



## Analysis of 'Editorial Treatment' of US Drone Attacks by the Prominent English Dailies in Pakistan

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**Abstract** *Drone attacks inside Pakistan remained the core issue in international relations and communication scholarship. This study aims to investigate the editorial treatment of US drone attacks inside Pakistan. The researcher has employed a content analysis method to examine the frequency and themes within the editorial published by The Nation and Daily Times from February 18th 2008 to February 28th 2011. The study found that Daily Times supports the Pakistani government stance on US drone attacks inside Pakistan and The Nation as opponent to the government regarding US drone attacks inside Pakistan. The findings imply that media in Pakistan is presenting diverse and pluralistic voices on political issues specifically on an international issue of drone attacks. In this way, its role in public opinion formations cannot be under estimated in the working democracy of Pakistan.*

**Key Words:** Editorial Treatment, Drone Attacks, English Dailies, Content Analysis

### Introduction

Popular debate on the United States' (US) administered drone attacks is constituted by the number of killings, views of the political and military policy makers; without knowing the humanitarian impact of attacks conducted through drones (Human Rights Institute, 2019). Disputed counts of casualties and killings is another dilemma that has cultivated distorted perceptions about the impact of drone attacks. (ibid) Usmani and Bashir (2014) estimated in their research study that 379 drone attacks were conducted by the US inside Pakistan from 2004 to 2013 and over 3,597 people were killed (p.4).

Media in Pakistan treated the issue of US drone attacks inside Pakistan as a controversy, Kaltenthaler, Miller and Fair (2012) underscored underlining that this coverage induced the following dominant perspectives among local audiences: a) they were convinced that attacks were wrong, b) the issue is being saturated with negative message about the attacks. Therefore, it was obvious that a Pakistani exposed to media was more likely to oppose the drone strikes (p.12).

Drone attacks are an essential part of military strategy while the media coverage of such military moves continues to impact readers through its contents. News pertaining to drone attacks are occupying a space in coverage of combats between armies and militants. As part of essential US military strategy to combat militants in different parts of the world, drone attracts achieved particular interest among media professionals.

Researchers and combat experts have underlined importance of Drone (B-Unmanned Airborne Vessel (UAV)) as a weapon of preference in the 21st century. Drew (2009) states that the drones were first used by the United States' military in Kosovo and Bosnia Herzegovina for surveillance purpose but now these are widely deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan war for surveillance and targeted killings of enemy combatants.

The military importance and peculiar use of drone attacks is resulting in a number of combats in different countries. News of such combats and fatalities has become a consideration among administration of many countries including Pakistan—the front runner against war on terror. Another reason of this importance is the nature of casualties that happen amidst drone attacks. These attacks have often claimed lives of unknown victims

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including the children, women, old-age people and at times people who had no role in terrorism. Grut and Shah (2012) stated that drone attacks might have many implications of overestimation and generalizations regarding causalities and other consequences.

In such a situation, for certain, media personnel faces a chaos; whether to maintain professional ethics or to be just the mouthpiece of the government and keep on reporting whatever they are told. It further complicates considering the fact that newspapers earn a lion's share of profit from government advertisement. It becomes a matter of bread and butter for a newspaper if it decides to take the plunge.

The study has framed the questions vital to examine the problem. The study is designed to answer the questions from the gathered data. All the questions can be answered by studying and comparing the editorials of The Nation and Daily Times for the period from February 18<sup>th</sup> 2008 to February 28<sup>th</sup> 2011.

Hence, the issue of US drone attacks inside Pakistan begs exploration of how the prominent English media is dealing with the matter that is related to national sovereignty and honor. The study is structured to describe the editorial treatment of The Nation and Daily Times on the issue to examine and analyze the core editorial stances of respective newspapers. This study has focused on analyzing editorial treatment of the issue outlining the features of criticism and endorsements made through the editorial. An academic comparison of editorials from The Nation and Daily Times is a worthy contribution on the issue dominantly connected to national integrity and sovereignty.

