

ROLE OF INDIAN MEDIA IN FOMENTING WAR HYSTERIA BETWEEN INDIA AND PAKISTAN: A CASE STUDY OF URI INCIDENT

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Abstract

This study highlights the peril of Indian media's insinuation of war with Pakistan in the aftermath of Uri incident of September 18, 2016. Uri was a violent expression of Kashmiri right of self-determination; but Indian media became a source of arousing anti-Pakistan hysteria for Indian public. The war frenzy created by the media, pressured Indian decision makers into making the claim of carrying out surgical strikes across the Line of Control (LoC). In this way, Indian media became a source of fomenting war between the two nuclear armed states. The study uses Indian sources to evidence the jingoistic frenzy of the Indian TV news channels. Importance of having responsible media in nuclear armed states has been underscored by Indian media's dangerous handling of Uri crisis. This study raises awareness about the responsibility of media in sustaining peace between the nuclear rivals, particularly during crisis situations.

Keywords: *Indian Media, War Hysteria, Kashmir Conflict, Uri Incident, Surgical Strikes*

Introduction

Pakistan and India have shared increasingly strained and often violent relations since their independence in 1947. The peace between them has often been threatened because of the contentious issue of Kashmir; and there have been several wars and military standoffs between them over Kashmir. Mutual distrust and hostility has also marred the peace negotiations and dialogue. The prevailing relationship between India and Pakistan can be judged by the observation that "the neighbours have never been on the same page on the most critical issues, be it the

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Kashmir conflict, terrorism, nuclear capability race, or military clashes. Suspicion and untrustworthiness are constant.”¹ Mutual aversion to each other has seeped deeply in their state and society structures and is noticeable in their media systems as well. As a result, media in both countries, especially in India, has become overly blatant and biased particularly during the crisis situations. Indian media coverage of crises is often tainted by jingoism rather than prudence. Such media coverage can lead to unintended consequences during the crises between the nuclear states. There is little doubt that media has become a powerful tool for inciting both positive and negative responses from the audience and the local media coverage is increasingly shaping the conflict dynamics.² The American media, for instance, pressured the then administration to take military action to neutralize the alleged Iraqi capability of “weapons of mass destruction.”³ Due to overwhelming reach of the media houses and journalists favouring attack on Iraq, nearly 75 per cent Americans supported the invasion of Iraq in 2003.⁴ In the same vein, journalists and media channels in India have become influential enough to bolster intense nationalistic feelings against Pakistan to pressure their political leaders to choose military responses to restore “national prestige.”⁵

It was in the morning of September 18, 2016 that four armed militants stormed a military unit in Uri, a town located in the Indian occupied Kashmir. Eighteen Indian soldiers were fatally injured in the attack that was termed as the “deadliest attack on security forces in Kashmir in two decades.” Militant organization “Jaish-e-Mohammed,” which had alleged links with Pakistan, was quickly blamed by the Indian authorities to have carried out the attack. This was followed by an incessant media campaign against Pakistan.⁶ This type of negative role of Indian media in Kashmir related conflict and politics became a norm in the recent years. This time the Indian TV news channels were poised for imminent war with Pakistan. The Indian media became the prime mover in shaping the conflict after the Uri incident. A concerted anti-Pakistan

¹ Salman Ali, “South Asian Politics: Dilemma of Trust and Mistrust,” *South Asian Voices*, September 18, 2015.

² Andrew Puddephatt, *Voices of War: Conflict and the Role of the Media* (Copenhagen: International Media Support, 2006), 3-8.

³ Steve Rendall and Tara Broughel, “Amplifying Officials, Squelching Dissent,” in *FAIR*, May 1, 2003.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ M. Hirsh, A. H Awan and J.K. Sarmah, “India and Pakistan: Outlining a Path towards Peace,” *Policy Perspectives* 15, no. 1 (2018): 21-42.

