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Representation of Social Actors in US Egress from Afghanistan: A Critical Discourse Analysis

Abstract

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Title

Representation of Social Actors in US Egress from Afghanistan: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

Media through discursive representation as contended by Van Leeuwen (2008) shapes the identity of the participants positively or negatively by their purposeful inclusion or exclusion in a text to gain desired results. Hence, readers' sympathy, cooperation, acceptance or rejection, contempt, and criticism primarily depend on how a social actor (Henceforth SA) has been represented. The objective of this study is to reveal how, at the time of US withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021, the New York Times and USA TODAY have represented the Afghan army, the Afghan government, the US army, the US government as In-group and the Taliban as Out-group in the news. The findings reveal that both newspapers reported the event discursively by building a positive image of the In-group and creating a negative image of the Out-group to influence the perception of the readers.

Contents:

Introduction

The article analyzes the reporting of *The NYT* and *USA TODAY* published between the 15th to 31st of August 2021 on the US withdrawal from Afghanistan to explore the representation of the SAs of the egress in the light of Theo van Leeuwen's (2008) model of SAs and Van Dijk's Ideological Square of (1998). The study examines how US print media employ exclusionary and inclusionary practices to construct the identity of the key social actors namely: the US Army, the US Govt., the Afghan Govt., the Afghan Army, and the Taliban.

Review of Literature

Critical Discourse Analysis henceforth (CDA), as a reaction against the uncritical paradigms of the 1960s and 1970s, emerged as a type of discourse analytical

research from Critical Studies in the 1980s as a pragmatic development in European discourse studies and further strengthened and supported by Norman Fairclough, Ruth Wodak and Teun van Dijk (Caldas-Coulthard & Coulthard, 2013). After its progress, as argued by Blommaert & Bulcaen (2000) development, and evolution, it has now established itself as one of the most influential fields of discourse analysis.

CDA, according to (Norman Fairclough 1993,2003, Fowler,1991, Van Dijk,1998, Van Dijk,2004, Gowhary et al, 2014, and Ahmad and Shah,2019) is a field of research that studies and analyzes written and spoken texts systematically to look at how discursive practices maintain, reproduce, and resist social power abuse, dominance, and inequality through text and talk in social, political, and historical contexts.

In the domain of CDA, language is believed to have a powerful influence on people's perceptions towards certain events, consequently, it helps the audience form opinions and views (Liliana, 2023; Alminawi,2024). The media use language as a tool in the creation, perpetuation and dissemination of ideologies, cultural knowledge and discourses that help us understand the world around us (Kazmi (2024). Therefore, to uncover what lies in and behind the discourse CDA is useful for studying socio-semantic perspective as it does not quantify textual features rather it examines the role of language in positioning and characterizing individuals, groups, or entities within discourse (Van Leeuwen, 2008).

Van Leeuwen (1995, 2008) is of the view that discourse has different angles of representing social actions, each angle encodes different interpretations. He further argues that actual discursive practices in any text do not always have either or choices, and boundaries between them can be purposefully kept blurred to depict people, events, or concepts unevenly to justify their actions, create their identity, fix their position, and assign them a role to create a desired image in the eyes of the reader.

Theoretical Framework

The study employs Teun van Dijk's Ideological Square (1998) as its theoretical framework. The framework encompasses the overall discursive strategies used in discourse to describe social groups and their relations. The framework has been selected due to its solid foundation for looking at the polarized division of participants as In-group versus Out-group categories in any text by emphasizing the positive 'us' and de-emphasizing the positive 'them'; likewise, it emphasizes the negative 'them' and de-emphasizes the negative 'us'.

Analytical Framework

Van Leeuwen (2008) contends that authors in actual discursive practices make choices that are not dichotomous based on "either" or "or" options. The writers' syntactic choices can purposefully blur boundaries and manipulate the representation of SAs by including or excluding them from texts to gain certain representational effects. To analyze this sort of representation of SAs critically, Van Leeuwen presented a framework of Social Actors in 2008. The model is very useful for CDA. It offers various options for analysis of any text because it unmasks uneven representation of social actors to reveal ideologies, identities, hegemony, power, and bias of SAs in different discourses.

