

War and Peace Journalism: The Role of Local and International Media during the Intra-Afghan Peace Talks

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Abstract

The former government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (hereinafter referred to as the Islamic Republic) and the Islamic Taliban Movement (hereinafter referred to as the Taliban) attached great deal of importance to media coverage of the intra-Afghan peace negotiations (can also be called Doha peace talks) that took place in Doha, the capital of the State of Qatar, between September 2020 and August 2021. They, for their part, claimed that the local media in particular had been taking sides and disseminating propaganda throughout the peace negotiations. This comparative case study has used mixed method to elaborate on how the local and international media covered Doha peace talks on Afghanistan. Using John Galtung's model of peace and war journalism as its theoretical framework, this article analysed 229 stories—including news articles, roundtables, interviews, and Op-Eds—published on the English websites of TOLONews, CNN, and Al Jazeera during the peace negotiations. Consequently, it was revealed that though the war journalism continued to be predominant reporting approach for all selected media outlets, TOLONews, as a local media, relatively deployed peace journalism compared to CNN and Al Jazeera, two worldwide major media outlets. Finally, it is recommended to explore why local media, despite being directly affected by the conflict, failed to adequately apply peace journalism in their coverage of the intra-Afghan peace negotiations.

Keywords: Peace Journalism, War Journalism, Intra-Afghan Peace Talks, Local Media, International Media.

Introduction

By virtue of an accord signed between the United States of America and the Taliban on February 29, 2020, in Qatar, the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Taliban, who presently control the country, entered into direct negotiations in September 2020 for the first time in around twenty years of war. However, these peace talks concluded catastrophically on August 15, 2021, when the Islamic Republic collapsed following the withdrawal of the U.S. troops from Afghanistan. Amidst the intra-Afghan negotiations, both parties involved to the conflict, for their part, claimed that the local media, in particular, had been taking sides and disseminating propaganda. As a case in point, in May 2021, then National Security Directorate (NDS) chief of Afghanistan accused a number of media outlets in the country of either broadcasting or publishing propaganda in favour of the Taliban. Simultaneously, the Taliban threatened some local media that they would face consequences for reporting in support of the government (Ariana News, 2021). In addition to the conflicting sides, some civil society activists also cautioned the media not to approach the peace talks with a biased reporting-especially they should avoid whitewashing the Taliban (حسين، 1399). Additionally, the intra-Afghan peace talks also garnered considerable attention from international media outlets. For example, as will be deliberated upon in the sections to come, Aljazeera and CNN contributed significantly in covering these talks. Overarching coverage of both media outlets included geopolitical implications of the talks, insights from domestic and international stakeholders, concerns over the peace process, and obstacles in reaching a perpetuate ceasefire.

In light of above-mentioned illustrations, the present paper, with a comparative perspective, will analyse English language news coverage on the websites of TOLONews, CNN and Aljazeera to find out whether these media outlets incorporated Peace Journalism or War Journalism during their reporting on the intra-Afghan peace talks. While TOLONews stands for local media, CNN and Al Jazeera represent international media in the context of the current study.

The following pages will provide a quick literature review with a focus on outlining the gaps and illustrating the importance of this paper accordingly. Although, the researches that have thus far been conducted offer valuable insight on coverage of peace and conflict in Afghanistan in general, a comparative study of the role played by local and international media in reporting the intra-Afghan peace negotiations has remained vital for further investigation. Therefore, the study at hand will attempt to address this critical aspect by specifically

deploying peace and war journalism theoretical framework in the context of the intra-Afghan peace negotiation with an in-depth concentration on local and international media. Methodology shall be discussed subsequently, followed by the findings and discussion. Lastly, a recommendation will be made concerning the future direction of the topic.

1. Existing Debates on Media and Intra-Afghan Peace Talks

Information is seen as a power that impacts public discourse. Media, as a pivotal source of information, can change our perception of how we view the world around us. Media can be a platform for debate and different opinion expressions, which leads to dispute resolution. However, they can also be abused to incite hatred and escalate tensions. In general, media can take on two different roles: either be active in the conflict or stay out of it independently for the sake of peace. While the former role contributes to the deterioration of violence and conflict, the latter seeks means to resolve conflict and alleviate violence. Although the rapid evolution and diversification of mass media have provided more direct access to news for the public, conventional mainstream media, such as television, still maintains its influence and has a crucial contribution in shaping the public's view about events (Puddephatt, 2006; Kuusik, 2010; Wang, 2022). The geopolitical landscape of intra-Afghan peace talks was deeply complex due to presence of multiple players, encompassing domestic, regional and international actors. This complexity was further deepened by internal division in Afghanistan, and lasting more than forty years of conflict. In such context, media could significantly either fuel skepticism or promote hope for peace amongst the involved players and public.

As already noted, the Taliban and the government placed significant importance to media coverage of the Doha talks. Both parties were concerned that media coverage might depict them as obstacles to peace or undermine the morale of their supporters. They tried to warn the media to stay away from what they referred to bias reporting on the peace talks. For instance, the Taliban issued a statement on June 24, 2019, stating that a week would be given to the radio stations, TV channels, publication or other kind of outlets to cease anti-Taliban ads that are paid by the government (Radio Free Europe, 2019). The Afghan Journalists Safety Committee (AJSC) similarly condemned both the Taliban and the government for their approaches towards media. In a press release issued on May 5, 2021, the committee asserted that “both sides involved in the conflict accuse the media of violating the principle of impartiality also shows that the media is not affiliated with any party and media do not bolster interests of a particular party.” Given the duration of the conflict and its devastating

implications, the intra-Afghan peace negotiations were considered as a critical juncture for bringing about a sustainable peace to the country. How did local and international media approach that historic breakthrough? This is a question which has been rarely addressed. Lynch & Freear (2023) examined war and peace journalism with regard to the intra-Afghan peace negotiations. Nevertheless, they only investigated the local media with a short timeframe, namely September 2020, the initial phase of the peace talks. Lynch & Freear argue that the local media in Afghanistan failed to support peace efforts. This claim holds some accuracy, yet it can be challenged provided that we look from a comparative perspective to the issue, taking also the international media into account. Furthermore, the period that these authors examined to assess the coverage of the intra-Afghan talks is insufficient for generalizing the results across the entire duration of the negotiations, which extended far beyond a month, from September 2020 to August 2021. They overlooked new facts and developments that emerged during the peace negotiations following September. Consequently, the validity of the study to generalize the conclusions drawn from a single month to the entire process is subject to question.

