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## Role of Media in Shaping Public Opinion About War in Afghanistan Post 9/11

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# Role of Media in Shaping Public Opinion About War in Afghanistan Post 9/11

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## Abstract

*The paper examines how the media affects people's understanding of the war in Afghanistan. The study investigates how media outlets' coverage of events, framing of issues, and informational presentation have influenced how the public sees and understands the conflict. It investigates the impact of media bias, propaganda, and censorship on shaping public attitudes towards the war, providing alternative perspectives and challenging mainstream narratives. This paper aims to explain how the media affects how people see and respond to global events. However, more precisely, the method in which countries could sway public opinion on the Afghan conflict in favour of their objectives with the aid of media outlets after the 9/11 incident. Also, the political usage of CNN as a tool to shape public opinion is discussed.*

**Keywords:** Role of media, Public opinion, Afghanistan, 9/11, Taliban, CNN, Global War on Terror.

## Introduction

Media plays a significant role in shaping public opinions, especially during war or conflict. The media uses several techniques for coverage and for convincing people about different matters. Media is politically used for a country's self-interests all around the world. This paper aims to analyze the role of media in shaping public opinion about the war in Afghanistan after 9/11 and highlight how media coverage influenced public opinion about 9/11 and blamed Afghanistan for it. In light of Afghanistan's difficulties and hardships after the overthrow of the Taliban rule in 2001, the country's media is praised as a development success story. Even while there were still Taliban groups that posed a threat to stability, development, and security, Afghanistan appeared to have established a reasonably open information environment and a variety of reliable media sources that might educate the people. After the fall of the Taliban, success in media development was achievable even in a country with a long history of violence and information restrictions. The three media development domains where these early results were most noticeable were local media, particularly radio, citizen-government communication, and the presence of foreign broadcasters in Afghanistan. The media environment in Afghanistan emerged independently, but in the early stages of rebuilding, high levels of collaboration and communication among regional, national, and international players helped in the emergence and growth of media outlets.

However, it becomes clear from a closer look at the state of the media today that sowing the seeds of free media takes lots of effort and provides an excellent example of media expansion. However, it also demonstrates the media's inherent fragility in a society that has experienced violence, as well as how quickly early wins may reverse. This example of media growth in Afghanistan after the transition to democracy gives valuable lessons. Media development's medium- and long-term effects are also significant for the government and the foreign parties engaging in the reconstruction effort.

A new age emerged with the Taliban's collapse and after Afghanistan's economy and social structure had been destroyed by years of civil warfare and oppression. However, severe obstacles, such as a lack of facilities, a positive environment, and a high rate of illiteracy, challenged the reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. The journey also had to deal with the consequences of a strict policy against the media. Initially, the establishment of various independent media outlets that would provide information to the public, cover elections, and hold government officials responsible was not seen as a top priority by Afghanistan's traditional Islamic culture. However, the survival of radio culture in Afghanistan was still the primary source of information for most Afghans. It can be attributed to several socioeconomic issues, as only bigger cities had access to electricity. Likewise, most Afghans, with an annual gross domestic output of \$8.8 billion (\$800 per capita), could not afford a television. Therefore, print media distribution was effectively limited, and constant delivery was practically impossible due to infrastructural destruction and a challenging environment, which posed significant challenges to newspaper and magazine companies. Similarly, Afghanistan's low female literacy rate of 12.6% and male literacy rates of around 29% present further challenged print media's effectiveness.

Since radio could reach the country's most remote areas, radio was able to meet the needs of the people far more effectively than print or television. Additionally, increased worldwide broadcasting in post-conflict Afghanistan helped to foster the radio culture. Ultimately, radio emerged as the clear winner, requiring fewer resources and more straightforward maintenance. This was because almost all of Afghanistan's earliest media growth efforts were carefully focused on radio stations. In a manner that the national government could not, local radio helped Afghans become closer and create social networks based on mutual respect and cooperation. The government had no means of communicating with the public in this new world, so radio stations had to guide the populace. Local media was one of the means that could unite disparate languages, ease tensions between regions, and teach without discrimination in a country split by social class and ethnicity.

