The Role of Media in the Framing of the Afghan Conflict and the Search for Peace

A dissertation presented to

the faculty of

the Scripps College of Communication of Ohio University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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August 2012

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This dissertation titled
The Role of Media in the Framing of the Afghan Conflict and the Search for Peace

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Abstract

NOORZAI, ROSHAN, Ph.D., August 2012, Mass Communication

The Role of Media in the Framing of the Afghan Conflict and the Search for Peace (306 pp.)

Director of Dissertation: Don M. Flourney

This dissertation explores media framing of conflict and peace in post-September 11, 2001 Afghanistan. The media selected for this study included: the BBC Pashto Service and Azadi Radio at the international level; Tehran’s Pashto Radio at the regional level; National Radio and Television of Afghanistan [NRTA], Tolo Television and Ariana Television at the national level; and Salam Watandar Network and Hewad Television at the local level.

In-depth interviews were conducted during fieldwork in the summers of 2008 and 2009. Participant observation, textual analysis and documents analysis were the other methods used in this study.

Using comparative frame analysis, this study identified the following main frames: state building, occupation as failure and civilian victims. Other frames identified and available to the media, which were either rejected or only partially supported by this research, were: Jihad, terrorism, ethnic victimization, and peace through negotiation.

The results of this study showed that, except Tehran’s Pashto Radio, all other media outlets used state building as the main frame. The data pointed to the broader socio-political contexts and the political economy of the media outlets as determining factors in adoption of this particular frame. In the frame contestation process, power relation and culture resonance played an important role. Although the dominant media
frames were identified using frame analysis, that process did not always explain why those frames were adopted and especially what were the different constraints, pressures and controversies at play. These positions and issues were addressed in this research through a second level of framing the researcher calls “journalistic frames.”

Four different journalistic frames were identified. The two most commonly used by media outlets were: national interest and public interest. The two levels of framing—conflict frames and journalistic frames—together with analysis of environmental pressures, journalistic norms, structural constraints and individual agency led to the formation of the “nested framing” model, which is the innovation of this research. The study concludes with some recommendations for peace activists, parties other than warring groups, and media practitioners.

Approved: ______________________________________________________________

Don M. Flournoy
Professor of Media Arts and Studies
I dedicate this dissertation to my parents
Mohammad Yaqoob and Hajira
Acknowledgement

First, I sincerely thank my advisor Dr. Don Flournoy. Without his extensive support, patience and guidance, this dissertation would not have been completed. I also thank my dissertation committee members: Dr. Drew McDaniel, Dr. Claudia Hale and Dr. Haley Duschinski for their valuable input and help in writing this dissertation. I also wish to express my sincere gratitude to the participants of this research and all those who helped me during my fieldwork and writing stages. In addition, I would like to thank the School of Media Arts and Studies, Ohio University, for providing me with the travel funds for my preliminary research in 2008.
Preface

The horrifically loud sounds of small and heavy guns shook the building. They were so powerful that they not only shut the doors but also broke the glass. This sudden outbreak of shooting caught us by surprise. As per our experiences, particularly with rockets, everyone in the family ran into the corridor. This was a measure that we would take to avoid being hit by bullets, glass, and debris. As everyone rushed into the corridor, my father pointed to one of the rooms in the apartment not in the direction of shooting, and said “go.” We all rushed into the room.

When the shooting persisted, we decided to leave the apartment, which was on the fourth floor of the Marccroryan building. For safety purposes, we had to get out one by one. Fortunately, we were able to take refuge in the neighborhood without being hurt. Later, when it got darker, the shooting decreased. Since the electricity was cut the whole city was dark. Together with a neighboring family, we were all sitting in a small room on the first floor of the building.

The silence that was dominant for hours was eventually broken with talk about what happened in the afternoon. After a while, our host turned on his radio; everyone became quiet to listen to what the BBC was going to say about the fighting. The radio reported that the Mujahideen had entered Kabul. The commentator mentioned that in some parts of the city there was fighting between two Mujahideen groups – Shorai Nezar led by Ahmad Shah Masoud, and Hezbi Islami led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. The BBC also spoke about the fighting in our area of the city. However, no further details about the fighting were given.
The next day, we woke up early and everyone prepared to leave. In a few minutes we were out of the building and saw that there were many other families leaving the neighborhood. It looked like no one was going to stay. Since there was no transportation, we decided to go on foot to my uncle’s house, which was about two hours away. At some point, we were caught in a cross-fire between the fighting parties. Again, we were fortunate that none of us were hurt. A week later, when we returned home, we found that our house had been burnt. The building showed signs of bullet holes. There were also a number of big holes in the building which told us that heavy weapons had been used in the fighting.

More than 18 years later, I am still frightened when I remember that day. I can still remember escaping the house, hearing the sound of bullets and smelling the burned gunpowder. Although I had experienced war even before that incident, this became a turning point in my life; we had to leave Kabul. It took our family about five days to reach Kandahar, 500 kilometers away.

On the way, I saw the destruction caused by the years of war. Houses on both sides of the highway were all deserted. Except for towns on the way, there was no sign of life. The burnt tanks and other destroyed vehicles were piled high on both sides of the highway. In some parts, we could not see anything other than the destroyed highway. Whenever the bus made a stop, the driver would tell us not to leave the road since both sides, he said, were laid with land mines.

When we reached Kandahar, I saw a devastated city. We stayed with my uncles, who were living in a suburb. There, too, we were cautioned about landmines in the vicinity. In the area where my uncles were living, there were no schools and all my
cousins, the same age as me, did not have education. After a few months, the situation in that province deteriorated. When our father finally joined us, we moved to our native village in the Western province of Farah. Compared to Kabul and Kandahar, the province was thought to be relatively safe.

Although I had been listening to news since childhood, after leaving Kabul I started listening to the radio every day. Sometimes, I would listen to external channels broadcasting in the Pashto and Dari languages. I also remember that, in my village, in the afternoons after the prayer, everyone would gather in front of the mosque and discuss issues related to the community and politics in the province and in Afghanistan. Sometimes, I would also participate in these discussions.

My native village, called Gajgeen, was about two hours away from the provincial capital, Farah City. At the district level, there was only one school for boys, about half an hour away from my village. It was closed during the conflict years. It opened when we were there; however, it did not have classes for students beyond seventh grade, and after a year staying in the village, we decided to move to the provincial capital where I went to school. Although Farah province was peaceful (except for some sporadic fighting in rural areas), it became the frontline with the emergence of the Taliban and their advancement towards the west. The City itself went back and forth into the hands of the Taliban and the then government forces under Ismail Khan.

My brother and I were sent to Iran to live with my sister’s family. Living conditions in Iran for refugees were tough. We could not go to school, and there was always the fear of being caught by the Iranian security patrols and sent back to Afghanistan. Most of the time, we had to stay at home. After six months, we returned to
Farah City. I resumed going to school. However, the Taliban, who now controlled the City, imposed some restrictions on school boys. We had to have a turban, have our hair cut, and wear *shalwar kames*, the traditional Afghan clothes. These had been banned by the previous groups governing the province who made us wear pants so that we could be recognized as students.

I do remember a day when the Taliban from *Amr Bil Maroof Nahi Al Munkar*, came to our school. We all tried to escape. Although the Taliban shot in the air to stop us, a number of us, including me, were caught on the main road of the town. The Taliban had scissors with them. One of my classmates tried to convince the Taliban not to cut his hair. Our resistance did not work, and in front of a crowd of the people, who gathered to watch us, the Taliban finally cut part of our hair and we had to go to the hair dresser to shave our heads.

My family decided to leave for Quetta City in Pakistan. There, I learned English and took computer training courses. I was also worked at a local business as a record keeper. Conditions in Pakistan were relatively better, particularly in Quetta City, where the majority of the population were Pashtuns. Quetta was the place where I got my higher education. Because of my interest in media, I chose to join the Department of Mass Communication at Balochistan University and had the chance to work as an intern with the Balochistan Times. I lived in Quetta for around five years, and travelled a number of times back to Afghanistan. I became part of a youth society in Pakistan that ran a library, and helped local students as well as refugees.

After the collapse of the Taliban in 2002, I returned to Afghanistan and started working with projects sponsored by the United Nations and USAID, mostly in media-
related positions. Through these organizations, I had the opportunity to travel into the provinces and work with local communities. In July of 2004, under sponsorship of the U.S. Department of State, I came to the United States for language training, and later enrolled in a Masters program in the School of Telecommunications, Scripps College of Communication, Ohio University, in Athens. In 2007, with a Masters degree completed, I was accepted into the University’s Ph.D. program in Mass Communication, which led to this research.

Having lived in and been affected by war, it is understandable that I would desire to contribute to the peace efforts in Afghanistan, and elsewhere. I have chosen this topic for my dissertation research in part to better understand the processes of war, conflict and peace, but also to learn more about the role that media can and does play in conflict environments and in reconciliation.

Roshan Noorzai, Athens Ohio, June 2012
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 The post-September 11 Conflict in Afghanistan

In 2004, after the reconstruction of Highway #1, travelling to Kandahar from Kabul took five to six hours. This was a sign of improvement in the living conditions in Afghanistan, which shortened the trip from its previous length of a day or two. Although in 2004 it was safe to travel on Highway #1, in 2006, after staying for two years in the U.S., I was advised by friends and family members that, while traveling on this road, I should remove the names of officials and the contact numbers of all foreigners from my phone, grow a beard, and avoid using any English words when I talked.

These precautions were recommended since there was a fear that the Taliban might have blocked the way and would search for those working with the government or with Coalition Forces. In 2008, when I went to conduct my preliminary research in Kabul, and wanted to travel to Kandahar, I was advised not to go by road since travelling along this highway was dangerous. Therefore, I went by air. In the summer of 2009, when I again went for my research to Kabul and wanted to go to Kandahar, friends and family advised me not to go to Kandahar, because of the greatly deteriorated security situation in the city. Although the Taliban and other groups fighting the Coalition and Afghan government forces did not control any part of the highway or the city, the threat of violence existed.

The danger of traveling on Highway #1 showed how the conflict in the country had escalated and the security situation had deteriorated. Violence increased year by year, particularly after 2005 and 2006 (The Afghanistan NGO Safety Office [ANSO], 2010 July, 2011 January, 2011 June; Cordesman, Mausner, & Kasten, 2009; United Nations...
Assistance Mission for Afghanistan [UNAMA], 2010 January, 2011 March, 2012 February). The violence also expanded geographically (Giustozzi, 2008), and the Taliban increased their activities during winters, the season in which the violence in Afghanistan would typically decrease (See Cordesman et al. 2009; ANSO, 2011, January).

During my fieldwork in 2008 and 2009, the major issue in the ongoing conflict was casualties caused by the war. With the increase in violence, casualties increased for the international forces. But the casualties of Afghan government forces were far higher than the international forces (Cordesman et al. 2009; ANSO, 2010, July). According to UNAMA in the prior five years civilian casualties had also increased (UNAMA, 2010 February, 2011 March, 2012 February). However, as Cordesman et al. pointed out, verification of the numbers—killed or wounded—was difficult. There were also problems in distinguishing casualties caused by fighting and those resulting from organized crime.

Besides direct military engagements, the Taliban and other groups fighting the international and government forces used improvised explosive devices (IEDs), suicide attacks, and target killings (UNAMA, 2010 February, 2011 March, 2012 February). There were also combinations of such attacks, called “complex attacks”. The international and Afghan forces used in addition to direct fighting, aerial attacks, different types of operations, raids, and escalation of force (EOF) incidents¹ (UNAMA 2010, February, 2011, March, 2012, February).

Conflict in Afghanistan has a long history. As will be illustrated in Chapter 2, the roots of the current conflict in Afghanistan can be traced to the 18th and 19th centuries.

¹ When civilians approaching military convey or check points fail to observe the warnings from forces.
The ongoing violent conflict in Afghanistan started in 1978, when the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) took power. Since then, the conflict changed time and again in terms of geography, form, players, and issues. The violence entered another phase after the attacks of September 11, 2001 in New York and Washington D.C., which had a great impact on politics and conflict in Afghanistan (Goodhand, 2002; Jones, 2008).

Considering Osama bin Laden and his network to be behind the September 11, 2001 attacks, the U.S. and its allies, in the following October, started their military operations against the Taliban and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan. With the help of the United Islamic Front, also called the Northern Alliance, and Mujahideen commanders who had fled during Taliban rule, it only took about a month to remove Al Qaeda and the Taliban from their positions in Afghanistan. When the Taliban were removed, the United Islamic Front and the local anti-Taliban commanders came back to power.

1.1.1 The state-building process.

While the U.S. and its allies were fighting the Taliban and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan, representatives of some of the Afghan political and military groups convened in Bonn and agreed on the establishment of an interim government and a roadmap for a democratic Afghanistan. The agreement was approved by the United Nations Security Council, and the United Nations was mandated to coordinate the state-building and humanitarian activities in Afghanistan (Thier, 2006).

U.N. Security Council Resolution 1378, signed on November 14, 2001, mandated the U.N. to play an important role in the transition period and help in establishing a government that was “broad-based, multi-ethnic and fully representative of all Afghan
people” (Thier, 2006, p. 45). The resolution urged the creation of an international security force to provide a safe environment for the transition to a broad-based government (Their, 2006). Furthermore, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) was established to coordinate international donor activities and assistance (Margesson, 2011). UNAMA played a major role in post-Taliban Afghanistan by holding and assisting elections and other state-building activities.

By the beginning of 2006, the country had an elected president, elected national assemblies, an independent judiciary and an open media. Reconstruction work, supported by the presence and assistance of the international community, was soon underway. The international forces expanded their presence and activities in the provinces to facilitate the reconstruction process and to help bring security and the rule of law to the country. However, a new wave of violence, particularly in the South, started challenging the presence of the Coalition Forces and the political stability in the country (Giustozzi, 2008; Johnson, 2007; Jones, 2008; Reidel, 2007; Rubin & Rashid, 2008).

1.1.2 The conflict in Afghanistan.

The post-September 11, 2001 conflict presented a complex picture. The new wave of violence in Afghanistan brought new participants into the conflict. Those participants widened and further complicated the ongoing conflict in the country (Rubin & Rashid, 2008). Each set of actors had different motives and interests, and operated at different levels within Afghanistan: nationally and locally (Giustozzi, 2008; Jones, 2008; Rubin & Rashid, 2008a) and also at the regional and global levels.

A crucial dimension of the conflict in Afghanistan was its national/local dynamics. The conflict in post September 11, 2001 became more complicated in terms of
the issues, forms, and participants. Stanley A. McChrystal\textsuperscript{2} said that the post-September 11 conflict in Afghanistan “can be viewed as a set of related insurgencies, each of which is a complete system with multiple actors and a vast set of interconnected relationships among these actors” (2009, August, p. 11).

One of the main actors in the conflict was the government of Afghanistan. The International Community assisted the Afghan government established after September 11 to create its security institutions. The number of Afghan forces increased to 170,000 by June 2009 (Afghan Conflict Monitor, 2009), and by the summer of 2012, it was expected that the number of Afghan security forces would reach 300,000. Other actors in the conflict, allied with the Afghan government and the international forces, include local militias and warlords and private security companies.

In the post-9/11 period, when the U.S. and its allies attacked the Taliban and Al Qaeda, it was thought that the Taliban were defeated. However, in 2002-2003, they were able to reorganize and start fighting the international and Afghan forces in the South, mostly inhabited by Pashtuns (Giustozzi, 2008). Giustozzi described the expansion of the Taliban in a number of steps. Starting in September 2002, the Taliban expanded their activities to two provinces in 2003, to Southwestern provinces in 2004 and 2005, and by 2008 they were active in all the Pashtun areas, and in 2009 they were active in about 80 percent of the country.

The Taliban’s presence spread across Afghanistan. They had stronger positions in the Southwest with lesser penetration in the Central parts of the country. Their presence was most noteworthy at provincial and local levels. There were also other groups fighting the international forces and the Afghan government in Afghanistan. Jones (2008) and

\textsuperscript{2}former commander of the United States Forces and the International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF)
Cordesman and colleagues (2010) noted that there were three major groups—the Taliban, Hezbi Islami of Hekmatyar, and Haqqani Network.

The Taliban, meanwhile, established their own parallel governance structures. They had governors for every province, and in some areas, where they were more active, they also had their district governors. In 2009, the Taliban published their code of conduct for their fighters. The manual also included their strategy, structure and combat policies and tactics. The manual included guidance for the Taliban in how to deal with local communities and recommendation to avoid civilian casualties (“The Taliban’s Code of Conduct” 2009, August 20).

At the local level, other conflicts were also going on. In addition to Kabul, I have visited three provincial capitals, Jalalabad, Kandahar, and Kunduz in 2009. The conflicts in these provinces were different with different forms, issues and participants. Giustozzi (2008) mentioned that the conflict that existed in Kandahar had a number of layers. The militias, supported by the foreign forces, were able to prevent the return of the Taliban in Kandahar, but they also tried to suppress their rivals, who were systematically marginalized. In 2008 and 2009, when I visited Kandahar, people would talk about local rivalries. Some of the participants working in Kandahar also mentioned local politics and its importance in shaping the conflict in the province. Considered to be “the worst trouble spot in the country” (p. 191), local politics played a central role in the fighting in Kandahar (Smith, 2009).

Kunduz province, where multiple ethnic groups—Tajiks, Uzbeks, Pashtuns—were living, became a hub for Taliban activities. Though the ethnic divides were believed to be the main reason for the post-September 11th insurgency, Moghaddam
(2009) argues that the Taliban should not be considered to be one hundred percent Pashtun. She pointed out the Taliban’s alliance with other ethnic, political, and military leaders, and the government’s alliances with “notorious warlords” were the reasons for the Taliban’s popularity (Moghaddam, 2009). In Kunduz, though the ethnicity played an important role and the Pashtuns were considered to be associated with the Taliban or at least sympathetic to the Taliban, there were also a number of local leaders from other ethnicities allied to the Taliban and other groups fighting the Afghan government and Coalition Forces.

Unlike Kandahar and Kunduz, Nangarhar province, located in the Eastern Afghanistan, has been relatively secure. Nangarhar is one of the main centers of the Pashtuns. The ratio of education is relatively higher here than in other provinces. Giustozzi (2008) pointed out that the educated intelligentsia maintained its contacts with the tribal connection, and the role of clergy is weaker. Jalalabad City had changed from the time I visited it in 2003 and 2004. Major development work was done in the City and some of the historical buildings, destroyed during the Civil War of the 1990s, were reconstructed.

Although local politics and rivalries were present, unlike Kunduz and Kandahar, in Jalalabad City and generally in Nangarhar City, the rivalries did not take violent form. However, in the two districts of Nangarhar province, Hisarak and Khugyanai, The Taliban and other groups fighting the international and Afghan forces were active. These were the districts that the Taliban had support during their rule in the late 1990s.
1.1.3 The regional and global dimensions of the conflict.

Global and regional powers—such as the U.S. and NATO member countries, Russia, Iran, China, India and Pakistan—were also involved militarily or politically in the post-September 11th, 2001 conflict in Afghanistan (Rubin & Rashid, 2008). According to Peimani (2003), every country pursued its national interests in post-Taliban Afghanistan. In addition, a number of non-state actors such as Al Qaeda and radical groups from around the globe were operating in Afghanistan (Rashid, 2008b).

At regional levels, rivalries that existed before September 11 (Ahady, 1998; Rashid, 1998), though left behind when the U.S. and its allies attacked the Taliban and Al-Qaeda bases (Khan, 2007; Lansford, 2003), once again came forth in post-September 11, 2001 conflict in Afghanistan. Pakistan, in particular its Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), was accused of having links and providing funding to the Taliban and other groups such as the Haqqani Network (Waldman, 2010). Media reports were suggesting that Iran was providing arms to the groups fighting against NATO led forces in Afghanistan (Sadat & Hughes, 2010). The rivalry between India and Pakistan was another regional dimension of the conflict in Afghanistan (Ganguly & Howenstein, 2009).

The international forces stationed in Afghanistan were among the main actors in the conflict in Afghanistan. Called International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF), they had a UN-mandate. In 2003, the number of international forces in the country was 5,000 troops and limited to Kabul. In August 2003, NATO took over the command of ISAF in Afghanistan. Later, the United States sent 10,000 to 12,000 troops to serve as part of ISAF under NATO (Morelli & Belkin, 2009). In December 2003, ISAF moved to the North and in 2006, it expanded to the West, South, and East (NATO, 2009). In addition
to the ISAF forces, there were also US troops under Operation Enduring Freedom. The two were later merged under a joint command.

Furthermore, provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs) were established by the ISAF. These civilian-military units of different sizes were designed to “extend the authority of central government” into areas outside Kabul, secure the environment and take on reconstruction and development projects. NATO officials considered PRTs as “the ‘leading edge’ of the allies’ efforts to stabilize Afghanistan” (Morelli & Belkin, 2009, p. 12).

On March 27, 2009, the President of the United States, Barack Obama, announced a new Afghanistan/Pakistan strategy. The main goal of the strategy was “to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and to prevent their return to either country in the future,” (“Foreign Policy” 2009, p. 1). The strategy also included building “self-reliant Afghan forces,” able to conduct counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations, with lesser support of the U.S. and involving the international community, giving the lead to the U.N. in achieving the objectives of the strategy. In addition, the strategy mentioned helping Pakistan both politically and economically (“White paper of the interagency” n.d., p. 1).

The new strategy stressed commitment for civilian efforts (Margesson, 2011). This strategy included providing resources toward building effective Afghan security forces and strengthening governance, capacity-building, and agriculture and infrastructure projects (USIP, 2011). The new strategy also included the deployment of 17,000 additional combat troops in the South and East of Afghanistan and an additional 4,000 military personnel to train the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF).
number of international troops in Afghanistan had reached 67,700 by October 2009 (Afghan Conflict Monitor, 2009).

On the ground, new “ISAF counterinsurgency” guidelines were issued. Using “counterinsurgency” methods, the guidelines considered “protecting the people” and helping the Afghan government “to defeat the insurgency threatening their country” as the mission of ISAF (ISAF, n.d., p.1). The guidelines mentioned that the focus was “people not the militants,” and that “the control over population,” should be taken from “the enemy” (ISAF, n.d., p. 7).

In December 2009, after a review of the strategy, the Obama administration announced that the US would commit an additional 30,000 troops to be deployed in Afghanistan. This time the strategy also included the withdrawal of international forces to begin in July 2011 (USIP, 2011). The security transition to Afghan forces also started and it was expected that the international forces would hand over the control of security to Afghan forces by the end of 2014.

1.1.4 Peace initiatives.

In post-September 11th Afghanistan, particularly when the violence increased, a number of initiatives by the Afghan government, international actors, and third parties were undertaken to negotiate, reconcile and bring peace to the country. These efforts were at local, national, regional, and international levels. The new U.S. strategy called “AfPak,” also included the reintegration of “reconcilable insurgents,” who denounce violence and cut their ties with al Qaeda (“White paper of the Interagency,” n.d., p. 1).

In 2005, the government of Afghanistan inaugurated the National Independent Peace and Reconciliation Commission, and in 2010, after a consultative peace Jirga,
convened by the government, the Commission recommended the establishment of the 70-member High Peace Council (HPC) (Margesson, 2011, p.12) to negotiate with the Taliban and other groups, and also win the neighboring countries support for a peace process in Afghanistan (Derksen, 2011).

Although the Taliban rejected talks with the government and the international forces, reports say that a number of meetings were held (Morelli & Belkin, 2009). Later, the Taliban also showed some leanings toward negotiation. In a statement, Mullah Omar, the leader of the Taliban said, “We believe in communication and understanding for the resolution of all the problems and disputes” (“Taliban leader calls . . .,” November 5, 2011). In the beginning of 2012, the Taliban announced officially that they were participating in talks over opening a political office in Qatar. However, differences in terms of preconditions between the opposing parties in the conflict and disagreement between the Afghan government and the US existed and were reported in the media. The presence of many so actors at different levels also made the negotiation process complicated.

1.1.5 International assistance and development.

I came to the United States in 2004, and have been to Afghanistan a number of times since then. Every time I visited there I observed changes. New construction work could be observed and new roads were built in different parts of the country. With the fall of the Taliban, the process of reconstruction and development began with the help of many nations (Rashid, 2008b). Through a number of conferences (Margesson, 2011), a total aid of $90 billion was pledged and by 2011 an amount of $57 was disbursed (International Crisis Group [ICG], 2011, August). Afghanistan’s GDP per capita was
$528 in 2010-2011. The annual GDP growth since financial year 2003-2004 has been 9.1 percent (World Bank, 2011). Public spending was coming from the international aid to Afghanistan. In 2010-2011, of $17.1 billion, 15.7 billion was coming from aid. Most of the money was spent on the security sector: 8.6 billion of the 13.8 billion external budget and 1.3 billion of 3.3 billion core budget.

A key event was the London Conference in February 2006, when the Afghan Compact was adopted. Providing a timeline from 2006 to 2011, the Compact focused on three main areas and discussed the goals and outcomes for each of four areas: security, governance (Rule of Law and Human Rights), and economic and social development. The Compact was followed by the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) which envisioned Afghanistan in 2020, with specific goals for over five years 2008-2013 (Margesson, 2011).

Among the areas in which Afghanistan made progress were primary and secondary education and health services. Afghan children, especially females, do not have equal access to education; geography makes a big difference. Some 75 percent of the population in Afghanistan is illiterate. In terms of health, Afghanistan had an increased number of clinics and there were some improvements in medical care; however, Afghanistan was still the second country in the world with highest mortality rates—1,600 maternal deaths per 100,000 births and infant mortality of 134 per 1,000 (Margesson, 2011). An area considered a potential contributor to the economy was developing the mining sector.

During 2001-2011, Afghanistan made some economic progress though it was uneven and far slower than hoped (Center for Policy and Human Development [CPHD],
In general, aid failed to bring stability and economic development (ICG, August 2011). Some 36 percent of the population lived below the poverty line and more than half of the population was vulnerable (CPHD, 2011). Based on multidimensional poverty indexes—health, education, and standard of living—of the UNDP, 84 percent of Afghan households are multi-dimensionally poor. According to the Human Development Index for 2010, Afghanistan was ranked 155th among 169 countries. In addition to conflict, being landlocked and having a narrow economic base (World Bank, 2011), Afghanistan was also the major producer of narcotics (Morelli & Belkin, 2009).

In the Second Bonn Conference in December 2011, in which 85 countries and 15 international organizations took part, the international community committed to continue support for “governance, security, the peace process, economic and social development, and regional cooperation,” in Afghanistan for another decade 2014-2024 (The International Conference . . ., 2011, December 5, p. 1).

1.1.6 The media situation.

Among the post-Taliban reconstruction and democratization processes, the establishment of the national and local media was an important achievement (Bajraktari & Parajon, 2008). By 2011, the country had more than 400 periodicals, more than one hundred radio stations, and tens of television channels. In addition, the global and regional media broadcasting from outside Afghanistan targeting the Afghan population increased their broadcasting hours and programming. Local, national, regional and international media all aimed messages at local populations. As will be noted in Chapter 2, they all had different policies, goals, and interests; as such, the post-Taliban media environment presented a very complex picture.
In post-Taliban Afghanistan, media became a battleground involving all parties involved in the conflict. This dissertation has examined how the issues, actors and events of peace and conflict in Afghanistan are framed, presented and conveyed by the media broadcasting for the population in Afghanistan. In particular, this dissertation research tries to understand the contestation processes over media frames. In addition, this study aims to better understand how media might contribute to promoting and achieving peace in Afghanistan.

1.2 Problem Statement

The role of media in conflict has evolved with new developments in telecommunications, politics, and international relations (Gilboa, 2005). Scholars have discussed the importance of media in modern conflict (Boyd-Barrett, 2004; Seib, 2005; Shapiro, 2002; Wolfsfeld, 1997a; Wolfsfeld, 2004). Media is thought to play a particular role in "asymmetric" or what are called "unequal" wars (Wolfsfeld, 1997a, 2004). In the literature on both “terrorism” and “insurgency,” the two most-frequently used terms characterizing the post-September 11, 2001 Afghan conflict, media has been shown to emphasize these types of conflicts.

Gilboa (2006) suggested that, in examining the coverage of mass media in conflict, it is important to distinguish between the internal and external media, those operating within the conflict areas and those outside. He observed that different levels of media, based on geopolitical criteria—local, national, regional, international and global—should be considered in studying the role of media in conflict. Moreover, it is also important to identify those stations broadcasting from outside and those broadcasting from within a country (Betz, 2006; Tehranian, 1993).
In terms of media content, one of the main concerns is whether the media stick to its crucial role of informing people (Graber, 1984; Hashem, 2004), or whether the media might allow itself to become a contributing factor in the conflict (Roach, 1993). The strategies of media outlets, whether to engage in public diplomacy or propaganda (Schechter, 2004; Zaharna, 2004) and complexity of globalized news flow centered on particular countries and events, make for an even more complex picture (Archetti, 2008).

This dissertation has sought to better understand the complexity surrounding the media and their role in reporting on Afghanistan, through the observation and analysis of the diverse media contents and operations in the post-September 11 period. Although aspects of the frame development process are already well researched (Carragee & Roefs; 2004; Edelman, 1988; Gans, 1979; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Wolfsfeld, 1997a), this study has paid special attention to the power relations, the role of journalists, and the larger social and political context in which the news frames are produced. The study has also sought to understand the role mass media might or might not have played in the conflict, in the reduction of the conflict, and in the establishment of peace in Afghanistan.

1.3 Literature Review

1.3.1 Conflict and its definitions.

Conflict has existed throughout human history (Mitchell, 1981; Warfield, 2007). It is an inevitable (Francis, 2002), everyday occurrence (Kandath, 2006). Conflict is a characteristic of all social systems (Kandath, 2006), and is present at every level of social life (Opotow, 2006). Being studied since time immemorial (Lederach, 1997), understanding and investigating “organized violence” has long been of interest to historians and statesmen (Mitchell, 1981). However, it has only been since the Second
World War that scholars started examining war and peace (Roach, 1993) using an interdisciplinary approach (Mitchell, 1981). Most of these studies focused on Cold War rivalries and nuclear war threats labeled as “conflict studies,” “peace research,” or “conflict analysis” (Mitchell, 1981).

Conflict is dynamic, expressive, and dialectical. It is to be considered as a progression through different stages (Lederach, 1997). Conflict can be rational or irrational (Putnam, 2006), and can be destructive or constructive (Deutsch, 1973). A constructive conflict can pave the way for change(s), whereas a destructive or negative conflict can impede change(s) (Lynch, 2002). Elias and Turpin (1994) noted that not all conflicts are bad. They argued that, if peacefully managed, some conflicts are healthy.

Mitchell (1981) provided a basic definition of conflict as “a situation in which two or more social entities or ‘parties’ (however defined or structured) perceive that they possess mutually incompatible goals” (p. 17). Putnam (2006) stated that most communication scholars consider that incompatibilities, the central element in conflicts, are shaped by perceptions or culture. She further mentioned that “parties may hold compatible goals, but they do not necessarily see them as congruent” (p. 5).

Pruitt (2006) observed that “conflicts are usually resolved without violence, and often lead to an improved situation for most of those involved” (p. 4). However, violence can be a form of response to a conflict (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005). Violence occurs in different forms (Kresberg, 1994). Lynch and McGoldrick (2005) observed that wars are the most visible and intense form of violence.

Scholars have argued “[W]ars are not the product of natural differences, but of social processes” (Allen & Seaton, 1999; p. 2). Marullo and Hlavacek (1994) used a
social scientific perspective to consider violence and wars as social happenings that change over time and space. Peace scholars from the fields of anthropology and psychology consider war as a cultural phenomenon (Roach, 1993). Furthermore, war does not have a single definition (Barazh & Webel, 2002). Different people have different meanings for war (Wright, 1964).

Causes of wars have also been an area of research. Opotow (2006) mentioned that although “readily available and stereotypical causes” (p. 510) are mostly cited as the common life explanation of violence, theories and research have come up with complex understandings of the causes of conflict. Theories explaining origins of violence can be “biological” or “dispositional” and relate to “nurture” or “social context” (Opotow, 2006, p. 510). Opotow asserted that the social context is specifically important because of its influence over the way violence takes place.

The conflict in Afghanistan, a continuation of past conflicts, has been classified as an “intractable” conflict (Zartman, 2005). In the post-September 11 conflict in Afghanistan, new participants were added and the conflict changed in form and issues and took asymmetric form. The conflict in Afghanistan is considered a “war on terrorism” or/and an “insurgency”.

O’Neill (1990) pointed out that terrorism mostly targets noncombatants. Terrorism depends on smaller cells and might not seek popular backing (Shultz, 2008); instead, terrorism is a strategy of the weak who cannot achieve their political objectives through conventional means (Metz & Millen, 2004). On the other hand, insurgency uses both political and military means and has some popular support (Shultz, 2008). O’Neill (2008) pointed out that terrorism is only one of the tactics used by insurgents. Other
tactics include guerrilla or conventional war. Kilcullen (2009) described insurgency as a struggle between state(s), or occupying state(s), and non-state actor(s) over “a contested political space” (p. 487). Efforts to gain popular support are central in counterinsurgencies, in which all parties are struggling for legitimacy among the local population (Jones, 2008; Lopez, 2007; O’Neill, 1990).

    Ordinarily, direct physical or behavioral encounters, such as killing, beating, intimidation or torture, are considered violence. However, studies of conflict have exposed some other dimensions/forms of conflict. These dimensions include structural and contextual forms of violence that are not clearly visible but that are “equally damaging and perhaps even more difficult to address” (Fisher et al., 2000, p. 9). Structural violence includes discrimination, denial of rights and liberties, and segregation. Contextual or cultural violence is even more invisible. Contextual violence includes “feelings, attitudes and values that people hold” (Fisher et al., 2000, p. 9).

    These three elements (behavior, context, and attitude) are interconnected. In fact, conflict is often the result of an “interaction between the underlying issues, the incompatible needs, interests and goals—known as the Contradiction—and two aspects of response, Attitude and Behavior, which was identified by Galtung as the “ABC conflict triangle” (in Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005, p. 38).

1.3.2 Media and conflict.

    The use of media during the First World War encouraged a number of scholars in the inter-war time to study the media and its relationship with war (Williams, 2003). Welch (2005) mentioned that the social and technological developments in the last 150 years have had a great impact on the coverage of news media and on the relationships
between politicians, the military, and media. Proliferation of new technologies has been an important development (Venkatraman, 2004), in particular, the use of mobile technology has had an impact on the nature of journalism (Laity, 2005).

Modern wars are fought both on the battlefield and through media (Shapiro, 2002). Scholars consider media as an important front, in both terrorism and insurgency (Ayotte & Moore, 2008; Ayotte et al., 2008; Barnhurst, 1991; Heath & O'Hair, 2008; Hoffman, 2006; Kilcullen, 2009; Laity 2005; Metz, January 2007; Miller et al. 2008, Spencer, 2005; Wolfsfeld, 1997a). In particular, media are important for the weaker parties in the conflict (Laity, 2005; Wolfsfeld, 1997a).

Wartime journalism “addresses the tensions, contradictions, and contingencies” (Boyd-Barrett, 2004, p. 12). Ruigrok, Ridder and Scholten (2005) mentioned that wars are episodic, emotional, and present conflict and striking images. Therefore, they fit well in news selection criteria. Additionally, some of the very founding values of journalism are also highlighted as responsible for the way wars are covered by the media.

Roach (1993) asserted that “Objectivity has also served as one of the major professional justifications for the mass media’s contribution to war” (p. 2). Media are likely to underline instant happenings and ignore the related historical context (Hashem, 2004). Roach (1993) pointed out that, among the three aspects that play a crucial role in the relationship of media and war, two belong to how news media operate: the structural-operational aspects of the mass media, and the news values, sources, and censorship.

Media frames influence public opinion (Dimitrova & Connolly-Ahern, 2007), particularly media coverage of war (Shapiro, 2002). Graber (1984) mentioned that, during a crisis, people become totally dependent on the media for information that might
be important to their survival. In times of war, media coverage serves the crucial role of informing the peoples of the world (Hashem, 2004; Roach, 1993).

Betz (2006) argued that the media usually side with the perceived national interests of the political environment in which they operate. He further mentioned that this makes it difficult for journalists to keep their independence and neutrality. However, Wolfsfeld and Entman pointed out that media do not “always provide blind support for government in all wars,” and their role changes over time and the environment in which they operate (in Wolfsfeld, Frosh & Awabdy, 2008, p. 401). As Wolfsfeld (1997) pointed out, little attention has been paid to the role of media in conflict. This study tries to fill that gap by exploring how media frame the conflict in Afghanistan and what actors and factors influence the framing process.

1.3.3 Conflict transition, peace, and media.

Peace has been defined in multiple ways. Some scholars provide a very narrow conceptualization for peace such as the absence of wars. Others consider the absence of war and direct violence “negative” peace (Elias & Turpin, 1994). Negative peace, in their view, “is a condition in which no active, organized military violence is taking place” (Barazh & Webel, 2002, p. 6). Yet, others depict peace as the presence or encouragement of social justice (Elias & Turpin, 1994). Alger (1994) has stressed that peace should be defined more broadly and should address inequalities, both structural and social. The conceptual development of positive peace has also been influenced by feminist scholars (Roach, 1993, p. 3).

Barazh and Webel (2002) emphasized that positive peace should include both the absence of direct and structural violence. However, Elias and Turpin (1994) mentioned
that negative peace and positive peace are interrelated. They further argued that the absence of negative peace hinders the encouragement of positive peace and vice versa.

One of the areas of research in peace studies has been the transition from violence to peace. Marcus (2006) has argued that if conflict means incompatibility in terms of ideas, behaviors, roles, needs, desires, values and so on, then, resolving conflict is somewhat related to changes in attitudes, perceptions, beliefs, norms, behaviors, roles and relationships. The change or transition from conflict to peace has been one of the main areas of research for peace scholars.

Galtung criticized the dominant paradigm in journalism and suggested a paradigm shift in the coverage of war (Garman, 2006; Gilboa, 2006). Wolfsfeld (2004) argued that with some structural changes, media can promote peace. He mentioned that media can be used as a central reference for peace monitoring. Tehranian (2004) argued that the news media can play a role in promoting peace. Scholars discussed how media can contribute to the peace processes (Galtung, 1986; Garman, 2006; Tehranian, 2004; Wolfsfeld, 2004).

Although it is easy to find a relationship between the news media and a conflict, it is difficult to construct a relationship between media and peace (Wolfsfeld, 2004). Allan and Seaton (1999) asserted that understanding media's role in conflict is important for understanding wars and how media can help to end them. Wolfsfeld (1997b) and Bratic (2005) mentioned that media can play a constructive role in a peace process. Roach (1993) argued that media frames play an important role in informing a population and influencing public opinion about war and peace. Framing can also contribute to the
transformation of conflict (Littlejohn, 2006; Pederson, 2006; Putnam & Wondollech, 2003; Watkins, 2001).

However, more work is needed to examine the role of media in peace processes (Levin, 2003). Taking into account the differences and the lack of literature on the subject, this study examines comparatively how the peace processes in Afghanistan have been covered both by the external and the internal media. This research also aims to understand how the media can contribute to promoting and achieving peace in Afghanistan.

