

# **Role of Media in Securitisation of Terrorism: A Case Study of Pakistan**

Atique-ur-Rehman<sup>\*</sup> and Nazir Hussain<sup>\*\*</sup>

## **Abstract**

*This paper explains the media process in reporting political communications in the securitisation dialogue. Securitisation is the process of declaring an issue a security challenge and requires an urgent and existential cause which is too important to be put to a normal political process and merits to be dealt decisively by the top leaders on priority basis. This paper also explores media agenda and framing practices along with their ensuing effects on the process of securitisation of terrorism in Pakistan. Media has always been inclined to highlight the sellable story line, using the propaganda and interests of dominant groups in the society. Defining the relevance of media in securitisation process, this paper takes the Army Public School (APS) attack in Peshawar in 2014 as a watershed event to examine the impact on media and evaluates its contribution to securitising terrorism as a threat to the country. Two influential newspapers, Dawn and Jang were examined through content and discourse analysis. A comparison of media framing and agenda setting, before and after the APS attack, highlights the level of securitisation of terrorism in the country and the role media plays in this process.*

**Keywords:** Securitisation, Terrorism, Mass Media, Agenda Setting, Agenda Framing.

## **Introduction**

Since 9/11, there has been an increased focus on terrorism as a global threat with far-reaching implications for the nation-states. Countering terrorism as a frontline coalition partner was one of the most daunting challenges for Pakistan. During the last two decades, Pakistan has been

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<sup>\*</sup> The author is Head of Media Studies and Communication Department, University of Wah.

<sup>\*\*</sup> The author is Professor, International Relations, Quaid-i-Azam University (QAU), Islamabad.

the worst hit country by terrorism.<sup>1</sup> More than 70,000 citizens including 6,900 security personnel have perished due to terrorism and alongside inflicting the loss of US\$123 billion to the state.<sup>2</sup> Despite the fact that Pakistan was one of the biggest victims of terrorism, a large portion of its society viewed terrorism with suspicion and deemed it to be a politically cultivated issue instead of a real threat.

During the last decade, media has increasingly taken the role of a leading opinion builder in the country and is often termed as the 'fourth estate' which helps further national interests, objectives and goals.<sup>3</sup> During an intense period of threat, people require an accurate update to avoid chaos or uncertainty. Accurate information and astute analysis is vital for determining and influencing public perceptions and its ensuing response during a crisis situation.<sup>4</sup> Media, thus, played a key role in questioning popular perceptions about the origin of terrorism threat and response by the security forces.

The Army Public School (APS) attack on December 16, 2014, was a watershed event with lasting effects on all segments of the society including media. The manner in which Pakistani print and electronic media framed the perceptions on the securitisation of terrorism in Pakistan, before and after the APS attack, was significantly different. It is in this backdrop that this paper endeavours to examine the 'processes' that media underwent with entirely different effects on securitisation of terrorism in Pakistan.

## Theoretical Construct

Securitisation, agenda setting and media framing have been used as analytical tools for this paper. According to Copenhagen School,

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<sup>1</sup> Dominic Dudley, "Terrorists Targets: The Ten Countries which Suffer Most from Terrorism," *Forbes*, November 20, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Finance, Economic Survey 2016-17, Annex-IV, "Impact of War in Afghanistan and Ensuing Terrorism on Pakistan's Economy," [http://www.finance.gov.pk/survey/chapters\\_17/Annex\\_IV\\_War.pdf](http://www.finance.gov.pk/survey/chapters_17/Annex_IV_War.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Muhammad Akram Somroo and Bushra H. Rehman, "Reasons to Remedy: Framing of Terrorists Attacks in Major Urdu and English Newspapers of Pakistan," *South Asian Studies*, 33:2, (July-December 2018).

<sup>4</sup> Syed Ali N. Abdullah, "A Study of Reporting about Terrorism on two Pan-Arab Television News Channel," PhD Thesis, *University of Leicester*, posted on April 11, 2016.