Raiszada (2020) is of the opinion that Afghanistan's media outlets have made effective efforts in support of peace: "Afghanistan media outlets have made continued effort to create understanding, tranquillity and peace in accordance to their human and national commitment". Raiszada does not explain how she reached such an outcome. Her argument relies more on subjective approach than on evidence-based perspective. This methodological shortcoming offers a great potential for bias, lacking sufficient evidences and methodical support in her article. For instance, she refers to an interview of Sediqullah Tawhidi, then Afghanistan's director of Journalists Safety Commission, who says "media outlets are playing as bridge between the government and people; therefore, it is the duty of media to make effort to aware the public of developments of peace talks and reflect them neutrally". Tawhidi's statement can be described as a recommendation that does not provide any evidence in support of Raiszada argument.

In their article "War and Peace Journalism: Representation of Conflict on Afghan Soil through Global Media", Elham, Haand, & Sadiq (2021) examined the coverage of the conflict in Afghanistan by New York Times and Daily Mail, two international newspapers that belong to the U.S. and China respectively. The article found out that according to Galtung's model of war and peace indicators, the two newspapers' coverage virtually focused on Elite-Oriented, with Visible Effects of War coming as the next.

Rahimi, Ziarmal, & Jalali (2021), in their article “War and Peace Journalism: Evaluating the Media Coverage of Afghan Conflicts” focused on TOLONews, Arianna (local) and Azadi Radio (U.S.) coverage of the conflict in post-Islamic Republic between 15 August and 21 November 2021. Employing the same theory used in this study, they focused on conflict between Islamic State-Khorasan (IS-K), a regional affiliate of ISIS, and the Taliban, as well as the United States. Though, this article investigated the two local media outlets and one external, the main concentration is on conflict state not conflict resolution. Furthermore, Ottosen (2010) discussed war and peace journalism approach utilising a Norwegian media outlet to understand whether or not peace journalism had been implemented during the U.S.-Islamic Republic war against the Taliban.

Mahmoodi, Saeed & Rahman (2021) see the peace and war journalism in Afghanistan’ conflict through analysing local print media photographs. They attempted to understand to what extent merely the local media employed peace or war journalism in the photographs that they posted. This approach is more about Visible Effects of War, which serves as an indicator to evaluate peace and war journalism in a media outlet, as stipulated in John Gultang’s theory.

As a gap in common, none of the previously discussed literatures have examined war and peace journalism (i) in the context of the intra-Afghan peace talks, and (ii) a comparative study of the local and international media combined concerning the present topic. Instead, they have overwhelmingly delved into the Afghanistan’s conflict as a whole. Distinguishingly, the current study will, first, contribute to the literature by filling this gap. Secondly, the fact that the Afghanistan’s conflict has not yet been resolved adds practical significance to the paper. This implies that negotiations could once more be a solution. In light of this perception, the article provides insights to the practitioners concerned on the media’s critical role in promoting possible peace opportunities for a long-term political settlement of the conflict in Afghanistan.

Media, especially mainstream international media outlets, function as the “fourth power” or “fourth estate” extending its role beyond mere reporting to exert political influence. Consequently, conducting a comparative analysis of local and international media may enhance our understanding of the stances held by the entities or countries hosting these media outlets regarding the intra-Afghan peace talks. Additionally, each media outlet covers an event in line with its editorial policies, target audiences, and geopolitical interest. Against this backdrop, a comparative study, which is undertaken by the present paper, will offer insights to understand local and international media policies towards the peace talks, thereby assisting

policymakers to developed more informed strategies for future peace negotiations to avoid shaping narratives that could affect the public opinions and the stances of conflicting parties in reaching peace.

2. Peace and War Journalism—Theoretical Approach

A conflict can be viewed in two different ways depending on whether the focus is on the meta-conflict that results from violence and war and the question of who prevails, or on the root causes of conflict and how to peacefully transfer it. While war journalism sees a conflict as a battle or sport competition, peace journalism spares no effort on conflict transformation. In war journalism, the reporting model has been assimilated to military command, wherein military advance, numbers killed, wounded, and material damage speak. It is also sport model reporting where the zero-sum perspective is applied and the idea wining is not everything, it is only thing serves as the core pillar. Contrary to this, peace journalism seeks opportunities in conflict to find new ways for the progress of human beings. With a win-win point of view, peace journalism attempts to answer why and where a conflict has been occurred (Galtung, Fischer, & Fischer, 2013, pp. 96-97).

In the word of the authors mentioned above, war journalism is ‘applied to negotiations as verbal battles: who outsmarts the other, who comes out closest to his original position’. Whereas peace journalism can motivate the parties concerned to improve negotiations for a peaceful resolution by covering the experiences of the people and the costs of waging war on society and on the conflicting parties. To present a competent picture about peace and war journalism, this paper prefers to resort to the model used in the book ‘Johan Galtung: Pioneer of peace research’ (2013, p.98), as well as, utilises Shinar’s (2009) explanation in this regards.

