

Siachen conflict between India and Pakistan: How politics and national security trumps environmental concerns

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Abstract

This paper looks at the conflict between India and Pakistan on Siachen glacier since April 1984. The killing of 138 people after an avalanche struck Siachen in April 2012 was the biggest tragedy in the history of this bilateral conflict. After such a major incident, the coverage of Indian and Pakistani newspapers still highlighted politics and national security issues instead of environmental concerns. This study analyses the coverage of this incident in three elite English language dailies, Express Tribune (Pakistan), Hindustan Times (India) and the New York Times (United States). The purpose of this research is to answer the research question as to how political and national security considerations trump environmental issues. Nitz and West (2000) have looked at the framing of environmental news stories during the presidential campaign of Al-Gore and George W. Bush in 2000 while using the framing design of Iyengar (1991). Applying the same framing design to Siachen conflict, this research analyses whether the coverage in three English newspapers was thematic (placing events in broader context and their effects) or episodic (simple event-based or statement-based coverage). This study also looks at the tone, responsibility and solutions offered, sources quoted and image versus issue frames. The results of this content analysis show that the newspapers in India and Pakistan focus on episodic framing and highlights conflict, as compared to the New York Times that focuses on thematic framing while highlighting Siachen as an environmental tragedy. How the newspapers are framing this dispute is important in the context of how the governments as well as the general public on both sides of the border look at the issue and think about the possibilities for its resolution. Other than media coverage, this issue has attracted very little scholarly attention. This research attempts to fill that much-needed gap.

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India is one of the world's most populous countries, located in South Asia, with more than one billion people. Pakistan, India's neighbor, is also a developing country with more than 180 million people. Both countries have had a hostile relationship since independence from the British in August 1947 while both suffer from a lack of infrastructure and severe environmental challenges. Kreft and Eckstein (2013) have ranked Pakistan at number 12 and India at number 18 amongst all the countries of the world in the Global Climate Risk Index for the period during 1993 to 2012. A bilateral conflict on the control of Siachen glacier between India and Pakistan has worried international community for many years (McArthur, 2010). The water of the glacier flows into the Indus river, which is used by people in both India and Pakistan. This water is getting contaminated because of military activity as troops are dumping over 1000 tons of waste at the glacier daily. Duparcq (2012) has pointed out that the militarization of the glacier had hastened its melting and it could completely melt in another three decades. This would have serious implications for global warming and water resources in both India and Pakistan.

The killing of 138 people after an avalanche struck Siachen on April 7, 2012 was the biggest tragedy in the history of bilateral conflict between India and Pakistan over the control of the Siachen glacier. Instead of drawing attention to the environmental degradation of the glacier in the aftermath of such a major incident, the coverage of Indian and Pakistani newspapers still highlighted political conflict and national security frames. This has the potential to likely form opinion of the public and opinion makers in a way that they are hesitant to take any step for resolution of the dispute. The tragic death of 140 people, including soldiers, at Siachen in April 2012 prompted the country's army chief to call for troops withdrawal for peace between both countries. However, in covering the news story, Express Tribune (2012), did not mention any environmental hazards that also needed to be taken into consideration to merit such an action. Following Pakistani army chief's statement, Pakistan's major English daily, Dawn (2012), carried a report, quoting Foreign Office spokesperson, hinting at a possible dialogue on Siachen. However, the official's remarks as well as the overall tone of the report was rooted in the national security and conflict-resolution frame with no mention of any environmental impact. However, Sawant and Aroor (2012), writing for India Today, termed the ceasefire on Siachen an attempt for political point scoring. It blamed the Indian Prime Minister for trying to gift the glacier to Pakistan and ruin the gains of the military. The entire story was built on the narrative frame, citing military sources, to justify why India should not withdraw troops.