⁶ Ankit Panda, “Gurdaspur, Pathankot, and Now Uri: What Are India's Options?” *The Diplomat*, September 19, 2016, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/09/gurdaspur-pathankot-and-now-uri-what-are-indias-options/>.

campaign was unleashed which stoked feelings of rage and hatred against Pakistan, compelling the Indian authorities to claim surgical strikes across the Line of Control (LoC). Given the fact that both India and Pakistan are nuclear armed states and any military confrontation between the two can escalate into the nuclear realm, it is crucial to investigate how Indian media can shape public opinion in India to clamour for war with Pakistan.⁷

The Indian media has significantly influenced strategic relations between India and Pakistan over the past two decades. In the aftermath of Uri attack, in particular, it manipulated facts about the incident to incite war between the two nuclear armed states. Indian television news channels created intense public frenzy which compelled the political leadership to take the decision of carrying out the so-called surgical strikes across the LoC. Pakistan denied the Indian claim of surgical strikes.⁸ This dampened the effects of unwise Indian adventurism; otherwise, the situation could have led to a serious nuclear crisis between the two states.

Media in Politics and Conflict

Media is accorded the status of being “the fourth pillar of the state” because of its importance in politics and policy. Foreign policy is one of the key policies affected by media’s influence. The role of media becomes acutely important when a country tries to resolve important geopolitical issues and crises with neighbouring states.⁹ In case of Pakistan and India, the respective national media have often stoked sentiments in overly nationalist manner. Some scholars have highlighted the role of media in shaping public opinion, yet the role of media in fueling conflict between nuclear India and Pakistan needs more scholarly attention. The influence of media on geostrategic choices of the major powers can be appreciated during the negotiations on “Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty” between United States and the erstwhile Soviet Union in 1981-1987. The American media has taken these negotiations in positive spirit and facilitated in concluding the INF Treaty.¹⁰ During these negotiations, the media has been able to set, reflect and build an agenda which affirmed

⁷ Karthika Sasikumar, “India-Pakistan Crises under the Nuclear Shadow: The Role of Reassurance,” *Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament* 2, no. 1 (2019): 151-169.

⁸ Syed Sammer Abbas, “Two guides from Muzaffarabad Facilitated Uri Attackers, India tells Pakistan,” *Dawn*, September 27, 2016.

⁹ Manzoor, R., Maken, A. M., Syed, S. A., & Ahmed, V., “Trading with India: Some Current Impediments for Pakistan,” *Journal of International Trade Law and Policy* 18, no. 1(2019): 39-55.

¹⁰ Marc A. Genest *Negotiating in the Public Eye : the Impact of the Press on the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Force Negotiations* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1995), 15-17, 62-78.

that the linkage between reporting, political decision making, and peoples' behavior is not constant but changing.¹¹ The way an issue is framed and presented impacts how the state responds and the public behaves. There is an important interrelationship between society and the level of ongoing communication. Nature of a society is often determined by the level of communication. In much the same way, the communication media tends to determine the nature of political system.¹²

The media causes political prejudices and advocates interest politics at the expense of impartiality.¹³ Sometimes, it tries to set the national agenda to steer the sequence of actions, and not just inform the people about what is happening. The Indo-Pakistan conflict could be visualized through the framework of "political competition model."¹⁴ The essence of this framework is that the role of media in politics could be understood by viewing the media competition as part of a bigger and more intense competition between the contenders for political control. The contours of media's "political competition model" became apparent shortly after Indo-Pak independence, when media in both countries started to play an important role in increasing tensions between them. Historically, the media has played a paranoid role and infested the strategic dynamics between the two countries with mutual suspicion and distrust. Due to its mammoth size, commercial self-interest, and proclivity to ride on the waves of Hindu nationalism, the role of Indian media has become more assertive, as compared to that of Pakistani media. The importance of media in conveying information, forming opinions, setting trends, and shaping social behavior in case of the two South Asian neighbours cannot be overstated.¹⁵

Role of media has increased in affecting the local and international opinions in today's interconnected world, owing to its 24/7 coverage of the events around the globe. This spectacle has enabled the media experts to be more effective in swaying the higher echelons of the government decision makers. Such impact of media on public and foreign policy can be appreciated with particular allusion to the "CNN effect." The new technologies have constricted the space for composed considerations on

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Colin Seymour Ure, *The Political Impact of the Mass Media* (London: Constable and Co., 1974), 9-14.

¹³ Karthika Sasikumar, "India-Pakistan Crises under the Nuclear Shadow: The Role of Reassurance," *Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament* 2, no.1 (2020): 151-169.

¹⁴ Gadi Wolfsfeld, *Media and Political Conflict: News from the Middle East* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1-12, 16.

