

## **Journalism in Balochistan after 9/11: Journalists' Perception**

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### **Abstract**

The incidents followed by 9/11 changed the world and had a direct impact on Balochistan due to the reasons quite evident today. America started its war on terror, which caused mass destruction and cost thousands of lives. For attacking Afghanistan, Pakistan provided land and a military base in Balochistan to the United States. Bordering Afghanistan, Balochistan was not safe from the impacts of Talibanization and the war against it. This study describes and analyzes the impacts of 9/11 on the media in Balochistan, where more than 45 journalists have lost their lives while performing their duty and 100 others are living under threats. The methodological approach of the research is based on multi-faceted approaches that deal with interviews, documented sources (both primary and secondary), and the focused group mechanism of qualitative research methods. The results of the research study show that the events of 9/11 have greatly affected the field of journalism, and a number of journalists have lost their lives.

**Key Words:** 9/11, Balochistan, Freedom of Press, Journalism, War on Terror

### **Introduction**

On September 11, 2001, millions of people around the world went to bed in shock. The world had changed, and everyone, from politicians to pundits, said, "Nothing would ever be the same again" (Baran, 2004), as did the media. After 9/11, America started launching armed aggression, first attacking Afghanistan and then Iraq. The post-9/11 wars caused mass destruction and cost thousands of lives. Civil liberties were curbed, and America became the Great Satan (Muzaffar, et. al. 2018; Jenkins, 2011). Pakistan had to become a reluctant partner when America went to war in Afghanistan (Rashid, 2012). On the tenth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks in 2011, the government of Pakistan published a half-page advertisement in the Wall Street Journal to show the sacrifices made by the Pakistani Army.

Gretchen Peters (2009), quoting the 9/11 Commission, says that Sept. 11 cost al-Qaeda only \$500,000 that terrorist groups can now earn from the dope trade every week. The Costs of War Project at Brown University estimates that the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan since 2001 have killed 225,000 people, and the total cost is estimated at \$4 trillion (Muzaffar, et. al, 2021; Rashid, 2012). Balochistan, the largest province of Pakistan bordering Afghanistan and Iran, had significance due to its defensive proximity with the bordering countries during the US war on terrorism post-9/11. Pakistan provided air space to America in Balochistan to carry out its war in Afghanistan (Javaid & Jahangir, 2015). The journalists in Quetta were exposed to the presence of Taliban leadership in the city (Rashid, 2012). The Pashtun nationalist leader, Mahmood Khan Achackzai, also said, "This regime has handed over the entire tribal belt to al Qaeda." (Gall, 2014).

The global changes ensuing 9/11 have not only changed the socio-political norms and traditions of the province but also immensely reflected on the behavior of the local media, especially the print. More than 45 journalists have been killed since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and the numbers are drastically increasing day by day. Talibanization is cited as the major cause of unrest, coupled with the growing militant struggle of the nationalists and increasing sectarian intolerance in the province, which are directly linked to the aftermath of the attacks on twin towers. This scenario has emerged as a challenge for the intelligentsia to correlate the effects to the causes and find solutions to come out of it so that the most promising, resourceful region of the country may contribute towards its own

development. The media, especially the local print media, provides a voice to the people, as mainstream electronic and print media have failed to see and present Balochistan beyond catastrophes, as is widely believed. Now there is a need to analyze and bring forward changes that occurred to draw a solution for the betterment and prosperity of society and country through effectively representative print media in the region.

## Literature Review

The world changed on September 11, 2001, when four hijacked planes hit the twin towers of the World Trade Center, killing more than 3,000 people from 115 other countries (Jenkins, 2011). Many writers connect the incident of 9/11 with the Cold War conflicts and hold responsible for the involvement of the United States in Afghanistan during the 1980s (Khan, D. H., 2013). After the 9/11 attacks, Pakistan was condemned internationally because it had supported the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Then Pakistan had to play the game by becoming a reluctant partner with the US in its “war on terror” due to its geo-strategic location (Javaid, 2011). America started launching armed aggression, first attacking Afghanistan and then Iraq (Jenkins, 2011). Pakistan, as a partner in the war against Afghanistan, was given an aid of \$10 billion over the next decade, which put Pervez Musharraf in a position in a position to promise to combat terrorism in the country (Sethna, 2015).