This paper mainly focuses on the role of media in shaping public opinion about 9/11 and the US-led war in Afghanistan. Though the domestic media in Afghanistan at that time was destroyed, the international media greatly influenced public opinion on various topics, including politics, social concerns, and environmental challenges. The media shapes public opinion through agenda-setting, selective reporting, framing, opinion leaders, and social media presence. However, the media's ability to shape public opinion has limitations, like negative assumptions and beliefs can be sustained and reality twisted by sensationalized, false, and biased reporting. Furthermore, there are problems with the media's impact on politics, especially when it involves partisanship and biases.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Cultivation Theory

"Cultivation Theory" backs up the claim that the average citizen's primary source of knowledge about global events is the mainstream media, including television. The theory considers the social function of television. Children have been raised viewing TV from an early age since the 1950s and 1960s and are exposed to television before they can read or develop views about what they like and do not like. Therefore, "our perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes of day-to-day norms and reality" are the product of popular media. Furthermore, George Gerbner compared television to a "key member of the family, the one who tells the most stories most of the time." Therefore, the more exposure people receive to television, the more their perspectives may increasingly resemble the prevailing narrative of the television network.

Since television was formed during a period when it dominated the storytelling landscape, it primarily focuses on a highly social phenomenon. Thus, newspaper agencies cannot be covered by the idea. Furthermore, because it has always been the most accessible and readily available media network, television has been emphasized by Gerbner as "the dominant socializing force in America." Unlike using a computer or reading a newspaper, watching television doesn't require any special abilities. Unlike going to the movies or purchasing a magazine, it also does not cost extra, is available for viewing from the comfort of one's home, and runs frequently. The structure of the messages broadcast on television was analyzed by scholars in order to develop the "Cultivation Theory", which argues that although it is not immediately evident, the topics covered were far from diverse; in fact, violence was unjustly committed against the elderly, minorities, and children. Also, if a viewer's life experiences are similar to the events broadcast, the impact of the coverage will be amplified.

### The Cultivation Effect

The theory suggests that television and media possess a small but significant influence on the attitudes and beliefs about society.



Those who absorb more media are those who are more influenced.

Heavy users show more cultivation effect

Source: Published by Rommanishitak on 12/08/21

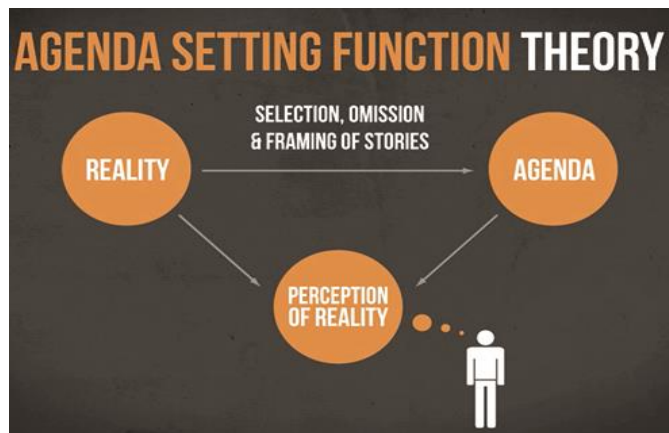
### 2.2 Agenda Setting Theory

Donald Shaw and Maxwell McCombs developed the "Agenda-Setting Theory" in 1972 as another idea to explain the media's effect. This concept upholds the notion that news organizations broadly influence deciding and swaying the reader's or viewer's perception of what is significant since they choose what stories to report and how often to mention them. Similarly, Bernard Cohen states, "The press may not be successful in telling people

what to think about most of the time, but it is stunningly effective in telling its audience what to think about".

An audience will consider a topic more essential than others if it is addressed frequently; this way of thinking is called "accessibility." Thus, the accessibility principle creates the notion that the more frequently a phenomenon is covered, the greater the presence of the event in the audience's imagination and memories. The idea that newspaper agencies' primary objective is to sell as many physical or digital copies as possible to guarantee financial success might also be connected to the "Agenda-Setting Theory." Therefore, regardless of a topic's significance or applicability in the global arena, media outlets cover exciting occurrences on a larger scale since they are more attractive to the general public. Furthermore, media companies are frequently partially controlled by powerful people. For example, Rupert Murdoch, the media mogul, owns Fox News, The Wall Street Journal, and The New York Post. This means that a limited number of owners' political and economic goals will influence how the stories are reported, either by restricting evidence, creating a never-ending state of uncertainty, or even by disseminating false information.