‘Securitisation’ is the successful process of labelling an issue with a security tag and results in the transformation of the approach in dealing with it. Hence, to securitise an issue is to present it as an urgent and existential cause, which is too important to be put to a normal political process, and merits to be dealt decisively by the top leaders on priority.<sup>5</sup> While defining the role of media in Securitisation, “agenda setting is a dynamic process during which any changes in media agenda leads to changes in public awareness of a specific issue. It leads the audience to ‘what’ to think about an issue whereas the framing theory instils the minds of the audience with ‘how’ to think about it.”<sup>6</sup>

According to an expert, “The key determinants in Securitisation process are: security, securitising actor, referent object, specific audience and speech act.”<sup>7</sup> Hence, securitisation is constructed as a concept of survival wherein an issue is presented as an existential threat to the designated object. During the last two decades, terrorism emerged as an existential threat to Pakistan which required measures beyond normal political procedures. The government as securitising actor articulated the issue of terrorism as an existential threat to the survival of the referent object which in this case is the state of Pakistan. Securitisation is only successful when a specific audience is convinced of the threat which, in this case, is the people of Pakistan. Securitising actor — the government — succeeds in using the language of security through ‘speech act.’ This is an important part in the process of securitisation. In this process, media works as a mediator of the speech act. The speech informs of reality and influences the perceptions causing a direct impact on human behaviour and outcome.

Media has its own procedures and practices. According to Agenda Setting theory,<sup>8</sup> media plays an influential part in according the due importance to an issue in the public domain. Agenda Setting is a

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<sup>5</sup> Adiong Nafees, “Securitisation: Understanding the Process in the Field of International Relations,” *SSRN Electronic Journal*, March 2009.

<sup>6</sup> Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organisation of Experience*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1974).

<sup>7</sup> Naseef M. Adiong, “Securitisation; Understanding its Process in the Field of International Relations,” *Seminar Paper*, University of Philippines, Diliman, March 25, 2009.

<sup>8</sup> Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Shaw, “The Agenda Setting Functions of Mass Media,” *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36:2, (Summer 1972):176-187.

dynamic process in which media agenda influences the public agenda. Agenda Setting theory leads the audience on ‘what’ to think about the issue whereas the framing theory directs the audience ‘how’ to think about that issue. Media framing focuses on certain events and then places them within specific meaning. The process of framing is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text. Framing challenges the concept of objectivity in journalism. Among many social institutions, media is the most effective tool to influence public opinion through agenda setting and framing.<sup>9</sup>

## **Terrorism in Pakistan**

Since 9/11, terrorism has often been viewed as a new threat to the global security. Rise of extremism and terrorism for political gains has added new challenges to the security in the country.<sup>10</sup> Pakistan has been one of the worst victims of terrorism during the last two decades.<sup>11</sup> From 2008 to 2014, 16,816 Pakistani were killed in 371 suicide attacks.<sup>12</sup> According to the 2016-17 Economic Survey of the Ministry of Finance, Pakistan suffered a loss of US\$123.13 billion due to terrorism during the past 16 years.<sup>13</sup>

The year 2008 witnessed the worst onslaught of terrorism in Pakistan. During that year, 2267 Pakistani citizens were killed in 2148 terrorist incidents that included 63 suicide attacks.<sup>14</sup> In May 2009, the government launched a military operation called *Rah-e-Raast* (The Right Path) in Malakand (Swat) Division against terrorists. More than one and a half million people had to be temporarily displaced before the launch of this operation. However, after the operation was completed, the people were relocated. In 2009, another military operation, *Rah-e-Nijat* (The Path of Riddance) was launched in South Waziristan Agency after the Swat operation. The gains of this operation could not be consolidated due to lack

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<sup>9</sup> Art Silverblatt, “Media as Social Institution,” *American Behavioural Scientist*, September 1, 2004.

<sup>10</sup> Noel Israel Khokhar, “Perspectives on Pakistan’s National Security,” *NDU Journal*, 2015.

<sup>11</sup> Aarish Ullah Khan, “The Terrorist Threat and the Policy Response in Pakistan,” *SIPRI Policy Paper*, September 11, 2005.

<sup>12</sup> Pakistan Institute of Peace Studies, “Pakistan Security Reports 2008-2014,” <https://www.peaceinsight.org/conflicts/pakistan/>

<sup>13</sup> Ministry of Finance, Economic Survey 2016-17, Annex-IV.

<sup>14</sup> Global Terrorism Database, [www.start.umd.edu/gtd/](http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/)

of required public support; the environment was also not as much conducive as it was in the case of the Swat operation.