This study analyses the coverage of this incident in the elite English press of Pakistan, India and the United States. How the issue is framed in the elite press can have very important implications on public discourse and for policy makers in both countries. McCombs, Shaw and Weaver (1997) have pointed out that framing is an extension of agenda setting. They described the agenda-setting function of media to make people understand not what to think, but rather what to think about. This is an important distinction in the context of conflicts like the Siachen glacier, where the framing in media can direct public opinion to look at it as a political and national security issue, instead of primarily being an environmental tragedy. When the media makes the audience understand that an issue is basically political in nature with national security at stake, the environmental concerns attached to it are moved to the background or made to look less threatening despite having far-reaching implications on future generations. This becomes even more of a concern in case of India and

Pakistan where the environmental degradation and pace of global warming (Kreft and Eckstein, 2013) is already under scrutiny.

History of Siachen glacier conflict

India and Pakistan are two neighboring countries in South Asia, which were created as two separate countries in August 1947 after the British left the Indian subcontinent. Both countries have had a history of hostile relations over the last six decades on a number of issues and have fought three wars. Amongst other bilateral issues, occupation of Siachen glacier in the Himalayan region has become a major dispute between both countries. This conflict started in April 1984 as a military standoff but has evolved into a major environmental issues ever since, with implications for both sides of the border. Ali (2002) has chronicled the history of the dispute and informed that Pakistani forces were occupying the southern slopes of the Saltoro ridge at the Siachen glacier whereas Indian forces occupied the northern slopes. Indian forces are also in control of the key passes of the approximately 6300 meters high glacier, including Sia La (6160 meters) and Bilafond (5550 meters). The Indian forces had moved first in 1984 to take position at the glacier before Pakistan reacted. Raghavan (2002) has pointed out how both governments (India and Pakistan) consider Siachen glacier as a matter of strategic importance with no end to the conflict in sight. This is despite the fact that the extreme weather at the Siachen glacier is causing severe health problems for the troops (like sun burn and acute depression etc.) stationed there as well. India Today (2004) mentioned environmental degradation of the glacier because of global warming and military activities. The newspaper also pointed towards scientific evidence to highlight that “the core of the glacier was melting”, quoting reports of IUCN and UIAA in support of the argument while mentioning that troops from both India and Pakistan were dumping around 1000 tons of garbage every day. The glacier could dry up in 50 years or so. Duparcq (2012) identified the environmental impact of the conflict and pointed out that the glacier had melted almost 30 percent (six miles) in 35 years, in addition to leaking poisonous materials in the Indus River that is used by people in both countries. He pointed towards poverty in both countries to throw light on the high cost of military conflict that could be better served elsewhere. Iqbal (2013), writing in *The Nation*, highlighted environmental hazards confronting the glacier while citing reports of Greenwatch, World Meteorological Index Organization and United Nations to draw attention towards climate change and call for immediate action on Siachen.

BBC (2012) dubbed Siachen glacier as the world’s highest battlefield. Easen (2003), writing for CNN, said that the extreme weather conditions at Siachen had claimed more lives than actual gunfight. Quoting unnamed environmentalists, the story highlighted environmental impacts of the conflict for both countries. “Military activities have sent tons of chemicals onto the surface of glacier, polluting the headwaters of the Indus river (used by people on both sides of the border)”, he mentioned while adding that the high altitude was causing soldiers to suffer from pulmonary and cerebral edema, headaches and hypertension, he said. He, however, saw no chance of the dispute resolving as long as there was deadlock between India and Pakistan on the issue of Kashmir valley.

The conflict understandably has attracted a lot of media attention over the years in both India and Pakistan besides the international media. However, the media in India and Pakistan has mostly framed Siachen conflict in terms of political conflict and national security frames, and ignored its environmental hazards. This kind of framing has serious implications for the public on both sides of the border because they don’t consider Siachen an environmental tragedy in the making despite suffering from its adverse impacts, as Kamker’s (2006) study found out.