The study employed only main categories and very relevant subcategories i.e., exclusion, suppression, backgrounding, inclusion, activation, passivation, beneficialisation, specification, notification, affiliation, functionalization, and appraisement. The key terminology is as under:

Exclusion

Exclusion means omission or concealment of the SA or participants from the text by applying certain linguistic mechanisms. Chiefly it is realized either by Suppression or by Backgrounding.

Suppression

Suppression is a technique of excluding an SA from the text altogether by not mentioning him/her/it anywhere in the text. There are different ways to achieve it, for example by passive agent deletion or by using nonfinite clauses. Likewise, nominalizations, process nouns and middle voice coding as mentioned by Halliday (1985) also help achieve exclusion. For example, "Concerns are being expressed about democracy in Pakistan." Who is expressing concerns has been suppressed in the text. Likewise, in "To live here is hard." For whom living is hard has been suppressed here.

Backgrounding

Another practice to realize exclusion is Backgrounding which excludes a SA in such a way that the text does not refer to him/her/it in relation to a given action, but the SA props up somewhere else in the text where the action of that SA is recognizable. Backgrounding can also be materialized by ellipses in non-finite clauses with -ing and -ed participles. For example, "Fuel price up again, it is due to hike in the price of crude oil," says the minister for oil and gas." In this sentence, the government has been placed in the background.

Inclusion

Inclusion shows the presence and participation of SAs in events, activities, and actions in any text and talk. It has the following major sub-categories:

Activation

Activation according to the framework takes place when participants are referred to as actively involved in doing something. It is achieved through either 'Participation' or 'Circumstantialization' or 'Possessivation'. Participation places the SAs at the place of a subject, which foregrounds the actions of the SAs as in "People strive for their fundamental rights". Here in this sentence, the action of the people has clearly been mentioned and foregrounded. Circumstantialization is achieved by prepositional circumstantial "by" or "from" as in "Some people received support from their friends. Here "from friends" is an example of circumstantialization. Possessivation employs possessive pronouns like (our, my etc.) to activate or passivate social actors as in this sentence, "My friends supported me in crisis." Here "my friends" has been possessivated.

Passivation

Passivation either makes SAs receivers of the action or they undergo an activity. It can be realized by grammatical participant roles or by transitivity structures. It is achieved through Subjection and Beneficialisation. Subjection in the text takes place when SAs are treated as objects while representing them. As in "Refugees taken in, have been given food." "Refugees" have been subjected here and are objects of exchange. Beneficialisation takes place when participants are mentioned as a third party and receive positive or negative benefits from the action.

Specification

Specification is also a sub-category of Inclusion that mentions SAs numerically and makes them identifiable individuals in the text. As in "This year 50000 students applied to enroll in the university." Here "50000 students" has been specified through Specification.

Honorification

It occurs when an SA is mentioned with a word that shows honour like Hazarat or Maulana before the names of Muslim scholars or fathers before the names of priests.

Affiliation

It occurs when an SA is referred to with words that show personal or kinship relations like my uncle, our army etc.

Functionalization

It takes place when SAs are referred to with an activity they do, a role they play or an occupation they have. It is achieved firstly, by using nouns derived from verbs by adding suffixes such as -er,- ent,-ant, -ee or -ian as in preacher, attendant etc. secondly by using a noun that denotes a place or activity associated with the SA. Thirdly, by compounding a noun related to a place and a tool closely associated with the activity of the SA. For example, "Taliban terrorists roaming in Afghanistan…". Here Taliban have been functionalized by referring to them as terrorists.

Appraisement

It refers to the participants of a text in evaluative terms that show love, hatred, admiration etc. As in "Our beloved president addresses the nation tomorrow." In this sentence "president" has been appraised.

Analysis

Exclusionary Practices to Represent SAs

Afghan Army

(i) (…in areas abandoned by Afghan government security forces) "*Taliban fighters, meeting no resistance, took up positions in the city…*" (*NYT*)

(ii) "*Unmotivated to fight for 'corrupt' government.*" (*USA TODAY*)

Backgrounding

Backgrounding does not fully exclude an SA; it remains retrievable through textual clues. Both the newspapers backgrounded the Afghan Army yet held it responsible for not resisting the Taliban and fighting for their country. Though the Afghan Army belonged to the In-group, the newspapers did not de-emphasize negative "Us" for it and did not prevent it from succumbing to the Taliban; implying that it was the Afghan Army that met defeat at the hands of the Taliban when the US made her exit from Afghanistan.