The Agenda-Setting Theory is related to the Governmental Agenda. John W. Kingdon describes: "The list of subjects and problems that government officials, and people outside of government, but who are closely connected to those in power, are paying serious attention to at any given time". Therefore, journalists frequently quote government officials in foreign policy pieces in times of crisis because they are thought to be the most reliable sources. As a result, government officials influence how the public is initially presented with the issue.



Source: Published by Make Some Noise blog by Irati Saenz, 2015

### 2.3 Framing Theory

The Framing Theory, proposed by Gregory Bateson in 1972, focuses on how media sources bring attention to specific events and generate a field of meaning as it establishes a relationship with the "Agenda-Setting Theory." Social standards deeply rooted in discourses, moral judgments, or cultural norms are examples of frames, as are mental pictures, which may be thought of as people's perceptions of specific events. They enable readers to rapidly understand, group, and assess problems without creating a complex analysis. Framing Theory upholds the notion that how news is delivered to an audience, referred to as "the frame", affects the audience's perceptions of the information and how

they absorb it. Furthermore, the concept implies that editors, reporters, and journalists voluntarily create frames in order to establish what might be called "common sense" and to connect stories to a larger context. Narratives should be compared ultimately to discover the broader picture since Entman notes that "these links are difficult to fully detect because many of the framing devices can appear as 'natural' unremarkable choices of words or images." Furthermore, Entman identifies five distinct framing techniques for news stories: Personalism, conflict, consequences, morality, and accountability.

In the 9/11 context, personalism was utilized to express the hundreds of feedbacks of those who lost loved ones in the attacks, as well as the political establishment's anxiety about the chaos and many threats facing the United States at the time. The frame of conflict was employed to highlight the opposing perspectives of the events that followed September 11: those who were accountable and those who were negatively impacted. In addition, the notion that the "war on terror" was the only way to balance the 9/11 assaults was connected to the media's use of responsibility. Furthermore, the United States often employs a security framework to promote a sense of cultural rationality in the American people during war or turmoil. Following 9/11 and during "the war ON terror," the security justification was employed to support armed combat, with terrorism serving as the root cause, morality demanding vengeance against evildoers, and warfare serving as the only viable option. Constructing a binary framework in which starting a war was the only way to bring peace back to the United States.



Image source - medium.com

Source: Published by *Psychology Magazine*, 2019

### 3. State of Practice: The Aftermath of 9/11

For many people, September 11, 2001, was a devastating day for the US, and it abandoned its isolationist strategy in favour of a more global agenda. Furthermore, given that hijackings and acts of terrorism had been occurring across the Western world throughout the 1990s, it became clear after 9/11 that the United States had fostered a false feeling of security. As to the description provided by Goldstein and Pevehouse, terrorism may be characterized as "a deliberate and indiscriminate use of violence to create media attention, targeting civilians, thereby amplifying its psychological effect on large populations." Fear, sadness, grief, and fury were the prevalent emotions felt by most Americans in the days following the 9/11 attacks. So, it was hardly shocking when

George W. Bush announced the "war on terrorism," setting off a course for more than two decades of retaliation. Because the Taliban had allegedly provided shelter as well as assistance to al Qaeda, the United States sought to use its influence in Afghanistan to overthrow the Taliban government. Other foreign actors rapidly backed George W. Bush's response to the terrorist events of 2001 because they also believed that the Taliban rule constituted a threat to global stability.

Even Russia, which has a long-standing enmity with the United States, supported the cause and facilitated the use of its airbases by the United States and other coalition troops in post-Soviet Central Asian Republics. Russia also sponsored the Northern Alliance, influenced by the West, and shared the intelligence with Western forces. Beginning on October 7, 2001, the US-led coalition forces overthrew the Taliban government from Kabul and demolished the foundations of al Qaeda. Eventually, an interim government supported by Western nations was constituted in Afghanistan in December 2001, and Hamid Karzai served as its chairman. Journalists on both sides of the fight were generating stories on the scenario as a follow-up to what was happening. It is crucial to highlight that while editors and journalists work hard to be neutral while covering global events, they cannot always be unbiased.

