

Waziristan: Escalation and De-Escalation Orientation of War and Peace Journalism Op-eds in Pakistani Newspapers

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Abstract

Understanding the manifest and latent content of conflict news coverage provides an insight into dynamics of conflict representation. This study analysed four op-ed articles, written by four prominent experts of the subject, during the 2007 Waziristan conflict. The analysis was based on Wilhelm Kempf's model of conflict escalation and de-escalation focus of media coverage. These articles were selected from 24 op-eds, published in two high-circulation English-language Pakistani newspapers, on the basis of their high levels of war and peace journalism orientation. These articles ad-

ressed, separately, two events in which an internal rift within the militant groups (Waziri-Uzbek fight, March 18 - April 12, 2007) was followed by a military operation launched by the Pakistan Army against the militants (War in Waziristan, July 24 - August 24, 2007). The analysis showed that war journalism op-eds typically had more escalation themes and peace journalism op-eds had more de-escalation themes. However, the de-escalation themes were not exclusive to peace journalism op-eds and vice-versa. Overall, op-eds presented diverse and extreme views, especially about conflict resolution. It was also found that abstract language and attribution of previously published reports apparently contributed towards escalation themes in the four articles, and concrete language and original reporting mostly added to de-escalation themes.

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Scholars have defined the term 'conflict' as a disagreement or interference between two or more individuals or interdependent groups (Cupach & Canary, 1997; Martin & Nakayama, 2010; Wilmot & Hocker, 2001). The disagreement involves a "perceived or real incompatibility of goals, values, expectations, processes, or outcomes" (Martin & Nakayama, 2010, p. 431). Pruitt (2001) argued that conflicts can broadly be categorized as either clashes of two or more parties (overt conflicts), which would include everything from fist fights to wars, or a perceived divergence of interests (subjective conflicts).

From the perspective of journalism, conflict is not only considered a significant criterion for news selection and coverage (Clayman & Reisner, 1998; Gans, 2004; Golan & Wanta, 2003; Schultz, 2007; Shoemaker, Danielian, & Brendlinger, 1991), but also it is often a way in which journalists interpret and present different types of newsworthy incidents such as political developments (Neuman, Just, & Crigler, 1992; De Vreese, 2005). According to Kempf (2002a), the intractable conflicts lead journalists towards war discourse. The range and reach of the media and its influence on the masses instigate the warring parties to exploit it for their propaganda aim. Media can no longer be seen in the framework of a simple "stimulus-response model" but in today's world it serves an important mediating role during conflict and war (Lynch, 2003).

As a part of the democratic process, the information sharing involves presentation of both positive and negative connotations (Kempf, 2002b). The op-ed acts as a journalistic contribution to democracy by presenting a platform for debate on competing ideologies of an issue of public importance (Song, 2004). As an advocacy tool, op-eds are written by newspaper staff, column writers, policy experts and issue advocates to influence public opinion and policy (Golan & Carroll, 2012; Kowalchuk & McLaughlin, 2009). The op-eds which are published in esteemed venues are inclined to gain status and attention for intellectuals (Coser, 1997). The diversity of the ideas discussed in the op-eds provides different viewpoints to the reader to make an informed opinion about a certain issue. However, this creates the problem of meaning because the meaning of the text is not always at the surface level (Kempf, 2002b). Since the perception of conflict is a subjective thing, questions focused at identification of the conflict object and its transformation into satisfactory solution for conflict party can change the war discourse into peace discourse (Kempf, 2003).

The present study is focused on the qualitative analysis for escalation and de-escalation aspects of op-eds, published in two high-circulation English-language Pakistani newspapers during the 2007 Waziristan conflict, which showed the highest levels of war and peace journalism orientation (Lee & Maslog, 2005) during preliminary analysis. The following section provides the debate on theoretical and epistemological evaluations of war and peace and escalation and de-escalation.

Peace Journalism and the Escalation and De-Escalation Model

In today's globalised world, where conflicts and war in one corner of the world affect the other corner of the world, it is very important for the world peace and security to contrive, amend and formulate effective ways of handling conflict. We have to look for the mediating systems and procedures that can give us deeper understanding of the conflict in order to reduce its impact (Shiner, 2007). The media and peace research is focused on looking at the ways media can be used for conflict prevention and de-escalation (Luostarinen, 2002).

Conflict is treated as a news value in coverage of war (Galtung & Ruge, 1973; Lee & Maslog, 2005). This treatment forces coverage to be sensationalist and commercial (Allen & Seaton, 1999; Hachten, 1999; Toffler & Toffler, 1995). Journalists themselves often consider sensationalism and commercialism as antithetical to journalistic professionalism and quality (Bernstein, 1992), even though there is no academic consensus on this issue (Grabe, Zsdehou, & Barnett, 2001). However, these tendencies, especially in the news coverage of violent conflicts such as wars and insurgencies, led communication scholars to propose the concepts of war and peace journalism (Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Galtung, 1998; Kempf, 2002; Lynch & McGoldrick, 1997). At the heart of these suggestions was the belief that news media affect the developments of war and peace and this influence through coverage could be exploited for responsible reporting and peace building efforts.

