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Media Performance and Conflict Management: A Case Study of Indo-Pak Relations after the Mumbai Attacks

South Asia is a conflict zone where media have been very influential in generating mutually hostile perceptions. Many analysts of Indo-Pakistan relations believe that jingoistic attitude of media in the sub-continent obstructs all peace moves in the region. Media have been responsible to increase the level of tension between both countries and resultantly incapacitate the governments' abilities to take concrete steps towards peace. This article is a case study of the performance of media in the realm of conflict management in South Asia. The study focuses on the coverage of escalating tension between India and Pakistan after Mumbai attacks in 2008 by major media companies of both countries. Four leading English newspapers, two each from India and Pakistan, have been selected and their editorial treatment of Mumbai attacks during November 2008 to November 2009 is analyzed.

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■ Introduction

I n today's world, the media is no longer content to simply report on international events as they take place, but seek to influence and direct events to a certain extent. The responsibility of media to report events has amplified manifold in conflict zones as they play a tremendous role in forming public opinion about different people, cultures, and states (Shaheen, 1985). Media possess the potential to initiate a dialogue that could help people understand the nature of conflict and ultimately lead them toward its management or resolution. It could also breed hatred by unquestioningly following the hawkish external policies of a state, enhancing tensions among conflicting states (Zelizer & Allan, 2003). South Asia is a conflict zone where media have been very influential in generating mutually hostile perceptions. Many analysts of Indo-Pakistan relations believe that the jingoistic attitudes of media in the sub-continent obstruct all peace moves in the region (Jan, 2005). Media have been responsible for increasing the level of tension between both countries and resultantly incapacitate the governments' abilities to take concrete steps towards peace. This article is a case study of the performance of media in the realm of conflict management in South Asia. The study focuses on the coverage of the escalating tension between India and Pakistan by major media companies of both countries after the Mumbai attacks in November 2008.

Media's role in the formulation of foreign policy and conflict resolution has generated a heated debate since early sixties (Cohen, 1963) and it is now considered to be an actor of tremendous importance in international relations. The media have been seriously criticized in current academic literature for inflaming conflicts. Some extremist, nationalist and sectarian leaders have used the media to promulgate inflammatory propaganda (Jan, 2005). Uses in despotic regimes, such as hate radio in Rwanda and the former

Yugoslavia, offer shocking examples of direct and powerful provocation to mass violence. However, media in democratic societies have attracted censure for promoting violence and fanning the flames of conflict (Zelizer & Allan, 2003). On the other hand, a few scholars believe that the media's role in the new generation of regional conflict and sub-state violence is ambiguous, unclear, and often misconstrued (Kasi, 2009; McQuail, 2005). In these activities, both journalists and policymakers seem to presuppose that media coverage has or could have an undefined yet pivotal role in helping conflict management and building a pro-peace public opinion. For example, it is thought that better coverage and clearer information should contribute to less misunderstanding and less escalation in a conflict. Indeed, a role for the media in conflict prevention is consistently assumed, but without a clear understanding of what that role has been or could be. Generally, the analysis of media's role is skewed by the emotion of anecdotal comments as opposed to rigorous analysis and the media are blamed both for what does and does not happen.

The post-Mumbai attack scenario has been exceptionally significant for India and Pakistan. It derailed the peace process and composite dialogue between two countries, and South Asia could have witnessed a deadly war as a consequence of the terrorist attack. Therefore, it is significant, both academically and practically, to analyze the role played by the Indian and Pakistani elite English press in such hostile and politically convoluted circumstances. For the purposes of this study, four leading English newspapers, two each from India and Pakistan, have been selected and their editorial treatment of Mumbai attacks during November 2008 to November 2009 is analyzed. Through the lens of social responsibility and the concept of framing, the current study examines the performance of media and analyzes if the elite newspapers played a responsible role by objectively commenting on the turn of events. This article also discusses how the South Asian community could foster a mass media that is devoted to combating inter-state prejudice

and ethnocentrism, as well as communicating the values and skills of conflict resolution.