1.3.4 Globalization and media.

Over the last twenty years, one of the most fiercely contested phenomena is globalization (Durham & Kellner, 2006). Straubhaar (2006) asserted that the discussion of globalization is becoming more complex. Greenfield and Pringle (in Garret & et al., 2006) stated that globalization is viewed differently by different people. McQuail (1994) and Held (2000) suggested the literature can be divided into two opposing poles: those who support and have positive opinions and those who oppose and are pessimistic about globalization.

The pessimistic pole argues that globalization is increasing the divide between poor and rich, and gives control over media and culture to corporations (Held, 2000). Globalization is the spread of western technologies and culture tied with modernity (Pieterse, 2006) and is the promotion of a market system supporting the West (McQuail, 1994). The positive pole argues that globalization is more than the spread of westernization (Held, 2000), that global communication helps in the liberation of people
from the barriers of time and space, and that globalization will advance modern
democracy (McQuail, 1994).

Williams (2003) has observed how globalization changes the role of the media,
noting how the media played important roles in the preservation, promotion and defense
of local cultures and identities in the 1990s. Hall has pointed out the hybridization
process, the mixing of local and global, through which new identities tend to appear
(Williams, 2003). Robertson also noted how global media adapted to local culture. He
called the process “glocalization” (in Straubhaar, 2006).

However, Straubhaar (2006) argued that many studies of globalization have
ignored the role of national governments, national identities, and media systems. The
author further mentioned the authority of the nation-state in structuring the environment
in which the media operate, though they are facing competition from global, regional and
local producers. Sreberny (2006) emphasized that the media, along with policies and
structures at the national level are still crucial. Hafez (2007) also suggested, with the
same conclusion, that the national media environment is still important.

Tehranian (1993) suggested that, through interactive public discourse, rather than
hegemonic one-way communication, the media can contribute to peace and mutual
understanding in domestic as well as international affairs. This dissertation research
examines the role of the media, whether global/international, regional/transborder,
national or local media, in the Afghan conflict and peace processes through a
comparative frame analysis approach.
1.3.5 Propaganda and public diplomacy.

It was during the First World War that interest in propaganda was developed (Veerser, 1994; Williams, 2003). Later during the inter-war years, a set of theoretical frameworks were advanced, looking both at media’s content and its impact (Williams, 2003). The use of media by the Communists in the Soviet Union and by the Nazis in Germany reinforced media’s role as a propaganda tool (McQuail, 1994). This led scholars to investigate the effects of propaganda during war and the circumstances under which propaganda can be effective (Williams, 2003).

Propaganda is part of every war. During the war, popular and media support are required. Governments, therefore, arrange propaganda campaigns to demonize their enemies and to mobilize their nations (Schechter, 2004). Related to propaganda and terrorism, Venkatraman (2004) noted that, in the countries where a “terrorist crisis” occurs, the media tend to function as a propaganda tool.

Miller (2004) observed that, traditionally, propaganda has meant manipulating the content and distributing it through government or independent media. He further stated that, in the current era, the U.S. and U.K. use “information dominance,” which encompasses other elements including gathering, processing, and implementation of information through such means as intelligence, military information systems, and computers. However, there can be resistance in acceptance of the provided information, which is an obstacle in the way of information dominance (Miller, 2004).

Another term used for “government-sponsored” information programs aimed at the public of other countries is “public diplomacy” (The Department of State in Wolf&
Rosen, 2004). Zaharna (2004) stated that confusion has existed in terms of differentiating propaganda and public diplomacy, even during the war on terror.

The Institute of Propaganda Analysis points out a number of techniques used to manipulate and control information, such as “name-calling, labeling and bandwagon” (Zaharna, 2004, p. 223). Propaganda uses different techniques in order to hide some aspects from the receivers so that they are compelled to accept the message. Propaganda “with coercion as the goal, information control and deception are key factors,” in the process. On the other hand, public diplomacy is defined as “open public communication in a global communication arena” (Zaharna, 2004, p. 223). He wrote:

Because the audience is free to accept or not accept the message, persuasion through coercion or control is not applicable. Instead, persuasion is achieved through gaining audience trust and confidence. To gain trust, public diplomacy must be absolutely credible if the government stands any chance of success. (p. 223)

Context and purposes determine when and where a government should employ public diplomacy versus propaganda. Zaharna (2004) mentioned that some of the propaganda might be of use for military purposes during warfare and that public diplomacy is effective in informing a foreign public in global, interactive, open, and public communication. This dissertation investigates, comparatively, how the global/international and regional media broadcasting for Afghanistan portray the conflict and peace processes in Afghanistan.
1.3.6 Framing.

In his famous work, “Public Opinion,” Lippmann (1922) wrote about the world outside that is out of our reach, vision, and mind. He pointed out that, because of its vastness, it is impossible to experience the world directly; therefore, it should be “explored, reported and imagined” (p. 29). Goffman (1974) said that “we tend to perceive events in terms of primary frameworks, and the type of framework we employ provides a way of describing the event to which it is applied” (p. 24-25).

Goffman (1974) argued that frames are important categorizing life experiences giving “meanings to events that otherwise would be meaningless” (p. 21). Similarly, Edelman (1993) argued that “what we ‘know’ about the nature of the social world depends upon how we frame and interpret the cues we receive about the world” (p. 231). According to Gitlin (1980), frames are “persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse, whether verbal or visual” (p. 7).

Providing a definition, Reese (2001) mentioned that “frames are organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world” (p. 11). Entman (1993) pointed out that through framing, some aspects of reality are highlighted and emphasized. He explained:

To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described. (p. 52)
Frames are accessible in our culture (Goffman, 1974). Society is a “kaleidoscope” of possible realities, “any one of which can be readily evoked by altering the ways in which observations are framed and categorized” (Edelman, 1993, p. 231). Van Gorp (2009) argued that framing has serious implications in the field of communication. This is because frames tell us that there are multiple ways of looking at events. Making sense of issues and events by communicators and by the audience is related to framing (Reese, 2001). Edelman further argued that, by using different frames, the meanings also change drastically.

Assessing the “organization of experience” is called frame analysis (Goffman, 1974, p. 11). There are two approaches applied to frame analysis: psychological or microscopic and sociological or macroscopic approaches (Scheufele, 2000). A psychological approach considers frames as a means of processing and organizing incoming information by individuals. Also called audience frames, microscopic frames were defined by Entman (1993) as “mentally stored clusters of ideas that guide individuals’ processing of information” (p. 53). The frame of reference and prospect theories are examples of such work (see Scheufele, 2000, p. 301).

A macroscopic approach to frame analysis can also apply to media frames (Scheufele, 2000). Organization of reality is the most important function of media frames (Tuchman, 1978). A media frame can be defined as “the central organizing idea or storyline that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events” (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987, p. 143). Gamson (1989) pointed out that facts are “embedded in a frame or storyline that organizes them and gives them coherence” (p. 157). Gitlin (1980) said that media frames, which are “largely unspoken and unacknowledged,” sort out information
both for media practitioners and to some extent for the audience (p. 7). Gamson (1985) argued.

News frames are almost entirely implicit and taken for granted. They do not appear to either journalists or audiences as social construction but as primary attributes of events that reporters are merely reflecting. News frames make the world look normal. They determine what is selected, what is excluded, what is emphasized. (p. 617)

Through “selection, emphasis, exclusion and elaboration,” media framing provides a context and explains what the issue is (Tankard et al. in Reese, 2001, p. 10). Given the news holes and airtime constraints on media (Gans, 1979), it is an essential instrument for journalists presenting complex issues in a manner that is understandable to audiences (Gans, 1979; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Patterson and Seib argued that a story “would be a buzzing jumble of facts if journalists did not impose meaning on it” (in Foreman, 2010, p. 193).

However, journalists use frames to sort out and put together the information (Gitlin, 1980; Hackett & Zhao, 1994). Frames used by journalists “assign meaning to and interpret relevant events and conditions” (Snow & Benford, 1988, p. 198). Graber (2006) mentioned that journalists decide what news is and which political issues should be covered and ignored.

Entman (1993) noted that, from a constructionist approach, a frame can be located in four positions: the communicator, the text, the audience and the culture. This perspective mentions that a stock of frames, as part of culture, connects news production and consumption. The constructionist approach emphasizes that the audiences should be
considered active in processing media messages (Van Gorp, 2009). Furthermore, Gamson and Modigliani (1989) mentioned that people are getting familiar with frames since they are participating in the culture. These frames are “accessible and useful to people in the same culture who ascribe to a wide array of ideology” (Frasher in Downs, 2002, p. 46).

Framing is not a static process. It is “a dynamic, ongoing process,” influenced by socio-cultural environment (Benford and Snow, 2000). They are subject to change historically (Goffman, 1981, p. 63). Cohen and Wolfsfeld (1993) pointed out that frames are not created in vacuum, “each new frame grows from an old one” (p. xviii). A key event can activate an alternative media frame (Scheufele in Van Gorp, 2009, p. 10). Van Gorp (2005) pointed out:

Frames are activated, reveal themselves in public discourse, are adopted by other actors (the media, politics, etc.), dominate the media coverage and public opinion, disappear and, finally, are applied again. During this process, the frame remains the same, yet the degree of perceptibility and, consequently, its effects can vary. (p. 490-492)

Media framing plays an important role in informing a population and influencing public opinion about war and peace, particularly at the international level (Roach, 1993). Framing is a way to understand conflict (Goffman, 1974). Frames play an important role in creation of “us” and “them” in a conflict situation (Shinar, 2002). Frame analysis is a way to investigate the coverage of conflict (D’Angelo, 2002; McCombs & Ghanem, 2003). Since it is a useful tool, the theoretical framework of framing will be used to guide this study.
1.3.6.1 Frame and agenda setting.

McCombs (2004) stated that, “This ability to influence the salience of topics on the public agenda has come to be called ‘the agenda-setting role of the news media’” (p. 1). Cohen (in McCombs, 2004) argued that the media might not be able to tell us what to think, but the media is successful in telling us what to think about. News selection is the core of the agenda setting process. With the gate keeping function, media tell their audience what are the important issues (Hale, 2007).

McCombs (2004) extended agenda setting to a second level by pointing out that public issues have identifiable aspects/attributes. He considered framing to be the second level of agenda setting. However, Ghanem (cited in Hale 2007) notes that identification of attributes does not help in understanding the influence of these attributes on how individuals think. Maher (2001) argues that considering framing as the second level of agenda setting is opposed to the sociological basis of framing.

Explaining the distinction between agenda setting and framing through systems theory, Maher (2001) argued that, among the four elements of a system, attributes and objects are identical to two components of agenda setting theory, whereas the two additional elements, relationship and environment, outside the system, are covered by framing theory but not by agenda setting.

Van Gorp (2009) argued that framing from a constructionist perspective is different from agenda setting and priming. Agenda setting and priming are both causal; however, framing stresses the “interactive process in which social reality is constructed” (p. 12). In addition, Van Gorp argued that agenda setting and priming are both dealing
with issues. Framing, on the other hand, considers multiple frames/angels in covering issues. In addition framing can be applied to diverse issues.

From the constructionist perspective of framing, media messages are the product of a process influenced by a number of factors: journalistic principles, environmental pressures, and active interpretation of audiences. Framing is also connected to the culture, “as a microsocietal structure” (Van Gorp, 2009, p. 12). Furthermore, framing can discuss the “alternative hypotheses” (p. 13). These are the areas ignored by the agenda setting perspective (Van Gorp, 2009).

1.3.6.2 Frame building.

Frames are not produced in a political vacuum; in fact they are the outcome of processes through which frames are contested and selected (Carragee & Roefs, 2004). Both journalists and sources can be frame sponsors (Gamson, 1989). The process that influences the formation and alteration of a media frame is called “frame building” (Scheufele, 1999, p. 115). In this process, through different strategies, actors are trying to have their argument dominate (Pan & Kosicki, 2001).

Competition among different groups over media frame is also called frame contestation (Wolfsfeld, 1997a). As Gamson (1989) pointed out, competition over meanings take place among a number of frame sponsors through “symbolic contests” (p. 55). Entman (2004) also discussed the frame contestation between different frame sponsors. As Carragee and Roefs (2004) pointed out, the contestation over frames should be studied as part of the larger social and political contest.

One area that needs to be explored in the contestation process is that of power relations. Edelman pointed out that media content is shaped by power relations. Carragee
and Roefs (2004) argued that social and political power structures play a great role in the frame creation process. In his cascading model of framing, Entman (2004) emphasized that, in the frame building process, “some actors have more power than others to push ideas along to the news and then to the public” (p. 9). However, it is also possible that the frame sponsors do not have any reason behind the frame and can only be “a conscientious effort to frame events in a way that the sponsor considers most meaningful” (Gamson, 1989, p. 158).

Carragee and Roefs (2004) suggested that media framing is a complex process involving a number of actors and factors. Van Gorp (2009) mentioned that a constructionist approach to framing argues that media messages are the outcome of journalistic principles and environment constraints.

Based on previous research (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Tuchman, 1978), a number of factors can potentially influence how journalists frame a given issue: social norms and values, organizational pressures and constraints, pressures of interest groups, journalistic routines, and ideological or political orientations of journalists (Scheufele, 2000). However, as Gans (1979) argued, there are differences in application of journalistic values for foreign and domestic news. In comparison to news targeted to domestic consumption, foreign news production is often the subject of political pressure (Graber, 1984).

The selection of sources influences the way events are framed (Dimitrova &Connolly-Ahern, 2007). However, Van Gorp (2009) takes a broader approach and argued that, in the frame building process, media practitioners are interacting with
sources and other actors, and the audiences are also interacting with media content and others. He further mentioned:

Thus, framing involves the interplay that occurs between the textual level (frames applied in the media), the cognitive level (schemata among the audience and media makers), the extramedia level (the discourse of frame sponsors; discussed below), and, finally, the stock of frames that is available in a given culture. (p.5)

Though frames are “difficult to get a grip on,” their reconstruction is possible.

There are a number of elements, infused during the news construction, through which frames can be traced. Based on Gamson and Modigliani’s concept, Van Gorp (2009) argued that these elements can be presented as a “frame package”. Frame analysis is about the reconstruction of these frame packages. There are three parts to a frame package: “the manifest frame device, the manifest or latent reasoning devices and an implicitly cultural phenomenon” (Van Gorp, 2007, p. 64). There are different devices by which a frame can be identified, such as word choices, metaphors, exemplars, descriptions, arguments, visual images and other symbolic devices (Gamson & Lasch, 1983; Gamson & Modiglianiin Van Gorp, 2007).

Kalyango (2009) pointed out that, in comparison to the frame’s influence on public opinion, little has been done on how elites influence the media frames. Carragee and Roefs (2004) mentioned that power is ignored in the framing research. Van Gorp (2009) added that not only power but culture should also be brought to the framing research. Although studies have examined both extrinsic and intrinsic factors influencing the production and selection of news (Gans, 1979; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Tuchman, 1978), little evidence has yet been systematically collected on how various factors
influence the structural qualities of news in terms of framing. Addressing these gaps in the literature, this study explores media frames of conflict and peace in Afghan and attempts to understand the frame building process.

Framing can also contribute to the transformation of conflict (Watkins, 2001). In an international crisis or conflict, media can play a role in promoting peace or reinforcing violence (Hafez, 2000). Framing can help move the conflict towards tractability (Pederson, 2006; Putnam & Wondolleck, 2003). Littlejohn (2006), in his recommendations for the transformation of conflict emphasized the construction of new frames to transcend differences. Taking into account the importance of framing in a conflict, this dissertation research investigates how the media, at different levels, have framed the peace processes and the peace-building initiatives in Afghanistan.

1.4 Statement of Research Questions

This dissertation aims to better understand the role of mass media in covering and framing the issues of conflict and peace in Afghanistan, taking into account the globalization of media outlets, the importance of media in modern asymmetric wars, media development in post-Taliban Afghanistan, and proliferation of mobile communications. In particular, this study attempts to understand how news media—at the international, regional, national and local levels broadcasting for Afghanistan—framed conflict and peace in Afghanistan, and how news frames were produced.

For this purpose, this dissertation not only identifies and reports news frames but also explores the broader socio-cultural and political context in which news production took place. Greatest attention was given to those conflicts and those news frames appearing after 2006 when Afghanistan got an elected President, an elected parliament, a judiciary and private media.
The media selected for this study includes: 1) the international broadcasting channels BBC Afghan Service, Radio Azadi and the Afghan branch of Radio Liberty; 2) regional transborder media outlets Pashto Radio of Tehran; 3) the national media Afghan Radio/TV and Independent Televisions of Tolo and Ariana; and 4) the news stories produced by Salam Watandar, a network providing content to around 40 local radio stations, and Hewad television.

News frames from these outlets were examined systematically. Frame analysis is a way to understand both conflict (Goffman, 1974) and media (Norris, Kern & Just, 2003). In particular, news frames are used to understand the way media cover conflict (d'Angelo, 2002; McCombs & Ghanem, 2001). Using frame analysis and drawing on the literature of conflict and peace and of media studies, this dissertation attempts to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. How did the broadcast news media, both internal and external, at different levels frame the conflict in Afghanistan?

RQ2. How did the broadcast news media, both internal and external, at different levels frame the peace processes in Afghanistan?

RQ3. How were the media frames produced, and how did the contestation processes affect the ways stories of conflict and peace in Afghanistan were reported?

1.5 Dissertation Outline

This dissertation is structured into six chapters. In Chapter 1, the problem to be addressed is stated and there is a review of the available literature on conflict and post-conflict situations and the role of media in these circumstances. Also examined is the
literature related to those theories considered relevant, including globalization, propaganda, public diplomacy, and media framing. The purpose of the study is restated and the research questions are identified.

Chapter 2 provides necessary contextual information for this study, presenting a brief history of conflict in Afghanistan. In addition, the political economy of broadcasting media in Afghanistan is discussed, along with media facilities, infrastructure and management. This is the part of the dissertation that highlights the stakeholders involved in news coverage and presentation in post-September 11th, 2001 Afghanistan.

Chapter 3 addresses the methodology. In addition to research design and methods used, this chapter discusses the implications of this approach, including some of the challenges faced during fieldwork in Afghanistan. Such fieldwork issues as self-reflexivity and the dialectics are considered.

Chapter 4 presents the findings of this study. The frames adopted and advanced by the media outlets are characterized. Journalistic frames used by reporters for filtering information to be broadcast are suggested. The constraints that influenced and shaped the production and presentation of news content are also noted.

In Chapter 5, a case study of the media coverage of the presidential and provincial council elections and violence in Afghanistan is selected for illustration. A brief introduction to the electoral process in 2009 follows, focusing on media coverage and violence during the polling day. Also explored is the post-election violence across the country.

In Chapter 6, the findings are analyzed in terms of how media covered issues of war and peace in Afghanistan and how that coverage was shaped. Questions asked in this
research were answered. In conclusion theoretical findings and practical implications of this study are presented.
Chapter 2: Conflict and Media in Afghanistan

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a historical context to the study, beginning with demographic and basic social, cultural, and economic information on the country. The history of conflict in Afghanistan is explored, including Soviet military intervention, the civil war following withdrawal of the Red Army, emergence of the Taliban as a military and political group, and their collapse after September 11, 2001.

The last part of this chapter discusses the political economy of media in Afghanistan. In addition to providing a history of broadcasting media in Afghanistan, the last part of this chapter discusses developments within media sectors during the years of war and after the fall of the Taliban.

2.2 Afghanistan

Today’s Afghanistan emerged from the remnants of the Durrani Empire, which was established in 1747 in the city of Kandahar. Its current boundaries were shaped in the 19th century by the expansion of the European Colonial powers, the Russian and British empires and local resistance movements. The country is land locked with a total area of 647,456 km². Neighboring countries Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan are located to the north, Pakistan is located to the south and southeast, and Iran is in the west. In the east, the country shares a 92 km border with China.
Estimates of the population vary from about 25 to 30 million. Around 70 to 80 percent of the population lives in the rural areas (UNDP, 2004; CPHD, 2011). Population growth is 2.8 percent and life expectancy is 48.1 years (Margesson, 2011).

The urban population has grown along the ring road that connects Kabul to Kandahar, then to Herat and in the north of Kabul to Mazar-e-Sharif. Nomadic groups of around 2.5 million, called Kochis, are dispersed all over the country (Weijer, 2005). Islam is the religion of 99 percent of the population in Afghanistan. There is a small community of Sikhs and also a small population of people practicing traditional religions. Around 80 to 90 percent of the population of Muslims in Afghanistan is Sunni (Rais, 2008).

Among the 34 different ethnic groups (Saikal, 2004), eight major groups are Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, Baluchis, Turkmens, Aimaqs and Kirgizs (Ewan, 2002) (see Figure 2). Most of the reports on population provided are based on partial
surveys and often contradict each other. Sources present different figures on ethnic composition (Appendix I).

Figure 2: Ethnolinguistic Groups in Afghanistan
(Courtesy of the General Libraries, University of Texas at Austin)

Family is the center of the social system, where power structure is patriarchal and hierarchical. All matters related to the family are considered private and are solved within the family (Wardak, 2003). Social and cultural values prohibit direct interference by the state in family affairs. Islamic law and social customs govern family related business, such as marriage and inheritance (Emadi, 2005). Emadi said that family structure, particularly in rural areas, also serves as an economic unit. In Pashtun areas, the
unwritten codes of *Pashtunwali* that includes bravery, hospitality, revenge, *purdah*\(^3\), and *Jirga*\(^4\) are also followed (Newell, 1972; Edwards, 1989).

In Afghanistan, there are around 37,000 villages. The average size of a village is from 50 to 200 individuals who share some socioeconomic or public facilities such as mosques, water springs, mills and water canals. The mosque functions as a community center (Ashgar, 1981). The urban and semi-urban units serve for the administrative and commercial needs of the surrounding villages (Emadi, 2005).

Economic development in the urban areas (Emadi, 2005), and droughts and fighting in countryside (Schutte, 2009) have accelerated the urbanization process. Kakar (1978) and Wardak (2004) argue that, in urban areas, a sense of citizenship, connecting people of different ethno-linguistic groups has emerged through education, intermarriage, and service in the army.

Afghanistan was underdeveloped, even before the war broke out in 1978 (Patel, 2008). The Afghan economy is based on agriculture, though only 12 percent of the land in Afghanistan is cultivatable (Wahab and Youngerman, 2007). Animal husbandry is another source of livelihood (Wheelock, 2005). Trade has been part of the life of Afghanistan for thousands of years (Rondinellie, 2004). Afghanistan has also untapped mineral resources (Wahab and Youngerman, 2007).

In the 1950s and 1960s, more than 60 percent of Afghanistan’s exports were its animal products. By 1967, the industrial products only comprised about 6.5 percent of the GNP (Ghobar, 1967). Wars have now destroyed the infrastructure of the whole country,

\(^3\) *Purdah* is the separation of gender

\(^4\) *Jirga* is the council which can be convened at different levels: local, district, provincial or national
including state institutions. The social fabric of the Afghan society has also been
damaged. Afghanistan today is one of the poorest countries in the world.

Over the last decades, some six million Afghans took refuge in neighboring
countries (Emadi, 2005; Patel, 2008) and millions were displaced at different intervals
during the conflict (Emadi, 2005). In addition to the killing of thousands of intelligentsia,
there was a brain drain where nearly all educated people left the country. Politically, few
parties were active in Afghanistan and the groups with military background were ruling
over the country.

In the years of conflict, a war economy replaced the legitimate economy where, in
addition to foreign support, trafficking of drugs and the smuggling of consumer goods
and gems funded the war. This tied warring parties to the war profit makers (Rubin,
2000). Ordinary Afghans were drawn into this new economy. In 2005, Afghanistan
produced 87 percent of world illicit opium, which involved local farmers (Goodhand,
2008).

2.3 History

2.3.1 Interacting with empires.

From the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries, the region today called Afghanistan
was divided among three empires -- the Safavid of Iran (controlling the Western part of
Afghanistan), Uzbek (ruling over the northern part), and Moghul (dominating the south)
(Figure 3). The three empires fought each other, particularly over Kandahar, which used
to be on the trade route between India, Iran and Central Asia (Dupree, 1970)
There was also a local resistance against these empires. Among the local uprisings, in the sixteenth century, were the *Roshani* movement and *Khushal Khan Khatak* among the Eastern Pashtuns against the Moghul Empire. According to Ghobar (1967), these uprisings failed to expel the Moghuls, but paved the way for the resistance against these empires and the emergence of an independence movement. In the eighteenth century, the uprisings of the *Ghalzais* and *Durrans* (two main branches of Pashtuns) in the south and west not only moved the country closer to independence but also led to the demise of the *Safavid* Empire.

During this period of time, the local conflict and the regional rivalries played a major role in the shaping the politics. After the demise of *Safavid* Empire, Ghalzais established an Independent empire and ruled Iran for 22 years. Later, they were defeated by Nadir Afshar’s troops, who later became the King of Iran. After Nadir Afshar death in 1747, the leader of his Afghan army, Ahmad Shah, a Durrani Pashtun, became the king of Afghanistan and established the Durrani Empire (See Noorzai, 2010).
2.3.2 Colonial experience.

Afghanistan experienced the expansion of colonial powers in its neighborhood during the 19th Century, when the Russian and British Empires colonized the surrounding regions (See map). The country was central to the “Great Game” and served as a “buffer state” between the two empires (Adamec, 2003; Klass, 1991). Hopkins (2008) argued that Afghan resistance to colonial power not only challenged the occupation of their country, but also shaped the identity of the modern state of Afghanistan.

Notions of “the Great Game” and “buffer state” are contested by a number of scholars, including some Afghan historians. Ghobar (1967) and Habibi (1972) consider resistance to outsiders to be a result of the determination and will of the Afghan population. Hyman (1984) pointed out that Afghan nationalists perceived the “Great Game” to be an excuse for intervention and violence against their country. Hopkins (2008) argued that going beyond the concept of Great Game, “frees our understanding of the momentous events taking place from the monolithic and totalizing narrative of a bi-polar imperial rivalry” (p. 60).

Tsarist Russia expanded into Central Asia, but the British had a greater influence since they considered Afghanistan part of their domain and occupied the southern parts of the country and fought with Afghans three times. In the eighteen century, the British, through the English East India Company (EIC), became the dominant European power in the Indian Subcontinent that not only controlled the trade in India but also turned India into a colony (Dupree, 1973). Though the British were able to control the Indian Subcontinent, externally, they were afraid of other European powers – first Napoleon and then the Russians. As Hopkins (2008) pointed out, “The projection of the British power
into Afghanistan and Central Asia was motivated by the perceived need to secure the Company’s frontiers” (p. 79). Ghobar (1967) and Dupree (1973) thought that the main intention of British colonialism was to secure natural resources and exercise global power.

2.3.2.1 The First Anglo-Afghan war.

Fearing the Russian-Persian expansion to the South and a possible cooperation with the ruler of Kabul, Lord Auckland, the Governor General of India (1838-42), issued the 1838 Simla Manifesto, declaring Dost Mohammad Khan, the Afghan ruler, to be a security threat to the frontiers of India (Kakar, 2006; Kaye, 1874). It alleged that Dost Mohammad Khan “avowed schemes of aggrandizement and ambition injurious to the security and peace of the frontiers of India; and . . . openly threatened could never hope that the tranquility of our neighborhood could be secured, or that the interests of our Indian Empire would be preserved inviolate” (Ewans, 2005, p. 30).

In an attempt to overthrow Dost Mohammad Khan, a tripartite agreement of cooperation between Ranjit Singh (the ruler of Punjab), Shah Shuja (the deposed King of Afghanistan), and the British was signed (Dupree, 1973). On December 10, 1838, the British Army, together with Shah Shuja’s troops invaded Afghanistan (Kaye, 1874; Schofield, 2003). After modest resistance, the forces captured both Kandahar and Kabul, and installed Shah Shuja (Maxwell, 1979). According to the Simla Manifesto, “once he [Shah Shuja] shall be secured in power, and the independence and integrity of Afghanistan established, the British army will be withdrawn” (Ewans, 2005, p. 38).

However, the British kept a garrison in Afghanistan, with the reasoning that it was not possible to keep Shah Shuja in power were the forces to be withdrawn (Dupree, 1973,
p. 379; Maxwell, 1979). The presence of British forces, in turn, led to civil resistance ending in a disaster for the British Army, in the winter of 1841-42 (Dupree, 1973). Macnaghten and Burnes, the two top British officers in Kabul, were killed and the British Army was besieged by Afghans. After sixty five days of siege in Kabul, on January 6, 1842 the British retreated (Dupree, 1973). From the 16,500 forces, only Dr. Williams Brydon reached Jalalabad alive. Discussing the defeat of the British forces in Afghanistan, Kaye pointed out that “No failure so totally overwhelming as this is recorded in the pages of history” (in Schofield, 2003, p. 78).

The British Army, under General Pollock with 8,000 troops, returned to Kabul on September 18, 1842, and as Dupree (1973) pointed out, the British forces “revented in blood and property” (p. 396). Later, troops were sent to Istalif and Charikar, towns north of Kabul City. These towns were razed and the great bazaar of Kabul, where the bodies of Macnaghten and Burnes were hanged, was also destroyed (Richards, 1990). As Dupree (1973) pointed out, during the destruction of Kabul’s Bazaar, camp followers and troops participated in looting and killing.

The damage of the Anglo-Afghan war was both physical and psychological (Ewans, 2005). Around 15,000 people including 4,500 British officers and soldiers were killed. The number of Afghans killed was even greater. Economically, the cost of the war for the British troops was 20 million pounds. The economy of northern India also suffered because of the loss of 50,000 camels (Ewan, 2005). In Afghanistan, the war not only destroyed harvests but damaged the agricultural system (Ghobar, 1967).

The defeat of the British challenged the notion of “British invincibility” and control (Richards, 1990, p. 56). The Sikhs of northern India later fought the British forces
and “most of the regiments that had served in Afghanistan during the war had to be suppressed or disbanded at the time of the Indian Mutiny” of 1857 (Ewans, 2005, p. 56). Relations between the two countries remained strained in the 1850s, as Lord Dalhousie pointed out (cited in Schofield, 2003). The contact with colonial powers also impacted Afghan’s attitudes towards Europeans and influenced their ideas about modernization (Farhang, 1989). This also highlighted the role of religion in politics and mobilizing and legitimizing resistance against outsiders (Hopkins, 2008).

2.3.2.2 The Second Anglo-Afghan war.

The second Anglo-Afghan war took place around 40 years later. Once the conservatives took power in 1874, Britain’s non-intervention policy was ended (Schofield, 2003), and the “forward policy,” was adopted (Snook, 2008).

The British occupied Quetta, now in Pakistan, on the Afghan border and built a military base there. This strained relations between the British and Amir Sher Ali Khan, the ruler of Afghanistan (Schofield, 2003). In addition, the arrival of a Russian envoy in Kabul and denying entrance to the British envoy to Afghanistan brought about the invasion of Afghanistan for the second time by the British.

The British forces occupied Kandahar and Jalalabad in July 1879. When a British emissary was sent to Kabul in July 1879, he and his small escort were killed. In retaliation, British General Roberts was sent to Kabul with an army with instructions that, for the killing of the British Embassy staff, the “Afghan nation must be collectively responsible” and those who participated in the uprising “should be punished, and that their punishment . . . should be swift, stern and impressive” (Balfour, in Kakar, 2006, 219).
Dupree’s analysis (1973) was that General Roberts, in practice, became the ruler of Kabul. Dupree pointed out, “He [General Roberts] ruled with an iron hand, and instituted a reign of terror remembered to this day” (p. 409). Once again, strong resistance to foreigners was demonstrated.

The British understood that they could not stay in Afghanistan (Ghobar, 1967). In February 1880, Sardar Abdur Rahman Khan, a nephew of Amir Sher Ali Khan, returned from exile in Central Asia to proclaim himself Amir. The British, under pressure of Afghan resistance, and another defeat in the Miawand village of Kandahar, accepted the new Amir and agreed to withdraw. In return, the British were given control of the foreign policy of Afghanistan to the British and the Afghan leaders ceded to them Khuram, Pishin, Sibi, Khybar pass and Michni pass (Schofield, 2003).

The border treaty, called the Durand treaty, not only drew a line between Pashtuns but also divided villages and families. The border agreement was not accepted by the locals (Ghobar, 1967), which “led to the greatest uprising against the British [by Pashtuns] west of the Indus, forcing them to employ more troops than they had in their two wars in Afghanistan” (Kakar, 2006, p. 224). According to Ghobar (1967), the people of both sides of the border took part in fighting the British.

**2.3.3 Modernization and resistance.**

In 1919, the Afghan King, Amanullah Khan, declared full independence from Britain, which brought about a month-long Third Anglo-Afghan War. The Afghan troops were mobilized in three different directions, Thal, Khybar pass and Kandahar and were joined by the Pashtun of the border communities (Dupree, 1973). Though the British
troops used fighting planes, the Afghan army eventually brought the British to the table, accepting Afghanistan independence.

King Amanullah, formed a government composed of reformist youth who were supporting radical changes. In 1923, a new constitution—Nizamnama—was presented to a Jirga of tribal leaders. Social and economic reforms, such as the introduction of banking and industries, education (including women’s education), were areas that the government paid attention to. These reforms, however, were soon criticized as against the religious values (Olesen, 1995).

Resistance appeared among the local communities and traditional and religious circles. In 1924, a rebellion started in the South Eastern province of Khost (Hammond, 1984). Amanullah was forced to give up some of the reforms (Edwards, 1986). However, after a tour of Europe, where he observed the development in those countries, the King started a new wave of changes (Hammond, 1984).

The process of implementing Amanullah’s agenda of modernization, together with the distribution of printed materials, caused revolts in the tribal communities. Pictures of King Amanullah and Queen Soraya in western clothes during their grand tour of Europe shown in the tribal areas heightened public anger (Hammond, 1984). Rumors spread that the European trip had cost one million pounds, and that the Amir’s conduct had been impious: he had danced, drunk alcoholic beverages and even eaten pork. Pictures of the Queen traveling unveiled in foreign lands appeared in such newspapers as Settare-y-e Iran (Star of Iran), Koushesh (Efforts) and Iran.
Ghobar (1967) was of the opinion that the British purposefully distributed the pictures to make the people rise against Amanullah Khan. In any case, his tax measures had alienated the urban population as well as the peasantry and religious establishment.

A series of revolts in the tribal areas of the south paved the way for Kabul to be captured from the North by Habibullah Kalakani, a Tajik known as Bacha-Saaqao (which means the son of water carrier). Habibullah Kalakani remained in power for nine months. A French journalist, Andree Viollis, who visited Kabul after the uprising, said that he was shocked “by the devastation wreaked upon the palace” (Dollot in Magnus & Naby, 2002, p. 1).

2.3.3.1 Gradual modernization.

Nadir Khan was an army general leading the Paktia front during the Independence War. He came to Afghanistan from France through British India. In 1929, he managed to unify the tribes, organize a tribal army against Habibullah, and capture Kabul. In fact, when the Southern tribes helped Nadir Khan to take power in Kabul, they demanded the reinforcement of the Shari’a law (Edwards, 1986).

Nadir Shah believed in gradual modernization, that progress and cultural reforms could be introduced with a slower pace. He perceived that the nation was not ready for Amanullah Khan’s reforms and argued that there is no disagreement between the religion and progress. He used the phrase, “Amanullah tried to change the minds of people by changing their hats” (Gregorian, 1969). His slow but steady approach was followed throughout the rule of Zahir Shah, his 18-year old son, who succeeded him to the throne after he was assassinated in 1933 (Shirzad, 1989).
During the premierships of Hashim Khan and then Shah Mahmud Khan, King Zahir Shah’s uncles—from 1933 to 1953—the main goal of the government was to establish the structure of the government, in particular the Afghan army (Edwards, 1986). Internal problems were given priority and a policy of neutrality in foreign affairs was preserved.

Cold War rivalries, beginning in 1947, gave the Afghan state the means to follow its development goals by acting independently from the tribal and religious establishments. A state-building and infrastructure strategy, in five-year increments, was started through foreign financial aid and the sale of the natural gas (Mehrabi, 1978).

In 1963, after the resignation of Daud Khan, an uncle of King Zahir Shah who had served in the post of premier, a decade of democracy (1963-1973) paved the way for formation of political parties in Afghanistan. In the late 1960s, two opposing political camps were formed, and struggled against each other. The pro-Marxists on one hand and the Islamists on the other were looking to win ground from more moderate movements. Both left and right politics can be traced to the beginning of modernization in the country.

The pro-Soviet People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) was influenced by the Soviet model for transforming the society. The Islamist movement started in the 1920s. The Afghan Islamists were influenced by such outside scholars as Hassan al Bana in Egypt, who founded the Muslim Brotherhood, by Sayd Qutb of the Muslim Brotherhood, whose books were translated, by Muhammad ibn Abdal Wahab of Arabia, by Mawdudi of Pakistan, and by Shariati of Iran (Misdaq, 2006). Other political groups included the pro-China party Shola (Flame).
Similar to other Middle Eastern countries, the Islamic movement started in the 1960s in Afghanistan among students advocating religion, who were influenced by such leaders as Mawdudi, Sayd Qutb and Ali Shariati. Their main argument was that the “Islamic society” could be achieved only through an Islamic revolution. Although they used Qur’an and Islamic texts to support their argument, their strategies resembled the modern ideology of Marxism that is by establishing a political party to lead the masses to the path of revolution (Roy, 1990).

The PDPA was the more vocal of the groups (Edwards, 1986) and, in 1973, with the support of PDPA members, Daud Khan ousted his cousin King Zahir Shah in a military coup. As President of Afghanistan, his reforms were centrally designed and infrastructure focused (Smith, 1980). During Daud Khan’s term in office, the Islamists tried to topple the government but failed. Their leaders were either killed or took refuge in Pakistan. Later, when Daud Khan took actions not in favor with the PDPA leadership, with the support of PDPA members in the Afghan army, the party launched a coup and assumed power.

2.3.4 The regime change of 1978 and violence.

April 1978 is considered a turning point in the history of Afghanistan. The PDPA launched a coup, and after killing President Daud Khan together with members of his family, they took power.

The new regime under Noor Mohammad Taraki, the leader of the Khalq faction of PDPA, took a non-ideological tone at the beginning, but after three months, radical reforms were announced. A clear policy of transforming the society along Marxist lines was implemented (Edwards, 1986). Among the reforms announced were the abolition of
usury, changes in marriage customs, and appropriation of land. According to the ideology of the PDPA, these steps were taken to do away with feudalism and capitalist practices (Newell, 1972).

The regime used both repression and structured reforms to do away with any sort of competition in all aspects of Afghan society, which threatened traditional power structures. Such radical reforms once again brought about local resistance and considerable conflict (Ewans, 2002; Roberts, 2003). Targeted were the tribal aristocracy, rival intelligentsia, and local leaders, resulting in thousands of members of the traditional elite and the religious establishment being killed.

The pro-communist take-over of Kabul ended the traditional neutrality of the Afghan state in regional and global politics, and turned it in favor of the Soviet Union (Rubin, 2002).

In 1979, Afghanistan was invaded by the Red Army. President Amin was killed and a new government under Babrak Karmal, exiled leader of the Parcham faction of the PDPA, was installed in Kabul. Around 120,000 Soviet troops in Kabul and the provinces were used to keep the regime in power (Shirzad, 1989).

With the Soviet invasion, the resistance entered a new stage. The internal problems of Afghanistan gained international attention (Rubin, 2002). The invasion dragged the Western bloc into the Afghan conflict (O’Ballance, 1993). USSR and the communist bloc on one side and the Western bloc, China and Islamic countries were on the other side (Rubin, 2002).