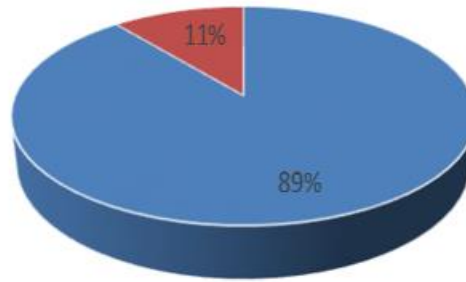
### *3.1 9/11 from the Western Media's Point of View*

The Western media, mainly the United States, presented a hostile narrative between the "evil" (typically those who oppose democratic regimes or those who do not share American values, thus, the so-called "axis of evil") and the "good" (the nations of the West, but more specifically the American political establishment). As a result, the Taliban and al Qaeda, who were located in Afghanistan, were the source of all evil after the events of 9/11. This strategy was made clear on September 20, 2001, about nine days after the attacks, when Bush delivered a speech that stated, "You are either with us, or you are with the terrorists".

In his study, Herbert Gans highlighted that American journalism is known for placing the country at the centre of the globe and concentrating primarily on its national interests, which are heavily affected by the White House. Furthermore, a different study revealed that American international news coverage has influenced the public's opinions about foreign policy and their perception of foreign nations. Furthermore, even the former President, Barack Obama, said in 2016 that the government's policies often influence the stories that foreign correspondents write because most are based in Washington, DC, rather than overseas offices. This statement indicates the significant influence agenda-setting has on news organizations and, in turn, on how the public perceives the world. Reporters covering September 11, 2001, events performed the role of war correspondents and acted as a link between the public and the happenings, providing live broadcasts on ongoing tragedies and the possibility of further tragedies. The reporters emerged as the primary information providers for the global community and Americans alike, helping them figure out the extent of the destruction. Newspapers were overflowing with coverage of the events the day after the attacks; in fact, 190 US newspapers ran a cover story on 9/11. Reporting on the attacks of 2001, however, was not a singular, isolated incident; instead, it was the spark for the ensuing rise in terrorism in US news, which reached a peak of 656% between September 2001 and September 2002.

Therefore, George W. Bush had the ideal conditions to proclaim a "war on terrorism" as public awareness and knowledge about terrorism increased. His speech had a paternalistic tone since he offered people the protection and retribution they had been

waiting for so long. However, what functions as one person's defence system against freedom is another's defence mechanism against danger and conflict. According to a Gallup survey conducted on November 16, 2001, 89% of Americans approved of the President's reaction to the events of 9/11. Furthermore, 92% of American citizens supported the war, according to the same poll. Thus, it can be argued that the Bush administration's narrative, which was supported by the media, was influential in giving legitimacy to "the war on terror." The Bush Administration promoted two primary narratives, one democratic and the other humanitarian, to strengthen their claims that going to war was the only option.



■ Approved of response post 9/11 ■ Disapproved of response post 9/11

### 3.1.1 *The Democratic Narrative*

In the wake of the 9/11 attacks, the media amplified the narrative put out by the US administration, which in turn promoted government initiatives. Reporters in times of crisis thus become reliant on the information they get from the executive branch. Above all, they strongly emphasized the security and humanitarian frames to present the American people with a picture of the world that supported their worldview. George W. Bush's post-9/11 speech revolved around the notion that he would be waging war in Afghanistan in order to advance "democracy, human rights, and self-determination". Furthermore, Bush frequently used the word "terror" in his speeches, bringing up the events of September 11, 2001, to play on Americans' fears and, therefore, justify "the war on terror." The American writer Sidney Blumenthal claims that during the former President's speech in Cleveland on March 20, 2006, he used the term "terror" at least 54 times to emphasize his points and to "awaken the public passions and hopes."

### 3.1.2 *The Humanitarian Narrative*

In terms of the humanitarian frame used by Bush to justify the US-led war, he portrayed military intervention as a means of liberating the Afghan people from the 'abhorrent values of the Taliban,' which were widely condemned by the American public, and thus as a means of ensuring a better life and a better future for the Asian population. The Bush administration's narrative centred on the Taliban's regulations, which prohibited women from working outside the home, denying girls access to school and healthcare. Laura Bush, the wife of President Bush, really used the public's hatred for the Taliban's oppressive gender policies as a platform to broadcast a nationwide radio campaign. President Bush attempted to bring attention to the dilemma that women were facing as a result of the "misogynist and incredibly repressive Taliban regime" during her weekly radio speech. She described how women were not allowed to leave the house without a male companion unless they wanted to be beaten and how girls were made to leave



school. The portrayal of women as "helpless victims" of fundamentalist authority was prevalent. Thus, the war adopted a feminist narrative to garner support: "The fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women." Because the Western public already recognized women as equals, this feminist viewpoint may be related to Entman's morality frame in that it suggests that women in other areas of the globe should not be allowed to be mistreated as second-class citizens.