■ The Concepts of Objectivity and Independence in Assessing Media Performance

Objectivity is an important concept on which to base assessments of performance of media in societies believing in liberal values and political pluralism. Governments in India and Pakistan claim to support freedom of media and democratic values encouraging media to thrive in a free market of ideas. However, journalists in both countries complain about threats hurled at media organizations and media professionals (Norris, 2010). Subsequently, it becomes very difficult for a journalist to objectively report events as they unfold. Media scholars also argue that objectivity is a desirable norm; yet, practice of objectivity in journalism is an impracticable idea in certain circumstances (Entman, 1989; McQuail, 1992; Tuchman, 1978) A few researchers argue that the notion of objectivity is abandoned by media in times of war, crises, tragedy and threat to national interest (McQuail, 2005; Zelizer & Allan, 2003). Media organizations may launch vicious propaganda campaigns against real or perceived enemy nations caring little for the members of their own community who may originally belong to the targeted enemy.

The case of objectivity while reporting conflicts from war zones is interesting as well as complicated. Few media professionals want to discuss partiality while covering conflicts and the resulting distortions. To do so would

undermine the perceived integrity and objectivity of correspondents who report from battle zones. It would also challenge the motives of the organizations that print and broadcast their material in the name of objectivity and balance. In fact, it is often claimed that truth is the first casualty in conflict situations. Despite inherent flaws in the concept, it is an important measure of trustworthiness, reliability, and accuracy that could help assess performance of media by its consumers (Bogart, 1989; Comstock, 1988; Norris, 2010). This approach to reporting and interpretation may also contribute to building a common base of evidence and information in different countries and among groups within countries, and in providing lines of reasoning, argument, and dialogue in analysis and interpretation distinct from that of governments. These characteristics may represent first steps toward creating transnational dialogue and conflict management processes. Nevertheless, there is an incessant pressure on media practitioners to adhere to the principles of impartiality and objectivity contrary to the ground realities where they have to face internal as well as external pressures of different kinds.

The internal pressures stem from a journalists' education, religion, gender, social class, political ideology and a whole bevy of personal biases. While the external pressures are chiefly generated by political parties, pressure groups, and advertisers. Some of the media organizations are aligned with certain political parties or share ideological lineage with likeminded groups (McQuail, 2005). However, the logic behind bias and propaganda in the news media is simple and it is same the world over. Each society and culture has a unique worldview that helps to cultivate realities and a sense of otherness. News media generally reflect the worldview of

the dominant culture where they operate and their political and economic interests are intertwined with that culture. But the external realities are often much more complicated than what appears to be true in any culture. The issue of bias in conflict-prone societies is especially problematic where a clash among cultures results in strife in the society. Thus, issues of objective representation in media have attracted the attention of media scholars since 1950s and the concept has grown more important in the aftermath of 9/11 terrorist attacks and ensuing war on terror (Zelizer & Allan, 2003).

War and conflict situations severely undermine ability of the media to report events objectively. News media has responsibility to uphold national interests of the state, which are determined by the government. Most of the information also flows from official sources in complicated war situations where journalists have a limited capacity to operate. It is also expected that media will exhibit some national bias and support initiatives of their government in tense circumstances (Hallin, 1986). Various studies have indicated that media performs in accordance with the expectations of the people and follows the official policy in most conflict situations (Glasgow Media Group, 1985; Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Robinson et al., 2009; Zelizer & Allan, 2003). However, when terrorists strike, journalists' objective role is further constrained because an overdose of coverage may lead to helping terrorists achieve their goals (Alali & Eke, 1991). The notion of objectivity turns out to be a contested term during challenges posed by terrorists.

However, media can present an objective analysis of events in their commentaries by indicating flaws in security apparatus and assisting in overcoming traumatic outcomes of incidents of terror. It is also difficult for the press to be

objective in editorials since an editorial represents the policy or voice of a media organization, and editorials provide interpretation and analysis, as well as prescriptions of what could be or should be the next steps for governments and foreign policy. The focus on objectivity and independence in editorials does not imply that no preferences or views are expressed, rather that the evidence is carefully and critically examined, and that analysis and arguments presented are developed from a stance distinct from that of the government. In some senses, when applied to the analysis of editorials, we may also think about independence in stance and perspectives in interpretation as building upon objectivity in reporting. The journalists, nonetheless, could play a role through their in-depth analysis of the causes of such incidents. They could also avoid being a part of the government propaganda machinery and comment fairly on an event by discussing the problem and offering solutions. The Mumbai attacks sent shock waves in all Indian communities and media being nonstop observers were directly affected. To what extent media was able to comment on the incident in a responsible fashion in India and Pakistan would be a valid parameter to measure performance of media in conflicts. Therefore, the concepts of objectivity and independence help us analyze and assess media performance during and after the conflict in Mumbai.

