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# Mediated framing contests in post-9/11 U.S.-Pakistan public diplomacy crises

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## **Abstract**

Public diplomacy is a principal means through which reputation-conscious international actors strive to project favorable self-images and counteract image problems in international politics. In times of highly publicized diplomatic controversies (or ‘public diplomacy crises’), public diplomacy via news media can become a strategy of crisis management. I argue in this study that the resort to such ‘mediated public diplomacy’ is a strategic choice state actors make to maximize the reputational stakes or ‘face’ concerns to pressure (or resist) one another by constraining the bargaining preferences of each disputant in a crisis. In so doing, I draw on insights from sociologically-oriented studies on Goffmanian impression management in international relations, as well as the theoretical literature on mediated public diplomacy in communication studies, and relevant negotiation and conflict resolution research on framing. The study ultimately shows that political actors manage their collective national ‘face’ while symbolically communicating through frames in the news media during public diplomacy crises. In the course of such mediated framing contests, opposing frames dialogically interact with each other during the onset, escalation, and resolution of a crisis. While crisis disputants may have incompatible interests that are conveyed in aggressive exchanges in the media, a shared concern about maintaining ‘face’ can bring crisis interactions to converge on a mutually agreeable frame. For the empirical illustration of my argument, the recourse to mediated public diplomacy during two crises in U.S.-Pakistan relations in 2011 are analyzed. First, the Raymond Davis diplomatic immunity dispute and, second, the aftermath of the killing of Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad. The data for each case study is drawn from official statements, news reports, and elite/expert interviews.

## **Dedication**

For my mother and father, whom I cannot thank enough for everything they have done for me.

## Acknowledgments

Several individuals and institutions contributed in meaningful ways to my education on the subject matter addressed in this study. While I cannot possibly thank them all here, I'd like to acknowledge those who were significantly involved in supporting and helping me over the course of my research and writing for this project.

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Lane provided me with patient guidance, warm encouragement, sound advice, and thoughtful critiques of my work while at the same time holding my feet to the fire, keeping my progress on schedule, shielding me from time-consuming bureaucratic paper-work hassles, and shepherding draft after draft to submission to get me across the finish line. I'm thankful to Lane for her ongoing support, mentorship, and instrumental supervision of my work.

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proposal drafts and helped me clarify and elaborate on some of my less well defined ideas for what eventually developed over time into this project. Also at WashU, I want to acknowledge and thank Arlene Taich, Marvin Marcus, and Tove Klovning, who consistently supported me in my educational goals and persuaded me to apply for admission to a PhD program as a logical next step once I'd completed my MA at WashU.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction: managing public diplomacy crises via the news media

### Context of the study

In the early 2000s, at the outset of the ‘war on terror’, Peter G. Peterson, a former U.S. Secretary of Commerce and then chairman of the highly influential Council on Foreign Relations, made the assertion that “‘image problems’ and ‘foreign policy’ are not things apart. They are both part of an integrated whole.”<sup>1</sup> Indeed, as the reputation or image of a state has an apparent effect on the policies of other states towards it, “influence-seeking actors acquire the drive for deliberate image projection.”<sup>2</sup> Arguably, this is why states and their agents around the world expend considerable effort in promoting favorable self-images, in support of their foreign policy interests, among both foreign and domestic public audiences.<sup>3</sup> And in this regard, public diplomacy is a principal means through which reputation-conscious international actors strive to project such favorable self-images and counteract image predicaments on the world stage.

In general terms, public diplomacy comprises a variety of different practices such as international broadcasting intended for foreign audiences, educational and professional exchange programs, cultural diplomacy, listening (i.e., public opinion research), and advocacy (i.e., media relations and public affairs).<sup>4</sup> Of these, the present study is primarily concerned with examining the practice of advocacy through engagement with domestic and foreign news media. The resort to public diplomacy via the media arena in negotiating international political crises and making ‘public opinion’ in the targeted state a part of the equation is undeniably at odds with the norms and practices of traditional, closed-door diplomacy. And yet, it is gradually becoming

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<sup>1</sup> Peterson 2002, 75.

<sup>2</sup> Mor 2007, 663-664.

<sup>3</sup> Herz 1981, 187; Mor 2007; Bernays 1942.

<sup>4</sup> Cull 2008.

normalized.<sup>5</sup> In relation to this, special attention is given here to what is referred to in this study as ‘mediated public diplomacy’.

Mediated public diplomacy consists of short-term, targeted communicative strategies of a state to influence how its actions are framed in the news media of another state, as well as in its own domestic context.<sup>6</sup> It can be defined as the organized attempts by the leadership and diplomatic apparatus of a state “to exert as much control as possible over the framing” of its foreign policy in the media content of a targeted state to generate support among foreign audiences for the targeting state’s foreign policy.<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that mediated public diplomacy is conceptually distinct from, and goes beyond, the kind of ‘diplomatic signaling’ that often occurs through the use of news media by political leaders and diplomats as an alternative, albeit indirect, channel of diplomatic communication.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, mediated public diplomacy is also a possibly risky communication strategy, given the potential for media interference or distortion of intended messages in the news framing process. While engaging in mediated public diplomacy, political actors in the targeting state seek to manipulate the framing of news coverage in their own domestic media as an initial step toward attempting to influence the framing of news in the targeted state.<sup>9</sup>

In contrast to the broader aims of influencing mass public opinion that is traditionally implied in the phrase ‘public diplomacy’ itself, this study agrees with the argument that “public

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<sup>5</sup> It would, however, be overstating matters to suggest that such a gravitation in international politics toward the news media somehow translates into a ‘democratization’ of public diplomacy. This is certainly not the case inasmuch as diplomatic decision-making still remains opaque and transpires, not in the public sphere, but as ever in “secret chambers.” Wetzstein 2010, 510.

<sup>6</sup> Entman 2008, 88.

<sup>7</sup> Entman 2008, 89.

<sup>8</sup> Jönsson 1996; Gilboa refers to this as ‘media diplomacy’, which is more contemporaneously used by political and diplomatic actors attempt to communicate with each other in lieu of ordinary diplomatic channels “to express interest in negotiation, to build confidence, and to mobilize support for agreements.” Gilboa 2002, 741.

<sup>9</sup> Entman 2008.

diplomacy might be better conceived as designed ultimately to shape elite opinion and action.”<sup>10</sup> Whereas in some societies, political elites may be more sensitive, if not responsive, to shifts in mass public opinion, the same might not be true in other contexts where elites can afford to ignore public opinion as irrelevant to foreign policy decision-making.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, it would seem that foreign public opinion matters most in instances when it appears to have a noticeable effect on elite decision-making within a targeted state.<sup>12</sup>

From the perspective of a targeted state whose interests happen not to be aligned with the targeting state, this would highlight the importance of “information management” practices in the context of public diplomacy, wherein news manipulation is used “to cultivate strong domestic opposition to external influence.”<sup>13</sup> For example, it is possible that lack of support for U.S. policies among foreign elites and publics is not because they somehow arrive at misunderstandings or merely lack good information.<sup>14</sup> Instead, antagonism toward U.S. foreign policy among foreign elites and publics may actually derive from well-informed hostility vis-à-vis policies broadly regarded as endangering the national interests of the target country.<sup>15</sup>

Contra the conventional wisdom of some media scholars that “less developed nations are mostly on the receiving end of public diplomacy, because most lack the communication capability to compete effectively on a global basis,”<sup>16</sup> such countries may not always be merely passive recipients of external public diplomacy initiatives. Their asymmetrical communication capabilities on the global stage do not necessarily render most regimes, authoritarian or

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<sup>10</sup> Entman 2008, 89.

<sup>11</sup> Entman 2008, 89.

<sup>12</sup> Entman 2008, 89.

<sup>13</sup> Gilboa 2008, 63.

<sup>14</sup> Entman 2008, 88.

<sup>15</sup> In such instances, the impenetrability of public opinion in the country may not be attributable to any failings of U.S. public diplomacy efforts, as “its publics and elites may well reject even the most sophisticated U.S. public diplomacy initiatives.” Entman 2008, 88.

<sup>16</sup> Hachten and Scotton 2016, 232.

otherwise, in the Global South powerless to contend with external public diplomacy messaging on the domestic front. Unfortunately, scarce attention has been given in the extant research to considerations of the impact that public diplomacy efforts might have at the reception point<sup>17</sup> or, for that matter, how a targeted state—be it in the Global South or the Global North—might respond to these efforts. These are blind spots in public diplomacy studies that remain largely unaddressed. In this study, the ability of a targeted state to respond—by resisting or acquiescing—to the mediated public diplomacy efforts of a targeting state is of significant interest and is the subject of close examination.

### **Motivation for the study**

During the first decade after 9/11, relations between the United States and Pakistan experienced a period of almost continuous tensions as the two countries struggled to maintain an uneasy alliance against the Al Qaeda terrorist network and the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan. Even before May 1-2, 2011, when Osama bin Laden was located and killed in Abbottabad, the bilateral relationship was being tested by intensifying suspicions between American and Pakistani military/intelligence institutions. Ties between these putative allies had long been complicated by differences over how to ultimately resolve the Afghan conflict and eliminate militant sanctuaries in the tribal borderlands of north-western Pakistan. Washington and Islamabad's increasingly troubled counterterrorism partnership had been roughly held together for as long as it had, not by any common strategic interests, but by reasons of practical necessity. From the onset of the Afghan war in October 2001, Washington had to depend mainly on overland transit through Pakistan to supply and fuel U.S. and allied military operations inside landlocked Afghanistan. In exchange for providing this vital logistical access, along with

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<sup>17</sup> For a few notable exceptions in this regard, see Wiseman 2015; Alexander 2014; McKenzie 2005.

assurances of Pakistani military and intelligence cooperation in the U.S. ‘war on terror’, Islamabad was compensated over the years with billions of dollars in much needed economic assistance.<sup>18</sup> However, in due course, foreign policy elites in Washington came to the conclusion that—financial incentives notwithstanding—Islamabad’s professed support for U.S. objectives in Afghanistan was not always forthcoming in instances where American and Pakistani strategic interests clashed.<sup>19</sup>

Between 2008 and 2009, a turning point in the relationship was reached as elections and political transitions occurred in both countries during that time. In Islamabad, a politically weakened military regime under Musharraf gave way to a return to (nominal) civilian rule with a Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) led parliamentary government in March 2008. However, the question of who was actually in charge of Pakistani foreign policy and national security matters only became more ambiguous. And so, from the perspective of the newly inaugurated Obama administration in Washington in January 2009, it was no longer entirely clear as to whom the appropriate Pakistani interlocutors were that could deliver on renewed U.S. demands to dismantle pro-Taliban militant sanctuaries along the Afghan-Pakistan border.

Immediately prior to this, in the final months of the Bush administration, as Islamabad continued to frustrate Washington by selectively confronting militants ensconced within its borders, and American casualties in Afghanistan mounted, the U.S. military and the CIA resorted to targeting suspected militant sanctuaries through a range of (ostensibly) covert measures, leading to a spillover of the of the U.S. conflict with the Taliban into Pakistan. To placate Washington, Islamabad had earlier tolerated, even facilitated, the secret war inside Pakistan initiated by George W. Bush, but as U.S. aerial drone strikes and cross-border raids became

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<sup>18</sup> Cohen and Chollet 2007; Hathaway 2008.

<sup>19</sup> Schaffer 2002.



increasingly frequent, aggressive, and unilateral under Barack Obama, such cooperation deteriorated. The question of whether the Pakistani civilian government or the military and intelligence leadership were more receptive to U.S. diplomatic pressure acquired greater urgency when bilateral relations were consumed by a succession of diplomatic crises during the *annus horribilis* of 2011.

By 2011, Washington and Islamabad seemed to be moving toward a rupture of relations as two major crises transpired in the first half of that year, starting with the arrest and seven weeks-long (January 27-March 16) detention of Raymond Davis, a purported U.S. diplomat who was, in fact, a CIA contractor, for killing two Pakistani civilians in Lahore. The resolution of that crisis was followed just weeks later by another crisis in the aftermath of the CIA-led operation that resulted in the killing of Osama bin Laden on May 1-2 in Abbottabad. In the course of both these crises, diplomatic disagreements and political tensions over the United States' expansion of its 'war on terror' into Pakistani territory were publicly negotiated through engagement in symbolic framing contests via the news media, which is referred to here as 'mediated public diplomacy'.

Unsurprisingly, the various controversies in post-9/11 U.S.-Pakistan relations—perhaps America's most challenging relationship in the Muslim world—have been of intrinsic interest for regional observers and practitioners of diplomacy alike. Increased attention to this subject has produced numerous valuable texts that have explored policy options for Washington vis-à-vis Islamabad and underscored the latter's problematic role in Afghanistan as well as the broader U.S. 'war on terror'.<sup>20</sup> However, the complicated theme of how best to persuasively

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<sup>20</sup> For notable examples of works in this vein by prominent former U.S. and Pakistani officials, journalists, and researchers, see Coll 2018; Etzioni 2012; Fair 2010; Gul 2010; Gall 2014; Haqqani 2013; Hussain 2010; Jones 2007; Krasner 2012; Markey 2013; Rashid 2012; Riedel 2011; Samad 2011; Schaffer and Schaffer 2011; Tomsen 2011; Weinbaum 2013.

communicate the compatibility of U.S. interests with those of Pakistanis has only recently begun to receive attention in the literature on political communication<sup>21</sup> and public diplomacy.<sup>22</sup>

It is peculiar that the media and communication aspects of the relationship had not received more serious attention earlier on, especially as both U.S. and Pakistani officials had, for many years, repeatedly exchanged accusations that the domestic news media of the other country deliberately misrepresent their country's foreign policy, seemingly at the prompting of their respective governments. After all, U.S. attempts to overcome political antagonism in various sections of Pakistani society—its media in particular—have been an enduring feature of the bilateral relationship and thereby an insurmountable obstacle to securing Islamabad's unequivocal diplomatic and material support for Washington's 'war on terror'. Moreover, while it may be that such mutually antagonistic news coverage further exacerbated tensions, it would be a mistake to regard this merely as the consequence of an unfortunate pattern of miscommunication between Washington and Islamabad.<sup>23</sup> Rather, it would seem that, with periodic breakdowns in closed-door diplomacy, especially during crisis episodes, American and Pakistani news coverage of U.S.-Pakistan controversies provided arenas of contestation, outside formal diplomatic channels, wherein tensions between both states were strategically played out.

### **Research questions and argument**

This study builds on the important topic of the participatory role of the news media in public diplomacy vis-à-vis post-9/11 U.S.-Pakistan relations by asking how U.S. mediated public diplomacy efforts that were intended to shift Pakistani elite public opinion (as reflected in the Pakistani media) in favor of Washington were received and responded to by Islamabad. By

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<sup>21</sup> For example, Fair et al. 2014; Fair et al 2015.

<sup>22</sup> For example, Smith 2011; Arif et al. 2014; Golan and Yang 2013.

<sup>23</sup> For an example of this type of interpretation, see Yusuf 2010.

scrutinizing the actions and attitudes of Pakistani state actors towards either resisting or acquiescing to U.S. diplomatic pressure in specific instances, it becomes possible to more adequately contextualize the challenges U.S. public diplomacy faces in dealing with Islamabad's disposition for tolerating—if not actively promoting—anti-American sentiment in domestic public opinion.

To answer the overarching research question in this study, two further questions specifically related to mediated public diplomacy in crisis contexts also need to be considered: First, how did U.S. and Pakistani political actors, including the news media, frame or manipulate definitions of the situation (as well as problem solutions) during such crises and, in so doing, what did they hope to achieve in terms of influencing the outcome of a given crisis episode? Second, how did competing frames or definitions of the situation during a given crisis episode enable or constrain U.S. and Pakistani political actors in terms of their range of available communicative responses and actions to escalate, de-escalate, or resolve the crisis? These, then, are the key questions that guide the research presented in this study.

In times of highly publicized diplomatic controversies, or what are specifically referred to in this study as 'public diplomacy crises', mediated public diplomacy can become a strategy of crisis management.<sup>24</sup> In addressing the above-mentioned research questions, I argue in this study that the resort to mediated public diplomacy is a strategic choice that political and/or diplomatic actors make as a means for maximizing reputational stakes or 'face' concerns to pressure (or resist) one another by constraining the bargaining preferences of each disputant in a crisis. To logically demonstrate this argument, I put forward a sociologically informed approach to analyze the ways in which political and diplomatic elites of states manage their collective national 'face'

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<sup>24</sup> A notable example of this is the *Jyllands-Posten* Muhammad cartoons controversy in Denmark during 2005-06. For examinations of this episode as a public diplomacy crisis, see Lindholm and Olsson 2011; Rolfe 2009; Andreassen 2008.

while symbolically communicating through frames in the news media during public diplomacy crises. While pressure on state actors to respond within an extremely limited timeframe is one of the defining features of a crisis, the diplomatic leverage one side might gain over another in a framing contest compels the opposing side not only to react defensively but also without much time for deliberation. Accordingly, the intensified involvement of the news media, as both instruments and actors in public diplomacy, brings greater complexity (as well as some degree of transparency) to communication processes in contemporary diplomatic crisis management.

Although there have been some studies of how different national news organizations framed international crises in the post-Cold War and post-9/11 periods, such comparative studies did not, however, take additional steps towards investigating what role, if any, was played by the media in crisis interactions.<sup>25</sup> The frame analyses in this study advance beyond mere comparison of divergences in official statements and news coverage to illustrate how opposing frames dialogically interact with and impact each other as a crisis unfolds. The analyses will reveal a progressive shift from initial frame contestation to produce an outcome of frame convergence. Furthermore, the analyses will demonstrate that while disputants in a public diplomacy crisis might have incompatible interests that are conveyed in aggressive exchanges in the media, a shared concern about maintaining 'face' consequentially brings crisis interactions to converge on a mutually agreeable frame.

In developing this argument, I draw on insights from sociologically-oriented studies on Goffmanian impression management in international relations, as well as the theoretical literature on mediated public diplomacy in communication studies, and relevant negotiation and conflict resolution research on framing. For the purposes of the empirical illustration of my argument, I analyze the recourse to mediated public diplomacy during the two aforementioned

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<sup>25</sup> For example, Hook and Pu 2006; Parsons and Xiaoge 2001.

cases of crisis in U.S.-Pakistan relations in 2011. Utilizing this focus, this study illustrates how the turbulence of the U.S.-Pakistan relationship—punctuated as it has been by escalating disagreements and crises—periodically provided opportunities for the American and Pakistani news media to serve as more than mere barometers by actually contributing to the process of crisis bargaining and its outcomes.

### **Aim and objectives of the study**

The central aim of this study is to understand how a state, such as Pakistan, that is targeted by the (coercive or otherwise) mediated public diplomacy interactions of another state, such as the United States, responds—by resisting or acquiescing—to such interactions during a public diplomacy crisis. Achieving this aim requires an examination of how political actors, including the media, in the targeted state attempt to resist such manipulation by countering with their own domestic ‘news management’ efforts. What is also of interest in the social phenomena of public diplomacy crises, with respect to this study, is the entanglement of diplomacy and domestic politics in publicly visible ways, which can either mitigate or exacerbate the crisis management and communication efforts of political actors. The research aim of this study is achieved by approaching the empirical subject matter on the one hand at the level of political culture, and on the other at the level of events through frame analyses of the two major crisis episodes. Hence, the objectives of this research were twofold.

The first research objective of this study is to provide a political-sociological analysis of what may be described as a transnational political culture of diplomacy and news that developed in U.S.-Pakistan relations over the course of the first post-9/11 decade (2001-2011). This analytical discussion appraises the inadvertent shift toward mediated public diplomacy between Washington and Islamabad, as well as the perceptions both sides have of each other. A

consideration of the distinct contexts of American and Pakistani media-state relations, wherein news coverage of U.S.-Pakistan relations was produced through interactions between government officials and news professionals *within* and *between* both countries, was crucial to this discussion. The role of journalists working in the American and Pakistan news media as *de facto* political actors in this volatile equation was also of significant interest.

The second research objective is to analyze the interpretive frames that emerged in American and Pakistani elite rhetoric and newspaper coverage of two extraordinary crisis events during 2011. An examination of such headline-generating quarrels between Washington and Islamabad offers useful cases to (a) compare the interpretive crisis frames and counter-frames that emerged, and (b) trace the ensuing political framing competitions between political actors in both countries as they attempted to control how their actions were portrayed by the media of their own and the other country. By analyzing two consecutive crises that were, in part, negotiated through the news media, the case studies delineate competing definitions of the situation (or versions of reality) presented by both governments via the media to make sense of events in terms favorable to their country's international image and national interests.

In pursuit of the aforementioned aim of the research, this study contributes evidence from critical episodes in post-9/11 U.S.-Pakistan relations to enrich the scholarly debate on public diplomacy and extend its analytical scope. Although research on public diplomacy has been attentive to its application in war and conflict situations, its role in international political crises has been overlooked by researchers until fairly recently.<sup>26</sup> In addressing this lacuna, this study makes an original contribution towards an understanding of mediated public diplomacy in crisis contexts as a dialogical negotiation between targeting and targeted states. At the same time, the study also adds to specific literatures on crisis management in international politics, post-9/11

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<sup>26</sup> For notable exceptions, see Lindholm and Olsson 2011; Olsson 2013; Auer 2016.

U.S.-Pakistan relations, U.S. public diplomacy in the Muslim world, and applications of Goffman's sociology in international studies.

## **Overview of the study**

This study consists of eight further chapters.

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 successively build on each other to lay out the theoretical framework of this study. Chapter 2 situates the study through a selective review of the relevant literature on public diplomacy. It also provides an overview of how this study draws on Goffmanian perspectives on impression management through face-work and framing to advance a dramaturgical sociology of crisis public diplomacy. Chapter 3 addresses the role and influence of the media in strategic crisis communication using Entman's theory of 'mediated public diplomacy' to elucidate the means by which political elites communicate with each other within and across national contexts via the media of their own and that of another country in crisis situations.<sup>27</sup> Chapter 4 focuses on 'framing contests' in public diplomacy crises, wherein state elites seek to manipulate media frames during the escalation, de-escalation, and resolution of public diplomacy crises. A case is made in this chapter for a frame analysis that examines public diplomacy crises as bargaining dialogues between (and within) competing frames, which veer between coercion and accommodation, while aiming towards reaching a practical agreement.

Chapter 5 presents the research design, data collection sources and strategies, and methods used in the empirical case studies presented in Chapters 7 and 8. It provides an overview of how research materials (i.e., elite/expert interviews, official documents, and news reports) informed the qualitative frame analyses conducted in the in-depth case studies of two major U.S.-Pakistan diplomatic crises.

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<sup>27</sup> Entman 2008.

Chapter 6 presents a broad overview of how the perceptions of American and Pakistani officials have been reflected in the media of both countries, and also the extent to which such news coverage has contributed to, or even exacerbated, recurring U.S.-Pakistan tension. This discussion covers the asymmetrical structure of mediatized communication that facilitates dialogical news exchanges (as opposed to unidirectional news flows) impacting diplomatic-journalistic developments between Washington and Islamabad. The interactions between American and Pakistani political elites and journalistic communities over the decade since 9/11 are approached as a distinct, transnational politico-cultural system of diplomacy and news.

Chapters 7 and 8 examine the framing contests that ensued in the aftermath of two major crises in U.S.-Pakistan relations during 2011. The case study in Chapter 7 looks at the crisis surrounding a diplomatic immunity dispute, which involved the arrest and seven weeks-long (January 27-March 16) detention of a clandestine CIA contractor, Raymond Davis, for fatally shooting two Pakistani men on a busy street in Lahore. The case study in Chapter 8 looks at the nearly month-long crisis that ensued in the aftermath of the unilateral raid by U.S. Navy SEALs that resulted in the killing of Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden in the cantonment town of Abbottabad (May 1-27), during which mutual accusations of betrayal between Washington and Islamabad ignited perhaps the most serious diplomatic crisis in U.S.-Pakistan relations since 9/11.

Finally, Chapter 9 concludes the study by relating back to the overall argument, aim, objectives, and research questions in this study. It reflects on the theoretical contribution and empirical findings of the research along with recommendations for future research in this area.



## Chapter 2

### Towards a dramaturgical sociology of (crisis) public diplomacy

#### Introduction

This chapter advances a Goffmanian dramaturgical approach to understanding public diplomacy during crises as a form of impression management via ‘face-work’ and ‘framing’. Goffman’s sociology not only offers insights into how social actors influence one another through manipulation of impressions but also how they protect their own ‘selves’ against such influence.<sup>1</sup> Despite Goffman’s apparent lack of interest in political sociology per se, he did demonstrate more than an occasional interest in diplomatic texts and manuals as illustrative examples for his social theories.<sup>2</sup> Adler-Nissen argues that Goffman’s sociological perspective—especially with respect to concepts such as the ‘interaction order’, ‘impression management’, and ‘face-work’—is essentially “a ‘diplomatic theory’ of society” that demonstrates his constant preoccupation with skill and tact in social interactions.<sup>3</sup>

The notion of ‘face’, as Goffman defines it, is “the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line [or definition of the situation] others assume he has taken during a particular contact.”<sup>4</sup> To put it another way, face can be understood as the desired self-image an actor seeks to publicly present in social interaction for implicit acceptance or approval by other actors to accrue social benefits (or avoid social sanctions). According to Goffman, a social actor’s face can be maintained, enhanced, saved, or lost.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, in social

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<sup>1</sup> Waksler 1989, 4.

<sup>2</sup> For example, Goffman 1969.

<sup>3</sup> Adler-Nissen 2012, 8-10.

<sup>4</sup> In the context of social interaction, a ‘line’ refers to an actor’s “pattern of verbal and nonverbal acts by which he expresses his view of the situation and through this his evaluation of the participants, especially himself.” Goffman 1967, 5.

<sup>5</sup> Goffman 1967, 8-9.

interaction, the presentation of a face to others, and to others' faces, is necessarily linked to 'considerations of face'. In this regard, 'face-work' refers to communications or actions intended to make a social actor's conduct compatible with their face.<sup>6</sup> In particular, face-work may serve "to counteract 'incidents'—that is, events whose effective symbolic implications threaten face."<sup>7</sup> Through face-work, actors maneuver in situations of social disequilibrium, where the definition of the situation is in doubt or disputed, to defend a face that comes under threat or restore a face that has been damaged. Hence, for Goffman, "to study face-saving is to study the traffic rules of social interaction."<sup>8</sup>

For Adler-Nissen, it is surprising that Goffman has up until now not received due recognition "as a theorist of diplomacy."<sup>9</sup> In his own words, concerning the utility of diplomacy in everyday social life, Goffman argues that

The members of every social circle may be expected to have some knowledge of face-work and some experience in its use. In our society, this kind of capacity is sometimes called tact, *savoir-faire*, diplomacy, or social skill. Variation in social skill pertains more to the efficacy of face-work than to the frequency of its application, for almost all acts involving others are modified, prescriptively or proscriptively, by considerations of face.<sup>10</sup>

In arguing for the extension of Goffman's concept of 'face-work' to diplomatic studies, Adler-Nissen makes the claim that most diplomatic activity is anticipatory and, as such, is defensively focused on maintaining or saving face.<sup>11</sup> It follows from this that the work and (face-to-face or mediated) interactions of diplomats can be understood as "national face-work."<sup>12</sup> To be sure, in the case of diplomats, as Goffman suggests, the necessity of focused "social skill and perceptiveness" may be expected to be greater among "groups whose members frequently act as

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<sup>6</sup> Goffman 1967, 12.

<sup>7</sup> Goffman 1967, 12.

<sup>8</sup> Goffman 1967, 12.

<sup>9</sup> Adler-Nissen 2012, 8.

<sup>10</sup> Goffman 1967, 13.

<sup>11</sup> Adler-Nissen 2012, 13.

<sup>12</sup> Adler-Nissen 2012, 3.

representatives of wider social units such as lineages or nations, for the player here is gambling with a face to which the feelings of many persons are attached.”<sup>13</sup> This study agrees with the contention that there is “a double theoretical potential in a meeting between diplomatic studies and Goffman’s theory.”<sup>14</sup> What follows is a proposition in just such a direction for an alternative perspective of public diplomacy based on a Goffmanian sociological approach.

This chapter is organized into two main sections. The first section acknowledges the definitional ambiguity surrounding public diplomacy and then proceeds to provide an overview of the tension between two main approaches to public diplomacy. This tension revolves around an ongoing debate as to whether the emphasis of public diplomacy should be on long-term relationship building between publics as represented by research within the ‘new public diplomacy’ perspective,<sup>15</sup> or on strategic advocacy aimed at influencing foreign elite and mass public opinion in target states to achieve specific, short-term foreign policy objectives.<sup>16</sup> In the course of the discussion, this section situates the current study within the latter perspective, wherein public diplomacy is approached as a form of strategic advocacy, given its more direct relevance to the focus in this study on public diplomacy crises. The second section draws on sociological and social psychological-oriented research on public diplomacy in particular, and international relations in general, to synthesize a sociological approach using Goffman’s concept of ‘impression management’ via ‘face-work’ and ‘framing’ for understanding public diplomacy as a kind of self-presentational activity international actors engage in during public diplomacy crises.

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<sup>13</sup> Goffman 1967, 13.

<sup>14</sup> Adler-Nissen 2012, 8.

<sup>15</sup> For example, Melissen 2005.

<sup>16</sup> For example, Manheim 1994.

## **Public diplomacy: relationship building or strategic advocacy?**

As is frequently the case with many concepts in the social sciences, it has become somewhat customary in public diplomacy research to make note of the slipperiness of ‘public diplomacy’ as an ambiguous and contested concept. A lack of definitional consensus exists despite the ever-increasing prominence and usage of the term in contemporary parlance by diplomatic practitioners and scholars alike. Various definitions have been on offer ever since the 1960s, when Edmund A. Gullion, a former U.S. diplomat and then dean of the School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, is said—according to official legend—to have coined the term ‘public diplomacy’ in an effort to distinguish it from propaganda, as practiced by the Nazis and the Soviets. For instance, one influential characterization defines public diplomacy as “a government’s process of communicating with foreign publics in an attempt to bring about understanding for its nation’s ideas and ideals, its institutions and its culture, as well as its national goals and current policies.”<sup>17</sup> More recently, Christopher W.S. Ross, a career ambassador and former special coordinator for public diplomacy at the U.S. Department of State, suggested a more succinct definition of the concept as involving state efforts “to inform, engage, and influence foreign publics.”<sup>18</sup> In a more strategic, foreign policy effect-oriented sense, public diplomacy can be defined as “efforts by the government of one nation to influence public or elite opinion in a second nation for the purpose of turning the foreign policy of the target nation to advantage.”<sup>19</sup> This study adopts this last definition of public diplomacy as a point of departure towards addressing the more substantive (and ongoing) debate concerning the practical function of public diplomacy in international crisis politics. As Hayden observes, “public diplomacy

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<sup>17</sup> Tuch 1990, 3.

<sup>18</sup> Ross 2003, 22.

<sup>19</sup> Manheim 1994, 4.

fulfills two (at times competing) roles for foreign policy institutions: to *advocate* messages or ideas and to *cultivate relations* of mutual understanding.”<sup>20</sup>

Before proceeding further, it is useful to outline the key practices of states engaged in public diplomacy so as to contextualize the theoretical discussion that follows. In a much-cited taxonomy, Cull identifies the following five elements of public diplomacy practices: listening, advocacy, cultural diplomacy, exchange diplomacy, and international broadcasting.<sup>21</sup> Listening involves a state’s efforts to collect information about foreign publics and their opinions by listening instead of speaking to them, and potentially using such data to advise policymakers and/or responsively adjust a state’s public diplomacy policies.<sup>22</sup> It is at least in this activity that the focus of public diplomacy is not exclusively concerned with influencing foreign audiences and instead leaves open the possibility of being influenced by them. However, this is something that is more often promised than practiced.<sup>23</sup> Advocacy involves international communication activities on the part of a state to actively promote specific policies, ideas, or the interests of that state in the thinking of a foreign public by explaining them through media relations and public information services.<sup>24</sup> Whereas features of advocacy are evident in other areas of public diplomacy, Cull notes that its “short-term utility has historically led to a bias toward this dimension of public diplomacy and a tendency to place it at the center of any public diplomacy structure.”<sup>25</sup> Cultural diplomacy (or ‘cultural relations’) comprises a state’s efforts to promote awareness of its cultural resources, heritage, and achievements (e.g., art and sport) and/or supporting cultural transmission (e.g., language and values) to foreign countries.<sup>26</sup> Exchange

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<sup>20</sup> Hayden 2016, 143 (emphasis in original).

<sup>21</sup> Cull 2008.

<sup>22</sup> Cull 2008, 32.

<sup>23</sup> Cull 2008, 32.

<sup>24</sup> Cull 2008, 32.

<sup>25</sup> Cull 2008, 32.

<sup>26</sup> Cull 2008, 33.

diplomacy involves a “mutuality” of benefits wherein one state sends its citizens to another country and reciprocally accepts citizens from that country for periods of study, training, and/or acculturation.<sup>27</sup> International broadcasting consists of a state’s use of news reporting via radio, television, and the internet to engage with foreign audiences.<sup>28</sup>

In turning to the theoretical research literature, one will find that the so-called ‘new public diplomacy’ is a significant conceptual trend, which contends that there have been substantial changes in the orientation of public diplomacy in the context of momentous social transformations since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War (i.e., the rise to prominence of civil society actors accompanied by technological innovations in communication).<sup>29</sup> For instance, Melissen argues that, in this new milieu, states “accept more and more that they have to engage in dialogue with foreign audiences as a condition of success in foreign policy.”<sup>30</sup> Moreover, in response to demands for greater transparency and intensifying collaborative, transnational relationships, the new public diplomacy “has in fact become part of the changing fabric of international relations” rather than a mere “technical instrument of foreign policy.”<sup>31</sup>

The new public diplomacy is no longer limited to activities such as (monological) messaging, promotional campaigns (nation-branding), or even direct official interactions with foreign publics in the service of foreign policy objectives.<sup>32</sup> According to this view, these practices are now relegated in favor of further priorities, such as forging relations with foreign civil society actors and coordinating network facilitation between domestic and foreign NGOs.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Cull 2008, 33.

<sup>28</sup> Cull 2008, 34; see also, Seib 2010.

<sup>29</sup> Cull 2012, 185.

<sup>30</sup> Melissen 2005, 13-14.

<sup>31</sup> Melissen 2005, 8.

<sup>32</sup> Melissen 2005, 22.

<sup>33</sup> Melissen 2005, 22.

This far-reaching shift in emphasis is attributed to the adjustment of states to the increasing prominence and agency of non-state actors as vital players in international relations as well as the proliferation of new communication technologies that have empowered them.<sup>34</sup> In describing what they believe has already become a reality, scholarly proponents of the new public diplomacy<sup>35</sup> pronounce such changes as amounting to nothing less than a total paradigm shift for public diplomacy and diplomacy, both of which are, according to Melissen, increasingly “merging into something new, as opposed to the conventional view that each is driven by a different logic.”<sup>36</sup>

In the new public diplomacy that is (apparently) progressively emerging at the forefront of contemporary diplomatic practice, messaging is moving away from monological persuasion-oriented modes of “peddling information to foreigners and keeping the foreign press at bay” toward open, dialogical engagement with foreign publics.<sup>37</sup> Nye argues that this progression of public diplomacy from a monological to a dialogue-based model “treats publics as peer-to-peer cocreators of meaning and communication.”<sup>38</sup> To achieve the goal of a “truly relational public diplomacy,” Fitzpatrick argues that it is necessary to adopt a perspective in which public diplomacy is seen “as a means for achieving *mutual* understanding and advancing *shared* interests among nations and peoples.”<sup>39</sup> Hence, as opposed to state-directed hierarchical (top-down) flows of information, the collaborative network approach to communication established and “employed by advocacy NGOs, is inherently relations-centred in that it focuses on message

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<sup>34</sup> Hayden 2016, 144.

<sup>35</sup> For example, Melissen 2005; Cowan and Arsenault 2008; Fitzpatrick 2007; Zaharna 2007; Zaharna 2012.

<sup>36</sup> Melissen 2011, 13.

<sup>37</sup> Melissen 2005, 13-18; Melissen 2011; Fitzpatrick 2011, 9.

<sup>38</sup> Nye 2011, 108.

<sup>39</sup> Fitzpatrick 2013, 30 (emphasis in original).

exchange, relationship-building and network creation” amongst a multitude of interdependent actors involved in ‘polylateral’ public diplomacy.<sup>40</sup>

By no means though, is the new public diplomacy an utterly selfless enterprise or merely a ‘soft power’ implement, for it can be employed in pursuit of diverse aims, for example in political negotiations, international trade and investment, and in bypassing “opinion gatekeepers” to form direct contacts with foreign civil society actors.<sup>41</sup> Beyond this, it can also have certain “‘hard power’ goals such as alliance management, conflict prevention or military intervention.”<sup>42</sup> Above all, Melissen contends that the new public diplomacy succeeds in the fullest expression of its potential—when attuned to long-term foreign policy objectives—within extremely integrated and interdependent states that are “linked by multiple transnational relationships and therefore a substantial degree of ‘interconnectedness’ between their civil societies.”<sup>43</sup> And herein lies perhaps one of the unacknowledged limitations of the new public diplomacy perspective: its practical infeasibility in contexts outside of the Global North where there may be little to no such ‘interconnectedness’ among weak or non-existent independent civil societies in many states. That being said, there is also the not insignificant factor of how receptive (or unreceptive) the governments in many targeted states might be to such external public diplomacy efforts. This is something that the new public diplomacy approach does not, but perhaps should, seriously consider.

None of this is to say that advocates of the new public diplomacy are not cognizant of the fact that vestiges of ‘older’ media relations and propaganda-oriented paradigms of public diplomacy persist in the practices of many states. As Melissen notes, the primary mission of

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<sup>40</sup> Zaharna 2007, 221; Pisarska 2016, 28; Melissen 2011.

<sup>41</sup> Melissen 2005, 14.

<sup>42</sup> Melissen 2005, 14.

<sup>43</sup> Melissen 2005, 10-15.



many a press and information department within diplomatic ministries “was, and in many cases unfortunately still is, dissemination of information and coordination of relations with the press.”<sup>44</sup> In relation to this, it is worth noting new public diplomacy proponents’ aversion to propaganda, a concept with which public diplomacy is frequently confused and conflated. For Melissen, a distinction can be drawn between the two on the basis of patterns of communication involved in each.<sup>45</sup> Whereas propaganda is one-way persuasive communication, public diplomacy is similarly intended to be persuasive, “but it is fundamentally different from [propaganda] in the sense that public diplomacy also listens to what people have to say.” Nevertheless, Melissen concedes that some diplomatic services are still reliant on “a formidable tradition of propaganda-making” in the construction of their public diplomacy.<sup>46</sup>

In contrast to its antipathy to propaganda, there are remarkable affinities between the new public diplomacy and public relations practices. Melissen argues for the usefulness of corporate sector approaches to public relations and marketing in developing public diplomacy campaigns.<sup>47</sup> While acknowledging that, in the past, such “marketing oriented thinking was anathema and even a vulgarization to traditional diplomacy,” Melissen observes its increasing encroachment in and contributions to contemporary diplomatic practices.<sup>48</sup> Thus, it is not surprising to observe research based in the new public diplomacy perspective complement and intersect with an expanding literature that explores the application of public relations concepts and frameworks to public diplomacy.<sup>49</sup> This strand of public relations-oriented public diplomacy

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<sup>44</sup> Melissen 2005, 13.

<sup>45</sup> Melissen 2005, 18.

<sup>46</sup> Melissen 2005, 11.

<sup>47</sup> Melissen 2005, 8.

<sup>48</sup> Melissen 2005, 8.

<sup>49</sup> For example, Signitzer and Coombs 1992; Grunig 1993; Yun 2006; Fitzpatrick 2007; L’Etang 2009; Fitzpatrick et al. 2013.

research has been notably effective in stimulating “a typology-centered mode of inquiry (that also incorporates normative concerns).”<sup>50</sup>

At least, in theory, the new public diplomacy perspective seems to suggest that an across-the-board reconceptualization of practices in traditional diplomacy and public diplomacy has taken—and continues to take—place. Hayden notes that the new public diplomacy is not merely “a description of the status quo as it is a prescription: a normative template for adapting public diplomacy to new conditions and political actors.”<sup>51</sup> However, others—including this study—would argue that this perspective remains more aspirational than descriptive of current realities in that it is far from always realized, and in some cases not realizable, in certain respects and different global contexts.<sup>52</sup> It would seem more accurate, then, to describe the new public diplomacy perspective as a high-minded, normative plea that makes a cogent case for what best practices in (ethical) public diplomacy ought to be.

To a certain extent, some of the normative arguments made from the ‘new public diplomacy’ perspective vis-à-vis its preference for long-term over more immediate objectives are not so new at all. In fact, they predate the recent rise to prominence of non-state actors in international politics and the mass proliferation of internet technologies. Deibel and Roberts provide an illustration of an analogous, earlier debate centered on the proper role of public diplomacy in a state’s foreign policy by adopting pragmatist philosopher William James’s classic distinction between “tough-minded” (empiricist; going by ‘facts’) and “tender-minded”

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<sup>50</sup> Mor notes that such studies are theoretically valuable “for delineating the research domain of public diplomacy and defining its categories; classification schemes, however, are but a stage in theory construction – ultimately, explanations have to be sought for the recurring patterns or practices that these typologies establish. Moreover, the focus on form and structure should not obscure the importance of content – what governments actually *say* when they engage in public diplomacy, and why.” Mor 2009, 222-223 (emphasis in original).

<sup>51</sup> Hayden 2016, 144.

<sup>52</sup> For example, Altman and Shore 2014; Khakimova 2013.

(rationalistic; going by ‘principles’) temperaments to label two opposing schools of thought.<sup>53</sup> In this version of the argument, the ‘tough-minded’ school of ruthless realists argues that

the purpose of public diplomacy is to influence foreign attitudes in ways favorable to the image and policies of the nation. They accept, even glory in the use of the word propaganda to describe their work; only for such hard-nosed efforts, they assert, is it morally justifiable to commit public resources. The tough-minded tend to see public diplomacy as primarily an information rather than a cultural program, relying principally on the fast media (such as radio, TV, and newsprint) to carry hard political messages.<sup>54</sup>

Richard C. Holbrooke—whose storied diplomatic career ended with his death while serving as U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan (2009-10)—can be taken as an exemplar of such ‘tough-minded’ thinking. Writing in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, Holbrooke famously argued for the strategic imperative of effective messaging to win ‘hearts and minds’ in the then-newly-declared ‘war on terror’:

Call it public diplomacy, or public affairs, or psychological warfare, or – if you really want to be blunt – propaganda. But whatever it is called, defining what this war is really about in the minds of the 1 billion Muslims in the world will be of decisive and historic importance.<sup>55</sup>

On the other hand, Deibel and Roberts argue that the school of ‘tender-minded’ idealists find themselves at

infinite pains to show that their position is no less realistic or supportive of foreign policy than that of their tough-minded opponents, these people insist that information and cultural programs must bypass current foreign policy goals to concentrate on the highest long-range national objectives. In this view, changing foreign attitudes is a process to be measured in years, and the only feasible goal is to create a climate of mutual understanding in which the particulars of future national policies can be communicated abroad in a receptive atmosphere.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Deibel and Roberts 1976; James 1907.

<sup>54</sup> Deibel and Roberts 1976, 14.

<sup>55</sup> Holbrooke, Richard C. 2001. “Get the message out.” *Washington Post*, October 28.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/12/13/AR2010121305410.html>.

<sup>56</sup> Deibel and Roberts 1976, 14-15.

An illustration of this line of thinking is evident in the words of Richard N. Gardner, a former U.S. Ambassador to Italy (1977-81), who made the following argument during the height of the Cold War in the 1980s:

‘public diplomacy’ ought to be conceived as a nation’s efforts to project its values, purposes, interests and policies to the people of other countries and to understand, in return, their values, purposes, interests and policies. It is more than just ‘selling’ the official policy of the moment through the daily mass media, important as that element is. ‘Public diplomacy’ has to do with assuring an effectively functioning ‘intellectual connection’ between one’s own and foreign countries.<sup>57</sup>

In contrast to their opponents, those in the ‘tender-minded’ school “view public diplomacy as predominately a cultural effort,” wherein the importance of truthfulness in communication is paramount to its effectiveness.<sup>58</sup>

As to the question of which perspective is correct, Deibel and Roberts see a complementarity in both approaches, while at the same time arguing that public diplomacy

is essentially an artificial term. What we have instead are two quite different functions: that of policy articulation and advocacy (the ‘policy information’ role), and that of portraying the national society overseas (‘cultural communications’ in its broadest sense).<sup>59</sup>

In relation to this, Hayden argues that public diplomacy ought not to be regarded merely as a catalog of message promotion or cultural relations strategies; rather it can be more practically seen as interventionist attempts to shape the very cultural environment and media structures wherein intended messages are sent and received.<sup>60</sup>

In contrast to the normative and prescriptive approaches of the ‘new public diplomacy’ perspective, some researchers draw on a sociological and social psychological perspective to provide theoretical frameworks that bring rhetorical interactions in short-term, advocacy-oriented

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<sup>57</sup> Gardner, Richard N. 1983. “Selling America in the Marketplace of Ideas.” *New York Times Magazine*, March 20.

<sup>58</sup> Deibel and Roberts 1976, 15.

<sup>59</sup> Deibel and Roberts 1976, 15.

<sup>60</sup> Hayden 2016, 145.

public diplomacy into the forefront of consideration.<sup>61</sup> Zhang, drawing on symbolic interactionism<sup>62</sup> and interaction ritual theory,<sup>63</sup> conceptualizes public diplomacy as “the active participation by nations in the construction of meanings,” wherein continuous state interaction with other states to negotiate the meanings of symbols and the performance of actions based on such meanings occurs within a context of inter-state power relations.<sup>64</sup> In so doing, Zhang’s work applies frame analysis to study competitive U.S. and Chinese public diplomacy efforts in the aftermath of the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami.<sup>65</sup> Mor’s research also draws on symbolic interactionism,<sup>66</sup> as well as theories of impression management (or ‘self-presentation’)<sup>67</sup> and social ‘accounts’ (i.e., excuses and justifications).<sup>68</sup> Specifically, Mor utilizes these frameworks while analyzing instances of ‘tough-minded’ public diplomacy as a form of strategic communication<sup>69</sup> in the course of Israeli military operations during the 2002 al-Aqsa intifada,<sup>70</sup> the 2006 Lebanon war,<sup>71</sup> and the 2010 Gaza flotilla raid.<sup>72</sup> The present study follows in a similar pragmatist vein (based on practical, as opposed to idealistic, considerations) by drawing on the sociologically-oriented literature on international actors’ use of impression management strategies, which Goffman terms ‘face-work’<sup>73</sup> and ‘framing’,<sup>74</sup> to acquire a better understanding of strategic communication interactions focused on (short-term oriented) advocacy during public diplomacy crises.

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<sup>61</sup> See, Zhang 2006; Mor 2007; Mor 2009; Mor 2012; Mor 2014.

<sup>62</sup> Cooley 1902.

<sup>63</sup> Goffman 1967.

<sup>64</sup> Zhang 2006, 27.

<sup>65</sup> Zhang 2006.

<sup>66</sup> Blumer 1969; Stryker 1980.

<sup>67</sup> Goffman 1959; Tedeschi and Reiss 1981.

<sup>68</sup> Scott and Lyman 1968.

<sup>69</sup> For discussions on public diplomacy as strategic communication, see Löffelholz et al. 2014; Farwell 2012, 47-53.

<sup>70</sup> Mor 2007.

<sup>71</sup> Mor 2009; Mor 2012.

<sup>72</sup> Mor 2014.

<sup>73</sup> Goffman 1967.

<sup>74</sup> Goffman 1974.

### **Crisis public diplomacy as impression management via face-work and framing**

Goffman's dramaturgical sociology provides an illuminating perspective on the impression management strategies that social actors deploy in negotiating their interactions with others. At the core of his theories about the 'presentation of self in everyday life' is the argument that interactions which appear to be ordered social encounters are actually the product of impression management processes. Crucial to this perspective are the ways in which actors attempt, through 'presentation of self', to manage convincing impressions of themselves, which they present before others,<sup>75</sup> and 'frame' or manipulate particular definitions of the situations that they find themselves in with others.<sup>76</sup> Considerations of 'face' underpin such situated interactions in that actors are habitually concerned with how others perceive them and, moreover, it is through interactive strategies of 'face-work' that actors negotiate perceptions of themselves and others.<sup>77</sup>

This chapter builds, in part, on Mor's (Goffman-inspired) sociological approach, wherein he argues that strategic communication in public diplomacy "seeks to manipulate the impressions of foreign audiences and does so by means of *self*-presentation" as an exercise in social influence and direct persuasive communication.<sup>78</sup> Borrowing from Goffman, Mor contends that public diplomacy can be conceived as a form of impression management whereby "states, like individuals, try to affect the attributions that significant others (in this case: foreign publics) make with respect to their identity."<sup>79</sup> However, referring to the behavior of social actors as a performance does not necessarily mean they are feigning sincerity.<sup>80</sup> It would seem to be

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<sup>75</sup> Goffman 1959.

<sup>76</sup> Goffman 1974.

<sup>77</sup> Goffman 1967.

<sup>78</sup> Mor 2009, 227 (emphasis in original).

<sup>79</sup> Mor 2007, 662.

<sup>80</sup> Hall 2015, 17.

particularly the case in diplomatic contexts that even actors whose behavior is genuine must possess awareness to some degree that their rhetoric, signals, and actions serve to maintain a particular definition of a situation as well as their role within that situation.<sup>81</sup>

Consequently, even in instances when they might be fully sincere, social actors will find themselves engaging in ‘performances’ in that they have to regulate and self-monitor their behavior to convey particular meanings, and thereby avoid inadvertently conveying unintended or undesirable meanings, vis-à-vis other actors.<sup>82</sup> This is based on the assumption that states, as social actors, are invested in how others perceive them, and that such perceptions are open to a certain degree of manipulation, so it would, therefore, follow that self-presentation allows an actor some control over the attributions others make of them.<sup>83</sup>

The social process of impression management, in Goffman’s words, consists of those “contingencies which arise in fostering an impression, and of the techniques for meeting these contingencies.”<sup>84</sup> Goffman states that when social actors appear in the presence of significant others, they are bound to have various motivations in relation to controlling impressions that significant others form of the situation.<sup>85</sup> This involves the manner in which social actors present themselves and their actions to others, how they manipulate the impressions others form of them, and the types of effects that may or may not be borne out in their performances before others.<sup>86</sup>

One of the motivations for engaging in impression management can be attributed to the assumption that actors in a given social context generally try to avoid blame and social censure through self-disassociation from responsibility for adverse actions and outcomes, but will seek

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<sup>81</sup> Hall 2015, 17.

<sup>82</sup> Hall 2015, 17.

<sup>83</sup> Mor 2009, 226; see also Tedeschi and Norman 1985, 293.