Galtung (1998b) defined war journalism as the prevalent media practice of covering a conflict as if it was a two-party battle that would inevitably end with victory for one party and defeat for the other. This is akin to the model of sports journalism in which reporters focus on winners and losers in their coverage of sports events because the athletes are locked in win-or-lose games. Peace journalism, on the other hand, would shift focus away from a win-lose scenario. It would talk of ways to both transform the conflict into an issue that affects more than just two parties and provide an opportunity to resolve the conflict (Galtung, 1998b). Peace Journalism does not see the conflict and violence of war on the surface level but its focus is on the "ABC context of conflict: attitudes, behaviour and contradictions – including underlying patterns of structural and cultural violence" (Hackett, 2007). In the same vein, Lynch and McGoldrick (2005) suggested that in peace journalism, the reporters and editors create opportunities for readers to consider non-violent responses to conflicts.

Lynch and McGoldrick (2005) believed that "news is about change" and journalists who are aware of conflict concepts will be able to report better on conflict issues and begin to view conflicts as not always negative but also constructive. To gain theoretical understanding of a conflict, it is often divided into stages, usually on a curve and two of the most crucial stages of a conflict are escalation and de-escalation. Escalation occurs

when the parties involved in a conflict begin to use “increasingly harsh contentious tactics” (Pruitt, 2001). Pruitt (2001) stated that escalation could consist of the reactions of one party instigated by the persistent annoyance caused by another party. Rubin, Pruitt and Kim (1994) considered escalation to be based on reciprocity of aggressive behaviour, such that if one actor behaves aggressively, the other responds in kind.

While escalation represents increasingly harsh tactics by the conflict parties, de-escalation refers to the stage when tensions are diffused. Kriesberg (1987) described de-escalation as a multidimensional phenomenon which would reduce the intensity of a conflict in one or more dimensions. It could also be a decrease in the extent of the conflict, including a contraction of conflict parties, and a general move towards the settlement of the conflict (Kriesberg, 1987). It is considered duty of everyone to not only prevent conflict escalation but also to divert it from destructive to a constructive path (Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997; Kriesberg, 1998). The accessibility of the journalists to the conflict scene make it possible for them to conduct background research of the conflict, the motivational factors of the actors, and the process of decision making (Carruthers, 2000; Dor, 2001). They can play a crucial role for both the escalation and de-escalation processes. This shows the face of peace journalism which is focused on democracy and participatory approach (Peleg, 2007).

Research on the escalation and de-escalation themes in conflict news coverage owes largely to the work of Austrian-born psychologist Wilhelm Kempf. Kempf (2003) explained that the controversy about war and peace journalism is mainly due to the nature of role journalism can play with reference to the aggressive interaction and construction of social reality in the conflict process. Kempf (2002a) argued that journalists' inclination towards violence as a measure of escalation, covering conflicts within a win-lose framework and closeness with elite sources, might lead news media to fuel conflict escalation through their coverage. He suggested “de-escalation-oriented conflict coverage” as an intermediary step in the move away from propaganda towards peace journalism. With de-escalation-oriented coverage, journalists would dismiss simplistic good-evil-type dichotomies in news (2002a, p.71).

There are six areas or escalation steps, as identified by Kempf (2002a, 2003), in which the perception of conflict gets distorted: Conceptualization of the conflict, valuation of rights and aims, evaluation of actions, emotional involvement, identification of others and overall direction. These areas could be used to check escalation or de-escalation orientation of news coverage and train journalists to follow the de-escalation approach.

In a study that measured audience responses towards escalation and de-escalation oriented news coverage, Kempf (2006) found out that the audience accepts de-escalation coverage “no less” than regular coverage (p. 7). Schaefer (2006) determined that escalation-oriented texts produce a higher acceptance of military measures taken in a conflict than de-escalation-oriented texts.

Thiel and Kempf (2014) subjected German readers to either articles about a Palestinian suicide attack or an Israeli military operation to check how they would respond to escalation or de-escalation oriented framing. The researchers found a direct effect and complex interaction, similar to cognitive dissonance, of the texts with the readers. This complex interaction was influenced by the readers' individual thought processes. On the basis of the findings, Thiel and Kempf (2014) argued that the propaganda function of coverage might be neutralized by the peace frame, although this would not be a simple exercise.

Ersoy (2010) looked at the way five Turkish and five Greek-Cypriot newspapers covered the Cyprus conflict and found out that Cypriot journalists do not seek solutions for the conflict themselves as they might have been if they were practicing de-escalation-oriented journalism rather the journalists wait for the decision-making elites for measures of conflict resolution.