■ Research Questions and Methodology

The nature of objective and balanced reporting of conflict has emerged as a critical question for media scholars. Although editorials reflect policy of a newspaper towards an issue and they are a commentary on significant sociopolitical

affairs, yet it is assumed that media would strike a balance in its observations and opinions by presenting both sides of an event (McQuail, 1992, 2005; Merrill & Dennis, 1996, 2005). Since this article is an in-depth analysis of media performance in conflict/crises situations, the following research questions have been raised to evaluate response of the media to terrorist attacks in Mumbai:

1. How did the selected newspapers of Pakistan (*Dawn* and *The News*) comment on Mumbai terrorist attacks during first four months of the incident (27 November, 2008 and 31 March, 2009)?
2. How did the Indian elite newspapers (*The Hindu* and *Times of India*) comment on the terrorism episode in Mumbai between 27 November, 2008 and 31 March, 2009?
3. What were the similarities and differences in the editorial coverage of the crisis by the elite press of India and Pakistan?
4. Did the selected newspapers follow the official policy of their respective governments in their editorial treatment of terrorist attacks in Mumbai?
5. What was the performance (partisan/elite, oppositional/ negative, objective/ independent) of the selected newspapers while editorially commenting on the crisis in Mumbai?
6. What was the role of the elite press of India and Pakistan in conflict management and prevention during the crisis that developed as a result of Mumbai attacks?

In order to find answers to the questions in the preceding lines, this article has applied qualitative content analysis as methodology to examine as to how the elite press of Pakistan and India reacted to the terrorist attacks in Mumbai in November 2008. A number of discrete steps, as required by this technique (content analysis), have been adopted in this article. This article utilizes an interpretive approach

seeking to bring forth the meaning of both manifest and latent contents found within a particular text (editorial) and rooted within a particular culture, time, and context. While quantitative content analysis builds coding that can be translated into numbers and analyzed using statistical techniques, qualitative content analysis focuses on human language expressing everyday experiences as they are related to a specific context (Jensen, 1991).

In order to keep the scope of the study manageable, four elite newspapers were chosen to examine the nature of relationships between newspaper organizations' commentary and editorial treatment of terrorist activity in Mumbai and the government policies in their base countries (Pakistan and India). For the purpose of this article, the universe or population of study includes the editorials of two Pakistani elite newspapers (*Dawn* and *The News*) and two Indian elite newspapers (*The Times of India* and *The Hindu*) during November 27, 2008 and March 31, 2009. All editorials that appeared in the selected elite newspapers of Pakistan and India during the period of study and had a relationship with Mumbai attacks and foreign policy initiatives have been considered as the units of analysis. Key categories of the contents have been identified, and within those categories, treatment of the issues by the elite press of India and Pakistan has been analyzed. In order to reduce and avoid possible author bias inherent in the qualitative approach, the researchers reread the material several times to judge that the inferences are consonant with all of the relevant portions and characteristics of the original communication material.

Direction of the editorial content was carefully determined. An editorial was considered to be "positive" if it supported the foreign policy position of the state where the

newspaper organization is stationed. It was categorized as "oppositional" or "negative" if it opposed the declared foreign policy standpoint of the governments of India and Pakistan. A "neutral" editorial was the one that objectively reported the crisis in Mumbai by presenting perspective of both sides in a fair manner and avoided blaming both governments for escalation of the conflict. An editorial was considered "objective/independent" if it developed an argument or recommendation drawing critically from sources and based upon a line of evidence or reasoning distinct from that of governments.

The following key categories have been developed to assist in the sorting of the types coverage and interpretation of the attacks in Mumbai:

1. *State as sponsor of terrorism.* Editorials in this category castigated sponsorship of terrorist outfits by India and Pakistan in each other's countries;
2. *Inefficiency of the law enforcement/intelligence agencies.* These editorials held concerned agencies responsible for a failure to anticipate terrorist movement and subsequent attacks;
3. *Rhetoric of war.* These editorials commented on hawkish statements by the politicians in both countries that escalated tension in the region; and
4. *Cooperation on curbing terrorism in South Asia.* These editorials urged the need to enhance regional cooperation to root out the menace of terrorism from the region and suggested mechanics through which this objective could be achieved.