America had to make Pakistan a partner in its war on terror for two reasons: first, its geographical position, and second, due to information regarding the Islamist movement (Jaffrelot, 2016). In a meeting in Washington on September 13, Richard Armitage, Deputy Secretary of State, put forward a list of seven demands to the head of ISI and Pakistani ambassador to the US:

- To stop Al-Qaeda operatives at its border and end all logistical support for Bin Laden;
- To give the US blanket overflight and landing rights for all necessary military and intelligence operations;
- To provide US with intelligence information;
- To provide territorial access to US and allied military intelligence and other personal to conduct operations against Al-Qaeda;
- To continue to publically, condemn the terrorist acts;
- To cut all shipments of fuel to Taliban and stop recruits from going to Afghanistan; and,
- If the evidence implicated Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda and Taliban continued to harbor them, to break relations with the Taliban government (Jaffrelot, 2016, pp. 523-524).

The Musharraf government accepted all these demands for the re-entry of Pakistan into the international community. On October 7, 2001, American air strikes began in Afghanistan, and Musharraf was forced to oust the figures from his public. According to Syed Saleem Shahzad (2011), “Al-Qaeda never aimed to launch a Jihad in Pakistan, but it was left with a dilemma when Pakistan sided with the with the US in Afghanistan. This left Al-Qaeda with no option but to consider Pakistan as no less an enemy than Western allies of the US”. The organization came up with a list of ‘objectives and goals’ Christophe Jaffrelot (2016) quotes the first four as:

- Struggle for the establishment of Islamic Shariah government in Pakistan and entire world and removing all obstacles toward it
- Declare Shi’a a non-Muslim minority.
- Kill every person who blasphemes or insults the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), his wives, companions, the Quran, and the religion of Islam
- Kill every journalist, businessman, lawyer, bureaucrat, doctor, engineer, or professor who misuses social position to tarnish the beliefs of Muslims or engage in any way in the preaching or publishing against the Islamic creed and beliefs.

- Allauddin Kakar (2017), in his study, finds out that “most Pakistanis believed that due to the Afghan war they were facing hardships because before the 9/11 attacks there was peace and that they had never heard about a suicide attack. From 1989 to 2000, some 1579 sectarian violence incidents killed 997 people and wounded 2238 in Pakistan, and from 2001 to 2013, 1672 incidents were responsible for killing 4535 and wounding 8042 (Jaffrelot, 2016).

### **Impacts of 9/11 on Balochistan**

A large-scale of migration from Afghanistan was witnessed in 2001 after the US attack on Afghanistan (Chaudhry, 2003). Sandy Gall (2012) quoting a report from the New York Times of January 21, 2007, writes that, “...dozens of interviews with the residents there was doubt that Quetta was an important base for Taliban, and that there were many signs that Pakistani authorities were encouraging the insurgents, if not sponsoring them”. In an interview with Carlotta Gall, Tariq Azim Khan, the then information and broadcasting minister of Pakistan said, “If there are Taliban in Quetta, they are few, You can count them on your fingers” (Gall, 2012).

Balochistan, along with Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa, both bordering Afghanistan, became the hub of activities of Al-Qaeda to provide training and recruitment for fighting NATO alliance in Afghanistan (Shahzad, 2011). Several demonstrations were carried out in major cities throughout the country. A building of the UN aid organization in Quetta was burned down, and four employees were killed (Carvalho-Fischer & Fischer, 2004). On the main road from Quetta to Kandahar, there are twenty crossing points manned by armed forces. Other than these 20 official points, there are 111 more crossing points unmanned (Schmidt, 2012). Hundreds of non-Afghan leaders and fighters of Al-Qaeda came into Pakistan’s tribal belt through these crossings (Rashid, 2009). Ahmed Rashid (2009), in this regard, says, “In Balochistan, a pure Afghan Taliban movement was left undisturbed and allowed to take root. Quetta was treated as their capital by Taliban leaders. “The Quetta Shura is the name given to the council of Taliban leaders and elders, many of whom, after 2001, settled in and around Quetta (Rashid, 2012). LeJ’s (lashkar-e-Jhangvi) Balochistan chapter, led by Usman Kurd, started targeting the Shia Hazara community in Quetta (Rana, 2015), because they were used as interpreters by US forces in Afghanistan (Rashid, 2009). LeJ was called to be responsible for the March 2, 2004 attack in Quetta during the Ashura procession, in which 47 people died and 150 were wounded. Other than the Islamists in Balochistan, there are grave dangers to the secularist movement. According to Ahmed Rashid (2009), “the Baloch insurgency was to provide great justification for the army to continue to support the Taliban and to castigate Karzai for allowing India to undermine Pakistan.”.