Khan (2012) has also looked at the avalanche tragedy that killed 138 people. He argued that both the countries (India and Pakistan) were involved in a useless war because each of them considered Siachen of strategic interest, but were ignoring the human and environmental fallout of this dispute. Ali (2012), commenting on the tragedy, wrote that more soldiers were dying because of health problems on the glacier instead of battle wounds. He contradicted the popular opinion that having control of Siachen served strategic interest of either country (India or Pakistan). Bemoaning lack of action by the politicians, he proposed the idea of converting the glacier into a peace park and a site for scientists to explore. Lynch (2001) has maintained that the production of news is not a one-way stream, because its consumption and feedback by the audience can have a significant influence on the course of events. McGoldrick and Lynch (2000) make an important point when they argue that the understanding of conflict by journalists can contribute towards war and peace. Iggers (1998) has questioned the norm of objectivity of news reporting and believes that it is as good as dead. Even in a crumbling state, this norm of objectivity continued to remain an obstacle in the journalists playing a more responsible role in social life or in conflicts.

Framing environment as a conflict

Druckman (2001) has maintained that media frames could include words, images, phrases, and presentation styles when it comes to conveying information about any particular issue to the audience. Chong and Druckman (2007) found out that the media frames repeated most frequently have the most effect on the thought-processes and opinions of the audience. Maslog, Lees and Kim (2006, p. 25) have referred to news frames as “an interpretive structure that sets specific events within a comprehensive context.” They pointed out that conflict as a news frame points towards its usage as a news value by the journalists. They argued that news was not just a reflection or reporting of a conflict, but it is rather influenced by the construction of the conflict for a society. With traditional rivalry towards each other trickling down to the level of general public in both India and Pakistan, it is not beyond comprehension that the elite press can also pick up that sentiment and start looking through bilateral issues (particularly those with an environmental angle) through a conflict-oriented lens. Richards (2001), who studied conflict resolution language, showed that journalists rely on conflict to tell the news and apply a ‘fighting frame’ by focusing on positions without exploring what lies behind them. Crandon and Sigletary (1999) looked at the environmental coverage of two competing newspapers in the United States and found that economic interests of a given community can make a newspaper tailor its environmental coverage in order to make environmental issue look less threatening than it actually is. They argued that this tendency becomes particularly dangerous because most of the people never experience the issue in question first-hand and only come to know about it through the media. Therefore, they start believing what they are made to see. It is interesting how one media outlet can frame an environmental issue as threatening and the other frames it as non-threatening, despite there being scientific consensus about it. The same can be said about the political and national interests in the context of this study, which can easily push environmental concerns in the background. The mediated communication through media can be confusing instead of providing clarity if the frames are used under such influences. Such news stories hide more than what they reveal about the environmental issues and their underlying dynamics.

Cox (2012) argues that conflict is one of the major journalism norms invoked by the reporters and editors for judging the newsworthiness of a news story. He has maintained that the tendency of reporters and editors is to try and fit an environmental news story according to these values before deciding whether to accommodate or reject it. When there are militaries of two countries at loggerheads, highlighting conflict as a news frame can become a major reason behind the flawed

covered of environmental issues like Siachen glacier. Entman (1993, p. 52) has maintained that “to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described”. Tankard, Hendrickson, Silberman, Bliss, and Ghanem (1991, page 3) have identified media frame as “the central organizing idea for news content that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion and elaboration”.

In analyzing such coverage frames, it is also important which details related to the issue are presented to the audience as facts and who is given a voice. Reis (1999) found that government officials were the most dominating voice in the media when it comes to talking about the environmental issues. It is not unimaginable then that these officials will thrive on misinformation to suit their own interests. Boykoff and Boykoff (2004) analyzed the coverage of US prestige press, the New York Times, the Washington Post, the Los Angeles Times and the Wall Street Journal to find out how these newspapers were contributing to the public discourse on global warming. They found that government officials, using arguments made by skeptics of global warming, were the most cited source in prestige press articles instead of the scientists. At a time when scientific community had reached a general consensus about the need for immediate and necessary action to check global warming, only 10.63 percent articles, in the Boykoff and Boykoff study, favored immediate and mandatory action. There are times when the journalists reporting on climate change are themselves not clear about the enormity of the problem and its possible causes or actions required for tackling it. When Pakistan’s national security advisor recently urged India to withdraw troops from Siachen as their presence was detrimental to environment and Pakistan’s water resources. Pakistan Today (2013) carried his remarks but did not try to back up the story with additional facts. The assertions made by the minister, being an authoritative figure, were considered enough, using the narrative frame. Prominence of the issue as well as the personality, and the nature of conflict contributed to the newsworthiness. Indian Express (2013) relied on military sources to dismiss the call from Pakistan government for withdrawing troops from Siachen on account of threats to environment. The paper’s report cited military officials to justify their presence on the glacier because of its strategic importance. The report, without quoting any source, mentioned that the army had taken steps like using renewable energy sources at the glacier; thereby implying that things were under control and environment was not really under threat. The report did not incorporate any of the threats earlier reported by international environmental groups to counter the military’s viewpoint. Literature provides evidence that how this confusion is deliberately spread through media under the norm of justifying newsworthiness. Corbett and Durfee (2004) study pointed out that the way environmental issues like global warming are framed in the media have a significant influence at how the audience views these issues. It is no surprise then that the majority of general public in India and Pakistan view Siachen glacier as a bilateral conflict and not as an environmental problem.