Peace Journalism	War Journalism
<i>Peace/conflict-oriented:</i> Explores the root causes of the conflict formation. Focuses on win-win situation. 'Emphasis on longer term processes and wider aspects'. Absence of military vocabulary...	<i>War/violent-oriented:</i> Focus on zero-sum. Seeing the parties as 'us' and 'them'. Concentrating on visible effects of violence. 'Emphasis on 'here and now' events'. Deploying military vocabulary...
<i>People-oriented:</i> Reporting on people's suffering, giving voice to the voiceless, women...and give name to 'all evil doers'- regardless of a bad action is committed by which conflicting parties. It gives voice to multi-parties...	<i>Elite-oriented:</i> Focusing on 'our' suffering. Reporting based on the elite source. Give name of 'their evil doer' to one of the conflicting parties...
<i>Solution-oriented:</i> Peace = nonviolence + creativity. Launching peace initiatives, and focusing on structures and culture.	<i>Victory-oriented:</i> Peace = victory + ceasefire. Concealing peace initiatives...
<i>Truth-oriented:</i> Expose untruths on all sides, impartiality.	<i>Propaganda-oriented:</i> Expose 'their' untruths; help 'our' cover-up/lies.

Table 1: Johan Galtung's Model of Peace and War Journalism (Galtung, 2013, p.98)

This study will explore John Galtung's (2013) war and peace journalism to analyses the intra-Afghan peace talks which were underway in the absence of a ceasefire. This means that the conflicting parties engaged in negotiations and fighting on the battlefield simultaneously. Therefore, the peace and war journalism theory is literally relevant to analyse whether or not the media prefers to work for peace in such circumstances.

3. Methodology of the Study

The present article, with a mixed methodological perspective, is a content analysis of stories, interviews, and Op-Eds published on the English websites of TOLONews (news in local languages Persian/Drai and Pashto are not included), CNN, and Al Jazeera about intra-Afghan peace talks to find out how the local and international media covered the aforementioned negotiations. Broadly speaking, content analysis can be divided into two categories: conceptual content analysis and relational content analysis. Conceptual analysis defines the presence and frequency of concepts in a text, whereas relational content analysis concentrates on the meaning of language through the relationships between words and phrases. The study benefitted from both types with respect to the criteria stated in the theoretical model. English websites of the chosen media outlets serve as the primary sources for this comparative study.

The 229 stories, including interviews, and Op-Eds between September 2020 and August 2021 (henceforth referred to as reports) make up the population of this study. This timeframe is selected due to the occurrence of the intra-Afghan negotiations within the

aforementioned period. These reports were hand-picked from among all the results that TOLONews, CNN, and Al Jazeera's websites displayed for the search of the term 'Intra-Afghan Peace Talks'. Stated differently, reports pertaining to the peace negotiations have been reached by entering the term 'intra-Afghan peace talks' on the websites of each selected media.

The authors look for the most dominant media outlets. Hence, TOLONews, CNN and Al Jazeera reach to the most people. Other media were investigated as well using the same method mentioned above for the selected media outlets. It has been discovered that their contents are mostly similar to that of the chosen media. This offers a venue for them to be represented by TOLONews, CNN and Al Jazeera.

Logic	TOLONews	CNN	Al Jazeera
Ideology	A variety of people with different ideologies follow TOLONews. Because this media outlet is an extended news channel for TOLO TV, which broadcasts traditional ¹ , religious ² and secular ³ programmes, particularly up until the collapse of the Islamic Republic. TOLONews also conducts diverse political and cultural discussions in comparison with other local media, such as 1TV, Ariana TV, National TV (RTA). As a moderate multi-programme agency, the outlet holds more audiences.	Hosting different people with various ideological background.	Hosting different people with various ideological background and political views (Telhami, 2023).
Recognition	TOLONews is the most trusted and popular local media. For example, it has 1.6 million ⁴ You Tube subscriber, compared to 750K for Ariana TV ⁵ , 637K for 1TV ⁶ , and 157K for National TV. ⁷ With 80.5% of news program	CNN is one of the most popular broadcasting outlets in the west. For instance, it has 17.3 million ⁸ You Tube subscriber, compared to 12.5M for Fox News. ⁹ These are the most dominant media in the	Al Jazeera is available in 430 million homes (Al Jazeera, n.d). Al Jazeera (English and Arabic) has a total of 34.2M subscribers on You Tube ¹² . While the

¹ *ON the Road*: "The show explores the beauty, culture, and everyday life of different Afghan villages and provinces": <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wov8r3gTdFw&list=PLBC6D67D837E3A153&index=1>

² فرهنگ و تمدن اسلام - اسلام چگونه به زن نگاه میکند؟ (Islamic Culture and Civilization) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dhGZflpuP2E>

³ *Afghan Star*. "Afghan Star is a talent quest which scours for hot new musical talent in the nation of Afghanistan." This programme does no longer functional since the Taliban return to the power.

⁴ See: <https://www.youtube.com/user/TOLONewsLive>

⁵ See: <https://www.youtube.com/@Ariana.Television>

⁶ See: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCNYssWlc1i2oC54Tive3c2g>

⁷ See: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC3q8PirPi_Dx8z28GiBgTbQ

⁸ See CNN: <https://www.youtube.com/cnn>

⁹ See Fox News: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCXIjgqnII2ZOINSWNOGFTThA>