US Army

Backgrounding

(i) "*Hastily arranged American military helicopter flights evacuated the sprawling American Embassy compound in Kabul,*" (*NYT*)

The US was responsible for planning and managing evacuation flights. Rescued persons faced trouble due to the inefficiency of the rescuers, therefore the *NYT* backgrounded the US Army in the above excerpt to conceal its inefficiency at the time of the withdrawal.

Suppression

(ii) "Radios and other sensitive equipment would be burned up by incendiary hand grenades …" *(USA TODAY)*

The newspaper achieved suppression by passive agent deletion i.e., omitting the doer of the action which excludes the agentive participant, and makes the reader believe that no human being is responsible for the action of the verb. The text excluded the US army from the agent position in the excerpt diverting the attention of the reader away from the US army that destroyed the war equipment. Though it was a war tactic in the eyes of common people it was an embarrassing act that needed to be concealed to save the US army from embarrassment.

Afghan Government

Suppression

(i) "The fall of two Afghanistan's cities… Mazar-i-Sharif…Jalalabad… was overshadowed by the collapse of the government in Kabul." *(NYT)*

The excerpt shows that the newspaper suppressed the Afghan government and lost the cities of Afghanistan and lost government in Kabul. The newspaper concealed the government to hide her loss in the war against the Taliban.

US Government

Backgrounding

(i) Kabul's collapse had been expected, but the speed at which it happened stunned U.S. officials.

The newspaper nominalized the verb 'collapse' that backgrounded the US government to make the agency disappear or neutral and placed the US government in the background. By doing this it seems that the US government, responsible for the loss, became obscure for the reader and achieved face-saving for her.

Suppression

(ii) "The American Embassy…, was shuttered by the end of the day on Sunday…" (*NYT*)

The NYT excluded the US government by passive agent deletion. A passivated clause like, 'the American Embassy… was shuttered', excluding the US government from the agentive role. The newspaper concealed the doer who shut the embassy.

Taliban

Suppression

(i) "Before the fall of Kabul, Biden defends his decision to leave Afghanistan." (*NYT*)

(ii) "After 20,744 American servicemen and -women injured, and the loss of 2,461 American personnel, including 13 lives lost just this week… (*NYT*)

(iii) "It was Trump, not Biden, who negotiated the agreement to pull U.S. troops from Afghanistan." (*USA TODAY*)

Both the newspapers excluded the Taliban through suppression that conceals the doer altogether. Through suppression, the doer and receiver of the action (of the nominalized verbs) are not mentioned. Whatever cities the US and Afghan governments and their armies lost, were described with nominalizing the verb 'fall' which excluded the Taliban to whom those cities fell. Similarly, nominalizations like "injured, lost and negotiated" exclude the Taliban who caused injury and loss to the US forces and, they were excluded as a party with whom the agreement was negotiated.

Inclusionary Practices to Represent SAs

Afghan Army

Activation

Activation foregrounds the actions of SAs and keeps them in the limelight as doers of action or participants in an activity. Hence, SAs placed at agentive places are held responsible for the subsequent actions and happenings. As in excerpts 1,3 and 4 below the newspapers assigned an agentive role through activation, to the Afghan Army in the news for not holding the country, instead, the soldiers were unmotivated, disorganized, and stealing fools who embraced defeat at the hands of the Taliban.

(i) "One more year, or five more years, of U.S. military presence, would not have made a difference if the Afghan military cannot and will not hold its own country," Mr. Biden said. (NYT)

Beneficialisation

(ii) *"We (US Govt.) gave them (Afghan Army) every tool they could need. We paid their salaries. Provided for the maintenance of their aeroplanes,"* Mr Biden said. (NYT)

Beneficialisation is a subcategory of passivation that places the SA at the receiving end where it undergoes an activity or just exists as an entity but benefits from the action of the doer. *The NYT* passivated the Afghan Army where it is the receiver of war equipment, salaries, and aid from the US. By utilising the Afghan Army in the text, the newspaper granted the Afghan Army a lower position and status of a dependent parasite on the US for its survival.