#### **4. 9/11 and its Aftermath: Expansion and Growth of the Local Media**

After the Taliban took control, they implemented the Sharia Law, which outlawed music and eliminated the few television networks that had existed until 1996. However, radio came under Taliban control, and the state-run station changed its name to Radio Shariat, which established a link with Sharia Law. It provided updates on the daily government operations carried out by the Taliban in addition to regularly airing recitations of the Holy Quran. It also prohibited reporting on any topic that would defame Islam, dishonour the Muslim faith, or undermine the army. As a result, any reporter who violated any of the abovementioned prohibitions would face suspension and maybe even persecution.

There was little information available to the Afghan people at the time of the 9/11 attacks. The bulk of people who tuned on the radio in support of the Taliban got only oblique explanations of what was happening, while a tiny fraction was informed because they listened to Voice of America or the BBC. Regarding the 9/11 attacks and the role of al-Qaeda and the Taliban, Wakil Ahmed Muttawakil, the foreign minister of the Taliban, conducted a press conference after the attacks in which he denied the notion that Bin Laden or the Taliban could not attack this. He stated, "We do not anticipate an attack against us because there is no justification for it."

After the Taliban's removal and establishing an interim government, Radio Shariat reverted to its former name, Radio Television Afghanistan, on November 13, 2001. It showed verses from the Quran, retransmitted music, and let women back inside the radio station for the first time in five years. Furthermore, the language on the radio changed from Pashto, the chosen language of the Taliban, to Dari, the language of the Northern Alliance. The United States and its allies' entry into Afghanistan created a new environment for the media there. According to Freedom House Press, Afghan news media became technically free in 2001 and remained that way until 2021. This was made possible by the assistance of American news experts in setting the agenda and providing guidance for the Afghan media. In addition to the political arena, transitional democracy in the media was required to establish an Afghanistan fit for the twenty-first century. Therefore, the Constitution guaranteed citizens' right to access information by introducing freedom of expression, encouraging public conversation, and outlawing censorship. Even though it was first exceedingly difficult for Afghan journalists to break away from the country's traditional heritage of reporting in an authoritarian manner, as time went on, the press began to adopt more Western-style reporting, which promoted freedom of expression in all its manifestations.

Bush was successful in propagating the notion that establishing democracy in Afghanistan would aid in the fight against terrorism, as indicated by the growing support for democracies from across the world. George W. Bush declared that "peace will be achieved by helping Afghanistan develop its stable government," so he pledged "true peace in the region." By 2002, regional warlords and governors took over local media outlets as they saw this as a chance to advance their personal or political goals or improve

their public perception. Warlords, Taliban and other extremist organizations, ordinary Afghans, Western, Iranian, or Pakistani government figures soon came to dominate the Afghan media landscape. Afghanistan's media landscape became ethnically and linguistically divided because every media outlet sought to represent its sponsors' interests. This occurred due to the Afghan public's propensity to believe accounts from individuals they could identify with.