The conflict intensified the level of violence within Afghanistan between the pro-Soviet regime and the Afghan rebels supported by the West. Regional powers, including
Pakistan, Iran, India, Arab states, some Islamist groups, and China took sides and became involved in the Afghan conflict (Ahady, 1998; Khan, 2007; Misra, 2004).

In 1988, the Geneva Agreement between Afghanistan, Pakistan, the United States, and the Soviet Union paved the way for the withdrawal of the Red Army by 1989. After being in Afghanistan for about 10 years and suffering many casualties, the Soviet Union left the country. This period was followed by a devastating civil war between the Mujahideen and the Kabul regime that continued until 1992.

The Mujahideen forces were composed of some 15 different groups. There were a number of local commanders independent from the rebel parties (Rashid, 2001; Rubin, 2002). Seven of these groups were in Pakistan and eight in Iran (Roy, 1990). Also involved were a significant number of Arabs from the Persian Gulf and around the Middle East who had traveled to Afghanistan to partake in the Jihad, or holy war, against the occupation forces.

From 1982 through 1992, approximately 35,000 Muslims (including 25,000 Arabs) fought alongside the Mujahideen. Many of these volunteers were trained by Pakistani intelligence forces or educated in the Pakistani fundamentalist religious schools or madrassas. The Arab Mujahideen also played an important role both in supporting the Taliban in terms of finance, and providing regular militant groups to fight alongside the Taliban in Afghanistan. During these years of war, around 6 million Afghans migrated to Pakistan and Iran. Many other families were displaced internally (Rashid, 2001).
2.3.5 The Mujahideen rule & the continuation of civil war.

After a rift within the party and the fall of a number of cities into the hands of the Mujahideen, in 1992, Afghan President Najibullah agreed to a power transfer plan of the United Nations. Before this could happen, however, Dostum and a number of other militia leaders, in the North, rose against Najibullah and toppled the regime. The U.N. tried to mediate between the parties but their plans failed (O’Ballance, 1993).

It was mid-April 1992 when the Mujahideen established an Interim Islamic Jihad Council to assume control of the country. The Council, consisting of 10 members, was chaired by Prof. Burhanuddin Rabbani who remained in the position until Kabul was captured by the Taliban in 1996. Factional fighting had started almost immediately in the city between Mujahideen groups, with Jamiat taking power in Kabul and Hezbi Islami the opposition group (O’Ballance, 1993). The UN and others sought to find a political solution to the ongoing conflict, but the fighting continued.

2.3.6 The Taliban.

In the spring of 1994, residents of the Uruzgan province of Afghanistan near Singesar, came to Omar, the local Mullah of a nearby village, and told him that a local governor had kidnapped two young girls, apparently to rape them at a nearby military base. Omar rushed to the location with his 30 colleagues, having only 16 rifles freed the girls and hanged the offender from the barrel of a tank (Rashid, 2001). Omar later became the supreme leader of the Taliban.

This is a well-known version of how the Taliban movement emerged, at least in the South of Afghanistan. Omar helped the poor against the powerful commanders, which made him popular and credible among the local population (Matinuddin, 1999). Talking
about his mission, Omar said: “We are fighting against Muslims who had gone wrong. How could we remain quite when we see crimes being committed against women and the poor?” (Goldenberg cited in Rashid, 2001, p. 25)

The Taliban’s October 1994 victory in Spin Boldak, the border town in Kandahar Province near to Pakistan, changed the movement into a powerful military and political force in Afghanistan. In reporting the events, Rashid (2001) and Matinuddin (1999) said that around 200 Taliban from Kandahari and Pakistani madrassas arrived at the border town used by those who smuggled goods, attacked the Mujahideen commanders and took control of the town.

Several weeks later, the Taliban captured Afghanistan’s second largest city, Kandahar. The political appeal of the Taliban was their promise to bring peace and normalcy, with a strategy to disarm people, enforce Sharia law based on their interpretation, and keep control over the areas they capture (Lansford, 2003). By declaring Jihad against corrupt rulers, their objective was “to recreate the time of the Khulafa-e-Rashideen by emphasizing equality amongst all citizens and simplicity in leading one’s life” (Matinuddin, 1999, p. 43).

After taking control of Kandahar City, around 12,000 Afghan and Pakistani Taliban came to join the Taliban, including local people. This made it possible for the Taliban to bring under their control around 12 provinces in a couple of months. Their victories were used to reinforce their perception about the truthfulness of their mission,

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5 During the conflict in Afghanistan, there were around 8,000 madrassas in Pakistan with half a million students in 1988 (Matinuddin, 1998).

6 Talib is the word equal to student in Arabic. Taliban is its plural form of Talib in Pashto. In Afghanistan, this word is mainly used for the students of religious madrassas. However, after the Taliban’s emergence in 1994, the word was also used in association with the movement.
that God was on their side and that their interpretation of Islam was the only possible interpretation (Rashid, 2001).

Bringing order, the Taliban initially got the support of the Pashtun-dominated areas. They attempted to collect weapons, and curb crimes such as rape and murder (Rubin, 2002). Rubin mentioned that the Taliban’s economic resources derived from a network linked to the Pashtun diaspora in Karachi and Dubai, and to the Pakistani administration in the Northwest Frontier Province and Baluchistan.

Though the Taliban were able to bring peace, they also imposed a very strict version of Islam, using unrelenting force (Gohari, 2000; Rashid, 2001). Unlike their successes in the Pashtun areas, the Taliban faced tough resistance in other parts of the country. The Taliban were not like the Mujahideen of the 1980s, who felt attached to their tribe and clan lineages and remembered their history. The Taliban were the generation who had never seen their country at peace. Besides, no memories of the past, the Taliban had no plans for the future (Rashid, 2001).

Besides banning on women from working, the Taliban shut down girl’s schools. For the men having a turban, keeping a beard, and going to the mosque were made compulsory. Many popular games, including football, were prohibited. Later, the Taliban lifted the ban on football, but only if the game would be interrupted when it coincided with prayer time. Both players and spectators must offer their prayers in congregation. Clapping was not allowed, instead participants had to chant Allah-o-Akbar [God is Great]. The Taliban used the football ground for executions, for it was where most people could gather and watch the scene (Matinuddin, 1998; Rashid, 2001). There was also a ban on pictures and visual media.
When the Taliban captured Herat and then Kabul, women could no longer go to their duty stations, schools and the university. Such restrictions damaged the public sector, especially the education system operated mainly by women. The Taliban were not supported by the people of Kabul (Rashid, 2001).

The rivalry between regional powers intensified. Pakistan supported the Taliban, with the intention of keeping Afghanistan away from India (Ahady, 1998; Khan, 2007; Rashid, 2001). Pakistan convinced Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to support and recognize the Taliban (Khan, 2007; Rashid, 2008b). Non-state actors like Osama bin Laden and his Al Qaeda network, and some radical groups in Pakistan, according to Rashid (2008), were also taking an active part in the Afghan fighting by giving support to the Taliban.

Iran, on the other hand, strongly opposed the Taliban. Iran, India and Russia supported the Northern Alliance in fighting the Taliban. Later, the U. S. gave support to the anti-Taliban forces (Khan, 2007).

By September 2001, except for Badakhshan and Parwan provinces where the forces loyal to the United Islamic Front (Northern Alliance) were operating, the Taliban had taken control of whole country.

The Taliban’s human rights record quickly isolated Afghanistan in global politics. Sanctions were imposed against the Taliban’s regime. Saudi Arabia and UAE both withdrew their recognition. The only country that recognized the Taliban as the government of Afghanistan was Pakistan.

After the September 11th, 2001 attack on New York and Washington D.C., the Taliban were removed from power by the United States and its allies with the support of
the United Islamic Front and former Mujahideen commanders. However, the Taliban were able to re-group. Giustozzi (2008) noted that the Taliban benefited from their cordial relationships with local Mullahs. There was also transnational support, in terms of recruits, training, and funding which made it possible for the Taliban to reemerge and challenge the Afghan government and the International forces.

2.4 The Political Economy of Broadcasting Media in Afghanistan

2.4.1 Early development of mass media.

As a part of modernization, radio broadcasting was introduced under Amanullah Khan. In 1927, two 100-watt transmitters were brought to Afghanistan (Gregorian, 1969). One of them was installed in Kabul (Zara, 1983). According to Gregorian, the estimated number of radio sets in 1928 was about 1,000 in Afghanistan; the audience was mainly in Kabul. Gregorian mentioned that the Soviet Union’s assistance package included the establishment of a powerful radio station in Kabul, but the uprising of 1928, which toppled the King, halted the reforms, including broadcasting.

Radio started broadcasting again in 1940 (Zara, 1983). Gregorian wrote that, for lack of radio sets, loudspeakers were used and listening was done in groups. By 1948, the number of radio sets reached 8,000. In 1957, two short-wave transmitters of ten and 50 kilowatts were installed (Shirzad, 1989). Most of the developments in broadcasting came during the five-year development programs that started in 1957.

By 1960, the short-wave signals of Radio Kabul were reaching places far beyond the boundaries of Afghanistan in English, French, Russian, Arabic and Urdu (“Arteries of Progress,” 1960; Shirzad, 1989). Its programming included, in addition to hourly news, music, dramas, and educational programs (Shirzad, 1989). Smith wrote that radio was
regarded as one of the main channels of entertainment and education, but was also used for development purposes (1980).

Though there were times that the press was relatively free, radio remained under strict control of the central government. Following the Soviet model, media in Afghanistan was a top-down and centralized system (Tanweer, 2001). By 1978, the broadcasting hours reached to 108 hours per week. An additional 31 hours were transmitting to foreign countries through short waves. Radio Afghanistan was broadcasting in Pashto and Dari, on a fifty-fifty basis (Meyer, 1978, January-February). Music formed about 50% of the programs (Smith, 1980). Radio signals were also received in-country from Iran, Pakistan and USSR (Meyer, 1978, January-February).

Before the Coup of 1978, Radio-TV Afghanistan, operating as part of the Ministry of Information and Culture, had around 700 employees. Most of them were graduates of Kabul University. In terms of finances, Radio-TV Afghanistan depended on the government. Though radio was a state-owned medium, advertisement in single blocks was allowed. The money from advertisement went to the Ministry of Finance. Radio Afghanistan was also getting revenue from paid obituaries. In terms of availability of radio receivers, there was one radio per thirty people; the ratio was higher in and around Kabul where the reception was good. Receiving signals in the mountainous terrain beyond the city was a constraint (Meyer, 1978, January-February).

In 1978, experimental television started in Kabul (Shirzad, 1989; Kushkaki, 1986). A new building was built, an antenna was erected, and personnel were sent to Iran, Japan, and Bulgaria for training. The technical equipment was the PAL color television system, provided by a Japanese grant.
2.4.2 Media and war.

Broadcast media was strictly controlled by each succeeding government of Afghanistan (Noorzai, 2006). Soon after the People Democratic Party of Afghanistan came to power in 1978, listening to stations broadcasting from outside the country were banned and restrictions were imposed on the listeners (Rawan, 2002); these were later relaxed.

Media were used mainly to broadcast the news and gain public support (Newell, 2005). Broadcasting was considered by the leadership of the PDPA’s to be a tool for the “awakening” and “awareness” of the masses and to educate and impart values. In the inauguration ceremony of Kabul Television, Noor Mohammad Taraki, the then President of Afghanistan and the leader of the PDPA, said that the television should “adapt to the interest of proletariat of Afghanistan,” and be used to educate people in line with the party’s agenda (“Rahbar inqilabi ma . . .”), August 22, 1978, p. 4-5).

The topics covered by state-media presented PDPA’s ideological leaning. These topics included “tyranny of imperialism,” the “backwardness’ of tribalism and feudalism, [and] the baseless proclamation of national unity and consciousness . . .” (Siddiq in Skuse, 2002, p. 270). Participant #27 said news harming the government’s position, such as conflict within PDPA, was not broadcast (personal communication, August 5, 2009). In this period, broadcasting in Uzbek, Turkmani and Baluchi was also started (Tanweer, 2001).

The media did not cover the war and security related issues, particularly in the beginning. Instead, the message was that people were happy and were supporting the PDPA and its reforms. However, media failed to establish a positive image of the ruling
party among Afghans (Shirzad, 1989). Participant #27 (personal communication, 2009, August 5) and Participant #91 (personal communication, 2010, February 23) worked with NRTA during this period. They each pointed out that there were restrictions in terms of issues covered. They said that, though the RTA staff would produce their own news stories and go for coverage, most of the news came from Bakhtar News Agency.

After the invasion, Soviet advisors helped the PDPA’s governments in terms of broadcasting (Skuse, 2002). In 1982, a satellite station was established and the Soviet satellite network, Intersputnik, was used for exchanging programs with other countries and providing content to the eleven local TV stations. Soviet films, documentaries, sports, dance, cartoons, and music were the major content of the mass media in Afghanistan (Shirzad, 1989).

In late 1980s, after Dr. Najibullah came to power, most of the ideological/communist materials were seized and radio was used to promote a policy of national reconciliation, a government-led peace initiative (Skuse, 2002). By 1990, Radio Afghanistan was broadcasting 50 programming hours per week. It had a listening audience of 10 to 12 million (Rawan, 2002). By the end of the 1980s, TV was broadcasting six hours daily. Around two million people in the capital and the surrounding areas received Kabul Television signals (Shirzad, 1989).

During the war, Mujahideen groups fighting the PDPA government forces, depended to a great extent on interpersonal channels of communication, such as public poetry and cassettes, and shabnama or night letters (Noorzai, 2006). However, a number of periodicals were also published by rebel groups in Pakistan and Iran. According to Tanweer (2001), Mujahideen publications had an important role in “political and
conscience awakening” of the masses (p. 460). Tanweer also reported the existence of underground press supporting the Mujahideen in Kabul.

In Pakistan, where millions of Afghans took refuge, Pakistan National Radio had a channel for Afghans refugees programmed by the Mujahideen (Participant #62, personal communication, 2009, July 25). Mujahideen groups also established a number of news agencies presenting their version of news. The United States Information Agency (USIA) helped create the Afghan Media Resource Center (AMRC) for Mujahideen to “publicize their cause internationally” (Barker, 2008, p. 113). Participant #81, an Afghan journalist who left Kabul after the Soviet Union’s invasion of Afghanistan and one of the pioneers of AMRC, said that the AMRC was thus able to get international coverage and present the Mujahideen side of the story (Participant #81, personal communication, 2010, February 21).

Inside Afghanistan, in 1979, Hezbi Islami seized a radio station from the government forces in the Asmar district of Kunar province. It had a transmitter capable of reaching an 80 kilometer radius. Called “Mujahideen,” or “Mokhalifin” [opposition] radio, it was moved to Khost province, in August 1979, where it was broadcasting for one hour every day. Later, in 1983, it was re-located to the Paktia Spena Shega area, broadcasting both on Medium Wave and Short Wave. The programming was increased to three hours and included news, tarani, songs, and other programs (Tanweer, 2001).

The use of the state owned media by the regime as a propaganda tool undermined the credibility of the national media. Though people were hearing a number of programs of Radio Afghanistan that were family oriented (Adam, 2005), they were depending on the international broadcasting and interpersonal communication channels for news and
information. In this period, as Adam mentioned, Afghans were listening to BBC, VoA, Deutsche Welle, Radio Iran, Radio Pakistan and All India Radio in their own Pashto and Dari languages.

2.4.2.1 Media under Mujahideen rule.

In March 1992, when the Najibullah regime collapsed, Mujahideen took control of Kabul and other provincial centers. The National Radio Television Afghanistan (NRTA) building in Kabul was taken by Jamiat Islami, the party dominating government after the fall of Najibullah. Control of provincial radio and television stations was taken by different Mujahideen groups and commanders. Participant #27 and #91 (Personal communication, 2009, August 5; 2010, February 23), who witnessed the change in regimes, said that they had no choice but to adjust to the policies of the new government. They understood that since they were working with the government media, they had to follow the government instructions.

Hezbi Islami, the main group fighting the government formed by its rival faction Jamiat Islami, brought its radio from Paktia, first to Logar and then to Charasyab and named it “Payami Azadi.” In 1992, Hezbi Islami established its own TV station, Payami Azadi TV, broadcasting from Charasyab, 15 kilometers away from Kabul. It was broadcasting for two to four hours a day (Tanweer, 2001).

During the fighting years, media was used as propaganda tools by different groups. NRTA’s infrastructure was damaged and most of RTA’s professional staff left the country (Yun, 2009). Under the Mujahideen, little support was provided media by the international and foreign organizations. For instance, National Endowment for Democracy (NED) provided $300,000 to support “media and publishing,” and $240,000
was given to those projects that had “a partial media and publishing component” (Barker, 2008, p114).

2.4.2.2 Media under the Taliban.

The Taliban, imposing their version of Sharia law, further damaged the media infrastructure and organizations of the country. Except for radio, all other forms of media were banned and most of the professional staff left Afghanistan. Some of the participants of this research left Kabul during the Taliban regime.

The Taliban banned playing or listening to music, taking or keeping pictures - particularly pictures of living beings - except for passport and other documents (Yun, 2009). They also banned watching television, and the keeping of video cassettes and satellite dishes (Rashid, 2000). Participant #62, who worked as a high level official for the Taliban, traced the roots of the ban on pictures to Sufism. He said that Sufism, which is practiced in Afghanistan, bans anything for which doubts exist about its benefit. (Personal Communication, 2009, July 25).

There was also a ban on free press and freedom of expression. Participant #66, who had also worked with the Taliban, noted that the group did not impose restrictions on the periodicals published outside the country (2009, June 29). Indeed, a few periodicals, mainly magazines, were published by the Taliban (see Yun, 2009). Radio was, however, the major mass medium used by the Taliban, which they renamed Radio Voice of Shari’a. Branches of Radio Voice of Shari’a were broadcasting in several provinces (Yun, 2009).

In the last years of their government, the Taliban launched their own website. However, except for some international organizations and a few ministries, no connection
to the Internet was ever allowed. Except for Herat City, which had a modern telephone system, and Kabul, which had about 12,000 lines and irregular service, there was no real telecommunications infrastructure in this period.

2.4.3 Media in post-September 9, 2001.


Radio Voice of Shari’a of Balkh Province remained on air, however, broadcasting by the Taliban until the fall of Mazar Sharif in the hands of General Dostum’s troops on November 10, 2001 ("Afghanistan: Media round-up. . .,” 2001, November 10).

During the attacks, the U.S. replaced Taliban broadcasts with its own “war propaganda” (Johnston, 2001 and Stone, 2001 in Barker, 2008) to maintain “information dominance” (Miller in Barker, 2008), and started disseminating U.S. military messages via its PsyOps radio, called Information Radio ("Afghanistan: Media round-up . . .,” 2001, October 28). For instance, during those October operations, the radio was broadcasting: “We have not come here to harm you. We have come to arrest Usamah Bin-Ladin, Al-Qa'idah and those who support him. . . . We are not here to make your country our colony or to plunder it ("Analysis: Afghan media background”, 2001, October, 15). The U.S. military also used leaflets and later used billboards (Wentz, 2010).
In the aftermath of September 11, Afghanistan became the focus of foreign media, when international news channels began sending crews to cover these developments. Until the fall of the Taliban, foreign media were mainly based in Pakistani cities near to the Afghan border. *Al Jazeera* was the only foreign channel allowed by the Taliban to enter for coverage (Hickey, 2002; “Analysis: Afghan media background,” 2001, October 15). In a number of instances, the Taliban took foreign media crews to cover some of the incidents.

In both the United States and the United Kingdom, questions were raised related to the domestic media broadcasting recordings made by bin Laden and other Al Qaeda’s members (“Blair seeks curbs . . .,” 2001, October 15). On October 10, 2001, Condoleezza Rice, the U.S. National Security Advisor “warned” that “full-text live messages or interviews from Obama bin Laden,” might “contain encoded messages for terrorists” (Graber, 2003, p. 545), and asked that Western news networks not broadcast them.

Questions related to the broadcasting of the Taliban-produced materials were also raised. For instance, the British government warned the media to treat the Taliban’s messages on civilian casualties with “skepticism” (Rebecca & Boshoff, 2001, October 15). The broadcasting of an interview with Mullah Omar by the U.S. Voice of America Pashto Service brought about a debate between the State Department and Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), the governing body looking after the VoA (“USA/Afghanistan: State Department's . . .,” 2001, October 1).

After the fall of the Taliban, the international channels broadcasting into Afghanistan, the BBC, VoA, Deutsche Welle and other stations, increased their broadcasting schedule and coverage. More reporters were hired to work in Afghanistan.
To restart broadcasting in Pashto and Dari, a total of $19.2 million was allocated by the U.S. Congress for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (“Afghanistan: Media round-up . . .,” 2001, December 11).

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty had been broadcasting in Pashto and Dari during 1985 to 1993 (“Analysis: Afghan media background . . .,” 2001, October 15). Sharing the airwaves with VoA, Radio Free Afghanistan started again broadcasting for 12 hours – 7:00AM to 7:00PM during the researcher’s fieldwork.

Radio Tehran’s Pashto service to Afghanistan had started in 1973. Iran’s three radio stations—Radio Tehran, Radio Mashhad, and Radio Zahidan—all increased their broadcasting hours for Afghanistan after September 11, 2001. In addition, some of the channels broadcast within Iran can be received in parts of Afghanistan and a number of Iranian channels are also carried by cable where available in the country.

On November 13, 2001, a day after the Taliban fled Kabul, the United Front troops entered Kabul, and about three days later, Radio Voice of Afghanistan, the replacement for Radio Shariat, started broadcasting seven hours a day. The Reuters news agency reported that Kabul television was on air beginning November 18, 2001, featuring a 16 year old Afghan girl, Mariam Shakebar (“Afghanistan: Media round-up . . .,” 2001, November 18).

NRTA remained under the control of the United Front. As Reporters Sans Frontieres explained, the United Front was trying to get control of the state institutions. At the provincial levels, stations remained under pressure from the powerful provincial figures, such as the governors or commanders. Another problem was NRTA’s culture, which was based on the Soviet model. There were significant differences between
“reformists” and “conservatives” concerning the content to be aired by stations (Reporter Sans Frontieres, 2002, November 11).

NRTA, as other state institutions, had been damaged by the decades of war. Its reconstruction started as part of the Nation Development Framework (NDF), drawn up by the Afghan Assistance Coordination Authority (AACA) in post-Taliban Afghanistan (Miller, 2003). Rebuilding media was considered to be an important part of the reconstruction process in Afghanistan (Feuilherade, 2003). When the International Community started media assistance, attention was paid first to the rebuilding of the state-owned radio and television facilities (Miller, 2003; “Analysis: Afghanistan gives . . .,” 2002, February 14).

The United States, Japan, Germany, India, Iran and a number of others started direct media assistance. Besides these, USAID, the European Commission, UNESCO, the BBC World Trust, Voice of America and Deutsche Welle also helped through financial assistance, provision of equipment, training, programming and materials. Grassi calculated that $60 million had been spent on Afghan media assistance between 2002 and 2004. This money was mainly spent on the state-owned Bakhtar News Agency and NRTA (The Killid Group [TKG], 2007). Later, some of this assistance went toward establishing local independent media in Afghanistan.

2.4.3.1 Media assistance & establishment of private media.

After the fall of the Taliban in February 2002, the Afghan Interim Administration (AIA) enacted the Media Law of 1965. Via a presidential decree (“Analysis: Afghanistan gives green . . .,” 2004, February 14), government monopoly over media was ended. By liberalizing the law and regulations, the establishment of commercial and non-
government media was made possible (Soloway & Saddigue, 2005, October). However, media freedom watchdogs expressed concerns about a number of issues, such as registration and licensing (“Analysis: Broadcasting in Afghanistan,” 2002, October 8; Miller, 2003), no guarantee of accessing information, and freedom of public media (Miller, 2003).

The two main donors involved in media assistance were USAID and the European Commission. The Office of Transition Initiative (OTI) provided a funding of $67 million from October 2002 to June 2005. From this amount, about $23 million was spent in improving the capacity of media (Barker, 2006). The goals set for the USAID/OTI media assistance package were to create “[W]estern-style media law,” helping Afghanistan’s government by doing research and production of programs, and assisting the establishment of independent media for the first time in Afghanistan (USAID/OTI, 2005; Barker, 2008).

Implementing organizations for media assistances were Internews and such other organizations as Afghan NGOs Killid Group and Aina. Torfeh (2009) observed that post-Taliban Afghanistan was “a free for-all manner of media and training agencies” (p. 40). The first “editorially independent program,” Good Morning Afghanistan (GMA), started in February, 2002 with the support of a European NGO, financed by the European Commission (“Good Morning Afghanistan . . .,” 2002, February 25; Feuilherade 2002).

The international broadcasters—VoA, with a grant from the USAID RFE/RL and the BBC World Service Trust, with a grant from the UK government—provided short term training to local journalists (“USA/Afghanistan: US broadcasting . . .,” 2002, July 2; Feuilherade, 2003). In addition, a number of NGOs working in the media sector, such as
Internews and Institute of War and Peace Reporting (IWPR), were also involved in training (Barker, 2008). Local NGOs, such as Aina, also took part in training (“Analysis: Broadcasting in . . . ,” 2002, October 8).

In March 2003, the first commercial channel, Arman FM, started in Kabul. Arman FM received a grant from USAID-OTI and was owned by a consortium of Afghan-Australian businessmen (Soloway and Saddigue 2005). The consortium was called Moby Group, run by the Mohseni family. In October 2004, OTI provided approximately $2.12 million to Moby Group to start the commercial TV channel Tolo (Soloway & Saddigue, 2005, October).

By 2010, the Moby Group had 700 staff started a 24-hour news channel called Tolo News, and a satellite network called Farsi. The Group was also involved in the related businesses of production, advertisements and “a record label-in” (Wentz, 2010). In 2005, another television station called, Ariana TV, started broadcasting (Nai, 2005, November 30). This channel was sponsored by Ehsanullah Bayat, who owned the GSM phone company, Afghan Wireless Communication, and also chaired the Bayat Foundation, a charity organization.

A major step forward in establishing local independent media was the establishment of a loose network of radio stations by the Internews. The organization opened its office in Kabul in February 2002 (Internews, 2002), with around 155 employees (Internews, 2005, spring). This project was funded by the USAID-Office Transition Initiative (OTI). Rohde (in Barker, 2008) reported that a grant of $4 million had been given in support of the project.
Internews selected the location and the owners of these radio stations, with the basic criteria that the locations of these stations should be dispersed, and each community should invest initially $1,000 while other expenses, such as training, employees’ salaries, and operational costs, were to be provided by Internews (Barker, 2008). The first radio, Killid, went on the air on August 19, 2003 (Soloway & Saddigue, 2005, October). By mid-2004, the number of independent radio stations increased to 17, and by the end of 2004 to 25 and by 2005 to 29 (USAID, 2004; Internews, 2005, spring).

Figure 4: BBC, Independent, and State Stations (Courtesy Internews, 2004)

Internews was not only involved in establishing, supporting, and training the independent media, it also helped in the production of such programs as Salam Watandar (Hello my compatriot), that served as a program network for the Internews-supported 42
radio stations. These stations had to broadcast at least three hours of Salam Watandar programming—7:00AM to 8:30AM and 6:30PM to 8:00PM. This program was also broadcast through two satellite channels—a mixed Pashto and Dari, and another Pashto.

The organization also established a network, called Tanin, to distribute programming to the stations (Internews, 2005; Kumar, 2006). In addition, Internews advised the government and media groups on media policy “in which independent media can thrive and journalists can report without fear of the government reprisals” (Internews, 2002, p. 6). Other donors and organizations that funded Internews included European Commission, IOM, and Asia Foundation (Internews, 2005, spring).

2.4.3.2 The constitution of 2004.

In terms of law and policy, a major development was the new constitution of Afghanistan, drafted in January 2004 that guaranteed freedom of expression. Article 34 of the new constitution stated:

Freedom of expression shall be inviolable.

Every Afghan shall have the right to express thoughts through speech, writing, illustrations as well as other means in accordance with provisions of this constitution.

Every Afghan shall have the right, according to provisions of law, to print and publish on subjects without prior submission to state authorities.

Directives related to the press, radio, and television as well as publications and other mass media, shall be regulated by law. (The Constitution of Afghanistan, 2004, January)
Based on Article 34 of the Constitution, a number of media laws were drafted and enacted in 2004, 2006 and 2009. Furthermore, in 2007, media professionals and academia drafted codes of ethics for journalists that prescribe impartiality, accuracy, and fairness as the fundamental guidelines for Afghan journalists (“Starting a local . . . ,” 2011, July).

One of the main issues addressed in the laws was the transformation of the NRTA into public service broadcasting (PSB). Since the beginning there was some support to change NRTA to a PSB (RSF, 2002, November 11). From 2002 to 2005, UNESCO was working on transforming RTA to a PSB with $1.5 million in funding from the Italian Government. However, there was resistance from some of the individuals and groups within the government. In 2009, one of the issues between the government and Wolesi Jirga was the control over RTA (Brossel et al., 2009, March).

The licensing of media came through the Ministry of Information and Culture [MoIC], who assigned NRTA to undertake the task, a long and time consuming procedure. Broadcast frequencies were to be allocated by the Afghan Telecommunications Regulatory Authority, under the Ministry of Communication and Information Technologies.

Related to program content, the media law clearly mentioned that media needs to adhere to “the principles of Islam, national virtual and morale values and psychological security” (“The Media Law of 1388,” 2009). This wording was similar to Article 3 of the Constitution, which says that no law can be enacted against the beliefs and provisions of Islam; no further explanation was given of what can be Islamic and un-Islamic. Yet, in 2008, the two journalists, Ghaos Zulmai and Kambakhsh were jailed on the charges of blasphemy (TKG, 2007).
Appearance of women on TV was another issue. Until January 12, 2004, when a song by female singer Salma was broadcast, the appearance of a female singer was considered “un-Islamic,” and was banned on NRTA (“Analysis: Afghan TV wins,” January 21, 2004). The ban also included international music and movies for which, in 2008 and 2009, Indian soap operas were the main controversy. In a dispute between the MoIC and Tolo TV, the Attorney General called the programs “anti-Islamic” and “anti-Afghani” (Torfeh, 2009; “Khusosi chanalona zmozh . . .,” 2009, March 7). The government did ban the Indian soap operas; however, the ban on soap operas was ignored by Tolo TV because it was “big money earners” for the channel (Mojumdar, 2008, December 28, para#14).

A number of participants of this research thought soap operas had a negative impact on the society. Participant #19, a historian and Afghan cultural expert, viewed Indian soap operas as a form of “cultural invasion” (Personal communication, 2008, July 27). Participant #66 went further and said that the broadcast served as a motivation for those fighting against the government [since soap operas were considered against the cultural values] (Personal communication, 2009, June 29).

One of the main groups pressing media on content was the National and Provincial Ulama councils. In 2004, the Chief of Justice, Fazil Hadi Shinwari, who was also the head of Ulama Council, called for action against the un-Islamic content of media (Mojumdar, 2005, February 10). A year later, the Ulama Council accused the two television channels Tolo and Afghan Television of broadcasting “music, naked dances and foreign films contrary to Islamic and national values” (Mojumdar, 2005, March 17, p. 2).
In 2004, based on the complaints of the Ulama Council, calling cable TV’s content “inappropriate” and “un-Islamic,” the cable operators were banned. However, after a few months, the Media Commission allowed 35 channels to be carried by cable operators (Nai, 2005, February 10). In 2006, Afghan TV, based in Kabul, was fined 50,000 Afg. by the Media Commission for media related offenses (Nai, 2006, February 12).

2.4.4 Media developments and challenges.

One of the major developments since 2005 was the emergence of private radio and television channels. In 2005, four TV channels—Afghan TV, Tolo TV, Aina TV, and Ghorian TV—were established (Altai Consulting, 2005). The number increased to seven in 2007. The same year, the number of radio stations increased to 50 (TKG, 2007). In 2008, there were 80 registered radio stations and 20 registered TV stations broadcasting in Afghanistan. Ten news agencies were registered with the MoCI (MoCI, 2008). In 2011, the number of television channels increased to 75 and the number of radio stations reached 175, including the provincial branches in Afghanistan (Altai Consulting, 2010, October; ISAF, 2011, July 25).

Only about 63 percent of the population could have accessed phone services by 2011 (Ministry of Communication and Information Technologies [MCIT], 2011), and only four percent used the Internet (Altai Consulting, 2010, October). Larger television networks, including Tolo TV, Ariana and NRTA were also broadcasting on satellite. In major cities, cable services were also available.

Radio remained to the most accessible medium in Afghanistan, where above 80 percent of the people owned radio receivers (“Internews Afghanistan…,” 2004; The Asia
Foundation, 2010). However, the number of female listeners was presumed to be lower (Kamal, 2004). Most of the channels were broadcasting for the general public, except for a number of radio stations that were broadcasting to women.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media</th>
<th>All(%)</th>
<th>Rural(%)</th>
<th>Urban(%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television set</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile phone</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Asia Foundation’s survey showed that 46 percent of people depended on radio for their news and information. In this regard, dependence on television was 28 percent, and friends and family 19 percent. There was a clear difference in media usage among rural and urban population—more people depended on radio in rural areas while those in urban areas people depended on television. The annual 2010 survey by the Asia Foundation showed a decrease in dependence on radio (The Asia Foundation, 2010).

The number of radio and television stations differed from one province to another. Of the three provinces visited by this researcher: Kandahar had six radio stations (two governmental and four private) and two television stations; Kunduz had two television stations (the private Khawaran and government-owned Kunduz TV) and four radio stations (a government and three private stations); and Nangarhar had nine radio stations (a military, a governmental, and seven private stations) and two local television stations.
(the government TV and Sharq). Most of these stations were located in the center of their provinces. The number of radio and television stations in these provinces has increased since those provinces were visited. After 2009, the international forces also launched new radio stations in some of the districts of Kandahar as well as in the districts in Nangarhar.

Based on their modes of operation and financial resources, the stations in Afghanistan can be divided into two main categories: government and private media. Government-owned broadcasting radio and television were operating in 18 provinces. Other such stations included Educational Radio and Television operating from Kabul (Yun, 2009). Private media, including commercial and nonprofit/community outlets, were defined as those media outlets owned and run by individuals and political, economic, social, and cultural organizations (“The Media Law of 1388”, 2009). Most of the private radio channels broadcast on the FM bands. Local radio station were often locally owned and supported by the community, providing land, buildings, and voluntary time. Other stations were started by NGOs; IMPACS started four stations for women (Kumar, 2006). Commercial media were mainly located in Kabul and other larger cities.

A number of RTV channels were associated with powerful individuals in Afghanistan. For instance, Aina TV, one of the private broadcasting stations operating in the Northern part of Afghanistan, is famous for supporting the powerful militia leader Abdul Rashid Dostum. Many of the new channels that started up after 2008, “have been known to follow an overt political agenda” (International Federation of Journalists [IFJ], 2011, June p. 4).

The financial sustainability of these channels was a concern (Torfeh, 2009; Kumar, 2006; TKG, 2007). The advertising market was small and funding by donors had
decreased (TKG, 2007). The cumulative budget that was $30 million from 2002 to 2006, was reduced to $11 million from 2007 to 2013 (TKG, 2007; Altai Consulting, October 2010). The European Commission’s strategy for Afghanistan from 2007 to 2013 did not include direct funding to the media (TKG, 2007).

Smaller channels, outside the Internews, had trouble finding funding (Barker 2006). Kumar (2006) mentioned that national media was preferred over the local ones. It was also difficult for local channels to compete with the military-funded (and Kabul based) content rebroadcast via satellite.

Another reason mentioned by Dinechin was that all the media outlets were targeting the general population rather than specific groups. He also expressed concerns that the lack of funding and advertisements might “lead the media to seek funding from political parties or foreign governments” (In TKG, 2007). On the other hand, neighboring countries, “notably Iran, are known to have funneled volumes of funds into the Afghan media” (IFJ, June 2011, p. 5).

This was also a worry that most of the research participants expressed. Participant #68, manager of a private media outlet, thought that the government should control the sources of media financing. He said that there are media outlets pursuing a foreign agenda. Participant #93 (Personal communication, 2009, August 29), a journalist working with different media outlets in Afghanistan since 2002, and at the time of my fieldwork research, an employee of Afghanistan Government Media Center, pointed out that, even though they were not able to find out the funding sources of media outlets, it was possible to judge, by their content. A number of radio stations were unable to sustain their operations (Soloway & Saddigue, 2005, October).
According to a survey conducted by The Killid Group, together with Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung (FES), the fighting coverage was 17.36 percent of the whole coverage by the media outlets selected for their study, reconstruction and economic news was 15.42 percent. Other categories in the survey included human rights, people’s needs and claims, politics and social behavior, narcotics, corruption, international aid, environment, and government accountability. The main source for news was the government which accounted for 40 percent of the sources. Foreign government was 2.16 percent. Other sources included individuals, 8.53 percent, civil society, 8.23 percent, other institutions, 7.80 percent, and international news organizations with 16.76 percent of the sources (TKG, 2007).

2.4.5 Violence and threats to journalists.

With the increase in levels of violence in Afghanistan, particularly after 2005, media became a front between main parties in the conflict. These parties developed media relationships for the purposes of influencing media discourse as well as to reach out to Afghans. The Taliban did not have a physical address; however, mobile technologies made it possible for them to present their version of the events to the media outlets. More often, the Taliban used traditional and small media.

Threats to the journalists also increased, including killings, arrests, beatings, kidnappings and injuries (Nai, 2011; See Figure2). Unreported threats possibly comprised the majority of instances (TKG, 2007).

Though most of the registered cases were in Kabul, journalists in provinces had more problems. Insecurity turned some areas into news “black holes” (Brossel, Julliard & Moini, 2009, March). There were also threats to women journalists. In a number of
instances, media stations were attacked. On May 29, 2006, during a riot in Kabul City, Ariana TV was attacked, and great damage was done to the station (Nai, 2006, June). In August 2006, Isteqlal Radio, in Logar, was torched (Nai, 2006, October).

Parties in the conflict threatened private media (TKG, 2007). In the beginning, threats came from powerful figures of the United Front, who controlled major ministries in the post-Taliban government. In the provinces, the threats were often coming from powerful local commanders. After 2006, the central government also tried to impose some restrictions on media. On June 12, 2006, the National Directorate of Security (NDS) presented an unsigned letter to a number of media managers/editors, and a similar letter was sent on June 19, 2006 (See Nai, 2006, July).

In the letter, a number of restrictions were imposed on the media’s coverage. It said that certain items should be avoided because they “deteriorate the morale of the public, cause security problems and which are against the national interests” (p. 1). The letter also mentioned that interviews and footage of “terrorist groups,” should be avoided. In addition, “terrorist related activities,” should not be in headlines. In November 14, 2006, another letter, this time signed by the Minister of MoIC, was sent to the media organizations (TKG, 2007). Many of the Survey Research Participants mentioned that the letter created fear among journalists. Participant #80, manager of a private TV channel in 2006 and one of the media representatives who attended the meeting called by the Minister of MoIC in which the letter was presented, pointed out that this letter achieved a certain level of self-censorship among the journalists (Personal Communication, 2010, July 14).
In March 2010, after an attack by the Taliban in Kabul, the Afghan government banned live coverage of violent incidents. The minister for MoIC after three days of meeting with journalist bodies and media came up with three new norms: 1) “disturbing pictures of terrorist attacks and of their victims” not to be broadcast; 2) if broadcasting of images of security forces during operations against terrorism possibly would “compromise” operational effectiveness, the broadcast should be avoided; 3) “Utmost professional accuracy” should be applied in coverage of violent incidents (IFJ, 2011, June). Furthermore, in the location of incidents, the International forces did not allow reporters (Nai, 2006, June).