On the night of June 8, 2014, the terrorists launched a brazen attack at Karachi airport killing 28 people. The post-operation intelligence confirmed that planning of this attack took place in the terrorist sanctuaries in North Waziristan. Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) — a terrorist outfit took the responsibility thereby challenging the writ of the state. The government launched a full-scale operation in North Waziristan Agency on June 16, 2014; Operation *Zarb-e-Azb* (Swift and conclusive strike).<sup>15</sup>

However, in the month of August, a significant political development hampered the success of *Zarb-e-Azb*. Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI) and Pakistan Awami Tehreek (PAT) declared an agitation on August 14, 2014 against the government alleging electoral rigging in the 2013 general elections. Media which was playing an important role in building the much needed national consensus in counter-terrorism efforts diverted its attention towards the coverage of sit-ins by the two opposition parties. This four-month-long standoff from August 14 to December 16, 2014 was a period of intense political activity. This was the diversion that contributed as a main hurdle in the securitisation of terrorism in Pakistan.

Media is always inclined to highlight and focus towards the sellable story line, using the propaganda and interests of dominant groups in the society.<sup>16</sup> It, sometimes, blows the ensuing conflict out of proportion to achieve higher ratings.<sup>17</sup> Incidents of Kerry-Lugar Bill 2009, Raymond Davis and the American raid on Osama Bin Laden compound in Abbottabad on May 2, 2011, the national elections in 2013, the 'Dharna'(sit-in) by PTI against the government in 2014 were the diversions that contributed as the main hurdles in the securitisation of terrorism in Pakistan.

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<sup>15</sup> ISPR Press Release NO PR- 124/2014-ISPR <https://ispr.gov.pk/press-release-detail.php?id=2574>

<sup>16</sup> Seow Ting Lee and Crispin C. Maslog, "War or Peace Journalism? Asian Newspaper Coverage of Conflicts," *Journal of Communication*, January 2006.

<sup>17</sup> Rukhsana Aslam, "Peace Journalism: A Paradigm Shift in Traditional Media Approach," *Pacific Journalism Review*, 17:1 (2011):119-139.

## Media Process Affecting Securitisation

In this article, framing is selected as a theoretical framework to study the reporting pattern of terrorist attacks in two major newspapers in Pakistan: English daily, *Dawn* and Urdu daily, *Jang*. Both newspapers are considered as opinion builders in the country. As the duration for content analysis is spread over seven years, the data was selected on a fortnightly basis. The ensuing content analysis revealed that the advertisement was a major priority of both newspapers; thereafter, 22 per cent political news in *Dawn* and 20 per cent news in *Jang* were accorded second priority in their respective news content. *Dawn* allocated 18 per cent space to terrorism while *Jang* 19 per cent.<sup>18</sup> Only incidents of major intensity like suicide attacks and drone strikes were accorded space in *Dawn* on front and back pages. However, *Jang* placed the bulk of terrorism news on its front and back pages.

The number of episodic frames indicates that both newspapers only reported terrorist incidents as an event while there was no effort devoted to any follow-up stories or investigation regarding the terrorist groups involved. The newspapers only covered the incidents to highlight casualties and the number of injured persons. Both newspapers did not provide their readers with any thematic account to offer a picture of synthesised information related to terrorism.

Media makes official, security, humanitarian and crime related frames of the news related to terrorism.<sup>19</sup> In terrorism reporting, the onus of attack is either claimed by an individual or entity or the media apportions the responsibility on someone. According to a study on media framing, “The responsibility frame presents an issue in such a way so as to attribute responsibility for causing, or solving, to either the government or to an individual or group.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Authors Content Analysis for agenda setting of randomly selected 359 newspapers, 147 daily *Dawn* and 210 newspapers of daily *Jang* between January 2008-December 2014.

<sup>19</sup> Daniela V. Dimitrova and Collen Connolly-Ahern, “A Tale of Two Wars: Framing Analysis of Online News Sites in Coalition Countries and the Arab World During the Iraq War,” *Howard Journal of Communications*, 18:2, 2007.

<sup>20</sup> Holli Sematko and Patti M. Valkenberg, “Framing European Politics: A Content Analysis of Press and Television News,” *Journal of Communication*, 50:2, (June 2000):93-109.