Editorials falling in the above-mentioned categories were analyzed to discover the performance of the elite media in conflict situations in South Asia. The analysis also helped to identify relationships between press and governments in

India and Pakistan, as many scholars have concluded that there is a positive or advocative relationship between media and framers of the foreign policy of a country (Cohen, 1963; Herman & Chomsky, 1988; McQuail, 2005; Robinson et al., 2009; Zelizer & Allan, 2003).

■ Mumbai Attacks: Responses of the Pakistani Elite Press

The editorial coverage of Mumbai attacks in elite press of Pakistan reflected the concerns of the Pakistani media organizations on escalating tension in the region. *The News* and *Dawn* paid fulsome attention to the issue and regularly commented on the situation unfolding in South Asia through their editorials. The coverage supported the official position of the Pakistan's government, which condemned the attacks and denied its involvement in terrorism incident; however, there were a few editorials that censured government's failure to handle an intricate conflict situation in the region. *The News* on January 3, 2009 editorially commented on Pakistan's denial that it had functional terrorist outfits on its soil by saying that "the remarks by the Foreign Office spokesman on Jan 1 that Pakistan has no terrorist infrastructure on its soil is going to be taken with a big pinch of salt by even many Pakistanis" (p. 7). The *Dawn* also advised the government not to engage in blame game and to work hard to uproot terrorism from Pakistan by taking stern action against those involved in such activities. However, the Pakistani press also advised the Indian government not to associate Pakistan with acts of terrorism by individuals and terrorists groups concentrated in the border area between Pakistan and Afghanistan. *The News*, for instance, wrote on February 11, 2009 that "if India wants

Pakistan to conduct an investigation, it cannot expect it to do so blindfold[ed] and with one hand tied behind its back. The attackers were Pakistani [in] origin but most unlikely to be acting at the behest of the state" (p. 7).

■ *Editorial of Mumbai Attacks in The News*

The News is owned by the largest media group in Pakistan and enjoys wide circulation and influence among policy makers. The editorial treatment of the Mumbai attacks by *The News* focused mainly on the peace process in the region. The newspaper has a history of involvement in encouraging a sustained peace process in the region. It cautioned that both governments should exercise restraint by avoiding hostile overtures and cooperate with one another in overcoming the menace of terrorism. The newspaper suggested that India should avoid troop deployment on the Pakistani border and that Pakistan should vigorously investigate Pakistani nationals' links to the terrorism in Mumbai. However, the newspaper adopted this position after Pakistan's foreign minister proposed a similar agenda in early January 2009. *The News* also held an intelligence failure to be partially responsible for the attack. On January 7, 2009, it argued that "even if the militants had links in Pakistan, they could not have staged their siege without substantial help from local persons" (p. 7). The newspaper advised the Indian media to focus on the role of Indian intelligence and law enforcement agencies' poor performance during the crisis.

The News, sometimes, harshly criticized statements emanating from New Delhi that used war rhetoric. Responding to the threatening statements from Indian ministers, the newspaper said that instead of talking in terms of war "India must accept the possibility of a role in the

Mumbai attacks by groups based on its own soil" (India's new threat, 2009, p. 7). On January 16, 2009, it argued that "New Delhi has stubbornly refused to waver from the line taken immediately after the attacks on Mumbai" (p. 7). It also criticized the Indian Army Chief's statement that "all options were open," by saying that war was not a solution and supported Pakistan's deployment of forces on the border in response to possible Indian hostilities. However, the newspaper robustly supported cooperation and peace initiatives in the region by urging the international community especially, US, UK, China and Saudi Arabia, to play an active role. On February 14, 2009, *The News* opined that "the fact is that only cooperation that cuts across frontiers and boundaries can defeat terrorism" (p. 7). However, the tone of the newspaper began to soften up after India agreed to share information related to the Mumbai attacks with Pakistan and Indian officials toned down their belligerent posture toward Pakistan. The terrorist attack on the Sri Lankan cricket team and Police Academy in Lahore in March 2009 also advanced a realization that cooperation was the key to overcome terrorism and the newspaper vehemently supported collaborative measures. When Ajmal Kasab – the lone gunman to survive the Mumbai attacks – was sentenced to death by the court in early May, 2010, the newspaper argued that mutual hostility should end and media courts and governments should act responsibly to promote peace in the region. Editorial coverage of the Mumbai attacks in *The News* indicates that the newspaper closely followed the foreign policy of Pakistan during the period. It, however, maintained its independence and objectivity on occasions by advising the Pakistani government to acknowledge presence of terrorist