The Taliban also pressed the journalists. In 2006, Taliban commander Mullah Dadullah said that those journalists who give “NATO figures of the Taliban battlefield casualties would be killed” (Nai, 2006, September). In April of 2007, The Taliban beheaded the Afghan journalist Ajmal Naqshbandi, who was captured in Helmand province together with an Italian journalist. Later, the Taliban sought to improve their relationships with the media. In 2008, after capturing the two journalists Menapal and Popalzai, and keeping them for few days, they were released.
The Government Media and Information Center (GMIC) was established in 2008 in an effort by the government and international community to improve relations with media outlets (USAID, 2009). To give support to journalists, a number of organizations were established. However, there was a lack of awareness about media; journalists needed training, particularly in investigative journalism, business/marketing, management, and other areas (TKG, 2007).

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the history, particularly of the history of conflict, in Afghanistan. Local and regional politics, colonization, modernization and religion are among the categories used by scholars to explain such conflicts. Both external and internal factors are prominent features in Afghanistan.

Modernization that started in the late 19th Century brought about considerable conflict within the Afghan society. Dictated by the central government, modernization was perceived to be a threat to the identity, local values, and power structures in the country (Noorzai, 2006). Modern institutions and knowledge also brought divisions, opposing values, and discourses. For instance, the difference between madrassas (traditional and religious knowledge) and schools (modern Western knowledge), and the rural and urban divide, came to be contributors to the violence in the country. Even so, in the complexity of Afghan politics, there were instances in which modern and traditional systems/structures were both used, either separately or together.

There were numerous failed attempts to find a political solution to the Afghan conflict and end the violence. However, it should be mentioned that violence was not uniform and present all over the country. The conflict, though continuing, changed in
form, geography, issues and participants. There were instances where opposing groups were able to reach agreement to end the violence in their local areas.

Media in Afghanistan were introduced by central government as part of socio-political reforms. Examples of such developments occurred during the Cold War under the centralized five-year development plans. Geography, ruling ideology, global and regional politics, religion, and availability of power and technology were among the contributing factors (Noorzai, 2006). Following the Soviet model of development, Afghanistan’s broadcasting system was a top down and centralized model used by the government as a tool of propaganda.

Developments in media sectors were considered major achievements in post-Taliban Afghanistan (Bajraktari & Parajon, 2008; IFJ, 2011, June). The monopoly over radio and television ended. Through media assistance packages, private media emerged. But with an increase in violence, particularly after 2005, Afghan media became a front between multiple actors in a conflict that is ongoing.
Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The methods used for this qualitative study included in-depth interviews, qualitative content analysis, and participant observation. This study is based on fieldwork conducted in Afghanistan during the summers of 2008 and 2009. At least 95 in-depth interviews with journalists, media experts, politicians, and government officials were conducted. I engaged in systematic participant observation and collected relevant news stories, documents, and other materials.

In this chapter, the methods used, the choices made, the challenges faced and the lessons learned during the research are reported. In the first part, the rationale for using qualitative analysis is explained, including the design, the stance, and the point of view taken. The three methods—in-depth interviews, textual analysis and participant observation—and their design for this study are discussed.

Frame analysis, the main approach used in this study, is explained in greater detail. The advanced planning needed to conduct fieldwork in an environment of conflict is noted, as is the perspective from which the research was carried out. Also discussed were the problems, challenges, strategies and lessons learned during the fieldwork. Finally, the data collected, its analysis and interpretation, verification and presentation processes are outlined.

3.2 Rationale for Qualitative Study

Choosing between different research methods depends on what one aims to study (Silverman, 2006). When an issue “needs to be explored,” qualitative methods are used (Creswell, 2007, p. 39). Since this study aimed to understand news framing of issues of
conflict and peace in Afghanistan, qualitative research methods were used. My interest in this investigation was to understand and explore the production news frames; therefore, this research can be considered an exploratory study. According to Babbie (2007) exploratory research, in addition to its usage for developing research methods and looking for the possibilities of further studies, is conducted to satisfy the researcher’s interests.

Qualitative research is a “heterogeneous area” (Jensen, 2002, p. 236). However, there are a number of distinctive features shared by most of the qualitative work. One of these attributes is that research should be conducted in a natural setting (Bailey, 2008; Creswell, 2007; Jensen, 2002; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). In fact, qualitative methods study people in their living settings as well as in places where they spend time (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Another feature of qualitative research is that the researcher is “a primary instrument” (Jensen, 2002, p. 236) in the process of the research (Jensen, 2002; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The use of indicative analyses is another characteristic of qualitative research (Creswell, 2007; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The final report, which is a combination of the participants’ voices, reflexivity of the researcher, and “a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and its contribution to the literature or a call for change” (Creswell, 2007, p. 44).

In qualitative research, different methods are used (Rossman & Rallis, 2003), which is known as triangulation (Glesne, 1999; Silverman, 2006). The application of triangulation increases the accuracy, trustworthiness (Babbie, 2004), and consistency of the research information (Patton, 2002). Therefore, this study used multiple qualitative
methods including in-depth interviews, textual analysis (of the news bulletins of the news media outlets selected for this study), observation/participant observation, and document analysis.

The process of qualitative research involves a number of “overlapping and interweaving” phases – “gathering data, focusing data in terms of social science concepts, questions, and issues, analyzing data and writing” (Lofland et al., 2006, p. 1). In implementing these tasks, a researcher is making choices “between a number of alternatives at various points in the process – from questions to data collection and analysis and ultimately to presentation of results” (Flick, 2009, p. 108). S/he must elucidate the choices that s/he makes throughout the process so that others understand how the research was conducted and judge the research in terms of “adequacy and trustworthiness” (Rossman & Rallies, 2003, p. 12). In this research, the investigator has been reflexive about the options available and the choices made.

3.3 Frame Analysis

Framing studies use mainly qualitative approaches (Maher, 2001). Media frames can be studied both as dependent and independent variables. Studying frames as independent variables was often conducted to examine the effects of the chosen frames, that is, the effects of the media frame on the individual. On the other hand, studying media frames as dependent variables was about the factors that influence “the structural qualities of news in terms of framing” (Scheufele, 1999, p. 109). In simple words, media frames, as the dependent variable, lead to consideration of factors that create and change frames (Scheufele, 1999).
Van Gorp (2009) argued that the social constructionist approach to frame analysis encompasses both dependent and independent variables. In this approach, both media practitioners and audiences “interact with the larger society and many frame sponsors,” and based on this interaction “social reality is produced, reproduced, and transformed” (p. 16). Building on arguments advanced by Goffman, Van Gorp mentioned that frames should be thought independent of the individual “with their logic and meaning,” (p. 5) and instead their connection with culture should be highlighted. He further observed that frames are the product of the interaction between journalists, audiences, text, and the larger culture. He said:

Media makers interact with their sources and other actors in the public arena, and the receivers interact with media content and with each other. Thus, framing involves the interplay that occurs between the textual level (frames applied in the media), the cognitive level (schemata among the audience and media makers), the extramedia level (the discourse of frame sponsors), and, finally, the stock of frames that is available in a given culture. (Van Gorp, 2009, p. 6)

According to Woo (in Kent 2006), news frames can be examined at three different hierarchical levels: macrostructural, microstructural, and rhetorical. The "Macrostructural" level, according to Kent (2006), is the contextualization of the news frames. This dissertation addresses the broader socio-cultural and political context in which news production took place. In addition to providing the political economy of media, the researcher used a number of sources and methods to collect data—observation/participant observation, in-depth interviews, textual analysis of news and document analysis.
The main frames that explained the conflict topics covered by media at the "microstructural" level were identified. Also provided were “rhetorical” frames that, according to Gamson and Modigliani, are journalistic styles, visual images and depictions, metaphors, examples, and catch phases (in Kent, 2006). Among the easiest ways to identify frames is the use of comparative frame analysis, and that is the approach of this research (Entman, 1991, 1993). Multiple media outlets of different types and locations have been selected.

3.4 Research Design

Social research requires a plan, one that speaks to the how and why of the research (Babbie, 2004; Moustakas, 1994). The research design for this study started when I selected the topic for this dissertation research. My goal was to better understand the process by which news frames related to conflict and peace in Afghanistan were selected and produced. As Creswell (2007) mentioned, in addition to discussing the topic of inquiry, the planning of qualitative research should address broader assumptions, worldviews and possible theoretical lens used by the researcher.

Social scientists consider their subjects using a number of sets of assumptions that guide their research (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). My stance on the philosophical assumptions is that reality is subjective. As such, there are multiple realities. The researcher is part of the study; my background and experience contribute to the study. It would not be possible to detach the researcher from his or her research. As for methodological assumptions, I prefer the approach of contextualization and inductive logic.
For a worldview, I am drawn to social constructivism and advocacy paradigms. In social constructivism users “are oriented to the production of a reconstructed understanding of the social world” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 184). Individuals try to understand the world in which they live and work (Creswell, 2007). The construction of meanings is considered to be the result of the context of the individual and the society in which the individual lives (Steedman, 1991). Since meanings are multiple and different, researchers “look for the complexity of the views” (Creswell, 2007, p. 20) and depend on the participants’ perspectives to better understand “social realities and to draw attention to processes, meaning patterns, and structural features” (Flick, Kardorff, & Steinke, 2004, p. 3).

The advocacy paradigm assumes that “research should contain an action agenda for reform that may change the lives of participants, the institutions in which they live and work, or even the researchers’ lives” (Creswell, 2007, p. 21). This dissertation was begun with the idea of making recommendations for policy makers, peace activists, and media practitioners. Based on social constructivism, data collected would come from multiple sources and be analyzed using different approaches (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002). A number of methods—in-depth interviews, textual analysis (for news items), focus groups interviews, participation observation, and document analysis (documents, poetry and letters)—were planned.

In-depth interviews are used as a way to understand the world from the participants’ perspectives (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004; Kvale, 1996). In-depth interviews expand researchers’ “intellectual and emotional reach across age, occupation, class race, sex, and geographical boundaries” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 3). I adopted the semi-
structured interview, since it is the most commonly used form (Kvale, 1996). As Patton (2002) pointed out, this kind of interview includes a guide that provides a list of questions and issues from which the interviewer asks, explores, and probes (Appendix II).

Focus group interviewing was another method that I planned to use. In a study where multiple methods are used, “focus groups typically add to the data that are gathered through other qualitative methods, such as participant observation and individual interviews” (Morgan, 1997, p. 3). For this study, I planned to conduct focus groups to understand individual frames, in a group setting, and reception of media frames.

I chose a focus group methodology to better understand group dynamics in reception of news and creation of meanings. The focus group method is used “to better understand the group dynamics that affect individuals’ perceptions, information processing, and decision making” (Steward, Shamdasani & Rook, 2007, p. 9). I chose to use a semi-structured focus group method that has an interview guide and has flexibility (Patton, 2002). As Steward, Shamdasani and Rook (2007) pointed out the verbal and observation data generated from the focus groups should be coded and analyzed through content analysis.

News frames have been frequent subjects in textual analysis (Beaudoin & Thorson, 2002). Quantitative content analysis applies “readily measureable minimally judgmental criteria” (Garber, 2004, p. 46), and give importance to denotations (Garber, 2004) and repetition of words (Reese, 2001). However, qualitative frame analysis rejects a positivist approach to content analysis; it assumes that any issue can be seen from
different perspectives and “be construed as having implications for multiple values or considerations” (Chong & Druckman, 2007, p. 104).

Grabber mentioned that qualitative content analysis “employ[s] many of the intuitive skills for message interpreting that humans possess” (2004, p. 45). Larsen (1991) pointed out that qualitative analyses have created awareness that media texts carry multiple meanings; “that their ‘content’ is carried, in part, by the mode of address; and that audiences are active in interpreting media, genres, and texts” (p. 132).

Observation methods, used in this study, are intended to address the complexity of a phenomenon (Patton, 2002). Observations that take place in the real world (Patton, 2002) aim to gather firsthand information about social processes in a “naturally occurring” context (Silverman, 2006, p. 21). As Dingwall (2006) pointed out, the purpose of observation is to “document members accounting to each other in natural settings” (p. 60). Direct observation can also serve as a way to check for “the potential deception” of other methods (Hammersley & Atkinson in Creswell, 2007, p. 134, emphasis in original).

3.5 Planning Fieldwork in a Conflict Zone

In conducting fieldwork in war zones, one should be aware of the dangers and plan visits carefully to avoid unintended events (Nordstrom & Martin, 1992; Sluka, 1995). After the fall of the Taliban in 2001, violence in Afghanistan increased. When I went to do my fieldwork, in 2008 and 2009, the violence had reached its highest peak. Typically, the summer is the fighting season. Taking the dangers of doing research in a war zone into account, the plan had to be carefully drawn. Even so, when in the field, there were unexpected circumstances requiring alternative steps.
As Flick (2009) pointed out, in the qualitative research process, the design is “constituted and modified by virtue of the decisions in favor of a particular alternative” (p. 128). Related to working in a conflict zone, Robben and Nordstrom (1995) argued that strategies for conducting fieldwork depend on circumstances. Sluka (1995) mentioned that researchers, in a conflict environment, should have a plan B for escaping when facing an unpredicted situation. Considering the security situation in Afghanistan and limitation of mobility in the countryside, I decided not to conduct focus groups and also avoid interviewing the active members of the Taliban.

In terms of flexibility, I come to agree with Creswell (2007) and Patton (2002) that designs should be flexible. Creswell called the process emergent, which means that the planning for research cannot be firmly stipulated. He further mentioned, “all phases of the process may change or shift after the researchers enter the field and begin to collect data” (p. 39). In Afghanistan, it was necessary to maintain flexibility in terms of leaving some decisions to the field because of the environment but also because issues were open to interpretation. For instance, the decision to not conduct focus group interviews, was based on the circumstances.

Having worked as a journalist and media practitioner, I planned not to take or support any side or group involved in the fighting. However, I agree with Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) that no field researcher can be a completely neutral, detached observer, outside and independent of the observed phenomena. As an advocate of peace, I was already taking a position. To address these issues during the design phase, I decided to be reflective and open about my own position. As Kvale (1996) and Rubin and Rubin (2005) pointed out, a researcher should be reflexive throughout the process. For this purpose, I
wrote down the details of my decisions and actions in a diary, and was mindful of my status during my fieldwork.

Also important are the ethical issues. Ethical questions, as Kvale (1996) mentioned, should go beyond their scientific value and consider the human situation. Ethical issues should be addressed in all phases of the research. From the planning phase, I wanted to ensure the safety of those I interviewed. I followed the IRB rules, but also made sure that my participants were not exposed to possible harm. Getting the informed consent of participants, creating confidence, and informing them of possible consequences were built into the research design.

3.6 Conducting Fieldwork: A Journey with a Purpose

For my preliminary research in 2008, my main goal was to explore and understand the nature of the topic through fieldwork. While waiting in Dubai for a flight to Kabul, I was still thinking about how to conduct this research, who to interview, and how to manage my time. I decided to keep a narrow focus, paying greatest attention to local non-government media.

On this trip, I conducted 24 interviews with local journalists and media experts, and made numerous observations. I also collected documents and relevant materials. The interviews I conducted were mainly with journalists working in Kabul. Although I spent time with my family, most of the time I was out for interviews, meetings and collecting information.

One of the difficulties I encountered during my fieldwork was making appointments and moving from one point to another in Kabul because of the traffic. I had to plan at least two hours ahead to reach each interview site. Rarely did potential
interviewees show up on time. Sometimes they would cancel or postpone for another day. Building trust, an important requirement for qualitative interviews, needed more time than could have been predicted.

There was a clear need to talk to participants for a while, not only to make them comfortable but also to familiarize them with the research and the purpose of the interview. When participants were asked afterward to say how the interview went, they often said that they had thought it would be some form of investigative journalism. Only after did they find out that it was an in-depth questioning and that they would have enough time to express themselves. From that experience, I learned that I needed to spend more time explaining the nature of the research and why the interview was important.

Another challenge was explaining my affiliations. For most of the participants, it was the first time that someone had interviewed them for a research project. In the 2008 interviews, at least one of the participants said he was afraid that I might have been associated with the intelligence services. After several such interviews, I realized the need to give more details about myself, my background, the purpose of my trip, and also the format of the interview.

I had to separate my work from the work of the NGOs and other organizations in Afghanistan. Many participants asked about my affiliation, at which point I clarified, “I am not affiliated with any government or non-government organization and my research is purely for academic purposes.”

Similar problems emerged in the summer 2009. When I requested data from broadcasting channels, they asked for my affiliation. At least two media practitioners, at a management level, asked what my budget was for getting footage or audio content. Later,
I found out that some NGOs and organizations would pay to access archival materials and for cooperation in their research projects.

The preliminary fieldwork helped not only in writing the dissertation proposal and in planning the research, but also in how to approach this research topic. Based on the data gathered in the preliminary fieldwork, I decided to explore the framing of conflict and peace by the media, focusing on government, regional, and international channels. In addition, I considered including at least one of the provinces.

By the time of my 2009 fieldwork, I had decided to try to incorporate two more provinces. In addition to Kabul and Kandahar, I went to the provincial capitals of Nangarhar (Jalalabad City) and Kunduz (Kunduz City) with the idea that these provinces would produce data with which to compare and contrast information gathered.

Security was an issue in 2009. My movement was severely restricted, forcing me to forego focus group interviews in areas surrounding Kabul City. Instead of spending two weeks in Kandahar, I only spent four days. I made a decision not to interview anyone from the Taliban (a point that is discussed in the limitations and exclusions part of this chapter).

Some 65 interviews were conducted in the summer of 2009, mainly with working journalists, with local experts, and with politicians. Multiple observations such as going with journalists to scenes and events, observing how they work in offices and studios were completed. News stories were collected from different media outlets selected for this study, and a large number of documents were acquired either in hard copy or through online archives of different media outlets or organizations.
3.6.1 Positioning myself.

In the third day of my stay in Kandahar, one of the persons I was interviewing, whom I had known before, in the middle of chatting, looked at me and said, “Tell me, are you now an Afghan or an American?” This was unexpected from a friend. I was wearing Afghan clothes, had my pato\(^7\) on and had not shaved my beard for about three weeks. After a pause, I answered that I was an Afghan. He looked at me, my clothes, my face and cap and after a moment said: “from your appearance and the way you speak you look an Afghan [but] we do not know about your mind [he smiled]” (Participant #37, personal communication, 2011, August 25).

A number of the people interviewed said they were participating because I was going to convey their message to Americans who were involved in the Afghan conflict. I was frequently asked by friends, relatives and some of the participants about politics in the United States and U.S. policies in Afghanistan. These queries and concerns by participants and friends led me to rethink and question my position as a “native ethnographer.” Narayan (1993), in addressing “the insider-outsider dichotomy,” pointed out that “education, gender, sexual orientation, class, race, or sheer duration of contacts” all play a role in distancing the researcher from his study subject (p. 672).

It is important that the researcher clarifies his/her position, in terms of insider versus outsider, since it plays an important role in the way the researcher collects, analyzes and makes use of information (Hermann, 2001). In a qualitative study, the researcher is making interpretations and choices, which most likely will be shaped by his/her “past experiences, biases, prejudices, and orientations” (Creswell, 2007, p. 208).

\(^7\) A pato is a blanket that in some parts of Afghanistan, men put over their shoulder or shoulders.
Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater (2002) mentioned that researchers need to address three positions. They are the fixed, subjective, and textual positions. The fixed position is a person’s “age, gender, class, race and education among others that could affect the fieldwork” (p. 119).

In terms of the subjective position, Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater (2002) pointed out that the researcher should reveal his/her background and experiences. From the beginning days of the research, I decided that I had to state my personal history and make clear my prior experience with conflict and with media. My background now prominently appears in the Preface of this dissertation.

I was part of the culture under investigation. I speak fluently and easily read the languages spoken in the areas where I conducted research. I consider myself to be an insider. Having grown up in Afghanistan and having worked there, I was at home within the environment of this research.

I have also lived in Pakistan, and understand both Urdu, the official language of Pakistan, and English, which I learned in Pakistan. And I am a Muslim, a follower of the dominant religion of the region. Thus, my cultural understanding and language skills put me a unique position to do the kind of qualitative investigation and analysis this study required.

Since my work focused on framing and media content, understanding the languages in which the content was produced and presented was a prerequisite. This was true not only for the textual analysis, but also for the observation, for the connotative meanings of phrases and words used by participants. Walking, talking, and listening to what people say and the way they reacted would not be possible if I were not an Afghan.
I could give participants the option of speaking the language with which they felt comfortable, and in which they could best express themselves. A number of participants would switch from one language to another in the middle of the interview. My background in Afghanistan, in Iran, in Pakistan, and in the United States helped me when communicating. But that fact also represented a principal difference between me and most of the individuals I interviewed.

Another factor that separated me from my participants was education. I was a Ph.D. candidate at an American University, while most of the people who joined in this research could hardly imagine such an achievement. Even as an Afghan, my viewpoint and ideas were different from those with whom I interacted with. I agree with Narayan (1993) that education and experiences, being away from one’s country, separate the researcher from those who are researched and problematize the insider-outsider dichotomy.

Also noteworthy was my advocacy stance as a peace activist. This predisposition inevitably influenced the framing of my research, and the conduct of my fieldwork. In the interview process, I raised the question of peace and the possible role of journalists in bringing peace. Even the way my questions were designed (Appendix II) included the ways journalists were or were not working for peace in the country, or not.

I took the stance that reflexivity should not only include providing background information and experiences but also decisions that are made before, during and after the fieldwork. As Hermann (2001) pointed out, “Simply by being members of the human race, researchers of a conflict become part of it” (p. 79). The reason it is important to discuss one’s position and be reflexive is that it helps participants to understand the
intentions and biases of the researcher. Merriam (1988) noted that reflexivity helps readers to understand the research’s position and biases that might have influenced the final product.

3.6.2 Interviewing.

A total of 92 interviews were conducted during the fieldwork, 24 people in summer 2008 and 65 in summer of 2009, all in Afghanistan, and three interviews in 2010 in Washington D.C. All interviews were conducted face to face, with an average duration of about 55 minutes. Later, the interviews were transcribed.

As Patton (1990) pointed out, qualitative studies are like doing purposeful sampling. The same sampling methods were used for participant selection. In purposeful sampling, decisions are made by the inquirer as to how many people and sites are to be sampled. For some organizations and for some locations, a snowball sampling technique was employed to identify the right people for the research, particularly in the provinces. This included a referral approach that saved time.

Participants interviewed included reporters, anchors, producers and those working at management levels. The sample also included some experts in communication/media and some politicians. Since I was watching and listened to news, I sought out the journalists and sometimes the newsmakers for interviews. I looked especially for those who had experience framing news reporting, production, and presentation.

As Warren (2002) noted, participants should agree on the time and the place of the interview. For most of the interviews, I asked interviewees to decide on the location. Most of the time, the interviews took place in an interviewee’s office or somewhere near to his/her offices. Gubrium and Holstein argued that, because the interview is a
“contextually based, mutually accomplished story,” there should be a feeling of collaboration between the participants and the researcher (in Fontana & Frey, 2005, p. 714). Before interviews were conducted, I sought to talk with the interviewee both to make him/her feel at ease, but also to create trust. Confidentiality and other issues related to the research were explained.

Informed consent was secured from all participants, making clear that participation was voluntary, and that they could withdraw from the study at any point. Identity of the interviewee and information collected would be protected. When the interview was recorded (always with permission), I clarified that the participant’s voice would only be used for academic purposes. The goals and potential benefits of the study were made clear. At the end of each interview, I debriefed the participant, thanked him/her for the interview and asked if I could contact them again.

Interaction between interviewers and interviewees can be very complex. As noted by Fontana and Frey (2005) and Kvale (1995), power dynamics, cultural setup, and other factors can influence the process of interviewing, as can transcribing, analyzing and reporting the interview. I sought to be reflexive, and kept a diary to note those details that might have not been captured through the recording. I tried not to show that I was taking notes.

The semi-structured interviews worked very well. This approach allowed for the topics that needed to be covered, yet provided flexibility and room for spontaneous questions. Johanson (2002) mentioned that there might be an unexpected turn or digression in the direction of an interview, which could be very productive. Therefore,
the interview should “go with the flow” (p. 111). The semi-structured interview keeps these options open.

Ethical considerations should be part of the process (Kvale, 1996). In qualitative studies, the participants in the study are human beings; therefore, the researcher should be very careful not to harm interviewees (Fontana & Frey, 2005). Kvale mentioned that the researcher should go beyond the scientific value and consider human situation improvement. Even though plans and decisions can be changed or compromised due to the situation, I did not want to compromise my professional ethics (Sluka, 1995).

The interviews were a learning process. As Johnson (2002) says, the “researcher can develop and cultivate the skills needed for in-depth interviewing with practice” (p. 103). The first lesson learned was to be prepared. Preparation helped to get work done on time, but it also created trust and reassured participants about seriousness of the research. I remembered being at the gate of a radio station in Kabul exactly at 9:00AM. When the participant saw me at the gate, at the exact agreed time, he was surprised. He said it was rare for anyone to be on time for an appointment in Kabul.

Advance preparation also meant that everything needed was checked and ready in working condition, such as the voice recorder, the notebook, the pen to take notes. In at least three instances, I had problems with batteries. Although I was told that the batteries were new, they did not last for more than 30 minutes. My interview notes helped when the recorder failed to work.

From my experience, it was also important to have enough sleep and be fresh; it was better to do one interview per day. However, this also depended on circumstances. For instance, when I was in Kandahar, I had to do all the interviews in a very few days.
Dressing up and being polite also had a positive influence on the interview process. Flexibility was another important factor, particularly with time and the order of the questions. It was important to build trust and make the participant comfortable.

3.6.3 Participant characteristics.

I chose to divide my interviewees into three groups. The first category included the journalists and media practitioners, those serving in media outlets in post-September 11 Afghanistan. I conducted 76 interviews within this group.

The second group included interviews for Chapter II: “The political economy of media in Afghanistan.” For this part, six interviews with older participants were conducted. The participants were those who worked with media outlets during the years of conflict, from 1978 to September 11, 2001. However, because of space constraints in writing this dissertation, I only partially used these interviews.

The third group of participants included those interviewed for the history chapter, mostly politicians and military personnel from the past. Ten individuals were interviewed from this group. Because of the space and time constraints, these were reported only briefly as historical sources.

In the larger group of 76 persons interviewed, 44 of them worked in Kabul, 28 worked in the three provinces where he went. Six additional participants were from the neighboring countries of Pakistan, Iran, and India.

The youngest participant was 21 years old and the oldest was 60. The average age of participants was 32. Around 71 percent of the participants were between 21 to 35 years of age. Only about 4 percent of the participants were above 50 years. Women represented 6 percent of the participants. Those who spoke in Pashto represented 61 percent, and 32
percent spoke in Dari. Only 6 percent of the interviews were conducted in English and 1 percent in Urdu. In terms of ethnicity, 47 percent of the participants were Pashtuns, 27 percent Tajiks, 3 percent Hazaras, 12 percent citizens of foreign countries, and 3 percent did not reveal ethnicity.

In terms of education, 16 percent of the participants held an MA degree; 42 percent had BA degrees; 4 percent were enrolled in a university degree program at the time they were interviewed; 33 percent of the participants were high school graduates, and 3 percent had finished the tenth grade. Still, some 4 percent of the participants had no formal education. A number of the participants, particularly those who had graduated from high schools mentioned that they had attended short-term courses.

3.6.4 News collection.

Analysis of the news items broadcast by the media outlets selected for this study was one of the main methods used in this dissertation. Therefore, collection of news items for the period of study was an important part of my fieldwork. News stories were selected from the months of June, July, August and the first ten days of September for the years of 2008 and 2009.

For 2008, I mainly took the news stories of Salam Watandar archived on its website for the months of June, July, August and the 10 first days of September 2008. Salam Watandar is a network that provides news and other content for 42 local radio stations across Afghanistan. The stations broadcast that content everyday for three hours: 7:00 AM to 8:30 AM and 6:00 PM to 7:30 PM. I downloaded Ariana TV news stories in Pashto and Dari from its website. Within the same time frame, I also accessed Tolo TV
and Ariana TV news stories, transcribed by BBC Monitoring, through the LexisNexis database.

Tolo and Ariana were selected because they were the most popular non-government television channels in Afghanistan. I interviewed journalists working with these channels. I was also to access their news content for analysis.

For 2009, I broadened my research agenda. I downloaded news stories from the same places during the months of June, July, August and 10 days of September, but also took the news stories of Hewad Television, broadcasting from Kandahar for the months of June and July of 2009. In addition to taking notes of the NRTA’s programs during my fieldwork, I gathered a month’s recording of the main 7:00pm news bulletin of NRTA and accessed the transcripts of the Bakhtar News Agency, the main source of NRTA’s news, for the months of June, July, August, and September of 2009. I also obtained the transcription of some of the news stories broadcast by NRTA through the LexisNexis database.

At an international level, I collected the news stories of BBC Pashto Radio and Azadi Radio (Radio Liberty) for the 2009 sample period. These were the most popular radio stations in Afghanistan. The BBC’s main evening news bulletin was recorded and later transcribed into English. I accessed and downloaded the evening news bulletin from Azadi Radio website and transcribed them.

For Radio Tehran, Pashto service, I downloaded most of the morning and evening hourly programs from its website. For Iran’s framing of the Afghan conflict, I also collected some of the news transcriptions of Radio Zahidan and Radio Mashhad, from BBC Monitoring, through LexisNexis. From among the regional radio stations, I selected
Radio Tehran’s Pashto service not only because I was interested to see how the Iranian media would be presenting the situation in Afghanistan, but the materials were fortunately available online.

I collected a number of press releases related to security developments in Afghanistan, issued by the Ministry of Interior, and some press releases issued by the President’s Office and the Ministry of Interior through their websites. Press releases issued by the ISAF forces in Afghanistan for the time period of my fieldwork in 2008 and 2009 were also collected. I used the Taliban’s news stories, provided on some websites and by also those transcribed by the BBC Monitoring through LexisNexis and the Internet.

For verification purposes, I collected some other source material, including the Pajhwok News Agency stories (accessed through LexisNexis), and those of the Wakht and Afghan Islamic Agency.

3.6.5 Observation/participation.

When designing this research, I considered my position as an observer. In a number of instances, I found myself drawn into the role of participant. This happened, particularly, when I accompanied journalists to see how they covered events at press conferences and at incident sites. People often thought I was a journalist. In Kandahar, for instance, when journalists went to cover an incident, they asked me to accompany them. I also made notes and took pictures. When I visited radio/TV stations and I went to their studios, I frequently felt that I was one of them.

Wanting to be more of an observer than a participant, I tried to keep the middle ground position. Patton (2002, p. 50) called this “Empathic Neutrality,” which means that
the researcher tries to get “vicarious understanding without judgment (neutrality) by showing openness, sensitivity, respect, awareness, and responsiveness, in observation it means being fully present (mindfulness)” (Patton, 2002, p. 40).

I also considered this fieldwork to be a form of unstructured observation, in which “researchers are less likely to have an observation guide, concentrating instead on what is deemed relevant as an event unfolds” (Bailey, 2008, p. 82-83). I made a conscious attempt to write, as far as possible, the details of what I observed or had been a participant in my field notes. Although I would normally write my thoughts and feelings in Pashto, my native language, I tried to write what I had heard and seen in the language that was spoken in that place, hoping this would be closer to the reality of the event.

As Prus (1998) pointed out, sincerity is one of the main strategies of successful qualitative research. I have tried to be very open about my tasks and intentions, particularly with my participant interviewees. However, I find myself agreeing with J. Roth who argues that “All research is secret in some ways and to some degree” (in Lofland & Lofland, 1995, p. 36). There were instances when I did not disclose my identity as a researcher, particularly when talking with ordinary people at the bazaar or other public places. The reason behind this was security. When I went to the cities of Kandahar, Jalalabad and Kunduz, I was dressed entirely in traditional clothes; I had let my beard grow out and did not use any English words or show in any way that I was coming from outside the country.
3.6.6 Fieldnotes.

Keeping detailed fieldnotes, quality recording and transcribing increases the reliability of the research (Creswell, 2007). During this fieldwork, I kept a diary. These notes were basically accounts of what was observed, encountered, and learned, and included the procedures taken to identify participants and access sites. As Bailey (2007) pointed out, a field research manuscript should include details of “the setting, interactions, and observation,” to answer who, what, why, where, when and how of the events (p. 136). Therefore, I tried to include those details. My fieldnotes often included feelings, and in some instances, even smells and graphic impressions of the environment surrounding the events.

In my diary, I wrote about issues faced and decisions made during each trip. News programs, events and topics chosen for broadcast by radio and television channels and carried in local newspapers were often included. Although sometimes I was not able to write down my observations and encounters at the moment, I tried to do them as soon as possible. As Emerson and colleagues (1995) argued, researchers should decide when and where to write their observations. Nearly every night before going to bed, I developed these jottings and main points into fieldnotes.

I also made some drawings and sketched maps and locations. When one of the participants described an event by drawing it, the informant was asked if I could keep the drawing and use it in my research. As Lofland and others (2006) pointed out, fieldnotes might also “include mapping, census taking, sound recording, filming, document collection, and so forth” (p. 81). When I went with the reporters for coverage, I made my
own footage or took pictures. I collected some recordings of radio programs, produced by
some of the participants.

Another important feature was recording my state of mind. This was not done in
2008, but was added as part of my field notes in 2009, based on a suggestion from my
dissertation committee. It is important that I noted my state of mind in a native
ethnography. As Lofland and Lofland (1995) pointed out, writing personal feelings, such
as fear, happiness, and frustration, should be included in the fieldnotes.

I tried to keep the originality of the events and expressions. Although I recorded
my own feelings in my native language, I wrote my fieldnotes in the different languages
of my participants. The main purpose behind this was to keep the meanings in their
original form. Naturally, dealing with nonverbal language and converting observations to
text was more difficult. As Emerson and others (1995) pointed out, researchers must
make choices as to how to convert experiences and observations into data. This is an
instance when reflexivity is needed.

I kept my diary with me when visiting Kunduz and Nangarhar provinces. But, in
Kandahar, when I went out he preferred not to take his notebook. It would not have been
safe to have a notebook, so I wrote notes at night. There were instances when I was not
able to take photos or get the information I wanted to collect.

3.7 Data Analysis

After conducting 10 interviews at the beginning of August 2008, I started looking
at the interview materials and field notes not only to see whether my methods and sources
were working but also to see the emerging themes. Data analysis is an integral part of the
research (Ezzy, 2002), which starts during data collection and the choices made during
data gathering influences data analysis and reporting (Patton, 2002). Some of the
decisions taken during this fieldwork, such as going to the provinces or including local as
well as regional and international media outlets, had consequences for data analysis.
These and other decisions were made based on expected and unexpected circumstances
during the research process.

Related to my interviews, I tried to finish transcribing them as soon as possible,
and some of my fieldwork time was devoted to the transcription. However, because of the
number of interviews, lack of electricity (during 2008), and trips to more than one
province, I was not able to complete transcription of the interviews. These were
completed during the fall quarter of 2009. During transcribing, I had to pay much
attention and listen carefully to my recordings, and consult notes taken during these
interviews. I transcribed the news bulletins from the BBC, Radio Liberty, and National
Radio and Television of Afghanistan (NRTA), which I had recorded or downloaded
online.

One of the main decisions I took was to transcribe interviews and news bulletin in
their original language. The reason behind this decision was that it was difficult and time
consuming to transcribe and translate at the same time. This was not only because of the
differences in structure, sentence order and time taken, but also I did not want to lose the
original meanings.

The process of transcription took a long time. According to Kvale (1985),
transcribing involves translating from an oral language, with its own set of rules, to a
written language with another set of rules. Therefore, during the interviews, I kept notes
about the settings, facial expressions, and other observations made. Except in Kandahar, I always had a notebook with me when conducting interviews.

The transcriptions produced a lot of data. The challenge in dealing with a massive amount of data is to order (Lofland & Lofland, 1995) and make sense of them (Patton, 2002). Coding helped reduce his data, as Bailey noted, “into smaller segments that, when needed, can be retrieved easily” (2007, p. 127). In qualitative studies, research establishes “patterns, categories and themes from the ‘bottom-up’ by organizing the data in increasingly more abstract units of information,” by using inductive data analysis (Creswell, 2007, p. 38). Therefore, through coding, I classified and categorized my data in ways that could be retrieved (Babbie, 2007).

To manage my data and time, for coding, I used a computer software package for qualitative data analysis, called Atlas. The program not only helped in managing data but also helped in coding and retrieval of the data. I started the process with open coding. In open coding, through “examination and questioning” of data (Babbie, 2007, p. 385), a researcher looks for codes (Ezzy, 2002).

I developed a textual analysis protocol for the media content collected (Appendix III). Media content for this study was in Pashto and Dari. The second step was to assemble codes around axes of main categories. This process is called axial coding (Ezzy, 2002). Strauss and Corbin argued that axial coding is “specifying a category (phenomenon) in terms of the conditions that give rise to it” (in Ezzy, 2002, p. 91). I also made notes during the process of coding for analysis. As Lofland and others (2006) have pointed out, taking notes, which they call “memos,” is important to understand the codes.
and the interconnections between them. Throughout the analyses and writing phrase, I had to go back and forth between my findings, discussion and data.

For the dissertation, I identified the following categories: law and order, development as peace, occupation as failure, and civilian victims. Other categories, such as peace through negotiation, terrorism, and ethnic victimization, were partially supported in this research. I categorized the journalistic frames into four groups: national interest, public interest or responsible journalism, freedom of press, and advocacy for peace.

During the analysis, I found it interesting to focus on the media coverage of the elections, and decided to add a section to the dissertation discussing the elections of 2009. In this section, I reported my experiences and observations during the presidential election day and campaign period. I also drew on my participants’ perspectives and the news stories collected.

I tried to verify the data collected using different sources of information and methods. Verification of data is the responsibility of the researcher, and is an ethical issue that needs to be addressed (Kvale, 1996). The documentation helped in the verification process.

3.8 Document Analysis

In addition to recording and collecting news items, I also collected a large range of documents, including radio and television bulletins and programs, news stories by organizations and individuals, media reports and related materials. Babbie (2004) and Patton (2001) pointed out that collecting and analyzing these documents should be part of research. In general, these documents were used as a way for triangulation. Triangulation
increases the “trustworthiness of the data” (Glesne, 1999, p. 31). The documents collected for this study were both primary, “original report of an accident,” and secondary, “a summary of this original report by someone who did not witness the accident itself” (Flick, 2009, p. 259).

Primary documents collected in this research were video and audio materials, and written accounts. However, I had some difficulty accessing the materials. When I wanted to take photos of the entrance of the Ministry of Culture and Communication, for instance, I was stopped by the Ministry’s security guards. My camera was taken and photos were removed, and I was made to stay at the checkpoint for about 20 to 25 minutes. Although there was no sign that taking photos was prohibited in the site, I was told by the guards that I should have sought permission to do so. Similarly, when I was leaving Kandahar’s airport, I tried to take photos, a friend who was with me advised me not to take photos. Referring to the guards, he said that they might fire on the two of us.