Various framing perspectives and media coverage affect how the public learns, understands or thinks about an issue.<sup>21</sup> *Dawn* was more inclined to frame humanitarian sufferings with 43.1 per cent news as compared to *Jang's* 39.7 per cent.<sup>22</sup> The humanitarian suffering of collateral damage due to drone strikes were more pronounced in both newspapers. The terrorists targeted girl schools in Swat, *Dawn* highlighted the effects of these attacks. Targeting of Shia *Imambargahs* (religious congregational halls for Shias) in Peshawar and Quetta; killing of innocent civilians in the shrine attacks; and of lawyers in Quetta were duly highlighted by the two newspapers. Both *Dawn* and *Jang* newspapers also seemed to embrace the official perspective occasionally. *Jang* made 22.7 per cent official and 27.6 per cent security frames compared with *Dawn* which made 18.5 per cent official and 28.7 per cent security frames.<sup>23</sup>

In fact, the media perspective of a news story leaves a major impact on the reader. The same applies to *Dawn* and *Jang*. Both newspapers focused on the events as crime stories. Thus, more the casualties, bigger was the display. The news stories where security forces were targeted were given a bigger coverage. The media outlets built this perception that it was not the civil society but the security forces that were the target of terrorism.

Media also focused less on the consequences of terrorist incidents. Its attention was more on the chaos created by terrorism and encouraging the readers to form their own conclusion regarding the perpetrators of the terrorist act. *Dawn* stories focus apportioned 22 per cent on the event, 43 per cent on victims and 28 per cent on accommodating details of incidents, only 4 per cent of *Dawn* coverage highlighted the consequences. Similarly, *Jang* rarely highlighted consequential aspects of terrorism and gave more attention to the victims and the details of incidents quoting official sources.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Paul Waldman, *The Press Effect: Politicians, Journalists, and the Stories that Shape the World*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>22</sup> Authors Content Analysis for agenda setting of randomly selected 359 newspapers, 147 daily *Dawn* and 210 newspapers of daily *Jang* between January 2008-December 2014.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Authors Content Analysis for agenda setting of randomly selected 359 newspapers, 147 daily *Dawn* and 210 newspapers of daily *Jang* between January 2008-December 2014.

The initial details of the terrorist incidents were often reported manually while the official updates were issued later. Media mostly relies on anonymous sources with less credibility and authenticity. The power of framing is determined by credibility of the source. The official confirmation and first-hand account by eye witnesses results in influencing the reader. *Dawn* heavily relied on its correspondents' reports (21 per cent) and also used 17 per cent official sources while *Jang* used 25 per cent official sources and relied 15 per cent on its correspondents for corroborating the details of its news stories.<sup>25</sup>

Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) is known to be the main terrorist outfit targeting the government, military and civilians while taking the responsibility of the attacks.<sup>26</sup> 34 per cent news in the daily *Dawn* was attributed to TTP as the spokesman of terrorist outfit claimed responsibility of the attack. Another 36 per cent attacks were not attributed to any terrorist outfit and the newspaper left it open for the readers to ascertain who carried out the attack. Most of the terrorist attacks were labelled as security lapses without divulging into any details or confirmation. This approach of not identifying the responsibility towards any group left a vacuum in the securitisation process. An uncertain narrative will never make any lasting impact as a reader's mind is persuaded through a recurring narrative.

The detailed description of terrorist victims in media plays a significant role in earning public sympathy and shaping public opinion. *Dawn* mostly mentioned civilian, security forces' and the terrorist casualties in a single count. There was no differentiation of casualties. This pattern was quite similar to any criminal act or a road accident to report total number of casualties. There was no empathy for the innocents who died during the heinous act or the security personnel who laid down their lives while fighting terrorism. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), more than 1268 senior and junior police officers have sacrificed their lives in the line of duty during 2006-2017 but it has never been properly lauded in media reporting.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Sara Mahmood, "Decapitating the Tehrike-i-Taliban Pakistan: An Effective Counter-Terrorism Strategy?," *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analysis*, 7:6, (July 2015):24-29.

<sup>27</sup> "Terrorists Kill 29 KP Police officers in over a decade," *Dawn*, November 15, 2017.