¹⁵ Muhammad Akram, "Role of Media in Resumption of Peace Talks between Pakistan and India," *ISSRA Papers* 2 no. 2 (2010): 84-102.

matters of public policy; and the policy makers are compelled to respond to media pressure without being fully prepared. The “CNN effect” encapsulates that the citizens and the political leaders could be pressured by the communication networks to respond to national and international happenings within a short time.¹⁶ On the whole, the media has started playing a salient role in shaping the political reality, in determining problems and setting the agenda of the political campaigns.¹⁷ Media has also become more pervasive in conflicts based on “institutionalized war economies,” where the vested interest of media houses and the corporates collude to cause conflict continuation. In such cases “power of the media coverage (and the concern it aroused in public opinion) proved stronger than the will of governments.”¹⁸ In case of India, media is tending to be “war crazy” as well and many Indian journalists are becoming increasingly eager to spread unconfirmed, conflicting and notional news which suites the official propaganda.¹⁹ Nobel Peace Prize laureate Kailash Satyarthi has also recognized the fact of long-time prevalence of war-mongering in the Indian media.²⁰ According to a seminal study of Stimson Center, Indian media has attained the prowess to influence political decision making, especially during a crisis with Pakistan. “The media, news-consuming public, and policymaking community form a self-referential cycle in which each feeds and reaffirms the other’s perception of reality regarding India-Pakistan crises.”²¹ The study concludes that during the Modi government, the pressurizing capacity of the media to influence official decision-making has been enhanced.

The preceding discussion shows that the role of the media has become the focus of scholarly attention around the world in exacerbating as well as managing a political conflict within and between the states. The media has become a strong mediator between the people and the governments. In this position, media appreciably influences the political

¹⁶ Piers Robinson, “The CNN Effect: Can the News Media Drive Foreign Policy?” *Review of International Studies* 25, no. 2 (1999): 301-309.

¹⁷ Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Shaw, “The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (1974): 176-187.

¹⁸ Puddephatt, “Voices of War,” 6-7.

¹⁹ Vaishnavi Chandrashekhar, “India’s Media is War-Crazy,” *Foreign Policy*, April 17, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/03/01/indias-media-is-war-crazy/>.

²⁰ Scroll Staff, “India-Pakistan Tension: Nobel Prize Winner Kailash Satyarthi Warns of ‘War-Mongering’ by Journalists,” *Scroll.in*, March 12, 2019.

²¹ Ruhee Neog, “Self-referencing the News: Media, Policymaking, and Public Opinion in India-Pakistan Crises,” in Sameer Lalwani and Hannah Haegel and (eds.), *Investigating Crises: South Asia’s Lessons, Evolving Dynamics, and Trajectories* (Washington, DC: Stimson Center, 2018):115-121, 125.

decision making in democracies.²² Its capability to form a “self-referential cycle” along with public and government is a critical phenomenon which could lead to a self-feeding catastrophe. There is also the evidence in scholarly research that Indian media is exacerbating the conflict for its commercial self-interest.²³ The media, especially the television news channels, play an important role in transforming the relations between political adversaries at national and international level. Such an influence becomes crucially significant when the media becomes an agent of war and conflict- as it did in case of India after the Uri incident.

Media in Perspective

Theoretical perspectives on media refer to complex socio-political-philosophical principles that organize ideas about the relationship between the media and society. The perspective of symbolic interaction is used in the context of understanding individual’s behaviour in society.²⁴ Examining communication and media impact on individuals and society through this perspective is useful. Communication is the key to exchange of meanings between individuals; and this exchange is executed through symbols and language. Meanings and symbols take shape when they are interpreted by others and the society. Symbolic interaction perspective makes it easier to trace human behaviour to a particular pattern or system of thought. Constructivism is an extension of the symbolic interaction perspective which proposes that “reality is what people construct cognitively to be it.”²⁵ Social constructs are developed by interactions with others and those that last over time have meanings that are widely accepted by the majority in society.

Vietnam War is thought to be the breakthrough in modern history of the media. Television and the press achieved more invasive role owing to the technology which facilitated recording of terrifying images and showing them to people at home.²⁶ Since then, television has increasingly focused on public perception building and consent construction. It is now the key tool for influencing the masses and the governments. It has

²² Robinson, “The CNN Effect.”