The secondary documents included press releases and periodicals, reports, policy-papers, laws, speeches, and other forms of information. For example, to understand the frames used by the main actors in the conflict and other parties involved in the conflict, I used press releases and news produced by them.

There were also difficulties in accessing secondary materials. Although I was able to get background materials from some organizations, others did not have archives or were unwilling to give me access. There were also a number of instances when the individuals in charge told me that if I would pay them, the materials would be provided. This was because when research projects had been done by international organizations,
they tended to pay an incentive for such services. However, I did not pay and told them that for my research I had no intention to make payment.

The use of electronic sources made it possible for me to access data not only from a single perspective but from different perspectives. There were a number of organizations that had archived their news or/and materials as digital data online. Nai, the NGO supporting private noncommercial media, had its Media Watch reports available on the Internews website.

After checking the credibility of sites and online documents, I often used them in my research. The documents not only served to represent different perspectives (Babbie, 2004), but also covered the period beyond his fieldwork. This helped me to better understand and contextualize the media environment in Afghanistan.

Document analysis can be used as “a complementary strategy” (Flick, 2009, p. 255) and a means to double-check the information (Patton, 2002). In the case of this dissertation, the documents served similar functions. For instance, I was able to double-check cases of violence against journalists by looking at the records of SAFMA, Nai and Reporters without Borders.

In using documents, I was careful about their sources and motives. Flick (2009) pointed out that, when using documents, one should always be skeptical about the producer and the purpose of documents. He further mentioned that these documents not only present institutional activities but are also attempts to legitimize what the document producers are doing.
3.9 Presentation of Findings

After the analysis and verification phases, I started writing the final report, beginning with my own background noted in the Preface. As Patton (2002) pointed out, since the researcher is becoming an interpretive instrument, reflexivity should be an integral part of the final report. Ezzy (2002) observed that the final report is a construction based on the researcher’s voice and a number of “exemplars” of other voices. Exemplars “allow participants, along with the author and the reader to participate in the collaborative construction of the text's meanings” (p. 147).

Ezzy pointed out that “exemplars” serve the readers as an entry to “imagined experience of the described culture and social world” (p. 147). In this regard, Van Mannen (1988) said the display of culture should be “in a way that is meaningful to the readers without great distortion” (p. 13). I tried to present the participants’ accounts and use their quotes in the dissertation to make sure that their experiences are presented in the way they were said.

Selections were also taken from the news and related documents. As Patton (2002) pointed out, qualitative data consists of the quotations, observations, and selections from documents. In Chapter 4, the first part of the chapter includes sample press releases issued by the parties involved in the conflict, as well as news bulletins and stories collected for this study. References were also made to other materials, such as published reports on media, conflict and peace.

Deciding how to write the final report was also a concern. I had conducted the research in four languages, yet had to write it in English. Since this study explores framing, I tried to stay as close as possible to the original meanings of the words in these
languages as I heard and read them. This is because the words have different meanings in different languages. I therefore agree with Richardson and St. Pierre (2008) that language “does not ‘reflect’ social reality but rather produces meaning and creates social reality” (p. 476). I was interested in understanding what vocabularies were used by the warring parties and how controversial terms were produced and used. When I use those words, I often put them in [. . .] in translation.

As for writing the dissertation in English, I fully understood that the choice of language has an impact on the final report (Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2002). Glesne (1999) pointed out that the “choice of the language” that one uses “tells a story in addition to what you mean it to say” (p. 177). I have tried to use simple and clear language to explain what I want to say.

3.10 Limitations and Exclusions

One of the limitations of this study was my inability to conduct focus groups for the purposes of gathering data. The constraint was due to the insecurity, especially in the rural areas. I was, nevertheless, able to interact with people and collect ordinary Afghan accounts. I used public transportation, attended public gatherings, listened to people, and wrote those accounts in my diary.

Another limitation was the fact that I conducted no interviews with members of the Taliban. It was just not possible to have face to face interviews with them. I had offers from people who said they could help, but for security reasons I did not go. One option was to conduct an interview on the phone; however, this would have raised some ethical questions, and there was the additional risk that the intelligence services might be
monitoring my phone conversations. However, in Kabul, I was able to interview a few former members not active in the conflict.

I did not visit either the regional or international media stations selected for this study. This study is considered to be exploratory, and I intend to build on it. Perhaps in the future I will visit the countries that serve as the broadcast homes of radio/TV programs broadcast into Afghanistan. Because of time and space limitations, I was unable to include the voices, visuals, and presentation styles of the news broadcasts, important factors in understanding broadcasting content.
4.1 Introduction

In July 2008, when I conducted my first interview for this study, Participant #1, the head of a media organization and an active journalist in Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban in 2001, started explaining to me how the warring parties contacted media and presented their accounts of each incident (Personal communication, 2008, July 26). He provided me with the hard copies of a press release from the International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) and an email from the Taliban in which they reported a story about the killing of civilians in Sangin, a remote district in Helmand Province. The event was portrayed differently by the two sources (Appendix IV).

Most of the participants in the sample used in this research were quite willing to discuss the way news was constructed and to portray the role of the main parties in the conflict, whether the Afghan government, the ISAF, or the Taliban. My observations during fieldwork and my analysis of the data showed that most of the news stories about conflict had the major parties as the main source. This is the reason I have chosen to start this chapter by examining the ways the main parties in the conflict framed Afghanistan’s ongoing conflict.

Later, I take a comparative approach examining the media frames produced and broadcast by the media outlets selected for the study. In addition to examining the interviews and fieldwork notes, I analyze the content of both the internal and external media. I explore the journalists’ professional worldviews— their understanding of their profession’s role in the society – and the potential impact of those views on what the media outlets produced. In conclusion, I discuss some constraints – environmental,
organizational, professional and personal – that might have been influencing and shaping news production and presentation.

4.2 The Conflict from the Lenses of its Main Actors

4.2.1 The Afghan government.

The government of Afghanistan was the dominant source of news for the media outlets selected for this research, although there were a few news stories about conflict that did not use the government side as their source. The journalists interviewed for this study considered the government’s version necessary and an important component in almost all news stories. Government office bearers at national, provincial and district levels were the purveyors of news. Although most of the officials’ accounts of the events came through direct contact, interviews and press conferences, the government departments also issued press releases. The press releases analyzed for this study were those issued by the President’s Office and by the Interior Ministry.

This research found that the main frame used to organize and interpret actors, events and issues in the conflict by the government was the law and order frame. In the press releases analyzed for this research, mainly stories of success on the part of the government forces were reported. These success stories included their discovery of munitions, IEDs and mines, reports of arrests, defusing of mines, seizure of explosives, and confiscation of drugs. Stories about casualties, blasts, mines explosions and condemnation of attacks were also covered.

In a number of press releases, it was mentioned that police tried to “provide a calm, peaceful and secure situation. . . . For this purpose, they are not hesitating in shedding their blood” (Ministry of Interior of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan [MoI],
2010, January 8). In other press releases, it was mentioned that “The police . . . always try to prevent destructive activities and they are ready to give a teeth breaking answer to those who want to disrupt the country’s peace and security” (MoI, 2010, January 11).

Among the vocabularies of the frame was the term, “ﻡﻝی,” which means “national.” In post 9/11 Afghanistan, the term became a prefix for the newly established Afghan security agencies. It was used for police, لی[national police] and army، لی[national army], as well as with the NRTA، لی[National Radio and TV of Afghanistan]. For the international forces, the words Coalition and International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) were used.

Related to casualties, those Afghan security forces killed during violence were called “ﺵﻩیﺩ” [martyred]. For instance, in a press release, when four soldiers were killed in a mine explosion, the headline said, “In a mine explosion four brave soldiers reached the degree of martyrdom” (MoI, 2010, February 8). In some instances, words like “ﻡﺭګ” [death] and “ﺝﺍﻥ ﺵﺍﻥ ﺭﺍ ګﺭﻑﺕ” [lost their lives] were also used. For the international forces, the word “ﻡﺭګ” [killed] was used. However, in the English version of press releases the word “killed” applied to the police and army soldiers both of the Coalition and Afghan government.

The words “terrorist” or “armed terrorist” were often used by the Afghan government for the Taliban. Considered to be behind the attacks, the Taliban were called “ﺩ ﺍﻑﻍﺍﻥﺱﺕﺍﻥ ﺩﺵﻡﻥﺍﻥ” [enemies of Afghanistan] and “ﺩﺱﻭﻝ ﺍﻭ ﺙﺏﺍﺕ ﺩښﻡﻥﺍﻥ” [the enemies of peace and stability in Afghanistan]. The word “ﻡﺵکﻭک” [suspected] was used together with the word “terrorist” in some of the press releases. There were instances that labels such as “ﻭﺭﺍﻥکﺍﺭﻱ” in Pashto or “ﻡﺥﺭﺏیﻥ” in Dari [destructors] were utilized for the
Taliban. For the attacks by the Taliban and other groups, “ﺡﻡ.ﺕ ﺕﺭﻭﺭیﺱﺕﻱ” [terrorist attacks] was used and their actions were considered “cowardly.” For a suicide attack, “ﺍﻥﺕﺡﺍﺭ” [suicide] was used and for those Taliban killed, “هلاک” or “killed” was used. Sometimes, it was reported that “foreign terrorists” were among those killed.

Civilian casualties were also covered in the press releases. Most of the casualties reported were caused by the attacks of “terrorists.” The number of civilian deaths and wounded were provided in the releases, and no further details about those killed were provided. The term “ﺵﻩﺍﺩﺕ” [martyrdom] was used for civilian casualties. There were also instances that the words, “[killed] and “[their lives were taken] were applied. In the English version of the press releases issued by the MoI “killed” was used for civilians.

With the condemnation of the civilian casualties caused by the Taliban’s acts, phrases used in the press releases included “wild actions of the terrorists” (MoI, 2009, November 24), and “un-Islamic and inhumane action” (Presidential Office of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan [Presidential Office], 2009, August 25). However, the tone of condemnation was not as strong when the civilians were killed in the raids by the international forces. For instance, when around 90 people were killed in Kunduz province, a press release issued by the Presidential Office said that the President was “Deeply saddened by the loss of Afghan lives. President Karzai said that targeting civilians was not acceptable and stressed that no civilians had to be killed or injured during the military operations” (Presidential Office, 2009, September 4).
4.2.2 Coalition forces/ISAF.

The Coalition Forces stationed in Afghanistan and the officials of those countries having troops in Afghanistan were used as sources for news stories. Mostly, these took the form of press releases issued by the ISAF. Journalists considered the ISAF side important in the news stories. There were a number of news stories in which the ISAF sources were present and the government was not present.

Similar to the Afghan government, the international forces used the law and order sub-frame for covering security related issues. However, the frame also connected security with issues of governance and development. Participant #79, a member of ISAF, said that the ISAF’s focus was on these areas. He mentioned, that based on the counterinsurgency strategy that ISAF implemented in Afghanistan, these areas were interconnected (Personal communication, 2009, September 4).

The job of ISAF was considered assistance in bringing peace and security to Afghanistan. In a press release, when it was reported that four ISAF soldiers were killed, it was mentioned that, “These soldiers died and were wounded trying to help bring peace and security for the Afghan people” (ISAF, 2008, June 18). Another press release said the ISAF was working with the Afghan government, “to protect the innocent from the violence of the insurgents” (ISAF, 2009, September 3). Press releases mentioned that the ISAF was working with Afghan security forces “. . . to disrupt these attacks and help ensure the legitimate governance of the Afghan people” (ISAF, 2009, July 27). The press release further mentioned that:

ISAF is a key component of the international community’s engagement in Afghanistan, assisting the Afghan authorities in providing security and stability
and creating the conditions for reconstruction and development. (ISAF, 2009, July 27)

The tactics used by the Taliban were called “cowardly” (ISAF, 2009, September 18). Actions of the “insurgents” were seen as a cause for continuation of the violence and disruption of the development activities. For instance, in a press release in which the Taliban were blamed for destruction of a school, an ISAF commander was quoted saying: ”. . . insurgents intentionally target places where Afghan children learn . . .” (ISAF, 2009, July 14, italics as in original). In a number of instances, it was mentioned that the Taliban’s acts showed, “. . . disregard the insurgents have for the lives of Afghans” (ISAF, 2009, June 21, italics as in original).

In a number of instances, the press releases discussed tactics used by ISAF forces in fighting the insurgents. They also reported casualties of the Taliban. For instance, a headline in a press release mentioned that “ISAF air strike kills known Taliban leader in Uruzgan” (ISAF, 2008, July 17). In another press release, it was mentioned that, “Although no final assessment has been made, it is believed insurgents suffered heavy casualties during several hours of fighting” (ISAF, 2008, July 13).

Although, in the beginning, during 2002 and 2003, the word “terrorist” was used (ISAF, 2003, December 3), the word “insurgent” was adopted for the groups fighting the international forces and the Afghan government. Remarks such as “Brave soldier” or “fine soldier” were used for the international forces’ casualties, which was one of the major areas covered in the press releases. In one press release, the ISAF spokesperson was quoted as saying “Our thoughts are with the family and friends of these brave
soldiers” (ISAF, 2008, June 3). However, press releases did not mention the nationalities of the soldiers killed.

When civilian casualties were caused by the Taliban, the press releases issued by ISAF would say that the Taliban used “indiscriminate methods” which led “to deaths of many innocent Afghans” (ISAF, 2008, July 16). In cases where civilians were killed by the ISAF forces, the deaths were described as “accidentally killed.” Alternatively, there were also instances when the ISAF would deny civilian casualties caused by their actions. For instance, replying to the reports that ISAF forces killed 500 civilians in Sangin District, ISAF countered in a press release that they had killed 220 insurgents (ISAF, 2008, September 02).

The ISAF, in a number of instances, accepted the civilian casualties caused by their side. The organization mentioned that it would coordinate with the Afghan government to avoid civilian casualties in the future. Quoting General MacKiernan, the release mentioned that coordination was necessary “because we cannot allow differences to provide an opportunity for insurgents to drive a wedge between us” (ISAF, 2008, September 3).

4.2.3 The Taliban.

With the exception of the National Radio and Television Afghanistan (NRTA), which did not include the Taliban in most of news stories, reference to the Taliban side was given. However, the way the Taliban were referred to was different across media outlets. For instance, Tehran’s Pashto Radio had stories that focused solely on the Taliban, while other non-government and international channels rarely reported a story
only about the Taliban. The Taliban sources used by the media included their two spokesmen.

The Taliban’s main frame for the conflict in Afghanistan was “Jihad.” This frame was also used by other insurgent groups, such as Hezbi Islami. The Taliban considered the presence of International Forces in Afghanistan as an invasion. In an interview, a Taliban commander was reported to have said: “My message to my Muslim nation is that they should continue their sacred jihad against the invading crusaders, and should not let them violate their sanctities and national honor” (“Taliban report clashes . . .,” 2009, June 9). They also considered that their strategy was to “engage and exhaust the enemy in a long war of attrition” (“Taliban report says . . .,” 2009, July 4).

The Taliban’s messages/news sent to journalists and presented on their websites were all about violence. They presented, to a great extent, the successes of the Taliban and the losses of the International and Afghan Forces in the war. In particular, the focus of their messages was “foreign and Afghan casualties.” Taliban tactics, their timing, and their location, mostly the exact place of the incidents, were also reported in these news stories/messages. The messages discussed the failures of the Afghan and International Forces and the civilian casualties caused by the International Forces operations.

Based on their rhetoric, the Taliban called their forces [Mujahideen of the Islamic Emirate] or simply [Mujahideen]. Suicide attackers were called “[self-sacrificing] or “martyrdom attackers.” For instance, in a press release mentioning a suicide attacker, it said, “martyrdom attack carried out by Martyr Hafez Abdol Wakil” (“Taliban commander sees. . .,” 2009, June, 9). The Mujahideen
would refer to their casualties as "شهداء" [martyr]. They would also use the phrase "إن الله أننا نرجع إلى رحمته" [We are from God and to Him we return].

The word "لبنين" [enemy] was used for both the national and international forces. The Afghan government was called "أجرام" [puppet administration]. They would call the Afghan soldiers "بدر" [mercenary soldiers] or simply "بدر" [soldiers]. Police and army or internal puppets were words also used. For the international forces they would use "جنود خارجيين" [foreign soldiers], "الشغالة" [invaders], or "الشغالة للكراد" [invading crusaders].

The Taliban releases often focused on civilian casualties. According to the Taliban, the international forces were responsible for any civilian casualties. In a news story, the group said, "... the enemy wants to cover up the heavy casualties and material losses that have been inflicted on the civilians as a result of their savage bombardment" ("Taliban deny their. . .," 2009, June 11). Those civilians killed were also called "شهداء" [martyred].

For civilian casualties, the Taliban blamed the ISAF. For instance, the Taliban reported that, in a land mine explosion, they had killed ten foreign soldiers who were patrolling in Nerkh District of Wardak Province. The news also mentioned that "the enemy fired machine guns on the surrounding areas after the explosion as a result of which a number of innocent civilians who were working in their orchards were wounded" ("Taliban claim killing . . .," 2009, June 9).
4.3 Media Frames

I identified four main media frames used by media outlets. These frames were “law and order,” “development as peace,” “occupation as failure,” and “civilian victims.” Although these four frames were the ones most often adopted by media outlets, other frames appeared, such as “Jihad,” “terrorism,” “ethnic victimization,” and “peace through negotiation.” These were either partially supported by the content analysis or were only present in the participants/public accounts.

The dominant frame that was used by all the media outlets, except Tehran’s Pashto Radio, was the “law and order” frame. Since this concept was so prominent, it appeared in the greater number of the stories. “Development as peace” was a frame also used by all media outlets, and appeared in many news stories. Tehran’s Pashto Radio, on the other hand, used the “failure of occupation” as its main frame. The “failure of occupation” frame was not used by other media outlets. The “civilian victims” frame was used by all media outlets to some degree. Although the frame provided an alternative to the “law and order” frame, it was not present in most of the stories.

4.3.1 The law and order frame.

According to the law and order frame, the principle problem in Afghanistan was the absence of law and order. The main causes of the absence were weak security agencies and disruption of the law and order situation by the acts of violence of some of the groups, in this case the Taliban. The frame recommended having strong security agencies as a way to improve the law and order situation and bring security to the country; therefore, the media tended to support the government security agencies in Afghanistan.
According to this frame, the government was responsible for restoring law and order and providing security to the population, as it had a monopoly in the use of force, and its actions were considered legitimate. The presence of the Coalition Forces in Afghanistan was considered legal and important in bringing security and improving law and order in the country.

To the contrary, the Taliban were considered a rebellious and outlaw group, and were responsible for the violence in the country. The Taliban’s activities and methods, particularly the use of violence, were seen to disrupt law and order, and bring insecurity and instability, and were, therefore, considered illegitimate. The frame also considered foreign states, in this case Pakistan, to be behind violence. This frame suggested that without state(s) support, the Taliban were not able to stage attacks and continue the violence.

Most stories, using the law and order frame, were episodic and did not provide background information. The news on conflict was focusing on incidents, similar to crime stories. One of the main characteristics of this frame, identified through content analysis, was the presence of the government sources. The government account was present in nearly all the news stories. The Taliban account of the events, on the other hand, was discarded.

Other characteristics of this frame were considering the presence of the government security forces necessary for bringing law and order in the country, blaming the Taliban for disrupting the law and order situation, not questioning the presence and operation of the Coalition Forces and externalizing the conflict by considering other states, in this case Pakistan, to be behind the violence.
In the news stories, the presence of the Taliban in different parts of the country was considered as a threat to the law and order situation in the country; therefore, the violence initiated by the government and Coalition Forces were not questioned and in some cases considered necessary. For instance, in the summers of 2008 and 2009, military operations were underway in some of the provinces, including Helmand, Kandahar, and Ghazni. These operations were seen by media outlets to have the purpose of clearing these areas of the Taliban and an attempt to restore law and order, bringing security and an adequate environment for the state-building process.

When Khanishin district of Helmand province was taken by government and Coalition Forces, a foreign soldier was quoted in a story by Tolo: “Today we have paved the ground for the residents of Khanishin to go out of their homes in a peaceful atmosphere and continue their work” (Tolo TV, 2009, July 5). The presence of security forces was seen as necessary for the law and order situation and reconstruction process. After the Nawzad district of Helmand province was taken, the spokesman for the governor was quoted saying: “After security check posts would be established, the reconstruction process would speed up and security would be brought to the province” (BBC Pashto, 2009, July 16).

Similarly, participants and people the researcher talked to considered the lack of functioning state institutions as a major problem. Participant #35, a young university graduate working as a reporter for an international channel in Kandahar, said, “corruption and inefficiency of the government institutions is the main cause of the conflict in the country” (Personal communication, 2009, August 26). Some of the participants pointed out incapability of the government officials and institutions as the primary reasons for the
emergence of the Taliban. Participant #36, a young journalist in his early 20s, said “after the fall of the Taliban, those who came to power were corrupt and trying to take revenge, therefore, the Taliban were fighting the government” (Personal communication, 2009, July 22).

Considering the presence of Coalition Forces legal, according to this frame, the current situation was different from the past presence of foreign forces in the country, although not all the Alliance activities were seen as effective. Participant #25, a private television anchor, pointed out that “After the Bonn Agreement, the Afghan war got an international name. It is legal. This is based on the UN and the Security Council’s decisions, but some parts of it, in particular air raids, are against the international conventions” (Personal communication, 2009, August 29).

One of the main characteristics of this frame was that it was externalizing the causes of the conflict. According to this frame, some states, because of their vested interest, were supporting the Taliban against the government and Coalition Forces. In this regard, Pakistan was mainly seen supporting the Taliban. The Afghan Foreign Minister said that there is “plenty of evidence” of Pakistan’s involvement in insecurity (Tolo TV, 2008, July 19). There were also reports quoting Afghan forces as saying that “foreign nationals” were fighting alongside the Taliban. The government blamed Pakistan foreign behind the violence in Afghanistan.

Participant #48, a former government employee who became a reporter with an international media outlet in post-Taliban Afghanistan, said that neighboring countries [Pakistan and Iran] did not want “a strong” Afghanistan (Personal communication, 2009, September 3). Participant #38, a journalist in his early 20s who was working with a
private radio station, said, compared to the internal problems, external problems were important. He pointed out that neighboring countries had a hand in the conflict. He said that the Taliban were provided with “training centers [outside the country] and financial support from other states” (Personal communication, 2009, August 25). Participant #65, director of a private media organization, said that neighboring countries were promoting “Jihad” in Afghanistan and saying that killing of Afghans is Jihad (Personal communication, 2009, September 5).

Supporting strong security institutions was seen as a solution to the conflict. The press conferences given by government officials were broadcast regularly, and in most cases, they were quoted or referred to in the news stories. Participant #35, trying to be convincing, pointed out that journalists were supporting the government because it was the government of the country. He said:

This [the government] is the ruling regime; it has international backing. In addition, it provides my security and an environment for me to work. On the other hand, the opposition side is a group with no principles. . . . They do not have any rules to deal with media. (Personal communication, 2009, September 26)

4.3.1.1. Dependence on government sources.

One of the main characteristics of this frame was dependence on government sources, or using them as primary sources. The government side, and sometimes the Coalition side, was present in all the news stories. The Taliban side was often present, but not in all of the stories. Other sources included the local population and politicians. The government agencies and ISAF were considered legal institutions; therefore, they were
included in the stories, the news editor for a national private channel, Participant #14 explained:

Journalists say that the [government] institutions have real and legal bases. For instance, the Defense Ministry is a legal institution, the Ministry of the Interior is a legal institution, and the [ISAF] is a legal institution, and they are involved in the Afghan conflict. (Personal communication, 2008, September 9)

NRTA used only official sources and those of the government owned Bakhtar News Agency. In a few instances, reference was made to the Taliban’s website, by saying “an Internet site says” (NRTA, 2009, June 16). As Participant #45, a former NRTA journalist, in a confident manner said, “no journalist was allowed to contact the government opposition” (Personal communication, 2009, September 1).

Private media, although varied across media outlets, usually used references to the Taliban. While most of the participants said that the government version should be part of the story, the Taliban version was not considered that important. Participant #16, a reporter working for private television in a northern province, said:

Unless we get a government source, we cannot broadcast the news. We should have government’s confirmation. The [Taliban] side is not that important. First, they are not official [legal]. The person says that he is Zabiullah Mojahid on the phone. We have not seen him or he is not introduced by any legal organization. (Personal communication, 2009, July 10)

In general, in a news report, the government sources would come first and then the Taliban’s. This approach was taken by Radio Azadi. As Participant #67, who worked for sometime with Azadi Radio, mentioned: Radio Azadi would use the government
sources first and then the claim of the Taliban and later the government’s rejection of the Taliban version (Personal communication, 2009, August 21). This was also the way other media outlets, both private and international, would usually refer to the Taliban in their news stories.

The Taliban’s framing of the events as “Jihad” was totally discarded. In only a few instances, the voices of the Taliban were included. The phrases used for the Taliban included, “Taliban claimed,” “Qari Yousuf Ahmadi,” or “Zabiullah Mojahid” [the two spokesmen for the Taliban], “who called himself the spokesman for the Taliban, [said that the Taliban] take responsibility for this killing” Phrases such as “Taliban were not there to comment” or “As yet, the Taliban have not commented” were also used.

On the use of direct Taliban quotes and frames, Participant #67, who was explaining to me the relations between the media outlet that he worked for and the parties in the conflict, pointed out that “as part of policy, we do not want to broadcast direct quotes [of the Taliban]” (Personal communication, 2009, August 21). A number of participants said that the Taliban did not have an address; therefore, it was not possible to confirm the authenticity of their sources. Participants pointed to a range of factors – from technical issues to opposing the Taliban message -- for not presenting the Taliban’s perspective. Though most of the participants defended the way media included the Taliban in news stories, there were a few participants, at least two, who thought that the Taliban should be given the same space and time as the government sources. On the other side, there were also at least two participants who argued that reference to the Taliban should not be included because it was promotion of extremism or terrorism.
Except when quoting the government sources, different terms were used for the Taliban. The “ﻡﺥﺍﻝﻑیﻥ ﻡﺱﻝﺡ [government/state’s armed opposition], “ﻡﺥﺍﻝﻑیﻥ ﻡﺱﻝﺡ دوﻝﺕ [armed opposition], “ﻡﺥﺍﻝﻑیﻥ [opposition], “ﻭﺱﻝﻩ ﻭﺍﻝ ﻁﺍﻝﺏﺍﻥ or “ﻁﺍﻝﺏﺍﻥ” [political opposition] were used. However, words, such as “ﺍﻑﻍﺍﻥ ﺍﻭﺭپکﻭ [Afghan insurgents], “ﻭﺭﺍﻥکﺍﺭی [destructors]” [terrorists] were often used for the Taliban, particularly by the international media.

The word “ﻡﻝی [national] was used for the government. For the ISAF forces, ISAF, Coalition or International Forces were used. American forces or NATO forces were also used. However, in a number of instances, on international media BBC and Azadi Radio, the term “ﺱﻭﻝﻩ ﺱﺍﺕی ځﻭﺍکﻭﻥﻩ [peace-keeping forces] was also used. The word “killed” was used for casualties on all sides, although quotes from the government side used the words mentioned earlier in the government framing section.

Participant #93, working with the Afghan government, said that one of the major problems was the different terminology used among Afghan officials. He said that some officials would call the Taliban “armed opposition” and others would call them “enemies of peace” (Personal communication, 2009, August 29). Participant #69, a journalist having experience working with an international channel since mid-1990s, said that the use of the word “armed” with the Taliban or opposition was appropriate since it would distinguish them from other Taliban [those studying in Madrassas] and the opposition [political opposition]. He also said that the use of such words as “terrorists” for the Taliban was fine if it was within the quotes of officials (Personal communication, 2009, July 21). Differences appeared among participants when talking about terms to be used for the Taliban. Participant #73, who was running a literary show and did some research
on Afghan culture and Pashto language, mentioned that because of the years of conflict, they [journalists] do not know legal terms and topics (Personal communication, 2009, July 19).

4.3.1.2 Differences in use of the law and order frame.

In addition to the analysis of sources, the law and order frame can be considered in terms of the tone, whether positive or negative, and the inclusiveness of the stories and bulletins. Being a government outlet, NRTA tended to present success stories of the government, such as Taliban detentions, seizure of weapons and foiling Taliban’s attempts. For instance, when there was a complex attack on a government installation in Logar province, the NRTA reported that “an unknown group has terrorized people but security departments were powerful enough to handle it” (2009, August 10). As a young journalist in Kandahar City, Participant #32 put it, “National radio TV (state run media) broadcast only the news that benefits the government, to a great extent, only positive stories” (Personal communication, 2009, August 24). The content of NRTA broadcasts mostly supported the government. An NRTA’s reporter Participant #31, defensive of NRTA’s position in supporting the Afghan government, said:

We are supporting the government . . . and this is a government, which after a long time and mischief, Afghans have come together. Now Afghans have the opportunity that their children can go to school or have other facilities. So we do not want to show the government’s opposition [Taliban] as an organized group. Our judgment is one-sided and even if the government has failed in an area we will show it successful. (Personal communication, 2009, August 22)
The private media outlets supported government activities; however, they also included opposition perspectives and criticism of the government policies. Participant #92, a young journalist in his late 20s who had worked with NRTA and was working with a local channel at the time of this research, said that Kandahar’s provincial channel was covering government activities. His local channel, although supporting the government, also focused on the problems and issues that the government was facing. There were differences across media outlets. Tolo was a station critical of the government and that focused on the government’s shortcomings, as in its failings to provide security (Personal communication, 2009, August 27).

Exclusion of stories, particularly those related to security, was characteristic of the NRTA. Many violent incidents covered by private media were not covered by NRTA. The NRTA failed to report issues and events not favorable to the central government. Participant #29, a young journalist who had work experience with private media and recently joined NRTA, said that all news should be presented, but the part that is “harmful” should be avoided. He thought that the NRTA was not covering violence because of its negative impact on women and children (Personal communication, 2009, August 16).

Participants from NRTA criticized private media for being negative. For instance, Participant #30, a journalist working with NRTA for about two decades, mentioned an incident in which NATO soldiers killed and burnt two Taliban. The incident was covered by Tolo TV. According to him, the news was negative. When I asked him what was the positive side of it. He said, “The positive side of this news was not to broadcast it”
(Personal communication, 2009, August 18). He was of the opinion that “[this type of news] would not benefit the nation,”

Participants working with private and international media, on the other hand, considered it their job to cover violent incidents, to air problems and give voice to their audiences. Participant #47, the head of a local radio station broadcasting for women, stressed “we cover what happens.” She observed that, “This is the job of media to broadcast people’s problems and their voices to those responsible so that they pay attention to the problems” (Personal communication, 2009, September 2).

4.3.2 Development as peace.

According to this frame, Afghanistan’s low literacy rate and its economic problems are the result of the years of war. The conflict in the country has led to its underdevelopment. Reconstruction of state institutions and advancement of development activities and projects are a means to end the conflict. This frame was used by all media outlets. There were, however, differences in the types and amount of development coverage among them.

In the news stories analyzed for this research, one of the main topics covered had to do with development activity, or lack of development. In most cases, the development news stories came from the government sources and mainly they were about planning, inauguration and completion of projects. Development activities were seen as an achievement; people wanted development projects. In areas where there were no development activities, there was conflict. Development work was correlated with bringing peace to Afghanistan. The journalists I interviewed strongly believed that
coverage of development activities was a way to balance the news of conflict, and this perception was revealed in the content analysis.

The poor economic situation and such social issues as illiteracy were seen as the main reasons for the continuation of the conflict. This was mentioned by many participants and the ordinary people that I talked to. As Participant #34, a reporter with a private television channel in Kandahar City, said:

Joblessness, illiteracy, no efficient planning by the government and no work opportunities for people, all together has been contributing and as a result now we have insecurity. . . . There is no agriculture, no industries, we do not have an economy, and to earn their living people use guns. . . . Guns bring destabilization, disorder. Guns bring anarchy in the country. (Personal communication, 2009, August 28)

In general, development work was seen as giving legitimacy to the state-building process. The level of development was compared to the past by government officials. This was also present in the accounts of the participants, particularly when they were asked about changes in Afghanistan. Participant #30 said:

I think the international community has worked a lot in this regard. Sometime ago, when I went to Kunar, in every district, there were two new clinics. It was not like that in the 70s. In every district, there were four or five schools. When I went to school, in my district there was no middle school, no primary schools. We did not have school buildings. Now we have buildings. There are problems with teachers but I think that is because of the fighting. (Personal communication, 2009, August 18)
The presence of conflict was considered to be hindering the development activities. For instance, the BBC mentioned in a report that, in a number of insecure districts in Khost province, no development [projects] were implemented (Wahdat, 2009, July 20). Participants from Nangarhar province would argue that the higher literacy rate in the province, compared to other provinces, was the reason they did not have as much violence as in the south. However, in the two districts of the province violence was reported. Participant #43, a young journalist who had spent all his life in Nangarhar province, thought the reason that there was no development work in the two districts in Nangarhar was violence in those districts (Personal communication, 2009, September 2).

Development and reconstruction activities were generally seen as positive activities that the media should highlight. Participant #93 said:

Here, we always have more news of killings. This is creating fear [among people] in Afghanistan. There is not only news on casualties, Afghanistan has achieved a lot in terms of justice or in terms of [development] projects but there is little coverage of those works. (Personal communication, 2009, August 29)

Participant #35, who worked for a media outlet supporting the government was not happy with how conflict was being covered. He mentioned that the media present only matters related to war and do not consider and highlight other problems and issues, particularly related to the development work. He pointed out:

How much progress has been made in economic issues? What are the social problems of people? What happened to the infrastructure projects? We are brought up in this kind of situation and in this environment that we think that
there is only fighting and war and these are the only issues and there are no more issues. (Personal communication, 2009, August 26)

Development work was widely considered to be a way to bring peace to Afghanistan. Participant #71, who had been working as a reporter since the fall of the Taliban, said: “In Afghanistan, establishing industries, factories and projects provide job opportunities for the youth. This is one of the best ways, for instance, it can prevent youth from going to crime, and from going over the lines to the opposition” (Personal communication, 2009, July 22). Participants working with the independent media often mentioned that the news of reconstruction was equated to news for peace. Participant #41 mentioned:

If there is a road constructed in Nuristan province, or any news of reconstruction, where a project is implemented somewhere. This, itself, is peace news. This means that it will have an impact on people’s thinking. On the issue that in Afghanistan, international forces are working -- They do not only fight but they are working for reconstruction of the country. (Personal communication, 2009, August 3)

Tehran’s Pashto Radio also presented news on development activities. Participant #57, working with Tehran Pashto Radio, said: “We are focusing on the positive cases in Afghanistan. We want to reflect the positive issues and help in the reconstruction and economic progress in Afghanistan so those Afghans who live in Iran as guests can return with peace” (Personal communication, 2009, July 29). He also mentioned that Iran has supported the reconstruction and development process in Afghanistan with hundreds of millions of dollars in grants.
4.3.2.1 Differences in the use of “development as peace” frame.

Among media outlets selected in this research, the main differences relating to development as peace frame had to do with who they used as a news source and the amount of development coverage. The NRTA focused primarily on the government’s version of development work. These channels covered official meetings, announcements, inaugurations and development project completions. Private media also used government sources, although not to the extent of NRTA, and there were also stories focusing on local people needs and demands. However, these stories were less in number.

Compared to private media, NRTA gave more time to the development stories. Participant #45, who worked with the NRTA for five years and at the time my fieldwork, was working with an independent channel. He said that one of the good things about working with NRTA was coverage of “positive work” (Personal communication, 2009, September 1).

Even those participants working with NRTA criticized the NRTA channels for only broadcasting official accounts of development work. As Participant #30, working with the NRTA, pointed out, “[development] reports are, to a great extent, bureaucratic/formal” (personal communication, 2009, August 18). He also said that there was no investigative reporting for development work. Participant #45 also said that NRTA’s development stories were mostly about government officials:

For instance, a clinic is inaugurated in Kunduz. The local government television . . . should speak with the governor, or deputy governor, if he is there, or the police chief, or the head of provincial council, and others [the government officials]. The
government television has to talk with those government officials who are present there. (Personal communication, 2009, September 1)

He said that the private channels broadcasting from Kabul do not have to follow the same format. Some of this study’s participants working with private media criticized private media for not covering reconstruction and development activities, or what they called “positive work of the government.” Participant #28, a journalist who had worked for NRTA for about three decades, in criticizing private media stated “without these violence incidents that this many people are killed and that many people are killed. No one said that this road is asphalted or built. Unfortunately, these types of stories [on reconstruction and development] are few in number” (Personal communication, 2009, August 15). Dissatisfied in the way private media covered violence, he further said, “If there is a bomb explosion killing one or two people, then they broadcast it, but they do not broadcast the achievements in districts” (Personal communication, 2009, August 15).

There were also a number of participants working with private media who did not accept the government media’s criticism and mentioned that they were giving priority to development work. In terms of private media, Salam Watandar and local channel of Hewad had more development news than the channels broadcasting from Kabul.

4.3.3 Occupation as failure frame.

“Occupation as failure” was the main frame used by the Pashto Radio of Tehran. This frame focused on the “foreign” intervention in the country. The Coalition Forces were portrayed to be an occupying force. In the occupation frame, the Coalition Forces were seen as creating an environment for conflict. It was recommended that they should leave Afghanistan.
The news stories broadcast by the Tehran’s Pashto Radio tended to be negative toward the presence of the Coalition Forces in Afghanistan. Different sources were used, including the Western media outlets and international news agencies. In addition to using the Afghan government sources, the Taliban sources were also used. In these stories the failure of the Coalition Forces in Afghanistan was highlighted.

Content analysis of these stories showed: the Coalition presence in Afghanistan to be the cause of the conflict; the Coalition Forces failed to bring security and peace to Afghanistan; lack of coordination between the Coalition member countries; Coalition Forces suffered casualties; Coalition Forces were blamed for civilian casualties, and the Coalition involvement in Afghanistan was unpopular among Afghans and Western societies.

The journalists working with Tehran’s Pashto radio mentioned that Iran was not in good terms with the United States and as Participant #56, a young Afghan journalist working with Tehran’s Pashto Radio, pointed out:

In general, Iran is kind of opposing Americans; this exists at the Iranian government level. So it is possible that based on this antagonism, [they] broadcast some reports that are against the foreigners in Afghanistan because Iran looks at America and the West as its enemy and they do not want to support them or work for their benefit. (Personal communication, 2009, September 8)

In general, the frame showed the presence of the Coalition Forces to be a failure that increased the violence. According to this frame, the increase in the number of foreign forces in Afghanistan, based on NATO’s strategy, intensified violence in the country. For
instance, in a news story broadcast by Tehran’s Pashto Radio on September 10, 2009, it was said:

In Afghanistan, as an excuse for fighting Al Qaeda and Taliban, one hundred thousands of foreign soldiers are based. They did not only fail to bring security and peace to the country but also made a number of places instable and drug cultivation and trafficking has increased [in Afghanistan].

The casualties of Coalition troops in Afghanistan were one of the main topics covered by the Iranian media. Although there were reports about casualties in other media outlets, the coverage of deaths was highlighted and noteworthy in the Tehran Pashto Radio news. Some of these news stories presented the total number of casualties, adding to it the new casualties. A news story broadcast on August 21, 2009 said:

The defense ministry of Britain said that in an explosion today two of their soldiers were killed in the Sangin district of Helmand province. With the death of these two soldiers the number of soldiers killed in Afghanistan reached 206.