In major incidents of terrorist attacks, *Dawn* covered the terrorists' dominance over security forces using specific phrases. For example, while reporting attack on General Headquarters (GHQ) Rawalpindi in October 2009, *Dawn* reported, "In a brazen but highly organised attack on General Headquarters, Pakistan Army's nerve centre in Rawalpindi, a group of militants armed with automatic weapons, grenades and rocket launchers drove up to the compound and shot their way through one checkpoint before being intercepted by soldiers at the second checkpoint." Reporting the killing of two senior military officers during the attack and many others taken hostage further sensationalised the news which said, "Six Army personnel, a Brigadier and Lieutenant Colonel among them and four militants were killed in the daring attempt."<sup>28</sup> Newspaper rarely used the word 'terrorist' and termed it as an 'attacker' thereby bringing them at par, as legitimate fighters with security forces.

In the same manner, it used word 'killed' for all casualties whether terrorists, citizens or the security personnel. The newspaper offered the same portrayal to the sectarian groups carrying out attacks in the Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK) and Afghanistan. The underlying message was the allegation that the security forces tasted the fruit of their own reaping. By drawing resemblance in pattern and technique of attacks inside Afghanistan and in Pakistan, the newspaper was trying to create a false impression on the readers' mind that the perpetrators were home grown terrorists. It was a consistent pattern with *Dawn*.

In its banner headline on GHQ attack, *Dawn* reported, "Audacious attack rocks GHQ; Brigadier, Lt. Col. among 6 army men killed; hostage saga continues." Apparently, it is a simple headline reporting the attack on a security forces headquarters, which is responsible to fight terrorism. In reality, it seemed more of a crime rather than an act of terrorism. The headline itself glorifies the terrorist act and undermines the strength of the security forces. The word 'audacious' is an adjective used to express willingness to take bold risks. The word attack is also specific to the military action of 'acting aggressively against enemy forces.' Similarly, 'rocks' is an informal expression which shows that it surprised or rattled the security

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<sup>28</sup> Authors Analysis of daily *Dawn* and daily *Jang* of October 11, 2009 news report of a major terrorist incident at General Headquarters.

outfit. There was no attempt to use the headline to show that it was an abhorrent act of terrorism.<sup>29</sup>

Daily *Jang* reported GHQ attack with headline “*GHQ par Dehshat gadroon ka Hamla, Brigadier, Colonel samait 6 Ehlikar Shaheed, Mutadad Yarghamal.*” (Terrorists attack at GHQ; 6 security officials including a Brigadier and Colonel embraced martyrdom and many made hostage). At the surface, this news story emphasises the intensity of the terrorist attack, “Army Headquarters was attacked and high-ranking officers along with few soldiers were killed and many were taken hostage.”<sup>30</sup> A closer analysis shows that this news does not only reflect this development as an act of terrorism but by using the word GHQ in its headlines magnifies the act without stating the obvious. It further sensationalises the incident by adding in its headline ‘6 including a Brigadier and Colonel among others killed and many made hostage.’

This was highly organised attack in which the terrorists came wearing uniforms, entered GHQ (Pakistan Army’s Headquarters which controls counter terrorism operations) killed senior officers and others and took many hostages. This Urdu newspaper persuasively summarises a tragic incident with an attempt to highlight the severity of the incident, at the one hand, and depicting a somewhat softer and helpless image of the security forces on the other hand. It also contains the details of causalities. Even the follow up arrests and investigations were also reported quoting the credible sources. In an overview, this type of news reporting created a negative framing for the readers.

*Dawn* editorials were vague in picturing responsibility frames. The analysis shows that 29 per cent editorials neither discussed any reason for the terrorist attacks nor suggested how the government could overcome the menace of terrorism. It left a void for the readers to infer the reasons of terrorist attacks on their own.<sup>31</sup> *Dawn* was critical of government’s foreign policy towards Afghanistan and the US, terming it as a major contributing factor towards terrorist attacks. Additionally, 15 per cent editorials commented that military operations are not helping to overcome the menace

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Authors content analysis of randomly selected daily Dawn editorials from January 2008 to December 2014.

of terrorism. 29 per cent editorials of *Dawn* were highly critical of the internal security policies for countering terrorism.<sup>32</sup>