## **5. Media, Ethnic Divide and Insurgency**

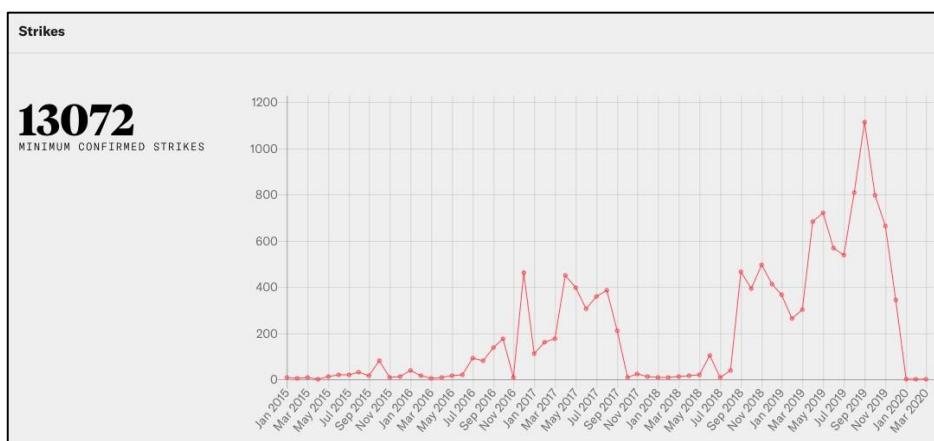
The Taliban leadership swiftly fled to Pakistan after the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, where they were able to find safety because of ethnicity – an important aspect that the United States and other Western countries mostly ignored. The role of identity, notably ethnicity, played a critical role in the Taliban's insurgency against foreign forces as many ethnic groups provided the Afghan population with a feeling of identity in a nation where the presence of foreign powers like the Soviet Union and the Western powers has been weakening it from the inside for decades. The Pashtun people, who make up over 40% of Afghanistan's population, are by far the biggest ethnic group and comprise mainly the Taliban.

However, the Tajik population, who made up just 25% of the Afghan population, backed both the Northern Alliance and the American soldiers. People tend to identify more with one side of the dispute than the other based on ethnicity. The Taliban's Pashtun heritage helped them to secure a harbour in Pakistan in addition to sustaining their power and support in Afghanistan's rural south. Furthermore, it created an opportunity to enlist new members among the over a million Afghan refugees, primarily Pashtuns, who resided along the boundary between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Furthermore, the civilian killings by the international forces non-reporting, misreporting and wrong reporting by the mainstream media (local as well as the international) helped the Taliban in their insurgency.

### *5.1 Drone Strikes*

Drones or unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) are employed for surveillance, bomb dropping, missile launching, or target impact. Following September 11, 2001, the United States began using drone attacks in Afghanistan to eliminate Taliban and al-Qaeda militants; however, they also resulted in several casualties among civilians.

The drone attacks occasionally resulted in following the incorrect individual or in the intended target being assassinated alongside a group of innocents. This had the unintended consequence of making the Afghan populace more hostile toward the US government as they felt defenceless against an upcoming, unstoppable assault. However, it took years for the CIA and the US military to realize that they were occasionally tricked into pursuing their objectives. Because occasionally, the people providing them with intelligence about the opponents of the United States were genuinely serving their interests either by getting their rivals sent to Guantánamo Prison or by persuading the Americans that they had to hunt down their local competitors. The Bureau of Investigative Journalism claims that the United States carried out over 13,000 drone attacks between 2015 and 2020, perhaps killing up to 10,000 people. September 2019 saw a peak in drone assaults, with an estimated 1,110 strikes.



Source: Drone Strikes in Afghanistan from 2015-2020, Bureau of Investigative Journalism, (2020).

## 5.2 Anti-Imperialistic Narrative

Following the American invasion, there were two different perspectives on the American and Western forces stationed in Afghanistan. On the one hand, others believed the West was using its presence in the area as a pretext to advance its geopolitical objectives further. However, the perception of the Western presence in Afghanistan was that it was the ideal chance to control the Taliban in Afghanistan and its neighbouring nations. As was previously indicated, there have occasionally been civilian casualties as a result of attempts to kill potential insurgents. Because of the civilian deaths, which the United States characterized as mistakes and the suffering they caused, Muslims all over the world developed a sense of solidarity against those who caused the mistakes, which helped the Taliban and al Qaeda attract more recruits.

## 6. The Lack of Narrative

As the Taliban appeared to be in retreat by 2002, the Bush administration began to believe that they were no longer a top priority and chose to extend the "war on terror" across the Afghan border. As a result, Iraq became the priority for the American administration, the general public, and the media. Most media outlets stopped covering Afghanistan and began using parachute journalists instead. Correspondents known as "parachutes" are dispatched to cover stories in nations where they know little or nothing and sometimes lack the language skills to communicate. Because they frequently use stereotypes to create their stories, their coverage is typically low quality. Karzai voiced his frustration with this change, not just because the press presented a typical picture of Afghanistan as a corrupt and dangerous country but also because the Afghan people were left to face the Taliban on their own without the assistance of a Western force. Ronald Neuman, the American ambassador to Afghanistan, notified Washington in 2005 that the Taliban had resurrected; however, the American media neglected to look into this story. Moreover, Afghanistan did not return to the political and media agenda or, more accurately, back into people's thoughts until the Taliban brought attention to the situation by dragging American and European forces into it.

