →“India” mentioned in section covering...	Sum
A	7	2	9
B	2	1	3
C	2	3	5
D	1	0	1
E	3	0	3
F	5	4	9
G	4	4	8
H	1	0	1
I	4	1	5
J	2	3	5
K	1	1	2
L	2	0	2
M	4	1	5
N	1	1	2

Source: Author’s own depiction of findings

## **6 Factors of Influence for Conflict Coverage – Findings Interviews**

At this point, I want to give a short overview of the dominant themes which emerged from the analysis of the interviews regarding the various factors which influence conflict coverage in India and Pakistan, in light of the security competition between the two countries.

### **6.1 Enduring Indo-Pak Rivalry and its Extension into Afghanistan**

Due to its troubled past with Afghanistan, Pakistan has an intense fear of being encircled. Since the 1970s, Islamabad's goals in Afghanistan have remained mainly the same and revolve around securing a balance of power in Kabul that serves their interests while reducing India's influence. Islamabad's calculations are based on a long-standing worry that India, working with Kabul, is weakening Pakistan's territorial integrity, especially by fomenting unrest among its ethnic Baloch and Pashtun populations (Constantino 2020, 9).

The Kashmir crisis as an essential factor in the conflict and also for understanding the conflict's relation to Afghanistan was mentioned often. India and Pakistan have fought several wars since independence in 1947, in addition to many militarised interstate disputes. The unresolved territorial dispute over Jammu and Kashmir is generally recognised as being the most severe point of contention between the two states, together with the discrepancy concerning religion (Mitton 2014, 361; Rajagopalan, interview with the author, Oct 20, 2022). Kashmir has deep-rooted historical and political importance for both India and Pakistan, shaping their identities (Waterman, interview with the author, Sep 12, 2022). Quoting Taneja (interview with the author, Sep 13, 2022): "The Kashmir crisis is not going anywhere for another century."

What has to be mentioned in this context is that there is an "imbalance in the concentration of power in the region in India's hands" (Rajagopalan, interview with the author, Oct 20, 2022). India's dominance causes a certain insecurity on Pakistan's end, and beyond the security Pakistan has gained from having nuclear weapons "they are not going to be able to successfully balance against India because India is now almost ten times their size" (Rajagopalan, interview with the author, Oct 20, 2022). For Pakistan Afghanistan was always a compelling prospect for confrontation. Pakistan could challenge India through its involvement in Afghanistan, surpassing its inability to do so conventionally (Mitton 2014, 369-370). As such, it

becomes clear that the rivalry in Afghanistan between India and Pakistan will continue, as long as the conflict remains.

On the other hand, Shahid (interview with the author, Sep 20, 2022) pointed out that “purely for financial reasons, Pakistan might have to rethink its security policy,” which they already had to do in Kashmir. “So only because of self-sustenance, I think Pakistan and India will align on the security front, but not make it too obvious. (...) India and Pakistan won’t say we are aligning. They will say that is their own interest, which will end up in an alignment and possibly a compromise on Kashmir” (Shahid, interview with the author, Sep 20, 2022). This, in turn, could also influence their proceedings in Afghanistan.

Both India and Pakistan gave the issue of Afghanistan more prominence than one would have expected, given the economic and strategic opportunities the case has offered. Only looking into the basic rivalry level between the two can explain why both countries apportioned such importance to Afghanistan (Mitton 2014, 372). “Afghanistan is a theatre of competition bound to the more significant dynamics driving the India-Pakistan conflict, which show no sign of abating” (Constantino 2020, 18).

## **6.2 Pakistan’s Role in the Taliban Takeover and Narrative by Policymakers**

While various interviewees pointed out the importance of the ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence) in the fast takeover by the Taliban, not all are similarly certain about the ISI’s role. Riedel (interview with the author, Sep 15, 2022) noted: “I think that there is every reason to believe the ISI helped them [the Taliban] with the strategy”, although he points out that he believes even the ISI was surprised at how fast the Taliban succeeded. Muhammad Ali Baig (interview with the author, Sep 19, 2022) was more certain concerning Pakistan’s support for the Taliban, pointing out Pakistan’s reasons as driven by the personal gain in the situation, mentioning that every country would have acted in this manner. Shahid (interview with the author, Sep 20, 2022) also asserted that “the Taliban takeover would not have been possible without the Pakistani establishment’s support for the Taliban.” However, he clearly expresses his devastation over the situation in Afghanistan and the fact of “how it is directly linked to Pakistan.” Brian Cloughley (interview with the author, Oct 11, 2022) also expressed his firm believe that the ISI helped the Taliban but remarks: “I don’t believe that the Taliban should have been helped by ISI.” He added that he believes some ISI members also shared his view, stating: “There were some people in the ISI that didn’t agree, of course.”

Riedel (interview with the author, Sep 15, 2022) also pointed out that he believes that “the ISI intends to have a very close relationship with the Taliban.” However, they face the problem that their leverage over the Taliban has enormously diminished, as they “no longer host the Taliban leadership’s families” or “control the training facilities,” therefore, “their leverage over the Taliban has significantly diminished - they still have leverage, I mean, they are the only real outlet to the rest of the world (...), but the Taliban doesn’t care.”

Initially, as could be deduced from the interviews, Pakistani policymakers, including the then Prime Minister Imran Khan, expressed support for the Taliban and projected a sense of victory and glee concerning the U.S. withdrawal, including India’s ‘defeat’ and the Taliban’s rise (Salam, voice messages to the author, Mar 9, 2023). Taneja (interview with the author, Sep 13, 2022) recalled that Khan said, “the Afghans have broken the shackles of slavery.” Additionally, Pakistani politicians were trying to make the Taliban regime more acceptable to the world by pointing out that working with the Taliban could moderate their behaviour. Which Ganguly (interview with the author, Sep 14, 2022) called “complete nonsense.” Concerning the Pakistani role, especially of the ISI in the Taliban takeover, Riedel (interview with the author, Sep 15, 2022) noted that “the Pakistani government (...) does not admit to its relationship with the Taliban” and the government portrayed the view that it was aiming for a political solution for Afghanistan. As mentioned earlier, Riedel (interview with the author, Sep 15, 2022) noted that he does not “see any real evidence that it ever wanted a political solution.”

Riedel (interview with the author, Sep 15, 2022) stated that: “Senior Indian security officials I’ve talked to are very concerned about the future, particularly as Lashkar-e-Taiba and other groups now have a second sanctuary in addition to Pakistan.” I go further into depth on India’s worries in the next section.

### **6.3 Implications of the Taliban Takeover**

Significantly often implications for Pakistan were pointed out, dominantly concerning border issues along the Durand line and the issues with the TTP in Pakistan. For India, mostly the issue of increasing Pakistani-sponsored terrorism, was pointed out, while also the implications for the conflict in Kashmir were dominant. Furthermore, the issue of the US-Pak relationship, as well as the declining trust in the US as a reliable partner was a dominant subtheme.

The TTP pose a substantial security threat to Pakistan. “The Pakistanis blame the Taliban right now for supporting the Tehreek-i-Taliban, the Pakistan Taliban” (Taneja, interview with

the author, Sep. 13, 2022). Pakistan's influence, on the Taliban-led regime in Afghanistan is limited, as the Taliban refuses to take sides between Pakistan and the TTP (Joshi, interview with the author, Oct. 26, 2022). There is a concern that the TTP may try to pursue its agenda of establishing an Islamic Emirate in Pakistan (Taneja, interview with the author, Sep. 13, 2022). This has also been confirmed in recent literature on the topic (see for example, Ganguly 2022). These worries so far have proven right, as "the number of TTP-claimed attacks more than tripled between 2020 and 2022" (Sayed and Hamming 2023, 5).

While initially Pakistan expected that the Taliban's takeover would be favourable for them, there was growing concern that Afghanistan's instability, terror organisations like ISIS or ISIL, and continuing warlord activities pose problems for Pakistan (Baig, interview with the author, Sep 19, 2022). Pakistan also may have expected that the Afghan Taliban would be more indebted to them because of the support Pakistan had provided over the years. However, several incidents have occurred along the Durand line border after the takeover, suggesting that the relationship is strained (Waterman, interview with the author, Sep 12, 2022).

As such, the matter of the Taliban takeover being a victory for Pakistan is questionable. "Pakistan has supported the Taliban for the last 25 years, offering sanctuary, safe haven, training, helping to raise funds, acquire weapons and provided strategic guidance. In that sense, Pakistan is definitely a winner" (Riedel, interview with the author, Sep 15, 2022). But especially the ties between the Afghan Taliban and the TTP are narrowing that victory. As Riedel (interview with the author, Sep 15, 2022) stated: "It's a victory, but it's a problematic victory." Ganguly (interview with the author, Sep 14, 2022) agreed, saying that Pakistan only disagrees with the Taliban on the issue of the TTP and the problem with the Durand line, their shared contested border. "Other than that, they are perfectly happy to have a Taliban regime in Afghanistan because they see a Taliban regime as quite sympathetic to their interests, unlike Ghani" (Ganguly, interview with the author, Sep 14, 2022).