²³ Praful Bidwai, “The Growing Crisis of Credibility of the Indian Media,” The Transnational Institute (TNI), April 28, 2011, <https://www.tni.org/es/node/11017>.

²⁴ Alver Fusun and Sebnem Caglar, “The Impact of Symbolic Interactionism on Research Studies about Communication Science,” *International Journal of Arts & Sciences* 8, no.7 (2015): 479–484.

²⁵ John Baylis, *The Globalization of World Politics* (London: Oxford University Press, 2011), 237.

²⁶ Eytan Gilboa, “Mass Communication and Diplomacy: A Theoretical Framework,” *Communication Theory* 10, no. 3 (August 2000): 275- 309.

become a cliché that television is “an independent force in international affairs.”²⁷ The first Iraq war was also the first media war in real time because the fighting reached homes, markets, and salons with all the brutal details in real time. The latest example of media influence on the political system is the innovative role of online social media platforms and the fast-paced changes they have brought in countries like Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen during the “Arab Spring.” Although the forms and types of media have vastly changed today, the basic and broad traditions of thought about media and its role in fanning or containing conflict are largely intact. In case of India, the mainstream television news channels intentionally buildup a melodramatic conversation during a national crisis. As per symbolic interaction and constructivist approaches, this buildup gets linked with the emotions and approval of the Indian public. This linkage is evident by the highest ever ratings of the jingoistic programs of the mainstream English and vernacular TV news networks during Uri crisis.²⁸

This research employs exploratory research technique and uses multiple sources for data collection, including reports, studies, books, and journal articles. A noteworthy aspect of the employed research technique is the reliance on accounts of Indian scholars and social activists on the role of Indian media during Indo-Pak crises in general, and Uri incident in particular. The reporting pattern of the termed ‘balanced’ national newspaper *The India Today*, *The Indian Express* and prime time shows of the news channels like *NDTV*, *Zee TV*, *News X*, *Aaj Tak* and *Times Now* have been explored as the leading shapers of the public opinion and war mongering during Uri crisis.

Uri Incident and Media’s War Mongering

The year 2016 was a year with continued tensions in Indian Occupied Kashmir. There were several critical gatherings of mobs and protesters that often led to brutal violence of the security forces against the dissenters. The agitation was further fueled when the Indian forces killed Burhan Wani of Hizbul Mujahideen (HM) on July 8, 2016.²⁹ Wani was a prominent local Kashmiri activist who was struggling against cruelty of the Indian Army. As a consequence of his death, mobs and protests

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Sujit Kumar Mohanty and Murali Basa, “Media Framing of the 2016 Surgical Strike,” Paper Presented in International Seminar on Media and Politics, Department of Journalism & Mass Communication, Assam University, Silchar on 6-7 December, 2017.

²⁹ “Burhan Wani’s Death and a Year of Living Dangerously,” *The Hindu*, July 8, 2017, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/article19240485.ece>.

increased and resulted in a large number of casualties.³⁰ In July and August 2016, around 85 Kashmiris were killed and 11000 were injured. In August 2016, India and Pakistan used their Independence Day functions to feed strains in their relations. In Pakistan, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif devoted the day to the “opportunity of Kashmir,” while the India Prime Minister Narendra Modi criticized “Pakistan-supported terrorism” in India.³¹ In this backdrop, the Uri attack caused a spike in the ongoing political and diplomatic strains between the two neighbouring countries. Indian Home Minister of that time, Rajnath Singh, blamed Pakistan for giving “direct help to terrorism and terrorist gatherings.”³² The tense situation in which the Indian leadership had put itself by portraying to be tough with Pakistan was an important factor in its succumbing to the public pressure.

The week of the Uri attack was also a testing time for the Prime Minister’s leadership. Modi, adept at judging the public mood, was aware that people expected him to “walk the talk” in acting tough against India’s implacable enemy. Public opinion in the country was inflamed. People were calling for an all-out war against Pakistan. Even saner voices were advocating at least some demonstrable retribution. Modi was aware of the public sentiment and the anger that was building up in popular perception.³³

On September 29, 2016 India claimed to have executed ‘surgical strikes’ against the suspected militant targets inside Azad Jammu and Kashmir, raising acute concerns about war between the two countries. The Indian government claimed that strikes comprised 70-80 Special Forces individuals, who killed around 35 to 70 militants in these strikes. Pakistani government rejected these claims, contesting that Indian forces had crossed the LoC from few places, but were driven back swiftly. Pakistan

³⁰ “Why the Death of Militant Burhan Wani has Kashmiris up in Arms,” *BBC News*, July 11, 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-36762043>.