<sup>84</sup> Goffman 1959, 80.

<sup>85</sup> Goffman 1959, 15.

<sup>86</sup> Goffman 1959, xi.

credit and social approval through self-association with responsibility for positive ones.<sup>87</sup> Given this assumption, actors are therefore incentivized to influence attributions of responsibility as well as significant others' perceptions of consequences.<sup>88</sup> Such 'credits' and 'debts' are constantly accumulated in the course of social relationships and interactions.<sup>89</sup> Thus, what is of significance for self-presenting actors is not so much how they regard their own actions and the consequences thereof, but instead how they are regarded by others, notably vis-à-vis responsibility for creditworthy and blameworthy actions.<sup>90</sup>

The manipulation of impressions via strategic communication to affect the perceptions others have of oneself is not an end in itself, but rather an intermediary means by which to ultimately affect the actions or policies of others towards oneself.<sup>91</sup> Concerning the aims of social actors engaging in situationally defined impression management in interaction with others, Goffman observes that,

Regardless of the particular objective which the individual has in mind and of his motive for having this objective, it will be in his interests to control the conduct of the others, especially their responsive treatment of him. This control is achieved largely by influencing the definition of the situation which the others come to formulate, and he can influence this definition by expressing himself in such a way as to give them the kind of impression that will lead them to act voluntarily in accordance with his own plan.<sup>92</sup>

The ability to control perceptions others have of oneself in a particular situation allows an actor to define the meaning of the situation, and thus also establish the appropriateness of norms and behaviors governing interactions between the interactants in that situation.<sup>93</sup>

The notion of a 'frame' is a key analytical concept that informs this study. As conceived by Goffman, a frame serves as an intersubjective "schemata of interpretation" allowing

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<sup>87</sup> Tedeschi and Reiss 1981, 5-6; Mor 2009, 226-227.

<sup>88</sup> Mor 2007, 665.

<sup>89</sup> Tedeschi and Reiss 1981, 6.

<sup>90</sup> Tedeschi and Reiss 1981, 6-7.

<sup>91</sup> Mor 2009, 226-227.

<sup>92</sup> Goffman 1959, 3-4.

<sup>93</sup> Tedeschi and Reiss 1981, 4.



individuals to “locate, perceive, identify, and label” events that occur around them.<sup>94</sup> According to Goffman, a frame answers the question of “What is it that’s going on here?”<sup>95</sup> With respect to the motives of actors engaged in framing, Goffman notes that

a ‘definition of the situation’ is almost always to be found, but those who are in the situation ordinarily do not create this definition, even though their society can be said to do so; ordinarily, all they do is to assess correctly what the situation ought to be for them and act accordingly.<sup>96</sup>

Since Goffman’s popularization of this concept in the social sciences, researchers from various disciplinary standpoints have appropriated the idea of a ‘frame’ as a way to understand how social actors decipher and describe the world. According to Entman’s widely cited definition, the communicative action of ‘framing’ or 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.”<sup>97</sup> In keeping with an interactional perspective, framing as strategic conduct may also be considered to be “the dynamic enactment and shaping of meaning in ongoing interaction (and frames are transient communicational structures).”<sup>98</sup>

### ***The role of ‘face-work’ in public diplomacy***

Along with framing, face-work serves as a conceptual lens through which the interactions in public diplomacy crises are analyzed in this study. While social actors may be said to maintain, lose, or save face, the notion of face itself is situated in the interactions between actors. That is to say, face is both generated from and negotiated within particular situations. Hence, face is a

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<sup>94</sup> Goffman 1974, 21.

<sup>95</sup> Goffman 1974, 8.

<sup>96</sup> Goffman 1974, 1-2.

<sup>97</sup> Entman 1993, 52 (emphasis in original).

<sup>98</sup> Dewulf et al. 2011, 8.

dynamic construct that can be “diffusely located in the flow of events in the encounter.”<sup>99</sup> As Goffman succinctly puts it: “Not, then, men and their moments. Rather moments and their men.”<sup>100</sup> Furthermore, despite whatever significance social actors may attach to their face, it is “only on loan from society” and may, accordingly, be withdrawn if an actor’s conduct is deemed unworthy of such face.<sup>101</sup> This means that face, as a socially-ratified self-image, is not only constituted and sustained through, and within, the context of interaction, it is also socially dependent on others for its construction and maintenance. A supposition here is that all social actors in an interaction share concerns regarding face as well as its maintenance through face-work.<sup>102</sup> Based on such a supposition, it can be said that a mutuality of face concerns among interactants forms the basis for the production and reproduction of a (rules-based) social order necessary to sustain interactions—through collusive rituals of face-work—in otherwise anarchic social contexts.<sup>103</sup> Therefore, face is not an objective of interaction, but rather a requisite condition for interaction.<sup>104</sup> In this regard, face-work serves the purpose of leveling differences among interactants to facilitate the orderly continuation of social interaction.

For Goffman, an interactional equilibrium is contingent upon a mutually agreeable definition of the situation.<sup>105</sup> Since this is so, social actors are, out of mutual concern for face, tacitly inclined to not only maintain or defend their own face as would be consistent with ‘self-respect’, but also to be protective of, or otherwise demonstrate ‘considerateness’ for, the face of others with whom they are engaged in interaction.<sup>106</sup> The stability of social interaction between an actor and others is, however, a delicate matter and susceptible to disruptions in, or deviations

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<sup>99</sup> Goffman 1967, 7.

<sup>100</sup> Goffman 1967, 3.

<sup>101</sup> Goffman 1967, 10.

<sup>102</sup> Goffman 1967, 12-14.

<sup>103</sup> Goffman 1967, 42-45.

<sup>104</sup> Goffman 1967, 12.

<sup>105</sup> Goffman 1967, 45.

<sup>106</sup> Branaman 2003, 93; Goffman 1967, 5-45.

from, the definition of the situation presented by any one interactant. As Goffman observes in this regard, “a false impression maintained by an individual in any one of his routines may be a threat to the whole relationship or role of which the routine is only one part.”<sup>107</sup> The disorder inherent in such interactional breakdowns can change the nature of the interaction and lead to face-threatening situations for one or all interactants.<sup>108</sup>

In that an actor’s self-presentation of face can only be ratified by others, each interactant is in this manner incentivized to act self-interestedly by maintaining the other’s face and by engaging in face-work to rescue the ‘spoiled’ situation. As Goffman notes in this regard,

Since each participant in an undertaking is concerned, albeit for differing reasons, with saving his own face and the face of the others, then tacit cooperation will naturally arise so that participants together can attain their shared but differently motivated goals.<sup>109</sup>

The collaborative nature of face-work is applicable in cooperative as well as competitive social interactions. This is so even though adversarial interactants may “have conflicting goals, they pursue those goals within a basic framework of rules and roles that define a particular kind of ‘game’.”<sup>110</sup> The commitment that opponents make to the framework of such a game may also ensure that they act to protect each other from threats to face, if only to allow the interaction to continue.<sup>111</sup> In this way, it can be argued that “there is a general conspiracy to save face so that social situations can also be saved.”<sup>112</sup> In the course of competitive public diplomacy in crisis contexts, opposing actors might be said to simultaneously conspire together and against each other in a game of impression management and face-work.

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<sup>107</sup> Goffman 1959, 64.

<sup>108</sup> Goffman 1967, 19.

<sup>109</sup> Goffman 1967, 29.

<sup>110</sup> Carson 2016, 111.

<sup>111</sup> Carson 2016, 111.

<sup>112</sup> Manning 1992, 39.

All social interactions involve some degree of face-work. Goffman acknowledges several different face-work strategies that can be employed to maintain an actor's face as well as the face of others.<sup>113</sup> Most of these face-work strategies involve constructing and reinforcing appropriate face, attempting to preserve face from potential loss on a continual basis, or responding to defend face in specifically threatening situations.<sup>114</sup> The basic face-work strategies described by Goffman may be analytically categorized as follows: 'avoidance' face-work, 'corrective' face-work, and 'aggressive' face-work.<sup>115</sup> Actors may engage in avoidance face-work either to prevent threats to face before they occur or to minimize the effect of a face-threatening interaction that seems likely to happen.<sup>116</sup> This type of face-work is meant to anticipatorily "contain or control the extent of damage to face."<sup>117</sup> Corrective face-work consists of remedial efforts after damage to face has already occurred in a face-threatening incident.<sup>118</sup> This type of reparative face-work may, according to Cupach and Metts,

be defensively offered by the actor responsible for creating face threat, may be protectively offered by other people who witness the loss of face, or may be offered by the person who has lost face as he or she attempts to regain lost social identity.<sup>119</sup>

In effect, then, corrective face-work allows actors to recover after a loss of face and thereby reestablish social order.<sup>120</sup>

In a study such as this one, on the communicative negotiation and bargaining of frames in public diplomacy crises, aggressive face-work occupies a primacy of position in relation to other

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<sup>113</sup> For Goffman, an actor will have two primary orientations in each social interaction: "a defense orientation toward saving his own face and a protective orientation toward saving others' face." Goffman 1967, 14.

<sup>114</sup> Goffman 1967, 13.

<sup>115</sup> Goffman 1967, 15-26.

<sup>116</sup> Avoidance face work "is also used to minimize face loss that seems likely to occur by framing the face-threatening action in light of extenuating circumstances." Metts 1992, 112-113; cf. Goffman 1967, 15-18.

<sup>117</sup> "The principle underlying avoidance is that in some face-threatening situations, drawing explicit attention to the face threat may be counterproductive." Cupach and Metts 1994, 9.

<sup>118</sup> Metts 1992, 112; cf. Goffman 1967, 19-23.

<sup>119</sup> Cupach and Metts 1994, 8.

<sup>120</sup> Goffman 1967, 19.

face-work strategies. While social actors may typically be expected to maintain both their own and the other's face, they may sometimes not conform to such expectations and thereby create a threat to the face for one or all interactants.<sup>121</sup> In such circumstances, actors may deliberately engage in 'aggressive face-work'<sup>122</sup> (or 'face attacks'<sup>123</sup>) against others to manipulate a social interaction in their own favor. Specifically, aggressive face-work occurs when an actor regards "face-work not as something he need be prepared to perform, but rather as something that others can be counted on to perform or to accept."<sup>124</sup> In this way, an actor can exploit expectations of (others to maintain and follow) orderly social interaction as a means of 'making points' for themselves.<sup>125</sup> At that juncture, according to Goffman, the social interaction

becomes less a scene of mutual considerateness than an arena in which a contest or match is held. The purpose of the game is to preserve everyone's line from an inexcusable contradiction, while scoring as many points as possible against one's adversaries and making as many gains as possible for oneself. An audience to the struggle is almost a necessity.<sup>126</sup>

In this kind of competitive interaction, an actor deliberately seeks to enhance their own face at the expense of the other interactant by introducing information that is favorable to themselves and unfavorable to others.<sup>127</sup> To maintain or enhance face as a result of engaging in aggressive face-work, the "winner" in such interactions has to also demonstrate that their capability in handling the situation is superior to that of their opponents.<sup>128</sup> However, the inherent risk in aggressive face-work lies in the potential for all interactants to lose face in the process. Yet,

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<sup>121</sup> Tracy and Tracy 1998, 226.

<sup>122</sup> Goffman 1967, 24-26.

<sup>123</sup> Drawing on Goffman, Tracy and Tracy define 'face attacks' as "communicative acts perceived by members of a social community (and often intended by speakers) to be purposefully offensive. Face attacks can range in offensiveness from displays of complete contempt to acts of mild disrespect." This conceptualization of 'face attacks' blends Goffman's idea of deliberate threats to face with his idea of calculated "ritual affronts" meant to "convey complete disrespect and contempt though symbolic means." Tracy and Tracy 1998, 227; Goffman 1967, 89.

<sup>124</sup> Goffman 1967, 24.

<sup>125</sup> Goffman 1967, 24.

<sup>126</sup> Goffman 1967, 24.

<sup>127</sup> Goffman 1967, 24-25.

<sup>128</sup> Goffman 1967, 25.

for an interaction to continue and for the maintenance of face, especially in the eyes of an audience, an actor's aggressive face-work towards others must be circumscribed by the constraints of an interactive framework.

The tense game of public diplomacy via (mediated) impression management on the 'front stage' before a public audience involves players—political elites, diplomats, and journalists—with complex motives and has both cooperative and competitive elements. Actors in contemporary (public) diplomatic crises cannot always, a priori, avoid face-threatening incidents as they might in traditional diplomacy that transpires behind closed doors or 'backstage'. Since maintenance of face is a need that all social actors are assumed to have, this factor can be relentlessly subject to exploitation and challenge in the context of political discourse.<sup>129</sup> Moreover, opposing actors engaged in aggressive face-work will generally have incompatible aims, which means that actors deliberately threaten each other's face and depict the other side as deceitful or hypocritical so as to discredit their definition of the situation and privilege their own.<sup>130</sup> On the one hand, calculated one-upmanship intended to offend an interactant, punish them for some transgression, or otherwise provoke them into overt conflict, can seriously aggravate the situation in an interaction.<sup>131</sup> On the other hand, as is argued in this study, demonstrating regard for the face of another interactant can de-escalate a crisis and facilitate the achievement of public resolution.

### ***Credibility, normativity, and social power in impression management***

In the course of self-presentation, an actor's "initial projection" commits them to whatever impressions they are constructing of themselves and must, therefore, altogether abandon other

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<sup>129</sup> Chilton 1990, 204.

<sup>130</sup> Taylor 2009, 211.

<sup>131</sup> Cupach and Carson 2002, 445.

pretensions.<sup>132</sup> As an actor strives to construct impressions through their performance before an audience to aid the actor in achieving their goals, the audience scrutinizes the impressions and messages an actor communicates, verbally and non-verbally, for indications of the actor's authenticity and consistency in self-presentation.<sup>133</sup> Therefore, to present a credible and successful performance, an actor needs to "pay attention to act and argue consistently with the cultural repertoires they have chosen in presentations of self or frames for their own advantage."<sup>134</sup> In the course of the interaction that proceeds among the involved actors, Goffman states that although further embellishments and alterations in the initial presentation of self may subsequently occur, it is crucial that any such changes not contradict actors' initial positions.<sup>135</sup> Hence, according to Goffman, an actor may encounter less difficulty by deciding "what line of treatment to demand from and extend to the others present at the beginning of an encounter than he can alter the line of treatment that is being pursued once the interaction is underway."<sup>136</sup> In this way, given that every performance demands an actor to become socially committed to it, actors cannot, in subsequent interactions, simply disregard their commitment to such repertoires if and when they no longer seem convenient or suitable for their purposes.<sup>137</sup>

In relation to the convincing impression that social actors seek to provide to others of their (actual or contrived) conformity to acceptable norms, Goffman makes the following statement, which is worth quoting at length:

In their capacity as performers, individuals will be concerned with maintaining the impression that they are living up to the many standards by which they and their products are judged. Because these standards are so numerous and so pervasive, the individuals who are performers dwell more than we might think in a moral world. But, *qua*

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<sup>132</sup> Goffman 1959, 10.

<sup>133</sup> Schimmelfennig 2002, 424; cf. Goffman 1969, 45.

<sup>134</sup> Schimmelfennig 2002, 424.

<sup>135</sup> Goffman 1959, 10-11.

<sup>136</sup> Goffman 1959, 10-11.

<sup>137</sup> Schimmelfennig 2002, 424; see also Barnett 1998, 47.

performers, individuals are concerned not with the moral issue of realizing these standards, but with the amoral issue of engineering a convincing impression that these standards are being realized. Our activity, then, is largely concerned with moral matters, but as performers we do not have a moral concern with them. As performers we are merchants of morality.<sup>138</sup>

Regardless of whether or not actors view themselves in the same way as others do, such is the concern about the impressions others form of them that these ‘merchants of morality’ will strive to avoid or minimize undesirable impressions and to entitle themselves to or enhance favorable impressions before others in their social environment.<sup>139</sup> Hence, although social actors may not necessarily internalize or be motivated by the normative expectations and cultural values governing their social environment, they are nonetheless compelled to act as though they are.<sup>140</sup>

With regard to this constraining adherence to norms in a social situation, Goffman notes that

The maintenance of this surface of agreement, this veneer of consensus is facilitated by each participant concealing his own wants behind statements which assert values to which everyone present feels obliged to give lip service.<sup>141</sup>

In Schimmelfennig’s reading of Goffman, even if actors happen to “believe in the rightness of the rules and, in principle, accept the obligation to follow them, they may still try to manipulate or circumvent them for their own advantage.”<sup>142</sup>

It is precisely because actors appreciate that a moral framework exists and understand its normative expectations that they are enabled to manipulate their own impressions and interpretative frames in a social situation.<sup>143</sup> According to Goffman, when an actor is engaged in maintaining a particular rule, they also become committed to a particular presentation of self, wherein the rules of conduct take the form of ‘obligations’, which establish moral constraints on an actor’s behavior, and ‘expectations’, which establish how others are morally obliged to act

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<sup>138</sup> Goffman 1959, 251.

<sup>139</sup> Tedeschi and Reiss 1981, 7; Schimmelfennig 2002, 425.

<sup>140</sup> Schimmelfennig 2002, 421.

<sup>141</sup> Goffman 1959, 9.

<sup>142</sup> Schimmelfennig 2002, 425.

<sup>143</sup> Barnett 1998, 34; Schimmelfennig 2002.



vis-à-vis said actor.<sup>144</sup> In this regard, Goffman suggests that “the very obligation and profitability of appearing always in a steady moral light, of being a socialized character, focuses one to be the sort of person who is practiced in the ways of the stage.”<sup>145</sup> However, as Barnett points out, such cynical manipulations are risky in that actors may quickly find themselves being called to account for the reputational and moral identities they have built for themselves.<sup>146</sup> To avoid being discredited, actors will, in Goffmanian terms, engage in impression management to persuade other actors and/or audiences that they are indeed functioning responsibly within a socially acceptable moral framework.<sup>147</sup> The linkage between the impetus to engage in impression management and the strategic conduct this entails is an actor’s ability to ascertain the relationship between what they decide on saying or doing and the influence this has on other actors.<sup>148</sup>

An additional, and no less important, rationale for engaging in impression management is the ambition of actors to realize ‘social power’.<sup>149</sup> As van Ham argues, “it is the capacity to establish norms and rules around which other actors’ actions converge that constitutes the core of social power.”<sup>150</sup> In relation to the utility of norms as instruments of social power, Barnett argues that actors are able to make use of “norms and symbols to influence the actions and directions of others, and they are able to use such means because others are susceptible to them and desire to maintain a public face.”<sup>151</sup> The practical exercise of social power in international politics, therefore, exclusively occurs in relationships between actors and ultimately depends on the perceptions others have of an actor, and this, in turn, involves the co-optation of other actors

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<sup>144</sup> Goffman 1956, 473-474.

<sup>145</sup> Goffman 1959, 251.

<sup>146</sup> Barnett 1998, 34; see also Schimmelfennig 202, 425; cf. Goffman 1959, 64.

<sup>147</sup> Barnett 1998, 34.

<sup>148</sup> Mor 2009, 226.

<sup>149</sup> Mor 2007, 666.

<sup>150</sup> van Ham 2010, 8.

<sup>151</sup> Barnett 1998, 44.

(instead of coercion) through various communicative guises such as strategic framing as well as public diplomacy.<sup>152</sup>

The social power of persuasion is exercised when rationales for acting in a particular manner, as opposed to acting in another way, are offered by an actor and accepted by another actor as an inherently reasonable and morally appropriate course of action.<sup>153</sup> Persuasiveness is contingent upon socially shared ‘cognitive meanings’ (i.e., ‘significations’ that represent specific definitions of a situation) and ‘value commitments’ (i.e., ‘legitimations’ through acceptance of common normative values), as well as the persona and attractiveness<sup>154</sup> of the actor that makes such rhetorical appeals and arguments.<sup>155</sup> Thus, the manipulation of impressions can be intended to induce certain identity ascriptions that are motivated by social power goals.<sup>156</sup> However, Mor adds that in the event an actor successfully constructs a “desired identity (and presumably enjoys the power dividends that such an identity brings),” then they would be compelled to defend it against challenges from other actors or audiences.<sup>157</sup>

Significantly, the establishment and maintenance of favorable images are not solely contingent upon an audience’s acceptance of international actors’ strategic framing and projections of norm-compliance.<sup>158</sup> Rather, they also depend “on credible performances which, in turn, requires the actors-as-performers to use the schemata and rules in a consistent and

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<sup>152</sup> van Ham 2010, 3-4.

<sup>153</sup> Scott 2002, 13.

<sup>154</sup> With respect to the social power of attraction in particular, Tedeschi and Reiss note how it can lead targeted actors to identify with its source and “internalize the attitudes, values, and actions that constitute both compliance to influence and realignment of the target’s cognitions to be more similar to those of the source. As a consequence of this dynamic, an attractive source is apt to be more influential than one who is not attractive.” Tedeschi and Reiss 1981, 12.

<sup>155</sup> Scott 2002, 13-15.

<sup>156</sup> Mor 2007, 666.

<sup>157</sup> Mor 2007, 666; Mor 2012, 400 n.36.

<sup>158</sup> Schimmelfennig 2002, 425.

impartial way.”<sup>159</sup> Credibility, in a public diplomacy context, denotes how believable the source of a communication and their message is perceived or determined to be by an audience.<sup>160</sup> Credibility is what allows an audience to perceive the connection between an actor’s avowed and actual motivations, intentions, and/or capabilities.<sup>161</sup> Hence, as a perceptual phenomenon, “credibility does not reside in a source. It is bestowed on a source by an audience.”<sup>162</sup> While self-presenting actors certainly aim to establish and maintain their credibility by endeavoring to be effectively persuasive in strategic communication, Mor notes that “what actors think will work (the question of means) and what actually works (the question of outcome) is not one and the same.”<sup>163</sup>

In making the observation that “politics has become a contest of competitive credibility,” Nye argues that “reputation becomes even more important than in the past, and political struggles occur over the creation and destruction of credibility.”<sup>164</sup> As international actors with greater credibility in certain contexts are likelier to be more effective in persuading target audiences to accept the ‘story’ that is explicitly or implicitly conveyed, success in public diplomacy “may ultimately be about whose story wins.”<sup>165</sup> Given these stakes, it should not be surprising that states compete with one another as well as other non-state actors, including the news media, to strengthen their own credibility and simultaneously strive to weaken the credibility of their opponents.<sup>166</sup>

Building on such notions of competitiveness and the increasing importance of credibility as a key aspect of social power in international politics, Mor presents what he calls a “sociology

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<sup>159</sup> Schimmelfennig 2002, 425.

<sup>160</sup> Mor 2012, 396.

<sup>161</sup> Mor 2012, 396.

<sup>162</sup> Gass and Seiter 2009, 156.

<sup>163</sup> Mor 2012, 395.

<sup>164</sup> Nye 2004, 106.

<sup>165</sup> Ronfeldt and Arquilla 2008, 359.

<sup>166</sup> Nye 2002, 68; Nye 2004, 106.

of credibility contests” to explicate the interactional process whereby actors set about to construct, defend, and enhance their credibility in public diplomacy contexts.<sup>167</sup> Such diplomatic interactions frequently transpire in the form of debates between opposing actors who present their competing arguments (or frames) before target audiences whose approval and support they are seeking.<sup>168</sup> Mor refers to the rhetorical construction of an actor’s own credibility (or damaging that of an opponent) in these interactions before an audience as “credibility talk,” a strategic practice of particular relevance to the articulation of competing frames and accounts in public diplomacy crises.<sup>169</sup> For an actor to credit their specific claim(s) requires believability, and in order to achieve this it becomes necessary to persuade target audiences that, “contrary to the claims of an opponent or critic, there is no gap between (a) how the actor presents itself and its actions to be – what account is provided – and (b) who or what the actor ‘really is’.”<sup>170</sup>

While Goffman’s original conception of impression management pertains to an actor’s attempts to define the situation to affect the impressions others will have of that actor,<sup>171</sup> Cox expands this to include attempts by actors to define situations in ways that affect or directly interfere with the impression management activities of others.<sup>172</sup> So conceived, Mor posits that, in public diplomacy contexts, self-presentation may involve strategies intended to encourage negative perceptions of opponents:

Indeed, if one of the actors resorts to such a negative campaign and appears to be successful, the other actor may be forced into a defensive strategy, attempting to protect its image against further deterioration.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Mor 2012, 396-397.

<sup>168</sup> Mor 2012, 396.

<sup>169</sup> Mor 2012, 394-396.

<sup>170</sup> Mor 2012, 401-402.

<sup>171</sup> Goffman 1959, 6.

<sup>172</sup> Cox 1970, 88.

<sup>173</sup> Mor 2007, 668; Mor 2009, 228.

Hocking describes this manipulation of the images of others as producing “image dissonance” by exploiting the inconsistencies “between images that countries project of themselves and those that other actors can be persuaded to regard as more accurate.”<sup>174</sup>

If consistency can be considered a robust basis of credibility, then the discreditation strategies of an actor that take aim at perceivable incompatibilities between the foreign policy behavior and public diplomacy advocacy of another actor will cause the latter to sustain reputational damage.<sup>175</sup> However, with respect to such competitive games of diplomatic one-upmanship, Barnett notes that it is worth remembering that

all encounters are something of a gamble, for they are laden with opportunities and dangers because of having to lay oneself on the line and because of the potentially dramatic consequences for one’s relationship to others after the encounter is over.<sup>176</sup>

Given this risk-reward tradeoff, there are instances where the potential exists for actors to enhance their own images through undermining those of others, which can be termed ‘identity-enhancing situations’ for the former and ‘identity-threatening situations’ for the latter.<sup>177</sup> Thus, as Mor argues, the rhetorical contestation in ‘credibility talk’ “is not just a verbal ritual of no consequence; it is an act of power – at least in relations that unfold in a context of shared criteria of evidence.”<sup>178</sup>

To be sure, for the exercise of social power in both establishing and undermining credibility in public diplomacy, there is a necessity for a normative standard of facts that is shared and followed by international actors.<sup>179</sup> It is important to note, as Mor does, that the credibility norms that actors make appeals to do not simply exist out there in ‘nature’, but rather

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<sup>174</sup> Hocking 2005, 39; see also Mor 2012, 394.

<sup>175</sup> Mor 2012, 394.

<sup>176</sup> Barnett 1998, 47.

<sup>177</sup> Mor 2007, 668; see also Tedeschi and Reiss 1981, 8-10.

<sup>178</sup> Mor 2012, 394.

<sup>179</sup> Indeed, even the notion of an ‘international system’ can be said to exist “if and only if there is enough of a set of rules (explicit, tacit or perhaps even latent) which international actors share and follow.” Hollis and Smith 1991, 87.

they are the outcome of interactions between actors.<sup>180</sup> While persuasion is certainly a consequence of such interactions, “so is the emergence of a normative structure that provides the building materials for strategies of credibility construction.”<sup>181</sup> Similarly, the use of social sanctions as an effective strategy is contingent upon the social embeddedness of international actors

in a shared normative order that leaves them mutually susceptible to and dependent on each other for dignity, honor, and approval. In this view actors can be pressed into action, solidarity, and conformity because of their concern with nurturing their self-image and protecting their self-interest.<sup>182</sup>

Without such a ‘working acceptance’ of social order,<sup>183</sup> facticity and accuracy may not automatically engender trust and can even lead to unintended consequences, especially in the face of deception and disinformation, which can be expected to weaken an actor’s credibility.<sup>184</sup> Echoing Goffman’s reference to a ‘veneer of consensus’ among otherwise self-interested actors,<sup>185</sup> Mor notes that an awareness of acceptable normative standards nevertheless allows even actors who might not internalize them (or be fully socialized to subscribe to them) to nevertheless strategically ‘play along’.<sup>186</sup>

### ***Impression management in the resolution of public diplomacy crises***

When a problematic situation arises within a public diplomacy context, Mor argues that such circumstances are shaped by the interaction between the impression a state ‘gives off’ through “its non-presentational policy and behavior, and the impression that the state attempts to effect

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<sup>180</sup> Mor 2012, 395.

<sup>181</sup> It is not entirely obvious that the revolution in communication technologies and “unprecedented intensification of cross-cultural interaction” this has facilitated has, as yet, produced “shared global norms on the meaning of proof and the criteria of evidence (analogous to the status of court proceedings).” Mor 2012, 394-395.

<sup>182</sup> Barnett 1998, 44.

<sup>183</sup> Goffman 1967, 11.

<sup>184</sup> Mor 2012, 398.

<sup>185</sup> Goffman 1959, 9.

<sup>186</sup> Mor 2012, 394.

through its self-presentation strategy.”<sup>187</sup> In other words, when there is a perceptible discrepancy between what one says and what one does in their self-presentations, a “disruptive event” occurs within the interaction which may contradict or discredit the actor’s “initial projection.”<sup>188</sup> This exposure of an inconsistency between a state’s avowed principles and its actual practices triggers an unacceptable image predicament for that state and its relations with other actors. Such situations, wherein an international actor’s social power and self-image (or face) is threatened, make up what are referred to in this study as ‘public diplomacy crises’. Though Mor does not label it as such, or at all, this is precisely the type of recurrent situation in public diplomacy contexts that he refers to, wherein “states are held responsible for untoward behaviour and are called to account for their actions.”<sup>189</sup>

It can be argued that in crises of this type, a “predicament of image protection” occurs in which an actor’s identity or public image is threatened by the prospect of being “associated with and held responsible for negative actions and consequences.”<sup>190</sup> In these circumstances, an actor will attempt to avoid blame and defend or mitigate against the negative reactions and/or inappropriate typifications of others toward themselves.<sup>191</sup> In response to such a predicament, “the logic of self-presentation strategies can be derived as either addressing the attribution of responsibility or the perception of consequences, or both.”<sup>192</sup> The actor being called to account for their conduct by others may resort to either invoking ‘excuses’ to deny responsibility or ‘justifications’ that accept responsibility but deny the negativity of the consequences of the action in question.<sup>193</sup> Impression management can, in such a predicament, serve to ‘realign’ an

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<sup>187</sup> Mor 2009, 229; see also Goffman 1959, 2.

<sup>188</sup> Goffman 1959, 12; see also Schimmelfennig 2002, 425.

<sup>189</sup> Mor 2012, 396.

<sup>190</sup> Tedeschi and Reiss 1981, 7; see also Mor 2007, 665-666; Mor 2009, 227; Mor 2012, 400-401.

<sup>191</sup> Tedeschi and Reiss 1981, 7-8.

<sup>192</sup> Mor 2007, 666; Mor 2009, 227; see also Tedeschi and Reiss 1981, 7-10.

<sup>193</sup> Scott and Lyman 1968, 47; Mor 2009, 227.

actor's actions with the normative expectations in a given situation,<sup>194</sup> and thereby permit the actor to escape their image predicament.<sup>195</sup> Such 'predicaments' are roughly analogous to what Scott and Lyman have referred to as a defensive "face game" wherein actors (or players) strive to defend their identities "against damage or spoilage."<sup>196</sup>

In connection with the subsequent diplomatic resolution of international crises, including those in a public diplomacy context, the notion of "national face-work"<sup>197</sup> mentioned previously becomes especially pertinent. Interactants in a crisis generally recognize the need for face-saving on each side. As Roberts argues, "a crisis is not a zero-sum game, but is instead a mixed motive game."<sup>198</sup> What opposing actors share in common is the difficult situation they find themselves in, and if they are to arrive at a mutually advantageous resolution, they must resist the punitive temptation to 'teach each other a lesson' for how not to act in future interactions.<sup>199</sup> With reference to implications for social relationships going forward, Goffman observes that

In trying to save the face of others, the person must choose a tack that will not lead to loss of his own; in trying to save his own face, he must consider the loss of face that his action may entail for others.<sup>200</sup>

As a result, adversaries in a diplomatic crisis become partners in crisis resolution efforts to save mutual face.<sup>201</sup>

## Summary

In sum, the basic premise of a dramaturgical sociological perspective toward public diplomacy in crisis contexts is that while states—like other social actors—are executing impression

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<sup>194</sup> Stokes and Hewitt 1976.

<sup>195</sup> Tedeschi and Reiss 1981, 5.

<sup>196</sup> Scott and Lyman 1970, 97; see also Lyman and Scott 1989, 140-141.

<sup>197</sup> Adler-Nissen 2012, 3.

<sup>198</sup> Roberts 1988, 106-107.

<sup>199</sup> Roberts 1988, 107.

<sup>200</sup> Goffman 1967, 14.

<sup>201</sup> Roberts 1988, 106.



management to control how they appear before significant others, they are simultaneously engaged in manipulating the frames (or definitions of the situation) other actors use to assign meanings to the events and interactions they find themselves in.<sup>202</sup> As part of what is referred to in this study as a ‘public diplomacy crisis’, there is a ‘predicament of image protection’ or identity threatening situation for an international actor (i.e., a state), which has to be resolved by means of negotiating the definition of the situation with significant others (i.e., other state or non-state actors). This provides a starting point for analyzing the symbolic exchanges—via face-work and framing—between international actors in the course of a public diplomacy crisis. In the chapter that follows, the role and influence of the media in such crises through ‘mediated public diplomacy’ is outlined.

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<sup>202</sup> Schimmelfennig 2002, 423.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Mediated public diplomacy – the diplomacy and news nexus**

#### **Introduction**

The connection between public diplomacy and the news media is an important one. As will be discussed below, the theory of ‘mediated public diplomacy’ explicitly makes this connection to illustrate how states attempt to influence media frames and elite public opinion in target states to generate support for their foreign policy objectives.<sup>1</sup> However, Melissen, a leading scholarly proponent of the (longer-term oriented) ‘new public diplomacy’, argues that conceiving of public diplomacy “as an immediate foreign policy tool” is bound to be problematic because “it exposes public diplomacy to the contradictions, discontinuities, fads and fancies of foreign policy.”<sup>2</sup> According to this line of argument, the objectives of this type of short-term oriented public diplomacy are “too mechanistic and ambitious” because the persuasive influence of mediated interventions in other states tend to be limited in their results.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps this is true in some instances, and such an ambition may indeed be shortsighted. Be that as it may, it is becoming increasingly clear (as the research discussed below suggests) that states seeking fulfillment of immediate foreign policy objectives, mainly when contending with the exigencies of crisis communication, are increasingly relying on such short-term strategies especially in the context of public diplomacy crises, the specific international phenomena under analysis in this study. After all, just because the instrumentalization of public diplomacy as strategic communication might not be preferable for some, from a normative point of view, does not mean it is unnecessary to seriously explore it as an empirical reality of contemporary diplomatic practice.

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<sup>1</sup> Entman 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Melissen 2005, 15.

<sup>3</sup> Melissen 2005, 15.

This chapter is organized into four main sections. The first section introduces Entman's theory of 'mediated public diplomacy'. This theory acknowledges and addresses the significant intermediary role and influence of the media as pivotal actors in strategic public diplomacy initiatives aimed at garnering favorable news coverage for a state's foreign policy objectives in the media of a target state, which might in turn persuade targeted state leaders and elites to extend support to the targeting state. The second section elaborates on the theory of mediated public diplomacy through a discussion of Entman's 'cascading activation' model, which describes the downward (as well as upward) flow of frames from a state's leadership to the media.<sup>4</sup> As part of this model, Entman discusses four interdependent factors as part of the cascade model (motivations, power, strategy, and cultural congruence), which help explain the diffusion of frames and how particular frames eventually achieve dominance over others.<sup>5</sup> The third section focuses on the interactional dynamics in mediated public diplomacy between targeting and targeted states as well as the domestic news media of these states. The fourth section provides a critical overview of research on mediated public diplomacy over the past decade to identify particular strengths, deficiencies, and research gaps in the extant literature that this study addresses. The importance of cultural congruence and resonance for a targeting state's framing to succeed in the media of a targeted state is acknowledged here. However, the chapter concludes by arguing for the need to also consider other factors such as the motivations, power, and strategy of state elites and news media, which can influence the success of mediated public diplomacy initiatives of a targeting state vis-à-vis the media of a target state.<sup>6</sup> This would mean taking the sociological implications of public diplomacy seriously. And finally, also noteworthy is the lack of attention that instances of bilateral contestation via mediated public diplomacy

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<sup>4</sup> Entman 2003; Entman 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Entman 2003, 421; Entman 2008, 92.

<sup>6</sup> Entman 2003, 421; Entman 2008, 92.

between targeting and targeted states have received adequate attention in the extant literature. Neglecting this vital dynamic within mediated public diplomacy limits an understanding of how targeting state elites strive to (and can potentially) achieve resonance and for their preferred frames within congruent and/or incongruent political cultures.

### **Media-state interactions in mediated public diplomacy**

Entman defines mediated public diplomacy as the organized attempts by the leadership and diplomatic apparatus of a state “to exert as much control as possible over the framing” of its foreign policy in the media content of another state.<sup>7</sup> He argues that this conceptualization of mediated public diplomacy is analytically distinct from conventional public diplomacy, as it comprises more short-term and targeted attempts via mass communication channels to generate support among foreign audiences for a state’s particular foreign policies.<sup>8</sup> Entman contends that “public diplomacy might be better conceived as designed ultimately to shape elite opinion and action.”<sup>9</sup> As Almond has remarked, “who mobilizes elites, mobilizes the public.”<sup>10</sup> Whereas in some societies, political elites may be responsive to shifts in mass public opinion, the same might not be true in other contexts where elites can afford to ignore public opinion as irrelevant to foreign policy decision-making.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, it would seem that foreign public opinion matters most in instances when it appears to have an obvious effect on elite decision-making within a target state.<sup>12</sup> In theorizing the role of the media in public diplomacy, explicit distinctions must be made between elite and mass publics.<sup>13</sup> The objective of mediated public

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<sup>7</sup> Entman 2008, 89.

<sup>8</sup> Entman 2008, 88.

<sup>9</sup> Entman 2008, 89.

<sup>10</sup> Almond 1950, 138.

<sup>11</sup> Entman 2008, 89.

<sup>12</sup> Entman 2008, 89.

<sup>13</sup> Entman 2008, 89.

diplomacy is to enhance a state's image, reputation, and credibility vis-à-vis elite public opinion, the attentive public,<sup>14</sup> and the news media in another (targeted) state.

Although elites cannot really know what the public think and are thus likely to interpret and judge public sentiment based on news frames, they are nevertheless certain to strive to influence the news frames that may influence the public.<sup>15</sup> The sensitivity of political elites in democratic (or nominally democratic) societies to “perceived public opinion,” which is mainly shaped by news reports, allows the media, albeit indirectly, to sway the attitudes of state leaders as well as their publics.<sup>16</sup> With respect to elite perceptions of foreign public opinion, public opinion polling may not be able to keep up with the pace of rapidly developing events, so the weight of news coverage and opinion leadership in the media of a target state is often presumed to provide political actors with indicators of imminent trends in public opinion.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, during the various phases of a developing political crisis or conflict situation, actors may gauge how they are viewed by a target audience based on how particular developments are presented in news coverage.<sup>18</sup> Since actual or perceived concerns about a state's behavior among publics, both at home and abroad, must frequently be taken into consideration and responded to,<sup>19</sup> elites may regard it in their interest “to induce the media to construct a particular perception of what public opinion is.”<sup>20</sup> Hence, states and political elites will regularly resort to news management practices to exercise a measure of control over how the media represent them and avoid being depicted in an unintended or undesirable manner.

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<sup>14</sup> An “attentive public” is defined by Almond as a specific segment of the public “which is informed and interested in foreign policy problems, and which constitutes the audience for the foreign policy discussions among the elites.” Almond 1950, 138.

<sup>15</sup> Entman 2004, 123.

<sup>16</sup> Entman 2000, 21; Entman 1989, 84-87.

<sup>17</sup> Mor 2009, 229.

<sup>18</sup> Mor 2009, 229.

<sup>19</sup> Louw 2010, 182.

<sup>20</sup> Entman 2000, 21.

A prerequisite for success in any state's mediated public diplomacy strategies is the ability to exert control over its domestic media frames successfully.<sup>21</sup> The easiest way to accomplish this is with state-owned and controlled media organizations, which can also help avoid any undesirable 'distortions' to the intended message as is often the case when one has to coordinate official frames through independent media.<sup>22</sup> If a state's leadership cannot exercise such control within its borders, the task of trying to influence the media of another country will be made all the more challenging, especially where attitudes towards the targeting state may be either neutral, skeptical, or hostile.<sup>23</sup> The conformity of the media cannot always be assured as journalists and news organizations are neither passively unaware nor always entirely powerless to resist government attempts to manipulate their reporting. It is especially in instances of crises, policy fiascoes, or scandals when governments lose "control over the political environment"<sup>24</sup> that the media can prove to be 'fair-weather friends' by behaving in a more independent or even adversarial manner.<sup>25</sup> This is often the case, as 't Hart notes, because

The very occurrence of a disaster or an acute crisis event implies that, at least momentarily, authorities lose control over the dramaturgy of political communication. They are literally overtaken by events, as well as by the fact that in most cases the mass media's initial responses are much quicker and more powerful in terms of generating images of the situation for mass consumption.<sup>26</sup>

If, on the other hand, political leaders manage to maintain control over the political environment, the media's ability to act independently can be limited.<sup>27</sup> A government's ability to manage the news is especially impaired during crises when the consensus among political elites or institutional factions unravels, and as official narratives lose coherence and credibility, it also

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<sup>21</sup> Entman 2008, 90.

<sup>22</sup> Simons 2014, 441; Melissen 2005, 8.

<sup>23</sup> Entman 2008, 90.

<sup>24</sup> Wolfsfeld 1997, 4; Molotch and Lester 1974.

<sup>25</sup> Wolfsfeld 2004, 31.

<sup>26</sup> 't Hart 1993, 41.

<sup>27</sup> Wolfsfeld 1997, 4.

becomes possible for the alternative or rival perspectives of domestic oppositional elites to gain broader currency in news coverage.<sup>28</sup>

Another consideration is the relative influence of a targeting state's official rhetoric on foreign media as opposed to the degree to which the media of the targeting state itself (i.e., in terms of media power and international influence) might have an impact on the foreign media in question.<sup>29</sup> A state that engages in mediated public diplomacy might view the public and media in a target state as an audience for their messages, but at the same time, the national media of the targeting state may not necessarily regard these foreign publics as their target demographic. It is not uncommon for the news media of different countries to frame an event, issue, or crisis through their particular nationalistic lenses. This puts the targeting state and its own (non-state) media at cross purposes, as it is generally the case that national news organizations tend to cater to their domestic audiences.<sup>30</sup> In so doing, the national media of the targeting state will likely frame news in a manner congruent with the predominant worldview and values in its domestic political culture and therefore reflect an ethnocentric attitude. This contributes to overly self-referential journalistic mindsets and practices wherein

News stories are almost always about “us”: about what is happening or could happen to us. When there is news about “others,” it centers on how they affect us. This is especially true about enemies [...] This ethnocentrism becomes especially blatant in times of crisis.<sup>31</sup>

If interpretive divergences between the media of one state and that of another exist, especially in instances of mutual antagonism, this would inevitably inhibit the success of any mediated public diplomacy framing efforts intended to bridge cultural misunderstandings.

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<sup>28</sup> Hallin 1986.

<sup>29</sup> Entman 2008, 98.

<sup>30</sup> Nossek 2004; Wasburn 2002.

<sup>31</sup> Wolfsfeld 2004, 22-23.

State leaders and elites can and do exercise considerable influence over domestic media frames in that journalists are typically inclined to rely on local official sources that are both cost-effectively accessible and can come across as credible to their audiences.<sup>32</sup> This being so, state elites have the capacity to promote frames in their domestic media that are potentially compatible, or at least amenable enough, to be adopted by foreign media in a target state. The problem, though, is that official statements intended for domestic publics and media are typically laden with particularist expressions of national interests that do not necessarily appeal to most foreign audiences. The challenge of contending with domestic media ethnocentrism is compounded during crises when state leaders and elites need to craft patriotic messages resonant with political realities and mobilize solidarity at home, which may not be entirely compatible with the positive image they want to convey in the media of target states.<sup>33</sup> Conversely, it is also possible that messages which could resonate favorably within a foreign context might not play so well in the domestic political scene.<sup>34</sup> All state actors are vulnerable to such domestic-foreign audience divides and therefore compelled to make a trade-off choice in this regard.

Ultimately, the success of a state's efforts in generating favorable news coverage about its foreign policy in the media of another state is highly dependent upon the degree of "political cultural congruency" between the targeting state and the targeted state, as well as on the motivations, strategic skills, and power of foreign elites to encourage positive coverage of the targeting state in their own media.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Bennett 1990; Chang 1993; Sigal 1973.

<sup>33</sup> Sheafer and Shenhav 2009, 277-279.

<sup>34</sup> Sheafer and Shenhav 2009, 278.

<sup>35</sup> Entman 2008, 87.



## **Cascading activation of frames in mediated public diplomacy**

As an analytical framework for understanding how mediated public diplomacy works, Entman applies his “cascading network activation” model to illustrate the framing process within the “relationship between government and the media in the foreign policy process.”<sup>36</sup> This model (see Figure 1) traces the diffusion of foreign policy frames from the leadership of a state and its diplomatic apparatus to other networks of national political elites and experts (who also act as sources for the media) and onward to domestic media organizations and journalists, who in turn relay these frames via news reports to the general public.<sup>37</sup> The leadership of a state at the highest echelons possess the utmost independence in deciding which frames to ‘activate’ and, therefore, also have the greatest likelihood of successfully transmitting their ideas into mainstream circulation.<sup>38</sup>

In this scheme, the national news media are considered to be the main public intersection wherein the diffusion of frames takes place (be it upward or downward) in the cascade. The movement of frames ‘cascading’ downwards is a result of interactions between elite/expert sources and journalists. On the other hand, as Entman observes,

If the news creates impressions that the idea is held widely and intensely by large swaths of the public, it can affect leaders’ strategic calculations and activities. However, this perception of where the public stands itself becomes a matter of framing, an object of political power and strategy.<sup>39</sup>

In this way, the media can serve as a “pumping mechanism”<sup>40</sup> through which oppositional elites and/or public opinion can sometimes feed input that might contribute to the “adjustment and

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<sup>36</sup> Entman 2003, 416; Entman 2008.

<sup>37</sup> Entman 2003, 415; Entman 2004; Entman 2008.

<sup>38</sup> Entman 2003, 420.

<sup>39</sup> Entman 2003, 420.

<sup>40</sup> Entman 2003, 420.

contestation” of a frame back up the elite-media-public cascade system to the state’s leadership.<sup>41</sup>

In the context of mediated public diplomacy, the promotion of favorable frames in foreign media through these feedback loops could (hypothetically) generate positive public opinion towards a targeting state, which might, in turn, persuade elites in the targeted state to adopt more favorable attitudes vis-à-vis the targeting state: “A positive public reaction in the foreign country reinforces incentives for journalists and elites there to employ the same ideas and a virtuous circle [...] could ensue.”<sup>42</sup> However, it is just as “easy to imagine a vicious circle that helps to reduce or banish” frames that are favorable to the targeting state.<sup>43</sup>

The ‘cascade’ model, when extended to mediated public diplomacy aimed at promoting favorable frames of the targeting state, “includes the addition of external forces that interact with the political communication system in the foreign nation.”<sup>44</sup> Such external influences consist of informal and formal diplomatic communications conducted in private between the leadership of the targeting state and the targeted state’s elites (e.g., the signaling of negotiating positions, threats, etc.), as well as news coverage of the targeting state’s foreign policy by international media (including the targeting state’s own national media) that influences elites, journalists, and opinion leaders in the targeted state.<sup>45</sup> Also includable in this are “longer term public diplomacy as well as narrower mediated diplomatic efforts to shape the foreign political communication system’s outputs.”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Aday et al. 2010, 328.

<sup>42</sup> Entman 2008, 97.

<sup>43</sup> Entman 2008, 97.

<sup>44</sup> Entman 2008, 97.

<sup>45</sup> Entman 2008, 97.

<sup>46</sup> Entman 2008, 97.

In explaining how specific frames are diffused and ultimately come to dominate over other frames, Entman identifies four interdependent factors as part of the cascade model: *motivations, power, strategy, and cultural congruence*.<sup>47</sup> Motivations ‘pull’ cognitive linkages into the thinking of elites, journalists, and the public to determine the responses of all involved actors to foreign policy issues.<sup>48</sup> For example, when dealing with journalistic motivations, such as professional norms, values, and economic pressures, the leadership of a state “must package frames in ways that comport with the motivations of media personnel and organizations.”<sup>49</sup> The power of state leaders to exercise influence over other elite actors and the news media, which may vary among different leaders at different times, is derived from the control they exercise over state institutions in general and the military in particular, allowing them to direct access to and control over material facts on the ground.<sup>50</sup> Other institutional and opposition elites, who possess lesser power, nevertheless can push conflicting frames to influence policy, and this, therefore, permits them limited access to the news media.<sup>51</sup> However, this can be qualified by noting that power differentials matter in terms of which leaders make supportive or oppositional statements given that the most powerful among them are likely to be deemed most newsworthy by their domestic media.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Entman 2003, 421; Entman 2008, 92.

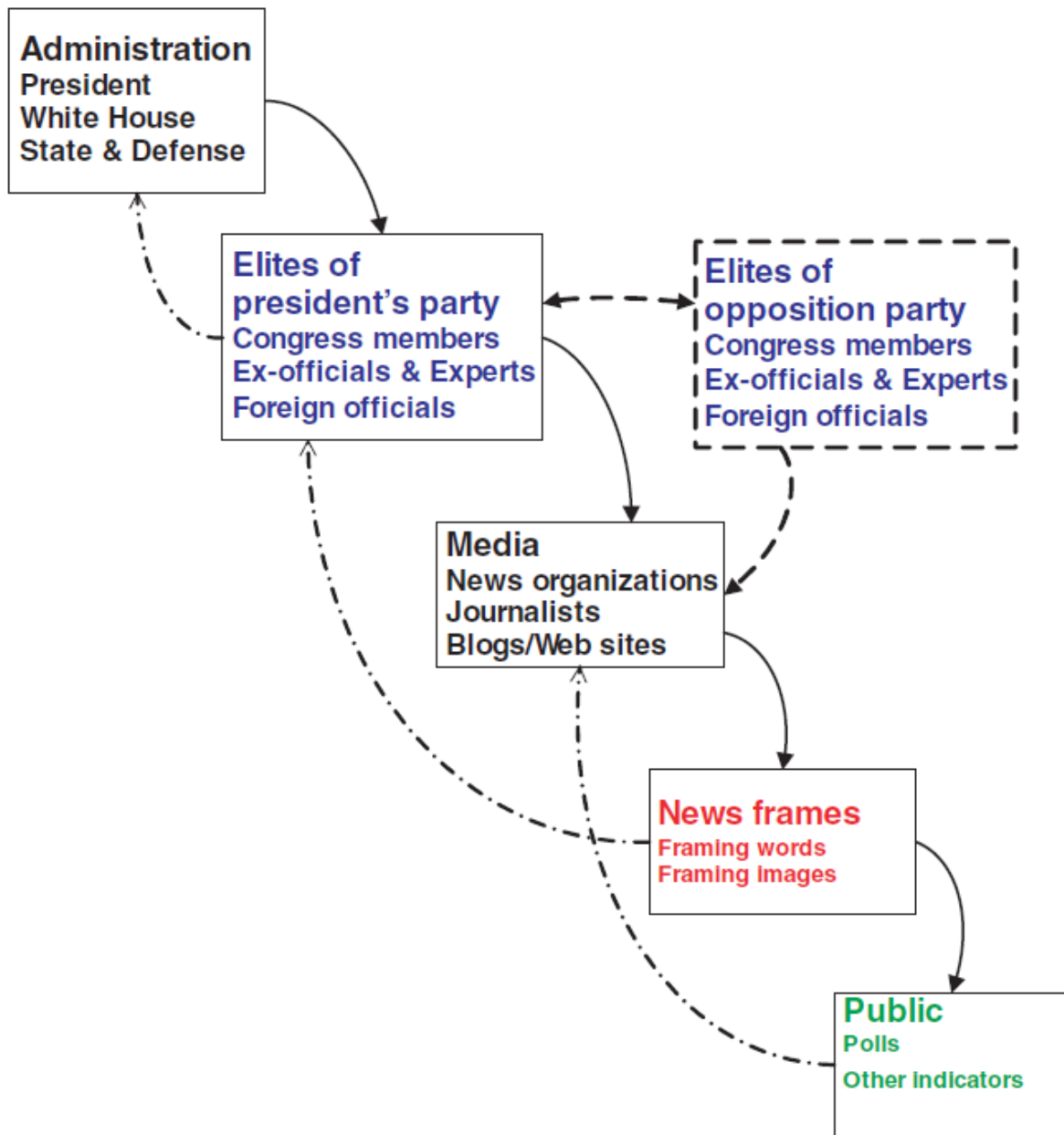
<sup>48</sup> Entman 2003, 421.