### **Objectives of the Study**

Following are the objectives of this empirical research:

1. To enhance understanding of the issue of Drone Attacks conducted by the US inside Pakistan.
2. To highlight editorial stances of each newspaper regarding the issue of drone attacks.
3. To study the framing of drone attacks issue in editorials of The Nation and Daily Times over time.
4. To compare editorial stances of two different English dailies will further enlighten the research realm.
5. To explain the similarities and differences between the editorial stance of newspapers and government policies.

### **Research Questions:**

**RQ1:** How did The Nation and Daily Times treat US drone attacks inside Pakistani territory in its editorials?

**RQ2:** In comparison, what are the similarities or dissimilarities in the editorials of both English dailies on the issue of US Drone Attacks inside Pakistani territory?

**RQ3:** In comparison, what are the similarities or dissimilarities in the editorials of both English dailies and government policies about the issue of US Drone Attacks inside Pakistani territory?

**RQ4:** Is there any difference in framing of drone attacks issue in editorials of The Nation and Daily Times over the time?

### **Literature Review**

Out of abundantly available literature on the issue, the researcher has only included most relevant and reflective material in this review. Kashyap (2011) indicated in a study: "Several articles in the Pakistani media deride the US drone attacks in the country's tribal areas. The US strategy of targeting militant sanctuaries in Pakistan's tribal areas, while helping the efforts against the Taliban in Afghanistan and saving lives of American soldiers might further destabilize Pakistan." Another researcher, Shah, (2010) states: "The United States suffers further blow to its image in Pakistani press through their coverage of the drone attacks." The study underlined that the issue of Pakistani sovereignty and the drone attacks have not been discussed sufficiently in the Urdu media when compared with English media.

Woods (2011) noted a critical aspect claiming that "Pakistani government does not publish a count of those killed and injured [in drone attacks]. The drone attacks are the work of the United States, and serve that country's

interests.” O’Connell (2010) concluded: “The U.S. has used drones in Pakistan to launch significant military attacks. Drone attacks are only lawful in the course of an armed conflict. But the U.S. has not respected the restriction.” Cloughley (2009) viewed that these dozens of attacks had proved counterproductive by killing many innocent people in the tribal areas, although they killed extremists as well.

Nawaz and Summer (2011) found that most people in Pakistan continue to oppose the drone attacks inside their territory and see them as an infringement on Pakistan’s sovereignty. Moreover, Chandran and Swanson (2009) found that “though political leadership in Pakistan has been accusing the US of violation of sovereignty, there seems to be an understanding between the security forces across the Durand line, on the drone attacks.”

The sole study about the topic is by Khan and Imran, (2011) who analyze the editorials of two Pakistani national dailies but it is limited to just 6 months. As far as the methodology is concerned, most of the studies reveal that the editorial analysis is suitable to understand the issue properly. Moreover, the single study on the editorial analysis takes just three categories and does not go into detail of sub-categorization. The study, though, found that the public and state have different and almost opposite stance on the issue of drone attacks.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Theoretical framework acts as a guide to research study. It enables researcher with working principles and directions important to administer the study. This study has employed Theory of Agenda Setting and Framing as theoretical foundation. Berger (2001) authored “the agenda-setting theory is a simple, but a powerful notion of the issues either present or absent in the media. Issues appearing on media receive attention and are defined, debated, and resolved. Issues that do not appear on media are not up for attention and action. Kim, Scheufele and Shanahan, (2002) found that issue attributes salient in the media were functioning as significant dimensions of issue evaluation among the audience. The media, by emphasizing certain attributes of an issue, tell us "how to think about" this issue as well as "what to think about." Priming, based on attribute agenda setting, is therefore a key process for decision making and consensus building in local communities.