Because India put great effort into supporting the government led by Ashraf Ghani, India may be seen as having lost in the situation (e.g., Riedel, interview with the author, Sep 15, 2022). India is concerned that the Taliban, hostile toward India, could provide a sanctuary for terrorist groups operating against India, especially in Kashmir. This is reinforced by the fact that the Pakistani security establishment has a historical pattern of supporting and utilising terrorist groups in Afghanistan and potentially using them in Kashmir (Ganguly, interview with the author, Sep 14, 2022). This is confirmed also by recent research (Taneja and Sinan Siyech



2021; Ganguly 2022, 63). Also, the potential transfer of high-end weapons from Afghanistan to Kashmir poses a substantial security threat to India (Taneja, interview with the author, Sep 13, 2022). “For a variety of reasons there have been fights and disagreements between the Taliban and Pakistan, which I think has also prevented Pakistan from using the Taliban’s takeover of Afghanistan in a way that would impact on Kashmir” (Rajagopalan, interview with the author, Oct 20, 2022). Furthermore, “Pakistan is going to be a bit preoccupied with domestic problems for the moment,” therefore, India is less worried about these issues (Ganguly, interview with the author, Sep 14, 2022). However, concerning domestic issues, “sooner or later, that is going to change, and Pakistan is going to be able to focus its energy on questions of its relationship with India, its objectives in Kashmir” (Riedel, interview with the author, Sep 15, 2022).

Concerning the development of the US-Pakistan relationship in the context of the Taliban’s rise to power in Afghanistan, it can be said that Pakistan has cooperated with the US due to its economic needs and the strategic importance of the relationship. This cooperation has impacted the relationship between Pakistan and the Taliban, as Pakistan had to provide US support not aligned with the interests of the Taliban (Rajagopalan, interview with the author, Oct 20, 2022). Pakistan’s strategic significance to the US remains despite changing regional developments. This importance is mainly due to Pakistan’s unique geographic location but also its nuclear capabilities and influence on regional dynamics, which are making it unlikely that the US will abandon its relationship with Pakistan (Joshi, interview with the author, Oct 26, 2022). On the other hand, there is the question: “Will Pakistan tolerate drone operations over Pakistani airspace?” (Riedel, interview with the author, Sep 15, 2022). As such, the relationship also depends on Pakistan’s perspective.

The abrupt and disorderly withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan raised substantial concerns, also in India, concerning the reliability and trustworthiness of the US as a strategic partner (Taneja, interview with the author, Sep 13, 2022). This is coupled with the fact that India also realised that the US is not likely to abandon its strategic relationship with Pakistan (Joshi, interview with the author, Oct 26, 2022).

## **6.4 Political Interests towards the Taliban**

Despite the basic setting, especially India’s and Pakistan’s interests and actions in Afghanistan were thematised. Afghanistan is viewed as critical for India’s interests because it is a neighbour of Pakistan, and the withdrawal of the US has left a power void India and Pakistan

need to address. However, India is no longer only occupied with Pakistan, as mentioned in the beginning of this chapter but as the interviews revealed the focus is also heavily on China in foreign policy decisions. As such, India is positioning itself in Afghanistan in relation to Pakistan and China. It seeks to maintain influence to counter the sway of the two countries in the region. Furthermore, a driving factor behind India engaging with the Taliban, aiming to continue its presence, is that it is determined to avoid repeating the circumstances of the 1990s when Pakistan had substantial influence in Afghanistan (Ahmed, interview with the author, Sep 16, 2022; Ganguly, interview with the author, Sep 14, 2022; Waterman, interview with the author, Sep 12, 2022). India's interest in Afghanistan is "to prevent Pakistan from using Afghanistan (...). For India, a neutral Afghanistan, focusing on its internal development is the best option" (Joshi, interview with the author, Oct 26, 2022). In summary, India's actions in Afghanistan are driven by a desire to counter Pakistan's influence, defend its interests, maintain regional stability, and engage with the Taliban to moderate their behaviour while managing concerns regarding China's presence in the region.

Pakistan has always viewed India's presence in Afghanistan as a means to encircle Pakistan strategically. For Pakistan Afghanistan factors in because in a larger conflict with India "they have a country or a government in Afghanistan that they can recede into. (...) It comes from the thinking that Pakistan knows that if there is a nuclear war (...) India will come out of it extremely wounded, but Pakistan may just not be there on the map" (Taneja, interview with the author, Sep. 13, 2022). As such, Pakistan has continuous interest in shaping the political structure and ensuring that there is no Indian presence in Afghanistan. Furthermore "it wants to use Afghanistan as a base for supporting terrorist groups opposed to India" (Ganguly, interview with the author, Sep 14, 2022). Conclusively a quote from Taneja (interview with the author, Sep. 13, 2022) can be used: "For India and Pakistan, you can't get up and leave. So, dealing with the Taliban is a reality. And the Pakistanis deal with the Taliban from an anti-India mindset, and the Indians deal with the Taliban from an anti-Pakistan mindset."

## **6.5 Afghanistan - Threat to National Security?**

Lastly, in connection to the earlier mentioned approach that the perceived threat to national security influences the coverage of a conflict, I want to address the question: What do the findings on the political ground tell for how the situation in Afghanistan could be perceived by journalists in its intensity as a threat to national security? For Pakistan both the conflict with India and with Afghanistan are high-security threats (Hussain et al. 2019). Nonetheless, the conflict in Afghanistan has to be viewed as a combination of the Indo-Pak conflict and the

conflict in Afghanistan in itself, and based on this, the threat to national security has to be assessed. When looking at the prominent opinion in the interviews that Afghanistan for Pakistan is only an appendage to its India policy and similarly for India Afghanistan is merely an extension of the Pakistan policy (for example Plagemann, interview with the author, Dec 1, 2022), it becomes clear that the issues of Afghanistan for both poses a high threat to their national security. Even more so, considering that their enduring rivalry causes them to view each other's policies also from this point of view, as such expecting that the other countries' proceedings in Afghanistan are meant to 'harm' them. This can also be connected to a comment by Pakistani journalist Ahmed (interview with the author, Sep 16, 2022): "But for sure, everyone [every newspaper] keeps talking about the situation in Afghanistan and the situation with India and Kashmir because these are like our constant challenges as a nation." Nonetheless, the conflict in Afghanistan as a security threat must also be considered in itself, especially for Pakistan, which is a direct neighbour to Afghanistan and faces threats emanating from Afghanistan besides the extensions of the Indo-Pak rivalry.

## **6.6 Media - Restrictions, Censorship and Threats**

Restrictions, censorship and threats faced by the Pakistani media emerged as dominant themes in the interviews. Issues connected to press freedom were mentioned extensively, more than for India. This shows how important the matter is for Pakistani journalists. I broadly present the main themes giving short examples, contrasting the Indian and Pakistani mediascapes while focusing on the most relevant parts for my research questions.

Both in India and Pakistan, restrictions and censorship are progressively worsening. Censorship laws in Pakistan are becoming increasingly stricter (Ahmed, interview with the author, Sep 16, 2022). When the Imran Khan government came to power in 2018, "it was the collaboration between that government and the military that increased censorship across the country" (Shahid, interview with the author, Sep 20, 2022). The ownership of Pakistani media outlets increasingly compromises journalistic independence, with media owners prioritising their personal or business interests and relations over objective reporting (Hussain, interview with the author, Oct 24, 2022); Syed, interview with the author, Oct 27, 2022). This, coupled with the fact that the Pakistani media has traditionally relied on government advertisements and finances and the fact that the media have to adapt to the evolving media landscape (shift to digital), which is costly, means that the reliance on government support makes media outlets more vulnerable to government censorship and control (Shahid, interview with the author, Sep 20, 2022).

Similarly, in India, advertising revenue is the primary means of government influence. Many news outlets depend on government advertising for a significant portion of their revenue. Threatening to withdraw or reducing the budget, significantly impacts newspapers, especially smaller publications, dependent on this budget. “Some newspapers like The Hindu have been quite courageous about being willing to give up a very large chunk of revenue, but by a large, people have responded by taking the positions that the government would like them to take” (Swami, interview with the author, Oct 10, 2022). As mentioned earlier, these financial constraints have also influenced the on-the-ground coverage, as it is always weighed against the question of what is worth the money (Swami, interview with the author, Oct 10, 2022).

The Pakistani media also have to deal with restrictions concerning access to certain conflict areas, like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. “So, if media cannot even go to certain places, all they have is what the state is telling them” (Shahid, interview with the author, Sep 20, 2022). A standard method by the Pakistani establishment to restrict dissenting views is either the banning of entire publications, for example, by taking down their websites, or deleting online articles without any explanation (Shahid, interview with the author, Sep 20, 2022; Ahmed, interview with the author, Sep 16, 2022). Sarwar (interview with the author Sep 23, 2022) also recalled that the establishment finds various ways of letting journalists and editors know that they are keeping watch on what is being published, “like we publish an article that they didn’t like and then we had to publish one, (...) that they sent, (...) as a counter.”