³¹ Sardar Sikandar, “PM Dedicates Aug 14 to Kashmir Cause,” *The Express Tribune*, 14 August, 2014; and “Highlights of Modi’s Independence Day speech,” *The Hindu*, 15 August, 2016, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/Highlights-of-Modis-Independence-Day-speech>.

³² “Isolate ‘Terrorist State’ Pakistan, says Rajnath Singh after Kashmir Attack,” *NDTV*, September 18, 2016, <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/1460127>.

³³ Nitin A. Gokhale, “The Inside Story of India’s 2016 ‘Surgical Strikes,’” *The Diplomat*, September 23, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/09/the-inside-story-of-indias-2016-surgical-strikes/>.

denied any surgical strikes on the militant bases.³⁴ According to the Indian media reports Uri attack was pre-orchestrated by Pakistan. The news rooms of Indian TV channels were playing with the concept that Pakistani Government wanted to start a war with India. On many occasions the Indian media personalities engaged in provoking war by using unverified sources as credible information for consumption of the general public. The media willingly jumped in the Uri crisis to generate hate and war mongering in the Indian public. Indian News Channels and Radio Broadcasts convinced their citizens that India was ready for war, and that Pakistan stood isolated after the Uri attack. Sonia Shukla, one of the saner voices in Indian media, observed “As the Indian media raises its relentless war cry, the government may find itself trapped between public demand for action and no viable military options. In such an event, how will the government dismount the tiger it is riding?”³⁵ Other sober elements in India also lamented the hate-charged and jingoistic media coverage of Uri and raised concerns about its peril. But there was little effect of these sobering voices, and the “voices of war” seemed to have prevailed.

The Uri attack has seen extensive coverage on print and television media. The nationalistic emotions (virtually amounting to jingoism) built over the last three years have led to the public- and some in the media- demanding an immediate response which impinges on the Government’s flexibility in strategic decision-making. There is a danger of public emotions and political compulsions forcing a hasty decision.³⁶

Indian mainstream Hindi and English channels continued to accord overwhelmingly aggressive and emotionally charged nationalistic coverage to the surgical strikes. Clearly, the coverage was a combination of militant nationalistic speech and religiously maligned designation of Kashmiri and Pakistani populations.³⁷ This was a dangerous undertaking

³⁴ “India says Raid Across LOC Hit Pakistan-Based Militants; Pakistan Denies Raid Occurred,” *CNBC*, September 29, 2016, <https://www.cnbc.com/2016/09/29.html>.

³⁵ Sonia Trikha Shukla, “Is the Indian Media Forcing the Government into a War with Pakistan?” *The Caravan Magazine*, September 26, 2016, <https://caravanmagazine.in/vantage/indian-media-forcing-government-war-pakistan>.

³⁶ Lt Gen HS Panag, “Some Action Against Pakistan is Imperative for Indian Morale,” *NewsLaundry*, September 21, 2016, <https://www.newsLaundry.com/2016/09/21/uriattack-how-should-india-respond-to-189>.

³⁷ Sushmita Pandit and Saayan Chattopadhyay, “Coverage of the Surgical Strike on Television News in India,” *Journalism Practice* 12, no. 2 (2018): 162-176.

because the media induced public pressure on the leadership to take a military action against Pakistan. This could have caused deterrence break down with apocalyptic consequences.

Media Frenzy and PM Modi's Aggressive Decision

On 19 September 2016, the day following Uri attack, *The Times of India* published a report quoting the unspecified government sources and security officials to claim that Indian army would bleed Pakistan all along the 778 km long LoC through punitive strikes and concentrated artillery firepower.³⁸ A day later on 20th September, the general tone of the stories and opinion pieces published in *The Times of India* had established that the war with Pakistan was inevitable. On 22 September, BJP leader Yashwant Sinha published an article in *The Indian Express* titled "Limits of Restraint" in which he pleaded that "appropriate military response to Pakistan" was the need of the hour. He went on to suggest "that the nature of military response and its timing should be left to the armed forces, but it should not be indefinitely postponed."³⁹