## 7. Rising of the CNN Effect

In 1980, Ted Turner founded CNN as the first news network to begin airing news around the clock across the entire globe. The Gulf War of 1990-1991 was an essential moment in

CNN's fame as a player in international politics and communications, as CNN was the only news organization transmitting from inside Iraq throughout the American bombing campaign. The network's outstanding reporting helped to establish CNN as one of the three major American networks during this conflict. CNN emerged at this point as the first illustration of how the media may affect politics on a national and international level. It was also praised for its part in the Somalian hunger crisis (1990–1991) and the conflicts in Kosovo (1999) and Bosnia (1995–1999). Thus, The public started to believe that this network was significant to world politics and might influence the foreign policy choices made by Western countries. The terms "CNN Effect," "CNN Complex," "CNN Curve," and "CNN Factor" were used to refer to this stated impact. The idea was first formed by politicians who thought that negative television coverage was the reason behind America's defeat in Vietnam. Some people believe that the CNN effect contributed to the fall of the Soviet Union. The media has been considered an enemy of government foreign policy ever since. Another reason for leaders' desire with CNN was the belief that television acted as the primary political mediator. In foreign policy and international relations, CNN was regarded as a superpower, and the CNN Effect was credited with having the ability to change worldwide affairs.

### *7.1 Role of CNN in 9/11 coverage:*

According to proponents of soft power, fax machines, blue jeans, and television were more critical in dismantling the Soviet Empire than tanks and cruise missiles. Belief in the influence and power of the mass media was a prominent subject throughout this time. On the one hand, in the late 1980s, the media was recognized as a significant agent in disseminating political ideas to people in Eastern Europe, inspiring them to oppose the status quo. However, it was thought that media representations of foreign "victims" had influenced decision-makers to order military action in areas like Somalia in 1992 and Iraqi Kurdistan in 1991. The phrase "CNN effect" was coined in response to the assumed influence of mass media on diplomacy and foreign policy, and it generated much discussion in the 1990s.

However, the excitement quickly ended with Al Qaeda's September 11 strikes on the U.S. From this angle, the 1990s were a unique historical time in which the US and its Western allies had no clear foreign policy danger or direction; however, 9/11 dramatically altered this situation and provided the Western foreign policy with clarity and direction, which provoked the launch of the Global War on Terror. Similar to the period of the Cold War, there was an evident rivalry that presented a real risk to the security of the country. As a result, the media, which had experienced a limited period in which they were mostly free from government control, were once more at the disposal of the state. One may argue that the September 11 attacks were the most significant terrorist strikes in human history because of their enormous influence on the media globally. Due to the mystery surrounding the occurrence, there was a high demand for information, and on September 12, 2001, newspaper stands were stocked with articles about it. 190 American newspapers ran an article on the incident on their front pages the day after the bombings. The incident was reported in Spain's nine significant newspapers, demonstrating that this may be adopted in other Western nations. The incident gained so much attention that it was covered comprehensively by 119 daily publications in the US, along with extra pieces that guessed on the event's potential effects on the country's politics, economy, and society. Americans became overloaded with details regarding Afghanistan, 9/11, al-Qaeda, and the Taliban during the ten days that followed the attacks. Ninety per cent of Americans got their information mainly from television, particularly CNN, which adopts the

cultivation theory. This is because, at the time of the events, television was the primary news source for the typical American citizen. Following the incident, 81 per cent of Americans acknowledged that they listened to the news on the radio or watched television during the day to stay updated. Furthermore, 46% of Americans began closely reading newspapers after the attacks, according to the Pew Research Center, to ensure they did not miss any significant events or information.