John R. Schmidt (2012) says, “The Pakistanis believed the Indians were using their diplomatic presence in Kandahar to support rebellious tribesmen in Balochistan engaged in a long-running dispute with Islamabad over the control of natural resources.” In 2003–04, the BLA started hit-and-run raids against the military in Balochistan; it also blew up gas pipelines, electricity towers, etc. The army had to rush 2,500 troops with tanks to defend Sui. Musharraf taunted the Baloch, saying, “Don’t push us. It isn’t the 1970s, when you could hit and run and hide in the mountains. This time, you won’t even know what hit you” (Rashid, 2009). “The Taliban have been very careful to maintain excellent relations with the Baloch and have refused to get involved in the civil war in Balochistan.” (Rashid, 2012)

### **9/11 and the Media**

Before the September 11 attacks, people didn’t care much about the happenings beyond their borders, and the news media reported less foreign news (Hachten & Scotton, 2007). After the first weeks of 9/11, the audience of CNN increased to three million US listeners, from about 6,000,000 to 8,000,000. The mainstream print media sent platoons of photographers and reporters to cover Afghanistan and Pakistan, and the press was appreciated for its initial war reporting.

According to Hachten & Scotton (2007):

After 9/11, international terrorism became a major concern at the top of the foreign news agenda as well as the global political agenda. After being downplayed by the news media for years, terrorism was major news again; the “acts of war” on September 11 immediately triggered a new kind of war with Islamist terrorists and any states supporting them. Over 75 journalists have died in the line of duty since 2001, making it one of the most dangerous countries for journalists (Khan A., 2011).

## Material and Methods

### Study Design

Anol Bhattacharjee (2012) jots down three goals of exploratory research: 1. To scope out the magnitude or extent of a particular phenomenon or behavior 2. To generate some initial ideas (or “hunches”) about the phenomenon, or 3. To test the feasibility of understanding a more extensive study regarding that phenomenon. Bhattacharjee (2012) further says, “This research does not lead to a very accurate understanding of the target problem, but may be worthwhile in scoping out the nature and extent of the problem and serving as a useful precursor to more in-depth research.

### Data Collection

The interview method of data collection was utilized for this study, which “involves the presentation of oral-verbal stimuli and replies in terms of oral-verbal responses” (Kothari, 2004). The interviews used a direct personal investigation technique. The interviews were non-structured because such a type allows the interviewer much greater freedom to ask supplementary questions and to omit certain questions according to the situation. According to Kothari (2004), “unstructured interviewing, however, happens to be the central technique of collecting information in exploratory or formulative research studies.”.

### Sample

A sample of eight senior journalists of Balochistan was selected for this study. The respondents were selected on the basis of following criteria: a. knowledge of the subject, b. senior journalists who have been working as journalists before 9/11.

1. Anwar Sajidi, Chief Editor, Daily *Intekhab*, Quetta
2. Shehzada Zulfiqar, Bureau Chief *BOL News*
3. Saleem Shahid
4. Asif Baloch, Editor, Daily *Azadi*, Quetta
5. Mustafa Tareen
6. Malik Siraj Akbar, Freelancer
7. Haji Khalil ur Rehman, Editor, Daily *Jang*, Quetta
8. Raza ur Rehman

## Results and Discussion

**Table**  
**Interviews of Journalists and their Experiences**

Respondents	9/11 Experience
Saleem Shahid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 9/11 showed us a different picture. We observed many journalist came to stay at Sareena Hotel Quetta to cover terrorism and the war on terrorism.</li> <li>• I covered the Taliban when they were in power</li> <li>• but after 9/11 we had to cover Afghanistan attacked by American and also blast and killings in our country.</li> </ul>

Banaras Khan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 9/11 was a very bad experience but it somehow enhanced our journalistic skills.</li> <li>• It finished the dark room concept replacing it with digital photography.</li> <li>• I got more assignments from AFP.</li> <li>• We got to learn from many foreign journalists. We learned how to quote sources.</li> </ul>
M Kazim	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 9/11 was global dilemma which reshaped the world. We could not save from its repercussions as Pakistan became an American partner in war on terror.</li> <li>• Before 9/11 we here covered some local protests but later they were dominated by the 9/11 and the war on terror.</li> <li>• Many foreign journalist also came here to cover what was going on but here local journalists instead of performing their duty became fixers for the foreign journalist just for 100 dollars a day.</li> </ul>
Asif Baloch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As 9/11 happened Balochistan got more coverage in the international media as they were in a race to cover the war on terror.</li> <li>• Every reporter first got good offers from the outside media organizations but later on it those offers became the problem for them.</li> <li>• They were even warned not to report for international media.</li> </ul>
Malik Siraj Akbar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When 9/11 happened, I was 19. I had never heard of violence against journalists in Pakistan or in Baluchistan. The first time I came across reports of violence against a journalist was when The Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl was kidnapped in Pakistan.</li> </ul>