The war drums were ever louder in the realm of Indian TV news channels since 18 September 2016. The TV anchors created sets of "War Room" and vehemently dismissed the few voices who dared to suggest political, economic and diplomatic options to deal with Pakistan.⁴⁰ "News anchors across television channels looked angry and revengeful as they donned the amplified versions of their usual, quarrelsome selves."⁴¹ Gaurav Sawant, the executive editor and anchor of *India Today* news channel, presented "To the Point" show in the prime time. Instead of wearing the usual nicely tailored suit, he chose to appear in "commando style khaki slacks and brown vest" to mimic a reporter on the war front and called his post-Uri set of the show as "the War Room." In one of the shows, during the discussion with Admiral KK Nayyar, the Indian Navy's retired vice chief, Sawant dismissed Admiral's suggestion of using diplomatic, economic and political measures.⁴² He retorted that only a befitting military response against Pakistan would entail success. The English news channel *Times Now* remained busy in issuing the war threats to Pakistan every evening starting from 18 September. "The channel, convinced that India has already secured itself a diplomatic victory over its

³⁸ Rajat Pundit, "Army to Turn on Heat, Asks Govt to Consider Cross-Border Strikes," *The Times of India*, September 19, 2016, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17512786.2017.1397529>.

³⁹ Yashwant Sinha, "Limits of Restraint," *The Indian Express*, September 22, 2016, <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/3043013/>

⁴⁰ Shukla, "Is the Indian Media Forcing the Government."

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

neighbour, is now fiercely advocating a strategic push.”⁴³ The channel *News X* continuously advocated the theme that “India will punish Pakistan” and “India to diplomatically isolate Pakistan.” A report on *Zee News* on 24 September claimed that “Pakistan had designated some targets inside India”- justifying that there was no choice for India but to opt for war. Shankar Roy Chowdhury, the retired chief of the army staff, blurted on *NDTV* that India should raise its own bands of “fidayeen fighters” and unleash them inside Pakistan for causing mayhem and destruction.⁴⁴ On 26 September, Hindi newspaper *Dainik Jagran* threatened that India would withdraw from “The Indus Waters Treaty.”

The incessant onslaught of Indian TV news channels to initiate war against Pakistan since 18 September 2016 convinced Prime Minister Modi to make up his mind in favour of war with Pakistan. On the evening of 23 September, Modi along with Ajit Doval and Defence Minister Rajnath, was briefed at the operations room of the Army Headquarters. It was here that Prime Minister Modi gave the go ahead for the attacks across the LoC.⁴⁵ There were little doubts that decision to take a risky military operation under the nuclear environment was ripe with cataclysmic dangers. And the decision was compelled by the jingoistic media frenzy of the past six days.⁴⁶ When the Indian army carried out the so-called surgical strikes midnight 28-29 September 2016; the Indian news media covered the development with ecstatic patriotic narrative. “What was supposed to be a covert military operation against terrorism became morphed into political rhetoric aggravated by the unwarranted jingoism of television news channels and social media.”⁴⁷ This national euphoria was aptly magnified and celebrated by the TV news channels and media houses as proof of their successful media campaign. In actuality, it raised the bar for India’s political leadership a notch higher in the nuclear risk taking- a fact that was later confirmed in India’s Balakot misadventure.

Claim of Surgical Strikes and Indian Media’s Self Interest

There appeared to be self-serving motives, especially of Indian mainstream English and vernacular TV news networks in fanning the nationalistic and jingoistic fervour against Pakistan during the time of

⁴³ “Uri Terrorist Attack-Time For India To Respond HARD To Pakistan: The Newshour Debate,” *Times Now*, September 18, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bSqW5utxuI>.

⁴⁴ “Former Army Chief Wants India to Raise 'Suicide Squad',” *The Express Tribune*, September 19, 2016.

⁴⁵ Gokhale, “The Inside Story.”

⁴⁶ Shukla, “Is the Indian Media Forcing the Government?”