War and Peace Journalism: The Role of Local and International Media during the Intra-Afghan Peace Talks

	viewers, TOLONews is in the first position, followed by National TV (4.9%), Ariana TV (2.4%), and others (25%), according to Auzarmi (2024).	United States, implicitly inclined to the Democrat and the Republican parties respectively. It also has the highest number of subscribers on YouTube, surpassing France 24 English, which has 3.14 million ¹⁰ , and CCTV of China, which has 600K subscribers ¹¹ .	number is 17.2M for Al Arabia (English and Arabic). ¹³
Politics	TOLONews has a major impact on Afghanistan's political environment. It is the first 24-hour news channel in the country and provides in-depth coverage of both domestic and international political events. TOLONews is known for its in-depth reporting, political commentary, and investigative journalism. During the Islamic Republic, it was encouraging public discussions and debates by giving a platform to a variety of political voices, including of the Taliban ¹⁴ , government officials, and civil society leaders.	The countries where these media operate, i.e., Afghanistan, United States of America and the State of Qatar, had been involved directly in the peace process. The US facilitated to make the intra-Afghan talks happened. CNN to some extent, reflect the point of view of the United States-especially in terms of this news channel's inclination towards the Democrats (as the ruling party within the period of the current study).	Qatar hosted and informally mediated the intra-Afghan peace talks. Al Jazeera, to some extent, reflect the point of view of the State of Qatar since the outlet is controlled by the state.
Geopolitics	As previously demonstrated, TOLONews is a mainstream media outlet that provides a local perspective on war and peace journalism.	CNN can relatively support us to understand the Western approach.	Al Jazeera can relatively support us to understand the Non-westerns Islamic Countries approach.
Culture	TOLONews, as a pioneering media outlet focused on societal and cultural transformation, more or less can open up a way to understand to what extent this media outlet was working genuinely for a transformed peaceful society.	Broadcasting with variant languages in different continents (e.g. CNN English, CNN Arabic, CNN Turkish).	Broadcasting with variant languages in different continents (e.g. Al Jazeera English, Al Jazeera Arabic, as two international languages)

¹² Al Jazeera English: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCNye-wNBqNL5ZzHSJj3l8Bg> Al Jazeera Arabic: <https://www.youtube.com/@aljazeera>

¹⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCQfwfsi5VrQ8yKZ-UWmAEFg>

¹¹ <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCmv5DbNpxH8X2eQxJBqEjKQ>

¹³ AlArabiya العربية: <https://www.youtube.com/alarabiya> Al Arabiya English: <https://www.youtube.com/AlArabiyaEnglish>

¹⁴ Interview with Taliban's Zabihullah Mujahid: Full Transcript: <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-173452> (this interview was conducted when the Taliban were fighting the government)

Pervious Literature	TOLONews is mentioned in the majority of those previous investigated literatures that focus on assessing local medias activities on different issues as a mainstream media representing the local broadcasting outlets. As an example, see: (Auzarmi, 2024; Sakhawati & Maihanyar, 2023; Nijat, 2022; Aria, Bayan, & Hazeem, n.d; Mahdiyar, 2021).	This study revealed that CNN covered the intra-Afghan negotiations more than other US media. This makes it perfectly relevant to the study at hand.	Al Jazeera CNN covered the intra-Afghan negotiations more than other media in the middle east as discovered during the review of their websites. This makes Al Jazeera appropriately relevant to the topic in question.
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Apart from that Al Jazeera and CNN benefit from their extensive geographical reach (Gowing, 1994; Sakr, 2001), driven by their distinctive editorial approaches (Seib, 2008; Thussu, 2007) and their use of English as a lingua franca, with Al Jazeera also offering access in Arabic. Their strong digital and social media presence, combined with frequent breaking news updates, positions both networks as leaders in the global media community (Newman & Levy, 2021; Shirky, 2011). From the perspective of the Global South, non-Western, and Muslim societies, Al Jazeera exerts significant influence, while CNN holds substantial sway over Western and broader international audiences (Nossek, 2004; Amin, 2002). These factors make the selection of these two international media outlets central to this study.

In connection to the codifying, due to the time constraint concerning the submission of this article, the paper probed into titles, available in the appendix, of those 229 reports one-by-one. Then each of them was classified as peace journalism, war journalism or neutral according to their relevancy to the criteria given in Gultang's model. Despite the fact that this study did not fully follow their approach, the codifying techniques used in this work is, more or less, influenced by Shinar (2009), Rahimi, Ziarmalv & Jalali (2021), as well as Siraj (2008). Although, the headlines provide a great deal of insight, they may simplify complex issues, leading to a less comprehensive and analysis of the subject. To mitigate this limitation, this study chooses the most relevant headlines to the Gultang's war and peace journalism criteria.

The term 'neutral', which will be seen in the coming pages, refers to news and stories that hold a potential of being cautiously categorized as peace journalism but do not explicitly and adequately meet the theoretical framework requirements to be defined as either peace or war journalism. In other word, neutral in the context of this study means a news that does not use an emotional or provoking language, lacking potential for interpretation of a report. A neutral content can be as the same as these sentences: *Next Round of Doha Talks to Resume Tuesday* (TOLONews). *Biden administration resumes Taliban peace talks* (CNN). *Pakistan-US hold talks on restarting intra-Afghan peace talks* (Al Jazeera).

Emphasizing on *multi-party/Two parties reporting* in Galtung's model, the study also explored peace and war journalism by examining of the selected media reporting based on their coverage diversity. Moreover, this article classified the selected media' reports as peace or war journalism with regards to *people-oriented, visible impact of the conflict* (military photos plus damages), and *military vocabulary*. The paper looked at military photos showing soldiers with equipment or photos of places where buildings, houses, and other structures have been destroyed due to conflict. Likewise, this study looked into the military terminology used in the headlines of each media outlet's reporting and Op-Eds. Finally, the time constraints associated with conducting further research on the subject matter of this study may limit the results comprehensiveness and their in-depth exploration.

4. Findings and Analysis

A total of 229 reports, including Op-Eds, roundtables, and interviews about the intra-Afghan peace talks were published. Out of these reports, TOLONews allocated 132 (57.64%), CNN published 59 (25.77%), and Al Jazeera posted 38 (16.59%).