**Table 2**  
**Responses to the Interviews**

<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Impacts of 9/11 on journalists' job function</b>
Saleem Shahid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some stories of various rumors that got reported in newspapers here such as the rumor of Osama bin Laden's killing in Chagai district of Balochistan.</li> <li>• Some journalists learned much about the profession when they accompanied foreign journalist but many of them were fixers they did not learn because they did not want to.</li> <li>• We learned to quote and report with credible sources as many authentic sources you have the more credible and important your story is.</li> <li>• We got to know that how the international media covers stories and we also noted their blunders they made.</li> </ul>
Banaras Khan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The workload increased as the demand was more those who digitally weak faced much difficulties to perform their duties.</li> <li>• We got to learn from many foreign journalists. We learned how to quote sources.</li> </ul>
M Kazim	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The reporting shifted to international level. The reporters started covering war.</li> <li>• Local journalists instead of performing their duty became fixers for the foreign journalist just for 100 dollars a day.</li> </ul>
Asif Baloch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It has also put reporters in tough situations. The reporter even cannot report many things which are newsworthy.</li> <li>• The job functions of the reporters also put them in hot water they could not report anything objectively.</li> </ul>
Malik Siraj Akbar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If I were a teenager in today's Pakistan where dozens of journalists have been killed in the past few years, I would never want to become a journalist.</li> </ul>

Pakistan is a haven for great stories. I wish there was no pressure or threat to one's personal safety. A lot of journalists have braved (all) to tell great stories. However, I think there would be far better coverage of these issues if there were no threats to journalists' lives.

**Table 3**  
**Responses on Change in Content of press**

<b>Respondents</b>	<b>9/11 changed the contents of regional the press</b>
Saleem Shahid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The news of attacks and bomblasts got space in the papers</li> <li>• but another thing I observed that ethics are/were not followed</li> </ul>
Banaras Khan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Newspapers turned to international from local.</li> </ul>
M Kazim	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The reports regarding 9/11 and the war in Afghanistan dominated the news items of local protests and problems</li> <li>• Quality analytical pieces were scare.</li> </ul>
Asif Baloch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I think it was not a problem for them as they get every news story from the news agencies just for a thousand or two but the newspapers of market which had a field force to dig out many news stories faced much of the threats.</li> <li>• The media owners and reporters were threatened not to cover the conflicts without the permission of ISPR</li> <li>• Target killings and bomblasts were enough for the journalists to be more careful. But as conflicts and crimes increased the contents got changed.</li> </ul>

**Table 3**  
**Responses on press Freedom**

<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Press Freedom</b>
Saleem Shahid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Freedom depends on the one who is reporting.</li> <li>• If one knows how to Balance a story than he is safe.</li> </ul>
Banaras Khan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is no freedom for press for instanced journalists cannot cover a press conference from the families of the missing persons.</li> </ul>
M Kazim	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is no freedom of press not only in Balochistan but in Pakistan</li> <li>• The one who has the power can publish what he wants</li> <li>• Without freedom there is no quality.</li> </ul>
Asif Baloch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As 9/11 happened many thongs changed so the contents of the press and the Musharraf government in order control it announced press laws and registrations</li> <li>• Action was taken against many newspapers.</li> <li>• And even the advertisement quota of the regional papers were increased somehow to make them mouthpiece of the government.</li> <li>• Investigative reporting is just read in books in this country because there is not safety for the reporter's life.</li> </ul>
Malik Siraj Akbar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Independent and free reporting is next to impossible</li> <li>• Many engaged in self-censorship to continue their work but they are surely not able to do the kind of journalism they want to do. Everyone exercises some form of censorship</li> </ul>

**Table 5**  
**Responses on Reporting situation**

<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Reporting put you in dangerous situation</b>
Saleem Shahid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No I have experienced much dangerous situations</li> <li>• Some 45 journalists have list their lives in Balochistan but I think if they had reported with responsibility it would have happened to them.</li> </ul>