15 per cent of daily *Jang* editorials did not refer to any reasons of the terrorist attack. 22 per cent of the editorials considered the Afghan policy shift as a major reason of the attacks and a somewhat lesser number of the editorials suggested that the military operations were the reason. 26 per cent of the editorials called internal security, counter terrorism policy and the flaws in dealing with sectarian issues as major contributory factors towards terrorism.<sup>33</sup> During the discourse analysis of an editorial, written after the terrorist attack on the Sri Lankan cricket team in Lahore, the newspaper dubbed this act of terrorism, as political wrangling between the Centre and Punjab province which was an irrelevant insinuation.<sup>34</sup>

### **Representation of Voices in Media**

Given that the media coverage is all about drawing the readers' attention to a particular issue, it comes as no surprise that media picks the statements depending on the relevance of the person/entity involved for framing. Framing can be conducive to an interpretation favourable to a group and unfavourable for another.<sup>35</sup> A popular voice will be more likely to be reported by the media prominently as compared to a less popular or minority voice. That is why newspapers only publish statements of popular political leaders, sportsmen or celebrities or philanthropists.

In this backdrop, the newspapers tend to prefer a greater inclusion of the voices which were critical of the security forces while excluding the supportive ones. *Dawn* prominently displayed the critical voices from Afghanistan and external forces, alleging Pakistan for its involvement in deterioration of law and order in Kabul. It did not use the lexis to describe the word 'terrorists' but preferred to use 'fighters' and 'attackers' which became an obstacle in mobilising a sympathetic public opinion against terrorism. The damaging negativity associated with the

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Norman Fairclough, *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003).

terrorist groups was not highlighted while the ills associated with the security forces remained on the preferred agenda of the newspaper.

*Dawn* also did not use the adjective ‘martyr’ (the one who lays down his life in the right path) to describe the personnel of the Pakistan Army, the Frontier Corps or the police. *Jang* did use the word *Dehshatgard* for terrorist and *Shaheed* for martyred soldiers who were laying their lives in this war against terrorism. *Jang* also afforded an opportunity to represent all the relevant voices including the government, security forces, political players and other major stakeholders such as the US and Afghanistan. However, this newspaper also distracted the process of securitisation by resorting to highlight the stories of missing persons. The newspaper could have highlighted the miseries of families of the martyred to gain sympathies for security forces and law enforcement agencies which it chose not to.

### **Framing of Army Public School Peshawar Attack**

On December 16, 2014, Pakistan witnessed a horrendous terrorist attack on Army Public School (APS) Peshawar in which 131 school children were brutally killed in cold blood. They were targeted simply because the school had many wards and children of military officials. This merciless attack was condemned not only in Pakistan but all over the world. The sheer brutality of this terrorist act shocked the entire world. The US President called Prime Minister of Pakistan and expressed his deepest condolences. China, UK, France, India, Germany and several others countries denounced the act and expressed solidarity with the government of Pakistan and the bereaved families.<sup>36</sup> After this terrorist attack, unity of Pakistan’s political elite became more pronounced against fighting the menace of terrorism. Urgency was felt for a comprehensive strategy with a common resolve at all levels to fight and overcome the menace of terrorism. The National Action Plan (NAP) was charted as manifestation of the resolve of the nation against terrorism.

Content analysis of the two newspapers, *Dawn* and *Jang* from December 17, 2014 to December 31, 2018 shows a significant shift in media framing leaning towards securitisation. Media frames ‘terrorism as a home grown problem’ changed to ‘terrorism a threat to Pakistan.’ Political

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<sup>36</sup> “132 Children Killed in Peshawar School Attack,” *Express Tribune*, December 16, 2014.

communication was visibly effective to highlight the threat of terrorism. Formulation of the NAP through an amendment in the Parliament and military courts was a reflection of consensus amongst the political elite.

These developments ultimately changed the political communication in the media as well. Lifting of the moratorium and an endeavour to persuade the Afghan government to take action against terrorists hiding in the sanctuaries were accorded prominent frames by both newspapers. Conviction of the terrorists by military courts remained a front page story in the leading newspapers. Legislation by the parliament and statements of politicians and government officials enforced the perception of government as an actor for securitisation. This had a visible impact on media framing and the media started making official and security frames.