Various topics were mentioned throughout the interviews, which journalists could not address critically, especially in the Pakistani context. I briefly list those ‘taboo topics’ in the Pakistani context connected to traditional national security issues and focus on those explicitly connected to the Indo-Pak conflict and Afghanistan. First, China in general and the South China Sea dispute and issues connected to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, specifically, have largely become taboo (Ahmed, interview with the author, Sep 16, 2022), as well as criticism of Pakistani allies (Syed, interview with the author, Oct 27, 2022). Ahmed (interview with the author, Sep 16, 2022) furthermore stated: “We couldn’t talk about what was happening under Doha peace talks and the role of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. We could not have that kind of conversation.”

Also, journalists are forced to avoid “anything which is against religion” (Syed, interview with the author, Oct 27, 2022) and everything connected to criticism of the military (Salam, voice messages to the author, Mar 9, 2023). Concerning Kashmir, Shahid (interview with the

author, Sep 20, 2022), for example, explained that you cannot even “have a view that is critical of jihadist separatists” even if this issue is precisely what Pakistan is struggling with as well and not constructed to justify Indian policy. Ahmed (interview with the author, Sep 16, 2022), a Pakistani journalist, said, “whenever we talk about national security or national emergency, that particular statement or (...) campaign is being designed by the security establishment.” This has led to “a lot of misinformation, misreporting” concerning the Indo-Pak conflict extension into Afghanistan, as whenever security agencies are involved “it’s very hard to present a nuanced picture for journalists who want to do that,” both in India and Pakistan (Sarwar, interview with the author Sep 23, 2022). Specifically concerning the army’s connection to the Taliban takeover, Riedel (interview with the author, Sep 15, 2022) noted that “they [the media] do not talk about the reality of the ISI’s role. Pakistani journalists who talked about the reality of the ISI’s role are usually either arrested or dead.”

The last-mentioned comment already touches upon the theme of consequences of critical coverage or following Bläsi’s (2004) terminology, sanctions for dissenters. In India, these are primarily connected to financial cuts. Furthermore, one interviewee, who wanted to stay anonymous concerning this comment, mentioned that under the BJP, there have been instances where proprietors were pressured into transferring editors to other jobs when the government disagreed with their editorial policies. Comparatively, in Pakistan, dissenting journalists face drastic sanctions, especially physical coercion. “There have been journalists who’ve been just beaten up and shot at and attacked, and sometimes killed” (Sarwar, interview with the author Sep 23, 2022). Hamza Azhar Salam (voice messages to the author, Mar 9, 2023) adds to this, stating that media organisations face censorship, while journalists also “face other forms of state coercion,” like arrests. “Journalists are killed, kidnapped, intimidated, harassed, very frequently in Pakistan” (Salam, voice messages to the author, Mar 9, 2023). Besides physical coercion, journalists also face “fake cases registered against them” (Salam, voice messages to the author, Mar 9, 2023), something with which Sarwar has been confronted herself, as she told me in the interview on Sep 23, 2022. Some Pakistani journalists who have gone abroad are not even safe there, having to change their area completely because still they “can be targeted and killed” (Sarwar, interview with the author Sep 23, 2022). Sarwar (interview with the author Sep 23, 2022) observes that also in India, “there are so many journalists in prison there, particularly in Kashmir, or underground or having to self-censor.”

Increasingly, all the different aspects mentioned have led to an intensification of self-censorship. Pakistani journalists have become cautious about what they say or report, fearing

repercussions. “There’s so many lines” by now which journalists are “very careful not to cross” (Sarwar, interview with the author Sep 23, 2022). Shahid (interview with the author, Sep 20, 2022) talked about how Pakistani publications no longer publish “anything that contradicts the state’s stance.” He said: “There’s one thing, rejecting an opinion, it’s just an opinion, okay, but if someone has evidence that, okay, this is something that’s happened, (...) I’ve spoken to people, I’ve documented evidence (...) you can check all the boxes, nobody is going to publish even that.” Furthermore, he adds: “Any even suggestion that, okay, we did this wrong, (...), anything in the context of India will no longer be published in Pakistan.” (Shahid, interview with the author, Sep 20, 2022). As a consequence, there is a strong focus on putting across the government’s view, even “English language newspapers (...) have become very careful in reporting” (Joshi, interview with the author, Oct 26, 2022). Indian journalists have become very careful in their reporting as well. Shahid (interview with the author, Sep 20, 2022) commented that they “are now more careful about writing for Pakistani publications because they would be labelled as Pakistan apologists, and similarly for Pakistan. A few years ago, there were a lot of writers writing for each other’s publications.”

In India, alternative and independent media still exist, which publishes dissenting views and, in some instances, holds the government accountable for their actions (Shahid, interview with the author, Sep 20, 2022; Swami, interview with the author, Oct 10, 2022; Rajagopalan, interview with the author, Oct 20, 2022). In Pakistan, Shahid (interview with the author, Sep 20, 2022) observed: “You don’t have dissenting, you don’t have true alternative media.” Swami (interview with the author, Oct 10, 2022) pointed out that concerning government pressure in India, a difference had to be made between types of coverage. He expressed that concerning foreign policy issues, like, as he puts it, “whether our policies on Pakistan are well advised or not” the government “largely tolerates criticism.” He assigned this to the fact that these “are not issues on which elections are fought, won, or lost” and “as long as there is no direct political input, it [the government] mainly does not care.” For some political journalists, especially “for Kashmiri journalists, particularly those ideologically sympathetic to secessionism, things are very, very different.” Joshi (interview with the author, Oct 26, 2022) noted that for India, it is a matter of how criticism is presented: “If you write it indirectly or if you criticise other people or if you criticise policy in a kind of a careful way, you can get it across.”

Indian journalists have faced problems of censorship in various ways and learned to work in tightly controlled media environments (Swami, interview with the author, Oct 10, 2022). The fact that the Indian media survived the period in the 70s has brought out a particular “fight in

the Indian print press, that not again, you're not going to do that again" (Taneja, interview with the author, Sep 13, 2022). Interestingly, Swami (interview with the author, Oct 10, 2022) remarked that he sees Pakistani journalists as being generally even better at this, "because they face these periodic pressures from military governments, but they've always found ways to push back, to look for space, to contest the establishment and I think we are learning some of these skills over here as well."

## **6.7 Situation On-the-Ground - Sources**

For Indian media, four dominant themes emerged from the data concerning sources: The dominance of international news agencies as information sources for international matters, the question of general availability of information, the unique press communication strategy of the Indian government and the overall importance of personal networks for retrieving information. For the Pakistani side, a lot less information could be retrieved from the interviews concerning sources, but the dominant themes aligned with some of the themes on the Indian side, like the reliance on press agencies and the dependency on official press briefings.

Due to the lack of independent Indian journalistic presence in Afghanistan and Pakistan, reporting is often based on international news agencies. This dependence on external sources limits the capability to provide an independent version of events (Joshi, interview with the author, Oct 26, 2022). Swami (interview with the author, Oct 10, 2022) stated that this could be due to the constant question of resource allocation in newsrooms. While the digital age has made data much more easily accessible, "finding out what is on the ground remains really difficult, especially in places (...) where there are active conflict situations. You just have to use the limited opportunities you have to travel the best you can" (Swami, interview with the author, Oct 10, 2022). Similarly, concerning Pakistani media, Salam (voice messages to the author, Mar 9, 2023) maintained that most of the time, his publication looks at what press agencies or other media outlets report, and then they quote that information.

Concerning official sources, what is important to mention first is that the Indian government under Modi has a unique approach to communication. While the ministries give weekly press conferences, "the Indian Prime Minister has not given a press conference in eight years," and as a result, "the Prime Minister's decisions are more like dictates coming in" (Taneja, interview with the author Sep 13, 2022). Swami (interview with the author, Oct 10, 2022) added to this by saying that many government officials think they can bypass the media and rely heavily on their social media presence, especially to reach a younger audience. Similarly, political

parties in Pakistan, led by figures like former Prime Minister Imran Khan, have harnessed the power of social media, “they’re efficient in doing trolling of its opponents and also propagating and projecting their politics via social media” as such, bypassing traditional media outlets and creating their own network of Vloggers (Hussain, interview with the author, Oct 24, 2022). Furthermore, India lacks elaborate communication structures. “If I send an email to government, I’m not going to get a reply. I have to know somebody who will respond to me in some way” (Swami, interview with the author, Oct 10, 2022).

Shahid (interview with the author, Sep 20, 2022) noted concerning Pakistani media: “Unfortunately, press briefing in most cases, especially on matters of national significance, press briefing is all we have. The media is literally told, this is how you’re going to report it” Ahmed (interview with the author, Sep 16, 2022) as mentioned, stated that usually concerning national security, statements are designed by the security establishment. Manoj Joshi (interview with the author, Oct 26, 2022), a former editor of several influential Indian newspapers, noted that when he was a journalist, he would get his information directly “from government officials, meaning talking off the record with some of them,” mainly through direct interaction in their offices. In connection to constraints journalists face, Joshi (interview with the author, Oct 26, 2022) stated that “now the [Indian] government has put in a lot of restrictions” also in the realms of being able as a journalist to communicate with government officials directly, making obtaining information challenging. Now, “unless and until someone has given you an appointment, you can’t meet the person.” However, when you have an appointment, you must register “so everyone knows who has come in to meet who, so people are reluctant to talk.” To not get someone into trouble as a journalist, ideally, “there should be no trail.” On the phone is a problem because, as Joshi (interview with the author, Oct 26, 2022) pointed out: “I’m assuming everyone’s tapping my phone” so now people are more reluctant to talk, as they must assume that their statements, when published, can be traced back to them.