The tendency to shift the blame on the other side can also make the audience think that they are not the cause of problem. This trend becomes even more profound when the issue involved is between two traditionally hostile neighbors like India and Pakistan. Carvalho (2007) looked at the coverage of climate change in Indian print media and found out that the journalists reporting these issues didn’t think that the cause of global warming in India was indigenous. This “us versus them” can easily transfer in the audience and make them even more insensitive to the problem. Sniderman and Theriault (2004) found evidence in support of this line of argument. He believed that the audience tended to believe in the frame that was more consistent with their own values. It is no surprise that these values are mostly defined through media frames in the first place. Moreover, if the journalists are

not clear themselves about what is causing the problem and how to address, they become part of problem and this confusion can also lead their audience to think climate change is not such a big issue as it is being made out to be. The Hindu (2013) mentioned that civil society groups had also been debating the Siachen issue and there had been suggestions to declare the glacier a protected area. The report did not point towards any major environmental threats that have been well documents by scientific and international advocacy groups during the previous years on a consistent basis.

Theoretical Framework

Nitz and West (2000) have looked at the framing of environmental news stories during the presidential campaign of Al-Gore and George W. Bush in 2000 while using the framing design of Iyengar (1991). They divided news content primarily in two categories, thematic and episodic, in terms of their content. Thematic framing was defined as an attempted to “place events in a broad context of related events, show effects of events, and discuss possible implications of outcomes that may result” (p. 208). This could apprise the audience with relevant knowledge regarding the social, political and historical details, in addition to the cause and effect, of the issue concerned. On the other hand, episodic framing mainly “presents public issues as singly, concrete events, as specific case histories, and instances occurring more or less in isolation. It only provides snapshots of an issue, with any explanations based upon sensational and emotional appeal” (p. 208). Iyengar (1991) had argued that it is difficult to find a news story that is either entirely thematic or entirely episodic, and it was normal to find stories invoking both kinds of frame. However, it was possible that the focus of the news story was either predominantly thematic or predominantly episodic. It was up to the audience of a news story to make-up their mind after reading it whether they considered it primarily thematic or episodic. Many studies, including Iyengar (1991) and Nitz and West (2000) found that majority of the environmental news stories used the episodic framing. This resulted in giving an impression to the audience that the issue was not that important and the focus tended to shift away from the real problem. Nitz and West (2000) included five additional frames in their study. These included responsibility and solutions, tone, sources, political campaign frames-image versus issue, and type of environmental issue. Boykoff and Boykoff (2004) analyzed the coverage of US prestige press, the New York Times, the Washington Post, the Los Angeles Times and the Wall Street Journal to find out how these newspapers were contributing to the public discourse on global warming during 1988-2002. They found that the government officials, using arguments made by skeptics of global warming, were the most cited source in prestige press articles. At a time when scientific community had reached a general consensus about the need for immediate and necessary action to check global warming, only 10.63 percent articles in the Boykoff and Boykoff (2004) study favoured immediate and mandatory action. The main reason given for this was that lack of action suited the agendas of the sources used in these stories.