*Dawn* was critical in pointing out inadequate actions by the government on various clauses of NAP which indirectly was helpful in the securitisation process. The official frames included the government's steps taken to block terror financing, revive peace through *Jirga* and build trust confidence of the people of FATA in the security forces. All these developments were big achievements in denouncing terrorism. The security frames highlighted the successes in the kinetic operations and the destruction of terrorists' hideouts in FATA through aerial strikes. Condemnation by the political leaders, both from government and the opposition benches was visibly seen in the media. Condemnation of terrorism by political leaders has been counted in the official frames since it helped the securitisation process.

The perspectives of news stories regarding terrorism were visibly changed after the APS attack. Consequences and official view alongside victims' miseries were more pronounced in the follow-up stories. Glorification of terrorism and conflict framing reporting were visibly reduced. A major shift was observed in perspective from event to consequences. It was a major change to securitise the issue of terrorism. 13 per cent news stories of *Dawn* had perspective on the consequences and 10 per cent stories of *Jang* had their inclination towards highlighting consequence of terrorism for the future concerns of the government about the involvement of hostile foreign agencies and conviction of the terrorists by military courts. While giving a good coverage to convictions by military courts, some editorials expressed reservations on resorting to military trials,

weaknesses in the judicial system and loopholes in the prosecution by law enforcement agencies.<sup>37</sup>

It goes without saying that identification of the perpetrators helps securitise the issue. TTP is the main group which has been targeting the government, military and civilian targets and taking the responsibility.<sup>38</sup> In KPK, Sindh and FATA, most terrorist acts were carried out by the TTP. Terrorist outfits were made responsible for the acts of terrorism. 57 per cent stories in *Dawn* considered terrorists responsible for terrorist attacks while 15 per cent stories highlighted the security lapses on part of the government and security agencies. However, still 26 per cent news coverage was left to the readers' choice regarding the responsibility for the terrorist act. *Jang* had same percentage of stories in which the terrorists were made responsible for the attack thus raising awareness about prevailing threat and leading towards securitisation. 56 per cent of the stories, in *Jang*, called out the terrorists making them responsible for the heinous attacks while 36 per cent left the news open to the readers' choice.<sup>39</sup>

The discourse analysis indicates a change in media language after the APS attack. The language of *Dawn* displayed a tilt towards securitisation of terrorism. While covering an aerial strike by the security forces, it reported 92 suspected militants were killed in their hideouts in aerial strikes in North Waziristan and KPK and two in Federally Administered Tribal Area Agencies (FATA). The news contained all the details with dateline and by-line. It described that 76 suspected militants were killed in North Waziristan Agency and 16 in Khyber Agency. The newspaper used word 'in a precise aerial strike' making a security frame and endorsing the killing of terrorists who were taking shelter in their hideouts.<sup>40</sup>

Another feature story in *Dawn* effectively focused on securitisation: Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) returning to their homes after restoration of peace in South Waziristan Agency. The reporter of the

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<sup>37</sup> Content analysis of the two newspapers, daily *Dawn* and daily *Jang* during December 17, 2014 to December 31, 2018.

<sup>38</sup> Sara Mahmood, "Decapitating the Tehrike-i-Taliban Pakistan: An Effective Counter-Terrorism Strategy?" *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analysis*, 7:6, (July 2015):24-29.

<sup>39</sup> Content analysis of the two newspapers, daily *Dawn* and daily *Jang* during December 17, 2014 to December 31, 2018.

<sup>40</sup> "92 Suspect Militants Killed in Aerial Strikes," *Dawn*, January 28, 2015.

newspaper travelled to an IDP camp at Kohat and shared a first-hand account of the ordeal and impressions of the returnees. Procedural delays in necessary documentation by the officials and concerns regarding their future household and local businesses were quite evident. Underlying perception gained from the story was that people were happy that they are returning to a peaceful area where no threat of Taliban existed anymore. All of them expressed satisfaction over prevailing peace in the area.<sup>41</sup>