Putnam and Shoemaker (2007) analysed 193 articles written about the Edwards Aquifer conflict in south-central Texas, which was at the center of an environmental disaster controversy. The researchers found out that the news reports labelled the issue as a "battle" and pitted the stakeholders against each other. There was also an increase in escalation coverage at the second of four major turning points in the controversy as the media reported on "non-negotiable issues" and "failed settlements" among other things (Putnam & Shoemaker, 2007, p. 5). However, this rise in escalation/de-escalation-oriented coverage was found to follow developments in the conflict.

Even though researchers have started to employ the escalation/de-escalation-orientation framing in their analysis of conflict news coverage, the bulk of existing research usually includes analysis of war or peace journalism in conflict news. Analysis of news coverage of diverse internal and international conflicts in four Asian countries at the turn of the century revealed a dominance of war journalism features (Lee & Maslog, 2005).

Based on the selected op-eds, the present research provides an understanding of the conflict; conflict parties, their rights, intentions, and actions; the emotional involvement of the conflict; and how the conflict parties were socially identified in "us" versus "them" discourse in the articles.

The Method

The selection of op-eds for qualitative analysis was done on the basis of the results of quantitative data. The basic model for quantitative analysis was the modified coding categories used by Lee and Maslog (2005) and Lee, Maslog and Kim (2006) driven by Galtung's peace journalism theory (Galtung, 1986, 1998a). The model's indicators, based on war and peace journalism orientation, comprised of two premises: approach and language. Based on the initial scrutiny of the data, only eight indicators from the

approach themes were selected from Lee and Maslog's model (2005, 2006) and new coding categories of war preparation (in war journalism) and negotiation process (in peace journalism) were added in the coding criteria. There was no change in the language themes. The approach based criteria for war and peace journalism respectively included: (1) visible or invisible effects of war, (2) elite or people orientation, (3) differences or agreements, (4) focus on here and now or causes and effects, (5) good and bad dichotomy or no labelling, (6) two or multiple party involvement, (7) partisan or non-partisanship, (8) zero-sum or win-win approach, and (9) war preparation or negotiation process. The language-based criteria included (1) demonizing, (2) victimizing, and (3) emotive words. The presence of the particular indicator is counted as 1 each time it is revealed in the op-ed (Lee & Maslog, 2005).

A total of two war journalism and two peace journalism oriented op-eds which had maximum indicators showing their orientation were selected from *Dawn* and *The News* for qualitative analysis. These op-eds were written by four prominent experts respected for their expertise and analysis on terrorism, militancy and geostrategic politics.

The Case of Pakistani Tribal Areas: Conflict in Waziristan

The Pakistani Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA, tribal areas) are divided into administrative units called agencies and frontier regions. It has seven agencies (Bajaur, Mohmand, Khyber, Orakzai, Kurram, North Waziristan and South Waziristan) and six Frontier Regions or FRs (Bannu, Dera Ismail Khan, Kohat, Lakki Marwat, Peshawar and Tank). In 2001, these areas got global attention in the wake of US invasion in Afghanistan (Nawaz, 2009). Due to their geostrategic importance, even in the past, these areas involved the interests of Britain, India, Afghanistan, Russia, China, Turkey and even France (Ahmed, 1978).

With the war in Afghanistan and the fall of Taliban regime, many former Taliban leaders were thought to have crossed the border into Pakistan and settled in the tribal areas, along with some of their foreign supporters. Troops were deployed to stop cross border insurgency and the military operations were started to counter militancy. However, these operations posed a big challenge for the Pakistani government (Cheema, 2008). The operations backfired when the security forces failed to score a decisive victory (Zissis & Bajoria, 2006). The difficult terrain and inaccessibility of these areas created a natural defence for the militants. Throughout history, the tribal areas have been known for their strong retaliation against any armed intervention (Caroe, 1958; Ahmed, 1978; Roe, 2010). The most affected agencies during the conflict were North and South Waziristan, collectively referred to as Waziristan. The armed conflict that started from these agencies aggravated violence across other tribal areas and the rest of the country.

The allegiances during the Waziristan conflict saw multiple shifts. There was bitterness among the local people and local militants against the military action by Pakistan

Army after the Wana Operation in 2004. Then, there was a fight among local and foreign militants known as the Waziri-Uzbek Fight in 2007 and the same year the War in Waziristan between Pakistan Army and local and foreign militants. The Waziri-Uzbek Fight and the subsequent War in Waziristan provided an interesting case for analysing the conflict dynamics of the tribal areas.