Connected to this, personal networks play a crucial role when collecting information in Indian journalism, which equip journalists with trusted sources and valuable knowledge (Joshi, interview with the author, Oct 26, 2022; Swami, interview with the author, Oct 10, 2022). These networks have evolved with the changing media landscape, both in India and Pakistan, as indicated by Sarwar (interview with the author, Sep 23, 2022), who mentioned, “I think social media has come into the mix also, and there’s a lot of connections happening through that.” Similarly, as Swami (interview with the author, Oct 10, 2022) said, the rise of the internet in



general has facilitated cross-border contact among journalists in South Asia and has given rise to informal groups and networks that improve access to information.

## **6.8 Journalists – Understanding of their Profession**

While this was not part of my interview guide, particularly in the talks with Pakistani journalists, the theme of how journalists understand their profession in connection to their journalistic responsibility came up often. As such, I decided to present the key arguments that were made in this section and relate those to the question of constructive conflict coverage and good journalism discussed in the realm of my methodological framework, in the discussion.

Ahmed (interview with the author, Sep 16, 2022) noted that Pakistan's media outlets are often polarised. For example, during election times, it is easy to identify which political party they support. For her, this conflicts with journalistic values. At the same time, she also mentioned the question of objective journalism: "I feel like I have a responsibility to tell the truth, but at the same time (...) you also have to clearly say that this is your truth, this is your perspective, which might be different from what the actual fact is." Concerning the reporting on the developments in Afghanistan she noted that "as long as you're not an Afghan, your voice is not that of an authentic Afghan. And your perspective is, again, then, it's a little tainted for me" (Ahmed, interview with the author, Sep 16, 2022). This implies that an authentic perspective often depends on one's background and experiences, implying that journalists might not fully understand the perspectives of those they report on, particularly in the international context. Several interviewees also emphasised the importance of writing in a balanced and fair manner, considering different perspectives, providing context, and avoiding an overly emotional or outraged tone in their reporting. "I just try to take an understanding from whoever I can speak to" (Sarwar, interview with the author Sep 23, 2022).

Salam (voice messages to the author, Mar 9, 2023) emphasised that, for their publication, public interest takes precedence over national interest. Accurate reporting and informing the public are the main goals of their journalism, and they prioritise facts over opinions. Shahid (interview with the author, Sep 20, 2022) expressed the importance of writing for local newspapers and emphasises the importance of grassroots journalism, reporting from the ground, and serving the local audience.

## 7 Concluding Discussion

The focus of the concluding discussion lies on presenting the results in synopsis while extensively comparing the findings from Dawn to those from TOI and juxtaposing them with findings from the interviews.

Although the importance of English-language print media is declining in Pakistan, concerning reporting on policy issues, they continue to play an important role. As can be derived from the interview analysis, concerning discursive features, they are less prone to sensationalism than Urdu or local news media. Pertaining to the findings in this study, it can be presumed that they represent the most moderate, unbiased coverage provided in Pakistan. Amongst the English-language newspapers, Dawn is described, in the interviews, as the most sensible and reasonable in their coverage.

In India, while the English-language press is also largely compromised through censorship, they hold a similar position as English-language media in Pakistan, still being more moderate and critical compared to the Hindi and vernacular press. As mentioned, some recent research (Akbar and Adnan 2018) found TOI to be the most neutral in portraying Pak-India relations in comparison to other prominent Indian newspapers, although the role TOI holds in the Indian media landscape stayed largely unclear in the interviews.

### 7.1 Examining the Hypotheses

All findings from the news articles must be viewed against the background that my sample is very small and, as such, presents only an ‘snapshot’. The findings from the interviews mainly address ‘the bigger picture’ and, as such, can be seen as more generic. I will always weigh the two sides and address the hypotheses from different points of view.

#### 7.1.1 RH 1 - Bias towards Negative Reporting

Regarding Indian media coverage of the Taliban takeover, the interviews revealed that there is no positive reporting. The situation was portrayed as a win for Pakistan and a defeat for India, as a setback and an issue of worry due to the possibility of Afghanistan becoming a haven for terrorists. In the examined headlines, TOI presented Pakistan in a neutral manner and an active role. Pakistan in TOI and India in Dawn were mentioned very rarely in the analysed headlines. Furthermore, actors connected to Pakistan were also presented neutrally and ascribed an active role. This shows that the TOI did not use Pakistan as ‘bait’ for drawing in readers, nor were the actors ascribed a secondary role. Moreover, in the TOI headlines, the

blame for the failures in Afghanistan was not put on Pakistan. Similarly, in the Dawn headlines, India was not blamed either. The focus was laid on rejecting the blame put on Pakistan.

Research Hypothesis 1 can, as such, be confirmed from the generic viewpoint of the interviews concerning the Indian media. Concerning the findings from the sample of headlines, there is no explicit bias towards negative reporting on matters connected to the Indo-Pak relations, neither in TOI nor Dawn found.

While this could be a result of the choice of samples and the method of analysis, it can also be due to the fact that both newspapers adhered to a high standard of unbiased reporting in their news articles. Existing research primarily examined opinion pieces or editorials, which are not intended to convey a neutral picture. This could be a reason why the findings concerning the TOI and Dawn diverge from existing research. Furthermore, this could also be seen as a confirmation of the finding by Akbar and Adnan (2018) that TOI follows a more neutral approach concerning reporting on Indo-Pak relations among Indian newspapers, whereas the interviews described a different picture concerning the Indian media in general.

### **7.1.2 RH 2 - Focus on Elite Actors**

Overall, the coverage was found to be focusing on stakeholders active in the political realm. Both newspapers did not focus on giving ordinary people a voice. In the headlines in both TOI and Dawn, the only actors mentioned were connected to the political realm. In both newspapers, the main focus was on actors connected to their respective countries. Noticeably, the second most noted actor in TOI was the Taliban, which also held discursive power, while Dawn focused extensively on the US. The findings from sections in TOI, where Pakistan was mentioned, confirmed the findings from the headlines, only referring to elite actors, despite a few instances where the Taliban, which were still non-state actors, despite their de facto power in Afghanistan, the Haqqani network or the TTP are mentioned. Two articles considered Pashtun actors, hinting at a non-elite perspective, but it is minor in comparison. In the sections from Dawn, only political actors were mentioned, and voices of ordinary people were missing entirely. Overall, the focus could be ascribed to the fact that a story which included either India (in Dawn) or Pakistan (in TOI) was most likely centred on the political realm and international relations. This matter needs to be explored further regarding a broader sample of articles and the actors included. The conclusion I can draw is that in sections where the other respective country was covered in the two newspapers, ordinary people did not get an active voice, nor were they mentioned in Dawn at all and only marginally in TOI.

The fact that TOI ascribed the Taliban discursive power in their headlines shows acknowledgement of their agency and recognition of their role in determining the situation. It could be an attempt to unbiasedly report different facets of the conflict by avoiding taking sides. This assumption is underpinned by the fact that TOI also presents the Taliban rather neutrally. Concerning Dawn, the importance laid on the US as an active stakeholder could be attributed to the fact that the English press focuses more on issues of a global nature and also caters to an international audience.

### **7.1.3 RH 3 – Alignment with Respective Establishment’s Perspective**

From the interviews, it can be derived that the takeover was initially portrayed by policymakers in Pakistan as a victory for Pakistan, a defeat of the US, and a setback for India. As such, a positive narrative was portrayed concerning the Taliban’s rise, with the expectation that the takeover would be favourable to Pakistan. Moreover, Pakistani politicians encouraged international acceptance of the Taliban regime, pointing out that cooperation with the Taliban could moderate their behaviour. Nonetheless, the Pakistani government did not admit a relationship with the Taliban. Additionally, the government held the strong narrative that it aimed for a political solution in Afghanistan. In India, the narrative held by policymakers was driven by worry concerning terrorist groups gaining power should Afghanistan become a haven for jihadist terrorists. Furthermore, India put great effort into supporting the Ghani government, working with the US as a strategic partner. The withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan raised concerns in India regarding the trustworthiness of the US as a partner.

The Dawn headlines followed the narrative that Pakistan was not involved in the takeover and held no responsibility for the failure in Afghanistan. Furthermore, the narrative that Pakistan was focused on promoting the peace process and security in the region was pushed, as these were the most covered topics in the news articles. Additionally, the comparison of the headlines in Dawn to the main focus of the articles also revealed that the narrative concerning Pakistan’s positive role in the peace process was deliberately pushed in the newspaper. This was also discovered by Hussain and Jehangir (2023) concerning supporting coverage for the government in Pakistan during the fall of Kabul. On the other hand, the celebrative tone could not be confirmed, as the sentiment portrayed in Dawn’s headlines concerning the Taliban takeover was found to be mostly negative or neutral.