<sup>49</sup> Entman 2003, 421-422.

<sup>50</sup> Entman 2003, 422.

<sup>51</sup> Entman 2003, 422.

<sup>52</sup> Entman 2008, 96-97.



**Figure 1: Cascading Network Activation in Domestic U.S. Media** (Reproduced from Entman 2008)

With respect to strategy, the intentional triggering of cognitive linkages is primarily an elite prerogative and the choice of language that is used as well as opportune dissemination or suppression of information are strategic resources that permit state leaders more control over framing than other elites, who might also engage in strategic manipulation.<sup>53</sup> Inventive leadership strategy can bestow elite frames with the added drive required to flow downward from elite networks to news organizations, and thereby reach public opinion.<sup>54</sup> Conversely, inadequate or incompetent leadership strategy can create power vacuums that oppositional elites and critical journalists may fill by supplying their own interpretive frames.<sup>55</sup> There are, of course, bound to be differences across context conditions and competencies among ruling and oppositional elites, in terms of the relative motivational capacity, power, and strategic skills that they possess.

In relation to the strategic political role of the media themselves, Page refers to the purposive potential of news organizations to advocate certain positions by using their media outputs to influence beliefs and preferences within mass and/or elite public opinion as an indirect approach towards seeking to influence policy decisions.<sup>56</sup> However, Entman qualifies this potential of the media, by arguing that although journalists also strategize when making framing decisions, they seldom aim to wield power in consequential ways.<sup>57</sup> Instead, most journalists strive to produce ‘good stories’ in the hopes of advancing their careers and professional prestige in accordance with the perception of themselves as independent watchdogs.<sup>58</sup> The exceptions to this, of course, being investigative journalists, experts, and editorialists, who may be inclined to strategize out of ambition to influence foreign policy in directions they believe to be right.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Entman 2003, 422; Entman 2004, 91.

<sup>54</sup> Entman 2004, 91.

<sup>55</sup> Entman 2004, 91.

<sup>56</sup> Page 1996, 20.

<sup>57</sup> Entman 2003, 422; Entman 2004, 91.

<sup>58</sup> Entman 2003, 422; Entman 2004, 91.

<sup>59</sup> Entman 2003, 422; Entman 2004, 91.

Entman attaches foremost importance to the factor of cultural congruence in creating favorable political conditions for effective mediated public diplomacy.<sup>60</sup> The reason for this is the effect that cultural proximity or remoteness between targeting and targeted states has on the success of framing efforts.<sup>61</sup> Hence, “the substance of a news event or issue matters” in such a way that the greater the congruence or resonance of a frame with dominant schemas within a political culture, the more successful it will be, and less vulnerable it will be to challenge by competing frames.<sup>62</sup> The activation and spread of counter-frames (favorable to the targeting state) in foreign media significantly depend on the “degree of congruence between the target nation’s dominant political culture and the facts of [the targeting state’s] policy, or cultural overlap or ambiguity at minimum.”<sup>63</sup> In relation to this factor, Entman distinguishes between frames that can either be ‘congruent’, ‘ambiguous’, or ‘incongruent’ vis-à-vis a particular political culture.<sup>64</sup>

The frames that are intrinsically strongest will be “fully congruent with schemas *habitually* used by most members of society” and are therefore capable of provoking similar stimuli at each level of the framing process among most elites, journalists, and the public.<sup>65</sup> Alternatively, there may often be instances of ambiguity when “culturally dominant schemas suggest conflicting or unclear interpretations” for a particular issue or event, and in such cases, framing efforts must rely even more so on factors of strategy, power, and motivations.<sup>66</sup> Where

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<sup>60</sup> Entman 2008, 92.

<sup>61</sup> Sheaffer and Shenhav 2009, 276.

<sup>62</sup> Entman 2003, 422; see also Gamson 1992, 135; Cross 2013, 5.

<sup>63</sup> Entman 2008, 93-94.

<sup>64</sup> Entman 2003; Entman 2008.

<sup>65</sup> Entman 2003, 422 (emphasis in original).

<sup>66</sup> Entman 2003, 422-423.

news frames prove to be incongruent with dominant political-cultural schemas, the resulting cognitive dissonance and complexity may lead to their being ignored or rejected altogether.<sup>67</sup>

### **Targeting and targeted states in mediated public diplomacy**

Before proceeding further, the potential actors in mediated public diplomacy need to be identified. La Porte defines a public diplomacy actor as “any state, association of states, sub-state or non-state actor that has interests with (inter)national/global repercussions and the will to attain them by influencing and persuading others who might be affected by those objectives.”<sup>68</sup> As such, the principal political actors are the targeting state and targeted state, each of which is represented by their state leadership, representatives of diplomatic, defense, and intelligence establishments, as well as oppositional elites. The cultural environment in which mediated public diplomacy takes place would, of course, be incomplete without the inclusion of the media as non-state actors (i.e., independent domestic news organizations and journalists) operating within the targeting and targeted states.

As in the case of the targeting state, some elites within the targeted state are considerably more well-positioned than others to dominate the frames in their domestic political culture and media, and this has significant implications for the success of any mediated public diplomacy initiatives.<sup>69</sup> In situations where the framing preferred by leaders and elites in a target state conflicts with the framing favored by the targeting state, it would be unlikely for that frame to receive favorable treatment within the targeted state’s media.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Entman 2003, 422-423.

<sup>68</sup> La Porte 2012, 444.

<sup>69</sup> Entman 2008, 97; see Figure 2.

<sup>70</sup> Entman 2008, 94-95.

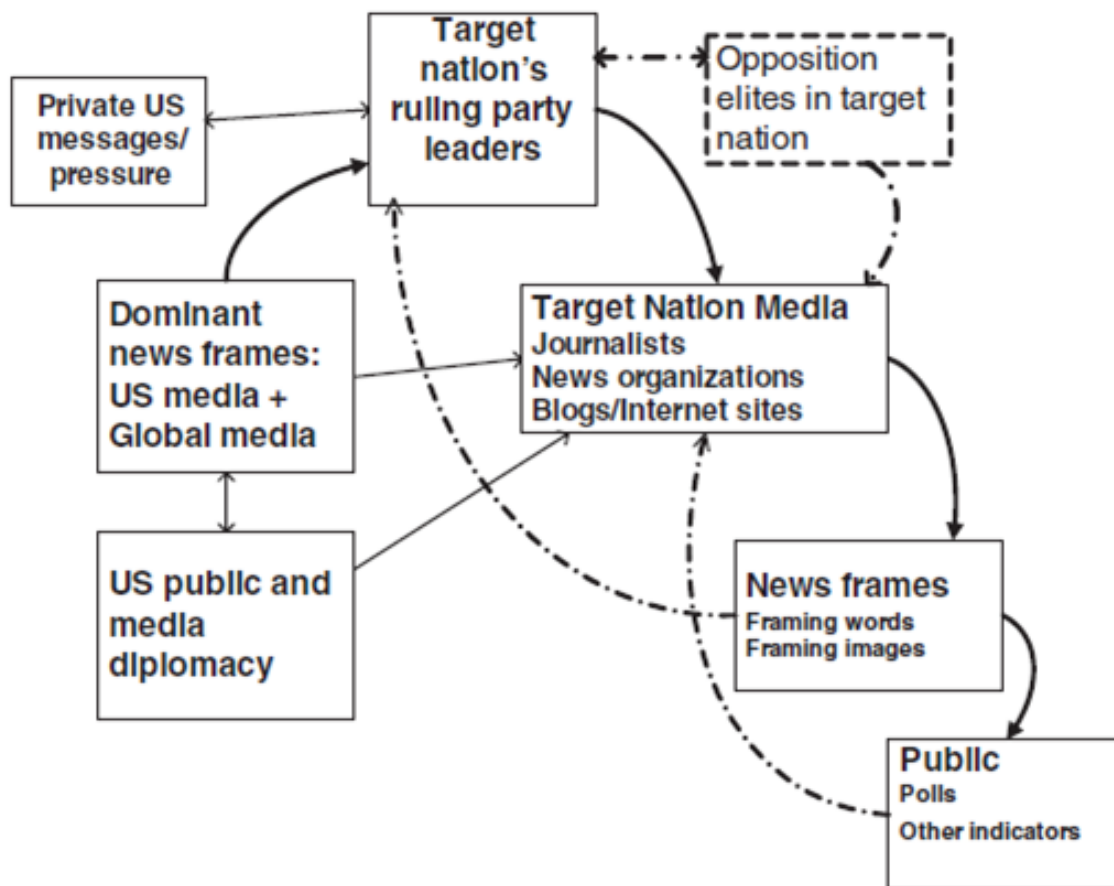


Figure 2: Cascading Activation Applied to U.S. Mediated Public Diplomacy (Reproduced from Entman 2008)



In the most ideal of circumstances, the leadership and elites of a target state may happen to favor a framing that overlaps with the targeting state's frame.<sup>71</sup> A consequence of favorable treatment of the targeting state's frame in the target state's media would be the generation of positive mass public opinion in the targeted state.<sup>72</sup> This would, in turn, feed back to target state elites who may then feel less restrained in publicly supporting the targeting state while communicating with their domestic media, and thereby promoting further favorable media coverage.<sup>73</sup> Conversely, at the other extreme, but in a more plausible real-world scenario, where the targeting state's foreign policy is deemed to be hostile to the broadly shared perceptions of national interests within the target state, the leaders and elites, as well as mass publics, of the latter country probably will resist the mediated public diplomacy efforts of the targeting state, regardless of how well refined they may be.<sup>74</sup>

The most receptive settings for frames favorable to a targeting state are authoritarian states where the dominant political culture is generally favorable to the targeting state and, importantly, where elites are also able to exercise strict control over their media.<sup>75</sup> However, this does not mean active engagement in mediated public diplomacy may not be required at all in such contexts; rather, it is here that it can expect to meet with greater success, at the very least, among the state's leadership.<sup>76</sup> However, in authoritarian media environments where the dominant political culture and state elites are either generally neutral or hostile towards the targeting state, it is the attitudes of the target state's leadership and elites that can be expected to dictate media frames consistently.<sup>77</sup> On the other hand, in the case of target states with "more

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<sup>71</sup> Entman 2008, 95.

<sup>72</sup> Entman 2008, 95.

<sup>73</sup> Entman 2008, 95.

<sup>74</sup> Entman 2008, 88.

<sup>75</sup> Entman 2008, 96.

<sup>76</sup> Entman 2008, 96.

<sup>77</sup> Entman 2008, 96.

pluralistic and open media systems,” a skillful mediated public diplomacy strategy ought to create some level of opportunity for the targeting state’s frame to receive better representation in foreign media.<sup>78</sup>

As the news media may be supportive or critical in their coverage of a country’s policies (their own or those of another), they retain the potential for enabling or constraining governments in their range of options for conducting foreign policy.<sup>79</sup> Hence the appreciation political elites and diplomats have for the news media as ever-increasingly important actors in international relations. Whatever role the media of any country play in political struggles at national and international levels is inextricably linked to domestic power relations between the media and the state. Different political regimes—be they authoritarian or democratic—may facilitate the agency of journalists or impose constraints upon their ability to report freely and critically, either through formal regulation or informal pressure.<sup>80</sup> What remains, more or less, constant across cultural contexts is the co-construction of frames in news coverage concerning political developments via interactive, if not collaborative, exchanges between journalists and their sources (or ‘frame sponsors’); the latter being those who actively seek to promote their preferred interpretations of events through the media.<sup>81</sup>

In the end, the success of any mediated public diplomacy framing efforts will be contingent on the following four factors outlined by Entman: (i) the level of motivation on the part of foreign elites to support a favorable framing of the targeting state’s foreign policy, on the basis of actual concurrence within elite and informed public opinion on specific aspects of that policy; (ii) the active backing of such a policy by key stakeholders within the foreign elite, “who

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<sup>78</sup> Entman 2008, 96.

<sup>79</sup> Gilboa 2002.

<sup>80</sup> Croteau et al. 2011, 71.

<sup>81</sup> Gamson et al. 1992, 385.

wield effective power in their government”; (iii) the exertion of “skillful strategy to advance positive framing” of the targeting state’s policy on the part of these powerful foreign elites; and (iv) the need for a trusting audience among foreign publics in the targeted state, who have the motivation and ability to access news sources with pro-targeting state frames.<sup>82</sup>

There may, of course, be cases where the leadership of a target state is supportive of, or at least sympathetic to, the targeting state’s policies, but are constrained by a dominant political culture that is “more congruent with oppositional framings” of the targeting state’s policies.<sup>83</sup> For example, in the specific case of U.S. mediated public diplomacy, Entman notes how commonplace it is to see

foreign “allies” of the United States remaining silent (if not actively opposing) U.S. policy, rooted in a political culture of habitual skepticism toward U.S. activities and rhetoric among elites, journalists, and publics. This engenders less favorable media framing of the U.S. position, which feeds further opposition and negative coverage.<sup>84</sup>

When confronted with such hostility in the political cultures of potential target states (as is true for many Muslim-majority countries vis-à-vis U.S. foreign policy), it would be desirable, from the perspective and purposes of U.S. mediated public diplomacy, for the leadership and elites in these states to possess the necessary motivation, power, and strategic skill to articulate pro-American frames in their national media. Instead, as Entman observes, the opposite is more common:

Facing little prospect of success, those leaders have weaker political motivations to actively promote America’s views in their own countries. In these circumstances they also must possess more power and exercise skillful strategy to make themselves heard by their media. And those media themselves have little incentive to antagonize their audiences and elite sources by supporting the United States when America’s words and actions conflict with the domestic political culture.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Entman 2008, 96-97.

<sup>83</sup> Entman 2008, 95.

<sup>84</sup> Entman 2008, 95.

<sup>85</sup> Entman 2008, 95.

On the other side of things, from the perspective of targeted state elites who are suspicious of such mediated public diplomacy framing efforts on the domestic front—or otherwise convinced by perceptions of a hostile media bias<sup>86</sup> against their self-interests—this highlights the importance of “information management” practices, wherein news manipulation is used “to cultivate strong domestic opposition to external influence.”<sup>87</sup> The ability of targeted states to resist such efforts in this way is worthy of further examination, and it is indeed for this reason that the United States’ application of mediated public diplomacy aimed at Pakistan during the first decade after 9/11 is of empirical concern in this study.

### **Empirical applications of the theory of mediated public diplomacy**

Although Entman presents his theory of mediated public diplomacy to conceptualize U.S. public diplomacy through mediated communication, he also suggests it is generalizable and therefore useful for understanding similar initiatives by other countries.<sup>88</sup> Consequently, over the past decade, researchers have increasingly recognized the significance of mediated public diplomacy as a strategic communication practice and applied Entman’s model to U.S. and non-U.S. contexts. Several studies have identified various instruments and tactics in mediated public diplomacy. These include the use of state-sponsored news outlets,<sup>89</sup> newspaper op-eds,<sup>90</sup> ‘advertorials’,<sup>91</sup> tourism advertisements,<sup>92</sup> social media,<sup>93</sup> and the personalization of leadership.<sup>94</sup> Notably, a few studies also focus attention on the mediated public diplomacy

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<sup>86</sup> For an elaboration on the ‘hostile media phenomenon’, see Vallone et al. 1985.

<sup>87</sup> Gilboa 2008, 63.

<sup>88</sup> Entman 2008, 87.

<sup>89</sup> Cheng et al. 2015; El-Nawawy 2006; Fahmy et al. 2012; Powers and Youmans 2012; Samuel-Azran 2013; Zhang et al. 2017; Zhang et al. 2018.

<sup>90</sup> Golan 2013.

<sup>91</sup> Golan and Viatchaninova 2013.

<sup>92</sup> Fullerton and Kendrick 2013.

<sup>93</sup> Hayden 2011; Hayden et al. 2013; Zhang 2013.

<sup>94</sup> Snow 2009; Golan and Yang 2013; Moscato 2017.

efforts of non-state actors such as the Taliban<sup>95</sup> and the so-called ‘Islamic State in Iraq and Syria’.<sup>96</sup>

Despite the geographical diversity of growing studies on mediated public diplomacy, to some extent, there appears to have been a shift in the center of gravity of research in specifically competitive contexts towards the Middle East. This is especially the case with several studies focusing on Israel’s diplomatic information campaigns to influence foreign media coverage during Israeli military conflicts and crisis incidents.<sup>97</sup>

In particular, Sheaffer and his colleagues have explicitly built upon Entman’s theoretical framework and operationalized it for sophisticated quantitative empirical research on what they refer to as ‘frame-building’ contests between Israel and Arab non-state actors, such as Hamas and Hezbollah, to generate supportive coverage in the media of third-party states.<sup>98</sup> Such studies are certainly valuable contributions to the growing body of research on mediated public diplomacy. However, what is problematic in this particular strand of research is not so much its uncritical acceptance of Entman’s contention that cultural congruence between targeting and targeted states is the most important determinant of whether a frame will resonate, but the singular focus on this factor almost to the exclusion of all other factors.<sup>99</sup> As Sheaffer and Shenhav put it,

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<sup>95</sup> Arif et al. 2014.

<sup>96</sup> Melki and Jabado 2016; for a comparative study of the general public diplomacy activities of non-state militant actors in the Middle East, see Yarchi 2016b.

<sup>97</sup> For example, Sheaffer and Gabay 2009; Sheaffer and Shenhav 2009; Shenhav et al. 2010; Harkham 2011; Sheaffer et al. 2013; Yarchi et al. 2013; Friedman and Kampf 2014; Sheaffer et al. 2014; Sheffer 2014; Yarchi 2014a; Yarchi 2014b; Ayalon et al. 2016; Yarchi 2016a; Yarchi 2017; for a recent exception to this Middle East-centric emphasis that focuses on competitive Sino-Japanese public diplomacy efforts aimed at third party states, see Kohama et al. 2017.

<sup>98</sup> For example, Sheaffer and Gabay 2009; Sheaffer et al. 2013; Sheaffer et al. 2014; Yarchi et al. 2013.

<sup>99</sup> Entman 2008, 92.

the greater the cultural resonance is between two countries, the more a government will successfully “push” its frames into the second country’s media, and the better that country’s image is among the second country’s public.<sup>100</sup>

This is apparently so, according to Yarchi, because “the target country’s culture affects its ability to transmit and absorb messages, since its political culture greatly influences how it reacts to different occurrences around the world.”<sup>101</sup> Such studies usually employ quantifications of cultural proximity as their preferred indicator of successful or unsuccessful mediated public diplomacy, a solitary measure that does not take into account the interaction of other factors specified in Entman’s cascade model.<sup>102</sup> The obvious implication here is that if there is proximity between the political cultures of targeting and targeted states, an opportunity for successful frame promotion exists, whereas in cases of vast distances between political cultures, such a possibility diminishes or disappears.<sup>103</sup> If so, this does not seem to explain why targeting states nevertheless persist in trying to promote their preferred frames in the media of target states where there is incongruence between their political cultures.

Complicating matters further is the manner in which the notion of ‘culture’ itself is conceived in this particular line of research. Several of Sheaffer and his colleagues’ studies seize upon the crudely deterministic, dead-end view of culture as a reified entity presented in Huntington’s controversial post-Cold War “clash of civilizations” thesis.<sup>104</sup> A less sterile understanding of culture would surely acknowledge that it is not an ossified and static one-

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<sup>100</sup> Sheaffer and Shenhav 2009, 276.

<sup>101</sup> Yarchi 2017, 5.

<sup>102</sup> Entman 2003, 421; Entman 2008, 92.

<sup>103</sup> Sheaffer and Gabay 2009, 464; Sheaffer et al. 2014, 164. For a more specific critique of Sheaffer and Gabay 2009, see Harkham 2011, 105-106.

<sup>104</sup> For example, Sheaffer and Shenhav 2009; Sheaffer et al. 2014; Yarchi et al. 2013. Huntington’s main thesis is that “the fundamental source of conflict in [the post-Cold War era] will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural.” Huntington 1993, 22. There have been countless critiques from various disciplinary standpoints of this argument and Huntington’s definition of religion-based civilization as “a culture writ large.” Huntington 1996, 41. For example, Gusterson 2004, 121-144.

dimensional stereotype of a society or nation.<sup>105</sup> Likewise, it would be more analytically advantageous to interpret political culture (which consists of shared norms, values, beliefs, and attitudes) as being part of a dynamic process, constantly in flux, adapting and undergoing reinvention as social actors actively exercise their agency in response to changing circumstances,<sup>106</sup> as well as in interaction with other cultures. As Swidler notes: “Variations in the ways social contexts bring culture to bear on action may do more to determine culture’s power than variations in how deeply culture is held.”<sup>107</sup>

The present study does not deny the importance of cultural congruence and resonance for a targeting state’s framing to succeed in the media of a targeted state. But it does want to contextualize political cultures as flexible, contested spaces wherein intersubjectively constituted norms, values, as well as symbolic meanings and strategies for action (in the form of repertoires of interpretive frames), are continually being negotiated and renegotiated by human agents.<sup>108</sup> In so doing, this study also wants to pay attention to other factors such as the motivations, power, and strategy of involved actors (i.e., state elites and news media), which can influence the success (or failure) of mediated public diplomacy initiatives of a targeting state vis-à-vis the media of a target state.<sup>109</sup> Arguing for the need for communicating actors to adapt their messages to correspond with an intended audience’s frame of reference Gass and Seiter point out that “a persuader doesn’t move the receiver to the message, the persuader moves the message to the receiver.”<sup>110</sup> In that public diplomacy requires communicating with assorted audiences in diverse

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<sup>105</sup> For a useful overview of various disciplinary conceptions of ‘culture’, see Sewell 1999.

<sup>106</sup> Crises and social upheavals, in particular, can and do act as dramatically powerful catalysts in the disruption of accepted meanings and inherited traditions within a political culture. For example, see Mirsepassi-Ashtiani 1994; Croft 2006.

<sup>107</sup> Swidler 1995, 31.

<sup>108</sup> Swidler 1986.

<sup>109</sup> Entman 2003, 421; Entman 2008, 92.

<sup>110</sup> Gass and Seiter 2015, 112.

cultural contexts, adapting to target audiences is indispensable for the exercise of effective influence.<sup>111</sup>

The tendency in most of the existing research on mediated public diplomacy discussed above has been to concentrate on competitions between one state and another state or a non-state actor to influence media frames in a third party state whose support or sympathies they would like to secure. What is not so clear from this research is how the targeted states and their news media respond to the attempts of targeting states to strategically influence their domestic frames and public opinion. In contrast to these studies, the present study takes a different approach. Instead of looking at competitive framing between two international actors to persuade a third party to support them, the focus here is directly on analyzing (bilateral) mediated public diplomacy interactions between a targeting and a targeted state, as well as the relations both states have with respect to one another in terms of power asymmetries and their associated impacts. This is done, to begin with, through attaching special significance to the contested public diplomatic negotiations and mediated communications that transpire in the domestic media of each state in crisis contexts. Curiously, instances of bilateral contestation via mediated public diplomacy between targeting and targeted states have not received adequate attention within the extant literature. Ignoring this crucial dynamic within mediated public diplomacy limits an understanding of how targeting state elites strive to (and can potentially) achieve resonance for their preferred frames within congruent or incongruent political cultures. The current study, therefore, explores an area of theoretical and empirical interest previously neglected by researchers in this subfield of public diplomacy.

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<sup>111</sup> Gass and Seiter 2009, 161.



## Summary

This chapter has laid out a detailed outline of Entman's theory of mediated public diplomacy along with a discussion of the four fundamental factors that underlie his cascade model, which explains frame diffusion and eventual frame dominance.<sup>112</sup> In an overview of existing research literature on mediated public diplomacy, the undue emphasis on cultural congruence/resonance, practically to the exclusion of all other factors, was noted along with the problematic conception of 'culture' adopted by some of the leading researchers in this subfield of public diplomacy. In contrast to previous research, which focuses on framing competitions between two international actors aimed at the media of a third-party state, the specific emphasis on bilateral (or dyadic) mediated public diplomacy in this study has been articulated. In the chapter that follows, the form, function, and dialogical dynamics of international framing contests in the course of public diplomacy crises are delineated.

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<sup>112</sup> Entman 2008.

## Chapter 4

### Dialogical frame contestation and bargaining in public diplomacy crises

#### Introduction

Political crises can, according to Boin, t Hart, and McConnell, be conceived of as contests between the ‘frames’ of opposing actors who seek to exploit the political opportunity opened up by crisis-induced disruptions in the existing order of social relations and normative expectations.<sup>1</sup> Political actors may, in such situations, engage in a politics of ‘crisis exploitation’ to redefine issues, policies, and relationships, or even attempt to enhance their own reputations while undermining those of opponents.<sup>2</sup> Frame contestation does not take place directly but is instead ‘filtered’ through the lens of the news media.<sup>3</sup> As t Hart and Tindall argue,

The media is not just a backdrop against which crisis actors operate, it constitutes a prime arena in which incumbents and critics, status quo players and change advocates have to ‘perform’ to obtain or preserve political clout.<sup>4</sup>

The results of actors’ subsequent framings are reliant not only on the weight of competing frames but also on how independent and sympathetic the media happens to be.<sup>5</sup>

Not only can the role and tenor of media coverage vary between different news organizations or from one political crisis to another, but it may at times also shift within the course of just one particular crisis.<sup>6</sup> In this regard, Wolfsfeld argues that “the best way to understand the role of the news media in politics is to view the competition over the news media as part of a larger and more significant contest among political antagonists for political control.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Boin et al. 2008, 286; Boin et al. 2009, 82.

<sup>2</sup> Boin et al. 2009, 82.

<sup>3</sup> McAdam et al. 1996, 17.

<sup>4</sup> t Hart and Tindall 2008, 31-32.

<sup>5</sup> McAdam et al. 1996, 17.

<sup>6</sup> Boin, et al. 2005: 74; Wolfsfeld 1997, 4.

<sup>7</sup> Wolfsfeld 1997, 3.

In explicating his ‘political contest model’, Wolfsfeld neatly distinguishes between cultural and structural dimensions of such contests: whereas the cultural dimension is concerned with the competition over media frames (i.e., the struggle over meanings), the structural dimension involves a competition over gaining access to the news media (i.e., frame sponsorship via journalist-source relations).<sup>8</sup>

This chapter proposes an analytical perspective for understanding how such (mediated) framing contests are actively negotiated and are ultimately resolved in the context of a public diplomacy crisis. It is organized into four main sections. The first section provides an overview of the cultural dimension of political struggles for control over frames in the news. As part of such struggles over meaning, mediated symbolic contests transpire between opposing actors’ varying frames to establish whose definition of the situation will prevail, along with assertions of necessary actions and assignments of responsibility for a crisis. The second section focuses on the structural dimension of this competition, (i.e., the struggle for media attention), in terms of how state elites (or ‘official sources’) collaborate with journalists through continuous social interaction to construct particular frames or accounts of events. Consideration of this element is important, as it is with these opening exchanges between official sources and journalists that the framing process is set in motion.<sup>9</sup> In considering more directly the function of such framing contests in public diplomacy crises, the third section applies Putnam’s metaphor of diplomacy as a ‘two-level game’ to consider how the entanglement of foreign policy and domestic politics—in publicly visible ways via the news media—can mitigate or exacerbate political actors’ communication efforts to resolve a crisis.<sup>10</sup> In such situations, decisions on how to frame events are guided by the substantive assessments of state elites as well as “strategic calculations about

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<sup>8</sup> Wolfsfeld 2003.

<sup>9</sup> Entman 1991, 7.

<sup>10</sup> Putnam 1988.

domestic political advantage and international diplomatic benefits and risks.”<sup>11</sup> Finally, the fourth section presents an analytical discussion of how frames dialogically interact with each other in a public diplomacy crisis and how culturally congruent frames can be arrived at through eventual bargaining in this process. Framing contests, it is argued, thereby function as a strategy that political actors engage in to cope with the ‘drama’ of a public diplomacy crisis.

### **Framing contests: mediated symbolic struggles over meaning and action**

In framing contests, different framings of a situation vie against one another for acceptance as authoritative accounts of reality.<sup>12</sup> Interactants in a framing contest can, therefore, be understood to be engaged in “a bidding war of sorts, as each party’s messages compete with the other’s to assert meaning.”<sup>13</sup> In a frequently cited quote, Schön and Rein state that in such sociopolitical disputes,

struggles over the naming and framing of a policy situation are symbolic contests over the social meaning of an issue domain, where meaning implies not only what is at issue but what is to be done.<sup>14</sup>

While informing, questioning, or arguing with each other about a given situation through their respective frames, disputants emphasize particular details about that situation and articulate how matters ought to be characterized.<sup>15</sup> Framing in such contests is ‘strategic’ in the sense that disputants maneuver to realize both political and communicative aims by taking strategic steps to impose their specific definition of the situation on other actors and call for purposive action in line with their preferred framing.<sup>16</sup>

Inevitably, political actors are likely to define situations differently and will, therefore,

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<sup>11</sup> Entman 2004, 91.

<sup>12</sup> Hilgartner and Bosk 1988, 58; Boin et al. 2009, 82; Matthes 2012, 252; Norris et al. 2003, 14; 't Hart 1993.

<sup>13</sup> Bodtker and Jameson 1997, 239.

<sup>14</sup> Schön and Rein 1994, 29.

<sup>15</sup> Dewulf et al. 2009, 170-171.

<sup>16</sup> Pan and Kosicki 2001, 40; see also Boin et al. 2009, 88.

have a special interest in how an issue is framed as well as how well their frame performs compared to those advanced by opposing actors.<sup>17</sup> With specific reference to framing contests, Kaplan argues that although the political actions of actors are concerned with pursuing their self-interests, their motives will depend on “the frame applied to the situation and, reciprocally, interests help select which frame will be applied.”<sup>18</sup> In this way, framing can serve as a means by which political actors’ competing definitions can potentially be transmuted into (material or symbolic) interests.

The contestation that transpires between actors revolves around the following four categories of framing efforts: the severity of the crisis, its causal agency, responsibility for its initial occurrence or subsequent escalation, and its potential policy implications and impacts.<sup>19</sup> During the ensuing process, politically invested stakeholders strive to exploit the disruption created by a crisis to bolster their own interpretations of situations, while attracting or distracting publicity, as the situation may demand, with the objective of either altering or preserving the pre-crisis order.<sup>20</sup>

At the same time, a particular frame that acquires widespread acceptance as a definitively ‘true’ version of events can explain who is to blame for a crisis.<sup>21</sup> But before causes can be identified to explain how and why a crisis occurred, and blame can be assigned (or avoided), it is essential to first know what exactly is at issue, for whom it presents as an issue (i.e., who is affected), and which norms or values are relevant to the situation.<sup>22</sup> With respect to public diplomacy crises, the preliminary task of issue identification is inherently complicated by

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<sup>17</sup> Ihlen and Thorbjørnsrud 2014, 45.

<sup>18</sup> Kaplan 2008, 730-731.

<sup>19</sup> ‘t Hart and Tindall 2009, 23; Boin et al. 2008, 286; Boin et al. 2009, 82.

<sup>20</sup> Boin et al. 2008, 286; 2009, 82-83.

<sup>21</sup> Bovens and ‘t Hart 1996, 129; Olmeda 2008, 64.

<sup>22</sup> Ihlen and Allern 2008, 235; Ihlen and Thorbjørnsrud 2014, 47; Pan and Kosicki 2001.

varying degrees, according to the conflicting interests, norms, and experiences that actors may bring to bear on a given issue.<sup>23</sup>

Frames do not come into being *ex nihilo*. They are produced within and influenced by specific cultural environments, as well as by the experiential backgrounds of actors who employ them, which both influence their reasoning and restrict their capacity to think ‘outside the box’ in constructing frames.<sup>24</sup> Hence, for political actors, frames can be both constraining factors as well as enabling resources, and the results of the ensuing contestation are influenced by focused action and interactions.<sup>25</sup> Strategic conduct and interest (or identity) construction both emerge from the real-world cultural ideas that constitute social interaction.<sup>26</sup> Different political actors can utilize frames in various ways, and therefore react to political developments and communicate their “policy priorities simply and effectively by adopting predominant cultural frames to streamline and simplify their message.”<sup>27</sup> Similarly, as the media are also part of a larger sociocultural context, their varying ability to “convey information, evoke emotional response, dramatize events, and focus attention” will be influenced by the social milieu to which they belong.<sup>28</sup>

In addition to sociocultural contextual factors, the political power and hierarchical status of political actors involved in a crisis context can substantially influence how both they themselves and other actors, as well as their actions, are perceived and depicted by the media. That is to say, some actors will find it much easier than others—by virtue of their power, position, and/or strategic prowess—to successfully promote their crisis frames in media venues,

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<sup>23</sup> Olsson 2013, 221.

<sup>24</sup> Desrosiers 2012, 4.

<sup>25</sup> Kaplan 2008, 730.

<sup>26</sup> McLean 1998, 54.

<sup>27</sup> Norris et al. 2003, 11.

<sup>28</sup> Zald 1996, 270.

however, such (domestic and foreign) media venues will, in turn, make their own contributions to the frames that are ultimately presented in news coverage.<sup>29</sup>

While incumbent state leaders and elites may, at least hypothetically, have the capacity to effectively ‘sell’ their preferred frames to the media, they can also disastrously fail at this task, or perhaps lose ground to the dramatic counter-frames developed and promoted by their opponents.<sup>30</sup> Despite the communicative assets that state elites usually have at their disposal, when they are unable to articulate a persuasive frame for an untoward turn of events, and therefore lose control over the meaning-making process in a crisis, such a frame becomes open to adverse reactions from opposing elites, media actors, and audiences.<sup>31</sup> So, although it might intuitively be expected that because state elites find themselves

in a privileged position in the political game of ‘normal’ times, they are all but ‘in control’ of the thickening of activities and intensive communication in forums characteristic of crisis ‘processing’ in the public domain.<sup>32</sup>

Politically dominant actors may attempt to reclaim control of the situation by imposing their preferred frames on public perceptions of a crisis as well as its broader consequences, but their efforts to prevail in such endeavors are unlikely to go unchallenged.<sup>33</sup> When state elites lack or lose control of the situation, it becomes possible for the news media to draw upon a more extensive selection of sources and viewpoints to frame events.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, this provides critical windows of opportunity for political opponents hoping to translate dormant discontent into meaningful political action by promoting their oppositional counter-frames to the media.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Olmeda 2008, 65; Entman 2003, 420; Entman 2004, 9-10.

<sup>30</sup> t Hart and Tindall 2009, 32; Boin et al. 2008; 2009.

<sup>31</sup> Olmeda 2008, 65-66.

<sup>32</sup> Boin et al. 2008, 287.

<sup>33</sup> Boin et al. 2008, 287.

<sup>34</sup> Wolfsfeld 1997, 4.

<sup>35</sup> Olmeda 2008, 65.

The mobilization of the news media during a crisis not only provides validation for actors' frames and the actors themselves, but those seeking to promote counter-frames and thereby expand the controversy surrounding a crisis also cannot do so without the media.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, concerning the critical role of the media in framing contests from the perspective of the involved actors, Gamson and colleagues note that

Participants in symbolic contests read their success or failure by how well their preferred meanings and interpretation are doing in various media arenas. Prominence in these arenas is taken as an outcome measure in its own right, independent of evidence on the degree to which the messages are being read by the public. Essentially, sponsors of different frames monitor media discourse to see how well it tells the story they want told, and they measure their success or failure accordingly.<sup>37</sup>

In so doing, political actors not only take notice of unfavorable media coverage contradicting their preferred frames in domestic and/or foreign news media but can also respond by trying to amplify their counter-frames to challenge or downplay the significance of unfavorable frames.

The diplomatic leverage that one side might initially gain over another in an international framing contest compels the opposing side to not only react defensively in 'damage control' mode<sup>38</sup> but also more rapidly without much time for deliberation.<sup>39</sup> The pressure on state elites to respond within an extremely limited timeframe is, of course, one of the defining features of a crisis. A timely response suggests that an effective crisis management strategy is in place, that state elites are equipped to contend with the crisis, and that the necessary corrective actions will be undertaken to resolve it. Conversely, a lack of coordination in communication among state institutions and agencies will betray a sense of chaos and confusion and give the impression that state elites are not up to the task of managing the crisis. Matters can be made much worse by a

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<sup>36</sup> Olmeda 2008, 65; 't Hart and Tindall 2009, 22.

<sup>37</sup> Gamson et al. 1992, 385.

<sup>38</sup> Wolfsfeld, 1997, 45.

<sup>39</sup> Gilboa 2002, 736.



failure to respond as this creates opportunities for opposing actors prepared to fill the information void.

### **Frame sponsorship: elite vs. media frames in framing contests**

Which frames end up receiving coverage in the news media, as well as how they are represented in news reports, is the result of competition between rival actors seeking to promote their preferred frame or definitions of the situation.<sup>40</sup> However, in that journalists' interpretations can endorse or challenge official narratives, as well as decide whether or not to adopt certain frames, the media produce the discourse that effectively sets the parameters of debate about an issue, and in so doing, "journalists contribute their own frames and invent their own clever catch phrases and metaphors, drawing on a popular culture that they share with their audience."<sup>41</sup>

While it is evident that the role of the news media in framing contests is crucial, the extent of influence that frame sponsorship by political actors has (or does not have) on news coverage also requires recognition. As Carragee and Roefs contend, "the character of framing contests and the ability of a particular frame to dominate news discourse even when opposing frames are present owe much to the resources available to and employed by sponsors."<sup>42</sup> The influence of asymmetries in political and social power on frame sponsorship and framing contests is essential for understanding how specific frames achieve dominance over others.<sup>43</sup> In relation to this, certain elites will possess higher degrees of power than others, or may yet prove more skillful, in strategically promoting their preferred frames in news coverage on the basis of the access, attention, and credibility granted to them by journalists.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Gamson and Modigliani 1987; Gamson and Modigliani 1989; Carragee and Roefs 2004, 216.

<sup>41</sup> Gamson 1992, 24.

<sup>42</sup> Carragee and Roefs 2004, 220.

<sup>43</sup> Carragee and Roefs 2004.

<sup>44</sup> Entman 2003; 2008; Olmeda 2008.

In assessing the impact of frame sponsors in framing contests, a useful distinction can be made here between elite frames and media frames; that is “framing *through* the media” and “framing *by* the media” respectively.<sup>45</sup>

An elite frame is one that official sources attempt to promote through the media while seeking to present themselves in self-favorable terms as well as to ensure their particular definition of a situation is the predominant one. In Rein and Schön’s words,

The sponsors of a frame seek to develop the frame, explicate its implications for action, and establish the grounds for arguments about it. They may also devise metaphors for communication about the frame—metaphors variously related to the metaphors that may have contributed to the generation of the frame itself.<sup>46</sup>

Under the most ideal of circumstances, elite frames that are successfully accepted by journalists and presented in the media, in more or less unaltered form, are often manifested as “utterances by frame sponsors and other actors—for example, by politicians when answering questions from journalists.”<sup>47</sup> More commonly, elite frames routinely advanced by official sources are expressed through statements and speeches, press conferences, background briefings, news releases, interviews, as well as orchestrated leaks.<sup>48</sup> These function as ‘information subsidies’ for journalists in elite attempts to achieve influence by exercising control over media access to and use of information pertaining to the actions of elites and other actors.<sup>49</sup>

Media frames, on the other hand, are the definitions of the situation that journalists independently arrive at in their reporting on an event.<sup>50</sup> Framing is an inescapable practical

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<sup>45</sup> Van Gorp 2007, 68 (emphasis in original).

<sup>46</sup> Rein and Schön 1993, 158.

<sup>47</sup> Van Gorp 2007, 68-69.

<sup>48</sup> Louw 2010, 190; Sanders 2009, 105; O’Heffernan 1991, 106; Hastedt 2005.

<sup>49</sup> Gandy 1982, 61.

<sup>50</sup> Van Gorp 2007, 68.

necessity of news reporting.<sup>51</sup> Journalists routinely use such frames as central organizing ideas that give meaning to events.<sup>52</sup> As Gitlin explains,

Frames enable journalists to process large amounts of information quickly and routinely: to recognize it as information, to assign it to cognitive categories, and to package it for efficient relay to their audiences. Thus, for organizational reasons alone, frames are unavoidable, and journalism is organized to regulate their production.<sup>53</sup>

The frame or theme within a news report, then, is the central organizing idea connecting “different semantic elements of a story (e.g., descriptions of an action or an actor, quotes of sources, and background information) into a coherent whole.”<sup>54</sup> As the media can establish limits vis-à-vis the frames within which issues are publicly discussed, even while allowing for dissenting views, they are able to restrict available political options.<sup>55</sup> Thus, the task of the frame analyst is not only to examine media content and its impacts, but also to understand the risks and potentials in the role of the news media as political actors.<sup>56</sup>

Journalists are not compelled to mechanically convey the frames advocated by political elites, but can instead not only select, shape, and reframe viewpoints advanced by other actors, they can also put forth their own frames.<sup>57</sup> Notwithstanding the attempts of official sources to influence how they are represented in news coverage and emphasize certain aspects of an event, it is more often the case that a limited degree of independent journalistic agency in shaping frames (relative to the greater power of state elites) prevails.<sup>58</sup>

While political elites engage in frame sponsorship in attempts to push messages in the media to gain advantage for their positions, the political influence of the media derives from how

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<sup>51</sup> For example, D’Angelo 2002; Entman 1993; Pan and Kosicki 1993; Reese 2001.

<sup>52</sup> Gamson and Modigliani 1987, 143.

<sup>53</sup> Gitlin 1980, 7.

<sup>54</sup> Pan and Kosicki 1993, 59.

<sup>55</sup> Tuchman 1978, 156.

<sup>56</sup> D’Angelo 2010, 357.

<sup>57</sup> Matthes 2012, 252.

<sup>58</sup> Kitzinger 2007, 137; Entman 2003, 422; Matthes 2012, 252; Trumbore 2011, 54.

they frame news in a manner that ends up supporting one side over the other.<sup>59</sup> Journalistic decision-making in terms of ‘source selection’, in addition to what aspects of a story are played up and what gets downplayed in news reports, is not an inconsequential factor when reporting on sensitive international relationships or crisis developments. Reciprocity and reflexivity in journalist-source interactions arise out of practical necessity in political communication, but such interactions with elite frame sponsors cannot always be presumed to be equal exchanges.

Among the essential elements in determining journalistic source selection is (perceived) credibility and trustworthiness, in terms of whether a source comes across as authoritative, providing accurate and pertinent information in a fair and unbiased manner.<sup>60</sup> The credibility of state leaders and elites is the most crucial determinant of how effective their crisis communication efforts will be, and their prior record in this regard can either be an asset or a liability.<sup>61</sup> Conversely, it is indeed possible that the crisis communication performances of political actors are not as consequential as the need for their rhetoric to match up with the existing predispositions of news organizations.<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless though, as Schlesinger notes, “official sources may not always have to be believed, but they do have to be taken seriously.”<sup>63</sup> In this regard, frame sponsorship “plays a major role in the exertion of political power, and the frame in a news text is really the imprint of power—it registers the identity of actors and interests that competed to dominate the text.”<sup>64</sup>

In circumstances when communication between political elites is mediated—as is the case in a public diplomacy crisis—journalists can be said to act as sources, intermediaries, and

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<sup>59</sup> Entman 2004, 4.

<sup>60</sup> Yoon 2005, 283; Gans 1979/2004.

<sup>61</sup> Olmeda 2008, 64.

<sup>62</sup> 't Hart and Tindall 2008, 32.

<sup>63</sup> Schlesinger 1990, 81.

<sup>64</sup> Entman 1993, 55; see also Rein and Schön 1993, 158.

political actors.<sup>65</sup> In terms of influencing political outcomes, however, the news media typically react to—rather than initiate—developments, but they are nonetheless instrumental ‘catalysts’ in political struggles.<sup>66</sup> Wolfsfeld argues that interactions between the political environment and the news media can be understood as a mutually constitutive dynamic, wherein “changes in the political environment lead to changes in media performance that lead to further changes in the political environment.”<sup>67</sup> This interactional dynamic, then, works as a reflexive feedback loop, wherein political factors and contexts influence what and how the media report on particular events, while this news coverage can, in turn, be expected to have reverberating effects on a political situation with implications for the involved actors.<sup>68</sup> Therefore, as pivotal actors in constructing political frames, the media play an influential role in setting political agendas as well as accelerating and amplifying political successes or failures.<sup>69</sup>

### **Negotiating the domestic-international divide in public diplomacy crises**

The communication process in public diplomacy crises can be understood as being in a state of flux, involving the interplay of a diverse array of potential stakeholders (e.g., political elites and the media) who have varying preferences and pursue their objectives in different arenas.<sup>70</sup> The implication of such a diversity of communicating political actors is that they must be adept at adjusting their messaging strategies to suit a particular communication situation and its audiences at different levels: international and domestic.<sup>71</sup> This section builds on Lindholm and Olsson’s

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<sup>65</sup> Davis 2010, 81.

<sup>66</sup> Wolfsfeld 1997, 43-44.

<sup>67</sup> Wolfsfeld refers to this as the ‘Politics-Media-Politics’ (PMP) cycle. Wolfsfeld 2004, 2.

<sup>68</sup> Edelman 1988, 1; Tuchman 1991, 90-91.

<sup>69</sup> Wolfsfeld 1997, 3.

<sup>70</sup> Lindholm and Olsson 2011, 256-257.

<sup>71</sup> Lindholm and Olsson 2011, 258.

suggestion that communication in public diplomacy crises be conceived of as multi-level and multi-actor games.<sup>72</sup>

Putnam's now classic metaphor of diplomacy as a 'two-level game' is useful for understanding the complex, 'entangled' interactions between domestic and international levels of politics, which he outlines as follows:

The politics of many international negotiations can usefully be conceived as a two-level game. At the national level, domestic groups pursue their interests by pressuring the government to adopt favorable policies, and politicians seek power by constructing coalitions among those groups. At the international level, national governments seek to maximize their own ability to satisfy domestic pressures, while minimizing the adverse consequences of foreign developments.<sup>73</sup>

In contrast to theories that privilege states as the main actors in international politics, the two-level approach acknowledges "the inevitability of domestic conflict about what the 'national interest' requires."<sup>74</sup> Noting the "unusual complexity" of international negotiation—a form of communication whose objective is to achieve agreement—in such two-level games, Putnam adds

that moves that are rational for a player at one board (such as raising energy prices, conceding territory, or limiting auto imports) may be impolitic for that same player at the other board. Nevertheless, there are powerful incentives for consistency between the two games.<sup>75</sup>

The burden of maintaining a simultaneous balance in communication between internal and external pressures at different levels is placed upon the 'central executives' of a state due to their parallel exposure to both international and domestic spheres.<sup>76</sup>

The logic of a two-level (or perhaps a multi-level) game is applicable to public diplomacy crises to understand communication and interactions between political actors and relevant stakeholders such as the news media, at domestic and international levels. It provides a

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<sup>72</sup> Lindholm and Olsson 2011, 256-258.

<sup>73</sup> Putnam 1988, 434.

<sup>74</sup> Putnam 1988, 460.

<sup>75</sup> Putnam 1988, 434.

<sup>76</sup> Putnam 1998, 432-433.

framework within which to identify factors that affect negotiation between and within states (i.e., how domestic-level pressures can impact state leaders' bargaining position internationally and vice versa). Viewed through this metaphor, communicating political actors in public diplomacy crises must either skillfully strive to balance competing interests or opt to secure one interest over others.<sup>77</sup> At each level, domestic and foreign news media provide public fora and simultaneously serve as conduits through which various interests are expressed and information is exchanged between political actors and relevant stakeholders.

Whereas international communication with foreign media and publics in a target state requires crafting messages that are flexible and concessional in character to achieve cultural proximity and solidarity on the basis of shared values,<sup>78</sup> domestic political communication with audiences typically demands state elites to cater to domestic audiences with messages reflecting a national interest.<sup>79</sup> In the domestic-level game, state elites are incentivized to make use of solidarity-building messages that preemptively undercut oppositional criticism.<sup>80</sup> In the international-level game, state elites will be interested in demonstrating credibility as well as flexibility and "presenting their positions as solution-oriented, expressing the belief that seemingly intractable issues can be solved" through diplomatic negotiations.<sup>81</sup>

Though state leaders engaged in diplomacy with other international actors are accustomed to simultaneously playing such two-level games, the often incompatible messaging requirements at each level will intensify with added urgency during crisis or conflict resolution negotiations.<sup>82</sup> This balancing act becomes ever more difficult when domestic considerations and

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<sup>77</sup> Lindholm and Olsson 2011, 258.

<sup>78</sup> Friedman and Kampf, 2014, 708.

<sup>79</sup> Friedman et al. 2017, 1598; see also Sheaffer and Shenhav 2009.

<sup>80</sup> Friedman and Kampf 2014, 706-707.

<sup>81</sup> Friedman and Kampf 2014, 707.