McCombs (1997) states that “Mass communication has significant consequences for building community. Amidst emerging contemporary approaches to journalism, this agenda-setting role of journalism is recognized as part of the social responsibility of the profession to its public. Every news organization needs to carefully consider what role it is playing – deliberately or inadvertently – in order to achieve community consensus.” Wanta, Golan and Lee (2004) summarize that majority of systematic studies focusing on Agenda Setting has supported the idea that public learn the relative importance of issues through the amount of coverage assigned to it by the media.

Framing is a routine exercise in the media industry. Leydesdorff and Vlieger (2011) quotes Danowski that “Framing is considered as a way of shaping the process of agenda setting. He also states that framing is mainly applied to provide a positive or negative view on an issue.” Zhu and Blood (1996) viewed the practice stating: “media can frame contents on any issue according to its policy and agenda that plays a decisive role in how the media treats any issue.” Richardson (2006) quotes Hartman, “News framing as a set of inferences about what it is related to, that define an area of subject-matter and provide the terms in which it is discussed.” Herman and Chomsky (2000) media frames can beautify as well as tarnish the overall picture of event. On the other hand (Gitlin, 1980) labeled it “significant social force” which originates public attitude.

Kiousis, Laskin and Kim (2011) conclude that “the contemporary explication of second-level agenda-setting has connected the concept with framing by suggesting that the salience of attributes in news media content can wield substantial influence on the salience of attributes in public opinion.” Recent studies claimed that the agenda of attributes covered in the media sets the agenda of attributes for the public. Discussing the influence in details, studies have suggested that the attributes of second-level agenda-setting are linked to newsmakers’ influence on the attributes of agenda for the public. Cole (2006) concludes that the edited material, editorials and articles reflect the visions of editors or reporters, intentionally or unintentionally, they jumble their views with these materials. Unfortunately media/press has the limited access in war torn areas and little is known about most of the events On the other hand, media, itself obscures some facts related to the foreign policy while some of the pictures, reports or results usually are published to capture the world’s attention. The study in hand has been designed to find out the comparative pattern of editorials based on the view that different media outlets set their own agenda differently. Each of them views an issue differently and suggests its own recommendations.

## Methodology

In present study, the researcher employed content analysis as a research method to gather and examine editorials of Daily Times and Daily Nation. The analysis includes editorials of Daily Times and Daily Nation from February 18<sup>th</sup>, 2008 to February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2011 on the issue of US drone attacks inside Pakistan. Each editorial of one day is considered as a unit of analysis. The Nation and Daily Times are among the most prominent English dailies in Pakistan. They present an indigenous and unique view to readers. Therefore, both the newspapers share a significant circulation and visitors online. This study examines editorial treatment of the Daily Times and The Nation regarding the issue of drone attacks as the editorials are considered the institutional opinion of newspapers.

Two editorials or editorial notes about the issue on the same day would be considered separate unit of analysis. This categorization is quantified to analyze and compare the editorial trend of each daily exclusively and comparatively. Frequency of editorials will show the intensity of importance attached to the issue by the respective daily. Population of the study consists of all articles of both dailies published from February 18<sup>th</sup>, 2008 to February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2011 that discuss the issue of US drone attacks inside Pakistan. The researcher has divided the editorials into three main categories. Following are the categories:

- 1) Pro-Government (favoring the governmental stance and actions regarding Drone Attacks)
- 2) Anti-Government (Criticizing the government stance and actions regarding Drone Attacks)
- 3) Neutral (neither favoring nor criticizing but providing information or record regarding Drone Attacks)

Pro-Government and Anti-Government categories are further sub-divided into one-dimensional scale of High and Low. The scale of intensity was judged from the semantic and logical presentation of writing.

## Period of Study

For short term analysis, the whole time period of the study from February 18, 2008 to February 28, 2011 split down into three periods. The need for this splitting is felt because of the fact that period of the study does not cover the year 2008 and 2011 on the whole. Thus it is convenient to create “years” to be applied only in this study. The selected time period is significant because of multiple reasons: a new democratic regime started with the newly elected government comprising of representatives from all major political parties. The researcher has decided to limit the time period from February 18<sup>th</sup>, 2008 to February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2011 owing to certain limitations. However, the study is covering a sufficient time period to disclose the editorial stances of respective newspapers and further features of both publishing.