organizations on its soil and take effective measures to eradicate them.

▪ *Editorial coverage of Mumbai attacks in the Dawn*

Dawn is the oldest English language newspaper in Pakistan and is considered among one of the most influential newspapers in the country. *Dawn,* having its headquarter in Karachi, a city not far from Mumbai, was deeply concerned with the Mumbai attacks. On November 28, 2008, it commented on the editorial page that, "terrorist attacks in Mumbai should be condemned in the strongest terms" (p. 6). It considered terrorism in Mumbai a despicable act that demanded strict action against terrorists by the governments of both countries. It also cautioned India and Pakistan not to fall a prey to the terrorist trap and avoid mutually hostile attitudes. The newspaper was a staunch promoter of détente between the South Asian neighbors and appreciated the cooperative moves taken by the Pakistani government soon after the attacks. On November 29, 2008, it wrote, "Pakistan's willingness to share intelligence with New Delhi on the terrorist attacks on two hotels in Mumbai is a major development in the unfolding drama in South Asia" (p. 6).

Most of the editorials written by the newspaper during four months after the attacks in late November 2008 were positively associated with the foreign policy of Pakistan. However, it also played an independent role by criticizing Pakistani government that had failed to uproot terrorist infrastructure from Pakistani society. *Dawn* also cautioned the Indian government to act prudently and criticized the Indian media for fanning the flames of a conflict. It rejected the claim of the Indian government and media that Pakistan's government was involved in the attacks and

advised them not to draw hasty conclusions. The newspaper heavily criticized the American president for what it considered a "go-ahead for India" by "encouraging belligerence instead of working for peace" (December 3, 2008, p. 6). It was also concerned about the escalation of tension and the increasing rhetoric of war coming from the Indian circle. Soon after the attacks, the newspaper urged on both governments to cooperate and to avoid using confrontational language. It also held the Indian internal situation responsible for the attacks and criticized the role of Indian administration by saying on November 29, 2008 that "India has a massive problem of domestic terrorism which it appears ill-equipped to respond to" (p. 6). Regarding the involvement of the Pakistani state in the Mumbai attacks, the *Dawn* denied charges by Indian and American officials that the terrorists had links with the Pakistani establishment. In some of the editorials, the newspaper highlighted the need to resolve political issues, especially that of Kashmir, to reduce tensions the region has witnessed for the last six decades.

Dawn came down heavily on the statements by Hindu extremist leaders that India should engage in a nuclear war with Pakistan. The newspaper reprimanded both the rhetoric of war and the aerial incursions by the Indian Air Force and urged recognition of the need to join hands in dealing with terrorism. It appreciated the Indian Chief Justice's comments that it was necessary to combat terrorism in ways that did not destabilize the region. On December 16, 2008 *Dawn* wrote: "Another Indo-Pakistan war will destabilize South Asia. Which is exactly what the terrorists opposed to the now suspended normalization process want" (p. 6). It argued that the international community including China, America, UK,

Iran, France and EU should be involved in investigating the issue and initiating a peace process between India and Pakistan. As the tension began de-escalating, the newspaper vigorously advocated sanity, peace, and dialogue in the region. On January 24, 2009, *Dawn* commented on the emerging plausible situation by saying that "the immediate aim should be to revive the dialogue process by cultivating a congenial climate for talks and winning each other's confidence" (p. 6). On February 14, 2009, the newspaper wrote, "the Mumbai attacks demonstrated the extreme urgency of developing the fledging joint anti-terrorism mechanism which emerged from one of the baskets of the composite dialogue" (p. 6). After attacks on the Sri Lankan cricket team in Lahore in March 2009, the newspaper emphasized the need to build consensus on regional cooperation in order to eradicate terrorism networks. A careful analysis indicates that *Dawn's* editorial policy was in line with Pakistan's foreign policy and it overwhelmingly supported the official standpoint during the conflict phase with India.