Appraisement

(iii) "…there were signs the Afghan military-unmotivated, disorganized, and plagued by low morale - …would struggle against the Taliban." (*USA TODAY*)

(vi) "The Afghan soldiers were "stealing fools" who looted equipment supplied by the U.S., said Victor Glaviano…" (*USA TODAY*)

Excerpts No (iii) and (iv) show that *USA TODAY* gave a negative appraisal to the Afghan Army by assigning negative attributes and actions to it. The newspaper declared it a shambolic force that was unmotivated, disorganized and consisted of stealing fools.

Afghan Government

Activation

While reporting about the role of the Afghan government in the war, *the NYT* gave the agentive role to the Afghan government in the text to report its collapse and crumbling before the Taliban. As in the following excerpt.

(i) "Kabul fall to the Taliban as the Afghan government collapses and the president flees." (*NYT*)

While reporting the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, *the NYT* granted an agentive role to the Afghan government that made the reader believe that it was the Afghan government that failed and yielded to the Taliban, not the US government or army.

Beneficialisation

(ii) "The insurgents' return to power…despite years and hundreds of billions of dollars spent by the United States to build up the Afghan government…"(NYT)

The NYT assigned the Afghan government a recipient role in the text. It received monetary, military, and political backup from the US. Beneficialisation can be positive or negative but in the case of the Afghan government, the newspaper created a negative image of the Afghan government by beneficialisation.

Appraisement

USA TODAY used negative appraisement to depict the Afghan government as a failed government which could not defend itself against the Taliban and ultimately collapsed and fell to them. As in this excerpt. "After two decades and billions spent, Afghan government collapses as Taliban take Kabul." (*USA TODAY*)

The newspaper through appraisement, makes the readers believe that it was primarily the Afghan government that could not defend the country and succumbed to the Taliban.

US Army

Activation

(i) "More than 2400 American troops gave their lives…" (*NYT*)

(ii) "Thirteen heroes gave their lives." (*NYT*)

(iii) "American troops were in the midst of evacuating all diplomatic staff…as the Taliban entered Kabul." (*USA TODAY*)

The newspapers activated the US army in all three above-mentioned excerpts for the actions it took when engaged against the Taliban in Afghanistan. The soldiers sacrificed their lives to establish peace and stability in Afghanistan, they helped evacuate. The role of the US Army has particularly been prominently mentioned in the text.

Specification

The NYT applied specification in excerpt No. (i) and (ii) above while mentioning the sacrifice of the US Army. This sort of inclusion draws the particular attention of the reader towards the action of a SA. The newspaper intended to highlight the sacrifice of the US Army, so used specification to catch the attention of the reader.

Honorification

Honorification is a kind of inclusion that mentions an SA with respect and honour in the text. As in the above excerpt No. (ii) shows respect and honour for the US soldiers who laid their lives in the war. The newspaper gave special honor to the US soldiers through honorification.

Passivation

(iv) "Taliban attacks on U.S. forces would have restarted and required yet another surge in U.S troops." (*NYT*)

The NYT granted a passive role to the US Army. It has been presented as a passive and inactive SA that faced attacks from the Taliban. The newspaper depicted it as a sufferer, victim and passive participant of the war who did not meet defeat.

The US Government

(i) "The U.S. pumped more than $ 80 billion in equipment and training into the Afghan security forces since the start of the war…" (USA TODAY)

(ii) "…the United States dispatched three helicopters to pick up 169 Americans…" (NYT)

Activation

The NYT activated the US government to show its positive behaviour and attitude towards the Afghan government, army and the nation of the USA. The newspaper gave an active role to the US government for her kindness and magnanimity by spending billions of dollars to develop the Afghan security forces by giving them equipment and training. The US government efficiently evacuated her nationals.