<sup>82</sup> Friedman et al. 2017, 1600.

pressures are in opposition to the action or agreement required in foreign policy negotiations. For the purposes of mediated public diplomacy, then, a frame that is effective and resonates well with domestic audiences could repel foreign audiences in a target state and vice versa.<sup>83</sup> An inadvertent ‘feedback effect’ may be said to occur when state leaders make statements intended for their domestic media audience that also happen to be reported in the media of another country and consequently generate a response from state elites in the other country.<sup>84</sup> This leaves practitioners of mediated public diplomacy with the predicament of either adroitly crafting frames that have cross-cultural resonance,<sup>85</sup> or to ‘disentangle’ the two games by crafting different frames to appease the inconsistent demands of each particular audience, which would deliberately result in ‘message gaps’ that can undermine their ability to maintain a credible image.<sup>86</sup>

Communicating political actors are also compelled to recognize they are dealing with other stakeholders who are active participants rather than passive recipients of communication, and that through their actions, the latter retain “the potential to affect and potentially aggravate or mitigate the crisis at hand.”<sup>87</sup> Within such a constellation of stakeholders, the news media constitute important actors who play a potential role in the escalation of crises.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, in public diplomacy crises, the involved political actors must rapidly improvise and reactively communicate with entirely new sets of stakeholders with whom they may not have pre-existing relationships or experience negotiating with, nor felt a need to have taken into account before the crisis.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Entman 2008, 98.

<sup>84</sup> Krauss 1996, 258.

<sup>85</sup> Entman 2008, 98.

<sup>86</sup> Friedman et al. 2017, 1600; Friedman and Kampf 2014.

<sup>87</sup> Lindholm and Olsson 2011, 258.

<sup>88</sup> Lindholm and Olsson 2011, 256-257.

<sup>89</sup> Olsson 2013, 220.



The potential for crisis-induced shakeups and an immediate emphasis on identifying new and suddenly relevant stakeholders presents the risk of communicating actors being caught unawares as they may be accustomed during non-crisis routines “to focus on stakeholders with whom they are already acquainted and who at first sight seem to be the most powerful.”<sup>90</sup> Therefore, a crucial component of public diplomacy responses to crises is stakeholder identification; i.e., ascertaining who the relevant stakeholders are that political actors must deal with in a crisis context.<sup>91</sup>

Given the multivocal nature of (mediated) public diplomacy crises, the multi-level game of negotiation, and ultimately crisis resolution, is further complicated in the case of internally divided regimes where power rivalries among civilian and military elites are a persistent aspect of the political culture.<sup>92</sup> Instead of a ‘chief negotiator’, there may be a cacophony of competing interlocutors representing different factions with whom communicating political actors must contend alongside the news media. Moreover, while competing domestic interlocutors may not entirely supplant chief executives in bidding to negotiate at the international level with external interlocutors, it is possible, as this study demonstrates that such interventions can nevertheless significantly impact the negotiation process and crisis outcomes.

### **Dialogical frame interactions and cultural congruence/resonance**

In a political crisis with a mediated dimension, getting the media to adopt a preferred elite frame is not the ultimate measure of success. A framing contest through mediated public diplomacy does not end, but instead begins, with frame sponsorship (via journalist-source interactions)

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<sup>90</sup> Lindholm and Olsson 2011, 257.

<sup>91</sup> Olsson 2013, 221.

<sup>92</sup> This is particularly relevant when looking at ‘transitional’ or ‘hybrid’ regimes where a civil-military imbalance remains as civilian supremacy has not been realized and control over state security institutions is exercised by military leadership. Examples of such uneasy cohabitation arrangements can be seen in nominally democratic, but de facto divided regimes (e.g., Pakistan and Myanmar).

wherein opposing sides seek to advance their subjective constructions of political reality that they hope will ultimately ‘resonate’ in targeted domestic and/or foreign news media. Ideally, success in a framing contest lies in actors’ subsequently achieving dominance for their promoted frame(s). However, counter-frames are deployed by political actors as much in the interests of promoting their own explanations and solutions as they are to discredit competing frames.<sup>93</sup> Of course, this framing/counter-framing dynamic need not always be a zero-sum game, especially in political outcomes where real-world compromises made between opposing sides typically necessitate a frame symbolizing the public resolution of a crisis.

In this study, the ‘clash’<sup>94</sup> between frames, and how frames interact with each other in framing contests are examined. To accomplish this, it is imperative to concentrate not only on how disputants go about framing their interpretations of the situation but also on how other disputants receive and respond to such frames by challenging or dismissing them.<sup>95</sup> Generally speaking, disputants in negotiating contexts typically begin with different definitions of the problem at hand; however, these definitions are subject to modification as a result of ongoing interactions and conflicts between opposing actors.<sup>96</sup> Faced with an initial incongruence of interpretations, elites will assert the validity of their frames as well as their own legitimacy as claimants, or alternatively seek a realignment in framing to reshape the perceptions and interpretations others have of an issue in their favor, usually at the expense of rival claimsmakers.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Desrosiers 2012, 12.

<sup>94</sup> Ihlen and Nitz 2008, 2.

<sup>95</sup> Dewulf et al. 2009, 177.

<sup>96</sup> Dewulf et al. 2011, 17; Vliegthart and van Zoonen 2011, 107.

<sup>97</sup> Kaplan 2008, 730-731; Entman 2003, 417.

Jerit observes that there is a tendency in some studies of political framing<sup>98</sup> to “predict that opposing sides of a political debate will emphasize different considerations, leading them in effect to ‘talk past’ one another.”<sup>99</sup> Jerit challenges this assertion—as does this study—by arguing that framing strategies have their limitations and that there can indeed be circumstances where “elites have an incentive to engage their opponent in a dialogue (i.e., talk about the same considerations).”<sup>100</sup> In a genuine framing contest, it is imprudent for political actors to simply advance their desired frames without factoring in the context in which their narrative is being communicated; taking this into account “may force them to engage with their opponents’ arguments and to take up well-resonating frames although they are unfavorable to them.”<sup>101</sup>

In this way, it is argued that framing contests are mechanisms for managing public diplomacy crises, which can be ‘dialogically’ mitigated or resolved as the involved actors’ different frames purposefully anticipate, refer, and respond to each other in a relational dialogue. Dewulf and colleagues describe the process as one wherein

new framings offered by one party provoke reframing of the situation by the other(s). In this sense, framing depends heavily on others, because through their reactions they can either align with or contest a specific kind of framing by a participant.<sup>102</sup>

In due course, the interaction between these opposing frames can lead to the constructive negotiation of alternative meanings and an intersubjective understanding of the situation allowing disputants to converge upon a shared frame symbolizing a compromise or resolution to the crisis at hand. Conversely, if disputants frame issues in an incongruous manner and cannot arrive at a mutually acceptable joint framing, the dispute will be extended.<sup>103</sup> Hence, what is

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<sup>98</sup> For example, Riker 1996; Simon 2002.

<sup>99</sup> Jerit 2008, 2.

<sup>100</sup> Jerit 2008, 2.

<sup>101</sup> Hoeglinger 2015, 107; Jerit 2008.

<sup>102</sup> Dewulf et al. 2011, 11.

<sup>103</sup> Dewulf et al. 2009, 171.

necessary for a restorative compromise is an ‘aligning action’ to correct the problematic situation by adopting a frame of reciprocal agreement, in which there can be said to be a “mutual alignment of conduct so that some kind of joint action can proceed.”<sup>104</sup> Ultimately, then, arriving at a joint framing of resolution principally involves “finding new alignments in the interaction among those involved.”<sup>105</sup> Accordingly, what is of direct relevance in analyzing framing contests in this study, from an interactional perspective, is “on whether and how framing changes over the course of interaction, as interactants react to each others’ framings,”<sup>106</sup> as well as focusing on the “alignments, disjunctions or turning points” that occur during the framing process.<sup>107</sup>

The greater the attentiveness of a frame to the social and cultural specificities of the target audience, the higher the probability that it will be received and accepted as the most obvious and natural interpretation of the situation.<sup>108</sup> Conversely, an inflexible adherence on the part of state elites to frames that have already proven ineffective can be interpreted as a sign of their vulnerability.<sup>109</sup> Framers, if they are to be successful, must be agile. According to Ryan, drawing on the “rich web of cultural resonances” is vital for frame sponsors because

Cultural resonances are the battleground for frame contests, for struggles to control what events mean. Frame contests are not driven by the fact-based logic we associate with classical debates; they belie distinctions between cognitive and emotional realms. The making of news is a profoundly ideological act, a power struggle in which frame sponsors try to unite audiences around their vision by melding facts with deep cultural themes.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Stokes and Hewitt 1976, 844; The notion of ‘alignment’, as used in this study, should not be confused with what Snow et al. refer to as “frame alignment” in the context of social movement organization (SMO) mobilization and participation processes. This latter concept refers to “the linkage of individual and SMO interpretive orientations, such that some set of individual interests, values and beliefs and SMO activities, goals, and ideology are congruent and complementary.” Snow et al. 1986, 464.

<sup>105</sup> Dewulf et al. 2009, 161.

<sup>106</sup> Dewulf et al. 2009, 164.

<sup>107</sup> Dewulf et al. 2009, 179.

<sup>108</sup> Ryan 1991, 80.

<sup>109</sup> Olmeda 2008, 66.

<sup>110</sup> Ryan 1991, 80-84.

Frequently, when frames are not convincing enough to resonate or fail to outperform other frames, Desrosiers observes that

actors turn to strategic communication in an attempt to attain their aims in the face of heterogeneous publics, challengers promoting their own frames and circumstances framers do not control. Framers strategize, try to align and achieve resonance precisely because they face constraints [...] Framing is about purposive human action in the face of other actors and social structural constraints.<sup>111</sup>

With respect to the persuasive objective of strategic communication in public diplomacy, prevailing frames and their associated symbolic imagery obviously influence public perceptions of unfolding events, but even framing that is favorable to an actor requires sustenance and cultivation to fend off criticism from an opposing actor.<sup>112</sup> So, whether or not a frame eventually achieves resonance (or congruence) depends on the appropriateness or applicability of a frame to specific situation, the identity and perceived credibility of the actors engaged in framing, and the extent to which the frame taps into prevailing political and cultural views (i.e., its contextual fit or ‘salience’).<sup>113</sup>

In the context of dialogical frame interactions examined in this study, frame congruence/resonance symbolizes the realization of “shared interpretations or successful alignment of framing,” which consequently emerges after communicating actors enact different frames to “test out and negotiate their meanings until they develop correspondence, accept mismatches, or change the framing about their situation.”<sup>114</sup> If and when state leaders constructively demonstrate their resolve toward calming tensions in an inter-state crisis, their policies, actions, and rhetoric in this regard can also help produce reconciliatory news frames.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Desrosiers 2012, 6.

<sup>112</sup> Mor 2009, 229 fn.62.

<sup>113</sup> Desrosiers 2012, 4-5; Benford and Snow 2000, 619-621.

<sup>114</sup> Dewulf et al. 2011, 11.

<sup>115</sup> Wolfsfeld et al. 2008, 379.

## **Summary**

This chapter has explicated the specific approach to frame analysis taken in this study of public diplomacy crises. A consideration of public diplomacy crises as two-level (domestic and international) framing contests will permit the exploration of factors contributing to dialogical frame contestation between states as well as their domestic media during such crisis episodes. In discussing frame sponsorship as a crucial component of framing contests, journalists and news organizations are conceptualized as sociopolitical actors who are deeply engaged in complex interconnected processes in which the meanings of events are actively constructed and contested. As might be expected in mediated competitions to establish definitive versions of political reality, frames are contested by opposing actors who evaluate and react to them with their own counter-frames, either as part of calculated attempts to exploit a crisis situation or to avoid blame in a public diplomacy context. In due course, however, bargaining towards a shared resolution frame becomes necessary to facilitate a face-saving climb-down on the part of one side or both to defuse tensions. The processes of frame interaction and bargaining between international actors have not, as yet, received the attention they merit. However, as the empirical case studies in this study will demonstrate, much can be learned by analyzing international framing contests during public diplomacy crises. In the chapter that follows, the methodological approach of this study is discussed.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Research design**

#### **Overview**

The main sources of data collected and utilized in this research included archival government documents, news content, and semi-structured interviews with U.S. and Pakistani diplomats, journalists, and foreign policy experts. The case studies in Chapters 7 and 8 build upon the theoretical frameworks developed and explicated earlier in Chapters 2, 3, and 4 to present in-depth frame analyses of two illustrative (mediated) public diplomacy crises in post-9/11 U.S.-Pakistan relations. For both case studies, data from pertinent official documents, elite newspapers, and select interviews with key stakeholders were examined through qualitative frame analysis to understand how the frames advanced by U.S. and Pakistani state elites dialogically interacted with each other in the mediated exchanges that took place during each crisis, as well as how closely American and Pakistani news coverage conformed to the attitudes of their respective governments. The data collection and analysis procedures for the empirical case study chapters in this study are elaborated on in the following sections.

#### **Case studies of (mediated) public diplomacy crises**

In Chapters 7 and 8, qualitative frame analysis is used to examine two cases of mediated public diplomacy crises in U.S.-Pakistan relations that transpired in 2011. By way of selective emphasis on international incidents or crisis episodes, Kennedy and Neilson argue that “historians and political scientists can peel off the multiple layers of a particular event in a way that is near-

impossible when dealing with larger topics over longer periods of time.”<sup>1</sup> Kennedy and Neilson further note that:

By considering an incident in depth, insights can be obtained that often help to explain the greater whole. This gives subsequent investigators an intuition about larger events and can often suggest whether previous generalizations need to be reexamined. Equally, when an incident deals with an area of study that is underdeveloped, it can suggest which avenues of research may prove fruitful. In these ways, then, the study of a specific incident can act as a probe, determining both whether more study is needed and what sort of study might be required.<sup>2</sup>

In examining international crisis episodes in which mediated public diplomacy between state actors played a prominent role, this research probes into how these mediated interactions influenced and were influenced by political factors at the international and domestic levels. Furthermore, in looking at instances of such crises in U.S.-Pakistan relations, this study contributes to a blind spot in the growing literature on mediated public diplomacy by directing attention to the behavior of hybrid regimes such as those in Pakistan and Myanmar, where democratically elected civilian governments are nominally in charge, but powerful military institutions exercise informal or formal influence.

A case study, as Stake puts it, “is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied. By whatever methods, we choose to study the case” and the case itself may be best understood as “a specific, unique, bounded system.”<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, each case study in this research presented a detailed analysis official statements and news coverage relating to a specific event bounded within a finite time period, i.e., from the point when a crisis came to public attention up until its eventual de-escalation or resolution. The Raymond Davis affair and aftermath of the Abbottabad raid were, at the time they transpired, moments of serious strain in U.S.-Pakistan relations. These two consecutively occurring crises were selected for analysis

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<sup>1</sup> Kennedy and Neilson 2002, viii.

<sup>2</sup> Kennedy and Neilson 2002, viii.

<sup>3</sup> Stake 2003, 134-136.



because of their political significance, a consequence of which is that their findings may receive more attention from researchers, thereby adding to “the usefulness and relevance of information where resources permit the study of only a limited number of cases.”<sup>4</sup>

## **Data sources**

### ***Newspapers***

For reasons of both practicality and quality, newspapers were the preferred source of material for case study research in Chapters 7 and 8. This was because, unlike the complicated and time-consuming transcription required for television or radio news reports, the accessibility of full-text content from newspapers in an electronic format offered greater convenience for systematically collecting, coding and categorizing data. Furthermore, in comparison to television, radio or other mass media, newspapers typically provide more extensive, consistent and continuous news coverage of political issues and events.<sup>5</sup> This affords news professionals opportunities to present more nuanced and analytical coverage that is both in-depth and inclusive of broad-ranging perspectives, which in turn allows researchers to identify elements of framing in such news items.<sup>6</sup>

Notwithstanding the contemporary decline of print media relative to broadcast and online news organizations, Jowett and O'Donnell note the continued relevance and importance of newspapers for researchers seeking “in-depth information and perspectives on news and events; as such, under the guise of both straight news reporting and editorializing, they do carry propaganda messages.”<sup>7</sup> Finally, while the agenda-setting influence of elite newspapers on news

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<sup>4</sup> Patton 2002, 241.

<sup>5</sup> McCombs 2004, 49.

<sup>6</sup> Jowett and O'Donnell 2011, 108; Gamson and Herzog 1999; Druckman 2005.

<sup>7</sup> Jowett and O'Donnell 2011, 108.

coverage of other print and non-print media may not be as dominant as in the past,<sup>8</sup> they nonetheless remain important repositories reflecting and informing the preferences and opinions of national political elites.

From each country, relevant news reports and editorials in three of the most prominent national newspapers in the United States and Pakistan were selected for analysis. Attempting to include a larger volume of data than this by drawing on additional mainstream sources might have led to an unnecessary over-saturation of information that would have been neither realistic nor conducive to an intensive qualitative analysis. Aside from catering to niche elite readerships, the significant role that each newspaper, along with the journalists working for them, played in instances of mediated U.S.-Pakistan public diplomacy justified their selection. This point is elaborated upon in the contextual background in Chapter 6 and subsequently demonstrated through the analyses in each of the case studies in Chapters 7 and 8.

The American newspapers were the *New York Times*, *Washington Post* and *Wall Street Journal*. They were chosen because of their national prominence, international stature and extensive attention given to international news, including the considerable investment these newspapers have made regarding sending foreign correspondents to Pakistan. It is worth mentioning here that in the U.S. context, the international reporting of these news organizations usually has an agenda-setting influence on the content of national broadcast media as well as other elite and non-elite newspapers. Although the news coverage of these three publications generally adheres to the norm of journalistic objectivity, their editorial positions range from center-left to center-right perspectives. News coverage for each crisis episode by these publications was accessed through the Lexis-Nexis research database.

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<sup>8</sup> Shoemaker and Reese 2014, 198.

The Pakistani newspapers were *Dawn*, *The News* and *The Nation*. These newspapers were chosen because of their national prominence and the status of each as a flagship English-language publication owned by one of the three largest Pakistani print and broadcast media conglomerates. In addition to the practical advantage of this choice not requiring the translation of Urdu-language news texts into English for analysis, it is worth noting that English, as in many former British colonial territories, remains the preferred language of Pakistani elites and was, at least until 2015, the official language of the country's bureaucratic and military institutions. Given that U.S.-Pakistan diplomatic communication is ordinarily conducted in English and that news coverage in Urdu or other regional languages in Pakistan relies on translations from original statements by political elites in English, much would be lost in translation (or re-translation).<sup>9</sup> Also significant is the fact that, unlike mass media content that is more widely available in Urdu or other popular local languages, English-language newspapers have historically avoided more rigorous censorship, allowing them to operate more independently from state control and thereby provide influential forums for the expression and debate of elite viewpoints. News coverage for each crisis episode by the selected Pakistani publications was accessed through each newspaper's online news archives.

For each case study, over 200 news items were collected and examined. Each individual news item was manually selected for close reading and intensive analysis. Along with news reports, editorials were included as part of the frame analysis for both case studies because of their potential to clarify the positions of the newspapers and their influence in framing the issues

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<sup>9</sup> A focus on news coverage in Urdu or another more popular Pakistani language (e.g., Punjabi or Pashto) would be better suited for a study in which media influence on mass public opinion was the object of interest rather than the rhetoric and perspectives of American and Pakistani political elites as happens to be the primary emphasis in this research.

during a given crisis episode. However, duplicate news articles or wire service reports (e.g., AP, Reuters, AFP, etc.) were excluded from the frame analyses.

### ***Official documents***

An additional step in the data collection process was gathering publicly available official documents pertaining to U.S.-Pakistan relations at critical junctures during and after the major crises that occurred in 2011. Over 60 documents were collected and examined. This included government press releases, foreign policy statements, and transcripts of public speeches by American and Pakistani officials, as well as relevant diplomatic communications, legislative proceedings.

From the United States, archived documents were gathered from the websites of the White House, Senate and House of Representatives, Department of State, and the Department of Defense. Archival documents from Pakistani government sources were neither as well organized nor always available online; however, it was possible to retrieve certain key documents from the websites of the Prime Minister's Secretariat, National Assembly of Pakistan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Directorate of the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR).

The information collected from these documents was valuable primary source material for the case study chapters in this project. The inclusion of official documents in the frame analysis was essential for identifying key stakeholders, their positions, and frame preferences during each crisis.

### ***Elite/expert interviews***

Conducting focused semi-structured interviews provided insights into the perceptions and attitudes of political actors as well as their interactions with news professionals in both the United States and Pakistan. A total of 34 interviews were conducted. Of these, a select number of

interviews were conducted with key stakeholders who had been prominently involved in the crisis episodes examined in Chapters 7 and 8. These case-study specific interviews, in which individuals recollected their experiences and reconstructed events, allowed for a better understanding of how a crisis was perceived by the individuals immediately involved in it as well as in learning about behind-the-scenes struggles to control how the actions of states and their agents are portrayed by the news media. These interviews were also useful for filling in gaps in information and verifying assumptions made during initial phases in the frame analyses of data from official statements and news content.

The participants in ‘focused interviews’, according to Merton and colleagues, “are known to have been involved in a *particular situation*” and the interview itself focuses “on the subjective experiences of persons exposed to the pre-analyzed situation in an effort to ascertain *their definitions of the situation*.”<sup>10</sup> Hence, “a distinctive prerequisite of the focused interview,” an approach originally developed in the 1940s for studying mass communication and propaganda, “is a prior analysis of the situation in which subjects have been involved.”<sup>11</sup> Merton et al. further elaborate on the advantages of a prerequisite phase of analysis, stating that when

Equipped in advance with an analysis of the situation, the interviewer can readily distinguish the objective facts of the case from the subjective definitions of the situation ... Through [a] familiarity with the objective situation, the interviewer is better prepared to recognize symbolic or functional silences, distortions, avoidances, or blockings and is, consequently, better prepared to explore their implications. The prior analysis thus helps [the interviewer] to detect and explore private logics, symbolism and spheres of tension.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Merton et al. 1990, 3 (emphasis in original).

<sup>11</sup> Merton and Kendall 1946, 541; Merton et al. 1990, 4.

<sup>12</sup> Merton et al. 1990, 4.

The preceding analysis can be used to inform the development of well-defined topics, themes, and questions for an interview guide and also assist in evaluating “the importance of what is not being said, as well as of what is being said, in successive stages of the interview.”<sup>13</sup>

The primary interviewees, purposively selected and approached for participation in this research, consisted of (current and former) U.S. and Pakistani government officials, spokespersons, and policy experts. It was anticipated that among the potential challenges would be the recruitment of participants willing to be interviewed ‘on the record’. Many interviewees, particularly those no longer working in government, were willing to discuss their experiences during the time periods examined in this research, however, reasonable allowances for confidentiality were agreed upon when discussing particularly sensitive issues.

Whenever possible, secondary interviewees were sought from among journalists who had actively reported on U.S.-Pakistan relations between 2001 and 2011, some of whom were also responsible for producing several news texts analyzed in the empirical case studies. These interviews with news professionals helped provide a better sense of their source preferences, their assessments of source credibility and the nature of their working relationships with political elites in both countries.

Unlike quantitative survey questionnaires or structured interviews consisting of pre-determined and closed-ended questions that elicit fixed or limited responses, qualitative focused interviews have a more flexible format and use a semi-structured interview guide. This can involve asking participants similar opening questions, but may otherwise be adjusted based upon prior analysis and research, as well as the specific backgrounds, experiences and responses of individual interviewees. The interviews varied in length of time; while some were as brief as 20-

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<sup>13</sup> Merton et al. 1990, 3-4.

30 minutes or as long as 2-3 hours, the average interview took between 45 to 60 minutes to complete.

The majority of the interviews were conducted face-to-face in the United States (primarily in Washington and New York) between February 2015 and July 2016. Obstacles to conducting interviews in the preferred in-person format with individuals situated in Pakistan or elsewhere were negotiated by relying on alternative interviewing methods via telephone or Skype. Follow up questions were generally submitted online via email, but in some cases additional phone or in person appointments were scheduled for this purpose.

### **Qualitative frame analysis**

The objective of the frame analysis in this study was not merely to identify the frames pertinent to each case study, but to also understand and explicate the strategic contestation of these frames by U.S. and Pakistani political and media actors through the course of the public diplomacy crises selected for in-depth examination. The pertinent frames were inductively identified through an analysis of the official statements and news content. The analytical procedure for frame identification was qualitative, using certain aspects of grounded theory methodology.

The analysis of news coverage during the specified time period for each case study was preceded and informed by a close reading of relevant official documents in order to achieve a deeper understanding of the context and chronology in which key events occurred and statements were made, while also taking into account the discourse of frame sponsors. Analysis of these documents permitted the identification of the primary stakeholders as well as mapping the articulation of their respective positions, competing interests, and frame preferences in symbolic contests that unfolded over the course of a particular crisis. In addressing potential concerns about the relative completeness of the documentary data for each case study, the media

analysis proceeded in an iterative manner to identify official statements that were referenced in news content but might have been inadvertently overlooked in the preliminary document analysis.

The identification of relevant stakeholders and their varying claims was achieved by examining the unmediated rhetoric or “original utterances” of political elites in response to a given crisis situation prior to their messages being relayed in news coverage.<sup>14</sup> The presentation and attention subsequently given by journalists to the official statements of these sources (or frame sponsors) was evaluated in the analysis of media content.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, this process simultaneously allowed for the identification of potential interviewees—some of whom had been prominently involved events in each crisis episode—to be approached and asked about their firsthand recollections of those events so as to better understand the situation, as well as test interpretations based on analysis of textual data.

Findings from completed interviews with key stakeholders were incorporated into the narrative discussion for each case study and used in the interpretation of the results of the media analysis. In instances where the necessary information concerning official discourse could not be drawn completely from documentary and interview research materials, a broad range of supplementary data sources were consulted, including political memoirs, opinion pieces and exclusive interviews granted to media outlets that were not necessarily part of the selected sample of news content for the case studies.

Each item from the selected sample of news content for the frame analyses in both case studies was manually selected for close reading and intensive analysis; duplicate or irrelevant news articles were discarded. Wire service reports (e.g., *Agence France Presse*, *Associated*

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<sup>14</sup> Kuypers 2009, 186-187.

<sup>15</sup> Kuypers 2002, 18; Kuypers 2009.



*Press*, and *Reuters*) found in either American or Pakistani newspapers were excluded from the analysis as the focus in this research was concerned primarily with understanding and evaluating political influence in the content that was the original (as opposed to derivative) content produced by the selected newspapers.<sup>16</sup> Editorials were included because of their potential to explicitly indicate and underscore the positions of the selected newspapers during each episode and how their respective stances influenced the framing of issues and events during each crisis.

It is not uncommon for frame analysts, particularly those who are primarily quantitatively oriented, to rely upon pre-determined frames that will be deductively identified, or alternatively, to rely on a template of generic frames, e.g. ‘conflict’, ‘human interest’, ‘attribution of responsibility’, ‘morality’ and ‘economic consequences’.<sup>17</sup> However, a shortcoming of such approaches for the purposes of interpretive analysis is that they overlook context specific frames that are relevant to the texts being analyzed. For the interpretive researcher, it would seem preferable, instead, to adopt an inductive (data-driven) approach that identifies frames as they emerge from a close examination of textual data. Yet, a criticism of such an open-ended approach is that it may be susceptible to idiosyncratic interpretations and researcher bias, especially in that “coming up with the names for frames itself involves a kind of framing.”<sup>18</sup>

The major interpretive frames for each case study were generated through an analytical procedure that loosely borrowed from grounded theory while using iterative, constant

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<sup>16</sup> Newspapers in many countries—including local newspapers in the United States—with limited resources available for international reporting commonly use reports from news wire services. In the case of Pakistani newspapers, this practice should not be as frequent as it often tends to be when it comes to reporting on significant issues in U.S.-Pakistan relations given the presence of several Pakistani foreign correspondents in Washington and New York. This may be due either to resource constraints faced by the small numbers of correspondents or it could be indicative of self-censorship or editorial discretion by strategically distancing the news outlet from reports that Islamabad may regard as containing ‘excessive foreign criticism’ of Pakistani policies.

<sup>17</sup> Semetko and Valkenburg 2000.

<sup>18</sup> Tankard 2001, 89.

comparison in open and axial coding.<sup>19</sup> Each stage of coding was accompanied by memoing to keep track of observations and responses to the data at various points in the process. In open coding, meaningful categories and subcategories were identified—intuitively and without a priori assumptions—and tentatively labeled to be made sense of on the basis of broad, recurring thematic patterns or concepts that initially emerged from rigorous close readings of, and interpretive reflections on, the collected data. During substantive line-by-line coding, in which key concepts and phrases were highlighted and characterized, the data were broken down and grouped together at a more abstract level into conceptual themes to be systematically analyzed for their potential relevance to the identification of incipient frames. To limit researcher subjectivity during this first, intensive reading of the data, the analytical process involved iterative interrogation and constant comparison for similarities and differences between categories and their specific characteristics. Furthermore, this coding was regularly modified by referring back to the data when and where it was deemed to be necessary. In axial coding, implicit relationships between and within the previously open coded data were inferentially established. Identified relationships (i.e., patterns and conceptual linkages) were either validated or invalidated by testing against the empirical data and categories were related to their subcategories. After revisiting and rereading textual data from official documents and news reports for each case study, the key thematic frames were identified.

The frame analyses of the two crisis case studies are preceded by a contextualization and elaboration of the American and Pakistani master frames that had been at work in U.S.-Pakistan relations over the years since 9/11 in Chapter 6.

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<sup>19</sup> Strauss and Corbin 1990; Strauss and Corbin 1998.

## **Chapter 6**

### **The political culture of diplomacy and news in U.S.-Pakistan relations**

#### **Introduction**

As a contextual prelude to the two case study chapters that follow, the current chapter approaches American and Pakistani journalistic-elite interactions as a transnational politico-cultural system of diplomacy and news, wherein journalists and news organizations have come to play a prominent role in U.S.-Pakistan relations. In so doing, it presents an overview of how the perceptions of American and Pakistani officials were reflected in the media of both countries, as well as the asymmetrical structure of mediated communication that facilitated dialogical news exchanges (as opposed to unidirectional news flows) impacting mediated public diplomacy between Washington and Islamabad.

The role of political culture in shaping the framing strategies of political actors competing over the news to amplify their preferred messages is also considered. The content of elite framing efforts are shown to be influenced by the shared political culture where diplomacy was conducted and news was produced, as well as by available options for strategic conduct and situational contingencies. This includes cultural and institutional factors that appeared significant in constraining or enabling how these framing strategies were employed in the course of mediated public diplomacy. This discussion is complemented with an assessment of the respective contexts of U.S. and Pakistani media-state relations within which American and Pakistani journalistic communities have operated while identifying the dominant master-frames in American and Pakistani diplomatic news coverage.

A key contention in this chapter is that, through an increased reliance on diplomatic communication via the media in U.S.-Pakistan relations, the diplomatic and news cultures of both countries periodically overlapped and converged during crucial moments over the course of the first post-9/11 decade in such a way that they might be said to have constituted

a shared transnational political culture. The use of the term ‘political culture’ in this study follows Gamson’s definition:

the meaning systems that are culturally available for talking, writing, and thinking about political objects: the myths and metaphors, the language and idea elements, the frames, ideologies, values, and condensing symbols.<sup>1</sup>

The political culture of interest here consists of the reciprocal relationships established between American and Pakistani diplomatic and journalistic elites along with the system of meanings produced and reproduced in diplomatic communication via news media between 2001 and 2011.

In making its contention, this chapter considers the shift toward mediated public diplomacy between Washington and Islamabad, the perceptions each side has had of the other, as well as the way each country’s media depicted the other and the implications of such news coverage for the bilateral relationship. A consideration of the distinct context of American and Pakistani media-state relations, wherein elite messaging and news coverage of U.S.-Pakistan relations was produced through interactions among diplomatic and journalistic communities of both countries, is crucial to this discussion. In this regard, the role of journalists working in the American and Pakistan news media as *de facto* political actors in this equation is also of significant interest.

### **The ‘diplomatic milieu’ in a transnational political culture**

In diplomatic confrontations, as in any conflict, the clash between opposing sides occurs within certain ‘symbolic environment’ and the emerging discourse is drawn from a set of available ideas, and utilizes a range of ‘symbolic devices’ to articulate them.<sup>2</sup> Such ideas are ordered and grouped in numerous ways to reflect and constitute different frames, and these may be said to comprise the political culture of a particular crisis or conflict.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gamson 1988, 220.

<sup>2</sup> Gamson 1981, 79.

<sup>3</sup> Gamson 1981, 79.

For analyzing the depictions and culture of any issue or conflict, ‘stimulus events’ of international significance, such as high profile diplomatic visits, international crises, or the onset of war, present themselves as occasions for demonstration of the political culture.<sup>4</sup>

According to Gamson, when this occurs,

Spokesmen for various parties in the conflict display it in their pronouncements on these events. Journalists display it in their commentary on the events. Major events affecting the conflict make the culture visible and provide us with an opportunity to analyse it.<sup>5</sup>

As the political culture of any given issue or conflict will have specific temporal and spatial dimensions to it, it will vary according to time periods as well as from place to place.<sup>6</sup> It is indeed possible that a separate political culture in one national context might draw on ideas and symbols without any corresponding equivalent in another country’s political culture for the same issue.<sup>7</sup> However, it is unlikely such cultural impermeability or a complete absence of cultural transfers and exchanges could be maintained in circumstances where there is considerable media exposure and mutually intelligible dialogue is possible for each side. With respect to the interconnectedness of contemporary globalized media ecologies, Le observes that

National journalistic communities do not work completely autonomously of each other. Despite the competition between media within a same national community or between media of different nationalities, journalists communicate with each other, and sometimes cooperate with each other. They might use each other as sources of information, or they might answer each other.<sup>8</sup>

The result is an ‘international media echo’, which, as Oehlkers puts it, “is not merely a technological phenomenon that allows for publics to see each other; it is a resource for staging symbolic communication episodes between nations.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Gamson 1981, 79.

<sup>5</sup> Gamson 1981, 79.

<sup>6</sup> Gamson 1981, 79.

<sup>7</sup> Gamson 1981, 79.

<sup>8</sup> Le 2007, 344.

<sup>9</sup> Oehlkers 2000, 35.

Within such an expansive conception of political culture, the shared symbolic discourse of diplomacy and news in U.S.-Pakistan relations could be seen on display whenever a noteworthy event or situation necessitated interpretation, as well as prescriptions for action, by government officials and news professionals in both countries. Also, wherein such circumstances existed, there was an increased reliance on diplomatic communication via the media to such an extent that, at times, tensions in the U.S.-Pakistan relationship came to be partly negotiated in the media sphere.

The structure of the political-sociological discussion presented in this chapter also borrows in part from Stinchcombe's 'sociology of diplomacy', which considers two separate dimensions.<sup>10</sup> The first dimension looks at the position a country and its policies occupy "in the symbol-system of domestic politics" of another country, particularly in terms of broad public opinion "among those who do not care about the foreign reality."<sup>11</sup> The second dimension, which is of direct relevance in this chapter, reflects on the perceptions of a much narrower grouping of elites of one country "who have had extensive and salient contacts with, and often interests in, the foreign political reality" of another country.<sup>12</sup> In contrast to domestic mass public opinion's indirect experience of another country, elite public opinion involving specialized experts comprises of

A smaller number of people [who] have a more complex experience and set of ideas, usually about a small part of the foreign group. Their experience and ideas are shaped by economic contacts, political and diplomatic occupations, émigré status, journalistic specialization, missionary interest, and the like. I will call such smaller groups the "diplomatic milieu" of one country's relations to another or to a linked set of others. The diplomatic milieu is, then, the social circle within which diplomatic activity is discussed, where opinions are developed about that activity, and where social and business contact with diplomats are common.<sup>13</sup>

It is these national 'diplomatic milieux', along with the interconnections and interactions between them, which constitute a shared political culture of diplomacy and news that are of

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<sup>10</sup> Stinchcombe 1994.

<sup>11</sup> Stinchcombe 1994, 4-5.

<sup>12</sup> Stinchcombe 1994, 4.

<sup>13</sup> Stinchcombe 1994, 6.

specific interest in the current discussion. It can be argued that the journalistic segment of such a milieu consists of the reporters, opinion columnists, editors, and publishers that work for a nation's elite news organizations.<sup>14</sup> It is with journalists belonging to these elite sections of media that state elites prefer to establish professional relationships and socialize with while "exchanging information off the record and on, at receptions, conferences, and elsewhere."<sup>15</sup>

As far as mass publics are concerned, Entman argues that "rhetorical endorsements of democracy notwithstanding, foreign policy elites (and journalists) would just as soon keep the public out of the loop."<sup>16</sup> At any rate, the most optimistic view would be that state elites are responsive to selective readings of public opinion, and in so doing, this "almost certainly gives media frames a central role in the process of representation."<sup>17</sup> Therefore, the act of framing functions as "the central process by which government officials and journalists exercise political influence over each other and over the public."<sup>18</sup> The journalist-elite interface is, according to Entman, "a key transmission point for spreading activation of frames, and it is not always easy to determine where the line between 'elite' and 'journalist' should be drawn, or who influences whom."<sup>19</sup> Thus, given the immense influence journalism has in shaping perceptions of public opinion and social consensus, Mancini stresses the necessity of studying not just "the rhetorical and formal characteristics of the journalistic text but also, and above all, its relations with the surrounding social context."<sup>20</sup>

State elites might prefer to view their domestic news media as an effective means for mobilizing elite or mass public opinion in support of policies and actions or, when necessary, to distract attention from failures. Of course, in actuality, (non-state) media organizations in most Western and many non-Western societies are not passively compliant transmission belts

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<sup>14</sup> Entman 2003, 420.

<sup>15</sup> Entman 2003, 420.

<sup>16</sup> Entman 2004, 143-144.

<sup>17</sup> Entman 2004, 143-144.

<sup>18</sup> Entman 2003, 417.

<sup>19</sup> Entman 2003, 420.

<sup>20</sup> Mancini 1989, 172.

that uncritically relay official statements to publics on behalf of their governments. Instead, formally independent news organizations can be regarded as considerably autonomous political institutions with individual journalists as political actors who interactively participate, be it cooperatively or antagonistically, with political elites in the co-production of news.<sup>21</sup> From a perspective that regards the news media as sociopolitical actors “with genuine interests and goals trying to find resonance for their opinions in the audience and the political system,” Eilders makes the following argument:

Media do not only act as neutral information agencies providing a forum for other actors. They take an active role in the political process by selecting and structuring information, interpreting and evaluating the stream of events continuously taking place. The selection of information can be regarded as a means of communicating their views to the audience. Issue coverage might vary or correspond between different media outlets depending on their respective political positions. Whether or not the media succeed in finding resonance for their views in the public and in the political system, however, depends on the formation of a collective opinion in the media system.<sup>22</sup>

Even though many journalists might reject such a characterization of their profession and prefer instead to be seen as functioning in an apolitical or non-partisan manner, that is not necessarily how they are often viewed by state elites whose activities they report on. In comparing the situation of press-government relations in Imperial Germany and the Allied countries during World War I in his 1919 lecture, ‘Politics as a Vocation’, Max Weber described journalists as “professional politicians” who both lived ‘for’ and ‘off’ politics.<sup>23</sup> At least since Weber, it has been commonplace in the social sciences to conceive of the media as political institutions or sociopolitical actors in this way<sup>24</sup> and to also acknowledge the involvement of the media in the social construction of political reality.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Cook 2005.

<sup>22</sup> Eilders 2000, 182.

<sup>23</sup> Weber 1946, 77-128.

<sup>24</sup> For example, Cook 2005; Mancini 1989; Page 1996; Patterson and Donsbagh 1996; Schudson 2002; Sparrow 1999.

<sup>25</sup> Johnson-Cartee 2005; Davis 2010; Molotch and Lester 1974.



Although it is something of a cliché to describe the mutual dependence among news professionals and government officials as ‘symbiotic’, this nevertheless remains an apt generalization about political news reporting in that each side feeds off what the other has to offer to thrive. Likewise, in foreign affairs coverage, state elites and journalists can generally be described as operating within a relationship of “interdependent mutual exploitation,” wherein it is recognized that “policy making cannot be done without the media, nor can the media cover international affairs without government cooperation.”<sup>26</sup> For just as state elites and their agents seek cooperative arrangements with the news media to build public support for their specific agendas, journalists strive to gain and maintain access to well-placed, and presumably credible, ‘official sources’ to convey a reliable flow of information to media audiences.<sup>27</sup>

Gans suggests that even though “it takes two to tango, either sources or journalists can lead, but more often than not, sources do the leading.”<sup>28</sup> In equating the journalist-source relationship to a “tug of war,” Gans argues that “while sources attempt to ‘manage’ the news, putting the best light on themselves, journalists concurrently ‘manage’ the source in order to extract the information they want.”<sup>29</sup> Despite the imbalanced nature of journalists’ relations with official sources, Ericson and colleagues point out that

all news outlets have some fundamental assets that put them in a powerful position: the power to deny a source any access; the power to sustain coverage that contextualizes the source negatively; the power of the last word; and the power of translation of specialized and particular knowledge into common sense.<sup>30</sup>

Indeed, none of this takes place in complete isolation from influences within the sociopolitical environment, as exchanges between journalists and official sources can

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<sup>26</sup> O’Heffernan 1991, 82.

<sup>27</sup> Carlson 2009; Gans 1979/2004; Shoemaker and Reese 1996; Sigal 1973; Tuchman 1978.

<sup>28</sup> Gans 1979/2004, 116.

<sup>29</sup> Gans 1979/2004, 117.

<sup>30</sup> Ericson et al. 1989, 378.

manifest themselves in quite diverse, interconnected arrangements. With regard to the ‘reflexive’ character of journalist-source interactions, Davis posits the following:

As the two sides know more about ‘the other’ so they adapt and find additional uses for their exchanges, and seek greater benefits from their personal investment in these relations [...] They also potentially impact on the social and symbolic construction of the political arena itself [...] In effect, it might be suggested that the journalist-source relationship potentially influences politicians and micro-level politics just as it does journalism and news production.<sup>31</sup>

Journalists typically invest considerable time in establishing and maintaining open lines of communication with official sources, which ultimately benefits both sides in the equation, and as Carlson notes,

On a symbolic level, the persistent presence of a set of sources mutually legitimizes both source and journalist. A cyclical pattern emerges in which the source gains authoritative status through being used as a source while the news gains authority through having used this authoritative source. In becoming patterned, the reliance on specific sources continually reconstitutes the power of the source to speak authoritatively.<sup>32</sup>

Hence, given the delicate balancing act that must be maintained, most journalist-source relationships can be more accurately regarded as being “volatile, complex and highly variable, with sources and journalists enjoying different and shifting fortunes in diverse settings.”<sup>33</sup>

### **U.S.-Pakistani mutual perceptions and asymmetric social power relations**

The consideration of a shared political culture of diplomacy and news in the present discussion cannot overlook the role of mutual perceptions (and apparent misperceptions)—as projected in official and media discourses on both sides—that arose in U.S.-Pakistan relations between 2001 and 2011. Much like the obvious power asymmetry between the United States and Pakistan in the international system, there has always been a considerable imbalance of

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<sup>31</sup> Davis 2010, 72-73.

<sup>32</sup> Carlson 2009, 530-531.

<sup>33</sup> Franklin 2003, 58.

influence between their respective national media cultures as well as the available resources and different strategies used by each state to defend their national self-images.

The American news media's global flow of influence or social power is such that its news narratives are more widely disseminated and accepted by the media of most other countries than those of the Pakistani media. This being so, the American media has wielded considerable social power when it comes to defining and shaping perceptions of other countries such as Pakistan on the world stage. For Washington's purposes, the American media has often been useful as an indirect means for applying diplomatic pressure on recalcitrant governments by shaming them before the court of international public opinion. However, establishing rhetorical hegemony for U.S. official views in international news (via mediated public diplomacy) is not synonymous with achieving the same kind of hegemony within the national news media of a target country such as Pakistan.

Nevertheless, from Islamabad's vantage point, this served to undermine the Pakistani government's ability to control how its image was constructed abroad and, to some extent, at home as well. In reference to the complex image problems Pakistan faces, Melissen notes that "few diplomats are probably more aware of the effects of foreign views on their country, which is loosely associated with military tensions and skirmishes along the border with India, nuclear proliferation, assistance to the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, and Islamic extremism."<sup>34</sup> The sensitivity of officials in Islamabad to negative portrayals of their country is captured well in the defensive words of one senior Pakistani diplomat, Ambassador Masood Khan, who writes the following:

Despite the sacrifices that we have given in fighting terrorism, domestic and international media paint Pakistan in dark colours; and Pakistan is projected as a volatile and fragile state. This is compounded by a cyclical pattern in Pakistan-US relations which gives the western media a free hand in distorting Pakistan's image. They would love to spread the rumour that Pakistan's nuclear weapons would be taken over by the extremists in Pakistan. Add to that consistent, well-heeled Indian

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<sup>34</sup> Melissen 2005, 10.

propaganda machine that demonizes Pakistan in all capitals officially and through media portals.<sup>35</sup>

It is not by coincidence, then, that Islamabad had placed a high priority on trying to exercise a degree of influence over the content of domestic news narratives in the Pakistani media, to counter what its diplomatic and military-intelligence elites regarded as hostile accounts presented in Western news coverage.<sup>36</sup>

Although the Pakistani news media's international reach and impact remained quite limited, if not negligible, it nevertheless possessed enough clout within its own borders when it came to how U.S. foreign policy was depicted and received there. This, along with Islamabad's unwillingness to coherently articulate the benefits of cooperation with Washington to its own citizens, meant that its national news media were allowed more or less a free hand in relation to how favorably or unfavorably the United States was presented to Pakistani publics.

Civilian and military elites in Islamabad may even be said to have themselves encouraged anti-American sentiment among Pakistani journalists in instances whenever they resorted to duplicitous official condemnations of U.S. military and intelligence activities inside Pakistan to temper domestic disquiet.<sup>37</sup> For instance, both the Musharraf and Zardari-Gilani regimes had secretly agreed to support the CIA's aerial drone campaign against suspected militants inside Pakistani territory.<sup>38</sup> However, reports of civilian casualties caused by these attacks were a frequent source of political embarrassment and public outrage to which Islamabad routinely responded with contradictory denunciations intended mainly for domestic public consumption. Although Pakistani leaders were concerned with concealing

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<sup>35</sup> Khan, Masood. 2016. "Pakistan's Soft Power." *Pakistan Observer*, April 25.  
<https://pakobserver.net/pakistans-soft-power/>.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with anonymous Pakistani government official, March 2016.

<sup>37</sup> Yusuf 2010, 4.

<sup>38</sup> Coghlan, Tom, Zahid Hussain, and Jeremy Page. 2009. "Secrecy and denial as Pakistan lets CIA use airbase to strike militants." *Times of London*, February 17.  
<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article5755490.ece>.

aspects of military and intelligence cooperation with the U.S. from their citizens, U.S. officials may not have been particularly pleased by Islamabad's attempts to inflame public opinion via its domestic media to resist U.S. pressure and demands for increased efforts against Pakistan-based militant groups.

So while Pakistani officials and journalists may have had much to complain about in terms of the American news media portraying their country in a negative light—not just before Americans but most of the world—so too did U.S. diplomatic elites have to contend with the Pakistani news media's sway on public opinion about U.S. foreign policy in Pakistan.

In the rest of this section, an overview is provided of opposing American and Pakistani diplomatic and journalistic discourse with brief illustrative examples surrounding issues such as the longstanding disagreements over Islamabad's problematic role in Afghanistan, hesitant Pakistani support for U.S. counterterrorism efforts, and concerns about the security of Pakistani nuclear weapons falling into the wrong hands.

Before 9/11, Pakistan had not received much media coverage in the United States (apart from the 1998 India-Pakistan nuclear weapons tests). However, this changed as Washington opted for military intervention against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and a global campaign against the al Qaeda terrorist network, and, as a result, Islamabad suddenly acquired renewed geopolitical significance for U.S. objectives. As Pakistan came to be regarded as a so-called 'frontline state' in the 'war on terror', its then-President General Pervez Musharraf—whose 1999 military coup had previously been denounced by the Clinton administration and made him an international pariah<sup>39</sup>—acquired greater international

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<sup>39</sup> Musharraf's 1999 coup was not greeted with approval by the Clinton administration, and only after 9/11 did the George W. Bush administration find itself embracing the Pakistani military regime while contradictorily pursuing 'democracy promotion' policies elsewhere in the Muslim world.

legitimacy for himself as ‘an indispensable ally’ of the U.S.<sup>40</sup> While exploiting his newfound ‘indispensability’ and trying to rehabilitate his own image, Musharraf was able to present a conveniently uncomplicated narrative of himself in the Western media as an enlightened military ruler who had defied domestic opposition and threats from Islamist militants to align his country with Washington.<sup>41</sup>

In due course, with the resurgence of the Taliban from across the border in Pakistan inflicting heavy casualties among U.S.-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) troops in Afghanistan, American official perceptions and media depictions of Pakistan shifted noticeably. As militant sanctuaries inside the ungoverned tribal territories of Pakistan attracted more significant attention to Islamabad’s problematic dual role as a supporter and spoiler of U.S. objectives in Afghanistan,<sup>42</sup> the tone of U.S. officials and American news coverage became increasingly critical of Islamabad and insistent that Washington ‘do something’ (i.e., step up pressure on Islamabad) to confront the problem.<sup>43</sup> Such statements and reports reflected and reinforced the idea that the continued existence of pro-Taliban safe-havens across the porous border in Pakistan had, more than any other factor, rendered the Afghan war ‘unwinnable’ for the United States became conventional wisdom in Washington. Along with admonishing Islamabad for ‘not doing enough’ to counter militants within its territory, news reports and editorials in American media routinely carried accusations that Pakistan’s ISI was playing a ‘double-game’ by covertly supporting the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan and shielding international terrorists.<sup>44</sup> Subsequently, with the rise in terrorist

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<sup>40</sup> Burns, John F. 2001. “Musharraf, the Indispensable Ally, Grows More Confident.” *New York Times*, November 5. <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/11/05/international/asia/05ALLY.html>.

<sup>41</sup> Shamsie 2007, 14-16; Musharraf 2006.

<sup>42</sup> Gall, Carlotta. 2007. “At Border, Signs of Pakistani Role in Taliban Surge.” *New York Times*, January 21. <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/21/world/asia/21quetta.html>.

<sup>43</sup> Moeller 2007, 9.

<sup>44</sup> For example, Bender, Bryan. 2006. “Pakistan engaged in ‘double game’ - It is said to help in war on terror to an extent.” *Boston Globe*, March 4, 2006.

[http://www.boston.com/news/world/articles/2006/03/04/pakistan\\_engaged\\_in\\_double\\_game/](http://www.boston.com/news/world/articles/2006/03/04/pakistan_engaged_in_double_game/); Mazzetti, Mark, and Eric Schmitt. 2008. “C.I.A. Outlines Pakistan Links With Militants.” *New York Times*, July 30. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/30/world/asia/30pstan.html>; Rodriguez, Alex, and David S. Cloud. 2011.

plots in Europe and the U.S. during the 2000s traced back to militant training camps inside Pakistan, the unchallenged presence of suspected al-Qaeda terrorists in these areas began to be viewed as a serious threat to the security of the U.S. homeland.