This research aimed to test the following hypothesis:

H1: When the Express Tribune and the Hindustan Times covered the Siachen glacier tragedy, their coverage was predominantly episodic.

H2: When the New York Times covered the Siachen glacier tragedy, its coverage was predominantly thematic.

H3: When the Express Tribune and the Hindustan Times covered the Siachen glacier tragedy, the attribution of responsibility was tone was causal.

H4: When the New York Times covered the Siachen glacier tragedy, it used treatment responsibility frame.

H5: When the Express Tribune and the Hindustan Times covered the Siachen glacier tragedy, the tone was predominantly negative.

H6: When the New York Times covered the Siachen glacier tragedy, its tone was predominantly positive.

H7: When the Express Tribune and the Hindustan Times covered the Siachen glacier tragedy, they predominantly used official sources.

H8: When the New York Times covered the Siachen glacier tragedy, it predominantly used scientific sources.

These hypothesis were tested to answer two main research questions through this study:

RQ 1: How did conflict and national security frames dominate the coverage of Hindustan Times (India) and Express Tribune (Pakistan) after the killing of 138 people at Siachen glacier?

RQ 2: Did the New York Times frame Siachen glacier mainly as an environmental issue while covering the tragedy that killed 138 people?

Methodology

Applying the Nitz and West (2000) framing design to Siachen conflict, this research analyses whether the coverage in three elite English language newspapers was thematic or episodic. From the additional frames analyzed in the Nitz and West (2000) study, this research has used only three; “responsibility and solutions”, “tone”, and “sources” (p. 209-210). The remaining two frames, “political campaign frames-image versus issue” and “type of environmental issue” (p. 210-211) were excluded from this study. It is because this research looks at only one kind of environmental issue (Siachen glacier) in different newspapers and the imagery used after the avalanche that killed 138 people was also not as diverse compared those associated with the mainstream political parties in the context of the U.S. presidential elections.

Nitz and West (2000) maintained that the attribution of responsibility in news stories was either causal (pointing towards the potential causes of a problem) or treatment responsibility (suggesting remedies for the problem). Iyengar (1991), however, had believed that attribution of responsibility (either causal or treatment) could be towards individuals or towards society. The individual attribution blamed individuals (like official or government etc) for the problem whereas the societal attribution found fault with the overall social, political or economic structures of a society.

As far as the tone of news stories is concerned, (Iyengar, 1991) had stated that the tone of a news story (positive or negative) could influence public opinion. While the negative tone encourages sensationalism and status quo, positive tone can urge the audience to become proactive and find solutions. Sources attributed in a news story also have significant impact for the way the audience process the information given in that story. This line of reasoning is in line with Iyengar’s (1991) assertion that episodic framing perpetuated status quo and existing power structures.

Three elite English language newspapers, Express Tribune (Pakistan), Hindustan Times (India) and the New York Times (United States) were selected for the purpose of this study. Express Tribune and Hindustan Times are among the top three circulated newspapers in Pakistan and India respectively that reach the opinion-makers and the general public alike. The New York Times was selected as an independent newspaper, not belonging to India and Pakistan, in order to compare the coverage of Siachen glacier tragedy. The coverage period specified for this research was from April 7, 2012 to May 8, 2012 (exactly one month from the killing of 138 people on the Siachen glacier).

A combination of search terms (Siachen+Avalanche, Siachen+Soldiers, Siachen+soldiers+avalanche) was used to generate news stories of all three newspapers in the Lexis-Nexis Academic database. The search for Express Tribune generated 66 results initially. After deleting duplicate links of news stories, the author was left with 40 sources. Out of these, op-eds (18), letters to editor (10) and editorials (03) were discarded. The remaining nine news stories were included in this research for the purpose of data analysis. The search for Hindustan Times generated 15 links of news stories initially. After deleting duplicate links, the author was left with 12 sources. Out of these, op-eds (06) were discarded and remaining six news stories were included in this research. From the New York Times, Lexis-Nexis database research produced seven links initially. After deleting three duplicate links, only six sources were left. Out of these, web blogs (03) and editorial (01) were discarded as being beyond the scope of this research. Remaining two news stories were included in this research for the purpose of data collection.