Furthermore, the frame focused on the civilian casualties, particularly the ones caused by the Coalition Forces. In general, the tone of the content broadcast by Iran’s Pashto Radio was negative. The station made mention of the articles in the Western press criticizing US and NATO forces’ strategies, tactics and other aspects of their involvement in Afghanistan. Though participant #58, working with Tehran Pashto Radio, did not think that all the news stories broadcast by Tehran Pashto Radio were negative, he said that because of the negative incidents, the news was negative,
There is conflict in the south. Can you avoid mentioning about it when you are making news about the south? Can you avoid mentioning about a suicide attack in the south or fighting between the Taliban and Afghan forces and foreigners? In the south of Afghanistan, there is fighting and if it is negative that is the news.

(Personal communication, 2009, August 6)

Participant #57 pointed out that all news organizations were focusing on negative news. He said, when the foreigners give news on an incident, “we should use it, the news is not limited to the western media.” He further mentioned that “when a foreign soldier is killed in Afghanistan the western troops provide the news themselves. Well, cannot we use this news? Did it ever happen that a soldier is not killed and we have broadcasted that?” (Personal communication, 2009, July 29)

In addition to covering the public opinion polls conducted in Western countries, which showed public opposition to the fighting in Afghanistan, this frame also highlighted the lack of coordination, showed the shortcomings of the Coalition troops in Afghanistan and portrayed their mission as a failure. One news story reported: “they resorted to any move to justify their defeat,” adding that “NATO has sustained a humiliating defeat in Afghanistan . . . It is now time to restructure the body, Mottaki said” (IRNA & Tehran Pashto Radio 2008, September 4).

In the Taliban press, the terms “Taliban” and “the opposition” were commonly used, and only in a few instances was the term “terrorist” used. The word “occupation” was used for the ISAF presence, particularly in commentaries and interviews. “Foreign forces” was used for the international forces. The word “national” was not used with the Afghan police or army.
In a few instances, some Afghan government officials and politicians also used the “occupation as failure” frame. For instance, President Karzai, on a number of occasions, mentioned, that if the Coalition Forces “do not stop killing Afghan civilians, the people of Afghanistan would consider them as invaders” (NRTA, 2009, June 13). There were also a number of instances in which someone working with the government or supporting the government would use the “occupation failure” frame. For instance, Enayatullah Baligh, a Mullah, in one of his Friday sermons after the Herat incident in which several hundred civilians were killed in an air raid, said: “Our country comes under bombardment by NATO elements. The nation can no longer tolerate the air strikes of infidel and invading elements on our sons, widows, sisters and brothers” (NRTA, 2008, August 29).

4.3.4 Civilian victims frame.

In the post-September 11, 2001 conflict in Afghanistan, civilian casualties became one of the most sensitive issues in public and media discourse. The “civilian victims” frame, focusing on the casualties and sufferings of the general public, caused both sides in the conflict to review their strategies and tactics. This was also a frame promoted and used to voice concerns by international, transborder and local organizations and networks. For instance, the UNAMA, Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) and local organizations such as the Independent Human Rights Commission of Afghanistan were promoting this frame.

When I was in Afghanistan, I observed the impact of the use of the frame that made main parties in the conflict to reconsider their strategies and tactics. The NATO forces adopted a counter-insurgency strategy, which recommended that civilian casualties
should be avoided (Salam Watandar, 2009, June 15). Meanwhile, the Taliban also introduced a new manual, guiding their fighters to avoid civilian casualties.

According to this frame, the main problem is civilian casualties and suffering resulting from the ongoing conflict. The frame will typically recommend that the parties in conflict should avoid such incidents. This frame provided an alternative to the “law and order,” “occupation as failure,” and “Jihad” frames.

One of the major themes covered in news stories using “civilian victims” frame was civilian casualties and suffering in war. The main characteristic of this frame, identified through content analysis, was the use of other news sources, including victims, eyewitnesses, parties not involved in the conflict and ordinary citizens. Impacts of the conflict on the civilians such as casualties, fear, demonstration and displacement were the topics covered through this frame. In addition, anger and protests were also reported.

The main focus of this frame was the civilians rather than parties in the conflict and these parties’ tactics, strategies or goals. This frame was also used together with the “law and order,” and “occupation as failure” frames.

Often news coming from the two sides in the fighting focused on the number of civilians who died due to violence. For instance, in a story about a roadside mine explosion in Spin Boldak district of Kandahar Province, it was mentioned that eleven people were killed and three were injured. Only casualties were reported (Ariana TV, 2009, June 17).

The number of civilian deaths was a controversial topic and the media present mainly the numbers. For instance, Tolo covered a raid in Tagab district of Kapisa province in which four people were killed. The report said that “According to locals, the
raids were carried out in Shahzada Khel village yesterday morning [22 Aug 08].” They said “those killed in the raids were civilians” (Tolo TV, 2008, August 23,). Then the news quoted the governor of Tagab District, who mentioned one of those killed was “a mosque preacher, two laborers and a fourth man.” Later, the news said that the Taliban mentioned that those killed were not the Taliban and the statement of Coalition Forces was cited saying that those killed were the Taliban (Tolo TV, 2008, August 23).

Although fewer in number, some reports included quotes from witnesses, victims, and ordinary individuals. The frame included the reactions and statements of the political parties and those not involved in the conflict. The frame was even more powerful when eye-witnesses and civilians were quoted. There were a number of news items that focused not only on the casualties, but also on the grievances, anger, fear, demonstrations, displacement, and larger impacts of the conflict.

A number of reports broadcast by media outlets were about victims of the explosion in Kandahar City on August 28, 2009, when around 50 people died. A BBC female journalist reported about a mother whose children were killed in the explosion. On Tolo TV, ordinary people were interviewed to talk about the security in Logar province. These are representative examples of this frame (Appendix V).

In another story, when ten civilians and two policemen were killed, a BBC report stated that “the Taliban take responsibility for the attack” (2009, August, 3). That report mentioned that “President Karzai condemned the attack and ordered an investigation and the perpetrator to be arrested.” The story continued, “It happened in a time that the Taliban said in its new manual that they will not attack in public places and people will
be protected” (BBC Pashto, 2009, August, 3). In the news by the BBC Pashto Service, a Taliban spokesman, Qari Yousuf Ahmadi was interviewed. He said:

We are accepting the responsibility of this incident and it is not in contrast with our manual because this explosion was not on civilians. It was on police vehicles, two rangers, and a vehicle of the municipality and ammunition in it exploded and with that civilians were martyred and they [government forces] also fired. Civilian people around two or three were martyred and a lot of others were wounded . . . the civilians that are killed are because of the explosion of ammunition and as a result of their shooting. If the information says that it is caused by our explosion, I am sorry for that. (BBC Pashto, 2009, August, 3).

Most of the participants were of the view that, besides the two warring parties in the conflict, victims and local populations should also be included. As Participant #6 pointed out, in the context of Afghanistan, “the local people’s point of view is very important since the fighting is not taking place in the desert but in the villages where people live, and they are in fact suffering in the war; therefore, it is important to include local population’s accounts” (Personal communication, 2008, July 10). Using this frame, journalists sided with the ordinary people. It was because of their experience living in Afghanistan, as participant #37, a youth activist and analyst told me with a quite assertive tone:

It is not important for me that I divide Taliban from Mujahideen, tell one is good and another is bad. It is not important for me that I call Al Qaeda or America terrorist, it is not important for me that I did Jihad against Soviet or Russian. One thing that I know is that I am destroyed. One thing that I know is that it is thirty
years that the fighting is going on in Afghanistan. . . . (Personal communication, 2009, August 25)

There were public demonstrations against civilian casualties, and this news was covered through this frame. People of Hodkhil blocked the Kabul-Jalalabad road for several hours in protest of a night raid by Afghan and Coalition Forces in which four civilians were killed. The report included among the victims: local people, a member of parliament and a government official (Tolo TV, 2008, September 1). Statements of condemnation by groups other than those directly involved in the conflict were also part of this frame.

The broader effects of the conflict were addressed, although only in a few stories. A news report about distribution of food and other items among displaced families in Helmand Province was broadcast. Salam Watandar reported on a story in which it was said that tens of families in Tagab district of Kapisa province, East of Kabul, were staying in the desert fearing the air attacks (2008, July 2). Other issues included the burning and closing of schools and damage done to local infrastructure. The economic and social impacts of conflict, on the other hand, were rarely given attention.

4.4 Other Frames

4.4.1 Peace through negotiation.

Although my content analysis identified few occasions when the “peace through negotiation” frame was used by media, this theme did appear in the participant accounts, among those I interviewed and it was articulated by some of the citizens with whom I talked. The principal occasions were during the presidential election campaigns and when the government announced that it had reached an agreement with the local Taliban in
Bala Morghab district of Badghes. The “peace through negotiation” frame was also present in some of the accounts of participants and people with whom I talked.

In this frame, the conflict itself was the problem. The causes were seen at multiple levels, both internal and external, although, in most cases, the causes were the parties involved in the conflict. The solution was negotiation and dialogue, i.e., peace-making steps to put an end to the conflict. Another version of this frame was that negotiation should be inclusive of women, political parties, and civil society groups.

The frame was present in a number of participants’ accounts. For instance, participant #28, referring to the election that was going to take place a few days away, said: “there is no other way except negotiation, peace, and inclusion. The government, whoever leads it, whether it is Mr. Karzai, Abdullah or Ashraf Ghani, should do [his] utmost. There is no other way to bring security to this country” (Personal communication, 2009, August 15). Supporting peace and thinking of having peace was also connected to the experiences of the participants, as Participant #49, a female young reporter of a private television channel, said:

When I see this incident on the streets, as an Afghan every child who is polishing shoes brings tears into my eyes. When I go to Ashiana to prepare reports on the children, you may not believe it, I cry. When these children would be able go to school, at times when they are at play and when there is no sound of bullets; that might be peace then. (Personal communication, 2009, September 6)

In terms of the vocabulary used in this frame, mostly the word “Taliban” was used. In a number of instances, particularly when the researcher was discussing with participants the negotiation and peace processes, they would use a softer word for the
Taliban, such as “Talib brothers” or “upset brothers.” This was the case, as Participant #67 pointed out, when high-level officials, including President Karzai, would talk about peace (Personal communication, 2009, August 21).

4.4.2 Terrorism.

Just after September 11, 2001, the “terrorism” frame was frequently used by media when describing conflict in Afghanistan. This frame considered the conflict as part of the international “War against Terror.” According to this frame, transborder terrorist groups were responsible. The frame emphasized that these groups were irreconcilable; in particular, the Taliban and Al Qaeda held views that were incompatible with democratic values. The recommendation was to defeat these groups.

This frame was only present at the policy level, particularly when high level officials were meeting and discussing security in Afghanistan and the region. The frame appeared in a few participant accounts, when talking about the conflict and peace in Afghanistan, but in general the frame was not supported through content analysis.

At least two of the participants mentioned that the Taliban and the Al Qaeda were the same and that the Taliban could not be reconciled with the current system in Afghanistan. These participants also used the word “terrorists” when referring to the Taliban, although they explained that they were not using the word in their narratives when writing their reports, since they were using the law and order frame.

Discussing the use of the term “terrorists” by NRTA, participant #26 mentioned that the word applies to Al Qaeda and its associates (Personal communication, 2009, August 14). This word was used by officials when describing some particular acts of violence such as suicide attacks.
The frame was also used in meetings between officials of states. For instance, in a news story on the European Commission delegation’s trip to Kabul, it was mentioned that the European nations were actively involved in the “war on terror” and reconstruction in Afghanistan (Ariana TV, 2009, July 26). In another news item, President Karzai pointed out that the “International community should target ‘terrorists’ hideouts in Pakistan” (NRTA, 2008, August 11).

4.4.3 Ethnic victimization.

This frame was present mainly in the accounts of ordinary Afghans, particularly Pashtuns. During my fieldwork, I encountered individuals who considered their ethnic group to be the victim in the conflict. The frame, “ethnic victimization,” although present in the accounts of the participants interviewed for this research, was not supported by the content analysis. According to this frame, an ethnic group, in this case Pashtuns, was being marginalized and the fighting was considered to be a conspiracy against them. This “ethnic victimization” frame recommended more government power for the ethnic group and more development work in areas where Pashtuns lived. Participant #61, a historian and political analyst, said:

It was a conspiracy when, in Bonn, the Taliban and Hekmatyar were not included. . . . On the other hand, those Tanzims [groups] who were included in the current government had control of the Ministry of Interior, National Security and Ministry of Defense. When they went to the Pashtun areas, particularly in Kandahar and Western provinces, they consider every Pashtun as a Talib and they started revenging and enmity against them and that was the time . . . that the
Taliban were given place [in the Pashtun areas]. (Personal communication, 2009, July 1)

A number of participants used the “ethnic victimization” frame to explain the role of media in the conflict. It appeared to them that some media outlets were against Pashtuns. Media “want to show that the situation in Kandahar is unstable” (Participant #32, personal communication, 2009, August 24). Participant #73, who was also critical of the terminologies used by media outlets, had concluded that the majority of private media reports were negative reports; they were broadcasting the killings in Kandahar or Khost because they were against the Pashtuns. He added that insecurity in the Pashtun areas meant to “introduce them [to the world] as wild,” so that no development projects would be implemented in those areas (Personal communication, 2009, July 19).

4.5 Journalistic Worldviews and News Construction

One of the main factors that influenced the choices that journalists were making in terms of receiving, organizing, and presenting news was their worldview -- how the reporters looked at their profession and role in the society. This is what I refer to as journalistic frames. In this dissertation, I identified four of these frames; they are “national interest,” “public interest (responsible journalism),” “freedom of expression,” and “advocacy for peace.” The first two were the dominant frames used by media outlets. The remaining two frames were supported by the journalists’ accounts but were not supported by the content analysis.
4.5.1 National interest.

The “national interest” frame was mainly used by the NRTA and Tehran’s Pashto Radio. In this frame, media and their journalists were supposed to keep in mind what is in the best interest of the nation when selecting, covering, and presenting issues of peace and conflict in the country. Therefore the selection, emphasis on, and exclusion of issues, events and actors were based on what was perceived as in the “national interest.” In this case, national interest tended to be defined more narrowly as “to serve the government.”

4.5.1.1 NRTA.

Journalists working with NRTA considered themselves to be responsible to the nation, which is why they worked for the government. As Participant #26 pointed out, “We have some limitations. It is because we have some responsibilities. . . . We have a national obligation both to the government and the nation” (Personal communication, 2009, August 14). For journalists using this frame, national interest was above “journalistic values;” Participant #31, who was pleased with the way NRTA covered the conflict, pointed out, “. . . sometimes journalists put aside their journalistic principles for national interests” (Personal communication, 2009, August 22).

I observed that the RTA did not broadcast a number of the stories that had been covered by other media outlets. In this regard, Participant #26, a manager at NRTA who had work experience with private media, said, “All the news stories that come we broadcast, the difference [with other media outlets] is that we keep the national interest into account” (Personal communication, 2009, August 14). Participant #31 further mentioned that working for the national interest was the main motive behind his joining the government media outlet. He said “It is the only incentive [working in the
government channels] that we keep [national interest]” (Personal communication, 2009, August 22).

When asked what national interest meant for them, participant #26 stressed that “national interest is respecting the geography of Afghanistan, the people of Afghanistan and national values of Afghanistan” (Personal communication, 2009, August 14). In this regard, Participant #31, drawing on the past civil war, said:

National interest is unity among Afghans. It is about Afghans living together. [The establishment of a broad-based government] is a major achievement for this country. This was not present in the past. . . . We [different ethnic groups] are working here together. Here we have programs in different languages. Pashtuns have their own programs for Pashtun areas. We have Dari, Uzbek and other languages programs and workers. (Personal communication, 2009, August 22)

4.5.1.2 Tehran’s Pashto Radio.

The national interest frame was also used by Tehran’s Pashto Radio. In this case, national interest meant Iranian foreign policy for Afghanistan. In general, all the journalists working with the regional media discussed Afghanistan’s national interest, which included the foreign policy of the state, as a filter covering issues of conflict in Afghanistan. Discussing the presence of the US troops in the region, participant #58 pointed out that Iran considered the presence of American troops to be a threat to the stability and peace of Iran (Personal communication, 2009, August 6).

Although Participant #57 thought that the news programs of foreign countries [here he included Iran’s media] were impartial, he stressed that, “Each media outlet designs and broadcasts programs according to its own policies . . . [and] for the benefit of
its country’s government” (Personal communication, 2009, July 29). Participant #56 connected the coverage of Afghan conflict by Tehran’s Pashto Radio to the Iranian opposition to Americans’ presence in the region. He said:

So it is possible that that based on this enmity, they broadcast some reports that are against the foreigners stationed in Afghanistan. It is because Iran is considering the United States and the West as its enemy. They do not want to support them or favor them. (Personal communication, 2009, September 8)

4.5.2 Public interest.

The international outlets broadcasting into and on behalf of Afghanistan as well as the local independent media used the “public interest (or responsible journalism)” frame. This approach to providing information to the public was considered the responsibility of journalists and media. The main argument was that media should inform the public about what was happening. However, participants working with both local and international media also mentioned the importance of keeping national interest in mind.

They were clear that following journalistic norms and providing information for the public was their job, and often pointed out the need for some kind of balance between national interest and freedom of expression. Participant #6, an experienced journalist in his mid-30s working with private media, said that “We are balancing, we do not use excessiveness, what we broadcast is based on people’s choices . . . and that is our difference” (Personal communication, 2008, July 10). Participant #70, a news editor and experienced journalist with an international channel, said that people wanted to be informed and that “media professionals have chosen to do this as their job” (Personal communication, 2009, July 23). Participant #71, an editor for an international radio
station who started out as a journalist, thought that the media was not favoring either the government or the opposition in the current fighting, he said:

An Afghan journalist has responsibility to his country’s national interest and to its people. Whatever is in interest of public, he is going to raise it. Or, the facts without considering that the news is against the government or opposition, for instance what would benefit the people and what people want [to be broadcast].

(Personal communication, 2009, July 22)

However, Participant #71 also mentioned that he received a number of threats via telephone from the Taliban who wanted him to cover their activities. He also mentioned that threats were not only coming from the Taliban but also from the government and other powerful figures.

4.5.3 Advocacy for peace.

Journalists supporting the use of an “advocacy for peace” frame believed that media should play an important role in bringing peace to the country. As for Afghanistan, Participant #3, a young and newly employed radio journalist in one of the provinces, pointed out “media should promote peace and create hatred for war” (personal communication, 2008, July 28). Participant #11, a young provincial reporter for one of the private radio stations, said that because radio is available in every house, it should be used to educate people (Personal communication, 2008, August 20). Participant #1, an experienced journalist, said programs can be produced to promote peace (Personal communication, 2008, July 26).

Although the journalistic frame of “advocacy for peace” was present in the accounts of journalists and broadcasting programs other than news bulletin, the frame
was not supported by the content analysis of news stories. In news stories related to the conflict, this journalistic frame was not used.

Though participants did not have a common solution to promoting peace in their news stories and bulletins, covering development work was considered a way to balance the amount of conflict news being produced. Participant #41 said, “If there is a major development project, then it is peace news. . . It is peace news in a way that influences people’s perception . . .” (Personal communication, 2009, August 3) Participant #10, an experienced journalist in his late 30s and a journalism trainer, considered having stories related to development as a way to balance the news bulletins. Talking about his experience, he said:

. . . I have a friend who has built his house on the Khirkhana Mountain . . . One evening, when I went to his house, I could see half of the city of Kabul. I asked my friend what a certain place was that I could see from the mountain. He told me that those were new buildings from the First Gulai to Sarayee Shamali areas in Kabul.

I was passing those streets two times every day . . . [being the head of a radio station in Kabul] I told my colleagues to prepare reports on the new buildings. They prepared more than ten reports on them. The first report was on the number of buildings, the second one was on the problem of electricity, the third one was on environment and the fourth one was on parking at these buildings; they prepared around 10 of these reports. These ten reports at least balanced the news bulletins for 10 days. (Personal communication, 2008, July 29)
In practice, such media outlets as the BBC and Salam Watandar did include development activities in their news. Salam Watandar had many stories on reconstruction and development projects in the provinces. Unlike other channels, the BBC rarely positioned violent incidents as its lead story.

4.5.4 Freedom of expression.

A few participants told me that they were allowed to cover issues because the constitution guaranteed freedom of expression. Participant #14, working with a private media outlet, mentioned that he was exercising his constitutional rights and following journalistic norms of free expression. He said that it did not matter whether the news was negative or positive (Personal communication, 2008, September 2).

Although participants argued that freedom of expression was abused by broadcasting media outlets, the “freedom of expression” frame was not supported by content analysis of broadcast news. It means that if this journalistic frame were applied, all newsworthy events and accounts of the parties in the conflict would be included in the news stories. Obviously, news that the Taliban offered was often not covered by media outlets.

The “freedom of expression” frame was, however, used by most of the Pashto news websites, based on my observation of these sites. In some of the online sites, particularly in the Pashto sites, the accounts of journalists, government, the Taliban, international media, the actors in the conflict were all presented. The news websites of Benawa and Larawbar, which are in Pashto, provided a space for all the parties in the conflict to present their version of the story.
4.6 Constraints

There were also a number of constraints or pressures that influenced the production and framing of news stories and bulletins. The constraints identified for this study were environmental pressures, organizational constraints, professional values, and individual beliefs and agency.

4.6.1 Environmental pressures.

A major problem that most of the journalists acknowledged had to do with the environment in which they were working. Among the pressures journalists faced was the dangerous nature of the conflict, lack of access to sites and the areas where fighting was taking place, and direct and indirect pressure from the parties involved in the conflict.

Since the post-September 11, 2001 conflict in Afghanistan was of an asymmetric nature, the strategies and methods used by the parties of the conflict made it difficult for journalists to cover all events. A number of participants told me that they were not sure about the type of the attacks, whether it was a single attack, a complex attack, an IED or something else. Participant #5, a local journalist in his 20s working with local radio in one of Southern provinces, explained:

For instance, if there is an explosion in the area of Zanukhel, we cannot go freely to take photos and make our report. We cannot do anything freely, because it is possible that there might be another bomb explosion near the incident. (Personal communication, 2008, July 29)

The difficulty in covering events directly was also one of the reasons for reporters using cellular phones to contact fighting parties and local populations when preparing their reports. Participant #11 acknowledged, “I contact local people and ask them about
the events. I do not often go to the area of the incident” (Personal communication, 2008, August 20).

The fighting was mainly happening in the rural areas, where access was difficult for the journalists. Therefore, they depended on the parties in the conflict to obtain the information. Participant #70, providing the example of fighting in a district of a province said:

Our problem is that no journalist can go there to report from the scene of what is happening, who is winning, what are the number of casualties, what are the losses of the local people, what people say . . . we depend on the three sides’ claims . . . the journalists are taking these three [sides’] claims and making the news. This is why standards are sacrificed. This is why the responsibility of media outlets in reporting the truth is overlooked. (Personal communication, 2009, July 23)

Participants in Kandahar province said that they were not able to travel outside the city. Participant #32 said: “A reporter cannot go to the places under the control of the Taliban. He does not trust the Taliban and, in many places, we cannot trust government officials” (Personal communication, 2009, August 24). There was also fear among the journalists in reporting any incidents related to security. Participant #70 pointed out that the killing of journalists during 2007 and 2008 had made them self-censors of their stories (Personal communication, 2009, July 23). As Participant #65, who was leading a media organization having reporters in different provinces, underscored, “Even if journalists know the truth, because of the threats, they cannot come out and say it” (Personal communication, 2009, August 5). Participant #35 observed that even eye-
witnesses and local populations, because of the threats posed by the warring parties, do not want to speak about the events (Personal communication, 2009, August 26).

In addition to government threats, the ISAF and the Taliban were also putting pressure on the media outlets and individual journalists. Few participants said they had been detained by the ISAF, but many said that they received threat messages from the Taliban. Participants working with NRTA pointed out that, because they were working with the government channel, they feared that the Taliban would capture and kill them. However, participant #20, an international staff member of a media organization who had trained journalists in Afghanistan, mentioned that “the Taliban want to get their story out, so they are (or are becoming) more cooperative with journalists” (Personal communication, 2008, July 30).

4.6.2 Organizational constraints.

Organizational constraints were some of the contributing factors shaping media messages. However, the importance and influence of particular constraints varied across media outlets. Participants from the NRTA and Tehran Pashto Radio considered some of these constraints noteworthy in the construction of news, while those working with the international and private media found them less so. Organizational constraints included control/ownership, organization culture, gatekeeping, financial and administrative issues, lack of professionalism, and training.

For the NRTA, all the participants acknowledged that their outlet was directly controlled by the Ministry of Information and Culture, and that the government was exercising control of the content of their outlet. Participant #32, working with a private media organization, mentioned that the NRTA acted as “a loud speaker” for the
government (Personal communication, 2009, August 24). Some of the participants, working with NRTA, mentioned the difficulties that they had with the government; for example, they were notable to convince the MoIC and the President’s Office to change the order of news stories, by having news ordered based on newsworthiness of the items rather than official hierarchies. The NRTA was still presenting the news in its old order: the president’s meetings followed by the meetings of the chief justice, followed by activities of the parliament.

The ownership and control of media was also a factor that participants working with Tehran’s Pashto Service mentioned as determining news construction, though not all participants working with the medium agreed. When asked if they were talking with the Taliban or discussed how the Taliban should be presented in their stories, Participants #56 and #58 (Personal communication, 2009, September 8; 2009, July 6) of Tehran’s Pashto radio said that their central office directly contacted the Taliban and they did not know about it. Though participants working with international media did not mention any issue related to the control and ownership of their media outlets, some issues came up in the way topics were selected. For instance, the BBC gave more space to the British involvement in Afghanistan and to Britain politics when it related to discussions about Afghanistan.

Related to control and ownership of the private media, the researcher observed cases showing how the owners were influential. For instance, Ariana TV was broadcasting the activities of its owner in the end of every news bulletin. Aiana TV, another private channel belonging to Rashid Dostum, was critical of the central government and President Karzai; however, after Dostum announced his support for
President Karzai’s candidacy in 2009, the outlet started supporting the government and President Karzai’s policies.

The role of the editor, as gatekeeper, differed from one organization to another. Participant #44, working with a provincial NRTA channel, mentioned that the Directorate of Broadcasting at the NRTA suggested specific programs and topics to be covered (Personal communication, 2009, August 6). Working with NRTA, Participant #30 confirmed that the editors were the persons deciding what needed to be covered. “Our editors are deciding what should be covered and they decide in the meetings what should be the length, based on the importance of the items” (Personal communication, 2009, August 18).

This was less often the case with private media outlets. Participants working with private media emphasized that they were following journalistic norms in covering issues of conflict in Afghanistan though some of them mentioned that, in the beginning, their work was inspected. Participant #4, working with a private channel, said something similar: in the beginning, their reports were checked by their Deputy Director. He said that about one and a half month later he was told that he can be trusted, and his reports were broadcast directly (Personal communication, 2008, July 29).

Participants working with the international media also noted that editorial meetings were when and where the issues to be covered were decided. However, they pointed out that related to the news on conflict, they were following journalistic norms. Similarly, participants working with Tehran Pashto Radio also mentioned that they follow journalistic norms in news coverage.
Financial and administrative issues were cited by participants working with NRTA and some local media outlets, particularly those working in provinces. The NRTA participants said that they are paid as government servants. They mentioned that compared to the private media, NRTA’s employees were paid much less. Some participants also mentioned that because of these economic issues, some of their colleagues left NRTA to work with private media.

Lack of capacity was another issue that most of the participants working with NRTA and private media would mention as a constraint influencing how news was shaped. Participants #53, #54 and #55 (Personal communication, 2009, September 8 & 9), who trained hundreds of private media practitioners, said that further training was needed to have professional journalism in the country. Participants working with NRTA also pointed out the generational gap within their organization. However, this was not an issue with private media outlets.

4.6.3 Journalistic norms.

Participants working with international and private media outlets, as well as Tehran Pashto Radio, considered journalistic norms to be the determining factor in the newsgathering and news construction process. They considered the journalists’ job to be one of “truth” finding and reporting. They believed that their responsibility was to inform the public by providing accurate and timely information. Participant #10, an experienced journalist who led a media organization, specifically mentioned that journalists considered “balance, accuracy, and neutrality of the subjects” (Personal communication, 2008, July 29).
These three norms were cited by most of the participants as factors kept in mind by journalists working with international and private media. However, a number of limitations were also observed in the application of these norms, particularly applying them in reporting conflict.

The application of journalistic norms, in particular the balance, was considered to be a way of distinguishing “independent” media from government-owned media. Participant #20, who was involved in training local journalists, pointed out that journalists trained by Western organizations, such as the BBC, Radio Liberty, and Pajhwok News Agency know to be “fair” and “balanced” and follow these principles (Personal communication, 2008, July 30). Most of the stories, broadcast by the private and international media as well as Tehran’s Pashto Radio had the two sides of the conflict as their main sources. Participant #10, underscoring the importance of balancing, said:

For balance we cover both sides of the story both in the social and security issues. For the social issues, if people have any problem, we will get the response from the officials. We will have people’s side and officials’ side. For security issues we will have the Taliban and the government sides. As journalists, we never include our comments in the news. (Personal communication, 2008, July 29)

Participants #6, a journalist with a private media outlet and Participant #17, a journalist working with an international media outlet (Personal communication, 2008, August 10; 2008, August 7) described their job as presenting the two sides and leaving judgment to the public. “Journalists only report; they do not provide ‘any judgment,’” said Participant #6, the editor of a local radio channel in Kabul. Related to covering the conflict, Participant #17 and #73 (Personal communication, 2008, August 7; 2009,
August 19) said that reporting about conflict, what he called war reporting, was easier and faster to compile. Participant #17 explained:

War reporting is easy. . . . One is that you ask the witnesses at the scene and the other is that government says that this many are killed and then talk about the opposition and ask them how many of you are killed or how many you killed.

(Personal communication, 2008, August 7)

However, some of the participants thought other parties should also be considered. Participant #23, who works with a newly established TV channel, pointed out that there could be more than two parties or sides of the story. For him, balance demands that these other parties are taken into account (Personal communication, 2008, August 2).

Participant #2, a young reporter working for a private television channel in one of the conflict hit provinces, argued that all three parties should be represented in each report: the Taliban, the government, and the local people or eye-witnesses (Personal communication, 2008, July 27). With respect to eye-witnesses, participant #1 said:

[Reporters] know to find victims or relatives of victims. When something happens, such as a suicide attack, besides taking footage and pictures, we also talk with eye-witnesses and take their voices. We ask them the what and how of the event. Their explanation is interesting for our viewers. (Personal communication, 2008, July 26)

Unlike some of the participants working with independent and international media who reported threats from warring parties, Participants #48 and #42 (Personal communication, 2009, September 3; 2009, August 4) said that it is because of balancing that they did not receive any threats from the warring sides. Participant #40 also
mentioned that if a journalist did not keep the balance, problems could happen (Personal communication, 2009, August 2). However, some of the participants agreed that there were limitations to the application of the concept.

Impartiality, as defined by participants, meant not taking a side. This was another principle that most of those working with the international and non-government media would emphasize. Participant #71 said, “Some of the media are independent and do not take side” (Personal communication, 2009, July 22). A number of participants argued that like balance, impartiality or detachment made it possible for them to work in the war zones. The head of a local radio station, Participant #47, who also argued that journalists covered what happened, pointed out:

If a journalist is impartial, I think he does not have problem. If he keeps himself impartial, he would never have problem. Only security is a problem . . . all the sides in the conflict, whether it is government or the Taliban, would not make a problem for them since they are keeping balance and [their] impartiality. There would be no problem. Until now, we did not have any problem. (Personal communication, 2009, September 2)

However, some participants thought that, because media were operating in the areas under the government’s control, they are taking the side of the government. Participant #35 said:

My security is taken by the government. The government is providing me with facilities. Of course it [the government side] is more important. This government is backed by the International Community. Besides providing me with security, they have also provided me with the opportunity to work. The Opposition is such
a group that does not have respect for any sort of principles. (Personal communication, 2009, August 26)

Accuracy was another principle that most of the journalists working with both international and national media mentioned as a principle to be followed in the news. Related to reporting events, Participant #71 explained how they would confirm the event before broadcasting it; he said:

When the Taliban claim or take responsibility of an action, Azadi Radio would try to confirm it by contacting the government officials. They would get the government’s view before broadcasting the news. (Personal communication, 2009, July 22)

There were also limitations in the application of this principle. Participant #35 working in Kandahar, a province where both sides tried to expand their influence, said that though the Taliban provide accurate information and details about the events related to the casualties, the Taliban rarely accept their casualties (Personal communication, 2009, August 26). The government side also hides the events and number of casualties, said Participant #72: “If there are two or three reporters in a province, they may have different reports in terms of figures” (Personal communication, 2009, July 20). The problem related to confirming the claims; the government was not always giving them information and confirming events and figures. Participant #2 explained:

Right now, I have a message [SMS] from Qari Yousuf [a Taliban spokesman] who says that they have attacked . . . . The problem for journalists is that [government officials] are not confirming.
When a journalist gets a tip for a story, he tries to go there. If we cannot go, then we contact government officials. However, when [government officials] know that a journalist is calling, they cut the phone. This is a problem. (Personal communication, 2008, July 27)

Related to the Taliban, Participant #65 pointed out that they would not answer if the news was not in their favor (Personal communication, 2009, September 5). Participant #35 also mentioned that sometimes the Taliban’s phones are turned off and therefore they could not be reached. (Personal communication, 2009, August 26)

4.6.4 Individuals’ beliefs and agency.

Although environmental pressures, organization constraints, and professional values remained important in shaping media messages, individual beliefs and agency also played a major role in the construction of news stories and media content. Agency in this case is defined as an individual’s free will to do things. In terms of individual beliefs and agency, education background, experiences and motivation were important elements in shaping the news stories.

Most of the participants interviewed in this study were educated in modern systems and were supporting modern life styles. These participants’ knowledge and understanding was influenced by their education, and by having been exposed to societies governed by rule of law and having modern effective government institutions. This background can thus be assumed as one of the reasons participants supported the law and order and development as peace frames. Being educated in a modern educational institution, few journalists would agree with the Taliban’s perception of Jihad.
Participants’ backgrounds and experiences of war was another major factor. Most of the participants had experienced the necessity of taking refuge or being displaced during the war years. Therefore, they were supportive of the law and order frame. Furthermore, most of the participants were young with no memory of peace in Afghanistan. Therefore, these journalists were inclined to support and work for peace, though most of them understood their limitations.

Participants’ worldview on the role of journalism in modern society and their professional experiences working in its institutions were also influential factors. For instance, NRTA’s participants, many of whom had former work experience with international and private media, mentioned that they were working for change in NRTA.

Their personal interests and motivation undoubtedly played an important role in the way they covered and shaped their media content. Participants were talking about how to balance war news with peace (development) news. However, most of the creative ways that participants suggested applied to radio and TV programming rather than just news. For instance, Participants #77, a journalist in his late 20s working with a private media outlet, and Participant #72, a journalist in his early 30s working with an international radio network, mentioned that they worked on a peace radio series.

Participant #72, who had work experience in a war-torn province and who was working in Kabul at the time of this research, said he would report more on social issues (personal communication, 2009, July 20). Talk shows and soft program formats were considered by journalists to also contribute to the peace process. As Participant #6 said:

To tell you in simple language, as I work in radio, I run many programs and [I] can broadcast different angles on peace and war. I can show people what is in
peace and what is in war and ask people which one they like. If there is war, in fact, people are destroyed, their brothers are killed, their sons are killed, their daughters are killed, their properties are destroyed and they lose their house. On the other hand, if there is peace, they will have everything with them. (Personal communication, 2008, August 10)

4.7 Conclusion

The different sides in the conflict in Afghanistan promoted their own frames. The government of Afghanistan and the Coalition Forces each used and promoted the law and order frame and the Taliban used the Jihad frame. Except for Pashto Radio of Tehran, the media in this study adopted the “law and order” frame as their main frame for security-related issues. For peace, they used the “development as peace” frame.

Tehran’s Pashto Radio most frequently used the “occupation is failure” frame, although they have also used development as peace as a frame. Another frame used by nearly all media outlets, at different degrees, was the “civilian victims” frame. The “peace through negotiation,” and “terrorism” frames were only partially supported by the content analysis. The “peace through negotiation” frame was present in journalists and public accounts; however, the “terrorism” frame was only present in a few participant accounts. On the other hand, the “ethnic victimization” frame was present in a number of journalist accounts and those of ordinary people but it was not supported by the content analysis.

Though media outlets sometimes used the same frames, there were differences. Among the reasons for these differences were the filters, what I called journalistic frames, applied during the selection, production, and presentation of news. The two
dominant journalistic frames used by journalists were “national interest” and “public interest (responsible journalism).” The NRTA and Tehran’s Pashto Radio used the national interest frame. On the other hand, the international and private media used public interest or responsible journalism frame. The two other frames “advocacy for peace” and “press freedom” were only partially supported. They were present in the participant accounts—“advocacy for peace” was present in most of the accounts and “press freedom” was only mentioned by a few participants—but were not supported by the content analysis.

Among these constraints, environmental pressures were mentioned and discussed by nearly all participants across media outlets. These pressures included the nature of the conflict, its location and the parties in the conflict. The organizational constraints were cited by those interviewed from the NRTA and, to some extent, by Tehran’s Pashto Radio. These constraints included control/ownership, gatekeeper, financial and professional issues. Participants working with the private and international media revealed the extent to which they were guided in their news construction by journalistic norms, including the norms of news balance, accuracy, and impartiality. Individual beliefs and agency was recognized as also playing a role in shaping media content.
Chapter 5: Elections, Violence and the Media

5.1 Introduction

In June 2009, two days before I reached Kabul to begin my second round of fieldwork, the two-month campaign for presidential and provincial-council elections officially started. When held on August 20, 2009, the elections came at a time when the violence was the worst since the fall of the Taliban in 2001 (UNAMA, 2010, March). The deteriorating security was a major news issue in Afghanistan.

About three weeks before the elections, Participant #76, a security official for voter registration and elections, explained to me that the registration process was being conducted in different phases, based on the security situation in different parts of Afghanistan. He noted that they were expecting more attacks in the weeks ahead and during the polling day (Personal communication, 2009, July 30). Unlike the previous elections, this time, the ISAF had a supporting role, and Afghan forces were leading in providing security. The International Community was taking a role in assisting the process of establishing a “legitimate government” (UNDP, 2009, p. 11).

In this chapter, I present a case study of media coverage during a time of violence when a national election is in progress. The chapter discusses the level of conflict occurring in the summer of 2009 before and during the polling period. Post-elections coverage is also examined.

5.2 Campaigning & Violence

Calling the elections of 2009 a national event, media outlets actively promoted the process. Not only did the media broadcast information about the elections, they also encouraged people to participate. Stations aired special programs, interviews, PSAs and
elections-related content. As the polling day approached, airtime was increasingly
devoted to election coverage.

News stories about the elections informed the public about gatherings in Kabul
and in the provinces in support of different candidates. There were a large number of
candidates. Forty candidates were standing for the presidency of Afghanistan, with two
women among them. By the election day, 36 candidates remained in the race. Some
3,300 candidates were competing for the 420 provincial council seats.