While reporting the visit of the Chief of the Army Staff (COAS) to Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) headquarters on May 16, 2015, *Jang* reported that the COAS appreciated the role of ISI in counter terrorism operations and the sacrifices being rendered by the members of the agency. He said that the work of intelligence agencies remains hidden but their achievements must be highlighted and appreciated. The underlying message of the newspaper was that a foreign hand in fuelling terrorism in Pakistan was repeatedly evident. It further argued that the incidents of terrorism, particularly in Balochistan and KPK did not occur in isolation. The Pakistani terrorists hiding in safe havens in Afghanistan were being supported by the Afghan and Indian intelligence agencies respectively, National Directorate of Security (NDS) and Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), the Afghan and Indian intelligence agencies respectively to carry out terrorist acts in Pakistan.<sup>42</sup>

Another change seemed visible in *Dawn* editorials which highlighted consequences of the threat that Pakistan was facing, suggesting a joint national approach to effectively handle this threat. Foreign policy gaps were constantly highlighted both in *Dawn* and *Jang*. *Dawn* was editorially active on counter terrorism after the APS. It was critical and occasionally frustrated in its use of the language: on May 29, 2015 its editorial stated that NAP was going nowhere. Underlying message was that the Government is only focusing on arresting and displaying numbers of those arrested and that there was no effort to cleanse the roots of terrorism.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Zulfiqar Ali, "ISPs to Start Returning to Their Areas Tomorrow," *Dawn*, March 15, 2015.

<sup>42</sup> See *Daily Jang*, May 17, 2015.

<sup>43</sup> Editorial, "NAP going no where," *Dawn*, May 29, 2015.

By the end of 2017, terrorism incidents substantially reduced after reaching their peak in 2014.<sup>44</sup> Media focus also shifted back to the political events. Panama Leaks, Dawn Leaks, tweet of military spokesman about rejection of inquiry report, removal of PM Nawaz Sharif from office by an accountability court and the 2018 general elections were the main focus of media agenda. Meanwhile, Pakistan Army also announced a kinetic operation (*Zarb-e-Azb*) in FATA and placed more emphasis on intelligence based operation in various cities.

The security forces, in collaboration with law enforcement agencies, continued their surge in urban areas to eliminate hiding terrorists. Since remnants of the terrorists fled away to far flung areas of Balochistan focus of intelligence based operations also shifted accordingly. During 2017, the inquiry against corruption cases of the former Prime Minister, commonly known as the Panama Case, dominated the news in media. The terrorist incidents had been substantially reduced by mid-2018 when new government of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf was installed in the country.

## **Conclusion**

This study has discovered that both newspapers went beyond material reality and their reports before the APS attack were influenced by their pre-existing ideas and beliefs about terrorism. Conforming to the global environment, Pakistan adopted the norms which assisted it to change its behaviour towards fighting terrorism. An adopted norm takes years to complete its life cycle and get accepted by the people. The second stage is the internationalisation of norms. However, this transformation could neither be observed nor was ignored intentionally by the international community, critical mass in the country and the media alike. It left a gap between the perceptions of the state and media which forced media to frame terrorism the way it did which in turn led to slowing down the process of securitisation. People are usually unable to form their own opinions based on superficial knowledge. They need a clear line of thinking through constant flow of information to reach logical conclusions. Thus, a securitising actor and the media give shape to the ground reality to the public.

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<sup>44</sup> Global Terrorism Index, <http://visionofhumanity.org/app/uploads/2018/12/Global-Terrorism-Index-2018-1.pdf>



Media saw the individual or organisational acts of few banned outfits and criminals through the same prism and did not resort to the securitisation outlook. This view of media understanding was further fortified by external forces through acts of terrorism within their own countries and conveniently blaming Pakistan for supporting these groups. Inter-media affect has a dominating influence in an era of digital technology. Whatever is published in foreign press, it is immediately picked up by local press also. Thus, for an effective securitisation process, political communication should remain dominant throughout. The state narrative should be pervasive at all stages till an issue is securitised. Rumours and misinformation should be quickly rebutted through all available mass communication means. Due to internet and social media activism, the rumours travel much faster than facts. Only a very quick and sharp response can overcome this laxity. The vacuum in information domain must not be tolerated so that it is not occupied by opposing forces. In a polarised society like Pakistan, consensus among political elite is the fastest tool to securitise an issue. Political forces must be taken on board on various policy issues of national interest. No single institution or a political party can securitise an issue unless it gets support of enough of influential voices in the country.