Using a content analysis methodology, the purpose of this research is to find out how political and national security considerations trump environmental issues. Iyengar (1991) had defined content analysis as a “systematic effort to classify textual material”. This classification can help identify the frames used in each news story and to analyze the effect it can potentially have on the mindset of audience. The qualitative content analysis helps identify the underlying themes in a news story and draw conclusions about its possible implications in the context of broad frames being analyzed.

Coding scheme

Iyengar (1991) had argued that the content of environment-related news stories were predominantly thematic or episodic. To quantify this predominance, Nitz and West (2000) had argued that the stories were thematic if 2/3rd of the content used thematic frame while the stories were episodic if 2/3rd of the content used episodic frame. The same coding scheme was used for this research to distinguish episodic and thematic frames. Nitz and West (2000) coding scheme was also adopted for responsibility, tone and sources frames. The attribution of responsibility was included both causal and treatment solutions. It was coded as individual (army chief, government officials etc) or societal (militaries, citizens). If 2/3rd of the focus in a news story attributed individual responsibility, it was coded as individual while it was coded as societal if 2/3rd of the content attributed societal responsibility. It was coded as natural if 2/3rd of the content attributed responsibility for the tragedy to natural/weather causes. The tone was coded as positive and negative. If the story predominantly (2/3rd) argued for maintaining the status quo, it was coded as negative while it was coded as positive if it predominantly (2/3rd) spoke of changing the situation. Where the tone was hard to decipher, it was coded as mixed. As far as the sources frames are concerned, these were coded as official, scientific and general. If more than 2/3rd of the content in a story was attributed to official sources, it was coded as official while if more than 2/3rd content of a story was attributed to scientific sources, it was coded as scientific. If the story did not meet this criteria or employed sources other than scientific or official,

it was coded as general. Two coders independently coded the news stories to ensure inter-coder reliability (ICR). The ICR was more than .80 for all framing categories.

Data analysis

The first hypothesis predicted that the coverage of Siachen glacier conflict after the killing of 138 people in the Express Tribune and the Hindustan Times would predominantly be episodic. This hypothesis was supported. Out of the total 15 articles in both newspapers, 11 (73.33%) articles used episodic frames compared to the remaining four articles (26.66%) that used thematic. The news coverage of both Express Tribune and the Hindustan Times remained focused on the avalanche tragedy and rescue efforts, without looking into the history of the conflict and the possible reasons that led to it. The second hypothesis predicted that the coverage of the New York Times would be predominantly thematic. This hypothesis was partially supported. Out of the two articles that the newspaper published during the study period, one (50%) was predominantly thematic. The second article, although, had thematic frames in it but did not qualify for inclusion as “thematic” only because such content was not 2/3rd of the news story. One example of the thematic frame used by the New York Times on April 8, 2012 highlighted how the disaster had brought the focus on the dangers associated with fighting on the world’s highest battlefield. It pointed out that despite little direct fighting for more than a decade, both countries had exposed their soldiers to face extreme weather conditions with an unending conflict over the control of glacier.

The third hypothesis predicted that the Express Tribune and the Hindustan Times would attribute causal responsibility for the avalanche tragedy. This hypothesis was also supported. Out of the total 15 news stories, eight (53.33) articles attributed causal responsibility. While six out of nine news articles in the Express Tribune attributed responsibility on natural causes (weather conditions etc.) for the killing of 138 people, two out of the six articles in the Hindustan Times that invoked causal responsibility attributed it to societal causes (Pakistan’s military). Only two out of the nine articles in the Express Tribune attributed treatment responsibility while none of the articles in the Hindustan Times mentioned it. The fourth hypothesis predicted that the coverage of the New York Times would predominantly use treatment responsibility frame. This hypothesis was supported as both news articles (100%) in the New York Times attributed treatment responsibility. An example of treatment responsibility by the New York Times on April 20, 2012 mentioned that the resolution of Siachen conflict was discussed between Indian and Pakistan government in secret talks.