From a Pakistani perspective, the apparently hostile U.S. official rhetoric and American news coverage was seen as part of a concerted campaign to depict Pakistan as a scapegoat for U.S. military failures in Afghanistan and to provide Washington with a compelling rationale for the unilateral expansion of the ‘war on terror’ into Pakistan by the Bush administration, and its consequent escalation under Barack Obama. The counter-narratives defensively presented in Pakistani political and media discourse described the escalation of domestic terrorism, particularly with the emergence of a homegrown Pakistani Taliban insurgency, as the retributive price ordinary Pakistanis were being made to pay for what was frequently criticized as their own government’s ill-advised support for fighting in someone else’s ‘war on terror’.<sup>45</sup> At the same time, however, the notion that the Pakistani military and ISI might be motivated by *realpolitik* and duplicitously providing covert support to the Taliban in Afghanistan—to ensure any pro-Indian regime in Kabul remained weak—was not prominently entertained in Pakistani media either.

After the December 2007 assassination of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto by al-Qaeda linked militants of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (or so-called ‘Pakistani Taliban’), and as their insurgency expanded over the next few years inside northwestern Pakistan, the country’s deteriorating security situation generated tremendous anxiety about the safety of its nuclear weapons in U.S. political and media discourse. Coupled with Islamabad’s already

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“Pakistan plays double game when it comes to militants, analysts say.” *Los Angeles Times*, May 3.

<http://articles.latimes.com/2011/may/03/world/la-fg-pakistan-double-game-20110504>.

<sup>45</sup> For example, Abbas, Zaffar. 2002. “Analysis: Pakistan searches for blast leads.” *BBC News*, June 14.

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/2045045.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/2045045.stm); Amir, Ayaz. 2007. “Fighting someone else’s war.” *Dawn*,

August 17. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1073347>; Morris, Chris. 2008. “Pervez Musharraf’s mixed legacy.”

*BBC News*, August 18. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/7567592.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7567592.stm); Shah, Saeed. 2008. “As Pakistan’s

Taliban take control of town, military stays in fort.” *McClatchy*, July 8.

<https://www.mcclatchydc.com/news/nation-world/world/article24490765.html>.

worrying record of nuclear proliferation<sup>46</sup> was the potential threat of its nuclear weapons falling into irresponsible hands.<sup>47</sup> This was a frequently recurring theme in American news reports, in which the specter of an anti-American coup in Islamabad or the possibility of ‘loose nukes’ falling into terrorist hands feature as recurrent doomsday scenarios for international security.<sup>48</sup>

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton was among the most prominent U.S. officials to publicly voice such alarm when, in a television interview with *Fox News*, she said:

One of our concerns is that if the worst, the unthinkable were to happen, and this advancing Taliban, encouraged and supported by al Qaeda and other extremists, were to essentially topple the government for failure to beat them back, then they would have the keys to the nuclear arsenal of Pakistan.<sup>49</sup>

In the words of a *New York Times* report in this vein, “senior American officials say they are increasingly concerned about new vulnerabilities for Pakistan’s nuclear arsenal, including the potential for militants to snatch a weapon in transport or to insert sympathizers into laboratories or fuel-production facilities.”<sup>50</sup>

Such concerns on Washington’s part prompted Pakistani leaders to offer repeated reassurances to the contrary,<sup>51</sup> but did little to defuse these concerns, especially as American media attention came to focus on Islamabad’s continued expansion of its nuclear arsenal

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<sup>46</sup> For example, Corera 2006; Frantz and Collins 2007.

<sup>47</sup> Tkacik 2010.

<sup>48</sup> For example, Warrick, Joby. 2007. “Pakistan Nuclear Security Questioned.” *Washington Post*, November 11. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/11/10/AR2007111001684.html>; Arnoldy, Ben. 2009. “Could Taliban get keys to Pakistan’s A-bomb?” *Christian Science Monitor*, May 15, 2009. <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-South-Central/2009/0515/p06s11-wosc.html>; Sanger, David E. 2009. “Obama’s Worst Pakistan Nightmare – What to do about Pakistan’s nuclear arsenal.” *New York Times*, January 8. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/11/magazine/11pakistan-t.html>; Windrem, Robert. 2011. “US prepares for worst-case scenario with Pakistan nukes.” *NBC News*, August 3. [http://investigations.nbcnews.com/\\_news/2011/08/03/7189919-us-prepares-for-worst-case-scenario-with-pakistan-nukes](http://investigations.nbcnews.com/_news/2011/08/03/7189919-us-prepares-for-worst-case-scenario-with-pakistan-nukes).

<sup>49</sup> “Clinton: Pakistan Must Keep Lid on Taliban to Guarantee Safety of Nukes.” 2009. *Fox News*, April 26. <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2009/04/26/clinton-pakistan-lid-taliban-guarantee-safety-nukes.html>.

<sup>50</sup> Sanger, David E. 2009. “Pakistan Strife Raises U.S. Doubt on Nuclear Arms.” *New York Times*, May 3. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/04/world/asia/04nuke.html>.

<sup>51</sup> Masood, Salman. 2008. “Nuclear Arsenal Remains Secure, General Asserts.” *New York Times*, January 27. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/27/world/asia/27nuke.html>.



amidst unstable security conditions in Pakistan.<sup>52</sup> Conversely, in the Pakistani media, concerns regarding nuclear weapons focused on suspicions that Washington may attempt to seize or destroy Pakistani warheads under the pretext of preventing them from being lost to the control of terrorist groups.<sup>53</sup> These fears eventually intensified in 2011 after the ease with which U.S. military forces were able to enter Pakistani territory undetected to locate and kill Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad.

By the mid to late 2000s, it had become commonplace for American and Pakistani officials to publicly engage in mutual recriminations while questioning each other's intentions and actions, particularly concerning the conflict in Afghanistan and the broader U.S. 'war on terror'.<sup>54</sup> And this was, of course, prominently reflected in the media of both countries. Indeed, even a cursory review of American and Pakistani news reports on U.S.-Pakistan relations during this period (and up until 2011) would reveal that neither government was depicted particularly favorably in coverage by the media of the other country, and this was not always conducive to mitigating bilateral tensions. That U.S. and Pakistani officials often appeared to have been exercised by such mutually antagonistic media coverage, was evident in the fact that both sides repeatedly exchanged accusations that the news media of the other country were deliberately misrepresenting their country's foreign policies, seemingly at the prompting of their respective governments.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Landay, Jonathan S. 2009. "Despite Taliban turmoil, Pakistan expands nuke plants." *McClatchy*, May 1. <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/news/nation-world/national/national-security/article24536806.html>; Sanger, David E., and Eric Schmitt. 2011. "Pakistan nuclear arms pose challenge to U.S. policy." *New York Times*, January 31. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/01/world/asia/01policy.html>; Shuster, Mike. 2011. "As Pakistan Expands Nuke Arsenal, U.S. Fears Grow." *National Public Radio*, July 7. <http://www.npr.org/2011/07/07/137651918/as-pakistan-expands-nuke-arsenal-u-s-fears-grow>.

<sup>53</sup> For example, Iqbal, Anwar. 2009. "US says no plan to seize Pakistan's N-weapons." *Dawn*, May 14. <http://archives.dawn.com/archives/99650>.

<sup>54</sup> Mazzetti, Mark. 2008. "When Spies Don't Play Well With Their Allies." *New York Times*, July 20. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/20/weekinreview/20mazzetti.html>; see also Koehlmoos 2010.

<sup>55</sup> For example, Sardar, Sheree. 2011. "Pakistan army says New York Times report is a 'direct attack'." *Reuters*, July 9. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/07/09/us-pakistan-usa-idUSTRE7681SM20110709>; Clinton and Mullen 2011.

It would be an oversimplification, however, to characterize this as an unfortunate result of a series of misunderstandings or miscommunications between the governments of the United States and Pakistan.<sup>56</sup> The contention here is that outward appearances notwithstanding, Washington and Islamabad were not merely talking past one another in many such instances. Instead, with periodic breakdowns in closed-door diplomacy, the news reporting activities of American and Pakistani media organizations frequently provided arenas of contestation, outside formal diplomatic channels, wherein tensions and apparent misunderstandings between both governments were strategically articulated. In instances of disagreement, U.S. and Pakistani officials often took to presenting competing definitions of the situation through mediated diplomatic exchanges to make sense of issues or disputes in terms favorable to their country's international image and national interests.

This diplomacy via media intensified as tensions grew between Washington and Islamabad with Pervez Musharraf's military regime beginning to collapse in late 2007 and President Barack Obama's disposition towards more unilateral counterterrorism activities inside Pakistan from the first few days of his assuming office in January 2009. As such, American and Pakistani news organizations became engaged as participants rather than mere observers within a cyclical pattern of increasingly confrontational mediated exchanges between U.S. and Pakistani officials. Bilateral tensions were only further inflamed in this way during and after the Raymond Davis and Abbottabad crises in 2011.

In a sign of increasing impatience with Islamabad, Admiral Mike Mullen, the most senior U.S. military official at the time, attributed an attack on the U.S. embassy in Kabul on September 13, 2011 to a Pakistani-backed faction of the Taliban (the so-called 'Haqqani network') which, in his description, functioned as a "veritable arm" of the ISI.<sup>57</sup> Mullen's

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<sup>56</sup> Yusuf 2010.

<sup>57</sup> Bumiller, Elisabeth, and Jane Perlez. 2011. "Pakistan's spy agency is tied to attack on U.S. embassy." *New York Times*, September 22. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/23/world/asia/mullen-asserts-pakistani-role-in-attack-on-us-embassy.html>; DeYoung, Karen. 2011. "Pakistan backed attacks on American targets, U.S. says."

remarks, as part of his testimony before a U.S. Senate committee, provoked something of a mini-crisis in U.S.-Pakistan relations, with Pakistani officials scrambling to dispute and denounce any linkage of their intelligence service with Taliban insurgents as ‘negative propaganda’.<sup>58</sup>

In this context, the varying official U.S. and Pakistani positions and journalistic milieux not only contributed to the construction of divergent narratives but also often led to (‘mediated’) dialogical exchanges that further influenced the character of diplomatic interactions and news coverage between both countries.

### **Opposing cultural master-frames in post-9/11 U.S.-Pakistan relations**

U.S. and Pakistani perceptions in diplomatic and media discourse did not emerge from a vacuum but evolved from existing cultural templates as well as through recurring interactions between the two sides. This section explores how American and Pakistani political and media cultures influenced news coverage of post-9/11 U.S.-Pakistan relations by news organizations in both countries. In so doing, it is worthwhile to identify and elaborate on the dominant master-frames in American and Pakistani diplomatic news coverage that came into dialogue with each other in the first decade after 9/11 as political and diplomatic elites competed over the news to amplify their preferred messages. However, the concern in this chapter is not to ascribe motives by explicating why particular cultural master-frames were prevalent in American and Pakistani diplomatic-journalistic discourse as this merits detailed treatment in

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*Washington Post*, September 22. [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/pakistan-backed-attacks-on-american-targets-us-says/2011/09/22/gIQAf0q6oK\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/pakistan-backed-attacks-on-american-targets-us-says/2011/09/22/gIQAf0q6oK_story.html); Syed, Baqir Sajjad. 2011. “Mullen Launches Diatribe against ISI.” *Dawn*, April 21. <https://www.dawn.com/news/622644>.

<sup>58</sup> Constable, Pamela. 2011. “U.S., Pakistani military chiefs trade barbs.” *Washington Post*, April 21. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/us-pakistani-military-chiefs-trade-barbs/2011/04/21/AFTImmKE\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/us-pakistani-military-chiefs-trade-barbs/2011/04/21/AFTImmKE_story.html); Haider, Zeeshan. 2011. “Pakistan rejects ‘negative propaganda’ on militant ties.” *Reuters*, April 21. <https://www.reuters.com/article/idINIndia-56492820110421>; Jaffry, Nasir.

2011. “Pakistan refuses US demands to do more on terror.” *Agence France-Presse*, September 29.; Masood, Salman. 2011. “Pakistani politicians reject Admiral Mullen’s charges.” *New York Times*, September 29. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/30/world/asia/pakistani-politicians-reject-admiral-mullens-charges.html>;

Yasin, Asim. 2011. “New policy to give peace a chance.” *The News*, September 30. <http://www.thenews.com.pk/TodaysPrintDetail.aspx?ID=9197&Cat=13>.

its own right. Instead, the focus here is on the description of these master-frames and the sociopolitical contexts wherein they were manifest in the discourse of diplomatic elites, journalists, and other relevant political actors.

Addressing this provides an appreciation of the role of national political cultures in conditioning elite framing strategies along with the influence of media cultures on journalistic practices and attitudes. The content of opposing political elites' framing efforts was influenced by the shared political culture wherein diplomacy is conducted and news is produced, as well as by their available options for strategic conduct and the situational contingencies that might present themselves in a crisis episode. This includes the cultural and institutional factors that appeared significant in constraining and/or enabling how these framing strategies were employed to apply or resist political pressure through the media in their recurring U.S.-Pakistan diplomatic tensions.

A commonality in the otherwise dissimilar American and Pakistani contexts was the nationalistic deference of news organizations to their respective governments. It is often the case that journalists working for national news organizations would rather rely on official sources within their own country than those of foreign governments.<sup>59</sup> It is no coincidence, then, that the vast divergences in American and Pakistani national interests, along with their mutual distrust, may have, in large part, contributed to the construction of different news narratives in the media of both countries. Such a seemingly deferential attitude can also be taken as indications of journalists' greater accessibility to, or their confidence in the credibility of, such sources as well as nationalistic biases or attachments in their reporting. These factors, coupled with a predictable tendency for domestic news organizations to cater

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<sup>59</sup> Chang 1993; Sigal 1973.

to their national audiences, may account for the divergent news framing of the same issues and events among the media of different countries.<sup>60</sup>

### *The ‘war on terror’ master-frame in U.S. elite and media discourse*

In the months and years following Al Qaeda’s terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, this new post-Cold War master-frame of the ‘war on terror’ was embraced by the Bush administration “as the primary standard used to reinterpret and understand ‘friends’ and ‘enemies’ around the globe.”<sup>61</sup> The clearest and most iconic expression of this framing was conveyed in the words of President George W. Bush:

We will pursue nations that provide aid or safe haven to terrorism. Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists. From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime.<sup>62</sup>

Consequently, as Norris, Kern, and Just note, the perceptual frame of the ‘war on terror’

was stretched and used to explain and justify the Bush administration’s hostility toward the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, toward Saddam Hussein’s Iraq, and Kim Jong-il’s North Korea, while simultaneously warming relations and creating new international alliances, notably with Russia, China, and Pakistan.<sup>63</sup>

In so doing, this master-frame presented U.S. political elites and journalists with a way to construct a simplified narrative for the American public to make sense of an array of news stories related to various international issues, security threats, and conflicts.<sup>64</sup> At the same time, this framing also served to communicate to the international community the United States’ new foreign policy priorities.<sup>65</sup>

The way in which the ‘war on terror’ master-frame became politically incontestable in American political and media discourse exemplified the habitual, nationalistic deference given by the American journalistic community to U.S. officials in the decade after 9/11. As

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<sup>60</sup> Nossek 2004.

<sup>61</sup> Norris et al. 2003, 15.

<sup>62</sup> Bush 2001.

<sup>63</sup> Norris et al. 2003, 15.

<sup>64</sup> Norris et al. 2003, 15.

<sup>65</sup> Norris et al. 2003, 15.

Reese observes, such was the extent of its power that it was “extremely difficult for any political actors to advance a compelling counterframe to the ‘war on terror.’ Indeed, even [Bush] administration critics [were] obliged to accept the phrase in saying that the president has ‘undermined the war on terror,’ or that others would prosecute it more effectively.”<sup>66</sup> Just as journalists working for most American news organizations had accepted the ‘war on terror’ as the dominant narrative of post-9/11 U.S. foreign policy<sup>67</sup> while naturalizing U.S. militarism, their subsequent upsurge of national security news reporting on, and foreign correspondence from, Pakistan was also primarily framed within this context,<sup>68</sup> the purpose of which was to deal with the recurring question of whether Islamabad was actually an ally or adversary in this conflict.

A well-known feature of American political journalism is its apparent overdependence on information provided by authoritative official sources.<sup>69</sup> The interdependence between journalists and official sources is even more pronounced in relation to reporting on issues of U.S. foreign policy, military, and intelligence issues.<sup>70</sup> As Hallin notes, the contradictory character of “journalism which aims to provide the public with a neutral record of events and which, at the same time, relies primarily on government officials to describe and explain those events” makes itself vulnerable to manipulation and therefore “has the potential to wind up as a mirror not of reality, but of the version of reality government officials would like to present to the public.”<sup>71</sup> With respect to institutional structures and hierarchies, it would be remiss to overlook the overwhelming degree to which ‘presidentialism’ not only determines U.S. foreign policy objectives but also how U.S. presidents tend to significantly influence the media agenda and the way in which American

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<sup>66</sup> Reese 2007, 152.

<sup>67</sup> Reese and Lewis 2009.

<sup>68</sup> Moeller 2007, 37.

<sup>69</sup> Gans 1979/2004; Sigal 1973; Tuchman 1978.

<sup>70</sup> O’Heffernan 1991; Zaller and Chiu 1996; Gup 2004; Diamond 2011.

<sup>71</sup> Hallin 1984, 20.

news organizations (deferentially) report on it, and thereby influence domestic public opinion.<sup>72</sup>

Quite apart from abiding by official restrictions on disseminating information about national security matters, journalists working for American news organizations usually tread carefully when expressing skepticism about the policy decisions of those in power, especially in wartime, to avoid having their patriotism questioned. According to Sigal, this has historically been a concern for American journalists as

the pressures are hardest to bear when public officials can call a newsman's patriotism into doubt. From Dean Rusk—"There gets to be a point when the question is, whose side are you on? Now, I'm Secretary of State of the United States, and I'm on our side"—to Supreme Court Justice Harry Blackmun—"I strongly urge, and sincerely hope, that these two newspapers will be fully aware of their ultimate responsibility to the United States of America..."—the sentiment of officials, however different their positions and the situation, bear a marked similarity.<sup>73</sup>

In this way, the notion that professionalism should, at times, yield to patriotism worked to the immense advantage of U.S. political elites.<sup>74</sup>

While personal safety concerns and geographical restrictions may have hindered the ability of many American news organizations to report on CIA activities inside Pakistan independently, the perceptions journalists and editors had of domestic audience preferences might have been an additional inhibiting factor. Specifically, such a perception of American public attitudes vis-à-vis the necessity and permissibility of undertaking exceptional measures in the 'war on terror' was premised on

the likelihood that some Americans, perhaps many, prefer not to be informed of how the [CIA] conducts its business (*their* business). Some, out of deference to the nation's leaders, resent any intrusion into security matters.<sup>75</sup>

Challenging perceptions of such deferential or indifferent public attitudes would prove difficult, as Gup points out, when Washington pursues its "security objectives, it also reflects

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<sup>72</sup> Entman 2003; Eshbaugh-Soha and Peake 2011.

<sup>73</sup> Sigal 1973, 83.

<sup>74</sup> Hutcheson et al. 2004; Eisman 2003; Barnett and Roselle 2008; Snow and Taylor 2006; Kaplan 2003.

<sup>75</sup> Gup 2004, 32 (emphasis in original).

and projects American values and identity. How the CIA conducts itself has implications for who we are as a people and how we are seen by the world.”<sup>76</sup>

In that most U.S. news organizations—and, by extension, their audiences—after 9/11 appeared to accept that certain national security-related activities need not be probed or publicized,<sup>77</sup> American reporting on activities such as the CIA’s drone campaign inside Pakistan may have seemed somewhat muted when compared with the sensational attention given by the Pakistani media to Washington’s clandestine activities inside their country.

### *The ‘anti-Americanism’ master-frame in Pakistani elite and media discourse*

The master-frame of Pakistani anti-Americanism—in direct opposition to the U.S. ‘war on terror’ master-frame—as well as a variety of misinformation in the form of innuendo and conspiracy theories have often served strategic diversionary functions for the Pakistani military and intelligence establishment.<sup>78</sup> It is somewhat unavoidable to speak of Pakistani anti-Americanism without reference to the influence of internal socio-cultural factors such as Pakistan’s weak and stigmatized national identity, which, more so than anything else, has always (necessarily) defined itself in opposition to that which it perceives itself not to be.<sup>79</sup>

Hence, it should not be surprising, as Henry Kissinger notes, that

Pakistan had never found the sympathy in America that India enjoyed, at least among opinion-making groups. It did not represent principles with which Americans could identify as readily as with the “progressive” slogans and pacifist-sounding morality of the world’s largest democracy.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Gup 2004, 32.

<sup>77</sup> Gup 2004, 32.

<sup>78</sup> Despite fuelling an unhealthy, paranoid national psyche and contributing to a societal atmosphere of mistrust, geopolitical conspiracy theories can, in fact, fulfill a vital communicative purpose by helping unite a national audience against the secretive and malevolent designs of an imagined, external ‘Other’. As an example of state instrumentalization of such narratives, Yablokov uses the case of the Russian state-run news broadcaster, *Russia Today* (RT), to illustrate how Moscow uses its “news agenda as a specific tool of Russian public diplomacy aimed at undermining the policies of the U.S. government and, in turn, defending Russia’s actions.” Yablokov 2015, 301-302.

<sup>79</sup> This absence of strong national identity has its historical roots in the ‘artificial’ creation of Pakistan based on a nebulously defined Muslim nationalism and anti-Hindu xenophobia. Jaffrelot 2002.

<sup>80</sup> Kissinger 1979, 849.



A senior U.S. diplomat with experience dealing with Pakistan likens Pakistani anti-Americanism not so much to consummate hatred of the United States, but more so to anger and frustration akin to that of a ‘spurned lover’.<sup>81</sup> Hence, contemporary Pakistani anti-Americanism is partly rooted in resentments over the historical experience of intermittent and expedient U.S.-Pakistan alliances in the early to late Cold War period,<sup>82</sup> especially in the aftermath of the Soviet-Afghan conflict in the 1990s, when Washington scaled back its engagement in the region and imposed economic sanctions against Pakistan for its nuclear weapons program.

Pakistani resentment and suspicions about U.S. motives in the region did not dissipate with a renewal of the U.S.-Pakistan alliance after 9/11. Instead, anti-American sentiment in Pakistani public opinion appeared to be further reinforced in response to U.S. violations of Pakistani sovereignty as a result of the CIA’s covert drone campaign and thereby undermined support for U.S. foreign policy.<sup>83</sup> Fair and colleagues note that

Pakistani public opinion matters when it comes to this issue. The media reacts to it, as does the government and even the military. Public opinion does not drive policy on this issue, but it constrains the range of options available to U.S. and Pakistani authorities.”<sup>84</sup>

Anecdotally, it would seem that an additional factor contributing to anti-Americanism, at least among Pakistani political and journalistic elites, is what Pakistanis perceive as ‘Pakistan-bashing’ in the American media.<sup>85</sup> This could, arguably, be said to include coercive U.S. public diplomacy aimed at pressuring Islamabad to abandon its strategic ambiguity vis-à-vis the Taliban in Afghanistan and to dismantle its partially state-sponsored jihadi

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<sup>81</sup> Interview with anonymous senior U.S. diplomat, February 2016. For detailed historical discussions of this unrequited love affair in international politics, see Kux 2000; Haqqani 2013.

<sup>82</sup> Kizilbash 1988; Waseem 2004.

<sup>83</sup> Pew Research Center 2011; Pew Research Center 2012.

<sup>84</sup> Fair et al. 2014, 32.

<sup>85</sup> In person interview with Amb. Riaz Khokhar (Foreign Secretary of Pakistan, 2002-05), May 2015; interview with anonymous Pakistani government official, March 2016.

infrastructure—all of which is at odds with Islamabad’s declared commitment to supporting U.S. counterterrorism efforts.

Since the early years of Musharraf’s declaration of support for Washington, Pakistani news coverage provided a kind of diversionary pressure release valve for public anger at U.S. foreign policy vis-à-vis Pakistan or the ‘Muslim world’ writ large—after the invasion of Afghanistan (and later Iraq)—under the ideological umbrella of anti-Americanism. At the same time, though, the Pakistani news media were usually careful to side-step questions about the veil of secrecy surrounding the true extent and nature of Islamabad’s counterterrorism cooperation with Washington. An otherwise permissive state of affairs for the Pakistani media, which existed in the early 2000s, was short-lived as the critical lens of news coverage eventually began to focus its ire on the Musharraf regime itself,<sup>86</sup> threatening its survival in 2007 and ultimately contributing to its downfall later on in the following year.

The Pakistani media’s otherwise acquiescent attitude toward the country’s military and intelligence institutions meant that their activities were off-limit topics in news coverage and therefore also largely beyond public scrutiny, which resulted in the frequent exercise of self-censorship.<sup>87</sup> For instance, any suggestion that the military-run Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI) abets state-sponsored terrorism in India and Afghanistan is absent in Pakistani news reports. Although Pakistani news organizations remained deferential to the military-intelligence establishment’s foreign policy interests and were instrumental in rallying public support for occasional counter-insurgency operations against local pro-Taliban militants,<sup>88</sup> there was considerable latitude for nationalistic posturing and conspiracy

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<sup>86</sup> Mufti 2007.

<sup>87</sup> Nadadur 2007.

<sup>88</sup> Lieven 2011, 460-461.

theorizing to deflect blame for Pakistan's internal problems by attributing them to external interference.<sup>89</sup>

Despite the return to civilian rule in 2008, the country's persistent civil-military imbalance allowed the persistent praetorianism of the Pakistani military to overrule civilian leaders on foreign policy matters, wherein the ISI was also able to exercise considerable influence on domestic news coverage of these issues. The Pakistani military's domestic public standing had been severely damaged by its association with Musharraf's autocratic rule, and it could not risk further inflaming Pakistani public opinion through overt exercises of power even as it remained determined to call the shots from behind a façade of restored civilian rule by exercising de facto control of Pakistani foreign policy. After Musharraf resigned as president to avoid parliamentary impeachment proceedings in August 2008, keeping the media on the side of the military was crucial to repairing and rebranding its public image as a benign national institution. The Pakistani news media, on the other hand, needed to retain the credibility, but it had to do so without antagonizing the country's powerful military-intelligence establishment and jeopardizing their own commercial interests. Hence, what may have constituted a missed opportunity for the consolidation of independent media as a new power center in Pakistani politics instead provided an opening for the Pakistani military to co-opt them.

It did not take all that long for the Pakistani media and the military to arrive at a convenient arrangement in which criticizing the ineffectual and inept civilian government headed by President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani was not only permissible but also mutually beneficial for the media and the military.<sup>90</sup> As Raza Rumi, a

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<sup>89</sup> Shamsul Hasan, Wajid. 2010. "Pakistan's conspiracy theories." *Reuters*, September 30. <http://blogs.reuters.com/pakistan/2010/09/30/guest-contribution-pakistans-conspiracy-theories/>; Rashid, Ahmed. 2009. "Pakistan conspiracy theories stifle debate." *BBC News*, November 27. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/south\\_asia/8369914.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/south_asia/8369914.stm).

<sup>90</sup> Rashid, Ahmed. 2009. "Pakistan conspiracy theories stifle debate." *BBC News*, November 27. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/south\\_asia/8369914.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/south_asia/8369914.stm).

prominent Pakistani journalist put it, “the ISI and the Pakistani military were able to exploit divisions between competing media organizations and reclaim the control they had lost over this space during the final years of the Musharraf regime.”<sup>91</sup> Hence, through sanctioned criticism of U.S. foreign policy towards Pakistan, the media frequently acted as a mouthpiece for the military on occasions when the latter had objections to being excluded from discussions between the civilian government in Islamabad and Washington. A notable example of this was the pro-military Pakistani media campaign to oppose the ‘Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act of 2009’ (otherwise known as the Kerry-Lugar-Berman Act), which made U.S. economic assistance to Islamabad contingent upon the latter’s compliance with Washington’s counter-terrorism demands.<sup>92</sup> With the Pakistani military seeing its interests threatened, loyalists in the media attacked the legislation as an attempt by the U.S. to secure the right for itself to interfere in Pakistan’s domestic politics. The Pakistani media backlash against this legislation was accompanied with denunciations of the complicit role of the civilian government for surrendering Pakistani sovereignty to Washington.

In general, matters are perhaps not helped by the fact that most Pakistani journalists also do not have routine access to U.S. diplomatic officials at the highest levels. Furthermore, Arif, Golan, and Moritz suggest that many Pakistani journalists might also not ‘treat’ information subsidies from the U.S. Department of State as a primary source of information due to the perception that such information is not unbiased and function “as mere tools of propaganda that were meant to hide facts, particularly when it comes to drone attacks in Pakistan.”<sup>93</sup> Moreover, in contrast to their somewhat limited access to U.S. officials, it would seem that Pakistani journalists find it much easier to gain access to militant groups such as the Taliban, who are more successful in cultivating relationships with Pakistani journalists

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<sup>91</sup> In person interview with Raza Rumi (Consulting Editor, *The Friday Times*), May 2015.

<sup>92</sup> Waraich, Omar. 2009. “How a U.S. Aid Package to Pakistan Could Threaten Zardari.” *TIME*, October 8. <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1929306,00.html>.

<sup>93</sup> Arif et al. 2014, 207.

and therefore adept in securing favorable coverage for themselves in Pakistani media at the expense of the U.S.<sup>94</sup>

### **Cross-national media linkages and public diplomacy interactions**

Beyond news coverage, it is useful to expand the discussion of mutual perceptions to include a consideration of American and Pakistani news management and public diplomacy activities aimed at influencing perceptions of their own country in the media (and, by extension, ‘public opinion’) of the other country. This discussion would be incomplete without acknowledging that the increased tendency in U.S.-Pakistan diplomacy towards communication via the media consequently empowered news professionals working for American and Pakistani media organizations as de facto political actors capable of influencing the framing process and thereby shaping national understandings of the self and other. The news media of both countries were not merely passive recipients and conduits of U.S. or Pakistani elite frames but were instead actively engaged political actors and institutions with some capacity to negotiate with officials and practices of both governments.

Hence, given the critical role the media played in U.S.-Pakistan relations during the first post-9/11 decade, both Washington and Islamabad made considerable efforts to influence how they were portrayed by their national media as well as by that of the other country. The asymmetries in social power and resources between the United States and Pakistan had an undeniable influence on the scope of news management and public diplomacy interactions that both states engaged in, for co-optive or coercive purposes, vis-à-vis journalists employed by American and Pakistani news organizations.

Under the Bush administration, Washington had directly dealt with Musharraf and was, according to one U.S. diplomat, “not as concerned with other elements of Pakistan’s

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<sup>94</sup> Arif et al. 2014, 209.

society or by public opinion, and neglected public diplomacy toward the media.”<sup>95</sup> The Obama administration took a different approach with Secretary Clinton personally engaging with Pakistani media outlets, including those critical of the U.S, through numerous interviews and appearances during a visit to Islamabad and Lahore in October 2009.<sup>96</sup>

As part of its more sustained outreach efforts towards the Pakistani media, the U.S. Department of State had for several years sponsored a number of journalist exchanges and fellowships—which are a traditional public diplomacy instrument—through Fulbright and East-West Center programs to promote mutual understanding among American and Pakistani journalists about the two countries and their relationship. In addition to this long-term initiative, in 2010, the U.S. embassy in Islamabad instituted a rumor control operation, which consisted of issuing ‘corrections’, clarifications or rebuttals, and reactions to local news reports to counter factual inaccuracies and ‘conspiracy theories’ in Pakistani news reports about the United States.<sup>97</sup>

In contrast to the U.S. approach, it must be said that the methods of the Pakistani government vis-à-vis American news organizations have been, at times, startlingly heavy-handed. While Western journalists were certainly courted by Pakistani officials to encourage favorable reporting,<sup>98</sup> those who reported critically on the Pakistani government, military or intelligence institutions typically experienced Islamabad’s displeasure in the form of expulsion orders,<sup>99</sup> and in some cases were at the receiving end of physical violence carried out by agents of the state.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Smith 2011, 61.

<sup>96</sup> DeYoung, Karen. 2009. “Clinton visits Pakistan in bid to improve ties.” *Washington Post*, October 28. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/10/27/AR2009102704018.html>.

<sup>97</sup> Brulliard, Karin. 2010. “U.S. embassy launches campaign to correct errors in Pakistani media.” *Washington Post*, June 27. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/06/26/AR2010062604390.html>.

<sup>98</sup> Walsh, Declan. 2009. “The ISI, Pakistan’s notorious and feared spy agency, comes in from the cold.” *Guardian*, August 5. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/aug/05/inter-services-intelligence-directorate-pakistan>.

<sup>99</sup> Anderson, John Ward. 2008. “U.S. Journalist Is Ordered to Leave Pakistan.” *Washington Post*, January 13. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/01/12/AR2008011201422.html>; Holpuch,

Although news professionals working for American and Pakistani media organizations operated under somewhat different institutional and cultural conditions, such apparent distinctions did not necessarily inhibit the many professional linkages and overlaps that developed over time between their activities and networks. Examples of cross-national media linkages could be seen in the routine reliance of Pakistani news reports on American news media for international stories and the occasional re-use of local Pakistani news photographs and video footage of events inside Pakistan by American news organizations. Also common was the engagement of Pakistani journalists—on account of their native expertise, contacts, and language skills—as ‘fixers’ for organizing and translating interviews on behalf of the foreign correspondents employed by American news organizations.<sup>101</sup> Such transactional dependence and exchange of American and Pakistani news products and services were indicative of the respective prioritizations and limitations of resources in the journalistic cultures of each nation. Other instances of intercultural partnerships included joint American-Pakistani ventures such as *Newsweek Pakistan*, *CNBC Pakistan* (currently trading as *Jaag TV*), or *The Express Tribune* (a broadsheet newspaper affiliated with the *New York Times*). However, such organizational collaborations were rarities, especially as the majority of news organizations in both countries remained unmistakably national in character.

Ultimately, these cross-national linkages and information flows between American and Pakistani journalistic communities did not seem to lead to greater intercultural understanding and constructive dialogue as might have been expected. Instead, the media of both countries ended up exacerbating U.S.-Pakistan tensions throughout the 2000s.

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Amanda, and Jon Boone. 2013. “New York Times Pakistan bureau chief expelled on eve of country's election.” *Guardian*, May 10. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/may/10/pakistan-new-york-times-declan-walsh>.

<sup>100</sup> Gall, Carlotta. 2007. “Rough Treatment for 2 Journalists in Pakistan.” *New York Times*, January 21. <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/21/world/asia/21qside.html>; Gall 2014.

<sup>101</sup> Baldauf, Scott. 2001. “In Pakistan, war coverage is a booming business.” *Christian Science Monitor*, November 2, 2001. <http://www.csmonitor.com/2001/1102/p7s2-wosc.html>.

Occasionally, there were instances in which there appeared to be more conflict than dialogue between American and Pakistani journalistic communities.

## **Summary**

This chapter has approached interactions between U.S. and Pakistani political elites and journalists as a distinct, transnational politico-cultural system of diplomacy and news. It presented an overview of how conflicting perceptions of U.S. and Pakistani officials were reflected in the media of both countries and the extent to which such news coverage has contributed to bilateral tensions during the first decade after 9/11 (2001-2011). The increased reliance on diplomatic communication via the media in U.S.-Pakistan relations was explored to provide additional depth of understanding about the role of political culture in conditioning the framing strategies of political actors competing over the news to amplify their preferred messages. The content of elite framing efforts was shown to be influenced by the shared political culture where diplomacy was conducted and news was produced, as well as by available options for strategic conduct and situational contingencies. This includes cultural and institutional factors that appeared significant in constraining or enabling how these framing strategies were employed in the course of mediated public diplomacy between Washington and Islamabad. The discussion was complemented with an assessment of the media environments in the United States and Pakistan, wherein the news management and public diplomacy practices of these two dissimilar societies were examined while identifying and elaborating on the dominant master-frames in American and Pakistani diplomatic news coverage.

The fact that the United States and Pakistan continued to cooperate on many issues including counterterrorism and the conflict in Afghanistan since 2001 was often overshadowed by their often ostentatious diplomatic quarreling, especially during the



Raymond Davis and Abbottabad crises in 2011. Indeed, in the words of Ambassador Richard E. Hoagland, the Deputy Chief of Mission at the U.S. embassy in Islamabad at the time,

2011 was a deep plunge in U.S.-Pakistan relations [...] Of course, there was intense interest from the major Western media and from the Pakistani media. And what we saw was that on both sides, there was way too much diplomacy, so-called, being done via media. Washington was leaking like a sieve on all kinds of stuff you normally wouldn't expect to see in the media. And Pakistan, through the ISPR [Inter-Services Public Relations], as they often do, was planting its version of reality. It got to the point where both sides, at high levels, said 'You know we really have to dial this back in the media because we can rebuild this [relationship] diplomatically but it has to happen behind closed doors'.<sup>102</sup>

The case studies in the following two chapters will demonstrate this tendency to resort to mediated public diplomacy over the course of the aforementioned crises of 2011.

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<sup>102</sup> In person interview with Amb. Richard E. Hoagland (U.S. Deputy Chief of Mission to Pakistan, 2011-13), May 2015.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Frames of the U.S.-Pakistan crisis during the Raymond Davis affair**

#### **Introduction**

Just months before the raid by U.S. Navy SEALs on Abbottabad in which Osama bin Laden was killed, the Raymond Davis affair, which transpired in early 2011, was a major diplomatic row and espionage scandal that threatened a rupture in U.S.-Pakistan relations. The controversy centered on a highly publicized and mediated dispute as to whether Raymond Davis, a covert CIA contractor, arrested for fatally shooting two Pakistani men—allegedly in self-defense—at a traffic intersection in Lahore on January 27, was entitled to absolute diplomatic immunity from criminal prosecution. Davis, a former U.S. Army Special Forces soldier turned private security contractor, had noticed the two men, Muhammad Faheem and Faizan Haider (who may or may not have been ISI operatives conducting counter-surveillance on Davis), on a motorcycle tailing his car as he drove through the Mozang Chungi area. While stopped at a busy traffic intersection, Davis fired several shots, killing them both. Apart from the fact that Davis killed the two men, other details such as whether one or both of them had weapons drawn or may have been working for the ISI are either unclear or disputed. Within minutes of his calling for help from the U.S. consulate in Lahore, a four-wheel-drive vehicle rushed, unsuccessfully, to recover Davis from the scene of the incident by driving into oncoming traffic and collided with and killed, Ebadur Rehman, a passerby motorcyclist. As the U.S. personnel involved in this botched recovery-turned-hit-and-run abandoned their vehicle and thereafter fled the country, Davis was taken into local police custody.

The incident inadvertently exposed the clandestine presence of U.S. intelligence operatives and private military contractors inside Pakistan, the full extent of which had

apparently not been known to the CIA's (ostensible) intelligence partners in the ISI. Inasmuch as this crisis was a very public clash between the intelligence services of both countries, the CIA and the ISI, it was also fuelled by a domestic intra-elite power struggle involving civilian leaders in the federal government in Islamabad and the opposition-led provincial government of Punjab, as well as the powerful Pakistani military-intelligence establishment. Hence, amidst a climate of intense anti-American outrage in Pakistani public opinion and the news media, efforts to achieve a swift resolution to the crisis were further constrained by the civilian government's concerns about its own political survival. This chapter draws on data from official statements, news reports, and selected elite interviews to trace the emergence and interactions of opposing frames at different junctures in the crisis during the period immediately after Davis's arrest on January 27 until his release on March 16, following an ISI-brokered 'blood money' compromise of reparative justice derived from an ancient and rarely practiced, Islamic legal tradition known as '*diyah*'.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter examines how U.S. and Pakistani government officials communicated during the weeks-long crisis, as well as the role played by American and Pakistani media in framing elite definitions of situations and interpretations of actions were variously presented at different stages in the crisis. By scrutinizing developments and interactions during the crisis, it becomes possible to draw out the competing frames and counter-frames that emerged. In what follows, this chapter traces the trajectory of the Raymond Davis case through an examination of the interplay between competing crisis frames and counter-frames. Each frame is elaborated upon along with illustrative examples drawn from the public rhetoric of U.S. and Pakistani officials and in news reporting by the media of both countries.

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<sup>1</sup> For detailed discussions of the practice of *diyah* in Islamic criminal law, see Ismail 2016; Peters 2005.

## **The diplomatic immunity frame**

Within the parameters of the ‘diplomatic immunity’ frame, official rhetoric on both sides focused on the Davis case as a dispute between Washington and Islamabad in support of and against these claims to diplomatic immunity afforded by the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations.<sup>2</sup> For U.S. officials, an essential function of this framing was to establish a precise and limited definition of the problem to contain the scope of the crisis by concentrating on one specific aspect: the argument, based in the language of international treaty law, that Davis was entitled to diplomatic immunity and was neither liable nor subject to Pakistani judicial authority. Hence, at the beginning of crisis interactions, through this frame, U.S. officials found themselves engaged in a kind of avoidant posturing—to prevent a threat to ‘face’ from occurring—via “defensive” face-work to keep “off topics and away from activities that would lead to the expression of information that is inconsistent with the line [they were] maintaining.”<sup>3</sup> Although initially willing to accept Washington’s assertions regarding diplomatic immunity for Davis, the political judgment of the pro-U.S. civilian government of President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani lost control of the situation when it was overcome by hostile Pakistani news coverage and perceived public opinion. Moreover, the matter did not seem as straightforward to Pakistani bureaucrats in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for whom the U.S. interpretation of the situation also did not accord with their version of the facts.

The initial framing of the situation advanced by U.S. State Department officials in Washington and at the embassy in Islamabad stressed that the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations<sup>4</sup> provided unequivocal guidance on an appropriate and immediate resolution to the issue. From the U.S. point of view, Pakistan was obliged, as a signatory state, to recognize that

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<sup>2</sup> United Nations 1961.

<sup>3</sup> Goffman 1955, 218.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations 1961.

Davis was entitled to diplomatic immunity from Pakistani criminal jurisdiction. The proper course of action (or preferred solution) asserted in this framing was for Islamabad to declare Davis “not acceptable”<sup>5</sup> and order his expulsion. However, by detaining Davis—despite U.S. calls for his immediate, unconditional release—Pakistan was characterized as acting in violation of international law and diplomatic norms. For the Pakistanis, the persuasiveness of this frame, along with the credibility of its sponsors, was not helped in that U.S. officials were at first unable to get their story straight regarding Davis’s exact position within the U.S. diplomatic mission in Pakistan. The discrepancy between initial U.S. statements, which described Davis as an ‘employee’ at the consulate in Lahore and subsequently referred to him as a ‘diplomat’ attached to the embassy in Islamabad, gave Pakistani foreign ministry officials cause to doubt U.S. claims of diplomatic immunity for him.

Within hours of Davis’s arrest, on January 27, Philip J. Crowley, the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs, responded to journalists’ questions during a daily press briefing at Foggy Bottom by confirming “that an employee at the U.S. Consulate in Lahore was involved in an incident today” and that the Pakistanis were investigating the matter.<sup>6</sup> Crowley would not confirm the identity of the individual taken into Pakistani custody and stated that the name ‘Raymond Davis’ being used in the media was “wrong.” Although Crowley reiterated that the person in question was a civilian employee at the Lahore consulate, he was unable to clarify when asked, at that time, if the detained employee had diplomatic immunity.<sup>7</sup> Citing the limited information then available to him, Crowley suggested that journalists “direct the questions to the Embassy in Islamabad. They’re – they’ve got, obviously, much more up-to-the-minute

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<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of State. 2011. “Background Briefing on Diplomatic Immunity.” February 21.

<sup>6</sup> Crowley, Philip J. 2011. Daily Press Briefing, January 27. U.S. Department of State.

<sup>7</sup> Crowley, Philip J. 2011. Daily Press Briefing, January 27. U.S. Department of State.

situational awareness than I do.”<sup>8</sup> The next day, on January 28, the U.S. embassy in Islamabad issued a brief press release consistent with Crowley’s comments, which read:

A staff member of the U.S. Consulate General in Lahore was involved in an incident yesterday that regrettably resulted in the loss of life. The U.S. Embassy is working with Pakistani authorities to determine the facts and work toward a resolution.<sup>9</sup>

From these initial statements, it is apparent that U.S. State Department officials may either have been working with limited information at the time or unduly optimistic to expect the issue could be resolved quickly and straightforwardly with Islamabad’s cooperation or acquiescence. Pakistani foreign ministry officials latched on to this initial U.S. statement and reasoned that the subsequent Vienna Convention on Consular Relations<sup>10</sup> was the applicable treaty in Davis’s case, which provided for limited consular immunity and would not have prevented him from being tried on capital murder charges.<sup>11</sup>

After it became clear Pakistani authorities would not—especially in the face of prejudicial media publicity—accept Davis’s claims to have acted in justifiable self-defense against the two men and release him, the embassy was prompted to issue a corrective statement the following day, on January 29, asserting, for the very first time, his diplomatic status:

The United States Embassy in Pakistan calls for the immediate release of a U.S. diplomat unlawfully detained by authorities in Lahore. The diplomat, assigned to the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad, has a U.S. diplomatic passport and Pakistani visa valid until June 2012.<sup>12</sup>

Along with the explicit U.S. demand that Davis be released, this second press release reflected a noticeable change in tone, admonishing Pakistani officials for being negligent or otherwise disregarding international law in their handling of the matter, noting that

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<sup>8</sup> Crowley, Philip J. 2011. Daily Press Briefing, January 27. U.S. Department of State.

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Embassy in Pakistan. 2011. “Embassy Statement Regarding Lahore Incident.” January 28.

<sup>10</sup> United Nations 1963.

<sup>11</sup> Noorani, Ahmad. 2011. “Is Presidency pushing for backdated immunity to Raymond?” *The News*, February 12. <https://www.thenews.com.pk/archive/print/611818-is-presidency-pushing-for-backdated-immunity-to-raymond?>

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Embassy in Pakistan. 2011. “U.S. Embassy Calls for Release of American Diplomat.” January 29.

When detained, the U.S. diplomat identified himself to police as a diplomat and repeatedly requested immunity under the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations. Local police and senior authorities failed to observe their legal obligation to verify his status with either the U.S. Consulate General in Lahore or the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad. Furthermore, the diplomat was formally arrested and remanded into custody, which is a violation of international norms and the Vienna Convention, to which Pakistan is a signatory.<sup>13</sup>

Notwithstanding this hasty clarification (following initial confusion) about Davis's posting as a member of the 'administrative and technical staff' at the U.S. embassy in Islamabad, however, the exact nature of his role and activities still remained vague. This intentional scarcity of details obscured whether or not Davis was engaged in the 'performance of official duties', which may possibly have afforded him immunity, at the time of the shooting incident.

In marked contrast to comments made a day earlier by Crowley, the U.S. Department of State's chief spokesman, about American willingness to fully cooperate with the Pakistani investigation,<sup>14</sup> the second embassy press release declared that the "U.S. Embassy is committed to working closely with the Pakistani government to secure the immediate release of the diplomat, as required under Pakistani and international law."<sup>15</sup> In light of this invocation of diplomatic immunity, Pakistani investigation into the incident was precipitously rendered not only inappropriate or unnecessary but unlawful, with U.S. officials having arrived at a satisfactory explanation on their own for what had actually happened.

In endeavoring to downplay the gravity of the shootings, the same U.S. embassy press release went on to offer an 'account' or justification<sup>16</sup> of what had transpired from the American perspective:

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<sup>13</sup> U.S. Embassy in Pakistan. 2011. "U.S. Embassy Calls for Release of American Diplomat." January 29.

<sup>14</sup> Crowley, Philip J. 2011. Daily Press Briefing, January 27. U.S. Department of State.

<sup>15</sup> U.S. Embassy in Pakistan. 2011. "U.S. Embassy Calls for Release of American Diplomat." January 29.

<sup>16</sup> Justifications, according to Scott and Lyman "are socially approved vocabularies that neutralize an act or its consequences when one or both are called into question. But here is the crucial difference: to justify an act is to assert its positive value in the face of a claim to the contrary. Justifications recognize a general sense in which the

On January 27, the diplomat acted in self-defense when confronted by two armed men on motorcycles. The diplomat had every reason to believe that the armed men meant him bodily harm.<sup>17</sup>

Davis's would-be assailants were portrayed as unsympathetic characters who, it was alleged, "had criminal backgrounds, had robbed money and valuables at gunpoint from a Pakistani citizen in the same area" shortly before their encounter with him.<sup>18</sup> In line with this explanation, the deceased men were not randomly murdered innocent Pakistani motorists but had gotten themselves killed in the course of a botched robbery attempt. Thus, through this "denial of victim" justification,<sup>19</sup> the U.S. embassy's statement expressed the position that the actions Davis undertook in self-defense were permissible and that the victims deserved the fatal injuries that befell them. Nevertheless, from the U.S. perspective, the question of Davis's guilt or innocence was rather beside the point, since Davis was entitled to absolute diplomatic immunity and could not be held criminally liable by Pakistani authorities for his role in the incident.<sup>20</sup> So although U.S. officials were frustrated with the arrest itself, the statement expressed regret "that this incident resulted in loss of life" and concluded by stating that the "U.S. Embassy is committed to working closely with the Pakistani government to secure the immediate release of the diplomat, as required under Pakistani and international law."<sup>21</sup>

The contradiction between earlier and later accounts of Davis's status in U.S. embassy press releases, as well as in official notes submitted by the embassy to the Pakistani foreign ministry on January 27 and February 3, seemed (at least to the Pakistanis) more a retroactive characterization than an attempt to correct a simple 'paperwork error'. This unfortunate

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act in question is impermissible, but claim that the particular occasion permits or requires the very act. The laws governing the taking of life are a case in point." Scott and Lyman 1968, 51.

<sup>17</sup> U.S. Embassy in Pakistan. 2011. "U.S. Embassy Calls for Release of American Diplomat." January 29.

<sup>18</sup> U.S. Embassy in Pakistan. 2011. "U.S. Embassy Calls for Release of American Diplomat." January 29.

<sup>19</sup> Scott and Lyman 1968, 51; Sykes and Matza 1957.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with anonymous senior U.S. diplomat, February 2016.

<sup>21</sup> U.S. Embassy in Pakistan. 2011. "U.S. Embassy Calls for Release of American Diplomat." January 29.



miscommunication created sufficient ambiguity for Pakistani diplomats to distrust and contest the validity of U.S. claims that Davis was entitled to absolute immunity accorded to embassy staff by the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations.<sup>22</sup> Officials in Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs had their doubts, and the apparent discrepancies in Davis's employment and visas did not, in the Pakistani view, bolster the U.S. case.<sup>23</sup>

Notably, U.S. demands for Pakistani compliance with the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations avoided entertaining the alternative possibility wherein Islamabad could, at some stage, have formally asked Washington to waive Davis's immunity under Article 32.1 of the Convention, so that he might be tried in Pakistan.<sup>24</sup> According to a *New York Times* report (February 22) by Charlie Savage, Washington had "made clear that it will not waive immunity for Mr. Davis."<sup>25</sup> Unlikely though it was, making such a request was always a hypothetical possibility in the realm of potential Pakistani counter-arguments, but it never came to that because the Pakistani foreign ministry did not accept the U.S. claim regarding Davis's entitlement to absolute diplomatic immunity in the first instance.