In the TOI headlines, the blame for the failures in Afghanistan was put on the US and the Afghan government, with the US mostly negatively portrayed, confirming that TOI followed the

policymakers' narrative. The findings concerning the sentiment expressed in connection to the situation in Afghanistan in the TOI headlines supported this, as they either used a negative or neutral tone. Looking at the most covered topics, this is less clear and requires further analysis concerning how each topic is presented and which actors are included. Security and stability, the topic under which worry concerning expanding terrorist activities would fall was not among the most covered topics. This shows that contrary to Saffee (2016) no paranoia was created concerning terrorism in TOI, which is a common theme in Indian media coverage connected to Pakistan. This could, building on Saffee's (2016) argumentation, be seen as a positive step towards coverage helpful for durable peace between India and Pakistan.

The interviews also confirmed that Pakistani media generally relayed the government's view of seeking a political solution in Afghanistan. The interviewees also recalled that criticism of the Pakistani establishment's approach was rarely expressed, and the Pakistani media predominantly followed the celebratory argumentative line of the Taliban coming to power and defeating the US, which was pushed by the government. This is not in line with the findings from Dawn's headlines but confirms the findings by Yasin et al. (2022), who point out that during August the Pakistani English-language media portrayed the Taliban mostly positively or neutrally in their editorials, while the specific findings for Dawn showed that the editorials were negative or neutral. As such it can be confirmed that Dawn portrayed a view which deviates from other media, with news articles being in line with the tone portrayed in their editorials during the time. Also, for the Indian media generally, the interviews reveal that the coverage aligned with the Indian establishment's perspective. The takeover is portrayed mainly as a win for Pakistan and a defeat for India, undoing India's actions in Afghanistan and turning the country into a safe site for terrorists, which could potentially become dangerous for India. Nonetheless, the interviewees also recalled that there was some critical coverage of India's approach to the situation, especially concerning a lack of Indian response. This can be confirmed from the analyses of the TOI headlines, which presented India rather neutrally, while one headline criticises India's lack of engagement with the Taliban.

As such, no definite assumption can be made concerning the alignment of the coverage with their respective establishment's perspectives. Concerning the interview findings, the Pakistani media aligned with the official perspective. However, it is less clear for the findings from Dawn. The question should be further investigated for TOI and Indian media, as results from the news articles and the interviews show that there was a different focus in the media than in the government narrative and even some criticism of the government's approach.

#### **7.1.4 RH 4 – Reliance on Official Sources**

The TOI almost exclusively referred to official sources in their headlines. The sections covering Pakistan included a greater variety of sources, but most were still official. The interviews indicated that for the Indian media coverage of the Taliban takeover, the information was retrieved mainly from Indian diplomats, while coverage of Afghanistan and Pakistan in general was often heavily reliant on international press agencies. Dawn only referred to official sources in its headlines and in the sections covering India. Interestingly, TOI mainly relied on official Pakistani sources in the sections covering Pakistan. On the other hand, Dawn relied heavily on Pakistani official sources, followed by American official sources when discussing India in its articles. The findings concerning TOI present a different picture than Hussain and Jehangir (2023) found concerning Indian media coverage of the Taliban takeover, which was more heavily dependent on national sources. It has to be mentioned though that they examined The Hindu. For Dawn the findings are in line with Hussain and Jehangir (2023).

As such, official sources, in all cases, were the primary resource for information, which is in line with findings from existing research. However, while it can be assumed that the TOI provided the view on Pakistan more from a Pakistani perspective, Dawn focused on a Pakistani perspective in its coverage of India.

The main reason for the heavy reliance on official sources and international press agencies in India can be ascribed to the lack of Indian on-the-ground reporting in both Pakistan and Afghanistan. This can be a question of resource allocation in connection to tight financial situations in Indian newspapers. Furthermore, getting statements from government officials – besides the official briefings – has become almost impossible in India. Pakistani media similarly relied on international press agencies and dependent on press briefings, in which the media is told precisely how to report on a particular matter, leaving little space for different stances. There is often no other way of retrieving information, especially concerning matters of national significance, like the issue of Afghanistan and the conflict with India. While the TOI's take on covering Pakistan can be seen as an attempt to report unbiasedly, it could also be due to the lack of possibility to collect information differently and, as such, the need to rely on Pakistani statements.

In general, heavy reliance on official sources can positively impact the accuracy of information provided on a conflict. Official sources, such as government briefings or military statements, are often considered more credible by the public (Hussain and Jehangir 2023, 3).

If truthful, they can provide information regarding the official positions on the conflict. In the Indian and Pakistani context, though, the truth content of official information must be questioned. Both establishments have vested interests in the conflict and profit from controlling the narrative, which can lead to misinformation and one-sided or biased reporting. It is unlikely that official sources provide the full context of the developments, meaning the coverage stays uni-perspectival. This is true, even when TOI referred to official Pakistani sources, if there is no juxtaposition with other sources, which was seldom the case. That Indian and Pakistani media was prone to uni-perspectival coverage was underpinned by the finding that it was mainly the narrative by policymakers which was dominant in the media. As such, even when a voice was given to different officials, the discourse stays dominated by the ‘elite’ narrative. Concerning these matters, restricted access to conflict sites, the lack of possibility to verify information independently and censorship and repression are discussed in connection to RH5.

#### **7.1.5 RH 5 - Influence of Restrictions and Pressure**

RH5 and the discussion in connection to this is closely connected to RH2, RH3 and RH4. As such, a short, intermediate conclusion is helpful. The findings concerning the previous hypotheses paint a clear picture that both newspapers focused mainly on political stakeholders, primarily the perspective of their respective establishments and relied on official sources, while it is less clear to what extent they followed official lines. Nonetheless, for all three hypotheses, it can be said that this is clearer for Dawn and the general findings concerning the Pakistani media, than for TOI and the Indian media. As mentioned, the coverage can be expected to have been heavily influenced by restrictions and pressure imposed on the media houses and journalists. The findings from the interviews confirmed this. As such, constraints in the context of the conflict coverage must be considered. I focus here on the issues presented in the conceptual framework based on Bläsi (2004) and on pointing out some clear connections concerning the findings from Dawn and TOI.

As mentioned extensively in connection to RH4, both establishments have vested interests in the conflict in Afghanistan and benefit from controlling the narrative. These factors, which Bläsi (2004) referred to as ‘lobbies’, were repeatedly mentioned also during the interviews and, as such, can be assigned as factors of influence on the production process of the conflict coverage. The interviews revealed that in issues in which the security agencies are involved, nuanced reporting becomes difficult. This could be one of the reasons for the lack of criticism and the uni-perspectival approach, especially in Dawn. In Pakistan, for national security issues, the campaigns for the coverage are pre-designed by the military establishment. This can

explain the extensive focus on Pakistan's role in the peace process and the lack of information on Pakistan's involvement in the takeover in Dawn, as one would otherwise expect coverage which would question Pakistan's role in the takeover. However, as mentioned in the interviews, journalists who talk about the ISI's role risk their lives.

Journalists often do not have the opportunity to verify information they get from official sources independently. This can lead to the dissemination of false or deceptive information. For conflict situations, reporters on the ground are indispensable to capture a comprehensive picture of the circumstances. As the interviews reveal, the conflict parties impose restrictions on access to certain areas, which can result in a narrow and lopsided view of the situation. On-the-ground coverage in Afghanistan most likely also fell victim to the financial restrictions, which also reside from cuts in government advertising, especially in India.

As stated in the interviews, the English-language news in Pakistan also caters to an international audience, and their coverage is seen as presenting an image of Pakistan to the global audience. This could be one reason why there was such a strong focus in the news articles from Dawn on issues connected to the US. Because of this external image, which might be created through English-language reporting, it could be expected that it presents the entirety of what Pakistan is, besides the terror-inflicted image international news presents. This has to be questioned, though, because of the findings concerning the influence the government has on the media, even the English-language press – meaning that it can also be seen as the image and the reputation the government wants the international community to have of Pakistan.

The different sanctions journalists may face in both countries have been mentioned extensively in chapter 6.6, and it can be expected that also in the context of the coverage of the Taliban takeover, these prospects have led to heavy self-censorship by journalists in their coverage. As such, in line with the findings concerning the manner of reporting in TOI, the interviews showed that the Indian media still had the possibility to criticise policy indirectly or carefully write on perspectives that deviated from the governments. The Pakistani media (including Dawn) were largely compromised through restrictions and censorship. Both the media in India and Pakistan experience heavy constrictions, which influence their manner of coverage, and to which biased, and uni-perspectival coverage can be ascribed.