**Period 1** covers the time interval from 18<sup>th</sup> Feb 2008-28<sup>th</sup> Feb 2009.

**Period 2** covers the time interval from 1<sup>st</sup> March 2009-28 Feb 2010.

**Period 3** covers the time interval from 1<sup>st</sup> March 2010-28<sup>th</sup> Feb 2011.

Each editorial was coded in terms of slant which shows the positive, negative and neutral treatment of the issue. Editorials contain positive image, activity, decisions, statements, discussions and impressions--are depicting positive stance about government. Same as the editorials which represent negative image, activity, decisions, statements, discussions and impressions are illustrating negative stance about government, all the editorials which represent neither positive nor negative stance about the government, have been considered as neutral. All of the above categories assisted the researcher to analyze editorial treatment and to examine how much space a newspaper has given them. It also provided the slant given by sources in the editorials.

## Findings and Discussion

**Table 1.** Editorial coverage of US Drone Attacks inside Pakistan in daily The Nation

Duration	Pro-Government		Anti-Government		Neutral	Total
	High	Low	High	Low		
18 <sup>th</sup> Feb 2008-28 <sup>th</sup> Feb 2009	7	12	6	12	18	55

1 <sup>st</sup> March 2009-28 Feb 2010	4	2	7	8	28	49
1 <sup>st</sup> March 2010-28 <sup>th</sup> Feb 2011	1	4	34	5	25	69
Total	12	18	47	25	71	173
	30		72		71	173
%age	6.93%	10.40%	27.16%	14.45%	41.04%	100%
	17.34%		41.62%		41.04%	100%

Table 1 and Table 2 show the results related to **RQ1**. Table 1 presents an overview at a glance all the editorials of "The Nation" from 18<sup>th</sup> February 2008 to 28<sup>th</sup> February 2011. During this period "The Nation" published total 173 editorials on the US drone attacks inside Pakistan. Out of which 30 editorials (17.34%) are pro-government. Out of these, 6.93% (of the total) are highly pro-government and 10.40% (of the total) are low pro-government. 72 (41.62%) editorials are anti-government. Out of these, (47) 27.16% are highly anti-government, in which government is criticized regarding wrong policies and response to US drone attacks inside Pakistan. Moreover, 25 (14.45%) are low anti-government. 71 (41.04%) editorials about US drone attacks inside Pakistan are neutral toward government. Anti-Government editorials are more in number than other ones. Pro-government editorials are the least. More (69 out of 173) editorials are published towards the end of the period.

**Table 2.** Overall Editorial coverage of US Drone Attacks inside Pakistan in Daily Times

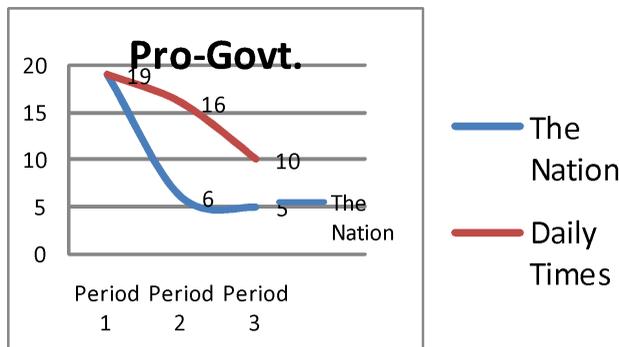
Duration	Pro-Government		Anti-Government		Neutral	Total
	High	Low	High	Low		
18 <sup>th</sup> Feb 2008-28 <sup>th</sup> Feb 2009	12	7	0	0	10	29
1 <sup>st</sup> March 2009-28 Feb 2010	12	4	0	0	14	30
1 <sup>st</sup> March 2010-28 <sup>th</sup> Feb 2011	9	1	0	0	13	23
Total	33	12	0	0	37	82
	45		0		37	82
%age	40.24%	14.63%	0%	0%	45.12%	100%
	54.87%		0%		45.12%	100%