The Pakistani foreign ministry, for its part, released a statement deferring the issue of Davis's diplomatic status, and whether he could be prosecuted, to be ruled on by a Pakistani court:

In response to queries from the media about killing of three Pakistanis in Lahore involving a US functionary, the Spokesman said that this matter is sub judice in a court of law and the legal process should be respected. The Punjab Police is handling the

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<sup>22</sup> United Nations 1961.

<sup>23</sup> Crowley, Philip J. 2011. Daily Press Briefing, January 27. U.S. Department of State; Kessler, Glenn. 2011. "Raymond Davis: our man in Pakistan." *Washington Post*. February 22. [http://voices.washingtonpost.com/fact-checker/2011/02/raymond\\_davis\\_our\\_man\\_in\\_pakis.html](http://voices.washingtonpost.com/fact-checker/2011/02/raymond_davis_our_man_in_pakis.html).

<sup>24</sup> For background on instances in which receiving states have made such requests of sending states to waive diplomatic immunity for individuals accused of serious offenses, see Denza 2016, 273-287.

<sup>25</sup> Savage, Charlie. 2011. "Pakistan Case Tests Laws on Diplomatic Immunity." *New York Times*. February 22. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/23/world/asia/23immunity.html>.

investigation and its report is awaited. For the above reasons, the Foreign Ministry has no substantive comments to offer.<sup>26</sup>

The foreign ministry's extraordinary deference to the judiciary in this matter appeared inconsistent with the spirit of the applicable Pakistani law, which provided that

If any question arises whether or not any person is entitled to any privilege or immunity under this Act, a certificate issued by or under the authority of the Federal Government stating any fact relating to that question shall be conclusive evidence of that fact.<sup>27</sup>

As Sajjad Ashraf, a former Pakistani career diplomat, put it at the time, the Davis case had the potential to “establish the principle that it is [Pakistani] courts and not the foreign office that determines the immunity question” in future instances.<sup>28</sup> Not only was this piece of legal nuance significantly overlooked in media coverage, it also did not cause Pakistani courts to return the case to the foreign ministry as the appropriate authority to decide this question.

As the crisis grew deeper, the familiar diplomatic punishment ritual of suspending high-level bilateral contacts was on display to signal U.S. displeasure with Pakistan's handling of the Davis case. A planned meeting between U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference in early February was canceled.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, according to *New York Times* report (February 8) by Jane Perlez, Washington had “warned Pakistan that if Mr. Davis is not released, a much sought-after state visit by President Asif Ali Zardari to Washington, planned for the end of March, could be jeopardized and badly needed financial assistance could be cut.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 2011. “On Lahore incident.” Press Release, January 29.

<sup>27</sup> Diplomatic and Consular Privileges Act, 1972.

<sup>28</sup> Ashraf 2011.

<sup>29</sup> Instead, Clinton met in Munich with Gen. Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, the head of the Pakistan Army, and reportedly impressed upon him that “Davis was being held illegally and must be freed.” Perlez, Jane. 2011. “Mystery Over Detained American Angers Pakistan.” *New York Times*, February 8.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/09/world/asia/09pakistan.html>.

<sup>30</sup> Perlez, Jane. 2011. “Mystery Over Detained American Angers Pakistan.” *New York Times*, February 8.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/09/world/asia/09pakistan.html>.

By the time the U.S. Department of State announced on February 12 the postponement of another foreign ministerial-level meeting for trilateral US-Pakistan-Afghan talks scheduled for later in the month,<sup>31</sup> Qureshi, who had been unwilling to confirm Davis's diplomatic status, had been ousted as foreign minister in a cabinet reshuffle.<sup>32</sup> Qureshi was quoted in *The News* as rejecting U.S. claims that Davis had absolute immunity, saying that

The kind of blanket immunity Washington is pressing for Davis, is not endorsed by the official record of the Foreign Ministry [...] On the basis of the official record and the advice given to me by the technocrats and experts of the Foreign Office, I could not certify him (Raymond Davis) as a diplomat.<sup>33</sup>

It was this stance, on Qureshi's part, that had apparently put him at odds with the Zardari-Gilani government. Qureshi's refusal to certify the diplomatic status of Davis—to the frustration of the Zardari-Gilani government—would, on the face of it, appear to have been a nationalistic or even principled act of defiance against U.S. pressure to turn a blind eye to human tragedy. At the time, however, there was considerable speculation regarding Qureshi's motivations in this regard. Haqqani is among those who have attributed this stance to personal ambition: perhaps Qureshi sensed a political opportunity for himself to replace Gilani, his political rival, as prime minister with the backing of the Pakistani military.<sup>34</sup> In contrast to this somewhat Machiavellian reading, a U.S. diplomat familiar with U.S.-Pakistan negotiations on the Davis case posited that the atmosphere of inflamed public opinion surrounding the controversy must have led many senior

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<sup>31</sup> Iqbal, Anwar. 2011. "Decision not 'mere administrative move': Washington puts trilateral talks on ice." *Dawn*, February 13. <https://www.dawn.com/news/605784>.

<sup>32</sup> "All The President's Men." 2011. *The News*, February 12. <https://www.thenews.com.pk/archive/print/285081-all-the-president%E2%80%99s-men>.

<sup>33</sup> Abbasi, Ansar. 2011. "Davis does not have immunity: Qureshi." *The News*. February 13. <https://www.thenews.com.pk/archive/print/611827-davis-does-not-have-immunity-qureshi>; Malick, Mohammad. 2011. Malick, Mohammad. 2011. "It's not a rumour, Americans did get Qureshi's scalp" *The News*, February 12. <http://www.thenews.com.pk/TodaysPrintDetail.aspx?ID=3939&Cat=13&dt=2/12/2011>.

<sup>34</sup> In person interview with Amb. Husain Haqqani (Pakistani ambassador to the U.S., 2008-11), June 2015.

Pakistani government officials, such as Qureshi, to justifiably fear for their lives and not want to be seen to be personally responsible for setting Davis free.<sup>35</sup>

Eventually, in a marked intensification of coercive U.S. public diplomacy to pressure Islamabad to comply with Washington's demands, President Barack Obama became directly involved, publicly insisting Davis had diplomatic immunity, should be released immediately and allowed to return to the United States. In a press conference on February 15, Obama stated that

With respect to Mr. Davis, our diplomat in Pakistan, we've got a very simple principle here that every country in the world that is party to the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations is—has upheld in the past and should uphold in the future, and that is if our diplomats are in another country, then they are not subject to that country's local prosecution. We respect it with respect to diplomats who are here. We expect Pakistan, that's a signatory and recognize Mr. Davis as a diplomat, to abide by the same convention ... So we're going to be continuing to work with the Pakistani government to get this person released. And obviously part of—for those who aren't familiar with the background on this, a couple of Pakistanis were killed in a [sic] incident between Mr. Davis within—in Pakistan. So obviously, we're concerned about the loss of life. We're not callous about that. But there's a broader principle at stake that I think we have to uphold.<sup>36</sup>

Clearly, by making such a declaration himself, the U.S. president was staking his personal credibility and prestige while signaling his administration's commitment to the position that Davis was a diplomat and that they would not be backing down from it.

This preferred framing of the situation by U.S. officials was somewhat uncritically accepted by the American elite press, even as it was vigorously contested in Pakistan by foreign ministry officials and the military-intelligence establishment as well as within the Pakistani media. While the minutiae of international treaty law were explicated in American and Pakistani

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<sup>35</sup> Interview with anonymous senior U.S. diplomat, February 2016. Indeed, the early months of 2011 were proving to be a time of political assassinations in Pakistan. Just weeks before the Davis incident in Lahore, on January 4, Salman Taseer, the governor of Punjab province (an appointee and ally of Zardari) had been assassinated by one of his own bodyguards, Mumtaz Qadri, who disagreed with Taseer's criticism of Pakistani blasphemy laws. Almost two months later, on March 2, Clement Shahbaz Bhatti, Pakistan's Minister for Minorities Affairs and the only Christian member of the federal cabinet, was also assassinated for advocating reform of the country's blasphemy laws.

<sup>36</sup> Obama, Barack. 2011. "Press Conference by the President." February 15.

news reports in the context of framing the situation as a dispute over Davis's diplomatic immunity (or lack thereof), journalistic interpretations of the implications of Davis's status were just as polarized. Ultimately, Washington's determined line on diplomatic immunity did not yield success as Islamabad did not acquiesce on those grounds. U.S. officials had underestimated the anger among Pakistanis and the extent to which they were willing to resist this line of argument. Although U.S. and Pakistani diplomats disagree to this day about Davis's diplomatic status, this argument was soon overtaken by other frames as the crisis dragged on.

### **The Pakistani civil-military divide frame**

While a very public back-and-forth ensued between U.S. and Pakistani viewpoints on the diplomatic immunity question, a parallel frame reflecting a deep civilian and military divide over the Davis case was discernable within the domestic Pakistani context. In addition to acknowledging the fact that the Pakistani state was divided on the Davis matter, the 'civil-military divide' frame promoted the view that the civilian government in Islamabad was too eager to comply with Washington's demands to release Davis, and therefore only Pakistan's military and intelligence institutions could be presumed to be acting in the national interest. Variations of this frame also denounced the civilian government's unabashed pro-Americanism for creating the very conditions that had allowed an incident such as the one in Lahore to take place. The rationale for this domestic framing was to identify who was causally blame-worthy for permitting individuals like Davis to infiltrate their country undetected and without any restrictions. While useful in attempting to 'endogenize' accountability<sup>37</sup> and inflicting political damage to vulnerable civilian elites, this framing also served to establish in Pakistani and American eyes which set of Pakistani elites could credibly and effectively act with minimal

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<sup>37</sup> Boin et al. 2009.

constraints to resolve the crisis. In this way, the frame operated on two levels with the common emphasis being the Pakistani civilian government's weakness and the added constraint of hostile news coverage and (perceived) public opinion vis-à-vis the Lahore incident, which left civilian elites incapable of responsibly or reliably dealing with the crisis.

<b>The civil-military divide in Pakistan (2011)</b>	
Pakistan People's Party (PPP) civilian-led federal government in Islamabad	Pakistani military and the Directorate of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI)
Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) civilian opposition and governing party of Punjab province	

In the domestic Pakistani context, this frame was explicitly articulated through hostile media coverage of statements by civilian government officials by impugning their motives as less than patriotic and blindly subordinate to American dictates, all of which had the effect of discrediting Pakistan's civilian leadership, undermining their ability to deal with the situation, and sowing intra-elite dissension in a time of national crisis. As evidence of the civilian government's alleged penchant for capitulation to Washington's demands, critics in the Pakistani media made pointed reference to the relaxation of Pakistani visa procedures for U.S. citizens since 2010. For instance, journalist Ansar Abbasi noted in *The News* that U.S. officials had, in the previous year, "been exerting immense pressure on the Government of Pakistan to cut delays and refusals in the issuance of visas to those assigned to go to Pakistan, apparently as government officials, diplomats or media men."<sup>38</sup> And so, according to Abbasi, in placating and accommodating Washington, the civilian government had exposed Pakistan to American

<sup>38</sup> Abbasi, Ansar. 2011. "A policy that has brought sheer disaster." *The News*. February 2. <https://www.thenews.com.pk/archive/print/611584-a-policy-that-has-brought-sheer-disaster>.

infiltrators in various guises including “dubious characters and criminals like the double murderer Raymond Davis,” who had “succeeded in getting the Pakistani visa in the garb of a US consulate official even before the policy was relaxed in mid-July last year.”<sup>39</sup> Who else has come in is a huge question.”<sup>40</sup> When Abbasi did refer to the role of Pakistani security institutions in such alleged lapses, it was to point to how their ability to fulfill their responsibilities had been compromised.<sup>41</sup>

Just as the visa relaxation policy was being denounced as ill-conceived and misguided, President Zardari was accused in some Pakistani news reports of personally sanctioning its implementation. For example, a February 26 report in *The News* argued that

The Pakistani government has been caving in to US pressures on the visa issue. The Davis affair, at the very least, warrants a complete review of the visa regime including any authority resting with the Pakistani embassy in Washington.”<sup>42</sup>

At the root of such complaints seemed to be an unsubtle insinuation of constitutional impropriety, wherein U.S. officials had “directly approached the president to get the visa policy relaxed.”<sup>43</sup> Not only did Abbasi attribute responsibility for said policy to “President Asif Ali Zardari’s personal intervention without the approval of the federal cabinet,”<sup>44</sup> he suggested that doing so had also been an inappropriate overstep of his figurehead role by the president because,

under the constitution of Pakistan, all such matters fall in the domain of the prime minister and his cabinet, a Foreign Office letter clearly showed that the visa policy was revised to the advantage of the Americans following the desire of President Zardari.<sup>45</sup>

Despite Abbasi’s claims, it was unclear whether he had actually seen such a letter and nor was any explanation offered regarding said letter’s contents or its availability. Nevertheless, Abbasi

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<sup>39</sup> Abbasi, Ansar. 2011. “A policy that has brought sheer disaster.” *The News*. February 2.

<sup>40</sup> Abbasi, Ansar. 2011. “A policy that has brought sheer disaster.” *The News*. February 2.

<sup>41</sup> Abbasi, Ansar. 2011. “A policy that has brought sheer disaster.” *The News*. February 2.

<sup>42</sup> Khattak, Taj M. 2011. “Beyond the Davis Affair.” *The News*, February 26, 2011.

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/archive/print/287354-beyond-the-davis-affair>.

<sup>43</sup> Abbasi, Ansar. 2011. “A policy that has brought sheer disaster.” *The News*. February 2.

<sup>44</sup> Abbasi, Ansar. 2011. “A policy that has brought sheer disaster.” *The News*. February 2.

<sup>45</sup> Abbasi, Ansar. 2011. “A policy that has brought sheer disaster.” *The News*. February 2.

reported that Zardari's alleged support for the visa relaxation policy had been a source of great frustration for "many in the Foreign Office and security agencies" because it meant "Pakistan's Embassy in Washington [was] free to issue visa to anyone without any security clearance from Pakistani security agencies."<sup>46</sup> Although acknowledging that the initial visa for Davis was granted before the relaxation in visa procedures for American visitors, Abbasi wrote:

Of late, a senior Foreign Office source had revealed to *The News* that after the implementation of the new policy, which empowered the Pakistani Embassy in Washington to issue visas to the Americans for one year without referring their cases to Pakistani security agencies, about 400 visas were issued to US citizens in first two days, including a weekend holiday.<sup>47</sup>

Therefore, by implication, Zardari was putting his pro-American sympathies above Pakistani national security concerns by sidelining the ISI. In contrast to the civilian government's lax attitude to national security and excessive deference to Washington, Abbasi noted how, "amid reports of national and international media about the presence of innumerable Blackwater and DynCorp personnel, the Pakistani security agencies have been seeking," ever-vigilantly, but apparently to no avail, "proper screening of American visitors to protect our national interest."<sup>48</sup> Thus, according to Abbasi, there appeared to be a vast gap between Pakistani civilian and military threat perceptions.<sup>49</sup>

The accusations against the Zardari-Gilani government in this framing of the situation were directly attributed to the ISI in a February 26 report in the *Wall Street Journal* by Tom Wright, which noted that

Pakistan's spy agency blamed the civilian government for allowing U.S. intelligence operatives to enter the country secretly, sparking an internal feud over a shooting by a

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<sup>46</sup> Abbasi, Ansar. 2011. "A policy that has brought sheer disaster." *The News*. February 2.

<sup>47</sup> Abbasi, Ansar. 2011. "A policy that has brought sheer disaster." *The News*. February 2.

<sup>48</sup> Abbasi, Ansar. 2011. "A policy that has brought sheer disaster." *The News*. February 2.

<sup>49</sup> Abbasi, Ansar. 2011. "A policy that has brought sheer disaster." *The News*. February 2.



detained Central Intelligence Agency contractor, and complicating U.S. policy in the region.<sup>50</sup>

According to this report, a “senior ISI officer” had told the *Wall Street Journal* that the Pakistani intelligence service believed that

scores of undeclared U.S. spies could be operating in Pakistan [...] The officer said Pakistan’s Embassy in Washington has given hundreds of new visas to U.S. government employees since a central Pakistani government decree in July allowed it to do so without security clearance from the ISI [...] The ISI officer said the agency was unaware of Mr. Davis’s CIA affiliation and believes the U.S. has sent scores of CIA operatives to Pakistan under the cover of other jobs since the change in visa policy.<sup>51</sup>

The same report also noted senior Zardari-Gilani government officials’ denials, along with the counter-accusation that the ISI was “using the shootings to weaken the democratically elected government.”<sup>52</sup> The Pakistani embassy in Washington was cited in this report as disputing these charges by the ISI, and an unnamed official was quoted as saying that the ISI was incensed by “the desire of the Obama administration to go through the civilian government.”<sup>53</sup> In an attempt to counter these accusations against the civilian government on the home front, a copy of Davis’s most recent visa was leaked to a Pakistani television news outlet, *Dawn News*, which showed Islamabad as the place of issue.<sup>54</sup> The Pakistani embassy in Washington also issued a denial in response to these accusations.<sup>55</sup>

With regard to the visa issue, Husain Haqqani, Pakistan’s well-connected and media-savvy ambassador in Washington, was singled out for particular opprobrium in Pakistani media

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<sup>50</sup> Wright, Tom. 2011. “Pakistan Strife Erupts Over CIA Case: Spy Agency Blames Government for Giving Arrested Contractor a Visa; Rift Complicates U.S. Diplomacy.” *Wall Street Journal*, February 26. <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748704150604576165810002665584>.

<sup>51</sup> Wright, Tom. 2011. “Pakistan Strife Erupts Over CIA Case.” *Wall Street Journal*, February 26.

<sup>52</sup> Wright, Tom. 2011. “Pakistan Strife Erupts Over CIA Case.” *Wall Street Journal*, February 26.

<sup>53</sup> Wright, Tom. 2011. “Pakistan Strife Erupts Over CIA Case.” *Wall Street Journal*, February 26.

<sup>54</sup> Interview with anonymous senior Pakistani government official, May 2016. See also Salim, Sadiq. 2011. “Last visa of Raymond Davis issued in Islamabad not Washington.” *The News*, 3 February. <https://www.thenews.com.pk/archive/print/283508-last-visa-of-raymond-davis-issued-in-islamabad-not-washington>.

<sup>55</sup> Embassy of Pakistan in the United States. 2011. “All visas to American officials issued with authorization - Ambassador Husain Haqqani.” February 9.

reports. Haqqani, who was often derisively referred to as the “U.S. ambassador to Pakistan,” attributed this media vilification to his unwillingness to uncritically go along with the Pakistani military’s script and its intolerance for independent viewpoints.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, according to Haqqani, the ISI was at this time seeking to diffuse responsibility for the policy fiasco leading up to the Davis affair by instead blaming the civilian government, and himself in particular, to distract attention from the ISI’s probable culpability.<sup>57</sup> Hence, in a counterfactual scenario, the ISI’s apparent obliviousness to the CIA’s covert infiltration of operatives, such as Davis, inside Pakistan might well have been seen as an embarrassing public exposure of an intelligence lapse on the part of the ISI.

It would appear, then, that news coverage adopting the frame of a Pakistani civil-military divide—which threatened or damaged the ‘face’ of the civilian government—served in an important way to fulfill the need of the ISI to protect and enhance its own ‘face’ in this crisis. The perception that the ISI was (ostensibly) more principled and unwilling to compromise national honor in the Davis case suited the ISI by allowing it to be seen in a comparatively better light in Pakistani media coverage and public perceptions than the (allegedly compromised) pro-U.S. leadership of the civilian government who were depicted as much too eager to acquiesce to U.S. demands. Regarding how Pakistan’s internal power struggle affected U.S. efforts to resolve the Davis affair, Wright noted that “the infighting highlights difficulties facing the U.S. as it tries to build relations with Pakistan’s elected leaders while at the same time strengthening counterterrorism cooperation with the ISI.”<sup>58</sup> In terms of affecting the outcome of the crisis, this framing had the added effect of undermining the ability of the civilian government to act as reliable interlocutors with whom the United States could successfully negotiate Davis’s release.

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<sup>56</sup> In person interview with Amb. Husain Haqqani (Pakistani ambassador to the U.S., 2008-11), June 2015.

<sup>57</sup> In person interview with Amb. Husain Haqqani (Pakistani ambassador to the U.S., 2008-11), June 2015.

<sup>58</sup> Wright, Tom. 2011. “Pakistan Strife Erupts Over CIA Case.” *Wall Street Journal*, February 26.

While the civilian government appeared, at least initially, to indicate a willingness to accommodate the U.S.-sponsored frame of ‘diplomatic immunity’, it ultimately proved not to possess the motivation, power, and strategic skill to adequately promote it, much less follow through with the logical conclusions of this frame by certifying Davis as a diplomat and expelling him. The civilian government subsequently dropped its attempts at accommodating U.S. demands and sought to publicly move closer to the firm line of the ISI. As a result, the ISI was able to audaciously exploit the situation by enhancing their domestic standing as well as their indispensability in negotiating with Washington. Hence, this simultaneously became an exercise in shifting of blame for the crisis as well as a turf battle in which the ISI was not about to let the civilian government bypass it in any compromise negotiations with Washington.

### **The espionage scandal frame**

The (not unfounded) suspicion that Davis was working for the CIA in some capacity was the subject of preferred framing early on in Pakistani news coverage, and it appeared to have been unsubtly encouraged by the ISI to inflame and escalate the situation further. Specifically, the counter-framing of the crisis as an ‘espionage scandal’ was advanced in direct opposition to and rejection of the ‘diplomatic immunity’ frame promoted by U.S. officials. While taking more than a few flights of speculative fantasy in earlier, unsubstantiated Pakistani news reports to emphasize the criminality of Davis’s actions—and by extension, those of the U.S. government—this framing directed attention to the intelligence aspects of the crisis. It was, after all, essentially a dispute between the CIA and ISI intelligence services that was, for the most part, being negotiated by American and Pakistani diplomats in the glare of the news media of both countries. At issue was a larger disagreement over the presence of undeclared CIA operatives coupled with concerns about the increasingly unilateral character of U.S. intelligence operations inside

Pakistan. When this frame was ultimately substantiated in media coverage after over three weeks into the crisis by the *Guardian*, a British newspaper, it served to unmask and threaten the ‘face’ of U.S. officials who had previously dissembled and denied Davis’s CIA association.

What is known about preliminary backstage discussions among U.S. officials from subsequent reporting by Mark Mazzetti, a national security correspondent for the *New York Times*, is that the CIA had insisted on U.S. diplomats resolving the matter solely by using the diplomatic immunity argument instead of coming clean and admitting to the ISI that Davis was, in fact, employed by the CIA.<sup>59</sup> Cameron Munter, the U.S. ambassador to Pakistan, had initially argued in favor of negotiating directly with Lt. Gen. Ahmad Shuja Pasha, the ISI chief, to secure Davis’s release. In so doing, the U.S. would have admitted that “Davis was working for the CIA, the families of the Lahore victims would be secretly compensated, and Davis would quietly be spirited out of the country, never to return again.”<sup>60</sup> Munter’s proposal was met with objections by the CIA:

Davis had been spying on a militant group with extensive ties to the ISI, and the CIA didn’t want to own up to it. Top CIA officials worried that appealing for mercy from the ISI might doom Davis. He could be killed in prison before the Obama administration could pressure Islamabad to release Davis on the grounds that he was a foreign diplomat with immunity from local laws—even those prohibiting murder. On the day of Davis’s arrest, the CIA station chief walked into Munter’s office and announced that a decision had been made to stonewall the Pakistanis. Don’t cut a deal, he warned, adding: Pakistan is the enemy.<sup>61</sup>

The ISI, angered by continued public and private U.S. denials and insistence on diplomatic immunity for Davis, was correspondingly emboldened to provoke an outburst of anti-American sentiment in Pakistani media and public opinion. In the end, the lack of traction in the CIA’s desired approach of diplomatic denial and coercion, as well as the severely overwhelmed and

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<sup>59</sup> Mazzetti 2013, 263-264.

<sup>60</sup> Mazzetti 2013, 263.

<sup>61</sup> Mazzetti 2013, 263-264.

weakened position of the Pakistani civilian government, convinced U.S. officials that Munter would have to negotiate the matter directly with Pasha.<sup>62</sup> This did not, however, happen before an ISI-abetted messaging campaign in the media had forcefully defined the crisis as an espionage scandal.

Suspicion and speculation in many sections of the Pakistani media that Davis might have been engaged in spying for the U.S. government were almost immediately reported as fact in reports during the first few weeks of the crisis.<sup>63</sup> Reporting along these lines was enabled by deliberately leaked information, such as videos of his interrogation and pictures of spy-like paraphernalia, from police and intelligence officials to stir up anti-American sentiment. Many in the Pakistani media seemed content to make sense of the situation for their audiences by seizing upon various details, factual or otherwise, to present innuendo and conspiratorial narratives, which tapped into existing anxieties about covert U.S. activities inside Pakistan. Examples of this included trying out all kinds of theories such as claims that Davis might have been supporting Islamist militants in ‘false flag’ operations,<sup>64</sup> or otherwise connected to the presence of Blackwater security contractors inside the country.<sup>65</sup>

The various conspiracy theories about an influx of Blackwater security contractors inside Pakistan were indicative of Pakistani unease with Washington’s expanded diplomatic mission and intelligence footprint inside the country. That Davis had at one time also worked for Blackwater seemed only to confirm the worst suspicions of many Pakistanis—that their entire

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<sup>62</sup> Interview with anonymous senior U.S. diplomat, February 2016.

<sup>63</sup> Abbasi, Ansar. 2011 “JIT to probe if Raymond is a spy.” *The News*, February 12.

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/archive/print/611814-jit-to-probe-if-raymond-is-a-spy>.

<sup>64</sup> Butt, Qaiser. 2011. “CIA agent Davis had ties with local militants.” *Express Tribune*, February 22. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/122105/cia-agent-davis-had-ties-with-local-militants/>.

<sup>65</sup> “America needs to protect their Raymond because there are 3,000 other Raymonds on the loose on Pakistani streets (with additional thousands in Iraq and in Afghanistan). We, on the other hand, need to make an example out of Raymond so that all trigger-happy Raymonds get a clear message.” Saleem, Farrukh. 2011. “Raymond Davis, GHQ and the Pentagon.” *The News*, February 18. <https://www.thenews.com.pk/archive/print/611930>.

country was crawling full of hundreds, if not thousands, of menacing Raymond Davises.<sup>66</sup> This fed into the pre-existing public hysteria and conspiracy theories in Pakistani media about Blackwater security contractors inside the country.<sup>67</sup> It was in no small part due to the selective attention of the Pakistani media to national security issues that Pakistanis regarded these phantom U.S. mercenaries as more of a nefarious influence in the region than the destabilizing legions of jihadists of Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad, which were spawned and sponsored by the Pakistani military and its intelligence service, the ISI.

In contrast to the understandably noisy media coverage in Pakistan, considerable effort was made by Washington to ensure Davis's CIA affiliation remained suppressed or ambiguous in American news reporting. And this, along with Washington's denials, made it expedient for U.S. officials to dismiss claims made by Pakistan's conspiracy theory-prone media. As it was, initial reports in the American news media about the Lahore incident were scarce as coverage of this issue was overshadowed at the time by the so-called 'Arab Spring' uprisings. These early reports vaguely depicted Davis as a 'U.S. official' or a 'diplomat' and, in doing so, maintained a narrative fidelity to the notion of an attempted robbery thwarted by actions Davis had taken to protect himself.

When British journalists Declan Walsh and Ewen MacAskill were able to confirm, in a February 20 investigative report in the *Guardian*, Pakistani suspicions that Davis was working

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<sup>66</sup> Interview with anonymous senior U.S. diplomat, February 2016.

<sup>67</sup> For example, Iqtidar 2016; Walsh, Declan, and Ewen MacAskill. 2009. "Blackwater operating at CIA Pakistan base, ex-official says." *Guardian*, December 11. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/dec/11/blackwater-in-cia-pakistan-base>; Crowley, Michael. 2010. "Robert Gates and Pakistani Paranoia." *New Republic*, January 26. <https://newrepublic.com/article/72752/robert-gates-and-pakistani-paranoia>; Dreazen, Yochi J. 2010. "Gates Confronts Pakistani Reports of U.S. Plots, and Fuels a Rumor." *Wall Street Journal*, January 22. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748704509704575018334096246888>; Huang, Carol. 2010. "When things go boom in the night, Pakistanis blame Blackwater." *Christian Science Monitor*, February 19. <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-South-Central/2010/0219/When-things-go-boom-in-the-night-Pakistanis-blame-Blackwater>; Syed, Baqir Sajjad. 2010. "Gates faux pas opens the door to criticism." *Dawn*, January 24. <https://www.dawn.com/news/515943/gates-faux-pas-opens-the-door-to-criticism>; Tavernise, Sabrina. 2010. "U.S. Is a Top Villain in Pakistan's Conspiracy Talk." *New York Times*, May 25. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/26/world/asia/26pstan.html>.

for the CIA were correct, they also revealed that the American news media had been complicit, en masse, in withholding this information from the American public for over three weeks, at the behest of the U.S. government.<sup>68</sup> While Davis's CIA connection was something that had been suspected, but not substantiated, earlier on by many in the Pakistani media, the silence or omissions of the American media in this regard revealed that the Davis affair had become as much a scandal of American journalism as it might have been one of espionage.<sup>69</sup> By acceding to U.S. government requests to not report Davis's CIA affiliation, American news organizations were revealed to have been complicit in interpreting the situation along Washington's preferred lines and providing cover for the 'diplomatic immunity' frame, which Washington preferred to emphasize in this crisis. In so doing, American news organizations had staked their own credibility along with that of the U.S. government. This loss of 'face' for American journalism resulted in something of a setback for U.S. officials by dampening American media support for Washington's line on Davis. Although U.S. officials abandoned their previous denials and readily acknowledged Davis' CIA connection after the *Guardian* report, they insisted this fact was rather beside the point as the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations still protected him. Nevertheless, the exposure of U.S. attempts at masking the facts in the Davis case, which now began to appear in a different light, changed how it was framed and discussed over the following weeks in both Pakistani and American news coverage. Through what might be termed the counter-coercive public diplomacy of the 'espionage scandal' frame, the ISI was emboldened enough in its attempts to seek a renegotiation of the terms of U.S.-Pakistan counterterrorism

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<sup>68</sup> Walsh, Declan, and Ewen MacAskill. 2011. "American who sparked diplomatic crisis over Lahore shooting was CIA spy." *Guardian*. 20 February. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/feb/20/us-raymond-davis-lahore-cia>.

<sup>69</sup> Brisbane, Arthur S. 2011. "An American in Pakistan." *New York Times*, February 26. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/27/opinion/27pubed.html>.

cooperation, starting with demands for the identification and withdrawal of all covert CIA contractors inside Pakistan.<sup>70</sup>

### **The justice and compromise frame**

The ‘justice and compromise’ frame represented an acknowledgment that the Lahore incident was a terrible tragedy that required—in the spirit of compromise—some measure of justice for the victims and their survivors. This frame also emphasized the need to preserve the U.S.-Pakistan relationship and not allow this incident to derail it. Although rhetoric arguing against allowing this crisis to jeopardize bilateral relations had been deployed earlier on by Obama administration officials (more often as a threat) as well as by officials in the Zardari-Gilani government, the aspect of justice that involved taking responsibility for Davis’s actions had heretofore not been given consideration in public statements by U.S. officials. This was so until the Obama administration accepted this frame, realizing that the CIA’s preferred strategy of coercive diplomacy through the diplomatic immunity argument was not likely to produce results. The public drama that ensued with the suicide of Shumaila, the young widow of one of the slain men, Muhammad Faheem, in protest against the civilian government’s perceived readiness to release Davis,<sup>71</sup> as well as the public sympathy for the surviving relatives of the two men, made earlier U.S. claims that Davis had acted in self-defense unpalatable for Pakistani public opinion. However, if Davis had been sentenced to death for the killings, this would have been enough reason for the United States to break off diplomatic relations with Pakistan completely.<sup>72</sup> To secure Davis’s release, Washington shifted to a more accommodative strategy vis-à-vis Islamabad. Hence, it was only when both U.S. and Pakistani sides stopped bargaining and began

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<sup>70</sup> Perlez, Jane. 2011. “Pakistan Demands Data on C.I.A. Contractors.” *New York Times*. February 25. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/26/world/asia/26pakistan.html>.

<sup>71</sup> Nizami, Ahmad Jamal. 2011. “I prefer death to injustice.” *The Nation*, February 7. <https://nation.com.pk/07-Feb-2011/i-prefer-death-to-injustice>.

<sup>72</sup> Interview with anonymous senior U.S. diplomat, February 2016.



operating within a shared frame of reference—or mutually agreeable definition of the situation—that a compromise (in a form the ISI wanted) could be reached to end the crisis.

Senator John F. Kerry, Chairman of the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, was asked by Ambassador Marc I. Grossman, the newly appointed ‘Af-Pak’ envoy, to visit Pakistan as an unofficial envoy on behalf of the Obama administration to persuade Pakistan’s leadership to release Davis.<sup>73</sup> However, instead of traveling initially to Islamabad on the evening of February 15 to meet with Pakistani government officials, Kerry arrived in Lahore first, the city where the incident had taken place, to speak with the Pakistani media directly.<sup>74</sup> Kerry wanted to stress that the United States and Pakistan had larger common interests that united them more so than any one issue, such as the Davis case, which was dividing them at that moment. He began his statement to the Pakistani media in a live televised press conference with the following words:

It’s a great privilege for me to be here on the eve of the celebration of the birth of the Great Prophet. Let me say also that I know this is a special time here in Lahore. So I’ll hope you will forgive me for bringing secular matters into that celebration, but that’s what I’m doing. Let me say that I know the people of Pakistan are struggling with some very difficult issues and these are issues which, as you know, we have become involved in with you in a great effort to find a mutual cause, to work together and to build progress [...] So, we have many mutual interests. And that’s what brings me here. I’m here, because in the middle of events that seem to be focusing people narrowly, we need to remember and think about the things that we care about and that we’re both fighting for that are bigger, the bigger strategic interests: stability in the region, opportunity for jobs for people, the right for people not to have their lives disrupted or ended suddenly and violently by radical extremists. This is in all of our interest. And these are the bigger issues that we need to be focused on and working hard. And we cannot allow one thing or another that might divide us in a small way to take away from the things that unite us in a big way.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> In person interview with Amb. Marc I. Grossman (U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, 2011-12), April 2015.

<sup>74</sup> Husain Haqqani had reportedly advised Kerry, prior to his visit to Pakistan, that “an expression of remorse” was needed and that this had to be expressed in Lahore, where the incident had occurred. Cottle, Michelle. 2011. “The Pakistan Whisperer.” *Newsweek*, May 15. <http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2011/05/15/the-pakistanwhisperer.html>.

<sup>75</sup> Kerry 2011.

Kerry went on to acknowledge the human tragedy that had occurred in the Lahore incident and expressed regret on the part of the American people to his Pakistani media audience, saying that

I know that in recent days, emotions have been very stressed by an extraordinarily unfortunate incident involving a diplomat assigned to the United States Embassy. We're all aware of that. And I want to come here today to express our deepest regret for this tragic event and to express the sorrow of the American people for the loss of life that has taken place [...] Personally, I've been through these kinds of losses. And I know the pain that the families of lost loved ones feel. I understand that. We share that and we want the people here to understand the depth of our sorrow for this loss of life. It is important, I think, and I express this on a very personal level, I want you to understand the degree to which we really do feel the sorrow of what has happened, and we express our sympathies to those families [...] One of the favorite sayings of the Holy Prophet was this question that he asked people. He said, "What actions are most excellent?" And then he talked about feeding people, the hungry, or caring for the afflicted. But he also specifically said, "To lighten the sorrow of the sorrowful and to remove the wrongs of the injured." That's why I'm here today. My hope is that we can find a way forward together, without politics, without getting into ideologies or other things. Let's work together as two countries who have a huge common interest, who are working together toward the same goal and find a path forward.<sup>76</sup>

In this apparently genuine display of cultural humility, Kerry appeared to succeed in some respects where other U.S. officials had thus far been unable to, as far as damage repair in the Pakistani media was concerned. Moreover, Kerry seemed mindful of distancing himself from American diktats on the Davis issue that had sparked Pakistani resistance:

I've come here to listen. I haven't come here to order anybody to do anything; I haven't come here to dictate. I've come here to listen carefully, to meet with your leaders and have an opportunity to find a path forward so that we can all live by the law and hopefully find a way to deal with some really urgent pressing issues for both of our countries.<sup>77</sup>

In response to Pakistani journalists' questions, Kerry further added:

I know that nothing seems bigger to the family of somebody that they've just lost than that loss. We respect that, and that's why I expressed the sorrow of our country about that. And I think that there are ways for us to work with your leadership to try to deal with those things in a quiet, private, and appropriate way.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Kerry 2011.

<sup>77</sup> Kerry 2011.

<sup>78</sup> Kerry 2011.

Moreover, Kerry offered assurances in response to additional questions from Pakistani journalists, saying that Davis's actions would be investigated by the U.S. Department of Justice in Washington:

We have a very powerful trust in the law, I think you know that, and this incident is a very tragic, very unfortunate incident. Nothing that we say or do about it is an expression of any kind of arrogance on our part. There is no arrogance here. In fact, I am at liberty to tell you today, that it's customary in an incident like this for our government to conduct a criminal investigation. That's our law. And I can give you the full assurance of our government today that that will take place. So there is no such thing as a suggestion that something is out of the law or that America thinks somehow that we're not subject to it [...] I shouldn't comment on the overall picture here because those are the facts that have to be part of this investigation. I promise you our department will investigate it thoroughly and appropriately.<sup>79</sup>

Kerry also seemed to suggest that the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee would also be scrutinizing the issue:

We in the Congress will obviously want to look at it, have oversight over that. So, it's not something that's done underneath the table or quietly. It has accountability and let's let those facts speak for themselves [...] Let justice speak here in the end, and I think the law can help us do that.<sup>80</sup>

In promising this accountability, Kerry added that "We still believe the immunity applies, but that doesn't mean that we don't have the right under our law or the capacity to go through our own process." The somewhat calming effect of Kerry's Lahore visit paved the way for a mutual face-saving public solution of offering 'blood money' (or *diyah*) in exchange for a pardon from the surviving relatives of the two slain men.<sup>81</sup> This display of symbolic deference to a practice in Islamic law served to rationalize the actual crisis resolution that was achieved through diplomacy behind closed doors.

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<sup>79</sup> Kerry 2011.

<sup>80</sup> Kerry 2011.

<sup>81</sup> "Blood money option being studied for Davis's release." 2011. *Dawn*, February 18.  
<https://www.dawn.com/news/606929/blood-money-option-being-studied-for-daviss-release>.

After the return to closed-door negotiations, the ISI was able to extract concessions from the CIA to scale back its presence inside Pakistan, but hostile Pakistani news coverage and public opinion, which had been deliberately inflamed and now needed to be calmed, was an impediment to explaining or selling a compromise. Enacting the ritual of ‘blood money’ was a symbolic device that seemed to fit the needs of just such an act of political dramaturgy to present a *culturally acceptable compromise as a rational resolution* to the Pakistani public. The ‘blood money’ solution had originally been Haqqani’s idea, which he had earlier shared with CIA Director Leon Panetta, Kerry, and Pasha.<sup>82</sup> However, it was ultimately the ISI under Pasha that was able to claim political credit in the eyes of U.S. officials for actually executing the idea and facilitating Davis’s release on March 16,<sup>83</sup> not on the basis of diplomatic immunity, but after restitution was paid to relatives who survived the deceased men.<sup>84</sup>

## Summary

As a public dispute ensued between Washington and Islamabad over whether or not he was entitled to diplomatic immunity from criminal prosecution, Davis came to be seen as the symbolic personification of Pakistani grievances against U.S. counterterrorism policy. While the Davis issue bounced between Pakistan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Lahore High Court, U.S. and Pakistani officials engaged in a framing contest in the media by variously resorting to strategies of damage control and crisis exploitation with competing claims and shifting interpretations of the situation as it unfolded over the course of his seven weeks-long detention. The highly public and mediated nature of this drawn-out crisis was indicative of the breakdown

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<sup>82</sup> In person interview with Amb. Husain Haqqani (Pakistani ambassador to the U.S., 2008-11), June 2015.

<sup>83</sup> Interview with anonymous senior U.S. diplomat, February 2016.

<sup>84</sup> Gall, Carlotta, and Mark Mazzetti. 2011. “Hushed Deal Frees C.I.A. Contractor in Pakistan.” *New York Times*, March 16. <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/17/world/asia/17pakistan.html>; Bukhari, Salim. 2011. “What you sold us for.” *The Nation*, March 17. <https://nation.com.pk/17-Mar-2011/what-you-sold-us-for>.

in closed-door diplomacy at a time of increased tensions and distrust in an already troubled U.S.-Pakistan relationship.

The mistrust, anger, and deterioration of communication between U.S. intelligence officials and their Pakistani counterparts meant the Davis issue could not immediately be resolved through direct negotiations. Instead, U.S. and Pakistani diplomats scrambled to contain the spread of Pakistani public outrage at news of the Lahore incident while simultaneously trying to broker an uneasy CIA-ISI truce to secure Davis's release. As a result of the Pakistani media's immediate and persisting interest in the incident and its fallout, this crisis was to a significant degree negotiated in public view by U.S. and Pakistani officials, often via the media as a channel of indirect communication.

For much of this public diplomacy crisis, the U.S. and Pakistani sides were not only far apart from each other, they were negotiating on altogether different subjects. The crisis ignited by the Raymond Davis affair was prolonged by the mobilization and interaction of competing interpretive frames that were either sponsored or embraced by political elites in Washington and Islamabad to approach and define the situation in support of their respective claims. Depending on the perspective from which it was considered, a particular frame could have presented a situation as an opportunity as much as a crisis to be negotiated with the other side.

Under the 'diplomatic immunity' frame, U.S. officials first defined the situation as a problem that could be resolved through invocation of diplomatic immunity. However, in this argument, each side claimed that international law was on its side. Washington's initial attempts to deny the true nature of the work Davis was doing inside Pakistan in the hopes that his diplomatic cover would secure his immediate release proved counterproductive as the crisis dragged on for several weeks until both sides were able to negotiate a compromise behind closed

doors. Not only would Davis's prosecution have set a precedent for future diplomatic incidents between the U.S. and Pakistan, but having Davis in Pakistani custody would have complicated the preparations that the CIA had underway for its upcoming covert operation in Abbottabad.

The ISI was able to enhance its own 'face', at the expense of the civilian government, through the 'civil-military divide' frame, and this was possible because the definition of the situation in this case for the civilian government was unsolidified throughout the duration of the crisis. The ISI boosted its negotiating status and was able to more flexibly embrace a resolution to the crisis that worked to its advantage by undermining the civilian government's ability to entertain the diplomatic immunity rationalization through a domestic blame game (in the 'civil-military divide' frame). For the U.S. side, the resulting ambiguity and confusion raised uncertainties about whom should the U.S. be talking to in order to resolve this crisis—the civilian government or the military and the ISI.

The ISI-abetted 'espionage scandal' frame, along with demands for a reduction in CIA personnel inside Pakistan, laid the groundwork for an adversarial communicative pattern that would be followed in the aftermath of the Abbottabad raid. Hence, despite the public resolution that was achieved through the 'justice and compromise' frame, the lingering mistrust and anger between both American Pakistani intelligence organizations foreclosed the possibility that CIA would alert the ISI before Abbottabad raid, setting the stage for the next crisis.

## **Chapter 8**

### **Frames of the U.S.-Pakistan crisis after the Abbottabad raid**

#### **Introduction**

The cross-border raid in Abbottabad by U.S. Navy SEALs to locate and kill al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden on May 1-2, 2011 was immediately followed by what was at the time the most severe crisis in U.S.-Pakistan relations since 9/11. The raid was conceived and carried out at a time when Washington's patience with Islamabad's questionable reliability as a counterterrorism partner had run out. Over subsequent days and weeks, a crisis of trust between Washington and Islamabad publicly played out in a series of accusations and tense public-diplomatic exchanges that were conveyed through the media (as well as by the media) of both countries.

In the ensuing framing contest, each side attempted to define the situation in terms favorable to their respective political interests. Viewed from Washington, where long-standing impatience with ambivalent Pakistani support for U.S. counterterrorism efforts had already reached a tipping point, this significant symbolic victory over al Qaeda also presented an opportunity to exploit the situation by publicly confronting Islamabad and demanding greater cooperation against Pakistan-based militant networks. Whereas for Islamabad, this incident intensified Pakistan's stigmatized image as a terrorist safe haven and placed it at considerable risk of becoming an international pariah. It also exposed its military and intelligence institutions to unprecedented domestic criticism and scrutiny, to which the Pakistani elites responded through defensive communication strategies of damage control and blame avoidance. After some initial misinformation and confusion in the Pakistani media about the military and the ISI's role in the Abbottabad raid, the unprecedented public criticism sparked a crisis of legitimacy for these institutions and their leaders.

The case study in this chapter traces the emergence and interactions of the primary crisis frames and counter-frames advanced in the official rhetoric and news reports of both countries from the time immediately after President Barack Obama announced bin Laden's death on May 1-2 up until Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's visit to Islamabad for restorative talks on May 27.

### **The Pakistani duplicity frame**

The fact that Osama bin Laden had been discovered hiding not in some remote part of the ill-defined and ungoverned Afghan-Pakistan tribal borderlands but within Pakistan proper effectively discredited repeated denials by the country's leaders that he could not—and therefore *would not*—be found there.<sup>1</sup> Islamabad's subsequent claims about not having been aware of his whereabouts were met with particular suspicion in American news coverage given that he had for several years lived in close proximity to the Pakistan Military Academy at Kakul.<sup>2</sup> According to Ambassador Marc Grossman, the U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, who had arrived in Islamabad to meet with Pakistani and Afghan officials on the morning after the U.S. raid on Abbottabad, “the Pakistanis seemed shocked; either because they had no idea that bin Laden had been there all along or because they did know and now they had been found out.”<sup>3</sup> Either way, the post-Abbottabad situation represented a humiliating loss of face for Pakistan. Washington held the upper hand at the beginning of crisis interaction because the Pakistanis found themselves vulnerable to further attacks on face by means of the duplicity

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<sup>1</sup> For example, see “Pakistan's Musharraf: Bin Laden Probably Dead.” 2002. *CNN*, January 18. <http://edition.cnn.com/2002/WORLD/asiapcf/south/01/18/gen.musharraf.binladen/>; Burns, John F., and Alan Cowell 2009. “Bin Laden Not in Pakistan, Prime Minister Says.” *New York Times*, December 3. <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/04/world/asia/04britain.html>.

<sup>2</sup> For the benefit of U.S.-centric audiences, this institution was quickly dubbed in the American news media as “Pakistan's West Point.”

<sup>3</sup> In person interview with Amb. Marc I. Grossman (U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, 2011-12), April 2015.



charge, which the latter were unable to immediately counter through diplomatic face-work. Through this framing of the situation, U.S. officials sought to publicly shame Islamabad by drawing attention to Pakistani intrigues and subversion in the ‘war on terror’, which they deemed an unacceptable state of affairs in the U.S.-Pakistan relationship and attempted to call for its transformation. Washington’s intention was to extract more substantial concessions from Islamabad—in the form of increased Pakistani military action against militant sanctuaries along the Afghan border—than it was likely to give without pressure.

Speculation and insinuation about Pakistani duplicity in the rhetoric of U.S. political elites and in American news coverage typically manifested in the notion that some elements within the Pakistani state had probably been aware of bin Laden’s presence and that Islamist sympathizers (or certain ‘rogue’ elements) within the ISI may even have covertly protected him (Entous et al. 2011).<sup>4</sup> All of this added greater weight to the long-running narrative that the Pakistanis had been playing all sides against each other in the Afghan conflict and the broader ‘war on terror’ while reviving questions about whether the U.S. ought to continue to regard Pakistan as an ally or openly acknowledge it as an adversary. As Jane Perlez noted in a *New York Times* report (May 5), for Washington, “the most urgent question of all is what to do about it, and whether the United States should continue to invest in a Pakistani military whose assurances that it does not work with terrorists carry less weight than ever.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Entous, Adam, Julian Barnes and Matthew Rosenberg. 2011. “*Signs Point to Pakistan Link.*” *Wall Street Journal*, May 5. <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704322804576303553679080310.html>. Later in-depth investigative reporting by Carlotta Gall, of the *New York Times*, suggests that the role of Pakistani intelligence operatives in protecting Osama bin Laden was not unofficial. Rather, she argues that responsibility for this task fell under the purview of a designated desk at the ISI, and while most senior Pakistani military officers might not have been aware of this, then ISI chief Lt. Gen. Ahmed Shuja Pasha was among the few who must have known. Gall 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Perelez, Jane. 2011. “Pakistani Army Shaken by Raid to Kill Bin Laden” *New York Times*, May 5. <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/05/world/asia/05pakistan.html>.

Although what may be called a frame of ‘Pakistani duplicity’ was actively advanced in news reports by journalists themselves (especially in the case of the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*), it was informed by what had by this time become well-established as a theme in reporting on U.S.-Pakistan relations: the notion of a Pakistani ‘double game’. This frame, in the specific context of the post-Abbottabad crisis, was also fuelled by the somewhat forceful rhetoric of U.S. political elites, on and off the record. However, beyond such rhetoric, what added further to the frame of duplicity were the confusing (if not themselves confused) reactions among officials in Islamabad, particularly the hesitant pace of Pakistani cooperation over the duration of the crisis with Washington. Examples of this, which were referred to by U.S. officials, could be seen in the ISI’s delays in allowing the CIA to interrogate bin Laden’s wives and in returning the wreckage left behind when one of the helicopters used in the raid crashed and had to be destroyed by the SEALs. The central questions posed by this frame, as manifested in many American news reports, primarily revolved around whether Washington could continue to regard Islamabad as an ally and induce greater cooperation, and if not, then what could the U.S. do to punish Pakistan for its alleged treachery (e.g., cutting off economic assistance to Islamabad).

Whereas earlier attempts by U.S. officials to persuade the Pakistani military, in private and public,<sup>6</sup> to be more resolute in their counterterrorism commitments had achieved limited success, this uncomfortable exposure of apparent Pakistani reluctance or inaction also seemed to present Washington with an unparalleled opportunity to compel Islamabad to desist from its ‘double game’ and finally pick a side. It was, therefore, much to the chagrin of Pakistan’s

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<sup>6</sup> For example, see: Landler, Mark. 2009. “Clinton Challenges Pakistanis on Al Qaeda.” *New York Times*, October 29. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/30/world/asia/30clinton.html>; Clinton, Hillary. 2010. “‘It Would Be a Mistake’ to Walk Away from Pakistan.” Interview with Greta Van Susteren. On the Record w/ Greta Van Susteren. *Fox News*, July 19. <http://www.foxnews.com/on-air/on-the-record/transcript/hillary-clinton-039it-would-be-mistake039-walk-away-pakistan>.

civilian and military leaders that the attention of American news reporting after the Abbottabad raid immediately seized on statements by U.S. political elites that made reference to Pakistan's suspected duplicity vis-à-vis the United States.