Passivation

(iii) "*Taliban fighters poured into the Afghan*
(iv) *capital…shocking close to the Afghan government and the 20-year American era in the country.*" (*NYT*)

The NYT blamed the US government for the actions that described the fall of Kabul to the Taliban as a natural phenomenon that occurred in her presence, for which it was not responsible. The US government on such occasions represented merely a third party which was shocked by the fall. It was not a defeat but only a fall that might reduce its influence in the country.

This sort of representation made the reader believe that the US did not fight the war, it was just a third-party participant who did not face any defeat at the hands of the Taliban, nor did it succumb to them.

Taliban

Activation

(i) "*As the Taliban started to gain territory in Afghanistan*…Biden was asked whether a Taliban takeover was inevitable.*" (*USA TODAY*)

Taliban at the time of US withdrawal from Afghanistan, captured city after city and finally took over the control of the whole country. While reporting the Taliban's regaining the country, *USA TODAY* gave an agentive role to the Taliban depicting them as actively involved in regaining power, seizing city after city, and finally pouring into Kabul and establishing their permanent rule.

Passivation

(ii) "…deal made with the Taliban had set a deadline…for the withdrawal of American forces and left the group in the strongest position…" (*NYT*)

The NYT, in the news reports, presented the Taliban as passive SAs to whom cities of Afghanistan including Kabul fell. They did not conquer, nor did they occupy the cities by dint of any weaponry or political power.

While negotiating and making deals for evacuation, the newspaper assigned the Taliban a passive, non-active role. They simply existed in such talks and deals and had no active role. This sort of placement in the news placed the Taliban in a lower position as compared to the US and its allies.

The newspaper placed the Taliban at a dormant place against the US invasion, warnings, and threats. Taliban has been shown as having no authority and status over the US; it is the US that holds power in important matters. Even if it wanted to strike a peace deal with the Taliban, the latter had been placed at the receiving end.

Beneficialisation

(iii) "*Nobody should be surprised: Why Afghan security forces crumbled so quickly to the Taliban.*" (*USA TODAY*)
(iv) "*…there was a distinct possibility that Kabul would fall to the Taliban.*" (*USA TODAY*)

The Taliban were the beneficiaries of the fall of Kabul as they took over the control of the country from the Afghan government. *The NYT* and *USA TODAY* depicted them as beneficiaries of the collapse of the Afghan government and the withdrawal of the US. The Taliban could never have gained power if the US had not quit Afghanistan.

Functionalization

(v) "*Taliban **fighters** poured into the Afghan capital…*" (*NYT*)
(vi) "*Taliban **fighters** marched into Afghanistan's capital… signalling a collapse of the Afghan government two decades after the U.S. invaded the country…*" (*USA TODAY*)

The newspapers functionalized the Taliban by denoting them with negative attributes like "fighters". Functionalization thus creates a negative image of the Taliban in the eyes of the public that considers them mere fighters and aggressive groups of people. It is important to note that the Taliban are the only SA of the event who have been functionalized in the news. No other SA has been functionalized and depicted with negative attributes in the news of the US egress.

Conclusion

The Afghan Army

Both the newspapers excluded the Afghan army by backgrounding leaving it traceable for the actions of having low morale, being unmotivated, incompetent, and inefficient in to fight against the Taliban. Consequently, it crumbled and collapsed when the US left the country. This sort of representation seems to deliberately portray the Afghan Army as responsible for the actions that led to defeat, chaos and loss at the time of the egress.

The newspapers passivated the Afghan Army by subjection where it is the recipient of war equipment, salaries, and aid from the US. After having been subjected to the text, the newspaper granted the Afghan Army a lower position and status of a dependent parasite on the US for its survival. The newspapers depicted the Afghan Army as the beneficiary of the US support in terms of money, and warfare equipment. The newspaper represented the Afghan Army as the recipient and giftee of the US favour, kindness, financial aid, and support to resist the Taliban.

Considering the representation of the Afghan army through exclusion and inclusion together, it seems that the newspapers concealed the Afghan army and saved it from blame only when it was expected that the blame would also pass onto the US army and the government. This sort of representation of the Afghan army insinuates that the newspapers provided less face-saving and exculpation and exoneration to the Afghan army.