### **7.1.6 RH 6 - Strong Escalatory and Weak De-escalatory Coverage**

For the assessment of the conflict and the resulting coverage in Hussain's (2020) critical pragmatic model for peace journalism, two dimensions of conflict involved in the coverage of the Taliban takeover had to be considered: The Indo-Pak conflict and the conflict in Afghanistan in itself, as already mentioned earlier. Based on the interviews, I assess that the matter is, for both countries, viewed as a high threat to national security, especially when looking at the theory of enduring rivalry, according to which both countries have unduly high stakes involved in the conflict in Afghanistan. Additionally, for both countries, the issue has implications, especially in connection to security and stability in their own countries, but also in general for the region. As a direct neighbour to Afghanistan, the risk is exceptionally high for Pakistan. As such, examining if the coverage reflected this, is essential, as in connection to Hussain's (2020) model, coverage in the realms of high-security threats could be expected.

Conclusively, Dawn can be seen as having moderate escalatory coverage, as it was focused on elite actors, uni-perspectival, with the main focus on the government's perspective, and blamed the Afghan government for the failure in Afghanistan. This would show that the Taliban takeover was seen as a medium threat to national security. The highlighting of voices for peace, although also focused only on the Pakistani establishment, hints at a weak de-escalatory coverage and, as such, a high-security threat estimation. The picture for TOI is less clear, which followed a multi-perspective approach, although also restricted to actors in the political realm. The language was primarily neutral, while the intense focus on issues connected to human rights also showed that the conflict was somewhat humanised. Still, no voices of ordinary people were included, and the fact that official sources were the primary source of information somewhat mitigates this. Overall, the TOI coverage can be assessed as somewhere between moderate escalatory and moderate de-escalatory coverage, hinting at a medium security threat estimation.

I go further into depth on this in the following conclusion. Nonetheless, it has to be mentioned here that concerning the enduring rivalry theory, it is surprising that the conflict was not reported in a high-escalatory manner in both papers. The fact that this is not the case might be because the rivalry did not influence the conflict in Afghanistan as much as could have been expected, at least from an Indian perspective. Pakistan also has higher stakes concerning Afghanistan than India besides the rivalry, due to its geographic proximity. The fact that the coverage was not reported in a high-escalatory and weak de-escalatory manner may mean that journalists did not see the takeover as a significant threat to national security.

### **7.1.7 Research Hypotheses – Conclusion**

When looking at the enduring rivalry between India and Pakistan and its extension into Afghanistan, the interviews confirmed that both countries continuously had a high degree of involvement in the conflict, which should have influenced the coverage of issues connected to the conflict. Both newspapers mainly focused on how the takeover was connected to their respective country. TOI additionally focused on the Taliban as holding an active role in the matter, while Dawn focused on the US as an active stakeholder. Both did not excessively focus on the other country and did not approach the topic mainly in relation to issues connected to the security competition and rivalry. Furthermore, TOI portrayed issues related to Pakistan from a Pakistani perspective, which shows a willingness to give Pakistani actors a voice and might lead to less biased reporting. Nonetheless, the coverage still showed that Dawn assessed the conflict more as a high-security threat, while India only addressed the conflict in a manner hinting at a medium-security threat assessment.

For the TOI, as the findings from the interviews revealed, one reason for the minor focus on Pakistan in the coverage could be attributed to the fact that Pakistan is no longer the main focus of their national security matters. While the rivalry remains, India is focusing increasingly on China, which also plays an essential role in Afghanistan. The rivalry is as such growing less important which could potentially mean that it will influence India's national security approaches less and less, something which could also influence the coverage. Pakistan remains more occupied with the conflict than India, which was also evident in the news articles in Dawn. However, the country at the time was highly focused on internal matters, which could also be the reason coverage was less focused on the conflict with India in Afghanistan than the enduring rivalry between the two countries would have suggested. Furthermore, regarding Indian media there was a clear consensus in the interviews with journalists that the media, in general, were still primarily occupied with Pakistan concerning all matters connected to Afghanistan. As such, it could be just the sample in this study that portrayed a deviating picture or that TOI generally deviates in their coverage from other mainstream media in India. Similarly, for Dawn, it cannot be denied that the newspaper follows a more liberal approach than the mainstream media in Pakistan usually does, which could have influenced their coverage.

## **7.2 The Feasibility of Constructive Conflict Coverage**

Concerning the findings of this research, it can be said that they support Hussain's (2020) view that conflict coverage is usually situated somewhere between war/violence and peace/conflict journalism. The coverage in TOI was following a peace journalism account on

the matters concerning invisible effects of war, with a strong focus on human rights issues in Afghanistan and their partial multi-party orientation when giving an active voice to the Taliban. Both papers also focused on the consequences of the conflict, although rather self-centred. Dawn further focused on the peace initiative Pakistan endorsed but lopsidedly concentrated on Pakistan's role. Concerning war journalism frames, both newspapers were elite-oriented in their choice of sources and the actors they mainly focused on. Dawn, as became apparent in the news article analysis, and Pakistani media, in general, as became apparent in the interviews, were somewhat partisan and propaganda-oriented, focusing on blaming the Afghan government for the failures, and ignorant of Pakistan's possible role in the takeover. For all other aspects, the coverage lay somewhat in-between the categories, even more so than the just presented sides, which are mostly not undebatable either.

The applicability of the peace journalism approach is questionable, and 'judging' coverage based on the dichotomous peace journalism categories is unfair towards the journalists without looking at the factors influencing the coverage. Nonetheless, the approach contains essential values. If these are followed, for example, highly polarised media coverage, which can be found in Indian and Pakistani media, could be avoided. Overall, I am inclined to assess the approach initiated by Galtung (2003) at best as helpful as a guideline for constructive conflict coverage, although it always must be evaluated in the realms of possibility in connection to the conditions of the conflict coverage production process. Furthermore, it also has to be questioned in relation to the crossing of lines between journalism and activism, as pointed out by many critics of the approach. Hussain's (2020) more fluent approach was better applicable, although the findings were also somewhat in-between categories, and a clear picture could not be drawn. Nonetheless, the approach was helpful to gain a better understanding of the coverage and the state of the political realm in which it is produced.

In the interviews, journalists expressed mostly values connected to the responsibility of telling the truth while being cautious about the fact that objectivity is impossible. Furthermore, they saw it as important to present the facts in a balanced and fair manner by considering the different perspectives, as such also letting those impacted by a conflict or those directly involved speak for themselves, allowing them to tell their truth. Moreover, they considered it crucial to capture a situation as unfiltered as possible, to provide context and exercise caution not to write in an overly emotional manner. This clearly confirms that journalists expressed an understanding of their journalistic profession in line with Kempf's (2007) definition of good journalism. There was also the sentiment that national interest did not precede public interest.

Furthermore, coverage from the ground and the importance of grassroots journalism was emphasised. As such, it became clear that journalists are generally trying to provide unbiased conflict coverage. However, an approach that touches upon activism, actively following the goal of peace, was not expressed by the journalists, which would collide with values such as fair, balanced and objective reporting. Furthermore, for Dawn, findings from the analysis of the headlines confirmed the interview findings that, within the bounds of possibility, Dawn tries to follow ethical standards, for example, by stating that a specifically presented matter is derived from military sources and their point of view, making clear in these cases that it is not independently verified news.

The bleak conclusion which must be drawn is that the only practical idea is, as pointed out during the interviews, for journalists to be transparent in their reporting and clearly state their source of information. They then have to trust that the reader will assess this information in connection to its origin when they have no other option but to rely on official sources. This cannot make up for the missing information, and the missing different perspectives on a situation, which journalists cannot provide as a result of imposed restrictions. However, as various interviewees mentioned, both for the Pakistani and the Indian sides, journalists have always found ways to push back when there is tight control on the media.

### **7.3 Emerging Issues for Future Research**

At different points during the concluding discussion, I stated various issues which should be further discussed in future research. Summarising, I want to address briefly the main fields future research should explore.

First, concerning coverage of the Taliban takeover, a comparison of findings with other time periods would be helpful to extend the understanding of the changing dynamics, narratives, and strategies employed by Indian and Pakistani media throughout the takeover while still examining the same discursive event. Similarly, a comparison to other vital issues in connection to the Indo-Pak conflict, like for example, the Kashmir issue, could help understand the importance of the Taliban takeover for the security competition. This would also give insights into how differently journalists assess these threats and generally adhere to the question of the current importance of the rivalry for both countries. Furthermore, this could show if different restrictions and censorship apply in various instances where the conflict plays out, which could, for example, be expected for coverage of Kashmir issues, as was indicated during the interviews for this study. Additionally, an explicit exploration of the various other factors

introduced by Bläsi (2004) would be helpful to build a comprehensive picture of factors influencing conflict coverage in India and Pakistan.

Furthermore, as this study focuses only on two English-language newspapers, a comparison with other English-language newspapers in India and Pakistan could show if the findings mirror the broader English-language media landscape in the two countries. Beyond English-language newspapers, research should analyse how the conflict is covered in newspapers published in languages such as Urdu, Hindi or other vernacular languages. This comparative analysis can shed light on how media in different languages approach the topic and what the differences might tell about the current importance of the conflict. Furthermore, it could give insights into the importance of English-language newspapers in covering these issues. Research should also assess the coverage in various other media forms, such as television, online newspapers or social media, and their impact on shaping public opinion and influencing decision-makers.