The Waziri-Uzbek Fight started on March 18, 2007, when local militant leader Maulvi Nazir accused the Uzbeks of killing an Al-Qaeda linked Arab, Saiful Adil. The local militants and tribesmen demanded the Uzbeks to leave, or to disarm. The fight, which lasted for 25 days, resulted in the deaths of foreign militants and local tribesmen. This fight reflected the rift between the militant groups and first gave rise to the debate of 'good' and 'bad' Taliban, a debate which is still a part of the mainstream discourse (Siddiq, 2011; Nasir, 2015; Ricks, 2015; Johnson, 2016). However, the opportunity to cash this break was short-lived. The Lal Mosque (also known as Red Mosque) siege in Pakistan's capital Islamabad sparked the conflict again. The siege was followed by three consecutive suicide attacks and the ceasefire between the government and militants broke down. These events led to the war in Waziristan on July 24, 2007, which went on uninterrupted until August 24, 2007. Within four years the conflict reached Bajaur agency, which is more than 400 kilometers away from Waziristan and the conflict in Waziristan has had a strong impact on Pakistan through aggravated terrorist violence (South Asian Terrorism Portal, 2016).

The Selected Op-eds

For the event of Waziri-Uzbek Fight, the op-ed with war journalism orientation was selected from *The News*: "Time to Act" by Zaman Khan Afridi (2007), a local expert. The writer discussed active action against foreign militants in South Waziristan. The article mentioned that the local tribesmen had been clashing with foreign militants and had realized that the foreign militants were an obstacle to development. It considered military action against foreign militants to be appropriate. The hatred between the tribesmen and foreign militants was mentioned with the portrayal of foreign militants as aggressors. It highlighted the failure of the *Jirga* (a consultative assembly or council of tribal elders that discusses issues of common interest and passes out judgements) but also supported democracy and local development. This op-ed was of 1230 words and had 32 indicators related to war journalism and 14 indicators related to peace journalism. The quantitative analysis showed that although the author highlighted the causes and resultant consequences of the fight and discussed the negotiation process, the main focus remained on elite-oriented debate, labelling, partisan approach, visible effects of the fight and zero-sum approach for dealing with the conflict.

The peace journalism op-ed for the Waziri-Uzbek fight was from *Dawn*: "The Game is Up for Uzbeks" by Ismail Khan (2007). Khan is the Dawn's editor for news from Northern

Pakistan and an expert commentator on the politics and militancy issues in the tribal areas. During his long career, he has supervised the paper's coverage of the Taliban government in Afghanistan, the US invasion of Afghanistan, the subsequent militant attacks in the Khyber-Pakthunkhwa province and the military operations in the tribal areas. The conflict representation in Khan's opinion piece brought out differences between the Uzbek militants and the locals but was less confrontational in its evaluations of the actions of all militants. This op-ed was of 1199 words and had 25 peace journalism indicators and 12 war journalism indicators. The author mainly elaborated upon the causes and consequences of the fight to provide the context to the reader. The author did slightly discuss the visible effects of the fight, labelling, two-party orientation and partisan approach. However, he balanced the discussion by suggesting the importance of the negotiation process and highlighted areas of agreement.

For War in Waziristan, the op-ed with war journalism orientation was selected from *Dawn*: "Unceasing US Pressure" by Tariq Fatemi (2007). Fatemi is a career diplomat, who served as Pakistan's ambassador to the US, Jordan and Belgium among other countries. He is currently the special assistant for foreign affairs to the Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. Fatemi's article discussed the increasing US pressure on Pakistan to take steps against militants. It mentioned the US inclination to hunt terrorists in Pakistani territory and the Pakistani government's reaction to this approach. It also criticised the September 2006 accord and denied the common gains from the end of the war. This op-ed had a word count of 1824 words and had 37 war journalism indicators and 16 peace journalism indicators. Though the author highlighted causes and consequences of the war and few suggestions of win-win approach, the article's major emphasis was on stressing differences, elite orientation, partisanship and zero-sum approach.

The peace journalism op-ed for the same event was selected from *The News*: "Jirgas still the best option in Waziristan" by Rahimullah Yusufzai (2007). Yusufzai is a veteran journalist and analyst of FATA politics, history and militancy. This article was centred at stressing the importance of *jirgas*. It focused on unsuccessful negotiations regarding the conflict; the increasing clashes between militants and military; the importance given to a military solution by the US; and the problems for locals and the media to make its case for the effectiveness of the *jirgas*. The op-ed highlighted the negative impact of the use of military force. It empathized with victims on both sides of the conflict and tried to deconstruct the threat by presenting an unbiased assessment of militants' intentions and behaviour by discussing trust and cooperation. It avoided identifying with military leaders and talked about the *lirga* members in terms of their role for peace in the area. The op-ed was of 1278 words having 27 peace journalism indicators and 13 war journalism indicators. The writer explained the context of the war by describing causes and consequences, multiple conflict party orientation, non-partisan approach and the importance of negotiation process for peace prospect. He provided both visible

and invisible effects of war and war preparation. Some emotive words and victimising language was used that indicates the war journalism orientation, nonetheless, the peace journalism indicators outweigh them.