Table 02 presents the account of all editorials of "Daily Times" from 18<sup>th</sup> February 2008 to 28<sup>th</sup> February 2011. During this period "Daily Times" published total 82 editorials on the US Drone Attacks inside Pakistan in all. Out of which 45 editorials (54.87%) are Pro-Government. Out of these, 40.24% (of the total) are highly pro-government and 14.63% (of the total) are low pro-government. None of the editorials is anti-government. Statistics show that 37 (45.12%) editorials about drone attacks are neutral toward government. Pro-government editorials are more in number than neutral editorials.

**Table 3.** Comparative Analysis of all Editorials on US Drone Attacks inside Pakistan in "Daily Times" and "The Nation"

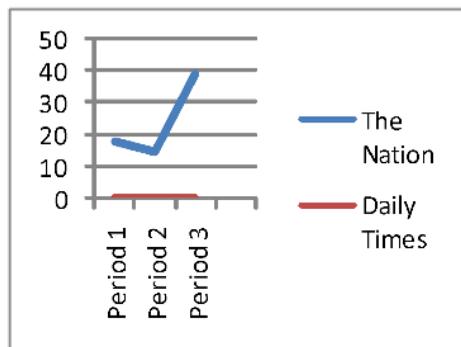
Newspaper	Pro-Government		Anti-Government		Neutral	Total
	High	Low	High	Low		
The Nation	12	18	47	25	71	173
Daily Times	33	12	0	0	37	82
The Nation	30		72		71	173
Daily Times	45		0		37	82

Table 3 aims to answer **RQ2** and **RQ3**. It explains the comparative editorials of "Daily Times" and "The Nation" from 18<sup>th</sup> February 2008 to 28<sup>th</sup> February 2011. "The Nation" published more editorials (173) on the issue of drone attacks and "Daily Times" presented only half of that of "The Nation", producing 82 editorials total in number regarding US drone attacks inside Pakistan. It shows that "The Nation" published 30 pro-government editorials that are lesser in number than "Daily Times" which published 45 pro-government editorials during the whole period of the research study. "The Nation" published total 72 anti-government editorials while "Daily Times" published none. "The Nation" published total 71 neutral editorials while "Daily Times" lagged behind giving 37 neutral editorials. Hence, we found that the editorial stances of The Nation and Daily Times are different from one another about the issue of drone attacks. Moreover, "The Nation" remained anti-government while "Daily Times" remained pro-government.



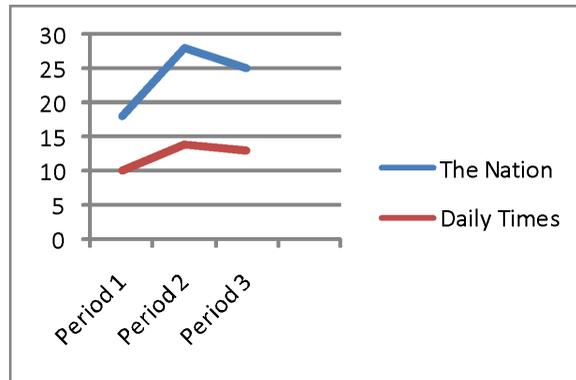
**Figure 1:** Flow of Pro-Government Trend on US Drone Attacks inside Pakistan in "The Nation" and "Daily Times"

Figure 1 traces the pro-government trend of "The Nation" and "Daily Times" for the period of study. It shows that "The Nation" declined its pro-government editorials with the passage of time. "The Nation" published 19 pro-government editorials in Period 1 and only 5 in Period 3. "Daily Times" published 19 pro-government editorials in Period 1 while only 10 in Period 3. However, "Daily Times" remained more pro-government than "The Nation" although it retreated from this trend. Both dailies have been equally pro-government in the beginning.