Additionally, China has become increasingly crucial concerning national security matters for India. As such, a study of how China is portrayed in Indian media could reveal if this conflict is gaining more importance than the conflict with Pakistan. Lastly, conducting quantitative studies using a large data corpus could also help identify distinct discursive features in the coverage of the Indo-Pak conflict and the specific matter of the Taliban takeover. Qualitative research is not entirely representative, and the possibility of generalisation, which quantitative studies offer, would be helpful in this context to assess the findings from this research.

Overall, the findings from this study combine an analysis of a short time frame, a specific type of news article and two newspapers, juxtaposing them with interview findings concerning the encompassing mediascape and conditions for conflict coverage. Various theoretical models have been included. Nonetheless, this study remains the portrayal of a small part of a big puzzle, and it should only be understood as such. Previous research set a frame, but it is up to future research to build on this research as part of that frame, with every piece contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the conflict dynamics and transformations in South Asia and the corresponding media coverage.

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## Appendix A – Additional Information Research Process

*Table A1 - Initial Data Corpus News Articles*

<b>Dawn</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Number of Articles</b>	<b>Times of India</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Number of Articles</b>
	10/08/2021	3		10/08/2021	2
	11/08/2021	2		11/08/2021	2
	12/08/2021	1		12/08/2021	2
	13/08/2021	3		13/08/2021	5
	14/08/2021	1		14/08/2021	2
	15/08/2021	2		15/08/2021	3
	16/08/2021	4		16/08/2021	1
	17/08/2021	10		17/08/2021	11
	18/08/2021	6		18/08/2021	22
	<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>		<b>Total</b>	<b>52</b>

**Source:** Author's own depiction of findings

*Table A2 - Research Participants*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Information</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Interview</b>
Alex Waterman	Research fellow at GIGA Institute for Asian Studies (Germany)	Sep 2022	video call
Kabir Taneja	Indian journalist, published in Indian and international media and Fellow at Observer Research Foundation (ORF) in New Delhi	Sep 2022	video call
Dr. Sumit Ganguly	Indian-born distinguished professor of political science and author, specialist in South Asian contemporary politics	Sep 2022	video call
Bruce Riedel	American expert on U.S. security, the Middle East, counterterrorism, and South Asia; former CIA analyst, served on the National Security Council and as a senior advisor to four US presi-	Sep 2022	video call
Remshay Ahmed	Pakistani TV and print journalist, news editor, foreign policy analyst, and communications officer at I4C South Asia Hub	Sep 2022	video call
Muhammad Ali Baig	Research fellow at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (Pakistan) with articles published in Pakistani magazines and newspapers	Sep 2022	video/audio call
Kunwar Khuldune Shahid	Pakistani-based journalist and editor, published in international media, member of 101Reporters	Sep 2022	video call
Beena Sarwar	Journalist with over twenty years of experience in the field in Pakistan and internationally, artist, documentary filmmaker, and editor, media consultant, and teacher	Sep 2022	video call
Anonymous Expert	Comparative political scientist focusing on the politics of South Asia	Sep 2022	video call
Brian Cloughley (Expert)	France-based independent researcher, spent eight years in Pakistan, as deputy head of UN Kashmir Military Mission and Australian defence diplomat	Oct 2022	video call
Praveen Swami	Indian journalist and author, specialised in international strategic and security matters, has been an editor of various newspapers	Oct 2022	audio call
Dr. Rajesh Rajagopalan	Indian professor of international politics at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi	Oct 2022	video call

Manoj Joshi	Former Indian journalist and editor including political editor at TOI, currently author and distinguished fellow at ORF (India), focusing on security and international relations	Oct 2022	video call
Syed Talat Hussain	One of the leading Pakistani journalists and YouTuber	Oct 2022	video call
Sabookh Syed	Pakistani journalist and anchor, chairman of the Digital Media Alliance for Pakistan	Oct 2022	video call
Dr. Johannes Plagemann	Research fellow and research team spokesperson at the German Institute for Global Area Studies	Dec 2022	video call
Hamza Azhar Salam	Pakistani journalist and editor with over 300 by-lines in international and Pakistani news organisations	March 2023	voice notes

**Source:** Author's own depiction of findings

**Table A3 - Process Thematic Analysis**

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarising yourself with your data	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

**Source:** Braun and Clarke (2006, 87)

## Appendix B – Codebooks

*Table B1 - Codebook News Articles*

Code system	The TOI		Dawn	
	Files	References	Files	References
Grammar				
Adjectives				
Adjectives of emotions	0	0	0	0
Comparative and superlative adjectives	0	0	0	0
Evaluative adjectives (neg)	1	1	0	0
Evaluative adjectives (pos)	1	1	0	0
Possessive adjectives	0	0	1	1
Adverbs				
Adverbs of emphasis	0	0	0	0
Adverbs of frequency	0	0	0	0
Adverbs of manner	1	1	0	0
Adverbs of place	0	0	0	0
Adverbs of time	0	0	0	0
Signal Words - Connotative Meaning				
Dramatising connotation	3	4	1	1
Emotionalised	0	0	0	0
Militarised	0	0	0	0
Negative connotation	2	3	0	0
Positive connotation	3	3	0	0
Power connotation	1	1	1	1
Victimised	0	0	1	1
Verbs				
Auxiliary Phrases				
Expressing ability or inability	0	0	0	0
Expressing advice (desirability)	0	0	1	1
Expressing intention	1	1	1	1
Expressing obligation or necessity	1	1	2	2
Expressing possibility	0	0	0	0
Causative verbs	2	2	0	0
Future (Tense)	4	4	0	0
Imperatives	0	0	0	0
Passive construction	1	1	0	0
Verbs of attribution	4	4	2	2
Ideological Standpoint				
Aims and intentions by actors				
Concerning new Afghan government	2	2	0	0
Evacuation from Afghanistan	1	1	0	0
International partnership	1	1	3	3

Code system	The TOI		Dawn	
	Files	References	Files	References
Peace in Afghanistan	1	1	0	0
Respecting human rights	1	1	0	0
Security for the region	0	0	2	2
Assessment of situation in Afghanistan				
Humanisation	1	1	0	0
Attitude/Connotation				
Negative (defeated)	6	6	4	4
Neutral	5	5	3	3
Positive (sense of celebration)	1	1	1	1
Responsibility				
Afghan government is responsible for failures in Afghanistan	1	1	1	1
Pakistan is responsible for failures in Afghanistan	0	0	0	0
The US is responsible for failures in Afghanistan	2	2	0	0
Securitisation	1	1	0	0
Social identities				
Class	0	0	0	0
Ethnicity	0	0	0	0
Religion	1	1	1	1
Intertextuality and Actors				
Actors (countries, people, organisations) mentioned (not as sources)				
Afghanistan (Afghan people, organisations etc.)	6	6	2	2
India (Indian people, organisations etc.)	7	8	2	2
International Community	1	1	3	4
Pakistan (Pakistani people, organisations etc.)	3	3	8	9
Religious Leaders	1	1	1	1
Taliban (as an organisation, people etc.)	7	7	1	1
The United States (American people, organisations etc.)	3	4	4	5
Reference to texts (reports, other news outlets etc.)	0	0	0	0
Sources referred to or quoted				
Anonymous source	0	0	0	0
Authoritative figures (non-gov)	1	1	0	0
Direct quotes	2	2	2	2
Experts	0	0	0	0
Officials (government, military etc.)	9	9	6	6
Ordinary people	0	0	0	0
Taliban	1	1	0	0
Language and Rhetoric (Linguistic Devices)				
Figurative language				
Metaphors	1	1	0	0
Simile	0	0	0	0

Code system	The TOI		Dawn	
	Files	References	Files	References
Symbols	0	0	0	0
Negation	2	2	2	2
Persuasive Techniques				
Comparisons and analogies	0	0	0	0
Exaggeration	2	3	3	3
Fear appeal	2	2	1	1
Inclusive language	0	0	0	0
Numbers, statistics and data	2	2	0	0
Rhetorical question	0	0	0	0
Power Relations				
Criticism of Indian establishment's approach	1	1	0	0
Criticism of Pakistani establishment's approach	0	0	0	0
Criticism of US actions	2	2	0	0
Democratic countries as guiding principles	1	1	0	0
Taliban as actors	3	3	0	0
US as deciding actor	2	2	3	3
Tone and Style				
Synonyms (descriptions of India)	0	0	0	0
Synonyms (descriptions) of Pakistan	0	0	0	0
Synonyms (descriptions) of situation in Afghanistan	6	6	5	5
Synonyms (descriptions) Taliban	1	1	1	1

**Table B2 - Codebook Interviews**

Code system	Files	References
Research Question 1		
Indian Media - Features of coverage of the Taliban takeover		
Coverage was not unique	1	2
Criticism of Indian establishment's approach	1	3
Following official lines	3	4
Narrative	1	2
No (late) Indian on-the-ground coverage	2	4
Possibility of having good relations with Taliban	1	1
Struggle Reporting Indian outreach to Taliban	2	3
Win for Pakistan or loss for India	5	9
Pakistani Media - Features of coverage of the Taliban takeover		
(Afghan Refugees)	1	1
Criticism of Pakistani establishment's approach	2	4
Different Views portrayed of Taliban	1	5
Following narrative portrayed by policymakers	4	8