Although the Afghan Army belonged to the In-group, being an ally of the USA, the newspapers did not de-emphasize negative "Us" for it, rather they tarnished the image of the Afghan Army and depicted it negatively. The newspapers highlighted its corruption, inefficiency, and unwillingness to fight against the Taliban to create its image as a failed and inefficient army that was sure to face defeat at the time of the US exit from Afghanistan.

It appears that ideologically, the US media needed a social actor to carry the weight of the defeat of the US in the war and egress from Afghanistan. Although the US and the Afghan armies were allies in the war against the Taliban, logically they jointly owned failure or success; however, to provide face-saving to the US Army and to save it from criticism and blame for defeat, the US media made the Afghan Army a scapegoat and held it responsible for the failure at the time of egress. The readers believe that it was the Afghan Army not the US Army that crumbled when the US withdrew from Afghanistan.

The US Army

The cited excerpts show that the newspapers used exclusion to de-emphasize the negative image of the US Army. The newspapers reported minimum negative activities of the US Army because even if they have been excluded, some of them leave a trace behind and others can also be inferred by the shrewd readers. It seems that the newspapers provided face-saving to the US Army to save it from expected humiliation and disgrace. Therefore, the newspapers had to apply less Exclusion as compared to Inclusion for the US Army.

On the other hand, the print media included the US Army for doing good and positive things. It has been reported for helping the Afghan Army, evacuating the needy including the US citizens at the time of withdrawal. This implies that the newspapers strived to create a positive image of the US Army and justified its presence and effort in Afghanistan; whereas the newspapers did not do the same in favour of the Afghan Army though it stood side by side or worked under the US Army in the war and after it at the time of withdrawal.

The newspapers applied honorification, and affiliation for the US Army that shows respect, regard, and honour. These categories of inclusion were not used for the Afghan Army nor for any other SA. This exclusive use implies that the newspapers gave exclusive respect, honour, and regard to the US Army that suits the US ideology to present the US as an ideal state and its army as an ideal army.

Another prominent feature of the representation of the US Army is the use of Specification. The newspapers specifically referred to the sacrifices of the US army to highlight its human loss to draw the particular attention of the reader to gain his sympathy and support for the army. This was not done for the efforts and sacrifices offered by the Afghan Army. Similarly, the Taliban also sacrificed their lives, but their sacrifices have never been reported and mentioned with reverence as they belonged to the Out-group.

The Afghan Government

When looking at the representation of the Afghan government in comparison with the US government, it appears that the newspapers have represented it discursively too. It seems that the media primarily saved the US government by excluding the Afghan government as blaming the Afghan government on such occasions would lead to blaming the US government because the Afghan government was run under the direction of the US government. The newspapers excluded the Afghan government to save the US government from blame and criticism because it was equally responsible for the loss, defeat, mismanagement, and chaos in the country at the time of withdrawal.

On the other hand, the newspapers included the Afghan government through various categories of Inclusion where the media particularly held it responsible for the defeat, loss, chaos, failure, and inability to hold the country at the time of the US exit from Afghanistan. Simultaneously, the newspapers gave an agentive role to the Afghan government for receiving economic and military aid to inform the reader that it depended on US support for its functioning. Had

there been no support from the US government and military, the Afghan government would not have existed.

The US Government

The newspapers gave maximum face-saving to the US government, by excluding it from the text, at places where readers would consider it responsible for losing the war, poor management in Afghanistan and finally for a humble exit from Afghanistan.

Ideologically, being a superpower and believing itself the world leader, it was difficult for the US government and the media to accept the defeat and loss incurred by the Taliban who were considered backward, savage, technologically and militarily less trained and equipped. So, the newspapers excluded the US government in most places while mentioning the defeat, loss, and victory of the Taliban and their capturing of the cities and Afghanistan herself.

On the other hand, both the newspapers while mentioning positive activities of the US government like financial aid, political support, and effort to establish democracy in Afghanistan, gave an agentive place to it. It appears that the newspapers highlighted those actions of the US government that could build a positive image in the eyes of the reader and consider it a sincere supporter of peace and democracy in Afghanistan and an entity that facilitated and supported safe exit and egress of the NATO, itself, and its allies.