The present study uses qualitative content analysis to provide an understanding of how the selected op-eds used escalation and de-escalation themes for contextualizing their argument. The qualitative checklist by Kempf (2002a) was used to evaluate how the conflict was conceptualized, how the rights, intentions and actions of the war parties were evaluated, which kinds of emotions related to representation of the conflict parties were reflected, what were the social identification patterns of conflict parties mentioned by the writers and how personal predicaments were reflected, and finally what was the overall direction of the articles.

The Escalation and De-Escalation Orientation Analysis

In order to understand the discussion of the escalation and de-escalation themes in the articles, it is important to first outline how the op-eds presented social construction and the role of the war parties.

In the war journalism op-ed on Waziri-Uzbek fight, Afridi (2007) divided conflict parties into internal and external actors. He presented foreign militants, local tribesmen/militants, Pakistani government, Afghanistan government and the *jirga* (a neutral third party) as conflict parties. The attitude of the external actors is depicted as hostile and conflict oriented. The foreign militants were said to be involved in murders of tribal elders and acting as obstacles to development while the local tribesmen were presented as patriotic and prone to a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

In the peace journalism op-ed on the same event, Khan (2007) also identified five parties involved in the conflict. Three of these parties were actively involved in the fight, namely local (Waziri tribesmen) militants, foreign (Uzbek) militants and Taliban from Afghanistan. The other two were the government of Pakistan and the US forces. The writer mentioned a change in militant hierarchy, backed by Afghani Taliban, which created a local tribal rift and a consequent divide between local tribesmen and Uzbek fighters.

For the War in Waziristan, the conflict parties presented in Fatemi's op-ed (2007) were the government of Pakistan, the US government and establishment, Al-Qaeda militants and Taliban. This op-ed was mostly based on the statements used by the government of Pakistan and the US establishment. The conflict parties were divided into three major groups: 'terrorists', Pakistan and the US. The militants were described with labels such as "evil" and were alarming, reenergizing, enhancing their attacking capabilities, and regaining momentum. The op-ed mostly highlighted the US perspective on the issue and its resentment against the government of Pakistan for not taking enough action against militants.

The peace journalism op-ed by Yusufzai (2007) was also written in the backdrop of the War in Waziristan. The identified conflict parties in the op-ed were foreign militants, local militants, local tribesmen, US, Pakistani government and the *jirga* as a mediating third party for conflict resolution. The writer presented a critical overview of the role of the conflict parties. While mentioning militants scrapping a peace agreement with the government, he pointed out the violations by the Pakistani government. He presented the imposing role of the US government and the problems faced by the local tribesmen and journalists.

The six areas identified by Kempf's analysis model (Kempf, 2002a; Bläsi, Jaeger, Kempf, & Möckel, 2004) were evident in all op-eds, with war journalism op-eds typically having more escalation themes and peace journalism op-eds having more de-escalation themes. However, de-escalation themes were not entirely absent from war journalism op-eds and vice versa. Also, one peace journalism oriented op-ed (Khan, 2007) showed a balance between escalation and de-escalation themes for the "overall direction" dimension of the selected model, which includes elite versus people-oriented sourcing and devaluation or better understanding of the opponents, among other indicators. The following is a discussion on the way the escalation and de-escalation themes of the six areas of Kempf's analysis model were reflected in the analysed op-eds:

1. The Conceptualization of the Conflict

In the war journalism oriented op-ed (Afridi, 2007) related to the fight between Waziris and Uzbeks, the emphasis was mainly on antagonism. The writer refuted, questioned and downgraded peaceful alternatives. The conceptualization of the conflict was mainly zero-sum. The emphasis on military values and the use of military force for eradicating foreign militants was emphasized. The writer showed support for democracy and the awareness of local people to overcome hindrance of foreign militants in social, economic and cultural development. However, the obstacles to peace were portrayed as overwhelming. The op-ed started by mentioning a gunfight between local tribesmen and foreign militants. It focused on the number of people that got killed and captured. The Uzbek militants' act of launching "terrorism" inside and outside Pakistan was highlighted. The failure of *jirga* process was highlighted although the idea of engaging influential people such as Maliks (or tribal elders), clerics, and political figures into a *jirga* for negotiation process was mentioned around the end. The conceptualization of conflict in the peace journalism oriented op-ed by Khan (2007) concerning the same event was, also, mostly escalation oriented. The writer emphasized antagonism and described killings, strength of the militants, use of ammunition and prospects of the fight which may lead further to inter-tribal clashes. However, he also mentioned some de-escalation related aspects including the abandonment of dividing protagonists into two groups.

In the war journalism op-ed related to War in Waziristan, the conceptualization of the conflict by Fatemi (2007) was mainly zero-sum with strong emphasis on refutation, questioning and downgrading of peaceful alternatives. The obstacles to peace were emphasized even though the writer showed support for democracy. In the peace journalism op-ed on the same event, Yusufzai (2007) questioned the appropriateness of the use of military force and talks about the “collateral damage” as a result of the militants’ attacks and military operations. He explained the sufferings of the people to highlight the negative effect of the use of force and also pointed out the pressure journalists in the tribal areas are facing from “militant groups, government intelligence agencies, tribal chiefs and criminal gangs” that made it difficult to report the situation from that area.