⁴⁷ Pandit & Chattopadhyay, “Coverage of Surgical Strikes on Television.”

crises. The mainstream news channels of *Aaj Tak*, *Times Now*, *News X*, *NDTV* and *Zee TV* dominated an estimated 60 per cent media coverage of the mammoth Indian population of 1.3 billion.⁴⁸ Their ratings increased at least two fold the routine ratings during the crises period and so did their revenues from the advertisements and viewership. The TV news channels spoke vehemently in favour of the military aggression which was linked with the national security of India to enhance their ratings and viewership. The ratings of *Aaj Tak* channel increased by more than 64 per cent during the coverage of surgical strikes as compared to the week before.⁴⁹ A record viewership of 160 million people was registered by *Aaj Tak* TV channel while covering the surgical strikes. *Times Now* witnessed two-fold increase in its viewership during the same time. Both, *Aaj Tak* and *Times Now*, retained the top position during the coverage. The English news channels doubled their viewership in the week of surgical strikes.⁵⁰ This important media undercurrent had been endorsed by the former intelligent chiefs of India and Pakistan when they pointed out the profit-seeking tendencies of Indian media. They maintained that “the media (in particular television and social media) profit by inflaming public sentiment and heightening the danger of war.”⁵¹

These facts point to an increasing tendency in Indian media for creating a nationalistic vehemence and hostility towards Pakistan as their enemy. There is also growing propensity of the Indian news networks to increase their revenues manifolds by doing so. Such a risky pursuit of self-interest needs to be watched by the Indian intelligentsia. And the quest for moderation and maturity needs to be preferred to bring calm and maturity between the nuclear rivals during the crisis situations. In this regard, the following concerns of an enlightened Indian political commentator Garga Chatterjee, needs to be considered seriously by the Indian media channels:

Mainstream media should be cognizant of the fact that India and Pakistan are armed with nuclear weapons and should educate their audience about the hugely destructive effects of a nuclear conflict. Media should critically examine claims made by their

⁴⁸ Raushni Bhagia, “News Channels Garner Major Viewership as Indian Army Performs Surgical Strike,” *Best Media Info*, October 7, 2016, <https://bestmediainfo.com/2016/10/news-channels-garner-major-viewership-as-indian-army-performs-surgical-strike/>.

⁴⁹ “News Channels Strike Highest Ever Viewership Post-Surgical Strike Week,” *Best Media Info*, October 14, 2016, <https://bestmediainfo.com/2016/10/>.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ A.S. Dulat, Asad Durrani and Aditya Sinha, *The Spy Chronicles: RAW, ISI and the Illusion of Peace* (New Delhi: Harper Collins India, 2018), 213.

respective armies and governments. Truth and realism should drive public opinion, not jingoism.⁵²

Conclusion

This research has attempted to explore how Indian media coverage of events, especially, in the crises between India and Pakistan shapes the public opinion in ways that stoke jingoism and war. The study evidences that media perceptions create lasting influences on citizens' attitudes towards Pakistan and highlights the lurking peril of the Indian media's insinuation of war during crisis situations with Pakistan. The Uri incident of 18 September 2016 was a violent struggle of the Kashmiri fighters to assert their right of self-determination. Following the incident, Indian leadership blamed Pakistan for abetting the attack without doing credible investigations. At the same time, the Indian media became a source of arousing anti-Pakistan sentiments in the general public, and pressured the Indian decision makers into making the decision to carry out surgical strikes across the LoC. In this way, Indian media became an instrument in fomenting war between the two nuclear armed states. The jingoistic frenzy created by the prime time TV news channels is found to be particularly important in inciting the Indian public opinion for war. The study also finds a linkage between media's corporate self-interest and its creation of nation-wide nationalistic excitement to "punish" Pakistan. This shows that media's irresponsible and self-serving role during Uri crisis partly led to a dangerous warlike situation between the two nuclear armed states. The study has attempted to raise awareness about responsibility of the media in creation and maintenance of peace and not war between the nuclear states. It is also highlighted that the political leaders in India tend to exploit the feelings of frustration of their people and make hard to fulfill promises with them. Consequently, every Indian government encounters greater media-manipulated public pressure to "punish" Pakistan than the preceding one. India's Balakot misadventure of 26 February 2019 has reaffirmed that Indian media's manipulation and insinuation of its public and leadership has seeped deeper in the structures of Indian state and society- and could result in more ominous and unfortunate consequences in future.

⁵² Garga Chatterjee quoted in Arafatul Islam, "How Indian and Pakistani Media are Covering Kashmir Unrest," *DW*, September 20, 2016, <https://www.dw.com/en/how-indian-and-pakistani-media-are-covering-kashmir-unrest/a-19562791>.