The fifth hypothesis predicted that the tone of the Express Tribune and the Hindustan Times in the coverage of Siachen glacier tragedy would be predominantly negative. This hypothesis was supported. Out of the total 15 news stories in both newspapers, 11 (73.33%) articles had a predominantly negative tone. These stories favored status quo, blamed the rival government for the conflict and advocated against withdrawal of troops unless the other country initiated it. The sixth hypothesis predicted that the coverage of the Siachen glacier tragedy in the New York Times would have a predominantly positive tone. This hypothesis was supported as both articles invoked a positive tone, talking about the futility of the conflict and the need to find a solution that could save huge military budget for the welfare of people in both India and Pakistan.

The seventh hypothesis predicted that the coverage of Siachen glacier tragedy in the Express Tribune and the Hindustan Times would predominantly use official sources. This hypothesis was supported as well. Out of the total 15 news stories, 13 (86.66%) news items used official sources (government and military). The Express Tribune used official sources in 66.66% news stories as

compared to two articles (22.22%) that used scientific sources. On the other hand, all articles in the Hindustan Times (100%) used official sources (predominantly military) to justify presence on the glacier and lack of action. The final hypothesis of this research predicted that when the New York Times would predominantly use scientific sources during coverage of the Siachen glacier tragedy. This hypothesis was not supported. Both news articles in the New York Times during the study period used official sources.

Discussion

This research has found evidence for the assumption that the newspapers in India and Pakistan rely on predominantly episodic framing (Iyengar, 1991) when reporting on environmental issues. Evidence has also been found that the newspapers in both India and Pakistan use predominantly negative tone and official sources in their news stories, in addition to attributing causal responsibility (Nitz and West, 2000). A possible explanation for this practice can be that the newspapers in both India and Pakistan have historically looked at the Siachen conflict as primarily a political and military conflict (Ali, 2002). Therefore, in case of a tragic occurrence that killed 138 people, these newspapers are unable to look beyond that framing. The media in both India and Pakistan have long been under scrutiny for not being free to independently report on controversial issues. World Press Freedom Index (Reporters Without Borders, 2014) has ranked Pakistan 158th and India 140th in terms of freedom of media on account of repeated attempts by state institutions in both countries to curb this freedom. This explains why the newspapers in India and Pakistan feel obligated to cater to the agenda of government and military when it comes to reporting issues like Siachen glacier conflict that are predominantly an environmental concern otherwise. Because the New York Times, being an American newspaper, had no such agenda to take care of and was not under any pressure, so it was able to report on the Siachen conflict and the killing of 138 people as an environmental tragedy that demanded immediate action.

The findings of this research have an important implication for the public and policy makers in both India and Pakistan. Iyengar (1991) had argued that the framing used by the media could significantly influence the public perception of an issue. Because the newspapers in India and Pakistan have failed to frame Siachen conflict as an environmental tragedy, the popular opinion on both sides of the border also does not look at it that way. Any attempt to find a solution from either country is met with suspicion (Raghavan, 2002). This tendency pushes the government back and encourages status quo. This research is only a starting point to look at this issue in detail and open the debate from an academic angle.

However, the availability of relevant data has been a limiting factor in this study. All stories published during April 7, 2012 to May 8, 2012 on the Siachen glacier avalanche that killed 138 people were not available on the websites of all three newspapers, the Express Tribune, the Hindustan Times and the New York Times. The search through the Lexis-Nexis Academic database did not generate all possible sources as well. Although the initial search had generated 88 links, many of these were posted duplicate while the op-eds, editorials and letters to editor were beyond the scope of this research. Therefore, this study was eventually limited to analyzing 17 articles in total, which is not a large enough data to generalize these findings. The coding of these articles was also a tedious process because the news stories did not always fit the 2/3rd criteria for frames included in this research. Future researchers need to expand on this effort and find out whether these findings hold across other newspapers and longer timespans. A larger dataset will also make it possible to find out whether the difference in the coverage of Siachen conflict in the newspapers in India and Pakistan and those in western countries is statistically significant or not. Any future research could also look at the

difference in coverage of newspapers and television on this issue. Television uses a lot of imagery to convey meaning but that frame was not included in this research.

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