2. Evaluation of War Parties’ Rights and Intentions

The evaluation of the rights and intentions of the war parties was not deeply explored in the articles. This dimension appeared most vividly in the peace journalism oriented article, related to the Waziri-Uzbek fight, where Khan (2007) presented a realistic self-critical evaluation of the war parties. He explained the government’s misperception about the strength of militants and the lack of ingenuity in the course of events. Afridi’s war journalism article (2007) on the said event was more focused on the war parties’ actions than on their rights and intentions.

For the War in Waziristan, the war journalism-oriented op-ed by Fatemi (2007) showed more emphasis on the incompatibility of interests and a denial of common interests. He critically evaluated the intentions of militants by quoting different US officials. He showed scepticism about their underlying intentions and their lack of seriousness for maintaining peace. Yusufzai (2007), however, showed inclination towards realistic self-critical evaluation, respect of the rights and intentions of militants and the need for democratic steps. The writer mentioned that the media are only presenting a “sanitized version” of events by the government due to their lack of access to Waziristan. He talked about the federal government’s violation of a ceasefire agreement when it redeployed troops at check points, the lack of interest by federal government and FATA secretariat to see the on-ground situation and the inability of the government to meet the challenge.

3. Evaluation of War Parties’ Actions

Discussing the Waziri-Uzbek Fight, Afridi (2007) presented reports about the use of pressure and relentlessness on the part of the militants, the need for military action, escalation and an end to cooperative behaviour. The writer justified the stance of locals and the government of Pakistan. He condemned the actions of foreign militants by suggesting that “local tribesmen are tired of the excesses being committed by the foreigners mostly of Uzbek Islamic Movement”. The foreign militants were presented

as the cause of deteriorating social and cultural norms in the area and as an obstacle to progress by causing social problems and unrest. In the peace journalism oriented op-ed by Khan (2007) written about the same event, the foreign militants' actions were given a less confrontational evaluation. The writer described how they came to Pakistan from Afghanistan and the welcome they received from the local Waziri tribe. He kept on explaining their group dynamics and the reasons for the clash between the local tribesmen and the foreign militants. These reasons included: realization by the Taliban and Waziris that Uzbeks were becoming a liability due to their alleged involvement in target killings, their alliance with ex-commander Maulvi Omar, the power structure of the tribal system, their reluctance in fighting against the US forces in Afghanistan, and their inclination towards fighting Pakistan. The writer presented self-critical evaluation of the actions by the government. He used an escalation-oriented theme by presenting reports about the use of pressure, relentlessness, military action and escalation.

In the war journalism oriented op-ed by Fatemi (2007) in the context of the War in Waziristan, the US was presented as the third party that was contributing to conflict escalation by exerting pressure rather than mediating. The writer claimed the US establishment reproached the then-Pakistani president Pervez Musharraf for the September 2006 peace accord that gave Al-Qaeda time to regroup. The statements related to using military force against militants were presented several times. The article showed mixed statements from the US establishment which at time presented Musharraf as a strong, trustworthy ally and at times he was mentioned as a "military dictator" who they feared was "playing on both sides of the street". The writer suggested that Musharraf was only considered useful by the US if he recognized the threat in their respect.

Yusufzai (2007) discussed actions of the war parties in detail. He discussed the news media's inaccessibility to Waziristan due to government and other factors, the government's violation of the peace agreement with the deployment of troops, and the government's inability to meet the challenge. The writer pointed out that during the peace period no high official from the FATA secretariat or federal government visited the area to review the accord and to monitor its progress. The writer asserted that the problem was not with arranging a *jirga* for conflict resolution but with the implementation of the *jirga's* decisions, which was evident because the North Waziristan accord had been scrapped. He stressed the importance of proper monitoring of the peace treaties. The writer showed his support for cooperative behaviour and explored possibilities of common gain. On the escalation side, he wrote about the failure of peace agreements but he still supported the negotiation process. He presented the role of the US as pressurizing rather than mediating. The writer condemned militants' actions and reported against military action and relentlessness regarding negotiations.

4. Emotional Involvement in the Conflict

The analysis of the emotional involvement in the conflict provides us an insight into how these articles have used emotional connotations to contextualize their assessment. In his war journalism oriented op-ed, Afridi (2007) focused on the viciousness of the militants. The writer said that local people were looking for government's help to evacuate the area from the foreign militants. The presence of foreign militants was a "major obstacle" in development and they were the reason for social and economic problems, unrest, and closures of schools. Local people had divided opinion regarding foreign militants. On the contrary, several examples of empathy-laden emotional involvement were identified in the peace journalism oriented article by Khan (2007). The writer talked about the events after a peace accord was scrapped and said that the death toll is getting higher both among soldiers and tribal fighters and the violence spread to the areas which were previously unaffected. In another passage, the op-ed pointed out the sufferings of the local population due to attacks by militants, army operations, roadblocks, inflation due to short supplies, slow commercial activities, and problems with basic utilities such as electricity and the telephone system.