The media 'feeding frenzy' for information that was set off immediately after President Obama's announced the killing of bin Laden in Abbottabad was attended to by a group of unidentified high-ranking Obama administration and CIA officials in a midnight press briefing held by conference call for the White House press corps. In response to a question about whether Pakistan's military or the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) had played any supportive role in the CIA-led operation or if they had been informed in advance, journalists were explicitly told that the U.S. government had "shared our intelligence on this bin Laden compound with no other country, including Pakistan. That was for one reason and one reason alone: We believed it was essential to the security of the operation and our personnel."<sup>7</sup>

Apparently unaware that they were being contradicted in Washington, the earliest public reactions of some Pakistani officials to the Abbottabad incident consisted of awkward attempts to claim in both domestic and foreign media that the ISI had played a supportive role to the U.S. special operators who killed bin Laden.<sup>8</sup> For example, in an interview with *Reuters* in London, Wajid Shamsul Hasan, Pakistan's High Commissioner to the United Kingdom, described what happened in Abbottabad as a "joint operation, secretly collaborated, professionally carried out and satisfactorily ended." And this, Hasan said, "belied all the allegations in the past that the CIA and ISI were not cooperating and that there was a rift between the CIA and the ISI."<sup>9</sup> Rather, the

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<sup>7</sup> "Press Briefing by Senior Administration Officials on the Killing of Osama bin Laden." 2011.

<sup>8</sup> A Pakistani television report on May 2 quoted Lt. Gen. Ahmed Shuja Pasha, then Director General of the ISI, making similar claims about a 'joint operation'. "Osama killed with ISI's assistance" 2011. *Dunya News*, May 2. [http://dunyanews.tv/print\\_news\\_eng.php?nid=49427&catid=2&flag=d](http://dunyanews.tv/print_news_eng.php?nid=49427&catid=2&flag=d).

<sup>9</sup> MacDonald, Myra. 2011. "Bin Laden killing was 'joint U.S.-Pakistani operation'." *Reuters*, May 2. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/05/02/us-binladen-usa-pakistan-idUSTRE7415ZA20110502>.

promotion of such false claims regarding the ISI's purported participation in the Abbottabad raid, particularly in the Pakistani media,<sup>10</sup> seems to have been a manifestation of panicked damage control. In contrast to the Obama administration's comparatively coherent message machine, the official Pakistani response seemed to be in complete disarray. It was not until much later in the day on May 2, several hours after President Obama had announced the killing of bin Laden that Pakistani leaders managed to get their story straight and put out a public statement through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in response to the news about the raid in Abbottabad.

The morning after the raid, at a White House press briefing (May 2), John Brennan, the Deputy National Security Advisor for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism, responded to a journalist's question about how Islamabad could credibly claim not to have known about bin Laden's presence and whether Washington would accept such denials at face value, by stating:

I think it's inconceivable that bin Laden did not have a support system in the country that allowed him to remain there for an extended period of time. I am not going to speculate about what type of support he might have had on an official basis inside of Pakistan. We are closely talking to the Pakistanis right now, and again, we are leaving open opportunities to continue to pursue whatever leads might be out there.<sup>11</sup>

Still, while acknowledging "differences of view with the Pakistani government on counter-terrorism cooperation, on areas of cooperation, and what we [the Obama administration] think they should and shouldn't be doing," Brennan tempered his remarks, saying

that Pakistan has been responsible for capturing and killing more terrorists inside of Pakistan than any country, and it's by a wide margin. And there have been many, many brave Pakistani soldiers, security officials, as well as citizens, who have given their lives because of the terrorism scourge in that country. So although there are some differences of view with Pakistan, we believe that that partnership is critically important to breaking the back of al Qaeda and eventually prevailing over al Qaeda as well as associated terrorist groups.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Mir, Amir. 2011 "How Pakistan helped the US get Osama." *The News*, May 3.  
<http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-2-44777-How-Pakistan-helped-the-US-get-Osama>.

<sup>11</sup> Carney and Brennan 2011.

<sup>12</sup> Carney and Brennan 2011.

However, it was perhaps understandable that attempts by U.S. officials to balance suspicions of Pakistani betrayal with conciliatory references to past instances of U.S.-Pakistan cooperation and optimism about the future did not have as much salience or prominence in American news coverage at this early stage.

In one of the *New York Times*' earliest reports on the death of bin Laden (May 2), Brennan's remarks were used to contextualize the Obama administration's characterization of this covert operation as the most judicious option (as opposed to a conventional air strike or even a targeted drone strike) despite the "extraordinary risks" of a clash with the Pakistani military.<sup>13</sup>

Hence, Brennan was quoted as saying:

They had no idea who might have been there, whether it be the U.S. or somebody else ... So we were watching and making sure that our people and our aircraft were able to get out of Pakistani airspace, and thankfully there was no engagement with Pakistani forces.<sup>14</sup>

A follow-up report in the *New York Times* (May 6) noted that "[t]he use of specially equipped helicopters also underscores the extent to which American officials wanted to get Bin Laden without tipping off Pakistani leaders."<sup>15</sup> The emphasis being made in this point picked up on by the *New York Times* was that President Obama's decision to order a cross-border raid using stealth helicopters as part of the operation—along with American preparedness to directly engage the Pakistani military if intercepted<sup>16</sup>—was indicative of the background of justified distrust that characterized U.S.-Pakistan relations at this time. It would seem to follow from this that Pakistan's reputation as an inconsistent ally had been more hindrance than help in the CIA's

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<sup>13</sup> Myers, Steven Lee, and Elisabeth Bumiller. 2011. "Obama Calls World 'Safer' After Pakistan Raid." *New York Times*, May 2.

<sup>14</sup> Myers, Steven Lee, and Elisabeth Bumiller. 2011. "Obama Calls World 'Safer' After Pakistan Raid." *New York Times*, May 2.

<sup>15</sup> Drew, Christopher. 2011. "Attack on Bin Laden Used Stealthy Helicopter That Had Been a Secret." *New York Times*, May 6.

<sup>16</sup> Schmitt, Eric, Thom Shanker, and David E. Sanger. 2011. "Bigger Raid Unit Braced for Fight with Pakistanis." *New York Times*, May 10.

long search for bin Laden and that their success in Abbottabad would not have been possible without recognizing this.

The *Wall Street Journal* advanced what was perhaps the most hawkish interpretation of Brennan's comments in suggesting that Islamabad's duplicity would be the subject of an investigation by Washington. According to a report in the *Wall Street Journal* (May 3) supplemented by off-the-record comments by Obama administration officials, the U.S. would "probe for the possible involvement of Pakistan's spy service [ISI] and the military" in harboring bin Laden.<sup>17</sup> This depiction was at variance with a *Washington Post* report on the same day in which the statements of U.S. officials, including those of Brennan, were described as attempting to balance the situation as they "tried hard to sidestep questions about possible Pakistani complicity in hiding bin Laden, while acknowledging skepticism about Pakistan's assertion that it had been in the dark."<sup>18</sup>

In an exclusive interview with *TIME* (May 3), CIA director Leon Panetta was much less charitable in his remarks towards Islamabad. As Panetta appeared to use this interaction with the media as an opportunity to express the CIA's frustrations with the ISI, journalists in other media outlets amplified insinuations of duplicity that were prevalent early on in American news coverage after the Abbottabad raid. While reiterating what other senior U.S. officials had already stated about the decision not to notify Islamabad until after the operation in Abbottabad was completed, Panetta went further, by bluntly stating the reason for this: "it was decided that any effort to work with the Pakistanis could jeopardize the mission. They might alert the targets."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Solomon, Jay, Laura Meckler, Tom Wright and Zahid Hussain. 2011. "Pakistan's Bin Laden Connection is Probed." *Wall Street Journal*, May 2.

<sup>18</sup> Brulliard, Karin and Karen DeYoung. 2011. "Compound in Abbottabad worsening bilateral ties." *Washington Post*, May 3.

<sup>19</sup> Calabresi, Massimo. 2011 "CIA Chief: Pakistan would have jeopardized bin Laden operation." *TIME*, May 3. <http://swampland.time.com/2011/05/03/cia-chief-breaks-silence-u-s-ruled-out-involving-pakistan-in-bin-laden-raid-early-on/>.

Furthermore, according to leaked accounts of a classified closed-door briefing, Panetta reportedly told members of the U.S. House of Representatives that the Pakistanis were “either involved or incompetent. Neither place is a good place to be.”<sup>20</sup>

The public airing of such characterizations of the Pakistanis as dubious and untrustworthy allies did not go unnoticed in either American or Pakistani news coverage and, as such, they contributed to further embarrassment and provoked defensive reactions from Islamabad. Only a day after issuing an initially conciliatory statement, Pakistan’s foreign ministry released a second statement expressing Pakistani objections to the unilateral U.S. raid in Abbottabad, and which in part also defensively responded to criticisms leveled against the ISI in U.S. elite and media discourse by stating:

Abbottabad and the surrounding areas have been under sharp focus of intelligence agencies since 2003 resulting in highly technical operation by ISI which led to the arrest of high value Al Qaeda target in 2004. As far as the target compound is concerned, ISI had been sharing information with CIA and other friendly intelligence agencies since 2009. The intelligence flow indicating some foreigners in the surroundings of Abbottabad, continued till mid April 2011. It is important to highlight that taking advantage of much superior technological assets, CIA exploited the intelligence leads given by us to identify and reach Osama bin Ladin, a fact also acknowledged by the U.S. President and Secretary of State, in their statements. It is also important to mention that CIA and some other friendly intelligence agencies have benefited a great deal from the intelligence provided by ISI. ISI’s own achievements against Al Qaeda and in War on Terror are more than any other intelligence agency in the World.<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore, Foreign Secretary Salman Bashir, Pakistan’s most senior career diplomat, publicly responded to media coverage of Panetta’s comments in a press conference on May 5, by stating the following:

This whole theme of complicity has continued to surface periodically, at times, perhaps motivated to pressurize Pakistan to do more. The mantra of ‘do more’ we have seen over

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<sup>20</sup> Bash, Dana. 2011. “Sources: Panetta to Congress – Pakistan either incompetent or involved.” *CNN*, May 3. <http://politicalticker.blogs.cnn.com/2011/05/03/sources-panetta-to-congress-pakistan-either-incompetent-or-involved/>.

<sup>21</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 2011. “Death of Osama bin Ladin-Respect for Pakistan’s Established Policy Parameters on Counter Terrorism.”

[the] years has surfaced. It's easy to say that the Inter-Services Intelligence or elements within the government were in cahoots with the Al Qaeda. This is a false hypothesis. This is a false charge. It cannot be validated on any account and it flies in the face of what Pakistan, and in particular the Inter-Services Intelligence, has been able to accomplish. More than any other agency, including the CIA, the performance of the ISI in interdicting Al Qaeda does not really compare with any other intelligence agency of the world.<sup>22</sup>

These self-laudatory claims notwithstanding, the Pakistanis proved unable to use their media access to push back against the duplicity frame or convince U.S. elite audiences that Islamabad's prior record of helping to capture second or third-tier Al Qaeda operatives was incontrovertible evidence of their commitment to counterterrorism while questions were being raised in Washington about Pakistani complicity in sheltering bin Laden.<sup>23</sup>

With Islamabad initially forced on the back foot by negative news coverage during the earliest phase of the crisis, U.S. officials in Washington were hoping to dial up the political pressure on the Pakistanis to elicit increased counterterrorism cooperation. As a *Washington Post* report (May 4) by Karen DeYoung and Karin Brulliard noted, Obama administration officials were regarding the crisis "as an unprecedented opportunity to solidify the [U.S.-Pakistan] relationship" and were seeking to "leverage the post-raid situation to gain more, rather than less, [Pakistani] cooperation."<sup>24</sup> A starting point for such cooperation would, according to DeYoung and Karin Brulliard's report, have been complying with U.S. demands "that Pakistan quickly provide answers to specific questions about Osama bin Laden and his years-long residence in a bustling Pakistani city surrounded by military installations."<sup>25</sup> In a subsequent report (May 6),

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<sup>22</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 2011. "PRESS BRIEFING BY FOREIGN SECRETARY SALMAN BASHIR." May 5.

<sup>23</sup> Cowell, Alan. 2011. "Pakistan Sees Shared Intelligence Lapse." *New York Times*, May 4. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/05/world/asia/05react.html>; Entous, Adam, Julian Barnes, and Matthew Rosenberg. 2011. "Signs Point to Pakistan Link." *Wall Street Journal*, May 5. <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704322804576303553679080310.html>.

<sup>24</sup> DeYoung, Karen, and Karin Brulliard. 2011. "U.S. presses Pakistan for key answers." *Washington Post*, May 4. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/pakistan-defends-role-condemns-unilateral-us-action/2011/05/03/AFrZ4lgF\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/pakistan-defends-role-condemns-unilateral-us-action/2011/05/03/AFrZ4lgF_story.html).

<sup>25</sup> DeYoung, Karen, and Karin Brulliard. 2011. "U.S. presses Pakistan for key answers." *Washington Post*, May 4.



Brulliard and DeYoung described the internal debate among Obama administration officials regarding how best to apply pressure on Islamabad:

At White House meetings Wednesday [May 4], President Obama's national security advisers discussed how long to wait before delivering a sterner message to Pakistan, what it should be and who should deliver it, the administration official said. One option under consideration is for Vice President Biden, who visited with Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari in January, to make a phone call. Another is to wait until Clinton visits Islamabad, the Pakistani capital, later this month.<sup>26</sup>

In the same report, an unnamed White House official was quoted saying that "We realize that at this point we have a great degree of leverage, and we want to make sure we use it wisely and effectively, because it won't last long."<sup>27</sup>

The duplicity frame was reinforced by harsher rhetoric from within the U.S. Congress by legislators who threatened to cut off economic assistance to Islamabad as punishment for its perceived disloyalty.<sup>28</sup> In one particularly notable instance of grandstanding, Republican congressman Ted Poe quickly introduced a bill to prohibit aid to Islamabad unless the Obama administration could certify that "the Government of Pakistan did not have any information regarding Osama bin Laden's possible whereabouts on or after September 11, 2001."<sup>29</sup> In his remarks on the House floor, Poe had the following to say:

Osama bin Laden has met his maker, and we appreciate the Navy SEALs for arranging the meeting, but Pakistan gives us some concern. It seems like Pakistan might be playing both sides, and they have a lot of explaining to do. For all these years, we believed that Osama bin Laden was on the run, living in a cave; but, apparently, Satan's Pawn has been living for years in a million-dollar compound just yards away from a Pakistani military base, but Pakistan claims no knowledge of Osama bin Laden's whereabouts. I just don't buy it. I've introduced a bill that would require Congress and the American people to get a full understanding of what Pakistan knew about bin Laden's whereabouts and when they knew it, before we give them anymore American money. Congress has already appropriated \$3 billion in aid to Pakistan for this year; and unless Pakistan can prove that

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<sup>26</sup> Brulliard, Karin, and Karen DeYoung. 2011. "Pakistani military, government warn U.S. against future raids." *Washington Post*, May 6. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/pakistan-questions-legality-of-us-operation-that-killed-bin-laden/2011/05/05/AFM2l0wF\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/pakistan-questions-legality-of-us-operation-that-killed-bin-laden/2011/05/05/AFM2l0wF_story.html).

<sup>27</sup> Brulliard, Karin, and Karen DeYoung. 2011. "Pakistani military, government warn U.S. against future raids." *Washington Post*, May 6.

<sup>28</sup> U.S. Congress. House of Representatives. 2011. *The threat to the U.S. homeland emanating from Pakistan*.

<sup>29</sup> U.S. Congress. House of Representatives. 2011. *A bill to prohibit assistance to Pakistan*.

they were not providing sanctuary for America's number one enemy, they should not receive any American aid.<sup>30</sup>

While criticizing these threats from U.S. legislators to cut off economic assistance to Islamabad, an editorial in *The Nation*, a pro-military newspaper, counseled Pakistanis against succumbing to U.S. demands and also took this opportunity to argue for a severance of the U.S.-Pakistan alliance:

The USA should not show so much pride in its aid, for though it burdens the entire nation for generations to come, it also ensures that the rulers, who do their best to favour them, carry on maintaining their lavish lifestyles at the taxpayers [*sic*] expense. The aid is less a requirement of the Pakistani people than of the USA and those protecting its interests here. Doling it out, which is not being done, is no justification for the kind of violation of sovereignty that the USA has committed, and which it is at pains to emphasise it will commit again. It also seems that the cost-cutting majority in US Congress in just seizing on an excuse to save money by reducing or ending Pakistans [*sic*] aid on even the shadow of an excuse. The whole affair has shown, once again, that the USA is no friend of Pakistans [*sic*], and the alliance with it should be broken, because far from serving any of Pakistans [*sic*] vital interests, it may well be used to ensure that they are harmed.<sup>31</sup>

Ultimately, however, the punitive mood among U.S. political elites in Congress was counterbalanced by influential legislative leaders such as Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman John Kerry and House Speaker John Boehner, along with senior White House and Department of State officials, who argued for the necessity of continued U.S.-Pakistan cooperation by emphasizing an alternative frame of 'mutual dependence'. An early report in the *Wall Street Journal* (May 4) noted that such unsolicited and potentially undermining domestic pressure from Congress risked unsettling the Obama administration's efforts to use its newfound diplomatic leverage to demand more significant Pakistani cooperation.<sup>32</sup>

The Pentagon appeared to remain silent in all this until its third-highest-ranking official, Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Michele Flournoy, told American journalists that she had

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<sup>30</sup> Poe 2011.

<sup>31</sup> "American Obduracy." 2011. *The Nation*, May 12. <https://nation.com.pk/12-May-2011/american-obduracy>.

<sup>32</sup> Solomon, Jay, Laura Meckler and Tom Wright. 2011. "U.S. and Pakistan try to ease tensions" *Wall Street Journal*, May 4.

impressed upon the Pakistanis the need for them to repair relations with members of the U.S. Congress by proving their commitment as U.S. allies. According to a *New York Times* (May 5) report, Flournoy had, in a previously scheduled meeting with senior Pakistani military officials at the Pentagon just 18 hours after the raid in Abbottabad, “urged them to take clear steps to show Congress that they were committed to fighting terrorism and working with the United States.”<sup>33</sup> Flournoy was quoted as saying that the U.S. government did “not have any definitive evidence at this point that [the Pakistanis] did know that Osama bin Laden was at this compound.”

Nearly two weeks later, as the post-Abbottabad crisis continued, but appeared to be de-escalating, American journalists had an opportunity to question both U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen regarding the notion that the Pakistanis might have known bin Laden’s whereabouts. During a press conference at the Pentagon on May 18, Gates had the following to say regarding this:

I have seen no evidence at all that the senior [Pakistani] leadership knew. In fact, I’ve seen some evidence to the contrary. But -- and we have no evidence yet with respect to anybody else. My supposition is: Somebody knew. [...] I mean, the supposition is somebody. We don’t know whether it was, you know, a retired -- retired people, whether it was low-level. We -- you have pure supposition on our part. It’s hard to go to them with an accusation when we have no proof that anybody knew. So I just want to underscore, it’s my supposition -- I think it’s a supposition shared by a number in this government -- that somebody had to know, but we have no idea who, and we have no proof or no evidence. [...] But if the leadership doesn’t know -- I mean, look, I -- you know, I’ve done as much about accountability here as perhaps anybody, but I never fired anybody because they didn’t [know] about a problem. I fired them because once they found out about a problem, they didn’t take it seriously. So if the senior leadership in Pakistan didn’t know, it’s hard to hold them accountable for it.<sup>34</sup>

In response to a question about whether Pakistan should have to “pay some price for that fact, if it is a fact,” Gates expressed a remarkable empathy for the Pakistani position, which had been notably absent in previous statements by U.S. officials in the early stages of the crisis:

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<sup>33</sup> Bumiller, Elisabeth. 2011. “Pentagon Breaks Silence on Pakistani Role.” *New York Times*, May 5. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/06/world/asia/06pentagon.html>.

<sup>34</sup> Gates and Mullen 2011.

I would say that if I -- if I were in Pakistani shoes, I would say I've already paid a price. I've been humiliated. I've been shown that the Americans can come in here and do this with impunity. And I think we have to be -- I think we have to recognize that they see a cost in that and a price that has been paid.<sup>35</sup>

Echoing Gates, Mullen made specific reference to the face-threatening humiliation that the Pakistani military had just endured as a result of the U.S. raid on Abbottabad:

I don't think we should underestimate the humbling experience that this and in fact the internal soul searching that's going on inside the Pak mil right now and the impact of that. Before you even start to talk about external effects, it's the -- internally, and I just know for a fact that is going on. And they're not through that, because they've been through a lot tied to this, and their image has been tarnished. And they care, as we all do - - and they care a lot about that. They're a very proud military.<sup>36</sup>

These statements, by Gates and Mullen, acknowledged that the Pakistanis had already been presented with a punitive loss of face by the U.S. raid in Abbottabad. And this unusual public display of “emotional identification with the others and with their feelings” evinced what Goffman (1955, 215) might regard as a “standard of considerateness” having been sustained.

Albeit this occurred at a much later stage in crisis interactions, by which time efficacy of the Pakistani duplicity frame had proven counterproductive. Nevertheless, in the initial stages of the crisis, it was this accusatory framing in the form of reprimands and demands—wherein the U.S. took on the role of the aggrieved party demanding to know why Pakistan was not adhering to the moral or normative expectations of their alliance—which set the terms for subsequent (mediated) diplomatic crisis interactions after the Abbottabad incident.

### **The Pakistani civil-military divide frame**

Pakistani civilian and military leaders were divided after the Abbottabad incident. Hence, their initial response to the U.S. challenge advanced in the ‘Pakistani duplicity’ frame was confused and contradictory. The Abbottabad incident had revealed that Pakistani defenses were useless

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<sup>35</sup> Gates and Mullen 2011.

<sup>36</sup> Gates and Mullen 2011.

against U.S. military surprise in the form of a cross-border raid launched from inside Afghanistan. As a result of this, the Pakistani military and ISI could be said to have been ‘out of face’ and momentarily incapacitated such that they were “expressively out of touch with the situation” to the extent that they were unable to present a ‘usable line’.<sup>37</sup> Meanwhile, on the part of the civilian government, which seemed to be satisfied, at least early on, with the humiliation of Pakistani military and ISI, it could be said that there was an attempt to exercise an avoidance practice of ‘tactful blindness’ by attempting to “maintain the fiction that no threat to face has occurred.”<sup>38</sup>

The Pakistani civil-military divide frame depicted the post-Abbottabad raid crisis in terms of the (potential and actual) tensions between the country’s civilian leadership and those of the military and intelligence institutions. Early on, the focus of this frame in American and Pakistani news reports seemed to be on the severe reputational damage to the Pakistani military and its intelligence service, the ISI, along with the political consequences that might follow from this. Eventually, a major emphasis of this frame in many news reports was on how Pakistan’s civilian and military leaders had differently understood the situation and disagreed over the appropriate response to the U.S. raid in Abbottabad. Along these lines, this frame pointed to a crisis within the larger crisis in U.S.-Pakistan relations: a domestic power struggle or showdown between (temporarily) emboldened civilian political elites—in government and opposition—and the overwhelmed leadership of Pakistan’s military and intelligence institutions.

Variations of the civil-military divide frame, as and when promoted explicitly by Pakistani political elites, operated at both domestic and external levels. While the Zardari-Gilani government adopted an inconsistent communication strategy of embarrassed confusion and

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<sup>37</sup> Goffman 1955, 214-215.

<sup>38</sup> Goffman 1955, 218-219.

cautious silence in Islamabad, in one version of this frame, some unnamed civilian official or officials seemed to engage in a whisper campaign in the American media to deny responsibility on the part of the civilian government and shift blame entirely on the Pakistani military and ISI. In the domestic context, the reluctance of the Zardari-Gilani government to make the humiliated Pakistani military and ISI accountable to civilian authority created an opportunity for civilian opposition elites to exploit with demands for an investigation into the military and intelligence failures in Abbottabad. While Pakistani civilian leaders may have sought to avoid escalating the crisis with Washington after the Abbottabad raid, the combination of American diplomatic and media pressure on Islamabad and the threat to regime survival in a domestic climate of civil-military tension eventually forced the Zardari-Gilani government off the fence and on the side of the military and ISI.

Islamabad's first official public reaction to news of the U.S. raid in Abbottabad came on May 2, several hours after President Obama's announcement in Washington, and this delay only compounded the sense of confusion among the Pakistani media. Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs finally released a statement, which in part read:

In an intelligence driven operation, Osama Bin Ladin was killed in the surroundings of Abbottabad in the early hours of this morning. This operation was conducted by the US forces in accordance with declared US policy that Osama bin Ladin will be eliminated in a direct action by the US forces, wherever found in the world [...] *Osama bin Ladin's death illustrates the resolve of the international community including Pakistan to fight and eliminate terrorism.* It constitutes a major setback to terrorist organizations around the world. *Al-Qaeda had declared war on Pakistan.* Scores of Al-Qaeda sponsored terrorist attacks resulted in deaths of thousands of innocent Pakistani men, women and children [...] Pakistan has played a significant role in efforts to eliminate terrorism. We have had extremely effective intelligence sharing arrangements with several intelligence agencies including that of the US. We will continue to support international efforts against terrorism. *It is Pakistan's stated policy that it will not allow its soil to be used in terrorist attacks against any country.* Pakistan's political leadership, parliament, state institutions and the whole nation are fully united in their resolve to eliminate terrorism.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 2011. "Death of Osama bin Ladin." (emphasis added).

With this statement, Islamabad sought to demonstrate that it viewed bin Laden's demise as a welcome development and attempted to echo the reference made by Obama, in his May 1 address, to the al Qaeda leader's 2007 call for rebellion against Pakistan's leadership and military forces so as to emphasize the improbability that he might have received any official protection there.<sup>40</sup> Husain Haqqani, then Pakistan's ambassador to the United States, later explained that this Foreign Ministry statement was deliberately crafted to make Islamabad's anti-terrorist position as unambiguous as possible so as not to leave Pakistan open to accusations of having harbored the al Qaeda leader in violation of UN Security Council resolutions 1267 and 1373.<sup>41</sup> Islamabad's preferred interpretation of the situation was by no means entirely convincing to everyone. For example, in a May 3 report, Carlotta Gall, the *New York Times'* Afghanistan and Pakistan correspondent, characterized the statement as an awkward "effort to put the best face on the surprising and embarrassing revelation that Bin Laden was living in a town so close to the capital, in relative tranquility."<sup>42</sup>

While the language of the foreign ministry's initial statement reflected Islamabad's immediate diplomatic priorities and may have appeared, on the surface, to merely be a desperate face-saving gesture, it was also taken note of as a source of disagreement behind closed doors in a meeting of the country's top civilian and military leaders after the Abbottabad operation. A *Wall Street Journal* report (May 9) later recounted the chaos and tensions in Islamabad on the morning after the raid:

As word of the significance of the attack spread Monday morning local time [on May 2], Pakistani officials sought to portray it as a joint operation, going as far as to claim the

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<sup>40</sup> "Bin Laden declares 'war' on Musharraf in new tape." 2007. *Dawn*, September 21. <http://www.dawn.com/news/267453/bin-laden-declares>; Farley, Robert. 2011. "Barack Obama says that "bin Laden had declared war against Pakistan'." *PolitiFact*, May 5. <http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/statements/2011/may/05/barack-obama/barack-obama-says-bin-laden-had-declared-war-again>.

<sup>41</sup> Haqqani, 2013, 345.

<sup>42</sup> Gall, Carlotta. 2011. "In Pakistani statements, an awkward acceptance." *New York Times*, May 3.

downed helicopter was one of theirs. Also that morning, Gen. Kayani and Gen. Pasha met with President Zardari and Prime Minister Gilani. In the meeting, there was a split between the generals, who wanted to protest against the unilateral U.S. operation, and the civilians, who felt the most important thing was to welcome bin Laden's death, according to officials.<sup>43</sup>

In highlighting this civil-military divide over what the appropriate Pakistani response ought to have been, the same *Wall Street Journal* report observed that the Foreign Ministry statement's declaration that "bin Laden's killing was in line with 'declared U.S. policy' [had] made no mention of the military's anger."<sup>44</sup> Indeed, to the contrary, the civilian-inspired May 2 statement claimed an unqualified unanimity among Pakistani civilian political leaders and all 'state institutions' to continue supporting global counterterrorism efforts.

Accounts of an immediate civil-military rift on the morning after the Abbottabad raid may not be entirely accurate, however. According to Haqqani, who was familiar with the details of this meeting, the thinking of Pakistani civilian leaders had shaped Islamabad's first official statement (May 2), and this was at first supported by General Ashfaq Kayani, the country's senior military officer, but was vehemently opposed by the ISI. Kayani's initial acquiescence to civilian preferences could be attributed to a situation in which the military's humiliation in Abbottabad seemed to bolster the position of the Zardari-Gilani government.<sup>45</sup> In relation to this, while acknowledging the uncritical and overtly pro-American tone of the May 2 statement, Haqqani pointed out that

the first statement was congratulatory [toward Washington]. That was when the civilians were in charge. For the first 48 or so hours, the civilians were in control of the situation, and they thought: 'It's not our fault. Everybody knows Abbottabad is a garrison city'.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Hussain, Zahid, Matthew Rosenberg, and Jeremy Page. 2011. "After Raid, Confused Response." *Wall Street Journal*, May 9. A6. The subsequently updated online edition of this report mentions this civil-military split: Hussain, Zahid, Matthew Rosenberg, and Jeremy Page. 2011. "Pakistan's Slow Dawn After a Midnight Raid." *Wall Street Journal*, May 9. <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748704681904576311480146648792>.

<sup>44</sup> Hussain, Zahid, Matthew Rosenberg, and Jeremy Page. 2011. "Pakistan's Slow Dawn After a Midnight Raid." *Wall Street Journal*, May 9.

<sup>45</sup> In person interview with Amb. Husain Haqqani (Pakistani ambassador to the U.S., 2008-11).

<sup>46</sup> In person interview with Amb. Husain Haqqani (Pakistani ambassador to the U.S., 2008-11).



So while civilian leaders may have sought to establish the blamelessness of the Pakistani state as a whole before the international community, and especially the United States, the foreign ministry's statement did not alleviate the reputational damage the Pakistani military and the ISI incurred, especially on the domestic front.<sup>47</sup>

In subsequent public statements in the first few days after the Abbottabad raid, Pakistani civilian leaders seemed to walk a fine line between endorsing the successful outcome of the U.S. operation and avoiding a situation that might contribute to the perception or development of real civil-military tension. A prominent example of the civilian government's early damage control efforts was a *Washington Post* op-ed (May 3), written in President Asif Ali Zardari's (2011) name, defending Pakistan's counterterrorism contributions against American allegations of duplicity. In support of its declaration that "the war on terrorism is as much Pakistan's war as it is America's,"<sup>48</sup> Zardari's op-ed, which was taken note of in the Pakistani media, made assertions that Osama bin Laden had been behind a 1989 plot to overthrow Zardari's wife, former prime minister Benazir Bhutto<sup>49</sup> and later, in 2007, to assassinate her.<sup>50</sup> In so doing, this op-ed sought to dispel perceptions of Pakistani political dysfunction, and civilian powerlessness in particular, claiming there was no split between civilian and military leaders while making a subtle plea for Washington's support and reliance on the civilian government as its primary interlocutor in Islamabad:

A freely elected democratic government, with the support and mandate of the people, working with democracies all over the world, is determined to build a viable, prosperous Pakistan that is a model to the entire Islamic world on what can be accomplished in giving hope to our people and opportunity for our children We can become everything

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<sup>47</sup> Abbasi, Ansar. 2011. "Has our civil, military leadership failed totally?" *The News*, May 3.  
<http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-13-5715-Has-our-civil-military-leadership-failed-totally>.

<sup>48</sup> Zardari, Asif Ali. 2011. "Pakistan did its part." *Washington Post*, May 2.  
[http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/pakistan-did-its-part/2011/05/02/AFHxmybF\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/pakistan-did-its-part/2011/05/02/AFHxmybF_story.html).

<sup>49</sup> Butt, Tariq. 2011. "Zardari brings up Osama's \$50 million to topple Benazir." *The News*, May 4.  
<http://www.thenews.com.pk/article-15117-Osama,-his-aides-plotted-BB-murder>.

<sup>50</sup> "Osama, his aides plotted BB murder." 2011. *The News*, May 4.

that al-Qaeda and the Taliban most fear – a vision of a modern Islamic future. Our people, our government, our military, our intelligence agencies are very much united. Some abroad insist that this is not the case, but they are wrong. Pakistanis are united.<sup>51</sup>

The expectation that Washington might entertain the prospect of a shift from its historical over-reliance on military-to-military contact with Islamabad in favor of the civilians seemed to reflect the emboldened position of the civilian leadership after Abbottabad as well as their naiveté. Unlike the more cautious Zardari, who avoided making further public comments and maintained silence on the Abbottabad incident, his prime minister, Yusuf Raza Gilani, was cited in foreign news reports effusively congratulating the Obama administration on its success in Abbottabad while also defending the military and ISI.<sup>52</sup>

In contrast to the rhetorical support for the military expressed by Zardari and Gilani, some (possibly one or more) Pakistani officials in the civilian government seemed eager to anonymously float the notion of a civil-military divide in news reports to underscore the military and ISI's weakened position after Abbottabad, and thereby presumably enhance the status of civilian political leaders as more reliable interlocutors with the United States. For example, while “speaking on the condition of anonymity” with the *Washington Post* (May 10), one senior Pakistani government official conveyed a sense of schadenfreude saying that “There’s a lot of egg on many people’s faces in Pakistan, but luckily none of these faces are civilian.”<sup>53</sup> Likewise, an earlier report *Washington Post* (May 4) quoted an unnamed high-ranking official in the Zardari-Gilani government optimistically noting that the post-Abbottabad situation presented “a chance for the civilians to exert some supremacy [...] to make it very clear that if the ISI and the

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<sup>51</sup> Zardari, Asif Ali. 2011. “Pakistan did its part.” *Washington Post*, May 2.

<sup>52</sup> Cowell, Alan. 2011. “Pakistan Sees Shared Intelligence Lapse.” *New York Times*, May 4.  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/05/world/asia/05react.html>.

<sup>53</sup> Brulliard, Karin and Greg Miller. 2011. “Pakistan agency accused in leak.” *Washington Post*, May 10.

military look very bad, they really need to eat humble pie.”<sup>54</sup> These early attempts on the part of civilian government officials to distance themselves from the anti-American sentiment within the Pakistani military and the ISI evinced a strategy of blame avoidance, and this also functioned in part to accommodate the ‘Pakistani duplicity’ frame predominant in U.S. elite rhetoric and media coverage. This partial accommodation was often manifested in instances where unnamed officials in the Zardari-Gilani government fueled suspicions—mainly in American news reports—by conceding that some deniable rogue elements within the ISI may have clandestinely sheltered Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad.<sup>55</sup> As a kind of whisper campaign against the Pakistani military, these anonymous remarks gained limited traction in certain sections of the American elite press (e.g., the *Wall Street Journal* and *Washington Post*), but failed to receive serious attention from official Washington to alter historic perceptions of the military and ISI as key stakeholders in Pakistan’s political culture.

The extraordinary intensity of domestic criticism of the military and ISI for having been caught off guard by the CIA-led operation deep inside the country<sup>56</sup> seemed to offer a unique opportunity for the Zardari-Gilani government—or indeed any other civilian political leaders—to consolidate and assert civilian supremacy over the military. At a time when the military was facing its most serious crisis of legitimacy since Pakistan’s 1971 defeat by India in the Bangladeshi war of independence, a more capable or less risk-averse civilian leader would conceivably have been tempted to dismiss Generals Kayani and Pasha as a first step towards curbing military interference in political affairs. In the absence of any coherent strategy to

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<sup>54</sup> DeYoung, Karen and Karin Brulliard. 2011. “U.S. presses Pakistan for key answers.” *Washington Post*, May 4.

<sup>55</sup> For example, see Myers, Steven Lee, and Jane Perlez. 2011. “Tensions continue to rise as U.S. officials press Pakistan for answers.” *New York Times*, May 4; Cooper, Helene and Ismail Khan. 2011. “U.S. demands more from Pakistan as details of bin Laden’s movements emerge.” *New York Times*, May 7.

<sup>56</sup> Brulliard, Karin. 2011. “In Pakistan, rare doubts about security apparatus.” *Washington Post*, May 5; Abbasi, Ansar. 2011. “Has our civil, military leadership failed totally?” *The News*, May 3.  
<http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-13-5715-Has-our-civil-military-leadership-failed-totally>.

achieve this, the generals were instead able to recover their footing and resist internal and external pressure by tapping into pre-existing anti-American sentiments in the Pakistani media and public opinion. Perhaps it was out of an awareness of their own political inadequacy and vulnerability that the Zardari-Gilani government was unwilling or unable to capitalize on the situation by taking any measures to alter the nature of Pakistani civil-military relations, lest it should provoke the anger of the military (regardless of how weak or humiliated it was then).

This failure to act was criticized and lamented as a missed opportunity in a news report for *Dawn* (May 12) by Cyril Almeida, who argued that the threat posed by the military and ISI to the civilian leadership had been overestimated:

the extraordinary blow dealt to the prestige and credibility of the army high command by the OBL debacle was an extraordinary stroke of luck for Zardari and the PPP. With knives out everywhere for the [military and intelligence] establishment, the possibility of the establishment slipping a knife into the back of the [civilian] government or politically decapitating it has now evaporated.<sup>57</sup>

Instead, according to Almeida, the base self-interest of the Zardari-Gilani government in preserving regime survival had allowed the military to evade a solution to the longstanding problem of Pakistani praetorianism:

Zardari has fetishised the goal of his government completing its term, subordinating every other consideration to it [...] inflexibility in the face of a stunning, historic opportunity to chip away at the civil-military imbalance will hurt the democratic project.<sup>58</sup>

It would seem, in light of realistic assessments of their limited capabilities and immediate priorities, that the Zardari-Gilani government was determined to maintain the status quo, even if this meant making common cause with Pakistan's disgraced military and intelligence institutions against domestic and external criticism.

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<sup>57</sup> Almeida, Cyril. 2011. "The right goal at the wrong time." *Dawn*, May 12.  
<http://www.dawn.com/news/628131/the-right-goal-at-the-wrong-time>.

<sup>58</sup> Almeida, Cyril. 2011. "The right goal at the wrong time." *Dawn*, May 12.

Unlike the Zardari-Gilani government, which was hesitant to exploit the domestic situation, domestic opposition elites were quick to capitalize on the confusion and outrage to demand a public inquiry into the institutional failures that created the conditions in which the Abbottabad incident had taken place.<sup>59</sup> In this regard, the most substantive challenge to the military and ISI came from opposition politicians such as Nawaz Sharif—the former prime minister ousted in Pervez Musharraf’s 1999 military coup—whose party, the Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N), was adamantly vocal in calling for an independent judicial commission.<sup>60</sup> As Almeida noted at the time in his report for *Dawn* (May 12):

Sharif appears to have grasped, and more importantly is willing to act on, a central fact in the quest to rectify the civil-military imbalance: the army will not surrender its ascendancy over the civilian politicians without the fiercest of fights.<sup>61</sup>

So whereas the Zardari-Gilani government appeared at times to either be siding with the military or cautiously adopting a “hands-off approach” in response to these opposition demands, Almeida observed how

Sharif’s call for a judicial commission has put both the army and the government on the back foot — the government because it will now have to explain why an in-house army ‘investigation’ is sufficient (as the army clearly wants Pakistanis to believe).<sup>62</sup>

Nevertheless, the Zardari-Gilani government’s political hedging (i.e., its attempts at placating the United States while declining to investigate the military) did not escape notice and was roundly

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<sup>59</sup> Noorani, Ahmad. 2011. “Government decides not to probe Abbottabad attack: Parliament may demand inquiry but US opposing it.” *The News*, May 9. <http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-6-45852-Government-decides-not-to-probe-Abbottabad-attack>; Ahmadani, Ahmad. 2011. “PTI demands independent probe into Abbottabad op.” *The Nation*, May 9. <http://nation.com.pk/national/09-May-2011/PTI-demands-independent-probe-into-Abbottabad-op>; <http://www.dawn.com/news/630158/abbottabad-inquiry-body-likely-after-pms-return>.

<sup>60</sup> “Demand for judicial inquiry to fix responsibility, terms of reference suggested: Nawaz rejects US raid probe by military.” 2011. *Dawn*, May 11. <http://www.dawn.com/news/627988/demand-for-judicial-inquiry-to-fix-responsibility-terms-of-reference-suggested-nawaz-rejects-us-raid-probe-by-military>.

<sup>61</sup> Almeida, Cyril. 2011. “The right goal at the wrong time.” *Dawn*, May 12.

<sup>62</sup> Almeida, Cyril. 2011. “The right goal at the wrong time.” *Dawn*, May 12.

criticized in the Pakistani media or among military<sup>63</sup> and opposition leaders.<sup>64</sup> This was made note of in a report in *The News* (May 8):

It is said that President Zardari and Prime Minister Gilani are cleverly in their view allowing the Pak Army to face both internal condemnation and American grilling and thus get weakened. Both the top leaders have played safe. On the external front both of them shared their excitement with Americans ignoring the serious breach of Pakistan's sovereignty whereas internally they ignored holding a high-level inquiry to fix responsibility for the serious intelligence and defence failures.<sup>65</sup>

In a similar vein, an editorial in the pro-military *The Nation* criticized the civilian government for not being "nationalist" enough in responding to U.S. pressure:

Pakistan's concerned agencies have set in motion the process of inquiring into the different aspects of the Abbottabad episode. But a weak and corrupt leadership, presiding over a crumbling economy and running a country with mounting public discontent threatening to blow up, is being subjected to a rising crescendo of pressure from the US. There is need for Islamabad to understand the rationale of this pressure and take steps to withstand it. In bin Laden's incident, the US has found an ideal scapegoat in Pakistan for its failure in Afghanistan. It will do all it can not to let it off the hook. Unless our leadership sheds its compliant behaviour towards the US and puts up a firm, nationalistic stand, Pakistan is in for real trouble. It should take a cue from Iran and North Korea which have, despite being heavily sanctioned, successfully rebuffed the superpower's demands.<sup>66</sup>

Calls for the president and prime minister to resign were not long in coming from prominent opposition elites.<sup>67</sup> Particularly notable among this chorus of voices was Shah Mahmood Qureshi,<sup>68</sup> the former foreign minister, who was by this time seen as closely aligned with the military and had fallen out with the Zardari-Gilani government less than two months before during the diplomatic crisis sparked by the Raymond Davis affair earlier on in 2011. Hence, for

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<sup>63</sup> Noorani, Ahmad. 2011. "Army top brass blames civilians." *The News*, May 7.

<http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-13-5821-Army-top-brass-blames-civilians>.

<sup>64</sup> Anis, Muhammad. 2011. "Nisar slams govt silence over Abbottabad raid." *The News*, May 7.

<http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-13-5811-Nisar-slams-govt-silence-over-Abbottabad-raid>.

<sup>65</sup> Abbasi, Ansar. 2011. "The huge price paid to protect Americans." *The News*, May 8.

<http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-13-5849-The-huge-price-Pakistan-paid-to-protect-Americans>.

<sup>66</sup> "Rationale of US pressure." 2011. *The Nation*, May 10. <https://nation.com.pk/10-May-2011/rationale-of-us-pressure>.

<sup>67</sup> Bangash, Faizan. 2011. "Qureshi, Nisar ask Zardari, Gilani to resign over US raid." *The News*, May 8.

<sup>68</sup> Brulliard, Karin. 2011. "In Pakistan, ex-foreign minister calls for president to resign after bin Laden raid." *Washington Post*, May 7.

some political opposition leaders, the domestic dimension of the crisis presented an opportunity to settle old scores and grievances as well as, if not more so than, weakening the military's influence in Pakistani politics.

If an awareness of their own political weakness had inhibited aspirations on the part of civilian political elites in the Zardari-Gilani government to subordinate the Pakistani military and ISI, the realization that these institutions would not endure a drawn-out bruising public humiliation without also dragging the civilian leadership down with them may have motivated the government to forgo further vacillation. The release of a second statement by the Pakistani foreign ministry on May 3 condemning the U.S. raid as a violation of Pakistani sovereignty was a reflection of the military's indignation at the U.S. raid and dissatisfaction with the civilian government's initially placatory response to Washington. Islamabad's sudden shift in tone was, according to Haqqani, attributable to Lt. General Ahmad Shuja Pasha, the Director-General of the ISI, who apparently succeeded in convincing the military to adopt a more denunciatory tone toward Washington that was at odds with Islamabad's initial official reaction.<sup>69</sup> In his recollection of the disagreement over the initial foreign ministry statement of May 2, Haqqani noted that

The army chief [Gen. Kayani] had gone along with the first statement, but he changed his position the next day when the ISI raised objections about its implications. Basically, they thought that [President] Zardari will sack the ISI chief [Lt. Gen. Ahmad Shuja Pasha]. The ISI chief then organized and orchestrated a media campaign and rent-a-crowd rallies to create the impression that they still had public support.<sup>70</sup>

Grossman, who had arrived for scheduled talks in Islamabad on May 2 just hours after the Abbottabad raid, reflected on the differences in tone between the two Pakistani foreign ministry statements, saying that

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<sup>69</sup> In person interview with Amb. Husain Haqqani (Pakistani ambassador to the U.S., 2008-11).

<sup>70</sup> In person interview with Amb. Husain Haqqani (Pakistani ambassador to the U.S., 2008-11).

The first statement that Pakistan issued after bin Laden's death was a fantastic statement, and it was only over a period of days that they decided they were going to change their message. So, in a way, being there those first 24 hours was for me quite easy because I just hung on the statement that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had issued, which was excellent [...] I think the first statement was a civilian reaction to the events and then over time the shock of the military turned itself into a deep resentment over what had happened. As military people sworn to defend their country they were horrified that [the U.S. was] able to enter Pakistan, do this deed, shoot up this compound and leave.<sup>71</sup>

Given the fact that the Zardari-Gilani government's earlier endorsement of the U.S. operation in Abbottabad had become a liability exposing them to considerable domestic criticism, and therefore a share of the blame, perhaps it made pragmatic sense for the civilian leadership to consequently join the military in diverting blame toward Washington. To appreciate the significance of the change in diplomatic stance that Pakistan adopted towards the United States in the aftermath of the Abbottabad raid, Grossman suggests the following 'what if?' counterfactual scenario: "think of what might have happened had they stuck with the first statement. It would have been a different conversation between the United States and Pakistan."<sup>72</sup> Therefore, with respect to the trajectory of this crisis in U.S.-Pakistan relations, it becomes apparent that tensions need not have escalated further—with a volte-face on the part of Islamabad—had it not been for domestic embarrassment and pressures faced by the leadership of Pakistan's powerful military and intelligence institutions as well as their unchallenged ability to strong-arm the civilian government into going along with them.

While the civilian government appeared, at first, to welcome the U.S. raid in Abbottabad and indicated a willingness to accommodate the U.S.-sponsored frame of 'Pakistani duplicity', it did not possess the motivation, power, and strategic skill to fully adopt or follow through with the logical conclusions of the duplicity frame by taking the military and ISI to account for its

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<sup>71</sup> In person interview with Amb. Marc I. Grossman (U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, 2011-12), April 2015.

<sup>72</sup> In person interview with Amb. Marc I. Grossman (U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, 2011-12), April 2015.



alleged complicity or apparent incompetence. Instead, the civilian government quickly moved to shift its position after its belated realization that the success of the U.S. operation in Abbottabad had not only been humiliating for the military and ISI, but for the Pakistani public as a whole, given the strong identification on part of the public (and the media) with Pakistani military institutions as national symbols, thereby creating a loss of collective face for Pakistanis. The civilian leadership's motivation in eventually supporting the military and ISI and in later denouncing the U.S. raid in Abbottabad—via the 'American unilateralism' frame—was to preserve its own political survival while confronted with what it perceived as a threat from considerable (real or media-manipulated) Pakistani public outrage against the United States.

### **The American unilateralism frame**

The counter-frame of 'American unilateralism' eventually came to serve as a mirror retort to allegations of duplicity that were being voiced in Washington and amplified by the American news media after the Abbottabad raid. The consequence of defining the situation as an instance of American unilateralism could be described as giving "it accredited status as an incident—to ratify it as a threat that deserves direct official attention—and to try to proceed to correct for its effects."<sup>73</sup> In the course of satisfying an "affective, need-based drive to address image predicaments following face loss and humiliation,"<sup>74</sup> civilian and military leaders in Islamabad considered themselves required to act, and to be seen as acting, in defense of the collective face of Pakistanis. Accordingly, Islamabad's adoption of this interpretive frame consisted of remedial actions (or 'corrective face-work') to repair the damage to collective Pakistani face and mediated public-diplomatic performances to credibly dramatize Pakistani anger for domestic validation and support.

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<sup>73</sup> Goffman 1955, 219.

<sup>74</sup> Mor 2012, 110.

The American unilateralism frame quickly found resonance in Pakistani news coverage, with the leaders of the military and ISI, as well as among civilian political elites, as it tapped into pre-existing grievances about past U.S. violations of Pakistani sovereignty. This was an especially sensitive subject in 2011 because the perception that Washington had little regard for Pakistani borders, or the lives within them, had repeatedly been reinforced over the years with routine CIA drone strikes, covert cross-border raids by U.S. military forces and border clashes with the Pakistan Army. With resentment from the Raymond Davis controversy of just a few months earlier still fresh in public memory it was not all too difficult for Pakistanis to depict the Abbottabad raid as yet another unilateralist assertion of American extraterritoriality in which the actions of U.S. operatives inside Pakistani territory were not subject to Pakistani consent.