The Pakistani elite press closely followed elite-driven/ advocative model and offered support to the official version while commenting on Mumbai attacks. Many scholars (Altschull, 1995; McQuail, 2005; Robinson et al., 2009; Zelizer and Allan, 2003) contend that almost everywhere media supports foreign policy of the state in times of war and conflict. However, Pakistani media criticized government for its failure to effectively deal with terrorist outfits, which reflects that media was also keen to maintain its independence.

■ The Indian Elite Press and the Mumbai Attacks

The Indian elite press was deeply concerned about the Mumbai terrorist strikes, as Mumbai being financial and cultural hub of India, had traditionally enjoyed a special place in South Asia. As McQuail (2005) argues, media has a bias in favor of important urban centers and news related to those cities are offered special treatment. The Indian elite press did confirm this concept and gave plentiful coverage to the dramatic events unfolding in one of the most important cities in India. The elite press sympathized with those who lost their lives and urged on the need to build a security capacity to deal with crisis situations. Unlike the vernacular press, the elite English press was extremely cautious in blaming Pakistan or other external forces, such as the Taliban, who could have supported the attacks. However, the press closely followed official policy and its editorial content varied depending upon positions taken by New Delhi during the early phase of the conflict. The newspapers also criticized jingoistic statements by Indian official circles exhibiting their objective and independent character and autonomy. *The Hindu*, for example, commented on the statement of the Indian Sports Minister of December 12, 2008: "One need not agree with Sports Minister M. S. Gill's observations blaming the whole of Pakistan for the mindless acts of a few fanatics" (¶ 1). *The Hindu* and *The Times of India* have been selected for this study as they exercise extensive influence and are widely popular among policy-making circles and intelligentsia (Walia, 2006). The editorial treatment of the elite press in India confirmed the elite-driven model (Robinson et al., 2009) of media performance during conflict situations.

■ *Editorial Coverage of Mumbai Attacks by the Hindu*

The newspaper expressed a deep sense of grief and shock over the attacks and adopted a cautious editorial policy. Soon after the attacks, it appreciated Pakistani government's decision to cooperate with India; but with the escalation of tension, it hardened its tone and followed the agenda of the Indian foreign office more closely. However, the newspaper did not engage in blame game and war-mongering propaganda against Pakistan. It also stressed the need to strengthen security measures and the need for the enactment of appropriate legislation to control terrorism incidents through the establishment of National Investigation Agency. It argued on November 28, 2008 that the Indian government should focus on "strengthening security through surveillance of public places, screening of entry, and more policemen on the ground" (¶ 4). It criticized the Indian state apparatus for its failure to bolster intelligence machinery and lack of sophisticated equipment to deal with disastrous situations. With the Pakistani government's initial denial that terrorists had any links with Pakistan, the newspaper commented that the complexity of this situation was a challenge for India's diplomatic and political capability but the sane answer was not jingoism or threats of military intervention (Denial or worse, ¶ 2). It also argued that the civilian government in Pakistan was not independent enough to cooperate with India and advised the Indian government to prudently act by understanding the Pakistani situation. It offered full support to the Indian parliament's resolution that culprits of theMumbai attacks would be brought to justice and termed it as a strong message to the outside elements.