Media	TOLONews	CNN	Al Jazeera	Total
Number of reports	132	59	38	229
Percentage (%)	57.64	25.77	16.59	100

Table 2: Distribution of Reports according to the Selected Media Outlets

Table 2 shows that, compared to CNN and Al Jazeera, TOLONews has given the intra-Afghan peace talks the highest coverage, regardless of whether war or peace journalism is being deployed. This indicates that TOLONews was more concerned about the peace talks, as it may have expected a direct effect from the negotiations, either favourable or unfavourable.

As also shown in Table 3, in contrast to CNN and Al Jazeera, TOLONews covered the talks in a diversified framework. It implies that, in comparison to the other two media outlets, TOLOws may offer a chance to apply peace journalism.

Media Outlets	TOLONews	CNN	Al Jazeera	Total
News	106	42	26	174
Op-Ed	12	14	11	37
Interview	4	00	00	4
Roundtable	4	00	00	4
Ad hoc report on people	6	3	1	10
Grand Total				229

Table 3: Distribution of Reports according to Diversification

Since it offers a potential opportunity for *multi-party framing*, the diversity in coverage of the peace negotiations can serve peace journalism. Table 3 has revealed that TOLONews applied this manner of coverage appropriately than the other two.

CNN and Al Jazeera are in the same status of diverse coverage of the talks, but with a difference in quantity. CNN ranked the second after TOLONews in terms of reporting. Additionally, taking the criteria of war journalism ‘*here and now*’ into consideration, the entire three media outlets performed in accordance with the war journalism. The ‘*here and now*’ approach focuses on the current situation concerning the conflict. Some examples are provided hereunder for each selected media outlet:

A Taliban delegation in Moscow said on Friday that it will not attack provincial centres – despite fighting by the group on the outskirts of many cities, including Qala-e-Naw in Badghis, over the last three days...Insufficient progress in the Doha peace talks and the escalation of the war all over Afghanistan has drawn strong criticism among the people of Afghanistan (TOLONews).

US ‘not ready to throw in the towel’ on Afghan talks even as Taliban violence grows. Talks with Taliban are making ‘very little progress’ as militant group gains momentum, says Afghan official (CNN).

Taliban kills 28 police officials as Doha peace talks continue... Some freed Taliban returned to battlefield: Top Afghan official: ABDULLAH (Al-Jazeera).

However, TOLONews conducted interviews, roundtables and ad hoc reports on people. These programmes potentially carry some sort of opportunities in favour of peace journalism. Because such kind of programmes, especially those that deal with the subject matter of this study, typically cover a wide range of topics including discussion of the conflict’s root causes, reflecting voice of people, and ways to encourage peace. These issues are clearly evident in the

War and Peace Journalism: The Role of Local and International Media during the Intra-Afghan Peace Talks

roundtables that TOLONews hosted. Diversification in coverage of the peace talks provided a chance for TOLONews to have interviewed people or parties involved in negotiations, where it brought more information and thoughts related to the peace talks to the eyes of public. As a case in point, of the four interviews, TOLONews interviewed two officials from the government and two from the Taliban. In doing so, this media deployed relatively impartiality as one of the significant criteria for peace journalism reporting thanks to those multiple coverage programmes and frameworks. For these reasons, a media with diverse coverage programmes has a potential room for peace journalism rather than of those lacking such activities.

The following tables classify the reports to peace and war journalism based on the overall characteristics of these two concepts mentioned under the theoretical framework.

Media Outlet	Peace Journalism	War Journalism	Neutral	Total
TOLONews	34	68	30	132
CNN	10	47	2	59
Al Jazeera	6	17	15	38
Grand Total				229

Table 4: Distribution of the Reports according to Peace and War Journalism

Here are some examples for peace and war journalism reporting mentioned in table 4.

Outlet	Peace Journalism (Solution-oriented)	War Journalism (Victory-oriented)
TOLONews	<i>"Aisha Khurram writes that there's a need for a bottom-up approach led and owned by the Afghan youth to accompany the elite-driven peace process."</i> ¹⁵	<i>"Asadullah Khalid, acting defense minister, speaking at the handover of four new A-29 Super Tucano attack aircraft to the Afghan forces on Thursday, said that the Afghan army will not allow any deal that compromises the achievements of the past two decades."</i> ¹⁶
CNN	<i>"Biden is making a major mistake on Afghanistan: Without question, between now and September, Biden and his top diplomats will be making their most valiant efforts to ensure a peace that can last beyond America's departure. Indeed, there may even be some Taliban elements who will do their best to negotiate a deal that can be sold to the American people as a face-saving victory and still pave the way for a rapid withdrawal of US forces"</i> ¹⁷	<i>"The Taliban now control half of Afghanistan's provincial capitals"</i> ¹⁸
Al Jazeera	<i>"Peace can still be achieved in Afghanistan... With the US and the world signalling their interest in Afghanistan is waning, it is time for Afghans to take the lead in the negotiations and to agree on a permanent ceasefire and a peace settlement"</i> ¹⁹	<i>"Taliban cheers Trump vowing early troop withdrawal, Kabul sceptic"</i> ²⁰

¹⁵ Saving the Future of Afghanistan: It Truly Is 'Now or Never' | TOLONews

¹⁶ Army 'Will Not Allow' Setback to Republic's Gains: Khalid | TOLONews

¹⁷ Opinion: President Joe Biden is making a major mistake on Afghanistan | CNN

¹⁸ The Taliban now control half of Afghanistan's provincial capitals | CNN

¹⁹ Peace can still be achieved in Afghanistan | NATO | Al Jazeera

Regarding the examples for Table 4, TOLONews reflected a content, on the peace journalism side, which concerns about structural shortcoming of the peace process. To further strength the peace process, the author of content proposed a bottom-up approach, focusing on youths to be included in the decision makings related to peace talks. The proposal is a solution on how to reach a lasting and comprehensive peace. This is aligned with the solution-oriented approach in peace journalism, which explores on the role of structures in peace and conflicts, peace initiatives and alike. On the other hand, the sentence “*Afghan army will not allow any deal that compromises the achievements of the past two decades*” implicitly seeks peace from a military victorious point of view. The defence minister asserted that the army is able to continue the war should there be a compromise on it. The language is not encouraging peace, rather showcasing the army’s power to the Taliban since the statement was being made in a military occasion.