The framing of the Abbottabad raid as an act of American unilateralism was appropriated in short order by the ISI and the military and, as mentioned earlier, subsequently also embraced by the Zardari-Gilani civilian government. Its earliest articulation in official Pakistani rhetoric came in the form of a revised statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on May 3 in reference to the Abbottabad raid. In this new statement, the U.S. operation that located and killed Osama bin Laden was re-characterized as an “unauthorized unilateral action” carried out in violation of Pakistani sovereignty, with Islamabad expressing

its deep concerns and reservations on the manner in which the Government of the United States carried out this operation without prior information or authorization from the Government of Pakistan. This event of unauthorized unilateral action cannot be taken as a rule. The Government of Pakistan further affirms that such an event shall not serve as future precedent for any state, including the US.<sup>75</sup>

Apparently, in direct response to accusations of complicity or incompetence, the statement declared that “as far as the target compound [in Abbottabad] is concerned, ISI had been sharing

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<sup>75</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 2011. “Death of Osama bin Ladin – Respect for Pakistan’s Established Policy Parameters on Counter Terrorism.”

information with CIA and other friendly intelligence agencies since 2009.”<sup>76</sup> With respect to the ISI’s failure to detect bin Laden’s presence in Abbottabad, the Pakistani position was that CIA had “exploited the leads given by us to identify and reach Osama bin Ladin” by making use of the United States’ vastly “superior technological assets.”<sup>77</sup> Prominent investigative journalist Umar Cheema, writing some weeks afterward in *The News* (May 29), cited an anonymous official source within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as saying that this particular statement “was dispatched to the Foreign Office from the GHQ [General Headquarters of the Pakistan Army in Rawalpindi].”<sup>78</sup>

Further to this, a May 5 statement attributed to General Ashfaq Kayani, the Chief of Army Staff, warned that “any similar action, violating the sovereignty of Pakistan, will warrant a review on the level of military / intelligence cooperation with the United States.”<sup>79</sup> With respect to the perceived risk of an American seizure of Pakistan’s nuclear arsenal, Kayani’s statement sought to reassure his domestic audience by saying that “unlike an undefended civilian compound, our strategic assets are well protected and an elaborate defensive mechanism is in place.”<sup>80</sup> Kayani’s statement was released after a meeting of the Pakistan Army’s senior leadership, where the prevailing mood was described in a report for *Dawn* (May 5) as “that of betrayal by the US, [while] the red-faced army brass addressed some of the concerns being expressed publicly.”<sup>81</sup> Apparently, then, the more seriously discrediting embarrassment that the

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<sup>76</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 2011. “Death of Osama bin Ladin – Respect for Pakistan’s Established Policy Parameters on Counter Terrorism.”

<sup>77</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 2011. “Death of Osama bin Ladin – Respect for Pakistan’s Established Policy Parameters on Counter Terrorism.”

<sup>78</sup> In addition, according to Cheema, “A piece of advice also carried this draft: ‘Don’t even try to make any minor change. Any attempt to fine-tune message couched in diplomatic language would backfire the efforts of sending abroad the desired message’.” Cheema, Umar. 2011. “Foreign Office fast becoming a post office.” *The News*, May 29. <https://www.thenews.com.pk/archive/print/614154-foreign-office-fast-becoming-a-post-office>.

<sup>79</sup> Inter Services Public Relations 2011.

<sup>80</sup> Inter Services Public Relations 2011.

<sup>81</sup> “Kayani orders probe into intel failure, seeks cut in US personnel.” 2001. *Dawn*, May 5.

Pakistani military was attempting to recover from was the one caused by the unilateral U.S. raid on Abbottabad, rather than the unhindered presence of Osama bin Laden inside Pakistan for nearly a decade.

This posturing on the part of Islamabad, in (belated) reaction to the Pakistani military's humiliation, along with the implied threat of severing U.S.-Pakistan military and intelligence ties, was well received by conservative sections of the Pakistani media. For example, a May 6 report for *The Nation*, a newspaper known for its pro-military and ISI positions, noted approvingly that Pakistan's civilian and military leadership had finally "taken a stance on the Osama bin Laden issue which is quite justified and logical" while at the same time expressing regret "that instead of apologizing for taking a unilateral action and violating Pakistans [sic] sovereignty, the US arrogantly defended the adventure."<sup>82</sup> Elite sections of the American media were left nonplussed by the sudden shift in Islamabad's official rhetoric, and U.S. officials were not immediately certain as to whether this was contrived outrage solely intended for domestic consumption within Pakistan or a genuine expression of disapproval or protest. According to one *Washington Post* report (May 6),

Obama administration officials said they were uncertain whether the statement by Gen. Ashfaq Kayani, which also acknowledged "shortcomings" in Pakistani intelligence on bin Laden, reflected Pakistan's actual stance or whether it amounted to posturing for a domestic audience. In conversations with U.S. officials, one administration official said, Kayani had been "much more nuanced. . . . We didn't hear this bellicosity." [...] Regardless of the statement's intended audience, it reflected the intense anger felt at the highest levels of Pakistan's powerful military toward the United States and suggested that the two countries remain far apart in how they view bin Laden's killing.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Mumtaz, Ashraf. 2011 "Time to distinguish between friends and foes." *The Nation*, May 6.

<sup>83</sup> Brulliard, Karin, and Karen DeYoung. 2011. "Pakistani military, government warn U.S. against future raids." *Washington Post*, May 6. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/pakistan-questions-legality-of-us-operation-that-killed-bin-laden/2011/05/05/AFM2l0wF\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/pakistan-questions-legality-of-us-operation-that-killed-bin-laden/2011/05/05/AFM2l0wF_story.html).

The same *Washington Post* report noted that the statements of indignation from Islamabad “appeared to reflect a concerted effort to redirect the public discourse toward anger at the United States,” which in turn meant that

Washington might not be able to easily leverage the embarrassing revelation that bin Laden was hiding in plain sight in Pakistan to force the nation’s army to hit harder against militant sanctuaries, turn over other high-value terrorists living in Pakistan or help speed reconciliation in Afghanistan.<sup>84</sup>

The Pakistani military and ISI’s preference for, and alleged promotion of, the American unilateralism frame were proving effective, at least on the home front, in dampening domestic criticism if not in countering American diplomatic and media pressure.

A further lift in Islamabad’s suddenly defiant mood came with the dramatic conversion of the Zardari-Gilani civilian government, who—despite their conflicting interests—moved to defend the Pakistani military and ISI in a show of unity meant to defuse the intensifying domestic uproar. This was evident in a speech on the Abbottabad incident by Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani before the National Assembly in which he declared his support for the military and ISI while warning the U.S. to respect Pakistani sovereignty. Despite initially applauding the killing of bin Laden in previous statements, in this speech, Gilani finally came out against the U.S. operation, saying that “Our people are rightly incensed on the issue of violation of sovereignty as typified by the covert US air and ground assault on the Osama hideout in Abbottabad.”<sup>85</sup> With specific reference to the unilateralism of the U.S. raid in Abbottabad, Gilani’s speech attempted to recast the operation as an act of sheer recklessness:

We regret that this unilateral action was undertaken without our concurrence. Unilateralism runs the inherent risk of serious consequences. Suppose the operation had

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<sup>84</sup> Brulliard, Karin and Karen DeYoung. 2011. “Pakistani military, government warn U.S. against future raids.” *Washington Post*, May 6.

<sup>85</sup> Gilani 2011.

gone wrong. A US helicopter was abandoned and destroyed on the site. This is a small though important reminder of the risks in such operations.<sup>86</sup>

In this parliamentary address, while declaring that “blame games serve no purpose,” Gilani took the opportunity to defend the much-maligned ISI and also pointedly sought to refute the notion of a civil-military split over the crisis:

The media spin masters have tended to portray a false divide between the state institutions of Pakistan. I would like to most emphatically reject the notion of divide. The political leadership is supportive of the strengthening of all of Pakistan's institutions. We follow a whole government approach. On all key issues, all stakeholders are consulted through inter-agency processes. The statements issued by the foreign ministry and the military on the death of Osama bin Laden were authorized by the Government. Let me also affirm the Government's full confidence in the high command of the Pakistan Armed Forces and the Inter-Services Intelligence. Indeed, the ISI is a national asset and has the full support of the Government. We are proud of its considerable accomplishments in the anti-terror campaign.<sup>87</sup>

A representative example of how Gilani's speech was received in the American elite press could be found in a *New York Times* report (May 10) by Jane Perlez, which expressed disappointment that he did not “use his speech to give an accounting of what Pakistan knew about Bin Laden's presence in Pakistan, but instead focused on how the raid was a breach of Pakistani sovereignty.”<sup>88</sup> Moreover, Perlez wrote that “Gilani furthered Pakistan's bristling response to the raid, making clear that Pakistani officials at the highest levels accepted little responsibility for the fact that Bin Laden was able to hide in their country for years.”<sup>89</sup> In an interview with *TIME*, Gilani later attributed his rationale for denouncing the U.S. operation in Abbottabad to hostile public perceptions at home, stating that “If public opinion is against [the U.S.], then I cannot resist it to stand with you. I have to go with public opinion.”<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Gilani 2011.

<sup>87</sup> Gilani 2011.

<sup>88</sup> Perlez, Jane. 2011. “Leak of C.I.A. Officer Name Is Sign of Rift With Pakistan.” *New York Times*, May 10. <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/10/world/asia/10pakistan.html>.

<sup>89</sup> Perlez, Jane. 2011. “Leak of C.I.A. Officer Name Is Sign of Rift With Pakistan.” *New York Times*, May 10.

<sup>90</sup> Baker, Aryn. 2011. “Why We're Stuck with Pakistan.” *TIME*, May 12. <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2071131,00.html>.

To demonstrate to their domestic audience that they were not indifferent to the infringement of Pakistani sovereignty and were now taking a firm stand, the Zardari-Gilani government intensified its public criticism of U.S. unilateralism in the days following Gilani's parliamentary address. On May 12, ten days after the Abbottabad raid, Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs delivered a *démarche* protesting the operation to U.S. Ambassador Cameron Munter. A report in *Dawn* (May 12) offered the following description of this development:

Munter was reportedly told by Foreign Affairs Secretary Salman Bashir that the US operation on Pakistan's soil was an attack on the country's security and sovereignty. Lodging a complaint with the US ambassador, Bashir said Pakistan 'will not tolerate' any such operation or violation of its airspace in the future. While he termed the death of bin Laden a success, Bashir said Pakistan should have been taken into confidence on the operation.<sup>91</sup>

Given the domestic pressure being exerted on the civilian government from different directions, this maneuver was the very least the Pakistanis could have pursued diplomatically, but it was also the most dramatic action they were willing to take vis-à-vis the United States. Meanwhile, however, on the domestic front, Pakistani civilian political elites, both in government and in opposition, along with the military leadership, rushed to express vigorous condemnations of the U.S. raid in Abbottabad.

On May 13 and 14, during a special in-camera joint sitting of the Pakistani parliament, comprising the National Assembly (lower house) and the Senate (upper house), senior military officers presented themselves before legislators—in an unprecedented display of military subordination to civilian authority—to provide an account of the security lapses that contributed to their humiliating fiasco in Abbottabad.<sup>92</sup> Although journalists were not allowed inside to cover the closed-door proceedings, details of the hearings were promptly leaked to the media. This

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<sup>91</sup> Mashwani, Iftikhar. 2011. "Foreign Office summons US ambassador over Abbottabad op." *Dawn*, May 12. <https://www.dawn.com/news/628104>.

<sup>92</sup> Wasim, Amir, and Iftikhar A. Khan. 2011. "Military offers itself for accountability." *Dawn*, May 14. <https://www.dawn.com/news/628576>.

“unusual, and apparently heated, closed-door” parliamentary session was described by Jane Perlez in a *New York Times* report (May 14) as follows:

The two generals [Gen. Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, the Chief of Staff of the Pakistan Army, and Lt. Gen. Ahmad Shuja Pasha, the Director-General of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI)] were called before the extraordinary 11-hour session to answer to the failures of the military and the intelligence agency that allowed a team of American commandos to enter and leave Pakistan in a stealth helicopter operation undetected. Unusually vibrant criticism by some politicians and the Pakistani press after the raid compelled them to try to repair the reputation of the military and the intelligence agency, which the army controls. But after recognizing the lapse, General Pasha rallied Parliament behind him, several legislators said, with strong criticisms of the United States that elicited thumps of approval from the chamber, including leading members of the Pakistan Peoples Party, the major partner in the coalition that the Obama administration supports.<sup>93</sup>

According to Perlez’s report, Pasha reportedly said he had engaged in a “shouting match” with Leon E. Panetta, the CIA director, over clandestine U.S. activities inside Pakistan during an earlier meeting in Washington, but on this occasion the CIA had “conducted a sting operation on us” with the unilateral raid in Abbottabad.<sup>94</sup> Furthermore, in a direct rebuttal of statements by U.S. officials that the ISI was playing a ‘double game’ by supporting the Haqqani network of Taliban-linked militants in North Waziristan, Pasha was quoted as having declared, “We have nothing to do with the Haqqani network.”<sup>95</sup>

Firdous Ashiq Awan, Pakistan’s Minister of Information and Broadcasting, who was briefing journalists on the hearing with Pasha, was cited in Pakistani and American news reports as saying that Pasha had “presented himself for full accountability and said if there was an intelligence failure he was ready to face the consequences and even ready to resign if parliament

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<sup>93</sup> It was Pasha, the ISI chief, who did most of the talking and submitted himself to questioning from Pakistani legislators. Perlez noted in her report that “General Kayani attended the session, along with the heads of the air force and the navy, but did not speak, apparently to be spared the humiliation. Senior military officials, considered to be above civilian law and a power unto themselves, rarely appear before Parliament, or even its defense committees.” Perlez, Jane. 2011. “Denying Links to Militants, Pakistan’s Spy Chief Denounces U.S. Before Parliament.” *New York Times*, May 13. <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/14/world/asia/14pakistan.html>.

<sup>94</sup> Perlez, Jane. 2011. “Denying Links to Militants, Pakistan’s Spy Chief Denounces U.S. Before Parliament.” *New York Times*, May 13.

<sup>95</sup> Perlez, Jane. 2011. “Denying Links to Militants, Pakistan’s Spy Chief Denounces U.S. Before Parliament.” *New York Times*, May 13.



so demanded.”<sup>96</sup> Gilani did not accept Pasha's offer of resignation, nor was it reportedly demanded by any of the legislators present during this session. According to one particular Pakistani news report that was blatantly biased in favor of Pasha in *The News* (May 14), Gilani was deemed to have been astute in refusing Pasha's resignation as it might have been seen as an “indictment against Pakistan in the aftermath of the lapse that led to the Abbottabad occurrence.”<sup>97</sup> Be that as it might, however, the politically weak Zardari-Gilani government also appeared to have calculatingly chosen to support (rather than risk a standoff with) the disgraced military and ISI to preserve their own regime stability. In the face of intensifying anti-American sentiment in Pakistani news coverage, and by extension domestic public opinion, civilian attempts to purge the military leadership could have been perceived, or characterized by pro-military media, as doing Washington's bidding (à la the frame of a Pakistani civil-military divide).<sup>98</sup>

At the conclusion this unusual parliamentary session on May 14, a unanimous resolution was passed in the National Assembly condemning “the US unilateral action in Abbottabad,” which was termed as constituting “a violation of Pakistan's sovereignty.”<sup>99</sup> In the text of this resolution, it was

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<sup>96</sup> Yasin, Asim, and Muhammad Anis. 2011. “DG ISI admits failure, offers to resign.” *The News*, May 14. <https://www.thenews.com.pk/archive/print/613793-dg-isi-admits-failure,-offers-to-resign>; Brulliard, Karin, and Shaiq Hussain. 2011. “Pakistani spy chief offers to resign.” *Washington Post*, May 13. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2011/05/12/AFdoRh1G\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2011/05/12/AFdoRh1G_story.html); Maqbool, Malik. 2011. “Pasha resigns before Parliament.” *The Nation*, May 14. <https://nation.com.pk/14-May-2011/pasha-resigns-before-parliament>.

<sup>97</sup> Zaafir, Muhammad Saleh. 2011. “PM turns down Gen Pasha's resignation.” *The News*, May 14. <https://www.thenews.com.pk/archive/print/613807-pm-turns-down-gen-pasha%E2%80%99s-resignation>.

<sup>98</sup> For an anticipatory example of this kind of media coverage, see Abbasi, Ansar. 2011. “CIA increases pressure on Pasha to quit.” *The News*, May 9.

<sup>99</sup> Additionally, in reference to the negative foreign news coverage Pakistan had been receiving in the aftermath of the Abbottabad raid, questioning its commitment to counter-terrorism, Pakistan's parliament, through this resolution, “Expressed its deep distress on the campaign to malign Pakistan, launched by certain quarters in other countries without appreciating Pakistan's determined efforts and immense sacrifices in combating terror and the fact that more than thirty thousand Pakistani innocent men, women and children and more than five thousand security and armed forces personnel had lost their lives.” National Assembly of Pakistan 2011.

Strongly asserted that unilateral actions, such as those conducted by the US forces in Abbottabad, as well as the continued drone attacks on the territory of Pakistan, are not only unacceptable but also constitute violation of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, international law and humanitarian norms and such drone attacks must be stopped forthwith, failing which the Government will be constrained to consider taking necessary steps including withdrawal of transit facility allowed to NATO/ISAF forces.<sup>100</sup>

The resolution also called on the Pakistani government to “re-visit and review its terms of engagement with the United States, with a view to ensuring that Pakistan’s national interests are fully respected and accommodated.” Islamabad appeared to be matching Washington’s threats to cut off economic assistance to Pakistan by directly linking its demand for an end to the CIA-run drone campaign inside Pakistan to a threat to block U.S. access to the transit route from Karachi through the Khyber Pass to supply the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. However, according to a U.S. diplomat familiar with the situation at the time, this statement by parliament (which has very little actual influence over Pakistani foreign policy) was deemed to have been made principally for domestic public consumption and was not followed up by the Pakistanis with any direct communication via diplomatic channels to the U.S.<sup>101</sup> Despite this, it would seem that this option was initially seriously considered, in an internal debate among Pakistani civilian and military leaders, as an appropriate retaliatory response to the Abbottabad incident in that Ambassador Husain Haqqani recalls having talked Lt. Gen. Ahmad Shuja Pasha out of pursuing precisely this line of action.<sup>102</sup>

Ultimately, the Zardari-Gilani government’s endorsement of a more confrontational diplomatic response to the Abbottabad raid—as preferred by the Pakistani military and the ISI—and the reframing of the incident itself as a unilateral attack perpetrated by the U.S., allowed Islamabad to assume the role of the aggrieved party and provided it with a unified posture to

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<sup>100</sup> National Assembly of Pakistan 2011.

<sup>101</sup> Interview with anonymous senior U.S. diplomat, May 2016.

<sup>102</sup> In person interview with Amb. Husain Haqqani (Pakistani ambassador to the U.S., 2008-11), June 2015.

counter allegations of duplicity as well as a means by which to attempt to restore or repair its loss of face. The adoption of the American unilateralism frame by Pakistani civilian and military elites was, on the one hand, an exercise in domestic face-saving (or damage control) via diversionary rallying of anti-American public sentiment, and on the other hand, an instance of daring international brinksmanship to extract concessions from the United States. Islamabad certainly did have some leverage in its capacity to block U.S. transit access to Afghanistan. But that Islamabad would attempt to exploit the crisis in this way by instrumentalizing anti-American public opinion to serve its own ends by seeking concessions (symbolic and otherwise) from Washington seemed consistent with what Schaffer and Schaffer refer to as Pakistan's "lower hand" strategy of using its 'coercive deficiency' to negotiate with the United States, by reminding Washington of the Islamabad's simultaneous importance and vulnerability.<sup>103</sup> In this instance, the Pakistani military made demands for the reduction of U.S. military and intelligence personnel based inside Pakistan, most notably the closure of the Shamsi airbase used as part of the CIA's covert drone campaign in the tribal areas. Other symbolic demands included calls for a public pledge by the U.S. not to target Pakistani nuclear weapons and the formalization of U.S.-Pakistan cooperation within the framework of a written agreement.

### **The U.S.-Pakistan mutual dependence frame**

The frame of 'mutual dependence' was an acknowledgment of what had always been apparent about the flawed U.S.-Pakistan counterterrorism partnership forged after 9/11: it was one of political expediency—often presented as a necessity—and based on transactional exchanges rather than any shared ideological or geopolitical purpose. The early appearance of this frame in the rhetoric of U.S. and Pakistani officials and the news media of both countries coincided with

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<sup>103</sup> Schaffer and Schaffer 2011, 175-176.

the prevalence of other more visible (dominant) competing frames, alongside which an emphasis on the beneficial aspects of U.S.-Pakistan interdependence served as an auxiliary or alternate frame that appealed for a compromise. Ultimately, in gradually bargaining or reframing the divergent U.S. and Pakistani positions toward a shared frame of reference, it was this frame that came to represent the ‘working’ acceptance of a mutually agreeable definition of the situation through cooperative U.S. and Pakistani face-work to restore Pakistani face based, as Goffman would say, “upon a willingness to give temporary lip service to judgements with which the participants do not really agree.”<sup>104</sup>

This conciliatory stance was evident early on in certain sections of official Washington, at the U.S. Department of State in particular. On the morning after the Abbottabad raid, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton reiterated Obama’s conciliatory tone with respect to U.S.-Pakistan relations in her first public remarks on the killing of bin Laden:

In Pakistan we are committed to supporting the people and government as they defend their own democracy from violent extremism. Indeed, as the President said, bin Ladin had also declared war on Pakistan. He had ordered the killings of many innocent Pakistani men, women, and children. In recent years, the cooperation between our governments, militaries, and law enforcement agencies increased pressure on al-Qaida and the Taliban, and this progress must continue and we are committed to our partnership.<sup>105</sup>

A few days later, as civilian and military leaders in Islamabad had assumed a more confrontational stance toward Washington, Clinton was quoted in a *Washington Post* report (May 6) acknowledging that the “[U.S.-Pakistan relationship] is not always an easy relationship,” while noting, however, that “on the other hand, it is a productive one for both of

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<sup>104</sup> Goffman 1955, 216.

<sup>105</sup> Clinton 2011.

our countries, and we are going to continue to cooperate.”<sup>106</sup> In reference to Clinton’s remarks, an editorial in *The News* (May 8) expressed a note of realism regarding the likelihood of the status quo being preserved:

despite all the embarrassment, accusations and counter-accusations, pragmatic voices on both sides are likely to prevail. Our relationship with the Americans is sufficiently “durable” to withstand a blow such as the one we have just suffered and vice-versa. Hillary Clinton has said that America will stand beside us even though there are difficulties in the relationship. Prime Minister Gilani has also talked of the ongoing relationship, and there is little doubt that the CIA and the ISI will be finding ways of keeping their backchannels open. For us, this has been a public relations disaster at every level. The killing of Osama bin Laden may be a ‘game changer’ for some, but for our leaders, even this may change little – and especially not the way they play their own games.<sup>107</sup>

While statements such as those by Clinton on the need for continued U.S.-Pakistan cooperation were generally expressed by officials in both Washington and Islamabad throughout the crisis, they were overshadowed in news coverage by the arguments of competing frames early on.

The necessity for continued Pakistani cooperation was inextricably linked in American news reports to the endgame in Afghanistan for the United States. Pakistan’s geographical location offered the most convenient sea-port to border transit routes for the movement of American and allied war materiel into Afghanistan, and this access, like every other aspect of Islamabad’s cooperation with Washington, was linked with continued U.S. economic assistance.<sup>108</sup> Moreover, with the mounting consensus in Washington that the conflict in Afghanistan could only be brought to a negotiated end, Pakistani cooperation was deemed essential to reaching a sustainable peace settlement with the Taliban.<sup>109</sup> The senior commander

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<sup>106</sup> Brulliard, Karin, and Karen DeYoung. 2011. “Pakistani military, government warn U.S. against future raids.” *Washington Post*, May 6. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/pakistan-questions-legality-of-us-operation-that-killed-bin-laden/2011/05/05/AFM210wF\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/pakistan-questions-legality-of-us-operation-that-killed-bin-laden/2011/05/05/AFM210wF_story.html).

<sup>107</sup> “Failure and trust” 2011. *The News*, May 8.

<sup>108</sup> Entous, Adam. 2011. “U.S. Balks at Pakistani Bills – Allies Clash on Payments for Terror War; 40% of Claims Rejected.” *Wall Street Journal*, May 17.

<sup>109</sup> Landler, Mark, Thom Shanker, and Alissa J. Rubin. 2011. “Killing Adds to Debate About U.S. Strategy and Timetable in Afghanistan.” *New York Times*, May 3.

of U.S. military forces along the Afghan-Pakistan border commented on the impact, if any, that the death of bin Laden might have on the Afghan conflict in a *Washington Post* report (May 10) by saying that a disruption in lower-level military-to-military cooperation and information sharing between the U.S. and Pakistan would be a more worrying prospect.<sup>110</sup>

In addition to the economic consequences that Pakistan might have suffered from a cessation of U.S. assistance, Islamabad's awareness of the exacerbated isolation and damage that its international standing would undergo proved sufficient to dissuade it from following through on threats to deny transit access or sever military and intelligence cooperation with Washington. According to Haqqani, ISI chief Pasha had to be persuaded against denying U.S. access to Pakistani transit routes into Afghanistan in this instance, but Pasha would later succeed in swaying Islamabad to do just that later in November 2011 after a friendly fire incident at the Afghan-Pakistan in which a U.S.-led NATO aerial attack killed 24 Pakistani soldiers.<sup>111</sup>

It was in the midst of this stalemated framing contest, with both sides having exhausted most of the leverage afforded by opposing frames of 'Pakistani duplicity' and 'American unilateralism', that the frame of 'mutual dependence' ultimately achieved resonance in the rhetoric of U.S. and Pakistani political elites and news coverage as the crisis moved toward resolution. Seemingly in the face of Pakistani anger, as expressed in the 'American unilateralism' frame, Washington backed down from coercive public diplomacy in the form of harsh criticism, threats, and ultimatums, which would have only made a permanent enemy of Pakistan and would not have been constructive for U.S. counterterrorism goals at a time when Washington was seeking to complete a military withdrawal from Afghanistan by 2014. This was the turning point, at which Washington having realized the inefficacy of its coercive public

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<sup>110</sup> Partlow, Joshua. 2011 "General: 'It's not the end of the war'." *Washington Post*, May 10.

<sup>111</sup> In person interview with Amb. Husain Haqqani (Pakistani ambassador to the U.S., 2008-11).

diplomacy, reversed to a strategy of accommodation to ease Pakistani sensibilities. It should be noted that an especially dramatic performance of defiance (or counter-coercion) on the part of Islamabad, via the ‘American unilateralism’ frame, had been necessary to induce this turn-around.

The turning point of the crisis occurred after Senator John F. Kerry, acting as an unofficial envoy for the Obama administration, visited Islamabad for talks with Pakistan’s civilian and military leaders on May 16 and, in doing so, laid the groundwork for resolution of this crisis. However, on the day before his visit, while traveling through Afghanistan, Kerry seemed prepared to present a firm *ultimatum* to Islamabad, along the lines of the ‘Pakistani duplicity’ frame, telling local Afghan media that “Pakistan needs to make a decision about what kind of country it wants to be and what side they are on in this struggle.”<sup>112</sup> Once actually in Islamabad, Kerry *signaled* his intention to seek a “reset” in U.S.-Pakistan relations<sup>113</sup> and was able to sufficiently calm Pakistani leaders, Gen. Kayani in particular, to release a joint communiqué reflecting the (rhetorical, if not actual) concessions each side was seeking from the other at the time. In specific reference to the Abbottabad raid, and for the benefit of his Pakistani hosts’ domestic audience, “Senator Kerry conveyed that the secrecy surrounding the operation was strictly for reasons of operational security and not of mistrust of Pakistani leadership. He said even in the U.S. government, very few persons knew about it.”<sup>114</sup> This statement read in part:

Pakistan’s leadership welcomed the clear affirmation by Senator Kerry that U.S. policy has no designs against Pakistan’s nuclear and strategic assets. Senator Kerry stated that

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<sup>112</sup> Nissenbaum, Dion, and Tom Wright. 2011. “Kerry Visits Pakistan with Warning on Aid.” *Wall Street Journal*, May 16.

<sup>113</sup> Perlez, Jane. 2011. “Meeting With Pakistani Leaders, Kerry Seeks to Ease Anger Over Bin Laden Raid.” *New York Times*, May 17; Wright, Tom, and Matthew Rosenberg. 2011. “Kerry Seeks ‘Reset’ On U.S.-Pakistani Ties.” *Wall Street Journal*, May 17.

<sup>114</sup> U.S. Embassy in Pakistan. 2011. “Joint Press Statement on the Visit of Senator John Kerry.”

he was prepared to personally affirm such a guarantee. In furtherance of its existing commitment to fight terrorism, Pakistan agreed to take several immediate steps to underscore its seriousness in renewing the full cooperative effort with the United States.<sup>115</sup>

As a result of this statement, Kayani could now tell his military rank-and-file that Washington had accepted Islamabad's demands not to target its nuclear arsenal, so there was no longer any reason for Pakistan to not cooperate with U.S. counterterrorism efforts. Also included in the text of this statement was the shared sentiment "that negative media messages were misplaced and detrimental to the core national interests of both the U.S. and Pakistan" and that, to avoid further counterproductive exchanges through the media, "the two sides would intensify their engagement through official channels."<sup>116</sup> This acknowledgment of the mediated public-diplomatic sniping between Washington and Islamabad implied that the inclusion of the news media as participants in the post-Abbottabad diplomacy had been a regrettable error rather than a deliberate strategy resorted to by each side over the duration of the crisis.<sup>117</sup>

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's subsequent meeting in Islamabad on May 27 with President Zardari, Prime Minister Gilani, Gen. Kayani, and Lt. Gen. Pasha may have produced some "awkward and unsmiling" photographs,<sup>118</sup> but it nevertheless symbolized the resolution of the severe crisis that had overwhelmed U.S.-Pakistan relations in the aftermath of the Abbottabad raid. The net result of this bargaining frame was a compromise, somewhat

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<sup>115</sup> U.S. Embassy in Pakistan. 2011. "Joint Press Statement on the Visit of Senator John Kerry." An editorial in *Dawn* made note of the calming effect that Kerry's visit and the joint communique had on the situation: "[Sen. Kerry] made a welcome effort to lay out for the Pakistani people the need for going after Bin Laden on their territory and the reasoning behind the manner and timing of the raid, including the need for secrecy. Whether or not his argument is considered reasonable, the time spent addressing concerns vis-à-vis the operation is at least an acknowledgment of Pakistan's unease about the way in which it was carried out." "Senator Kerry's visit" 2011. *Dawn*, May 18.

<sup>116</sup> U.S. Embassy in Pakistan. 2011. "Joint Press Statement on the Visit of Senator John Kerry." May 16.

<sup>117</sup> Abbasi, Ansar. 2011. "Cool it, military tells media persons." *The News*, May 19. <https://www.thenews.com.pk/archive/print/613915-cool-it,-military-tells-media-persons>

<sup>118</sup> Myers, Steven Lee. 2011. "In Tense Post-Bin Laden Trip to Pakistan, Clinton Seeks Firm Action on Extremists." *New York Times*. May 28.



slanted in Islamabad's favor, in the sense that Washington probably could have achieved more from the crisis had it not been for its heavy-handed public shaming and criticism of the Pakistani military and ISI. Consequently, Washington lost leverage over Islamabad as the Zardari-Gilani civilian government sought to align itself more firmly alongside the military and ISI before the Pakistani media and public opinion by distancing itself from Washington by blustering and tapping into popular anti-American sentiment. The post-Abbottabad crisis may have been over, but U.S.-Pakistan relations did not improve as a result. By no means did the resolution of this crisis solve any of the underlying problems in the bilateral relationship, but it did save it from devolving into what could well have been a serious rupture between Washington and Islamabad.

## **Summary**

From the outset, senior U.S. officials, most notably at the White House and the CIA, appeared almost immediately to be on the offensive, seeking to strategically exploit the situation by demanding greater cooperation from Islamabad in terms of cracking down on pro-Taliban insurgents in Pakistan's tribal areas.<sup>119</sup> Such Pakistani cooperation, along with Islamabad's prodding the (Quetta-based) leadership of the Afghan Taliban towards peace negotiations with Kabul, might have aided U.S. hopes for ending the conflict in Afghanistan before the then-anticipated withdrawal of American military forces from that country by late 2014. At the same time, Pakistan's civilian and military leaders had been caught off balance after the Abbottabad raid and found themselves forced into defensive damage control mode in front of both international and domestic audiences. For Pakistani civilian elites, attempting to appease Washington and calm domestic public opinion proved to be mutually contradictory objectives,

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<sup>119</sup> At the top of Washington's list of desired targets was the pro-Taliban Haqqani militant network based in North Waziristan, which had strong links with both al Qaeda and the ISI, and against whom the Pakistani military had been reluctant to act as they were regarded as strategic assets for Islamabad since the Afghan-Soviet conflict during the 1980s. For an in-depth account of the Haqqani network's long-standing connections with both al Qaeda and the Pakistani ISI, see Brown and Rassler 2013.

and this tension was reflected in news reports on the aftermath of the Abbottabad raid. The controversy was kept alive and in news headlines with the mobilization and interaction of competing interpretive frames that were either sponsored or co-opted by state elites in Washington and Islamabad to define and respond to the situation. Depending on the perspective from which it was approached, a given frame presented the situation as an opportunity for one side and a crisis that had to be negotiated with by the other side.

In the escalation and de-escalation of U.S.-Pakistan tensions over the duration of this particular crisis episode, four significant frames emerged and were contested among U.S. and Pakistani political elites and within the news media of both countries. The *Pakistani duplicity* frame was an expression of the concerns that official Washington and the American elite press had long held about how Islamabad's 'double-game' was threatening U.S. strategic objectives in Afghanistan and the 'war on terror' against al Qaeda. The *Pakistani civil-military divide* frame was a depiction of the crisis in terms of tensions between the country's civilian leadership and those of the military and intelligence institutions. Whereas one version of this frame in the American media highlighted the existence of a gulf in civilian and military attitudes vis-à-vis support for U.S. counterterrorism efforts, another variation promoted by Pakistani civilian opposition elites in domestic media stressed the necessity of military subordination and accountability to civilian authority as means to address the crisis of legitimacy experienced by the military and ISI after the Abbottabad raid. The *American unilateralism* frame was a manifestation of themes frequently employed by Pakistani civilian and military leaders over the years since 9/11 to express disapproval of U.S. counterterrorism policies and actions (e.g., aerial drone strikes and cross-border military raids) that Islamabad either found objectionable or did not overtly support and therefore characterized as violations of Pakistani sovereignty. As an

expression of anti-Americanism, this frame retained a great deal of currency in mainstream Pakistan media discourse on U.S. foreign policy. In this specific instance, the efficacy of this frame lay in countering the American-sponsored frame of Pakistani duplicity by redefining the situation to deflect blame for the situation onto the United States. Finally, the *U.S.-Pakistan mutual dependence* frame conveyed the rationale of expediency for Washington and Islamabad to maintain their problematic alliance, despite their conflicting interests, because the consequences of not doing so might have been even more unacceptable for both sides. The resonance this frame ultimately achieved between U.S. and Pakistani political elites and in news coverage may be attributable to a communicative stalemate and the incomplete resolution of tensions arising from the controversy.

While the American media had both conveyed and amplified Washington's doubts about Islamabad as a U.S. ally, the Pakistani media found itself in an influential domestic role by providing the initial problem definition while confusion and divisions between Pakistani civilian and military institutions led Islamabad to alternate between responses to the incident. The Pakistanis (or at least the military and the ISI) may well have started out with protestations of sovereignty over the Abbottabad raid were it not for their being caught completely off guard and also the potential created for a shift in civil-military relations in the aftermath of the incident. In the end, U.S. officials were unable to successfully exploit the crisis to Washington's advantage by actually inducing greater Pakistani cooperation, even with threats of aid cutoffs from Congress and the intense scrutiny to which the Pakistani military and the ISI were subjected to in the American media. On the other hand, the leadership of the Pakistani military and the ISI managed to survive what had become an immediate threat to their domestic legitimacy by distancing themselves from and denouncing the U.S. raid in Abbottabad. The crisis in U.S.-

Pakistan relations in the aftermath of the killing of bin Laden could also have lingered for much longer or even led to a severance of ties, but instead, through a mediated framing contest and varying face-work strategies, both sides concluded that a decisive rupture was impractical given the interests at stake. Moreover, it was through face-to-face diplomacy and news management in which journalists collaborated with political elites in assessing diplomatic options and conceding that preserving a dubious U.S.-Pakistan relationship was better than having none at all.

## **Chapter 9**

### **Conclusion**

#### **Research argument, aim, and objectives revisited**

This study has demonstrated how, in times of highly publicized diplomatic controversies (or ‘public diplomacy crises’), mediated public diplomacy can become a strategy of crisis management. Specifically, I have argued in this study that the resort to mediated public diplomacy is a strategic choice that state actors make to maximize reputational stakes or ‘face’ concerns to pressure (or resist) one another by constraining the bargaining preferences of other disputants in a crisis. For the purposes of demonstrating this argument, I advanced a sociological approach for analyzing how political and diplomatic elites of states engage in a kind of ‘national face-work’ (i.e., face-saving and/or face-threatening measures) while symbolically communicating through frames in the news media during public diplomacy crises. As crises generally place demands on political actors to respond swiftly, the diplomatic leverage that one side gains over another in a mediated framing contest can compel opposing actors to react defensively and without the benefit of adequate time for deliberation. Moreover, the intensified involvement of the news media as arenas and as players in public diplomacy disrupts the conduct of traditional, closed-door diplomacy by introducing greater complexity and transparency to negotiations in contemporary diplomatic crisis management.

The central aim of this study was to understand how a state (i.e., Pakistan) that is targeted by the mediated public diplomacy interactions of another state (i.e., the United States) responds—by resisting or acquiescing—to such interactions during public diplomacy crises. The research aim was achieved by approaching the empirical subject matter at the level of political

culture and the level of events through frame analyses of two major crisis episodes. Therefore the objectives of this research were twofold.

The first research objective was to provide a political-sociological analysis of what was described as a (shared and reinforced) transnational political culture of diplomacy and news that developed in U.S.-Pakistan relations over the course of the first post-9/11 decade (see Chapter 6). In relation to this, the shift toward mediated public diplomacy between Washington and Islamabad, the perceptions that both sides have of each other, as well as the way each country's media depicted the other and the implications of such news coverage for the bilateral relationship were evaluated. This involved a discussion of how political elites and the media of both countries co-construct news involving the other. These perceptions did not emerge from a vacuum but instead evolved from existing cultural templates and through interactions between opposing sides. Therefore, it was essential to outline the American and Pakistani narrative master-frames that came into dialogue and crosstalk with each other over the decade since 9/11. Also, crucial in this exploration was a consideration of the distinct contexts of American and Pakistani media-state relations, wherein news coverage of U.S.-Pakistan relations was produced through interactions between government officials and news professionals *within* and *between* both countries.

The context of media-state relations in both American and Pakistani political cultures and institutional structures was pertinent to understanding the specific conditions that had a bearing on the production of news on U.S.-Pakistan relations. Moreover, an appreciation of the differences in domestic political and media systems and the obvious geopolitical power asymmetries between the United States and Pakistan helped explain the different news management strategies used by both states to either apply or resist political pressure through the

media in their recurring diplomatic quarrels. The role of journalists working in the American and Pakistani news media as *de facto* political actors in this volatile equation was also elaborated on.

The second research objective was to analyze the interpretive frames that emerged in American and Pakistani elite crisis rhetoric and newspaper coverage of two extraordinary crises during 2011, a pivotal year in U.S.-Pakistan relations: (i) the Raymond Davis affair (see Chapter 7), and (ii) the aftermath of the Abbottabad raid (see Chapter 8). An examination of these headline-generating quarrels between Washington and Islamabad offered useful cases to compare the interpretive crisis frames and counter-frames that emerged and to reconstruct the ensuing political framing contests between political elites in both countries as they attempted to control how their actions were portrayed by the media of their own and the other country. By analyzing two consecutive crises that were, in part, negotiated through the news media, the case studies delineated competing definitions of the situation (or versions of reality) presented by both governments via the media to make sense of events in terms favorable to their country's international image and national interests.

### **Applicability and contribution of the theoretical framework**

In terms of theoretical contribution, this study adds to existing research and understandings of (mediated) public diplomacy crises by examining how political elites in one country manipulate their national news media and that of another country (via framing and face-work), while also looking at how elites in the targeted state respond to such manipulation by countering with their own domestic news management efforts.

This study advanced a Goffmanian sociological framework for understanding crisis public diplomacy as a kind of impression management activity on the international 'front stage' (see Chapter 2). As part of what was referred to in this study as a 'public diplomacy crisis', there

occurs a ‘predicament of image protection’ or identity threatening situation for an international actor (i.e., a state), which has to be resolved by means of negotiating the definition of the situation with significant others (i.e., other state or non-state actors). This provided a starting point for analyzing the symbolic exchanges between international actors in the course of a public diplomacy crisis. When an actor’s face comes under threat, they will resort to various face-work and framing strategies to manipulate definitions of the situation in accord with their preferred self-image and interests to effect an outcome favorable to them.

With respect to the role and influence of the media in public diplomacy crises, this study built on Entman’s theory of mediated public diplomacy (see Chapter 3) to explain the process of frame diffusion and eventual frame dominance from a targeting state to a targeted state. Along with this, a discussion was provided of the dynamics that underly their interactions with the news media in each state, which occupy a pivotal intermediary position within the framework of mediated diplomatic communications between states. Through an overview of the existing research literature on mediated public diplomacy, an excessive emphasis on cultural congruence/resonance, practically to the exclusion of all other factors was noted along with the flawed conception of ‘culture’ adopted by some of the leading researchers in this subfield of public diplomacy. In contrast to previous research, which focuses on framing competitions between two international actors aimed at the media of a third-party state, a specific emphasis on bilateral (or dyadic) mediated public diplomacy in this study was articulated. The contention here was that the anticipated and realized influence that a mediated public diplomacy campaign might have on an intended foreign audience cannot be properly assessed without taking into account the responses of the targeted state, which cannot be assumed to be a merely passive recipient of a targeting state’s public diplomacy efforts.



The theoretical framework built up to an understanding of the form, function, and dialogical dynamics of international framing contests in the course of public diplomacy crises (see Chapter 4). A consideration of public diplomacy crises as two-level (domestic and international) framing contests allowed for the exploration of factors contributing to dialogical frame contestation between states as well as their domestic media during such crisis episodes. In the course of such mediated framing contests, opposing frames dialogically interact with and impact each other during the onset, escalation/de-escalation, and resolution of a crisis. Furthermore, while disputants in a public diplomacy crisis might have incompatible interests that are conveyed in aggressive exchanges in the media, a shared concern about maintaining ‘face’ can consequentially bring crisis interactions to converge on a mutually agreeable frame.

### **Discussion of empirical findings**

An anticipated outcome of this study was to obtain a better appreciation of the challenges encountered by post-9/11 U.S. public diplomacy efforts in Pakistan. This was addressed, in part, by approaching the interactions between U.S. and Pakistani political elites and journalists as a distinct, transnational politico-cultural system of diplomacy and news (see Chapter 6). The increased reliance on diplomatic communication via the media in U.S.-Pakistan relations was explored to provide additional depth of understanding about the role of political culture in conditioning the framing strategies of political actors competing over the news to amplify their preferred messages. The content and efficacy of elite framing efforts were shown to be influenced by the shared political culture (or ‘symbolic environment’) where diplomacy was conducted and news was produced, as well as by available options for strategic conduct and situational contingencies. This included cultural and institutional factors that appeared significant in constraining or enabling how these framing strategies were employed in the course of

mediated public diplomacy between Washington and Islamabad. The discussion was complemented with an assessment of the media environments in the United States and Pakistan, wherein the news management and public diplomacy practices of these two dissimilar societies were examined while identifying and elaborating on the dominant master-frames in American and Pakistani diplomatic news coverage. This was addressed further in the two empirical case study chapters in this study.

Over the course of the crisis during the Raymond Davis affair, as a public dispute ensued between Washington and Islamabad over whether he was entitled to diplomatic immunity from criminal prosecution, Davis came to be seen as the symbolic personification of Pakistani grievances against U.S. counterterrorism policy. This incident resulted in the inadvertent exposure of the clandestine presence of U.S. intelligence operatives and private military contractors inside Pakistan, the extent of which had previously not been known to Islamabad. While the Davis issue bounced between Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Lahore High Court, U.S. and Pakistani officials engaged in a framing contest in the media by variously resorting to strategies of damage control and crisis exploitation with competing claims and shifting interpretations of the situation as it unfolded over the course of his seven weeks-long detention. This case study traced the emergence and interactions of opposing frames at different phases of the crisis during the period immediately after Davis' arrest on January 27 until his release on March 16, following an ISI-brokered 'blood money' settlement.

Inasmuch as this crisis was a very public clash between the intelligence services of both countries, the CIA and the ISI, it was also fueled by a domestic intra-elite power struggle involving civilian leaders in the federal government in Islamabad and the opposition-led provincial government of Punjab as well as the powerful Pakistani military-intelligence

establishment. Hence, amidst a climate of intense anti-American outrage in Pakistani public opinion and the news media, efforts to achieve a swift resolution to the crisis were constrained by the civilian government's concerns about its own political survival while simultaneously trying to prevent a rupture in Islamabad's relations with Washington.

The highly public and mediated nature of this drawn-out crisis was indicative of the breakdown in closed-door diplomacy at a time of increased tensions and distrust in an already troubled U.S.-Pakistan relationship. The mistrust, anger, and deterioration of communication between U.S. intelligence officials and their Pakistani counterparts meant the Davis issue could not immediately be resolved through direct negotiations. Instead, U.S. and Pakistani diplomats scrambled to contain the spread of Pakistani public outrage at news of the Lahore incident while simultaneously trying to broker an uneasy CIA-ISI truce to secure Davis's release. As a result of the Pakistani media's immediate and persisting interest in the incident and its fallout, this crisis was to a significant degree negotiated in public view by U.S. and Pakistani officials, often via the media as a channel of indirect communication.

In the aftermath of the unilateral raid in Abbottabad by U.S. Navy SEALs that resulted in the killing of Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden on May 1-2, 2011, mutual accusations of betrayal between Washington and Islamabad were conveyed *through* the media (as well as *by* the media) of both countries, igniting what was perhaps the most serious diplomatic crisis in U.S.-Pakistan relations since 9/11. Over subsequent days and weeks, in the ensuing framing contest, each side attempted to define the situation in terms favorable to their respective interests. Viewed from Washington, where long-standing impatience with ambivalent Pakistani support for U.S. counterterrorism efforts had already reached a tipping point, this major symbolic victory over Al Qaeda also presented an opportunity to exploit the situation by publicly confronting Islamabad

and demanding greater cooperation against Pakistan-based militant networks. Whereas for Islamabad, this incident not only intensified Pakistan's stigmatized image as a terrorist safe haven and placed it at considerable risk of becoming an international pariah, it also exposed its military and intelligence institutions to unprecedented domestic criticism and scrutiny, to which the Pakistanis responded through defensive communication strategies of damage control and blame avoidance. This case study traced the emergence and interactions of crisis frames and counter-frames advanced in the official statements and news coverage of both countries from the time immediately after President Barack Obama announced the killing on the evening of May 1 up until U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's visit to Islamabad on May 27 for restorative talks.

From the outset of the crisis, senior U.S. officials, most notably at the White House and the CIA, appeared almost immediately to be on the offensive, seeking to strategically exploit the situation by demanding greater cooperation from Islamabad in terms of cracking down on pro-Taliban insurgents in Pakistan's tribal areas. Such Pakistani cooperation, along with Islamabad's prodding the (Quetta-based) leadership of the Afghan Taliban towards peace negotiations with Kabul, might have aided U.S. hopes for ending the conflict in Afghanistan before the then-anticipated withdrawal of U.S. military forces from that country by late 2014. At the same time, Pakistan's civilian and military leaders had been caught off balance after the Abbottabad raid and found themselves forced into defensive damage control mode in front of both international and domestic audiences. For Pakistani civilian elites, attempting to appease Washington and calm domestic public opinion proved to be mutually contradictory objectives, and this tension was reflected in news reports on the aftermath of the Abbottabad raid. The controversy was kept alive and in news headlines with the mobilization and interaction of competing interpretive frames that

were either sponsored or co-opted by state elites in Washington and Islamabad to define and respond to the situation. Depending on the perspective from which it was approached, a given frame presented the situation as an opportunity for one side and a crisis that had to be negotiated with by the other side.

In both crises, as the American media had both conveyed and amplified Washington's doubts about Islamabad as a U.S. ally, the Pakistani media found itself in an influential domestic role by providing the initial problem definition while confusion and divisions between Pakistani civilian and military institutions led Islamabad to alternate between responses to the incident. The crises could also have lingered for much longer or even led to a severance of ties, but instead, through mediated frame contestation and bargaining, both sides concluded that a decisive rupture was impractical given the interests at stake. Moreover, it was through face-to-face diplomacy and news management in which journalists collaborated with political elites in assessing diplomatic options and conceding that preserving a dubious U.S.-Pakistan relationship was actually better than having none at all.

In each case study, I examined rhetorical attempts of U.S. and Pakistani officials to influence news content by persuasive sponsorship or outright imposition of their desired interpretations of developments during each crisis, and their likely motivations and purposes for doing so. There was an apparent rationale for this in that U.S. and Pakistani-sponsored elite frames vied to control the media narratives, and therefore public perceptions, surrounding the developments and details of each crisis to their advantage and the detriment of the other side. However, while such zero-sum reasoning may be sufficient in itself at certain points, it need not have been the only explanation in every instance.

The interests and preferences of U.S. and Pakistani frame sponsors were inferable in official public statements as well as in news reports in the media of both countries. The analysis of official documents and statements in each crisis case study was concerned with determining the particular frames and counter-frames that were driven by the rhetorical energies of U.S. or Pakistani political elites as actual and potential official sources for news reports. The frame analyses advanced beyond a mere comparison of divergences in official statements and news coverage to illustrate how opposing frames dialogically interacted with and impacted each other as each crisis unfolded. The analyses revealed a patterned shift from the initial contestation of crisis frames and counter-frames to bargaining toward an eventual convergence upon a shared frame to symbolize a resolution to a crisis.

### **Recommendations for future research**

Although public diplomacy via the news media as a strategy of crisis management and communication is a recent phenomenon, engagement in mediated public diplomacy, especially during crises, is likely to increase as political and diplomatic actors continue to communicate publicly using conventional media as well as social media channels. In this regard, mediated framing contests warrant closer attention as an encapsulating element of public diplomacy crises. This study provides a general outline of frame contestation and bargaining during such crises that can be profitably applied to other geopolitical contexts as well. Additional empirical research can establish whether the patterns of initial frame contestation followed by bargaining toward eventual frame convergence is a recurring phenomenon beyond relations of mutual dependence, as happens to be the case with the U.S.-Pakistan relationship.

In broader terms, the research agenda on mediated public diplomacy is in dire need of a critical repositioning away from its current dead-end fixation on static monological

communication and should instead take account of the dynamic dialogical interactions that occur between targeting and targeted states. Too often, much of the existing research in this sub-field of public diplomacy has largely avoided directly engaging with the importance of how mediated public diplomacy is actually received by targeted states. Puzzlingly, when reception in a targeted state is considered, it is frequently conflated with media coverage in targeted states, and this has been to the neglect of the agency of such states. This study should provide an impetus for thinking more seriously about and investigating the role and responses of states at the receiving end of the mediated public diplomacy initiatives of other states.

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