The Hindu urged the international community to pressurize Pakistan to take serious action against terrorist outfits such as *Lashkar-e-Taiba*, which was directly linked to the attack. It commented on December 19, 2008 that "given Pakistan's record of consistent reliance on terrorist organizations to execute its strategic designs, few would be optimistic that the demise of outfits such as *Lashkar-e-Taiba* is imminent (Breaking, ¶ 1). It supported the Indian government's firm stand that Pakistan was not dealing with the terrorists genuinely and called for the need to enhance cooperation. The proposal for precision air strikes in Pakistan to eradicate terrorist infrastructure was also discussed; but the newspaper's main focus was détente between two countries. It stated on January 6, 2009 that "if India and Pakistan are to walk away from the current crisis with a joint victory against the scourge of terrorism, especially of the cross-border kind, they will do well to heed the voices of reason and sanity being raised on both sides of the border" (¶ 1). The newspaper denounced Hindu extremists using war rhetoric as *Hindu Taliban*. The chief concern of the newspaper appeared to be the blocking of cross-border terrorism and the resumption of peace talks and cultural activities and exchanges between the two countries. It appreciated the Pakistani government when it admitted that the culprits were Pakistani citizens who planned attacks on Pakistani soil. The newspaper also expressed concern when terrorists sprayed bullets at the Sri Lankan cricket team in Lahore in early March 2009. The overall coverage of the newspaper was advocative of Indian foreign policy but opposed to the rhetoric of war applied by extremist elements in both countries.

■ *Editorial Coverage of Mumbai Attacks by The Times of India*

The Times of India used strong language while expressing its opinions on the Mumbai attacks. The editorial policy of the newspaper spoke volumes of its sentimental attachment with Mumbai the city that was under attack by the terrorists. On November 28, 2008, the newspaper editorially commented that "the scale, intensity and level of orchestration of terror attacks in Mumbai put one thing beyond doubt: India is effectively at war and it has deadly enemies in its midst" (¶ 1). The editorial commentary on attacks applied war rhetoric right from the beginning without holding any particular country or group responsible for it. Interestingly, the newspaper claimed that terrorism springs out from three countries of the region – Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. According to the *Times of India,* extremist groups were operating unhindered in these countries and they wanted to export their conservative ideology and religious agenda to the world. It wrote on December 1, 2008, "By striking India these terrorists are striking at the free world. It is, therefore, pertinent that powerful global players in the Western world, and China, exert their influence on the administrations in Islamabad and Dhaka" (¶ 3). Following the Indian official policy, it criticized Pakistan for being stubborn and going "on the offensive and whipping up a war hysteria that New Delhi has studiously stayed clear of despite being provoked" (The war, 2008, ¶ 1). It stated in unequivocal terms that perpetrators of Mumbai attacks were Pakistani and that the government of Pakistan was being unreasonable by denying any involvement in the incident.

The Times of India was also concerned about failure of security and intelligence agencies. It criticized relevant counter-terrorism agencies for not being able to guard the sea route and the bureaucratic lethargy that did not anticipate such events and kept relevant agencies underutilized and ill equipped. On November 29, 2008, the newspaper argued that "there is an urgent need for better coordination among various intelligence agencies and with the armed forces. This, however, is possible only if we have a major revamp of our security architecture" (¶ 3). It also advocated for the need to establish an independent agency to deal with crisis situations. Despite using a belligerent linguistic style in the early weeks after the attacks, the newspaper toned down the editorial language and criticized extremist elements fanning the flames of conflict. It warned the politicians to be publically cautious as war hysteria could exert unbearable pressure on the government dealing with a national tragedy. It appreciated token protests by the Indian Muslims on Eid day and tried to dispel the commonly held notion that Muslims sympathize with terrorist outfits. In this way, the newspaper played a role in averting communal strife in India. *The Times of India* also expressed satisfaction over international community's concern on terrorism in Mumbai and argued that Islamabad should be forced to initiate a serious action against trainers, planners, and perpetrators of Mumbai attacks.

However, as the policy of New Delhi softened towards Pakistan, the newspaper began to vigorously support the need for a dialogue. It welcomed Pakistan's belated admission that terrorists had links with organizations operative in Pakistan. It underscored the importance of regional cooperation to overcome transnational terrorism.

The newspaper also joined hands with *The News* of Pakistan to initiate a program called *Aman ki Aasha* (desire for peace) as both groups have organized several activities to build confidence among people on both sides of the border. Thus, *The Times of India* practically came forward to promote peace and harmony in the region. It expressed its solidarity with the people of Pakistan when Lahore was under the grip of terrorist attacks in March 2009. Although, the newspaper followed the elite-driven model of media performance during first four months of editorial coverage of Mumbai attacks, yet it also maintained its autonomy as the conflict subsided and both governments decided to avoid confrontation.