CNN warns the United States about its hasty withdrawal’s consequences on peace talks in Afghanistan. The author criticised Biden being not genuine to bring peace in Afghanistan, rather to end the US war against the Taliban. Similarly, the Taliban use, according to CNN, the negotiation to encourage the US to withdraw quickly. This would jeopardize then on-going intra-Afghan peace talks. The warning came true with the collapse of peace talks between the Taliban and the government. As for as the war journalism is concerned, CNN portrayed a victory approach reporting by speaking on the Taliban advancement throughout the country. This report potentially exaggerated on the violent victory.

The headline for Al Jazeera over peace journalism attempts to give hopes on the future of the peace talks. To materialise this hope, the author suggested an agreement on ceasefire to reach a peaceful settlement of the conflict. Encouraging peace, he tried to prevent the society to get desperate for intra-Afghan negotiations by the US withdrawal. However, the way Al Jazeera portrayed the second headline, indicated a victory-oriented language concerning the Taliban.

²⁰ Taliban cheers Trump vowing early troop withdrawal, Kabul sceptic | Taliban News | Al Jazeera

Media Outlet	Total reports	Peace Journalism	War Journalism	Neutral
TOLOnews	132	25.75%	51.52%	22.73%
CNN	59	16.94%	79.67%	3.39%
Al Jazeera	38	15.78%	44.74%	39.48%

Table 5: Percentage of War and Peace Journalism Coverage by each Media

Tables 4 and 5 show, of the 132 reports that TOLOnews published about intra-Afghan peace talks, 34 (25.75%) depicted peace journalism, 68 (51.52%) portrayed war journalism, and 30 (22.73%) deployed neither peace nor war journalism. Of 59 reports published on CNN, 10 (16.94%) set out peace journalism, 47 (79.67%) characterized war journalism, and 2 (3.39%) drew a neutral status. Finally, of the 38 news that were published concerning the talks, Al Jazeera used 6 (15.78%) for peace journalism, 17 (44.74%) for war journalism, and 15 (39.84%) for neutral reporting. The followings are some example of peace and war journalism for every single selected media outlet. Each instance is identified with an indicator enshrined in the theoretical model.

Media Outlet	Peace Journalism (Indicators used)	War Journalism (Indicators used)	Neutral
TOLOnews	<p>(i) <i>Afghans Fear Losing Gains in Women's Rights in Peace</i> (ii) <i>Afghans Will Suffer if Peace Fails.</i></p> <p>-----</p> <p>These are some examples for those kind of news which are people-oriented. The current headlines expressed demands of the people and implicitly cautioned that peace talks should regard voice of women and reach an agreement. The current situation in Afghanistan which is resulted from the failure of the peace negotiations, confirm the accuracy of TOLOnews prediction on the suffer of people.</p>	<p><i>As Violence Intensifies, Abdullah Asks Taliban to Engage in Talks</i></p> <p>-----</p> <p>This example is regarded as war journalism reporting. Because it included military vocabulary, violence-orientation, and here and now. The report focused on a current situation where there is an increase in violence. This violence led the government to ask for peace talks. The main concentration is on military advance of the Taliban.</p>	<p><i>Next Round of Doha Talks to Resume Tuesday.</i></p> <p>-----</p> <p>This sentence neither reflects peace and war journalisms characteristics explicitly. Hence, it is categorized as neutral.</p>
CNN	<p>(i) <i>What civilians in Afghanistan say about America's withdrawal?</i> (ii) <i>For Afghan women, the US rhetoric of liberation has fallen short.</i></p> <p>-----</p> <p>Critical/people oriented has been used in these headlines. The United States as a player in the conflict has been criticized for its policy on Afghanistan's peace.</p>	<p>(i) <i>Taliban threaten to seize first provincial capital as fighting intensifies across Afghanistan.</i> (ii) <i>Besieged on a 'Taliban-made island,' Kandahar's residents see no way out as militants advance ever closer.</i></p> <p>----</p> <p>The present report has used violence, military vocabulary, and victory language, which make it as war journalism reporting.</p>	<p><i>Biden administration resumes Taliban peace talks.</i></p> <p>-----</p> <p>This sentence neither reflects peace and war journalisms characteristics explicitly. Hence, it is categorized as neutral.</p>

Al Jazeera	<p><i>Afghanistan: Peace demands sacrifice.</i></p> <p>-----</p> <p>This example encouraged all parties involved in the negotiations to acknowledge that peace would not be achieved if they do not show flexibility and concession during the negotiations. With a long-term perspective, the report asks the negotiation parties to compromise their personal and short term interest for a durable peace.</p>	<p><i>(i) Taliban kills 28 police officials as Doha peace talks continue. (ii) Dozens killed in fighting in Afghanistan as peace talks continue.</i></p> <p>----</p> <p>such a reporting approach in a circumstances where the peace negotiations are underway hider the public sense and the negotiating sides towards result of the talks. This a violence-based portray that could make the society and the parties concerned pessimistic for peace. here and now, military vocabulary and victory-based characteristics of war journalism are used.</p>	<p><i>Pakistan-US hold talks on restarting intra-Afghan peace talks.</i></p> <p>.....</p> <p>This sentence neither reflects peace and war journalisms characteristics explicitly. Hence, it is categorized as neutral.</p>
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Table 4 and 5 demonstrate that while all the selected media focused on war journalism more than peace journalism, TOLONews allocated a significant portion of its reporting to peace journalism compared to CNN and Al Jazeera. One of the reasons that might have contributed to the rise in war journalism on CNN part can often be related to focusing on the US departure from Afghanistan. When it comes to war and peace reporting, Al Jazeera has achieved a somewhat balanced coverage than CNN. Conversely, the greatest proportion of neutrality, as defined under the method, indicates a degree of indifference by Al Jazeera about applying either war or peace journalism to the talks.