Fatemi (2007) quoted hard statements by the US establishment while discussing the War in Waziristan. The focus was on the mistrust and denial of possibilities for cooperation. Yusufzai (2007), however, showed empathy with victims of both sides and tried to deconstruct threats by presenting an unbiased assessment of militants' intentions and behaviour. The writer also put emphasis on cooperative experiences that can rebuild trust.

5. Social Identification and Personal Entanglement

In the analysis of the social identification and personal entanglement in the pretext of Waziri-Uzbek fight, Afridi (2007) used escalation-oriented aspects. The ideology of humanizing "our" leaders, "our" soldiers, "our" victims and "our" civilian population is used multiple times. The writer emphasised, "The ongoing clashes between the tribesmen and foreign militants, is a vivid indication of their patriotism...But with the passage of time they realised that those foreigners while exploiting their social and cultural norms started using the area for launching acts of terrorism inside and outside Pakistan". Similarly, the op-ed by Khan (2007) showed escalation-oriented aspects despite of its main orientation towards peace journalism. The writer tried to de-humanize militant leaders as 'unruly' and hardened enemy that killed about two hundred tribal leaders, intelligence operatives, journalists and government officials. The local sympathy turned into fear and resentment for Uzbeks and he expected that this would lead to taming of firepower of Uzbeks and tribal militants.

Yusufzai's (2007) article, however, showed de-escalation oriented aspects. The writer refrained from identification with escalation oriented leaders on all sides. He has also

pressed upon the use of peaceful means, *jirga*, for resolving the conflict, for example:

“The government has to think of other options keeping in view the national interest. Bowing to US pressure would reinforce the general impression among the fiercely independent Pashtun tribes inhabiting Waziristan and other tribal areas that the military operations are being carried at the behest of America. That perception needs to be corrected but it can only happen if traditional methods such as *jirgas* are employed to resolve the conflict” (p. 6).

6. Overall Direction of Articles

The focus of both war journalism articles (Afridi, 2007; Fatemi, 2007) was on elite sources. The use of elite sources of information and the focus on presenting background reports for devaluing militants has contributed to the escalation-oriented themes. The peace journalism article by Khan (2007) was mainly elite oriented but also provided background information of the militants that contributed to a better understanding of their construction and aims and objectives. Yusufzai’s article (2007) also provided background reports of militants that contribute to a better understanding of the militants. The writer had given voice to elite as well as common people.

Discussion and Conclusion

Diversity of opinion is the main construct of the op-eds selected for the qualitative analysis. Since the present study only focused on the four selected op-eds, its findings might not be generalized to larger media coverage of conflict events in FATA. However, it is important to note that these op-eds are the assessment of writers who hold authority in this subject. These articles provided extreme views about the militancy in Pakistan’s tribal areas, especially there was a strong divide on the peaceful resolution of the conflict and the use of force for dealing with the militants. They identified the same conflict parties, but the conceptualization of the conflict had strong escalation and de-escalation oriented themes. Rights and intentions of the conflict parties were vague and the main focus remained on the actions of the conflict parties. The choice in these types of discourses then remains the same: a centre-aligned policy by the government and divided opinion among the masses.

It was noticed that in the four opinion articles, the use of abstract words and phrases almost always leaned towards escalation within the six dimensions studied above. However, where the abstract sentiments were followed closely with specific examples and situations, the narrative moved towards de-escalation for the six dimensions. For example, while trying to describe weakened government control in Waziristan, Yusufzai (2007) presents the political agents – the topmost government representative in the tribal areas – as “beleaguered”, fearful, and “unable to wield power after gradual loss of authority”. He follows up the abstract descriptions of apparently harassed and