The audience was flooded with terms like "terror," "enemy," and "war" to strengthen the message's effect and establish a framework that would subsequently be very simple for the populace to recognize. Additionally, when terrorism began to appear in the minds of Americans, CNN and other news organizations began to cover the story regularly. The sense of risk grew along with the amount of news coverage. Although 75% of those polled said they feared what they read or heard, this was not enough to discourage them from consuming media. The sense of being in danger was reinforced by the continuous display of pictures and details from the assaults. This was subsequently transformed into a framework of meaning by using commonly understood language and symbols so that the public could relate to the picture the media had already painted of the assaults. The post-9/11 national surroundings created an increasingly common sense of unity among Americans. The reality that the terrible acts of terrorism had touched every single individual in the nation justifies this sense of solidarity. 92% of respondents to a Pew Research Center study conducted following the 9/11 attacks said they experienced sadness when viewing news reports about the attacks. They were also furious, as eighty-seven per cent of Americans said they were still upset over the terrorists' deaths at the World Trade Center and Twin Towers three weeks after the attacks. Because of this, the American political system, CNN and other media outlets were able to create the idea that terrorism was a worldwide phenomenon that was becoming worse and that the problem would only get worse if a solution (attacking the people who had carried out the attacks) were not discovered. In addition, it helped to generate overwhelming sympathy and support for US borders. For instance, the title "We are all American now" in French on Le Monde's front page from September 13, 2001, perfectly captures this feeling of unity with the United States.



Source: (Le Monde shows support after the 9/11 attacks, Twitter 2015)

This story suggested that any step taken to reduce the possibility of terrorism inside US borders was acceptable, even encouraged. 83% of Americans in January 2002 said "defending the nation from future terrorist attacks" was the biggest priority. As a result, government policy centred on putting policies in place that would guarantee the protection of American residents within the country's boundaries. Actually, since the

attacks, terrorism has been seen as a "top priority" by both American Democrats and Republicans.

## **Conclusion**

The US could win over civilian support for the war it led by using the media's influence. However, the media's politically motivated agenda helped strengthen strong support for a cause. People wanted to stop what appeared to be an unseen destruction that no one, not the most potent American superpower, could see coming or stop. They also desired punishment for a threat made against the United States. Over two decades have passed since the September 11 attacks, and their effects are still felt. News organizations benefited from this event to create a picture of chaos and instability, with their and the Bush administration's policy being the only feasible solutions. The fact that turmoil, insecurity, and weakness were infecting the whole Western world, especially the American populace, contributed to the advancement of the narrative employed by the media and, by implication, the government's objective. The population was only able to depend on the government and the media as sources of power at a period when danger could be seen everywhere.

Furthermore, people viewed anything presented as a source of stability and peace as a good answer without question. In reality, security has two sides: although it fosters mistrust toward the foreign, it also strengthens ties of trust with those perceived as their guardians. This produced the ideal environment for people to believe anything they presented with. Additionally, the public was forced to believe what government officials and the media told them about the battle in Afghanistan since their only source of information about the subject was that. The paper argues that the hostile narrative directed towards Muslims was developed primarily to support the war in Afghanistan. Moreover, in a nation such as the United States, which had just recovered from the deadliest assaults in its history, public mistrust rose along with people's feelings of vulnerability and terror. As a result, the storyline that the media employed to defend the war against the Muslim nation painted all Muslims as being innocently placed together and posing a threat to the US security structure.

In addition, the paper argues that media agencies play a significantly more significant role in shaping public opinion. Media outlets may be viewed as gatekeepers who consciously gather, "organize and present the ideas, events, and topics they cover" per the theories. Thus, it may be assumed that most of the public believes nothing that is not reported on television exists. Television assists in understanding the meaning of what people generally believe, say, and do by presenting the narratives. As a result, media networks not only influence how people view events and form their perspectives but also have the authority to decide what is most important and is not notable. Lastly, there are some recommendations about the role of media while reporting, particularly in conflict zones: First, the media must describe the situation from all angles and present several viewpoints fairly and impartially. Second, the media must prevent bias in reporting by being aware of the prejudices and trying to deliver the facts objectively. Third, the media must ensure the material is accurate before disseminating or reporting it and clearly distinguish between what is factual and what is opinion. Fourth, the media must be honest about the editorial process and declare any possible conflicts of interest or affiliations that might affect reporting. Fifth, the media must not use too dramatic or offensive language to bring up controversy or change public opinion. Sixth, assist audiences in understanding a particular issue's nuanced and complicated nature by

providing context by presenting information within its larger context. Seventh, promote critical thinking in viewers by arming them with the knowledge and resources they need to make their own decisions. Lastly, follow moral principles in journalism, honour the rights and dignity of people and groups, and refrain from violence or bias.

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