Security remained a top concern. Quoting official sources, the media were
relaying reassuring messages that the government would provide security during
elections day. Officials said that those districts under control of the Taliban would be
taken and security would be provided. The assurances and comments of ISAF officials
and heads of states of countries having troops in Afghanistan were announced. The BBC
Pashto service, for instance, broadcast the U.S. President’s comments saying “his country
and other allies are trying to provide security until the 20th of August, when the elections
are held in Afghanistan” (BBC Pashto, 2009, July 12).

A number of stories discussing worries of people about the security situation were
aired. Many of the participants, interviewed before the elections, also expressed their
concern. Questions about the participation of women and the lack of public awareness
about the elections were raised.

In a number of provinces, including Helmand, Ghazni, Herat, and Kunduz,
military operations were conducted. Though it was said that these operations were
planned before the elections campaign, their purpose was cited as providing security for
voter registrations and elections processes.
When Khanishin district was taken from the Taliban following the “Khanjar” [dagger] operation, the Ministry of Defense announced that voter registration centers would be opened in the district (Tolo TV, 2009, July 5), and the IEC started registration for the elections (Tolo TV, 2009, July 16). Though most of the news stories presented these operations as helpful in providing security, Mashhad radio (2009, July 5) interviewed two MPs who were pessimistic that any deployment of additional U.S. forces in Helmand would help in securing the province.

During the campaigning period, security remained a major issue for the candidates. The government said it would provide security for the candidates and their campaigns; for each candidate, ten policemen were assigned. The Ministry of Defense also promised air transportation for the candidates (BBC Pashto, 2009, June 4), though most of the national candidates visited only a few provinces. The top four candidates, as the researcher followed their campaigns, traveled at least to the major cities. Among them was Ramazan Bashardost, who rejected having security guards, and traveled to 27 out of 34 provinces of Afghanistan.

The presidential candidates were from different backgrounds and ideologies, representing different regimes over the prior half of a century in Afghanistan. There were candidates who had worked under the Taliban (1996-2001), Mujahideen (1992-1996), the PDPA (1978-1992) and the era before 1978. A number of candidates were educated at the Ph.D. level at Western universities. There were candidates who had religious backgrounds; a number did not have any formation education.
The large number of candidates made it difficult to understand and compare candidates’ positions on major issues. It was usually easier to identify their stance on major issues based on their background and ideology. All agreed that an end to the conflict in Afghanistan could not be won militarily. Negotiation with the Taliban and bringing peace was at the top of their lists. A consensus emerged among the candidates that the only way to end the conflict was through dialogue and negotiation.

The four top candidates—President Hamid Karzai, Dr. Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai, Dr. Abdullah Abdullah and Dr. Ramazan Bashardost—all stressed negotiation with the Taliban. Peace talks were a prominent part of their future plans. During the campaigning, the announcement of a ceasefire in Badghes by the government and Ahmad Wali Karzai’s claim that he was negotiating with the Taliban in Kandahar, made top news.
President Karzai, the IEC and the UN called on the Taliban to take part in the elections. In their statements, the Taliban rejected any kind of negotiation and urged people to boycott the August elections. In a press release (Afghan Islamic Press News Agency [AIPNA], 2009, July 30), the Taliban called the election process an “American game,” and vowed to interrupt the process. “There are few points for the Muslims of Afghanistan and the Mujahedin,” it said.

The entire Afghan nation must boycott this so-called American process. To achieve real independence, they must go to Jihadi trenches instead of going to fake election centres, and through resistance and jihad, they must free their invaded country from the invaders. (AIPNA, 2009, July 30)

The statement mentioned that the Taliban are planning attacks. A day before the polling, the roads would be blocked (AIPNA, 2009, July 30). Although the international, regional and local media referred to the statement, in saying that the Taliban would boycott the elections and attempt to disrupt them, the statement itself was not broadcast.

In a report by Tolo TV, the spokesman for IEC said that elections were the best way to form a government. The report included the quote: “Once again, it shows that the Taliban are stuck with their retrogressive ideology and they are dependent on Al-Qa’idah” (Tolo TV, 2009, July 31). As the polling day approached, worries about security increased. Even the IEC warned of postponing elections if the security situation did not improve (“Azadi Radio, 2009, June 22).
When I contacted friends, family members and their relatives living in villages, they said that the Taliban were distributing night letters and ordering people to not participate. In Kabul, even a week before the polling day, some people were saying that the elections would be postponed. The threats and concerns were not the same all over the country. In Jalalabad City, for instance, I saw a lively campaign, with gatherings and posters, even though participants in the city were expressing worry about the potential lack of security.

5.3 Getting Nearer

After returning from Jalalabad, in the morning of August 5, 2009 around 5:00 am, two missiles hit Kabul. The sound of the first missile together with the voices of children and women and breaking glass woke me. One of the missiles came down in the vicinity. I heard the second missile, although it was not clear where it came down. A child and an aged man were wounded.
Later, when I wanted to go back to the bed, since it was early in the morning and there was little noise, I could hear a couple of women in the neighborhood talking. One of the women said that “there will be no peace in Afghanistan,” while the second woman said that “It is becoming just like Dr. Najibullah’s time.” This made me think about my years in Afghanistan, and the impact of three decades of war. Conflict had influenced the way I and everyone else understood and made meaning of such incidents. However, concerns about security increased when the polling day was approaching.

NATO’s Secretary General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, issued reassurances that “NATO has sent enough troops to Afghanistan to help ensure security of the 20 August presidential elections in Afghanistan (NRTA, 2009, August 5). Media outlets also raised questions about the security measures taken by the government. For instance, when a suicide attack hit an area between the ISAF’s Headquarters, the American Embassy, Ministry of Transportation and RTA on August 15, 2009, the media questioned whether the government was indeed able to provide security to the thousands of polling centers around the country.

While all media outlets covered the incident, the researcher was focused on what the outlets were reporting. When he met journalists from NRTA, the same day that the suicide attack happened, he found them to be critical of the private media, whom they said were “playing a negative role.” Participant #28, one of the most experienced journalists working for decades with NRTA, emphasized that “Private media has a negative role and they will broadcast the incident throughout the day[in every bulletin] and that is the negative work that media is doing.” Instead of broadcasting such footage,”
he said, media should “encourage people” to participate in the elections (Personal communication, 2009, August 15).

The Azadi radio broadcast an interview with Zmarai Bashri, spokesman for the Interior Ministry, who said that three people died and 85 were wounded in the incident. The ISAF revealed that two of its staff members were injured, and the American Embassy said that none of their diplomats was hurt. The Azadi news story also referred to the Taliban’s spokesman, Zabiullah Mojahid, who took responsibility saying that 25 foreigners were killed in their attack. Later in the bulletin, the commentator mentioned that “Government officials rejected their claim” (Azadi Radio, 2009, 15 August). In this case, the NRTA was the only channel that depended solely on government accounts of the incident. Other media outlets provided the numbers referred to the Taliban’s account and some outlets also interviewed eyewitness and wounded people.

The campaign period ended at 12:00am on August 17, 2009 and the silence period was announced. On Tuesday, August 18, 2009, unlike normal days, there was little traffic in the city. Two missiles hit the city in the morning and the UN announced “white city,” which meant that there would be no movement of UN vehicles in the city. In ordinary days, it would take me hours to reach Kabul University; however, that day it only took him 10 minutes. On the way, I asked the driver what he was thinking about the emptiness of the streets. The driver, a bearded man in his mid-40s, replied: “Did not you listen to radio? There were rockets, not one but four.” He added “people are afraid, and that is why the city is empty;” the driver worried that he would not be able to earn his “bread,” i.e., that people would not be out that day needed his services.
Later, a suicide attack on Jalalabad Road was reported. The researcher was at Kabul University where there were rumors that a number of suicide attackers had entered the city. That night, it was announced that seven people were killed in the Jalalabad Road attack. Unlike the one that took place in Chora district of Uruzgan province the same day, the Road attack was covered by all the media outlets. The camera crews of several TV channels went to the site and interviewed eyewitnesses. Reported hours later, the attack in Chora district, quoted only by a provincial official; there were no eyewitnesses or other parties interviewed.

Media outlets continued to promote the elections process. Radio Azadi interviewed the head of the Islamic Scholars Council of Khost Province, who emphasized that the elections were in line with the Sharia Law. Radio Azadi also reported about Farhad Darya’s concerts in a number of provinces, encouraging participation in the elections.

A day before the elections, when the researcher went out, he found the city empty. On the same day, the Taliban had attacked a bank, and other violent incidents were reported. It was the 90th anniversary of Afghan Independence, but not celebrated as before. When the older generation talks about peace, they often bring up the example of the day before the takeover of the PDPA in 1978. In 2008, during the Independence Day parade, the Taliban attacked the events and fired from a nearby building on Karzai and other top officials. The chaotic scenes were broadcast by media outlets.

As part of promoting and encouraging participation in the elections, Radio Azadi devoted two hours of its time to a live program on “how to vote.” In the program, two guests were invited and listeners were calling in and participating. Discussing security,
one of the guests stressed that Afghan should participate in the election. However, a listener called and presented a different perspective. He said:

There is a question of the independence of Afghanistan; there is a question of the colonization of the country. There is a question of corruption and that is why the Taliban do not agree, why they brought out all their forces to halt [the elections]. And it has already worked; you will see tomorrow not more than 10 percent of the population participating. (Azadi Radio, 2009, August 19)

Although it was not possible to learn the identity of the listener, whether he was a Taliban member or a sympathizer, it was clear that he was talking in line with the Taliban stance. Another of the guests in the talk show responded: “See other people’s progress, but the fighting has not finished and look [we are] at the 21 Century . . . we are still fighting” (Azadi Radio, 2009, August 19). The radio program presented the two opposing perspectives that existed in the society, the very arguments used by the two sides in the conflict.

The media outlets also invited security officials. The night before the elections, the BBC had a detailed interview with the Interior Minister on the security situation in the country and the measures taken to provide security for the polling centers. The broadcast reminded them that:

The opposition has increased its propaganda and warned that it will disrupt the elections and create fear among people. The Afghan government has given assurance to the people and called upon them to participate in tomorrow’s historical elections to decide their future. (BBC Pashto, 2009, August 19)
In the interview, the Interior Minister did not reject the possibility of attacks, but he tried to assure that there would be enough forces and measures to hold the elections in secure circumstances. The bulletin also mentioned the BBC reporters’ coverage on the preparation in the provinces.

In a statement, the Afghan Foreign Ministry asked that national and international journalists and their affiliated stations not cover any violent acts occurring during election day, “to ensure the wide participation of the Afghan people” (Azadi Radio, 2009, August 19).

This decision was, however, criticized by the UN, the U.S. government and such other organizations as Reporters without Borders and the Independent Journalist Association of Afghanistan. The U.S. spokeswoman Fleur Cowan said “free media reporting is directly linked to the credibility of the elections” (Faiez & Vogt, 2009, August 19). Reporters without Border said that the decision "not only violates media freedom but also the fundamental right of Afghan citizens to know what is going on in their country.” Rahimullah Samandar, head of the Independent Journalist Association of Afghanistan, said “We will not obey this order. We are going to continue with our normal reporting and broadcasting of news” (Faiez & Vogt, 2009, August 19).

Such media organizations as the BBC rejected the restrictions, saying that, "We have a duty to our audiences to report on the situation in Afghanistan fairly and accurately, and we will continue to do so" (The Guardian, 2009, August 20). A number of local media also rejected the mandate, arguing that Afghans have the right to get information about security during their elections day (Azadi Radio, 2009, August 19).
5.4 Election Day

Like Independence Day, polling day was calm and quiet. Early in the morning, when I went out there were only a few cars on the roads. Security forces were checking cars on the main roads. The day before, people in Kabul had been advised not to use private transportation. The attacks in the days ahead of polling and fear of more violence made most people stay home.

Returning home, the first thing that I did was to turn on the radio. Since it was early, I tuned into the BBC and Good Morning Afghanistan. Later, at 7:00 AM, I started listening to Radio Azadi, which had a special program on the elections, airing from 7:00 AM to 7:00 PM. The joint Pashto-Dari program included mainly coverage of voting sites, some press conferences, and interviews with government officials. Every two hours, the radio had guests, called “experts,” who gave analysis and perspective. All other channels were devoting airtime to the elections as well.

In addition to providing information about the elections, Radio Azadi frequently mentioned that strict security measures were being taken all over the country. It noted that thousands of national and Coalition Forces were deployed trying to provide security. This was repeated in at the top of each hour. In an interview with Radio Azadi, Zahir Azimi said:

[We have] a well-organized plan and 300,000 national and international security forces to provide security for 6600 polling sites. We had explosions in Zabul and Kandahar. They did not have any casualties. . . . Participation of the people of Afghanistan in the elections means they say yes to peace, democracy and development and say no to terror, suicide attacks and foreign interference.
people have the courage to say yes to a national process for the national interest. Fortunately, right now as I am speaking to you, we are connected to all the centers and people are going towards these centers and casting their votes. . . . People of Afghanistan have the pride and courage that whatever happens they will go and vote. (Azadi Radio, 2009, August 20)

According to Azadi Radio’s reporter in Kandahar, there were not that many people participating in the elections. When the reporter was talking live about the election process in Kandahar, he did not say anything about the security in the region. However, he did mention some technical problems (Azadi Radio, 2009, August 20). In Ghazni province, Azadi Radio reporters said that people feared that the Taliban might attack. He said “Though security was provided by the police and [other] security forces and there was no security problem, people were not coming to the polling stations. In the district of Deh Yak, which is near to Ghazni City, no one went to vote” (Azadi Radio, 2009, August 20). The guest for the first two hours of the program said that based on the reporters’ accounts, this would raise questions about the legitimacy of the elections.

Azadi Radio also mentioned that the ban did not allow media outlets to report about violence during the polling day. It added “the government warned violators that the outlet would be closed and, [in case of being foreign] journalists would be expelled.” It also mentioned that the UN and the United States condemned such measures, saying that Afghans have the right to get information about security during their elections day.

It was around nine o’clock when I turned on the TV. All the TV channels had special programs on elections. The RTA was broadcasting the coverage of the elections and national songs. Ariana and Tolo TV channels also had special programs covering the
elections, and were giving out information about security measures and the deployment of Afghan and international forces. Ariana TV called the elections “an important and decisive day in the history of Afghanistan” (Ariana TV, 2009, August 20). Journalists in Kabul and several provinces reported live on the process.

The NRTA presented the elections as a success story. There was no coverage of violence. News was based on official accounts, showed that people were participating in large numbers and supporting the process. Participant #31, a young journalist having work experience of about three years with NRTA, had been sent by NRTA to report from an area in Kabul. In his interview, he said that he encountered two incidents. One was a small explosion near a polling center in a local school and a shooting in the local police office. He did not cover the incidents since he was observing the ban imposed by the government. He said,

I contacted the office, they told me that it was not needed and that I could go to another voting center. I then went to Noor Mohmmad Shah Mena where I saw people coming to vote. Though there were problems, they did not prevent people from coming to the polling center. Women, youth, all were coming to vote.

(Personal communication, 2009, August 22)

Participant #31 said in the interview that he could have reported the incidents, but he had “a kind of feeling” that he did not want to cover [security] incidents fast. “I did not want that.” He added,

I wanted to encourage people to participate in the process because it is a national participatory process and a national task. Compared to a bomb that will keep ten people from going to the polling, if we have ten more people to participate (the
whole country) would benefit. I wanted to give preference to positive developments. (Personal communication, 2009, August 22)

Most of the channels that I watched or listened to were reporting about the technical issues, and not about the violence. Interestingly, some anchors mentioned this on air. For instance, when a journalist of Azadi Radio reported by phone, the anchor of the program asked him, on air, not to report on the “things” prohibited by the Foreign Ministry.

In a number of cases, when reporters discussed security incidents, they were interrupted by the anchors. A reporter from Kunduz province was interrupted as follows:

[Reporter] I am in Sheer Khan, though there are some missile attacks from the opposition, we see people are coming to election sites to cast their votes… but still if we compare it to the last election and related insecurity . . . [interrupted by the Anchor] . . . Are there any technical problems or not?

[Reporter] In some of the places, there were problems with machines but they are not that significant. In some other places, because of the threats from the opposition, people have been asked not to mark their fingers with ink . . . it is expected that in some of the places people will not vote. (Azadi Radio, 2009, August 20)

Later, when I talked to the reporter, he said that he was surprised when those in the main office told him not to report on the fighting. Reporters working with the Independent media had similar stories. Participant #34, a private channel reporter in a province, was cut off when he was reporting from a province about the missiles that hit
the city. Later, I asked him why he was cut when he was reporting during the election’s day. He said:

Exactly, I do not know but I know this much that the night before the elections, we were told that the President ordered the media not to broadcast news about the fighting. But the International Center for Journalism, from Kabul, told us that we decided that it is the right of the people and we have to broadcast all news whether on security or insecurity. Therefore, we decided to broadcast it. (Personal communication, 2009, August 28)

Other journalists reporting about insecurity in their respective areas considered the low turnout to be the result of threats by the Taliban. One of the reasons for lower turnouts among women was considered to be the security threat.

Some of the reporters interviewed thought that there was no news on that day other than news about violence. Participant #48—although later said that he was fine not to report for a day because of the national interest, he was discontent with his media outlet—was of this opinion:

They told me not to give the security account, but there was no news without insecurity. Shall I say that the elections started in 7:00 O’clock, the governor cast his vote and no one else came [to the polling station] because there was shooting . . . ? Because there were no people, I could not say that people were coming [to the polling station] in groups. Anyway, the ban on journalists was against the principles of journalism. (Personal communication, 2009, September 3)

However, further along in his interview, this reporter seemed to soften his objection. He agreed that the ban was based on the national interest, and was only from
7:00AM to 4:00PM. He said that if they covered the violent incidents, those who participated in the polling would not come. I talked to a number of journalists who considered the measures by the government appropriate and effective. Participant #46, a graduate of Kabul University and director of a newly established channel, said:

It was a day of pride, since it was a day of voting. We had to go to the voting boxes; therefore, I was feeling responsibility not to create worries among people by broadcasting negative news. Possibly all the media outlets did the same. In the press conference, the directorate of security thanked us. (Personal communication, 2009, September 3)

Participants #46 and #47 mentioned that they had received calls from their listening (viewing) audience. However, they could not use this information because they did not broadcast “rumors.” It could have created fear among people. Participant #35, a journalist working with Azadi Radio, said that the government made the right decision, even though there were threats of the Taliban. He said:

From the morning when the radio started until four in the evening, around 20 rockets hit Kandahar and around 12 or 13 explosions happened here, so the government’s opposition until evening put a lot of pressure on us. That is why we did not broadcast all the news. We said that it is an order . . . they said that if you do not broadcast our news then whatever happens to you we would not be responsible for that. (Personal communication, 2009, August 25)

Participant #32, who worked with non-government media in Kandahar, observed that “unprofessional” journalists were the ones who covered the “Taliban’s propaganda.” He said:
Even before the elections, some media were broadcasting the propaganda of the Taliban in all the cities and districts [of the Southwest] . . . we could not find five persons to go to the election sites. . . . This shows how irresponsible and unprofessional media and reporters are. This unprofessionalism paved the way for such things [insecurity]. (Personal communication, 2009, August 24)

On elections day, a number of reporters trying to cover a shooting event between the government and some armed men in the Shah Shahid area of Kabul were detained and were alleged to have been beaten by the security forces. The BBC reported that more than 10 journalists were arrested and that one of its correspondents was also among them. Participant #46, working with a local TV station in Kunduz, pointed out that, for his own safety and the station’s security, he was armed (Personal communication, 2009, September 3).

Just after the polling, Kai Eide, the UN Special Representative, announced that the election day was successful and that the Taliban’s attacks were not that serious. Later, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown said that, in 30 years, it was the first time that Afghans had conducted elections. Anders Fogh Rasmussen, the NATO chief, said that participation in the election showed that people wanted democracy (BBC, 2009, August 20). After the polling, in a number of press conferences, Afghan officials said that the elections were successful. Though the Taliban’s account was not presented in media outlets, on their website, they mentioned that their attacks had been successful in closing many centers and stopping the polling process. They mentioned that there were attacks all over Afghanistan (Shahamat website, 2009, August 20).
The NRTA broadcast national songs and celebrated the polling day as a success. Quoting official sources, Radio Azadi and the BBC were reporting that the elections were successful. In its 7:00PM news, BBC Pashto reported that the elections were held in all the districts. The voting was framed as “satisfactory” (BBC Pashto, 2009, August 20). There was some criticism of the process. Tolo TV, in a news story, mentioned that in Kandahar province only a small number of people voted (Tolo TV, 2009, August 20). The station also mentioned that there had been violence in the city, with missiles and explosions.

![Figure 8: The Streets of Kabul were Empty after the Polling](image.png)

Although the voting time had been extended for another hour (until 5:00PM), President Karzai was on air in a 6:30PM press conference explaining that there had been 73 attempts to disrupt the polls in 15 provinces. He also talked about “martyrdom” of the
national army soldiers and civilians in Kandahar and Khost. (NRTA, 2009, August 20). There were “takhrebee,” [destructive] operations in 15 provinces, and there were civilian deaths in Khost and Kandahar (Tehran Pashto Radio, 2009, August 20). However, later, it was reported that around 400 attacks had taken place during the election day.

Figure 9: Election Day Violence Based on NDS Data

In a press conference, government officials thanked media outlets for not reporting violence. The head of the National Security Council said: “I also thank them for their patience in accepting our request for not reporting disturbing incidents; it was in our national interest.” He also mentioned, “We did not want [security] incidents to be reported in a way that might undermine the spirit of those of our compatriots, who have access to visual and audible media in Afghanistan, and to reduce the election turnout” (NRTA, 2009, August 20).
5.5 Post Election

A day after polling, normal life started in Kabul City and, although it was a holiday, the streets were again crowded. Kabul City looked like people were no longer worried about the attacks. News about violence during the polling day continued to surface on media outlets. On the other hand, a number of foreign leaders welcomed the elections in Afghanistan. These leaders included the U.S. President who congratulated people of Afghanistan, “on the successful conduct of elections” (Azadi Radio, 2009, August 22).

Post-elections violence, such as the torching of ballot papers in parts of Afghanistan, was also. The most catchy news item was the “chopping off of the fingers of two voters,” which I heard from friends and family members and also from media outlets. The news was based on a statement from the head of Free and Fair Elections for Afghanistan [FEFA] and the spokesman for the Human Rights Commission of Afghanistan. Naderi, of FEFA, reported from Kandahar that the inked fingers of two voters were cut off. Although the news was broadcast by almost all media, including global outlets, it was not repeated.

When I went to Kandahar and asked participants about the incident, none of them had information about it. Participant #35 said: “We tried to find those whose fingers were cut, or find some people who knew about it so they could tell us. But we could not find anyone. The Taliban and their spokesman said they had not cut any fingers” (Personal communication, 2009, August 26). However, he also thought such rumors would not be baseless and that the issue needed further investigation.
News about fraud during polling soon dominated all media and public discourses and news on violence was to some extent forgotten. When I contacted friends and family members in provinces, they told me about ballot-stuffing and other irregularities during the elections day. In Kandahar, I met the head of a polling station who was beaten up because he would not comply with the demands of a powerful figure in the province to allow his men to fill the ballot boxes. He said to me that he talked to the provincial human rights officer, but was trying to make sure that he remained anonymous since he feared that he or his family might face retaliation. Later, a number of cases of ballot stuffing were revealed through the Internet sites and also some media outlets.

During the time I was in Kandahar, Janullah Hashimzada, an Afghan journalist was killed near to the Khyber Pass returning to Peshawar from Afghanistan. In Hendara [Mirror] Center, where journalists gathered, they were talking about arranging a press conference to condemn the killing. Since it was Ramazan and the fast breaking time, I was tired and went early to my hotel. Soon after, a major explosion happened. The explosion was so strong that I thought it was inside the building.

The dust from the roof filled the room and the sounds of broken glass and people talking could be heard. Shooting started at that moment. I tried to seek safety in the corridor. The door had been displaced by the blast and he could not open it. With force, he pushed. A few minutes later, I followed two businessmen from Kabul into their room.

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8 The holy month during which Muslims keep fasts
Dinner on *starkhan* (a piece of cloth used for food) was laid out. They were celebrating the breaking of the fast. One of them cursed those responsible for the explosion. Although he did not name the group, it was clear he was blaming the Taliban. He said: “Is this your Islam? People are breaking their fast and you are exploding bombs.”

He sat with the businessmen and talked about the incident. When they turned on the TV, Ariana TV mentioned the explosion in its news bulletin, but said details would come later. Soon he received calls from his family in Kabul, and from friends and relatives in Kandahar. They were worried and asked how he was.

Later, the two businessmen received some guests, who looked to be business partners. After greetings, a discussion began about where the explosion happened and who the targets were. It was interesting to me to see how people were trying to make sense of the events. They were saying that the destruction had been caused by explosive
materials placed near an oil tanker. They thought a local commander was the target. They said that some of those living and working in the nearby Sopzhmai Salon and Shah Jahan hotel were also killed.

When I went into the empty restaurant of the hotel, the manager was talking about someone he knew killed in the explosion. The manager and the waiters looked very sad. At approximately 9:00pm, the state-owned TV of Kandahar aired some footage taken from the place where the explosion happened. The on-air reporter said that 34 people had been killed, 56 were wounded, and four were lost. The governor of Kandahar province visiting the area was interviewed. He said: “May God punish the enemies, bless those martyred and may God give the wounded health.” The government officials were blaming the “enemies of Afghanistan” for the attacks.

Next morning at about 8:45AM, the researcher went to the Hendara Center. Most of the glass in the center had been broken and a maintenance person was sweeping up the broken pieces. On inquiry, the helper said he was from Arghandab district, and said that there had been fighting there every night. In the Center, there was a satellite receiver and the cleaner turned on the TV at the top of the hour, which opened to CNN. Though he did not understand English, he watched the channel interested to see how CNN framed news of the incident.

The same day journalists gathered in the Center were discussing when to go to the area of the incident. The area had been cordoned off and journalists were not allowed to report from there. One of the journalists received a call and reported that an Azadi Radio reporter had been detained by police while trying to get local people’s voices. This news made some of the journalists furious and they cursed the police.
The journalists present at the Center then tried to call the reporter, whose name was Menapal. When he was contacted, the researcher also talked to him. He said that he was fine and added, “This is what working in Kandahar is about.” Showing solidarity with Menapal, the journalist in Hendara Center decided to boycott the Interior Minister’s press conference. The Minister was in Kandahar as part of the investigative team sent by President Karzai.

Figure 11: The Site of Explosion in Kandahar City

After the authorities allowed people to visit the site of the incident, the researcher went with a group of journalists who were catching photos and trying to compile their reports. The place was not too far from the Hotel, where I was staying. The destruction was enormous. The nearby hotel, shops and houses were all destroyed. One could see the
blood spots and the remaining parts of human bodies. It was a sight of tremendous disaster.

The BBC Pashto Service, few nights later, broadcast a story in which an old woman, who lost her children, was crying and saying that she did not have anyone and anything to eat. The story was reported by a female reporter, and it was very touching. The story presented the difficulties and sufferings of the ordinary Afghans.

While we were observing the destruction caused by the explosion, one of the journalists in our group asked me who I thought was behind the incident. I said: “I do not really know.” He replied, since it was huge, he was thinking that the Taliban were not behind it. I said: “well, we do not know. This needs an investigation.” However, no one

Figure 12: The Destruction Caused by Explosion in Kandahar City
took responsibility and no information came forth about the incident. Just like other incidents in which tens of civilians died, this one was also forgotten.

After my trip to Kandahar, I went to Kunduz in the North, with a friend of mine.

From the airport, we went in a taxi to Kunduz City. The driver was talking about the situation in the province. He pointed towards the left of the road and said that was the area where the Taliban were active. While talking, in a number of instances, he mentioned “Americans in the province.” I interrupted him and asked whether there were Americans or German soldiers in Kunduz. He said both are the same. He also used the word *Kafir* [non-Muslim] for the ISAF forces. This made me to compare him and some other people who would use similar vocabularies with those people in Kabul who would consider the Taliban as violent, backward, and tools in the hands of Pakistan. These two opposing poles existed in the society.

![Figure 13: At the Kabul Airport, Leaving for the U.S.](image-url)
Few days later, I left Kunduz, and before I returned to the United States, about 95 people were killed in an air attack in Kunduz province. Subsequent to the incident, a New York Times’ journalist and his interpreter were kidnapped in the area. In the rescue operation by the British forces, the foreign journalist was released and his Afghan interpreter was killed. By the time, I returned to the United States, the results of the elections were unclear and controversy over fraud in the polling remained unsolved.

5.6 Conclusion

Elections were considered an important part of the state-building process. Media outlets promoted and encouraged elections as a “historical” and “national” process. Maintaining law and order and providing security during the polling day was considered the main job of the government and security organizations. Although media raised concerns about security, they depended on the government sources and gave enough time to the government officials ensuring secure environment and undermining the threats.

In Afghanistan, the elections day was the most violent day since the fall of the Taliban. Because of the government pressure and influence by the “national interest” frame, the violent incidents were not covered during the elections day though violent incidents were covered in days ahead. However, a number of journalists, using “public right” frame – through which they considered their responsibility to provide information to the public – tried to cover the incidents.

On the other hand, in some instances, “civilian as victim” frame was also used; however, media mainly reported about those incidents when they happened in cities and they had access to the site. Most of the incidents in rural areas were covered through “law and order” frame. Furthermore, this case study also presented the importance of public
perception and interpretation. It also showed the importance of rumors and the complexity in coverage and framing of the events.
Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter starts with a comparative presentation of frames used by the media outlets, followed by the frame production process. Addressing the broader socio-political and economic context in which media in Afghanistan operate, the researcher explores frame sponsorship and power dynamics during the frame building process. Other factors influencing the framing process are mentioned.

A conclusion presents the theoretical implications, referring to the nested-framing model. Some policy recommendations for media organizations and some practical suggestions for journalists are noted.

6.2 Media Frames

“Law and order” was the dominant frame used by the media outlets to cover issues of conflict in Afghanistan, except for Tehran’s Pashto Radio that mainly used the “occupation as failure” frame. The “civilian victims” frame was used to some degree by all the media outlets selected for this study. Frames such as “terrorism,” “ethnic victimization,” and “Jihad” were observed, but they were quite limited.

The “terrorism” frame was only present in the policy level meetings and a few participants used “terrorism” to explain the conflict in Afghanistan. “Ethnic victimization” was only present in the accounts of some of the participants and ordinary people and was not supported by the content of media outlets. “Jihad,” on the other hand, was used and promoted by the Taliban, which was rejected and discarded by journalists and media outlets in Afghanistan, although I met a number of ordinary Afghans who were supporting the Taliban’s “Jihad” frame.
The dominant frame for peace was “development as peace.” The frame was present in news stories of all the media outlets selected for this study. The “peace through negotiation” frame was only partially supported by this study. This frame was used on a number of occasions in participant accounts.

6.2.1 Media frames of the conflict.

The government and private media broadcasting from Afghanistan used the “law and order” frame as their main frame for coverage of the post-September 11th, 2001 conflict in Afghanistan. The international media, BBC Afghan Service, and Azadi Radio also used this frame as their main lens in covering conflict in Afghanistan. The only media outlet that did not use the “law and order” frame, as its main frame, was Tehran’s Pashto Radio.

The “law and order” frame defined the problem in Afghanistan as the absence of law and order. According to this frame, the reason for the conflict was weak law enforcement, and disruption of the law and order by the acts of violence of some groups, in this case the Taliban. The frame recommended having stronger security agencies to maintain law and order in the country.

According to this frame, the government has the monopoly over the use of force. Its actions, bringing law and order to the country, were considered necessary and legitimate. On the other hand, the Taliban were a rebel and outlaw group. Their actions, disrupting the law and order, were considered illegitimate, bringing insecurity and instability to the country.

One of the main features of this frame was dependence on the government sources. In terms of sources in news stories, the main difference among media outlets was
that the NRTA solely depended on the government sources while private and international media made references to the Taliban. Yet, all these media outlets rejected the Taliban’s “Jihad” frame.

Another characteristic of this frame was externalizing the conflict, considering other states to be behind the violence, particularly the frame often mentioned that Pakistan was supporting the Taliban. On the other hand, the presence of the Coalition Forces in Afghanistan was considered legal and important for keeping the law and order in the country, and bringing security.

Although the media outlets were generally positive about the performance of the security agencies in maintaining law and order, there were differences in the tone. Compared to NRTA, which positively presented and promoted the government agenda, the international and private media were moderate in emphasis. However, because of the large number of private channels, there was variation among them. For instance, compared to other private channels, Tolo TV was critical of the government’s performance. Another difference in the use of the “law and order” frame was exclusion of incidents of violence. In most cases, NRTA did not report stories of violence, although other media outlets covered those events.

The terms and phrases used by official sources were present and prominent in this frame since media outlets depended on the government and Coalition sources. However, there was dispute over the use of terms for the Taliban. Mostly, media outlets used “armed opposition” or “government armed opposition” for the Taliban, used also by politicians. There were instances when the term “Taliban” would be used, which was the term used by the ordinary people.
Most of the participants preferred “armed Taliban” and “armed opposition,” but words such as “terrorist” or “insurgent” were also used for the Taliban, particularly when news was translated or reported by the international news agencies. Thus, usage was disputed among the media makers and there was no consensus in what terms and phrases were used for the parties in the conflict. As participants pointed out, there were disagreements and uncertainties in the use of terms and phrases, particularly the ones for the Taliban.

For the government agencies, the word “milli” was used. For the Coalition Forces, the words “coalition,” “international” and “ISAF” were used. However, there were instances when the word “peace-keepers” was also used for the Coalition Forces. Except for the NRTA’s news stories, which used “martyred” in some cases, and when official sources were quoted, the word “killed” was used for members of the parties in the conflict who died and in most of the cases for the civilians.

Related to the format of the news stories, most stories were episodic. Iyengar (1991) pointed out that episodic reports, unlike thematic coverage, are the ones like “on the scene coverage” and lack background materials. He mentioned that these types of stories are easier in terms of resources and time. As participants in this research pointed out, this type of reporting was what they called “war reporting,” which was easier for them to cover. The news about violent incidents was presented as crime stories; the focus was on incidents, and no background or details were given.

Another area of differences among journalists and media outlets was in the level of importance given to the coverage of conflict. While the NRTA ignored most of the violent incidents, the private and international media covered the news of violence.
However, there were differences in the way violence was covered. For instance, Azadi Radio and private media would include the news on violence in their bulletins as other news items, but the BBC would include news of violence as a single news story and position it later, after the 20th minute of their night news bulletin.

The law and order frame considered the presence of the Coalition Forces in Afghanistan legal and important in bringing security. An alternative to this frame was the “occupation as failure” frame that considered the Coalition Forces to be occupying forces. According to this frame, the main problem that created the environment for the conflict was the presence of Coalition Forces in Afghanistan. In the “law and order” frame, the solution was establishing strong and modern security organizations, while in the “occupation as failure” frame the solution was withdrawal of allied forces from Afghanistan. Except in a few instances, when some individuals used this frame, it was solely used by Tehran’s Pashto Radio, as its main frame for covering the conflict in Afghanistan.

The casualties of the Coalition Forces, and in general the failure of the Coalition Forces, were a major focus of this frame. Another characteristic of this frame was that it highlighted the lack of coordination and shortcomings of the Coalition troops in Afghanistan. The tone of the content of Tehran’s Pashto Radio was negative and its reports considered Coalition mission as a failure.

Unlike other media outlets that depended on government sources and did not carry stories that depending solely on Taliban sources, Tehran’s Pashto Radio reported a number of stories based on the Taliban’s accounts. There were also stories where the headlines were based on Taliban reporting. Furthermore, the outlet used other sources,
such as the international media outlets, particularly when Coalition casualties were reported, and in presenting issues that Coalition Forces were facing in Afghanistan.

The terms used for the allied forces in Afghanistan were “foreign forces” and “occupation.” On the other hand, the Taliban were called “Taliban” or the “opposition” and, in a number of instances, the word “terrorists” appeared. The government forces were called the “government forces” without using the term “national” with it. Instead of direct quotes, the accounts were most often paraphrased. There were also instances that the “state-building,” frame was also used together with the “occupation as failure” frame in the same news story.

The civilian casualties were another area covered by the media outlets. In the law and order frame, civilian casualties were associated with the violence started by the Taliban and other insurgent groups, or as the result of the lack of coordination or mistakes of the Coalition Forces. However, the “occupation as failure” frame mainly considered the presence of foreign forces in Afghanistan to be responsible for the civilian casualties. They mainly highlighted those events in which civilians were killed in the attacks of Coalition Forces.

An alternative frame to the “law and order” and “occupation as failure” was the “civilian victims” frame that focused on casualties and sufferings in the conflict. The frame recommended that the parties in the conflict should avoid civilian casualties. Though most of the time news came from the parties in the conflict using the two main frames, there were also reports that included and quoted ordinary individuals, witnesses, victims and sources other than parties in the conflict.
These sources, their reactions, and statements of political parties and civil society groups about the incidents were used in the civilian victims frame. The frame was powerful when the eyewitnesses and civilians were quoted. The frame not only focused on the casualties, but also on grievances, anger, fear, demonstrations, and displacements.

The civilian victims frame was similar to the frames a number of researchers identified in conflicts. For instance, Jasperson and El-Kikhia (2003), analyzing CNN and Al Jazeera, identified a frame they called “humanitarian.” They mentioned that Al Jazeera covered the Afghan war in terms of civilian casualties and sufferings. Wolfsfeld (1997a) in his research also identified a similar frame he called the “innocent victims” frame.

Unlike the “law and order” frame, which was state-centric, and the “failure of occupation” frame, which was international-oriented, the “civilian victims” frame focused on victims of the conflict. The “civilian victims” frame’s main focus was on the people who suffered from the conflict. In this frame, the problem addressed was civilian casualties and suffering. This frame was also used with the “state-building” frame in the same news story. There were also instances that the frame was used together with the “occupation as failure” frame by Tehran’s Pashto Radio.

The three frames identified in this study presented alternatives for covering issues of conflict in Afghanistan. These frames focused on different aspects of the conflict. As Van Gorp (2009) pointed out, these alternative frames enabled media practitioners and their audiences “to see that the same event make different kinds of sense depending upon frame applied” (p. 5).
Van Gorp mentioned that, since frames are a part of the larger culture, more frames are available than those used. For this study, a number of frames were identified but were rarely used by media outlets or were only supported partially by this research. These included: “terrorism,” “ethnic victimization” and “Jihad.” These frames were accessible in the larger culture (Goffman, 1974), and as Edelman (1993) pointed out, society is a “kaleidoscope” of possible frames that society can use in the interpretations of events.

Among the conflict frames, the frame of “terrorism” was only partially supported by analysis of this dissertation. According to this frame, the problem was transborder groups or their proxies in Afghanistan, which caused the conflict. The frame carried the message that Al Qaeda and Taliban values were irreconcilable with democratic values and the post-September 11, 2001 political system in Afghanistan. The solution was to defeat these groups by means of force. This frame was used at the policy level when statesmen and high-level officials were meeting. Few participants used this frame.

The “ethnic victimization” frame was not supported by content analysis of this dissertation, though it was present in accounts of a number of participants. According to this frame, Pashtuns were marginalized and the fighting was considered a conspiracy against them. This frame recommended more government power for that ethnic group and more development work in their areas.