weak political agents immediately with the specific example of Pirzada Khan, North Waziristan's political agent, who survived a suicide bomb attack on his office in which some of his staff members were killed. The writer further explained the lost glory of the political agent's office, a post for which he said civil servants used to offer bribes but which now they try to avoid. The shift from abstract to specific here widens the scope of the conflict, shedding light on the actors involved. It is not just the militants versus the military anymore but also the political agents, the bureaucrats that form the selection pool for the political agent's office, the staff that works for the political agent and between the lines, the innocent civilians who might get harmed by militant attacks launched on government buildings. Yusufzai's (2007) argument was that the lack of government monitoring, rather than the tribal alternative dispute resolution system itself, led to the failure of a peace accord, and by extension, better government support could lead to peace through the tribal *jirga*. Here, the specific example helps his argument for peace building and falls within the de-escalation orientation. In contrast, Afridi (2007) follows abstract descriptions with more abstraction to create an escalation-oriented two-party, good-versus-evil conflict. He describes the clashes between Waziri tribesmen and their Uzbek guests as a sign of the tribesmen's patriotism, suggesting that the tribesmen first welcomed the Uzbeks as "Muslim brothers" but later found them to be exploiting the local "social and cultural norms" and turned against them. Afridi's (2007) only description of the norm violations is "acts of terrorism" but he does not provide any specific details of either the patriotic and cultural sentiments or the violations of hospitality. Elsewhere in the article, he uses quotes from the provincial governor to suggest that the tribesmen consider the Uzbeks a hindrance to "progress" and this is again followed by vague mentions of peace and development without any explanation of what the tribesmen consider progress. The lack of specific information and analysis here gives an escalation orientation to particularly the conceptualization of the conflict, the actions of the conflict parties, and the social identification dimensions of the Kempf model (2002a). The abstractions and generalizations also appeared to divert the opinion piece from any discussion of local militants in the area and the draconian Frontier Crimes Regulations – a set of British-era laws that were used without amendment by the Pakistani government instead of its own constitution to govern the tribal areas up until 2011 and is considered to be a dominant cause of the socio-economic deprivation of FATA residents.

The escalation-oriented themes were prominent in the four opinion pieces where writers relied on previously published news reports, hearsay, and statements by elite sources. Information used from such sources seemed already slanted towards a two-party, zero-sum orientation of conflict, which benefited escalation rather than de-escalation themes. For example, statements such as "situation is said to be tense" and "both sides are reportedly entrenched in their positions" (Afridi, 2007), and "Frances Townsend squarely blamed the Musharraf regime" and "Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid called

on the US to use military force to destroy the terrorist safe houses” (Fatemi, 2007) borrowed the tones of escalation of their sources and relayed them forward, as if to compound the effect, without much insight. Just like the use of abstract themes, this reliance on published material over analysis also appeared to take away from “an all-sided view of the conflict” which Kempf (2001) considered to be a necessary tool for journalists contributing to de-escalation. On the other hand, authoritative writing based on personal insight and original reporting in the four op-ed articles provided a clearer, detailed picture of a multi-party conflict with hints at solutions. For example, “the plight of Waziristan isn’t widely known due to the remoteness of the area” in Yusufzai (2007) not only became a point of entry for the readers to understand the variety of challenges to independent news coverage of the conflict but also informed the readers about the plight itself, through the mainstream press.

In the four analysed articles, the background or contextual information cuts both ways. Information that simply presented fatality figures or instances of violence often fell in the escalation-oriented themes for the action of the war parties. Afridi (2007) and Khan (2007) were both guilty of dramatic and sometimes gratuitous mentions of violence. But at the same time, the background information also helped shed light on the intentions of the war parties. For example, Khan (2007) uses in-depth original reporting to tease out the causes of the Waziri-Uzbek clashes. Similarly, even though Fatemi (2007) quoted aggressive statements from US officials to highlight the strains in the Pak-US relations and the flaws in US foreign policy, he eventually adopted a critical distance to the bellicose US statements, which was indicative of de-escalation oriented reporting (Kempf, 2003). He concluded by suggesting military action alone cannot work and a long-term solution would require support for democratic values, also a de-escalation oriented reporting indicator (Kempf, 2003), thereby contextualizing his use of the quoted statements.

The conclusion sections of the four op-eds analysed for this study also provided a point of inspection for their escalation and de-escalation orientation. It was found that three writers presented some form of recommendations to the conflict parties while one predicted the outcome of the current developments. Among the three writers who presented suggestions, only one (Afridi, 2007) recommended the use of force while the other two (Fatemi, 2007; Yusufzai, 2007) categorically stated that the military actions cannot be considered a long-term solution. The latter two writers recommended peace building and diplomatic measures such as support for democratic values, human rights and dispute resolution through negotiations. The first of the latter two articles was quantitatively categorized as a war journalism article and the second as peace journalism. However, the qualitative analysis suggests that through the concluding paragraphs, both articles showed a de-escalation orientation in the conceptualization of the conflict. This also highlights that conflict conceptualization continues throughout an opinion article and is not limited to the lead or introductory paragraphs.

These findings suggested that in the four opinion articles the use of language, authoritative writing based on original reporting, the presentation of background information, and the conclusion of an article contributed to the article's escalation or de-escalation orientation. Even though these findings might not be generalized, writers and editors can pay close attention to the effects of their writing on the conceptualization of conflict, evaluation of intentions and actions of war parties, and the social identification and emotional involvement presented in their articles.

By incorporating Kempf's model (2002a), future studies can explore the conflict dynamics by temporal analysis of the different milestone events as covered by newspapers and television channels. This might not only give an insight into media texts but, if coupled with the analysis of government policies, it can also provide a holistic view of the conflict in the tribal areas.

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