The Taliban

The Taliban is the only SA that has the maximum number of Suppression, a subcategory of Exclusion that excludes the SA completely and leaves no trace of the excluded SA behind. Both the newspapers excluded the Taliban by suppressing them. This is the only SA that has been excluded by suppression from the text at places where the Taliban stood victorious, captured cities, retook Afghanistan and caused harm to the US, NATO, or Afghan forces. This shows that the US print media represented the Taliban discursively to conceal their victory, success, power, strategy to fight back and ability to run the country after the withdrawal of the US. It seems that the newspapers did not want to inform the reader that the Taliban resisted the US political, and military might, fought back, and regained the country as it was against the ideology of the US to accept the Taliban as an entity that could resist, fight back, and win the war against the US.

On the other hand, all the inclusions depicted them as wicked, uncivilized, usurpers of civil rights, brutal, uncultured and killers in the text. The newspapers activated the Taliban for all the negative activities to spoil their image in the eyes of the reader. They re-imposed brutal rule by removing Ashraf Ghani, defeated Afghans, and indulged in revenge killings, raced to Kabul, declared victory (not legitimate rulers) and established an oppressive rule.

The newspapers exclusively applied functionalization for the Taliban to represent them. Functionalization refers to an activity that SAs do, a role they play or an occupation they have. It introduced them with negative attributes that denoted them as fighters, insurgents, militants, and terrorists. Through functionalization, the newspapers portrayed them as lovers of fighting, insurgency, militancy, and terrorism which were hated and disliked by the public all over the world. The newspaper tarnished the image of the Taliban in the eyes of the reader by depicting them as evil-doers.

To sum up, the newspapers represented the Taliban discursively and it seems that they excluded them from the text where they could have been perceived as victors at the time of the US egress from Afghanistan and included them in the text through various categories of Inclusion to depict them as producers of evil and originators of all mischief in Afghanistan.

The print media placed the Taliban in Out-group and de-emphasized their regaining of cities, Kabul, and control of the country at the time of the US withdrawal. The newspapers emphasized their bad attributes to the maximum by assigning an active role to them in victimizing the public. The newspapers emphasized their image as killers, tyrants, brutal and uncivilized groups of people.

Findings and discussion show that both newspapers represented the SAs of the egress from Afghanistan discursively. The representation shows that Van Dijk's (1998) theoretical square is fully operational here as SAs have been placed in a binary division of "us" versus "them". The US government and the US army have been dealt with divergently. The newspapers represented the US government as a promoter of democracy and a restorer of peace in the world. The print media built its image of an ideal democratic government that did its best to restore peace and promote democracy by fighting against the Taliban in Afghanistan. The newspapers presented it as a superpower, having a central role in defeating the Taliban.

The US government was portrayed as if it did not fail in Afghanistan, whatever loss the US government and its allies faced, was due to inefficiency and incompetence of the Afghan government and the army. The US exited the country after completing the mission and helped evacuate the American citizens, their supporters, and allies in the war at the time of egress.

The newspapers depicted the US Army as a professional, loyal, dutiful, and loved force by the American people. It was sent by its government to Afghanistan to crush the Taliban and hunt down Al-Qaida to save humanity and restore peace in the country. Being a peacekeeping force, it did not kill masses in Afghanistan, nor did it cause any harm to them. Primarily it assisted the Afghan Army in doing so. It was not defeated, whatever loss it had to suffer in Afghanistan was due to the Afghan Army's poor performance, corruption, and unwillingness to resist the Taliban. Overall, both the SAs did a marvellous job and achieved their goal, hence, deserve the world's applause.

On the other hand, the Afghan government and the army have been portrayed as a failed government and a failed army, exclusively responsible for the defeat in the war and mishandling the US withdrawal. Chaos and the takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban could have been averted if both the Afghan government and the army had been efficient. Therefore, both the SAs are responsible for the loss that the US bloc suffered.

The newspapers depicted the Taliban as an uncivilized, brutal, and savage group of barbarians who illegally occupied Afghanistan at the time of the US egress made the lives of people miserable and put world peace at stake once again. They are incarnations of every evil and, hence deserve world condemnation.

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