“Jihad” was one of the alternative frames presented and promoted to the media outlets by the Taliban and other groups fighting the government and the Coalition Forces in Afghanistan. In this frame, Afghanistan was invaded and it was the duty of every Afghan and Muslim to stand against the Coalition and Afghan forces. The government of
Afghanistan was considered a puppet. The frame saw the defeat and withdrawal of the Coalition Forces as the way to end the conflict.

Jihad frames mainly presented the successes of the Taliban and losses of the Coalition and Afghan Forces in the war. The focus was on foreign and Afghan casualties. These news stories/messages reported the Taliban’s tactics, timing and location, mostly the exact place, of the incidents. These messages pointed to the failures of the Afghan and Coalition Forces and the casualties caused by the Coalition Forces operations.

The “Jihad” frame was similar to the “occupation as a failure” frame. However, the two differed in that “occupation as a failure” only focused on the international forces rather than the Afghan government. Though the Iranian media were against the foreign presence in the country, it supported the post-Taliban government of Afghanistan. On the other hand, the Taliban’s Jihad frame considered both the Coalition and Afghan forces as enemies.

The frames identified in this study, focusing on different aspects of the conflict in Afghanistan, were used and available to the media outlets. As Gamson (1989) said, in a war, media could focus on destruction caused by war or struggle against oppression. It can call an attack “invasion” or focus on the victims or invaders. In the post-September 11, 2001 Afghanistan, media adopted the “law and order” frame as its main frame for covering the conflict. Only the Iranian media adopted the “occupation as failure” frame and the “civilian victims” frame was used to some degree, though not as the main frame. “Terrorism” and “ethnic victimization” were partially supported and media outlets rejected the “Jihad” frame.
6.2.2 Media frames of peace.

In terms of peace, the main frame used by the media outlets was “development as peace.” The focus of this frame was on the reconstruction and development activities in post-Taliban Afghanistan. According to this frame, the problem was the under-development of the country. The causes for the conflict were seen as illiteracy, joblessness, and the destruction, particularly of the state institutions, caused by years of war. Development was considered to be the solution to the conflict.

This frame referenced past destructions and the post September 11, 2001 achievements in education and other forms of development. There were differences in the composition and sources of the story, the amount of coverage, and the number of stories. For instance, the NRTA focused on official accounts of the development and gave more coverage to development work. The international media also gave space and time to this issue. There were some differences in coverage of development work by the local private media. For instance, Salam Watandar and Hewad had more stories on development than other channels.

An alternative to “peace as development” was the “peace through negotiation” frame, which was supported partially in this research. In this frame the conflict between the main parties was the main problem. The causes were seen in multiple levels, both internal and external. The solution was negotiation between the warring parties and ending of the conflict through dialogue. This frame was event-oriented; for instance it was used when the government of Afghanistan announced that it had reached an agreement with the local Taliban in Bala Morghab district. Though this frame was not
used by media outlets, it was becoming part of the dominant discourse, particularly during the Presidential elections of 2009, as discussed in Chapter 5.

The “law and order” and “development as peace” frames were part of the larger “state-building” frame, which saw the problem as weak or non-existing functional state institutions. According to this master frame, the Taliban and other groups who did not want to see a strong Afghanistan, were causing disruption in the state-building process. The solution offered was the establishment of modern and democratic state institutions. The establishing of independent media was considered to be part of the state-building process, as were the elections of 2009.

The choice of frames used by media obviously changed how the events, issues, and parties in the conflict were presented. As Edelman (1993) pointed out, through the use of alternative frames, meanings can change drastically. The frames identified for this study provided different meanings to the same events. However, all media outlets, except for Tehran’s Pashto Radio, adopted the state-building frame. Except for some differences in the way the “law and order” frame was used – to be explained in the next section - there was no major difference between the internal and external media under examination. The next section of this chapter will address the reasons for which the “state-building” frame was favored and adopted over other frames.

6.3 The Frame Contestation Process

As Nooris, Kern and Just (2003) mentioned, it is important to understand why a frame is adopted among other available frames. To understand why a frame is selected among available frames, there is a need to explore the larger social and political context in which media and journalists work. Shoemaker and Reese (1996) pointed out that extra-
media factors are important in the frame building process. The September 11, 2001 attacks on New York and Washington and the response to them were major factors in shaping the post-Taliban politics in Afghanistan and the region. Also, the removal of the Taliban and the subsequent developments in Afghanistan were influential in the framing process.

The state-building process started in post-Taliban Afghanistan and included the reconstruction of media infrastructure and the establishment of private media in Afghanistan. Media were supposed to assist and facilitate the state-building process. With the increase in the international involvement in Afghanistan, media from outside the country also increased the amount of broadcasting and related programming to Afghanistan. However, with increases in violence, media discourse became a contesting space among different actors involved in the conflict.

The post September 11, 2001 conflict presented a complex picture, and a number of state and non-state actors were involved in the conflict. The violent incidents were of an asymmetric or unconventional nature. As discussed in Chapter 1, the parties in the conflict used methods and tactics that added to the uncertainty and the complexity around the violent incidents. Though violent incidents happened all over the country, most of the fighting took place in the rural areas of the country. Those areas were often inaccessible to the media outlets. For instance, journalists in Kandahar City rarely travelled to the rural districts and villages in their own province.

Interaction with the main parties in the conflict was another factor that influenced the construction of news. As Pan and Kosicki (2001) pointed out, in the frame building process, actors use different strategies to dominate media discourse. For coverage of
violent incidents, media depended on the government sources. In the post-September 11, 2001 conflict, the Afghan government and the international forces, on one side, and the Taliban, on the other side, were all promoting and presenting their frames to the media outlets.

6.3.1 Frames of the main parties in the conflict.

Understanding the association of media frames and those frames promoted by the adversaries is critical in understanding the frame contestation process (Wolfsfeld, 1997a). The government and ISAF used regular press conferences, press releases, interviews, and other forms of communication to provide information to the media outlets. The Taliban, on the other hand, were contacting media by calling, texting, and emailing media outlets about the incidents and their activities. The actors in the conflict formed the main sources for the media outlets.

The three major parties in the conflict – the government agencies, the ISAF, and the Taliban -- were providing their versions of what was going on. The Afghan government and the ISAF promoted the state-building frame and the Taliban was promoting the Jihad frame. These two frames presented the conflict in Afghanistan in opposing ways. As Wolfsfeld (1993) argued, central to every conflict is “the struggle over interpretive frames” (p. xiv). Gamson and Modigliani (1987) mentioned that the competition over definitions and meanings is what the political process is about. As they and Wolfsfeld (1997a) argued, the opposing parties of the conflict promoted their definitions to the media and public.

Each party in the conflict presented its definition and positions related to the conflict. These frames were used for legitimization and defining “us,” versus “them.”
Shinar (2002) argued that framing is a way to legitimize the violence initiated by their sponsors, creating camps of “us,” versus “them.” As Van Gorp (2009) pointed out, the press releases provided by frame sponsors not only aim to provide information but also seek to convince the receivers.

In the law and order frame, the use of violence by the government and Coalition Forces was promoted as legitimate and necessary for bringing security to the country. In this frame, the job of the government security organizations was to provide security to the population. The Taliban actions were considered illegitimate, causing insecurity in the country.

In the Jihad frame, used by the Taliban, Afghanistan was occupied and the government in the country was considered to be a puppet. According to this frame, fighting against Coalition Forces and Afghan government was legitimate. The foreign forces were seen as invaders and the government forces were considered as mercenaries whose killing was allowed. The frame came with the idea that the only way to solve the problem is to end the occupation of the country by foreign aggressors.

Both sides used vocabularies, concepts, and catchphrases pertaining to the frames, such as national forces, international forces against “terrorists,” or “insurgents,” or “destructors.” The Taliban used “Mujahideen” and “Taliban” for themselves and declared that they were fighting against the “Kafirs,” [non-muslims], “occupying forces,” “mercenary army,” and “puppet government.”

Although there were a number of topics that both groups disputed, the most frequent and sensitive issue had to do with casualties, for which responsibility was attributed to the opposite party. As each side was trying to gain public support, each
changed its strategies to avoid civilian casualties. The Counterinsurgency Manual of the Coalition Forces and the Taliban’s Operational Manual clearly mentioned that civilian casualties should be avoided. Each side also used its own particular vocabulary for civilian casualties – such as “those martyred” and “the innocent ones.”

I tend to agree with Cohen and Wolfsfeld (1993) who argued that “each frame grows out of an old one” (p. xviii). The major frames identified in this study have roots in Afghanistan’s contemporary history. Van Gorp (2009) pointed out that identifying frames that were used in other social, political, and historical contexts and time periods is useful. In fact, from the perspective of Afghanistan, studying frames in other contexts and periods is not only useful it is essential in understanding and explaining the framing process.

“State-building” and “Jihad” frames have been used in different historical periods (See Farhang, 1989; Ghobar, 1967; Hopkins, 2008). They were used in explanations of conflict. The “state-building frame” can be traced to the era before modernization associated with the empires and earlier political structures, in particular the law and order sub-frame. In modernization, the establishment of modern state institutions was considered the most important task. In Afghanistan, a strong and modern state – with an army and police – was thought to provide security and pave the way for development and prosperity.

The state-building frame was also used by the pro-communist PDPA. In the era of civil war – in the late 1980s to 2001-- Afghanistan did not have a functioning state. It was widely thought that the war continued because of the lack of legitimate and effective state institutions. The word “milli,” was used as the main term for the state-building frame in
post-September 2001 era. It was to show a break from the Civil War era, where every warring group had its own security organizations.

The state-building frame had its support among the urban educated population. Educated people, living in Kabul and some other urban areas, were the ones supporting the state-building process. The frame also had supporters among some ordinary Afghans. For instance, many informants told the researcher that the problem was corruption and ineffective government and, if these problems were solved, the conflict would end itself. There was also a perception that the state was supposed to play a major role in providing services to the people. Citizens who suffered during the decades of war, in particular those who took refuge in neighboring countries, those who did not have the same opportunities and privileges as the citizens of their host countries, supported the state-building process after the fall of the Taliban.

The Taliban, on the other hand, used the “Jihad” frame. The term “Jihad” was employed both before and after September 11, although interpretations were somewhat different. In the post-September 11, when the Taliban re-emerged in the South, they used the “Jihad” message to fight the foreign and government forces in Afghanistan. Before September 11, the Taliban used “Jihad” as a justification for using force to bring peace in Afghanistan. According to their interpretation, fighting corruption and establishing a pure Islamic state was the mission of the Taliban.

The “Jihad” frame has had a long history in Afghanistan and the region, and was used to legitimize violence against the central government and invasions by outside forces. More recently, the frame was used against the Soviet Union’s invasion of Afghanistan. As Giustozzi (2008) pointed out, the Taliban had support among the village
Mullahs, who had the same ideology and belonged to local Mosque networks. During the researcher’s trips into the provinces, the researcher met a number of ordinary Afghans who were supporting the Taliban’s ideology and worldview.

The “state-building” and “Jihad” frames promoted by the main parties in the conflict presented the actors, events, and issues in different ways. These different explanations of the situation in Afghanistan can be summarized as a clash between modernism and traditionalism, Madrassas and schools, rural and urban areas. At least, the parties in the conflict chose to present it in that way. Unlike the “state-building” frame, which promised a better future with modern state-institutions and development, the “Jihad” frame mainly depended on historical accounts and glorification of past achievements.

By actively supporting and presenting these two frames, the parties in the conflict polarized the conflict in the country (See Appendix IV). The use of these frames avoided the complexity of the conflict and through them the parties in the conflict presented and promoted a simplified version, helping to achieve cohesion within the parties fighting each other.

Though the sponsors promoted these two frames, there were also a number of other news sources and news frames available for media makers. As Gamson (1984) pointed out, not all the sources of news were contesting in the framing process. In Afghanistan, the main parties in the conflict were so actively promoting their frames that other news sources and news frames were not regularly presented and promoted.
6.3.2 Frame adoption.

One of the major factors determining why the state-building frame was adopted was the power-relation. In his cascading model, Entman (2004) pointed out that some actors have more power in pushing their ideas to the media outlets and to the public. In this case, it was the government of Afghanistan and the Coalition Forces that had the greater power.

Reese (1999) pointed out that governments have many advantages in the frame building process. Bennett (2007) mentioned that the government officials are the main sources for the media news. Gans (1979) and Shoemaker and Reese (1996) argued that sources play an important role in the construction of news, and Ghanem (2010) pointed out that media frames “produce the dominant political culture” (p. 202). Similarly, in the case of Afghanistan, government sources played an important part in the construction of news stories, and the media outlets were producing the dominant political culture.

Only rare references were made to Taliban sources through the media outlets selected for this study, except Tehran’s Pashto Radio. Kalyango (2009) pointed out that sources present their frames in sound bites and in interviews. No sound bites or reports of interviews of the Taliban were carried by the media outlets. Entman (1993) said that “omissions” of a potential frame might be as important as it inclusion (p. 54).

The Taliban, on the other hand, found that they could communicate their presence by providing timely information on the violent incidents they provoked. They were able to be present in the news through their acts of violence. As observed during the polling day, the Taliban pushed journalists in Kandahar and elsewhere to cover violence. The Taliban were not forcing journalists to present their frames but to cover their acts of
violence. In rare instances, the Taliban’s main frame reached the public media either directly or through their supporters.

The government understood that its officials should be its main source for the news. The government also used other means to impose restrictions on media outlets. Among others, these restrictions included the letter issued by NDS dictating to media outlets how they should cover the stories, banned media from covering violence during the elections, and cordon off sites by the Coalition Forces.

Violent stories would find their place in the news. As Wolfsfeld (1993) pointed out, the government influence is limited by its “ability to control conflict events and the flow of information” (p. xviii). In the case of Afghanistan, though the government and Coalition frame was dominant, they were not able to entirely control the flow of information. The government imposed restrictions on the media outlets, but the government officials also understood their limitations.

Those groups fighting the government and Coalition Forces, in most of the cases, started the violence; therefore, they had advantages in breaking the news and providing information about the incidents (Wolfsfeld, 1997a). The Taliban used this strategy to show that they had the power to initiate violence and get coverage by the media outlets. In fact, they were fine with the reporting of violence, without the presence of their frame. During the polling day, the Taliban’s expectation of journalists and their media outlets was coverage of their violent incidents rather than the presence of their “Jihad” frame.

There was also an understanding between the main parties in the conflict and the journalists and media practitioners about their roles. Blumler and Gurevitch pointed out that journalists and politicians understood each other’s role and routines that governed
their transactions (in Pan & Kosicki, 2001). As many participants pointed out, there was an understanding of how war/violence needed to be reported and what elements constituted war reporting.

In the frame contestation process, not only the parties in the conflict but also journalists played a major role in the news construction. Garber (2006) mentions that journalists decide what news is and which political issues should be covered and which should be ignored. Journalists use frames to organize the content, provide context, and explain an issue (Gans, 1979; Ghanem, 1999, p. 2; Gitlin, 1980). In this research, similar logic applies. Framing of news was seen as a routine and necessary means to organize information related to conflict and peace in Afghanistan. Journalists, particularly those working with the private and international media, believed that the news stories were based on journalistic values of balance, impartiality, and accuracy.

Although different frames were available, journalists covering Afghanistan used the state-building frame predominantly. Gamson and Modigliani (1989) pointed out that, though frame sponsors are attempting to convince journalists to use their frames, the journalists still had the option to ignore the frame or use the counter-frame. In addition to the power relations, there were a number of other factors that influenced the journalists’ choice of frame.

One of the important factors influencing the selection of frames by journalists and media practitioners was cultural resonance. Gamson and Modigliani (1989) pointed out that cultural resonance plays an important part in frame adoption. Most of the journalists were educated in modern schools. Being educated in such an environment, journalists
tended to disagree with the Taliban’s perception of Jihad and had little resonance with the terms and phrases used by this frame.

As Cohen and Wolfsfeld (1993) pointed out, cultural resonance not only helps in selecting what should be included in the news, but also what should be cut and tailored to fall within a media frame. In this case, even when the Taliban were included in the stories, references were rarely made to their sources, and since Taliban’s terms and phrases would not fit the state-building frame, they were discarded.

Ideology and biases also play an important role in framing (Edelman, 1993). As Van Gorp (2009) argued, personal ideology is one of the influential factors on which journalists (un)consciously support their selection of frames from the available ones. In this regard, journalists’ individual beliefs and agency very likely made a difference. Most of the participants were living in the cities and considered having modern state institutions necessary. They expected the state to bring peace to Afghanistan by maintaining law and order.

The knowledge and understanding, as well as the beliefs and perceptions, of the participants in this study can be expected to have been influenced by their education. The modern education system promoted a state based political system. The choices that journalists made were favoring the “state-building” frames of “law and order” and “development as peace.”

The backgrounds and experiences of individual journalists also played an important role in the selection and supporting of a particular frame, for example experiences of wars and suffering. Most of the study participants had experienced taking
refuge in other countries during those years. Those journalists were supporting the state-building process.

Such factors were also influential in not adopting other available frames. For instance, though there was political support for the “terrorism” frame; it was only partially adopted by the media outlets. In Afghan society, the frame did not have the same cultural resonance as “state-building.” Although the “terrorism” frame provided a solution through the defeat of terrorist groups, the “state-building” frame was focusing on the institution building that had the stronger appeal.

The “development as peace” frame was popular not only among journalists but also among ordinary Afghans. Journalists wanted to be part of the development process that started after the fall of the Taliban; therefore, development stories appeared in news bulletins. Covering issues of development activities brought into balance the news on violent incidents, which most journalists called negative news.

Though the “ethnic victimization” frame was present in the accounts of journalists, it was not used by the media outlets. The frame was under-used since it was associated with the “ethnic conflict” of the past civil war and not in line with state-building. The post-September 11, 2001 state-building process gained legitimacy in breaking from the pre-September 11 conflict in Afghanistan.

Another important player in the contestation process was the Afghan people. Most of the journalists selected for this study were Afghan citizens. Even the journalists working for the international and regional media were mostly Afghans. The use of the “civilian victims” frame was the result of the ordinary people’s framing. Most of the
people the researcher met, including participants of this study, showed sympathy with the
victims of violence and mentioned the hardships that the local populations faced.

Using the same frame, however, did not mean that there was a total agreement
among the participants in terms of what fit within the frame, and what needed to be
included or excluded. Deciding how to deal with the Taliban’s account of incidents was
one of the major issues. Inclusion of the Taliban in stories reported remained
controversial. A news frame provides for an array of positions that allow “a degree of
controversy among those who share a common frame” (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989, p. 3).

The differences within a frame were not adequately explained by the frame
analysis. Therefore, this study applied a second level of frame analysis that did not only
explain the different positions and controversies within the frame but also why some of
the frames, such as “occupation as failure,” were selected by some media outlets.

In the second level of framing, journalists were deciding what needed to be
included or excluded based on their understanding of what was the “professional”
position to take, or what the researcher called “journalistic frames.” From the perspective
of the professional reporter, the two dominant frames observed in this study had to do
with the “national interest” and the “public interest.”

Two more frames, “advocacy for peace” and “freedom of press,” were also
present, though they were not supported in the analysis of media content. These
journalistic frames had a great influence on the selection of the news stories.

Both the NRTA and Tehran’s Pashto Radio used the national interest frame, and
each mentioned that organizational constraints were playing an important role in the
construction of news. On the other hand, the international media outlets and private media outlets tended to use the public interest frame and their editors and reporters argued that mostly journalistic norms determined how a story is written or what is included in the story.

Although the two levels of framing helped in understanding media frames of the conflict and peace in Afghanistan, a number of constraints and pressures were also influential in the frame construction process. Four different categories of such constraints and pressures were identified in this research—environmental pressures, organizational pressures, journalistic norms and individual agency.

Participants working with the NRTA thought that serving the government was serving the national interest. They pointed out that the Ministry of Information and Culture and other government agencies were exercising both direct and indirect control of the content of their outlet. At the provincial level, it was the editors who decided what areas needed to be covered.

Organizational culture played an important role in the news broadcasting process. For instance, the NRTA kept its usual presentation format: reports on the president’s meetings followed by the chief justice meetings, followed by the parliament’s activities. Financial and administrative issues, such as low salaries, unprofessional staff and bureaucratic hurdles, were mentioned as constraints in covering development issues.

Participants working with Tehran’s Pashto Service mentioned that the ownership of the station was a major factor determining news construction, although not all agreed. They also mentioned that inclusion (or not) of the Taliban in news stories was decided through the main office.
Participants working with the international and private media considered organizational constraints less important in the news construction. There were some instances when station ownership made a difference. For instance, the BBC reports gave more space to the British involvement in Afghanistan, and Ariana TV made it known its owner supported the government and President Karzai’s policies. Participants working for these media outlets were, nevertheless, quick to point out that they were following journalistic norms when reporting conflict news.

Journalists working with NRTA and Tehran’s Pashto Radio mentioned the role of organizational constraints in the construction of news items. However, journalists working for the international and private media considered organizational constraints less important and emphasized journalistic norms to determine news construction.

Giltin (1980) argued that the application of journalistic norms favor usage of some of the frames rather than others. Shoemaker and Reese also mentioned this constraint as an important factor in construction of news items. The participants working for private and international media were emphasizing that their job was “truth” finding and reporting. They believed that their responsibility was to inform the public by providing accurate and timely information.

Impartiality, defined by participants as not taking side, was a principle most of those working with the international and non-government media emphasized. However, some participants agreed that, because their media were operating in the areas under the government’s control, they were taking the side of the government.
Accuracy was another principle that was often mentioned by the international and national media, although some participants complained that the government was neither giving them information, nor confirming events and figures.

The two levels of framing—the main frames of the conflict and the journalistic frames—together with the exploration of environmental pressures, organizational constraints, journalistic norms and individual beliefs and agency presented a more comprehensive model for media framing and news construction analysis.

6.4 Conclusion

Understanding how frames are chosen needs a holistic approach. It is important to take into consideration the larger social and political context in which contestation over media frames takes place. The political economy of media outlets, power relations, and cultural resonance, negotiations between different actors and other contributing factors and constraints are central to the studying of the framing process.

To study news framing of the conflict in Afghanistan, one must understand Afghanistan politics. In particular, one must learn about the post September 11, 2001 events and processes taking place in the country, for these have shaped the contestation over framing.

As Scheufele pointed out, “a key event can activate an alternative media frame” (Gorp, 2009, p. 10). In this case, after the attacks of September 11, 2001 and the removal of the Taliban, the Bonn Conference was a key event that reactivated the state-building frame in the Afghan society. As the findings of this dissertation research has shown, the dominant frame among media was the state-building frame, the dominant discourse occurring in Afghanistan at the time.
Cohen and Wolfsfeld (1993) argued that, “each new frame grows out of an old one” (p. xviii). Both the “state building” and “Jihad” frames had been used earlier in the context of Afghanistan, activated and reactivated at different periods, changing over time. As Goffman (1981) pointed out, frames “are subject to change historically” (p. 63).

The political economy of media outlets also plays a role in the frame contestation process. As Bennett (2007) pointed out, the political economy of media affects the nature of the news. The reconstruction of state-owned media and the establishment of private media were part of the post-September 11 state-building process in Afghanistan through media assistance packages.

Furthermore, media outlets broadcasting from outside the country increased the number, type and frequency of newscasts targeting Afghanistan in post September 11, 2001. These outlets were funded and supported by different states and agencies, according to their own interests and objectives. The political economy of the media outlets selected for this study was influential in the choice of media frames adopted.

6.4.1 Frame adoption and power.

A number of alternative frames were available for organizing, presenting and discussing issues of peace and conflict in Afghanistan. The frames identified for this study were: state-building, Jihad, occupation as failure, civilian victims, terrorism, ethnic victimization, and peace through negotiation. Three of those frames were among the most frequently adopted, namely state-building, occupation as failure, and civilian victims.

In addition to understanding the frames available in the society, it is crucial to understand what frames are promoted by the parties involved in the conflict. As Gamson (1989) pointed out, analyzing news as frames incorporate the intent of the sender of the
message (Gamson, 1989). Among the frames promoted by the main parties of the conflict were the “state building” and “Jihad” frames. The government of Afghanistan and the Coalition Forces promoted the “state-building” frame and the Taliban used the “Jihad” frame. In addition to providing a definition for the conflict, these frames were used to legitimize the conflict and to define “us” versus “them.”

All the media outlets selected for this study, except Tehran’s Pashto Radio, adopted the state-building frame as their dominant frame for covering issues of peace and conflict in Afghanistan. In this regard, the dominant frame was the one promoted by the government and international staff.

In this regard, exploring power-relations helps in understanding the process of frame adoption. Carragee and Roefs (2004) argued that framing should put power at the center. One of the ways to understand the power in the framing process is to explore the sources used in the news stories. In this study, government sources were predominant in news stories. The Afghan government and the Coalition Forces were considered the legal sources and were automatically a part of the story.

The counter-frame of Jihad, promoted by the Taliban, was an alternative frame that the principal media makers sought to suppress. Consequently, that frame was rarely present in the news stories included in this dissertation research. By exploring the context, it can be understood why the Taliban’s frame of conflict was discarded.

Taliban sources were referred to in the news stories, except for the NRTA. In a few instances, the Taliban were also interviewed, such as BBC Pashto’s interview with the Taliban’s spokesman. But the use of these sources remained a controversy among journalists and media practitioners.
6.4.2 Frame building and negotiation.

Parties in the Afghan conflict promoted their own frames. The sources used in the news stories by the media outlets played a major role in how news stories were told. In this case, most of the news items were government sourced. Media outlets adopted the same frames used by the government. As broadcast, however, applications of the dominant frame were somewhat different.

This study showed that frames were adopted and news stories were constructed and aired through a negotiated process. A number of factors and participants were involved; even ordinary people were influential in the negotiation over frames. Choices of the sources and words went through a negotiation process. There were differences in the use of the same frame among media outlets.

6.4.3 A nested framing model.

This dissertation emphasized studying media frames at two levels. The first and most basic level was to find out, through research, which frames were available and adopted—including the dominant and alternative frames—by the media outlets and learn why some of the frames were preferred over others. The second level of frame analysis not only added to our understanding of why some of the frames were preferred over others but also acknowledged the differences that appeared within a particular frame.

Exploring relevant constraints and pressures were part of frame analysis. The constraints and pressures discussed in this dissertation played an important role in the frame production process. The two level framing process, when taken together with the relevant constraints and pressures, led to what the researcher calls a “nested framing model.”
In the first level, the dominant and alternative frames were identified. In the second level, the dominant journalistic frames – “national interest,” and “public interest” – were explained. These two levels together, in the context of particular environmental, organizational, professional, and individual constraints – explained how and why frames were adopted or discarded by journalists and media outlets. The “nested framing” model helps to explain the adoption of frames, the selection of dominant and alternative frames, and the different positions and controversies emerging from within a particular frame.

6.4.4 Implications for the coverage of conflict and peace.

This study makes a number of recommendations for researchers working in conflict zones. The first are practical suggestions: 1) that researchers and media practitioners understand the socio-political context and the complexity of the media environment, 2) that they choose as informants sources other than parties in the conflict, and 3) that frames promoting peace and peace through frames be encouraged. In terms of policy and future research, the recommendations would be: 1) attention should be given to addressing cultural and historical roots of the conflict, 2) media’s role in conflict resolution at local and national levels should be encouraged, 3) reporting models and training materials should be developed, and 4) journalists, civil society and general public should be trained.

Understanding the socio-political environment in which media outlets work and address the complexity of the conflict are important factors in the production of media messages. It is also important to understand the cultural capital of the region in conflict since the media and their audiences draw upon it for the creation of meaning. Given the new information age, transborder broadcasting, regional and local stations as well as
social media networks should be taken into account when exploring the role of journalistic reporting and framing of messages in conflict zones.

For sources of news on conflict, caution is advised in becoming dependent on participating parties. Such sources tend to ignore the larger context, resulting in a simplified version of the conflict, making conflict resolution and peace difficult. The effect is often that the media simply provide a platform for the warring parties to promote their version of events, and media outlets merely become a tool of propaganda.

Journalistic frames, such as “advocacy for peace,” can easily be adopted to promote and support the peace process. Lynch and McGoldrick (2005) have pointed out that, in peace journalism, editors and reporters make choices of what and how to report. In the case of Afghanistan, drawing on sources other than warring parties can provide space and time for such other frames as “civilian victims” and “peace through negotiation” in the news covered. Questions related to peace can be raised by journalists, as was done during the Presidential Elections in 2009.

The “development as peace” frame, used for covering development projects from the government perspective, has the potential to also address structural issues of the conflict, such as imbalanced development, shortcomings in education, and distribution of funds.

The “peace through negotiation” frame has the potential to be broadened. Media practitioners and civil society might include the issues of sustainability and inclusiveness of a peace process. This frame can also address local conflicts and grievances.
6.4.5 Future research.

There is a need for further research on the cultural and historical roots of the conflict. Exploring the frames used historically during conflict and peace in Afghanistan could help in understanding how future peace might be promoted in Afghanistan. One important area in need of further work would be to understand how the frames used in Afghanistan during periods of conflict may have evolved and shifted during periods of relative peace, and why.

Much attention has been given to the role of media in conflict management and resolution at the national level. However, it is important to explore the role of media outlets in management and resolution of conflict at the local level. In multilayer conflicts, such as the one in Afghanistan, it will be important to understand the role of media at whatever level and from whatever source, so that media can be more helpful in the peace processes.

Reporting models for covering issues of conflict and peace as well as development should be developed so that reporters and media practitioners have the understanding and skills to cover issues of conflict and peace.

Journalists need training. This was one of the recommendations made by the participants of this research. Particularly those journalists working with the NRTA and with private media outlets felt the need for training in how frame their stories so that peace can be promoted.

Other parties, such as those involved in the conflict, members of the civil society, and all those pursuing a peaceful resolution to the conflict need training in media’s potential role in conflict resolution. Peace journalism should be taught as a subject to the
students of journalism at state and private universities in Afghanistan. In addition, there should be media literacy programs for the Afghan people.
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## Appendix I: Ethnic Composition of Afghanistan (www.hewad.com/ethnic.htm)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Publication</th>
<th>Ethnic Groups</th>
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<td>The ethnic composition of Afghanistan</td>
<td>A six year survey and research</td>
<td>WAK Foundation 1999 Norway</td>
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<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>Max Clumborg</td>
<td>1960</td>
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<td>Fundamentalism reborn? Afghanistan and the taliban</td>
<td>William Maley</td>
<td>London 1998</td>
<td>Pashton 62.73 Tajik 12.4 Hazara 9 Uzbek 6 Baluch 2.69 Turkm 2.68 Aimaq pashae 3</td>
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<td>The world geoethnology</td>
<td>Academic research M. Mahjub F. Yawari</td>
<td>5th – Ed, 1987 Iran</td>
<td>Pashton 60 Tajik 20 Hazara 5 Uzbek 5 Baluch 2.69 Turkm 2.68 Aimaq pashae 3</td>
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<td>The world population</td>
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<td>1981 u.s.s.r</td>
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<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>Prof. M. Ali</td>
<td>1955 Kabul</td>
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<td>The National language of Afghanistan</td>
<td>Prof. Aslanov</td>
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<td>M. Enam Wak</td>
<td>2000 Pakistan</td>
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<td>Afghan Mellat journal</td>
<td>Issu 42-43</td>
<td>1995 Pakistan</td>
<td>Pashton 50 Tajik 21 Hazara 8 Uzbek 8 Baluch 2.69 Turkm 2.68 Aimaq pashae 3</td>
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<td>History &amp; establishment of Afghanistan</td>
<td>Abdullah Ahmad Almir</td>
<td>1980 London – Qattar</td>
<td>Pashton 58.7 Tajik 28.7 Hazara 2.7 Uzbek 8 Baluch 2 Turkm 3 Aimaq pashae 3</td>
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<td>Ibid</td>
<td>Abdul Azim Walyan</td>
<td>1987 Iran</td>
<td>Pashton 70 Tajik 13 Hazara 5 Uzbek 5 Baluch 2.69 Turkm 2.68 Aimaq pashae 3</td>
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<td>Sukhan Journal</td>
<td>Ali Akbar Jafaryan</td>
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<td>Afghanistan</td>
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Appendix II: Interview Protocol

Demography

Name:
Sex:
Age:
Place of origin (town, province) in Afghanistan:
Ethnicity:
Language:
Occupations:
Education:
   1. When did you start journalism as your profession?
   2. Where have you been working?
   3. Where are you working?

General areas to be covered:

1. Tell me about your childhood (also tell me about your family, where you went to school).

1. Tell me about your professional experiences, how long have you been working as a journalist/media practitioners?

2. Where have you been in the years of conflict (during Russian occupation, civil war and the Taliban)?

3. What does the conflict mean for you? How do you see the Afghan conflict?

4. How do you see the role of journalists/media in reporting the conflict?

5. How do you report/present the conflict through your outlet?

6. Mainly, where do you get your information and how much freedom do you have to cover the fighting/violence?

7. Who is making the final decision in selecting the news items?

8. Who/what is important when you are reporting about the conflict?

9. What does peace mean for you?
10. How do you consider the peace process in Afghanistan?

11. How do you see the role of journalism/media in contributing to the peace process?

12. How do you think media should be used for contributing to the peace process?

13. What is the difference in reporting about conflict and peace?

14. Anything else you want to add.
Appendix III: Textual Analysis Protocol

No: ________

Frame:

Secondary Frame (If any):

Sources:
  Primary
  Secondary
  Other

Rhetoric Characteristics:

Remarks:
Appendix IV: Sangin Incident Presented by the ISAF and the Taliban

Add

From: PRESSOFFICE [PRESSOFFICE@hq.isaf.nato.int]
Sent: Saturday, July 26, 2008 11:55
To: PRESSOFFICE
Subject: 080726-3404-NUI-NR-348 escalation of force incident, 4 civilians dead and three others wounded

NEWS RELEASE
International Security Assistance Force – Afghanistan

Helping to bring security, stability and foster development in Afghanistan

2008-348

ISAF escalation of force incident, 4 civilians dead and three others wounded

KABUL, Afghanistan (July 26) — ISAF soldiers opened fire on a vehicle that failed to stop at a check point earlier today killing four civilian occupants and wounding three others. Two further occupants were unharmed.

The incident occurred in the Sangin district of Helmand Province. The vehicle approached the check point and was directed to stop but it drove on. ISAF soldiers fired warning shots in a safe direction away from the vehicle but were eventually forced to fire at it when it refused to stop, fearing an insurgent attack.

The injured civilians were treated for their injuries by ISAF medical personnel at the scene and were taken to Camp Inkerman for further checks. They were then taken by helicopter to Camp Bastion hospital where they arrived at 0900 hours for further treatment.

The bodies of the four civilians who died were taken back to their village by the two civilians who were uninjured in the incident. Both indicated that the driver of the vehicle was at fault for failing to stop when required to do so.

ISAF deeply regrets this unnecessary incident caused by the reckless actions of the vehicle driver. The incident will be investigated.

-30-
Gardiz city capital of Paktia province, however the damage and casualties to the enemy of Islam could not be confirmed in there entirety. Reported by Qari Muhammad Yousuf

**1 Tank Of Canadian Destroyed In Kandahar**

Today 26-07-2008 at approximately 5 am local time, Mujahideen of Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, with remote controlled landmine blew up a military tank of Canadian occupation army when it was travelling in Spervan area of Panjwai district in Kandahar province. In the explosion the tank was completely destroyed and 8 occupation terrorists were killed. Reported by Qari Muhammad Yousuf

**A Vehicle Of Puppet Army Destroyed In Logar**

Today 26-07-2008 approximately 7am local time, Mujahideen of Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, with remote controlled landmines blew up a vehicle of puppet army on Mis Ainak road of Amuhammad Aghi district of Logar province. The landmines completely destroyed the vehicle and three puppet terrorists in it were killed. Reported by Qari Muhammad Yousuf

**2 Oil Tinkers Of American Invaders Destroyed on Kabul Jalalabad highway**

Today morning, Mujahideen of Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, ambushed a supplying convoy of American occupation army and its puppet police who were providing security for the convoy which was travelling on Kabul Jalal Abad highway in Khirokhil area of Qarghio district of Laghman province. In the attack 2 oil tankers of American occupation army were destroyed. Reported by Qari Muhammad Yousuf

**A Vehicle Of Puppet Army Destroyed In Zabul**

Yesterday 25-07-2008 approximately 10am local time, Mujahideen of Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, with remote controlled landmines blew up a vehicle of puppet army on Kandahar Kabul highway in Poli Sangi area of Qalat city of Zabul province. The landmines completely destroyed the vehicle and four puppet terrorists in it were killed. Reported by Qari Muhammad Yousuf

Dr Talib
Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan
Afghanistan /Kabul
www.alemarah.110mb.com
www.alemara.110mb.com

7/26/2008
British Invaders Martyrs 7 Civilians Including Women And Children In Helmand

Today morning 7 people including women and children were killed in an cowardly attack of British invaders in Sarwan Kala area of Sangin district of Helmand province. The invader forces earlier directed the local residents bus and martyring 7 innocent civilians including three women and 2 children, all in the name of democracy. Reported by Qari Muhammad Yousuf

1 Checkpoint Demolished In Helmand

Last night approximately 12:30am local time, Mujahideen of Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, with heavy and light weapons attacked puppet police checkpoints in Chanjer area of Lashkargaah city of Helmand province. In attack the checkpoint was demolished, 6 puppet terrorists were killed others fled and their arms were booty Mujahideen. Reported by Qari Muhammad Yousuf

BM's Mortars Shells Fired At Capital Of Paktia

Last night 26-07-2008, Mujahideen of Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan fired BM's Mortar shells at Bali Hsar army division where a large number of American occupation live and
Residents near Afghan capital say they are being hit by Americans and Taleban

LENGTH: 363 words

Text of report by Afghan independent Tolo TV, on 23 August

[Presenter] If the government does not take serious measures to prevent insecurity in Logar Province, insecurity will spread to Kabul too.

A number of residents of Logar Province, at a gathering in Kabul today, said Logar had witnessed the highest level of violence in recent months.

[Correspondent] The people of Logar Province ask for serious attention by the government towards the security situation in that province. They say the rise in Taleban attacks and air raids by foreign troops have caused insecurity in the province.

[First man] Mr Karzai, we did not vote for you to kill our sons, or to bombard us. We have not voted for you to destroy our nation. We voted for you to bring security to Afghanistan.

[Second man in Pashto] Our students cannot go to their homes during the holidays, because the Taleban are on the roads. They cannot come back through fear of the Taleban.

[Third man in Pashto] Foreigners impose oppression on us. Innocent people are martyred.

[Correspondent] The residents of Logar Province also express concerns over the rise in civilian casualties in air raids by foreign troops in that province.

[Fourth man] The Taleban come and hit us. Americans, too, come and hit us. They bombarded our homes.

[Fifth man] Americans came and took dead bodies out [of graves] and their sniffer dogs checked them. They injected our martyrs, and put them back into the grave. They cut some of the dead bodies. We did not vote for you [Karzai] so that you can bring Americans and their dogs to sniff our martyrs.

[Shekeba Hashemi, MP for Logar Province] We made compromise with the warlords that were destroying us until yesterday. Do we have to use them again today, or should we use these people who took part in the elections and voted for the president, or the people whose sons are bombarded by Americans? The government, too, hits them.

[Correspondent] The residents of Logar Province warn that if residents of the province are harmed in operations by foreign troops, the government of Afghanistan will face a serious reaction by the local residents of the area.

Source: Tolo TV, Kabul, in Dari 1330 gmt 23 Aug 08