In those tables, the paper defined the percentage of peace and war journalism in relation to the reports published on each media outlet separately. In table 6, this article will repeat the same process while taking the entire study's population (229 reports) into consideration.

Media Outlet	Peace Journalism	War Journalism	Neutral	Study's population
TOLONews	14.85% (34)	29.70% (68)	13.1% (30)	229 (100%)
CNN	4.36% (10)	20.53% (47)	0.88% (2)	
Al Jazeera	2.63% (6)	7.43% (17)	6.55% (15)	

Table 6: Percentage of Peace and War Journalism based on the Entire Study's Population

Though, table 6 illustrates that war journalism continues to be the most common reporting approach for all the chosen media, CNN and Al Jazeera being far less comparable with TOLONews in terms of peace journalism deployment. TOLONews accounts for around 15% of the total population (299 reports), while CNN and Al Jazeera combined make less than half (6.72%) of this contribution. This table discovers a consistent position of TOLONews in terms of leading peace journalism compared to those two media outlets.

Furthermore, in order to support the findings in tables 4 to 6, this paper has elaborated on peace and war journalism using people-oriented reporting, the conflict visible effects, and military vocabulary indicators.

Media	People Oriented	Visible impact of the conflict (military photos plus damages)	Military vocabulary
TOLOnews	13 (9.85%)	12 (9%)	20 (15%)
CNN	5 (8.48)	31 (52.54%)	30 (50%)
Al Jazeera	2 (5.26%)	4 (10.53)	10 (26.31)

Table 7: Distribution of Reports according to People Oriented, Visible Impact of the Conflict, and Military Vocabulary Considering the Total Reports on each Media (132, 59, and 38)

Both the visible impact of the conflict and military vocabulary can be seen on the photos displayed on page 14. The terms “blast, troops, Taliban fighters, armed group, and capture” represent deployment of military vocabulary by the selected media outlets, as mentioned in the preceding pages of this article. Concerning the visible impact of the conflict, Al Jazeera and TOLOnews did post some regular images of soldiers and rebels, whereas CNN posted combined images of military and damaged areas. Furthermore, it has been figured out that officials, authorities, and elites make up the absolute majority of the sources for the news published by all, with some contrast, of these media. In spite that table 8 still reflects war journalism as a common aspect of reporting in all those three media, TOLOnews appears to continue its pioneering contribution to peace journalism, focusing, to some extent, on people-oriented reporting, as opposed to CNN and Al Jazeera.



Source and explanation: CNN - Afghanistan-kabul-car-blast-08-04-2021



US Troops in Afghanistan (TOLONews, 21 Feb 2021)



Al-Jazeera (12 August 2021): Taliban fighters patrol inside the city of Ghazni, southwest of Kabul, which the armed group captured on Thursday

The examples for people oriented can also be seen as follow:

TOLONews (people-oriented)	CNN (people-oriented)	Al Jazeera (people-oriented)
<i>Afghans Urge Unity, End to Violence on the Threshold of Talks: “The Afghan people are tired of the war. They want a lasting and real peace,” said Mohammad Hamid, a resident of Herat.²¹</i>	<i>The next chapter of the story of Afghan women does not have to be a tragedy (CNN)²².</i>	<i>A peace deal alone cannot solve Afghanistan’s myriad problems: There is a need for a clear plan to address systemic problems such as corruption that undermine reconstruction and development efforts in Afghanistan²³.</i>

TOLONews devoted around 10% of its 132 reports to representing the voice of people directly or indirectly, 9% to the invisible effects of conflict, and 15% of the total reports contained military terms. CNN attributed 8.5% of its 59 reports to voice of people (not directly

²¹ <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan/afghans-urge-unity-end-violence-threshold-talks>

²² <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/06/04/opinions/afghan-women-us-withdrawal-lemmon/index.html>

²³ <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2020/11/6/a-peace-deal-alone-cannot-solve-afghanistans-myrriad-problems>

War and Peace Journalism: The Role of Local and International Media during the Intra-Afghan Peace Talks

in most cases), 52.54% to the visual effects of conflict, and 50% to the usage of military terminology. Finally, Al Jazeera assigned 5.26% of its 38 reports to people-oriented issues, 10.53% to visible impact of war, and 26.31 to military terms.

TOLONews conducted interview with the ordinary people to ask them for their opinions and demands from the peace talks. As an example, a citizen from Herat province stated how a lasting conflict frustrated the people. They were eager for peace. The reporting of this kind could have influenced the decision makers in both sides of the conflict if the media enhanced and adapted people-oriented approach during peace negotiations. Because the conflicting parties would think they would lose the support of public if did not progress in peace talks.

The concerns of the women of Afghanistan over their future, reflected by CNN, and the importance of a comprehensive plan for peace, reflected by Al Jazeera, both reminded the decision makers to prioritise the public interest through effective mechanisms that could produce perpetuate peace. Though the selected media deployed an aspect of this kind coverage for the intra-Afghan peace negotiations, they remained ineffective in relation to the peace talks due to dominance of war journalism.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study sought to understand how the local and international media covered the intra-Afghan peace negotiations. The overarching findings of the study about coverage of the intra-Afghan peace talks by TOLONews, CNN, and Al Jazeera can be filed into three categories: coverage quantity, coverage variety, and coverage type in relation to war and peace journalisms.