Code system	Files	References
Prediction before Taliban takeover	3	6
Sense of celebration (immediately after)	3	4
Research Question 3		
Media		
Media environment in India		
Difference between English, Hindi, vernacular	5	12
Discourses and narratives in Indian media		
Existent viewpoints and discourses	6	11
Narrative concerning Afghanistan	4	5
Narrative concerning Pakistan	5	6
Indian English-language press		
Importance nationally and globally	4	8
TOI	2	3
Pakistani voices in the Indian English-language press	2	3
Views portrayed in English-language press	3	4
Indian journalists' experiences and personal views		
Target audience and reasons for reporting	3	7
Understanding of their journalistic profession	1	2
Indian media - sources		
(International) news agencies	2	3
Availability of information (& difficulties)	2	4
Government or military sources	3	8
Personal networks of Indian journalists	3	5
Indian media as subject to restrictions (and censorship)		
Consequences of critical coverage	3	5
Development	6	11
Financial constraints	2	11
Government methods to pressure dissenters	3	7
Government Tolerance of Dissenting Coverage	1	6
No Indian journalistic presence in Pakistan or Afghanistan	4	7
Resistance against censorship		
Alternative media	5	5
Indian media trained in dealing with censorship	2	3
Self-censorship	3	4
Role of Indian print media	5	6
Media environment in Pakistan		
Comparing different language media		
Difference between English, Urdu, vernacular	3	5
Editorial focus	4	9
English media stance towards Afghanistan policy	1	1
Less censorship in English	1	2

Code system	Files	References
Revenue (number of printed copies)	2	5
Sensationalism	4	4
Pakistani Newspaper - Dawn	5	8
Censorship of Dawn	2	4
Dawn's editorial stance and importance	5	9
Problems with Dawn	1	6
Role of the English-language press		
Continuing importance	2	2
Declining importance nationally	3	4
International role	2	4
Similarities between English, Urdu, vernacular	6	8
Pakistani journalists experiences and personal views		
Experiences with threats and censorship	5	11
Independent projects	4	9
Not enough press and security training	1	4
Target audience and reasons for reporting	3	5
Tough, unfair or unsafe work environment	1	9
Understanding of journalistic profession	5	14
Pakistani Media - restrictions, censorship and threats		
Development	5	17
Non-establishment threats and backlash	3	9
Restrictions by the establishment (gov. & military)	1	1
Banning publications & deleting of articles	3	16
Indirect threatening (keeping watch)	2	2
Influence and censorship	6	20
Non-accessibility of critical areas	3	4
Physical coercion	4	12
Taboo topics	0	0
CPEC	1	4
Critical of Jihadist separatists in Kashmir	1	1
Harassment and sexual exploitation	1	1
Negative of allies	2	2
Negative of military	2	2
Negative of religion	1	1
Security agencies	2	4
War in Afghanistan	1	1
Self-censorship	3	10
Trained in working in tightly controlled environment	2	2
Pakistani media - sources		
Government or military sources	4	12
Personal networks and archives	5	10
Press agencies	2	2

Code system	Files	References
Pakistani media narrative concerning India	4	12
Role of print media		
Continuing importance - not retractable	2	3
Declining importance (online)	4	7
Politics		
Indo-Pak conflict - security competition		
Basic setting	6	11
Extension into Afghanistan	3	4
India's interests and actions in Afghanistan	11	27
Modi government	3	3
Pakistan's interests and actions in Afghanistan	7	13
Pak-Afghan (Taliban) Alliance	5	7
Pakistan - needs to think about its own people	3	4
Pakistan's location advantage concerning Afghanistan	4	5
Shared ethnic identity	2	2
India's dominance	2	5
Kashmir crisis	7	25
Indian standpoint	3	5
Pakistani standpoint	3	5
Pakistan - self-occupied	6	9
Pakistan's insecurity	3	6
Possibility of Indo-Pak conflict transformation	3	4
Economic Reasons	2	4
Impossible	2	3
National security policies		
India	5	16
India-China - Dispute with China	7	15
Problem of China-Pak Alliance	1	4
India-US relations	4	6
Pakistan Focused	8	15
Pakistan as the enemy	3	3
Public discourse	1	3
Turbulent neighbourhood	3	3
Pakistan	7	17
Influence of domestic politics	1	3
Influence on domestic politics	2	3
Focused on dealing with India	2	5
Pakistan-US relations	3	4
The Taliban takeover 2021		
Celebration of anti-colonial force	2	2
China's Influence in Afghanistan	2	3

<b>Code system</b>	<b>Files</b>	<b>References</b>
Collapse of Afghan government	2	4
Engagement with Taliban	2	2
India	5	16
Pakistan	4	9
Declining influence	3	6
Haqqani network	2	2
Implications		
Afghan Society	3	8
For Pakistan	12	31
Pakistan - border issues - Durand line	7	8
Pakistan - refugee problem	2	5
Pakistan - TTP	8	14
For the Kashmir Crisis	4	13
India - Pakistani-sponsored terrorism	4	9
Pakistan's relationship with US	5	9
Security in the region	6	7
Trust in US as partner	3	13
Narrative (policymakers)		
Narrative in India	4	5
Narrative in Pakistan	8	13
Pakistan as the winner	6	9
Role of the ISI	5	6
The Taliban as a movement and their interests	5	15
Triangular relationship	3	4

## **Appendix C – Exemplary Interview Guides**

### **Exemplary Interview Guide Journalists**

#### **Media Landscape and Work as a Journalist in Pakistan**

- How would you describe the media landscape in Pakistan?
- Can you say something about the media landscape in India as well?
- Can you describe the media strategy of the government of Pakistan?
  - national security policy issues
  - the India-Pakistan conflict
  - concerning Afghanistan
- Would you say there is a big difference in reporting between English-language press and vernacular press in Pakistan?
- How would you describe the role of the English-language press concerning policy issues (national security policy)?
- What is your take on media censorship in Pakistan?
  - Has it affected your work?
- What is your experience writing for English-language news outlets in Pakistan?
  - Who is your main target audience? Why?
  - Do you try to challenge the discourses created by policymakers in your journalistic work?
  - Do you have experience with editorial choices concerning articles on these policy issues?
  - Where do you usually get your information from? (Sources?)

#### **Reporting on Policy Issues (National Security Policy/India-Pakistan Conflict)**

##### **...in General**

- How would you describe the media discourse around national security policy issues concerning the India-Pakistan conflict in general and its extension into Afghanistan in particular?
- How would you describe the discourse which is constructed by the media around national security policy issues?
  - Do you see differences in the discourse created by policymakers and media creators?
- Do you pay attention to other news outlets' reports (in India)? (On similar topics to the ones you report on)?
- What stories do you think are missing in the Pakistani English language press? Why do you think they are missing?

##### **...concerning the Taliban Takeover**

- How did you experience the events of August 2021 in Afghanistan?
- Did you notice differences in the reporting on the events between Indian and Pakistani print media?

- How was the Taliban takeover portrayed by the media in general? (India/Pakistan, English-language/vernacular)?
  - Would you say that the media discourses are extensions/reflections of the discourses created by policymakers around the India-Pakistan conflict and its extension into Afghanistan?
- What specifically did you write about concerning Afghanistan before August 2021?
  - Did you write about India’s role in Afghanistan?
  - What kind of narrative/perspective do you take when reporting on issues concerning the Taliban and the triangular relationship between India, Pakistan and Afghanistan?

## **Exemplary Interview Guide Experts**

### **Policy Issues - National Security Policy & India-Pakistan Conflict in Afghanistan**

- What have you focused on in your work on the India-Pakistan Conflict and the triangular relationship with Afghanistan?
- How would you describe the security competition and rivalry between India and Pakistan?
  - How does this influence their Afghanistan policy?
  - What role does Kashmir play in the context of a security competition between India and Pakistan?
  - How important is the security competition and enduring rivalry between India and Pakistan for India at the moment? How would you assess Pakistan’s current take on the India-Pakistan conflict, and enduring rivalry also in connection to Kashmir?
- What discourse is created by Indian and Pakistani politicians concerning the national security policy? What narrative concerning the Taliban takeover? **Taliban takeover in Afghanistan**
- How did you experience the events of August 2021 in Afghanistan?
- Officially, Pakistan has said that it supported a political solution, but there is no sign that it actively tried to get the Taliban to make a deal with the Ghani government. - Is it fair to assume that the ISI helped the Taliban plan the fast takeover in 2021?
- Is Pakistan the real winner of the Taliban victory in Afghanistan?
- How would you describe India’s interest vis-a-vis the Taliban?
- Pakistan’s interest vis-a-vis the Taliban?

### **Order in South Asia**

- What effect does the Taliban takeover and India’s and Pakistan’s involvement in the country have for the order of the region (in South Asia)?
- What implications does the Taliban takeover have for India/Pakistan?
- What role does power play in the situation/developments?

### **Media Reporting on these Policy Issues**

- Do you follow news media reporting on these issues in India and Pakistan?
- How would you say these issues are narrated? What discourse is created?