**Figure 2:** Flow of Anti-Government Trend on US Drone Attacks inside Pakistan in "The Nation" and "Daily Times"

Figure 2 traces the anti-government trend of "The Nation" and "Daily Times" editorials during the period of study. It shows that "Daily Times" never published any anti-government editorial in the whole period. However, "The Nation" became more anti-government with the passage of time.



**Figure 3:** Flow of Neutral Trend on Drone Attacks inside Pakistan in "The Nation" and "Daily Times"

Figure 3 explains the neutral trend of editorials of "The Nation" and "Daily Times" for the period of study regarding the US drone attacks inside Pakistan. It depicts that the neutral trend of both dailies varied with the passage of time, with the gradual rise and decline again. However, "The Nation" remained more neutral than "Daily Times". Towards the end of the period of the study "Daily Times" seems to be constant in neutral trend.

Figure 1, 2 & 3 seeks to answer **RQ4**. "The Nation" declined its pro-government editorials with the passage of time. "The Nation" published 19 pro-government editorials in Period 1 and only 5 in Period 3. "Daily Times" published 19 pro-government editorials in Period 1 while only 10 in Period 3. "Daily Times" remained more pro-government than "The Nation" although it retreated from this trend. Both dailies are equally Pro-Government in the beginning. "Daily Times" never published any anti-government editorial in the whole period. However, "The Nation" became more anti-government with the passage of time. It is clear that the Neutral trend of both dailies varied with the passage of time, with the gradual rise and decline again. However, "The Nation" remained more neutral than "Daily Times". Towards the end of the period of the study "Daily Times" seems to be constant in neutral trend.

## Conclusion

US drone attacks inside Pakistan and NATO routes through Pakistani land has created much room for debate, discussion, enmity, revenge, alliance, and of course, research. Public seeks towards media for information while the media has no definite point of view on the issue so much like government officials. United States wants to safeguard her land and national interests beforehand; fighting battles not on her own land but always choosing battle fields of her own choice. A real example is drone attacks in Pakistan. The problem is that Pakistani government perhaps is unaware of her national interests. Public has anti-American sentiments but could do nothing or in fact doing nothing. As government has not revealed its inner intentions about American drone attacks, nation as well as media is unable to throw light on the situation.

This research study tried to compare and contrast the editorial trends of "The Nation" and "Daily Times". This proved much more productive and revealed some interesting findings. "The Nation" has a nationalistic stance. Its overall editorial response is the opposition of drone attacks in the fashion of angry young man. Some editorials suggested shooting down drones flying in Pakistani air boundaries. It tried to urge military to take this action. At the same time, some editorials expressed the view that drone attacks are killing militants, and hence, tolerated. Its main stance is that drone attacks are violating national sovereignty, killing innocent people, producing anti-American sentiments, and violating international war laws. It has the view that government is not sincere and not fulfilling public commitments. Its editorial response regarding drone attacks have become vague when it is found that it published both pro-government and anti-government editorials. It reveals its confusion and contradiction on the issue. Although "The Nation" has anti-American stance but it expresses in apologetic manner, requesting to stop drone attacks.

"Daily Times" bears no resemblance to "The Nation". But it must be admitted that "Daily Times" has clear and definite stance on the issue of Drone Attacks. In its editorial response to the drone attacks, "Daily Times" is

opposite to that of "The Nation". Its stance is that the drone attacks are helping hand and necessary to eliminate terrorists present in the Northern Areas of Pakistan. It justifies drone attacks on the grounds that in the compliance of UN terms, Pakistan is bound to allow these attacks. It suggests that government should develop strong friendly relations with the US. It views US as the only benefactor. "Daily Times" warns that Pakistan is getting so much financial aid and many other benefits from US, so government should not displease US. Pakistan is getting dollars and other monetary packages which would not be available if we oppose drone attacks. Drone attacks are not violating national sovereignty and collateral damage must be tolerated as it is not intentional.

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