Category	TOLONews	CNN	Al Jazeera
Coverage Quantity	TOLONews ranks on the top as it covered the peace negotiation with the highest number of reports (132 reports).	CNN ranks in the second position (59 reports).	Al Jazeera received the last position (38 reports)
Coverage variety	In terms of diversity in coverage on peace negotiations, TOLONews distinct with an upper hand since it offers a variety of reporting framework and programmes, including interviews, Op-Eds, and ad hoc reports on people demands.	CNN mostly focused on regular reporting and Op-Eds.	Al Jazeera mostly focused on regular reporting and Op-Eds.

<i>Coverage Type: War or Peace Journalism</i>	Deployed war journalism as predominant reporting approach rather than peace journalism. However, comparatively speaking, TOLONews incorporated peace journalism more effectively than CNN and Al Jazeera, although war journalism remained dominant.	CNN focused on war journalism in general	Al Jazeera appeared to have not created an extreme distance between war and peace journalism reporting in comparison to CNN. Nonetheless, it also allocated most of its reports to war journalism.
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The findings potentially suggest that the local media applied peace journalism more successfully than the international media, even though they did not cover the peace talks with an emphasis on peace journalism adequately. To give an example, as a result of war journalism dominance, people were not being aware sufficiently of the consequences of the mechanisms deployed in the Doha peace process. The process began with US-Taliban negotiations, excluding the Afghan government as the primary party to the conflict. The media, especially local, did not conduct serious discussions on the consequences of the government's exclusion from the talks. As was seen later, the US-Taliban deal, signed on February 29, 2020, undermined the leverage of the Islamic Republic in the intra-Afghan peace talks, and thus the negotiations failed.

A brief examination of the current study's findings and focus in relation to ongoing discussions reveals that this research makes a valuable contribution to the literature by offering a fresh perspective on the media within the context of Afghanistan. For instance, Lynch and Fear (2023) contended that local media did not adequately support peace negotiations; however, their analysis is confined solely to local media. The current research discovered that while the implementation of peace journalism by local media is not satisfying, they are comparatively in a more favourable position than the prominent international media. Likewise, the objectives and findings of the studies carried out by Raiszada (2023), Elham, Haand, and Aidiq (2021), Rahimi, Ziarmal, and Jalil (2021), as well as Mohmoodi, Saeed, and Rahman (2021), diverge from those presented in this paper. Each of these works addressed various topics, including the role of local media in fostering peace, the portrayal of the Afghan conflict by the New York Times and Daily Mail, the reporting on the conflict involving the Taliban, ISIS-Khorasan, and the United States by TOLONews, Ariana, and Azadi Radio, and the approaches employed by local photographic media regarding peace negotiations (for additional information, refer to the literature review). A comprehensive review of supplementary literature was also conducted, encompassing works by Auzarmi (2024), Sakhawati and Maihanyar (2023), Nijat (2022), Aria, Bayan, and Hazeem (n.d.), as well as Mahdiyar (2021).

Auzarmi utilized a theoretical framework similar to this study; however, he specifically investigates the news reporting tendencies of Afghanistan's broadcast media. His focus is on determining whether these media outlets emphasise truth, the public interest, and solutions, or if they lean towards propaganda, elite agendas, and narratives of victory, possibly undermining national interests. His initial findings indicate that Afghanistan's broadcast media, such as TOLONews, plays a role in fostering positive coverage of events occurring within the country. The findings of Auzarmi, while seemingly aligned with the findings of this study regarding local media, especially TOLONews, arise from distinct contexts. Auzarmi emphasizes the local media's role in fostering social understanding, education, and protecting national interest, whereas the present study unpacks media within the framework of peace and conflict, specifically concentrating on intra-Afghan negotiations. Sakhawati and Maihanyar employed a distinct methodology, utilizing questionnaire techniques, to investigate the level of trust in TOLONews and BBC among the populace. Their findings have suggested that TOLONews emerged as the most trusted source. Furthermore, in their semi-structured interviews, Aria, Bayan, and Hazeem examined the influence of local media, particularly TOLONews, on fostering political engagement within the community. The findings indicated that TOLONews had a beneficial impact. Mahdiar examines the coverage of terrorist activities by TOLONews in Afghanistan. His research reveals that TOLONews lacks the competence to function as a socially responsible media outlet within the Afghan context. The primary issues identified in the news reported by TOLONews include misleading and sensitive headlines, overly brief leads, and inadequate contextual information. Although TOLONews serves as a shared reference point between the current study and Mahidiar's research, each examines it from distinct perspectives. The former investigates whether this media outlet maintained an appropriate approach to reporting on terrorist activities amid the ongoing incidents in Afghanistan, while the latter focuses on analysing the portrayal of peace and conflict in TOLONews coverage during the peace negotiations.

To conclude on the existing reviewed debates, none of them have explored war and peace journalism (i) in relation to the intra-Afghan peace talks and (ii) a comparative analysis of both local and international media regarding this subject. The present study has now addressed this gap to further enrich the relevant literature.

The practical importance of this paper arises from the ongoing unresolved conflict in Afghanistan. This indicates that a resolution may once more depend on negotiations. In light of this perspective, the study provides practitioners with valuable insights regarding the critical role

of the media in fostering potential peace initiatives aimed at achieving a sustainable political resolution to the conflict.

Eventually, the study fills a crucial gap by offering a comparative analysis of war and peace journalism in context of the intra-Afghan peace talks. Given Afghanistan's ongoing conflict, media's role in shaping public discourse and influencing future negotiations remains a critical area for further investigation. The comprehensiveness and depth of this study could have been more significantly enhanced had there not been a time constraint.

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