■ *Summary*

The discussion in the preceding paragraphs could be summarized as following:

1. The Pakistani elite press denounced Mumbai terrorist attacks in unequivocal terms and called for a joint action to bring the culprits to justice. *Dawn* and *The News* were concerned with the fallout of the incident and emphasized the need to exercise restraint. *Dawn* was more critical of Indian officials and media than *The News,* which contributed more editorials about peace initiatives between the two countries.
2. The Indian elite press was deeply concerned with the attacks as Mumbai, being the financial capital of India, also drives the overall Indian economy (and also provides significant advertising revenue to the media and newspaper industries). *The Hindu* and *The Times of India* stressed the need to encourage mutual cooperation between India and its neighbors to uproot terrorism from the region. It also encouraged involvement of international actors to pressurize Pakistan to effectively control terrorist outfits. The newspapers also advised Indian government to strengthen its security and

intelligence capacity to deal with crisis and conflict situations such as Mumbai.

3. *The Time of India's* tone was harsher than its counterpart *The Hindu*. Both newspapers advised the governments in Islamabad and New Delhi to peacefully resolve the issue; but they adhered to a firm stand on terrorism. They argued for the eradication of terrorism from the region by involving international partners. However, the Indian newspapers criticized the Pakistani government for its lack of interest in action against terrorist organizations such as *Lashkar-e-Taiba*. They also criticized extremist elements in India for escalating the tension in the region, which had the potential of translating into a full-scale war between the two countries.

4. The selected newspapers in India and Pakistan closely followed official foreign policy of their respective states. The newspapers also maintained their independence by opposing official circles when they found that statements by officials were resulting in escalation of tension. Thus, elite-driven model proposed by Robinson et al. (2009) was supported despite the fact that sometimes media followed the independent/mixed model as well.

5. The editorials during first four months after Mumbai attacks were positively associated with the foreign policy of the respective governments. No editorial opposed the official position of the state during the crisis. Similarly, neutrality was not maintained and the press adhered to specific positions as per the policies of their organizations and the government.

6. The role of the elite press in managing conflict was remarkable after the Mumbai attacks. The newspapers on both sides of the border advised their governments to act prudently and not to engage in an active conflict. Occasionally, the newspapers in India and Pakistan supported the rhetoric of war, but the language of most of the editorials supported peace initiatives. Thus, the elite press acted responsibly and, despite having followed the official foreign policy agendas, it contributed to keeping the temperature down in South Asia.

■ Conclusion

The editorial treatment of the Mumbai attacks in the elite English press of India and Pakistan bears testimony to the

fact that media in general and press in particular supports foreign policy initiatives of a state in conflict or war situations. Robinson et al., (2009) call it the elite-driven model of media performance, which has also solicited support from works of other communication scholars (Altschull, 1995; Chatterji, 2009; McChesney, 2008; McQuail, 2005; Zelizer & Allan, 2003) who opine that media invariably supports official standpoints in crisis situations. The norms of objectivity and independence are temporarily suspended to safeguard the national interest. The government sources that provide information to the journalists, are unquestioningly accepted and that information is disseminated (Zelizer & Allan, 2003). The coverage of Mumbai attacks followed ebb and flow of complex relations between India and Pakistan. During first week after the attack, the journalists and the governments had no clue about what had happened and the editorial commentary heavily depended on guesswork. However, after the identity of the attackers was established, both the Indian and Pakistani governments hurled accusations at each other and the press earnestly supported their governments, which is a norm around the globe. This study concludes that the elite English press in South Asia was far from being objective during conflict and closely followed elite-driven model proposed by Robinson et al., (2009) and supported by many previous studies.

At the same time, the media performance in this conflict situation in South Asia deviates somewhat from the established models. The press assumes the role of a guide and offers solutions to intricate problems between the nations (Chatterji, 2009; Rasul, 2002). The elite press in South Asia guided governments on both sides of the border on a number of occasions by highlighting flaws in government

policies. Therefore, more work is required to build a fourth model that could establish a new media performance model where media leads the government on international affairs. It is here we might explore how the roles of objectivity in reporting and independence in analysis might be connected to the broader agenda of media performance in conflict management and institution building. This study was also limited in its scope as it only addressed the editorial coverage of elite English press. Researchers in future are required to probe the performance of vernacular and broadcast media to have a comprehensive understanding of the role of media in conflict management in South Asian context.

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