Banaras Khan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yeah! When I went Kandhar for reporting. When I came back I was picked up for investigation.</li> </ul>
M Kazim	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I am very afraid of reporting sensitive issues. If I had reported with responsibility and objectivity I would been in dangerous situations.</li> <li>• We are not doing responsible journalism rather we are the reporting events which we can call “Munshi Giri”.</li> </ul>
Asif Baloch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I have never been threatened personally.</li> <li>• many of our collogues are living under threats</li> <li>• we have warned collectively many times</li> </ul>
Malik Siraj Akbar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• received a number threatening phone calls</li> <li>• was taken to military cantonment by military intelligence peronnal in 2007 the meeting began with bizarre questions such as on the sources of funding of different Baloch newspaper editors, but ended with threats of death if I did not stop reporting on enforced disappearances.</li> </ul>

### Discussion

After 9/11, journalists from all over the world in bullet-proof vests came to Pakistan (Carvalho-Fischer & Fischer, 2004). The German media alone had 70 reporters in Pakistan and over 30 in Portugal who were ready to take risks to report the best stories. According to Carlotta Gall (2014), “reporters were picked up by unidentified people and disappeared for two or three days. After their release, they refused to talk about what had happened. They became quieter and practiced cautious journalism.” A Taliban spokesperson in Quetta, pretending to be in Afghanistan, talked to Pakistani journalists on local numbers and warned them to carry Taliban propaganda in their newspapers (Rashid, 2009). Razeshta Sethna (2015) writes that the reporters in Quetta, the capital city of Balochistan, are facing death threats and are mentally ready that anything can happen to them, and many of them have left the city, province, and even the country. Malik Siraj Akber, a Baloch journalist who has gotten asylum in America, says:

When 9/11 happened, I was 19. I had never heard of violence against journalists in Pakistan or in Baluchistan. The first time I came across reports of violence against a journalist was when The Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl was kidnapped in Pakistan. The reason I mention this is that if I were a teenager in today’s Pakistan, where dozens of journalists have been killed in the past few years, I would never want to become a journalist. Pakistan is a haven for great stories. I wish there was no pressure or threat to one’s personal safety. A lot of journalists have braved it all to tell great stories. However, I think there would be far better coverage of these issues if there were no threats to journalists’ lives. Many are engaged in self-censorship to continue their work, but they are surely not able to do the kind of journalism they want to do. Everyone exercises some form of censorship. (as cited in Sethna, 2015)

A report by the Pak Institute for Peace Studies (2014) declares Balochistan as the worst-affected province of the country in terms of the safety of journalists. The report further says, “The media in Balochistan faces a lot of pressure, attacks, abductions, and even murders at the hands of the security forces, Islamist militants, Baloch separatist insurgents, and tribal chieftains.” In Balochistan, independent and free reporting is next to impossible. “The journalists are up against two extremes: there are agents of the state who want a complete media blackout on some issues, and non-state actors demand inappropriately high coverage. The media practitioners are caught in the middle” (Pak Institute for Peace Studies, 2014). A mission supported by the International Federation of Journalists in 2011 aimed to dig out various threats and problems faced by journalists in various districts of Balochistan. The report finds out:

Following the events of 9/11 and up until December 2011, Pakistani journalists have buried as many as 22 of their colleagues in Balochistan. The period between 2008 and 2011 was particularly bad, with 16 journalists killed in attacks by militants (these militants are either Taliban or belong to

nationalist, separatist, or pro-federation groups). The killing of a number of journalists remains uninvestigated. (Rathore, Zulfiqar, Tareen, & Shahid, 2012).

### **Conclusion**

Because journalists covering war areas face several obstacles every day, their safety is a complicated matter. According to their results, journalists frequently are unable to pinpoint the precise origins of threats due to a variety of dangerous agents, including separatist movements, nationalist movements, foreign agencies operating in the area, and the high degree of extremism. Furthermore, when reporting from conflict areas, journalists claim that their media outlets do not support them and that they must rely on the Pakistani army to defend the rights of the journalists in the face of such hazards and difficulties. The events that followed 9/11 altered the course of history and directly affected Balochistan for reasons that are still readily apparent today. America began its war on terror, which resulted in thousands of deaths and massive destruction. Pakistan gave the United States territory and a military facility in Balochistan in exchange for fighting Afghanistan. Balochistan, which shares an Afghan border, was vulnerable to the effects of Talibanization and the counteroffensive. The effects of 9/11 on the media in Balochistan, where over 45 journalists have died while carrying out their duties and 100 more are under threat, are discussed and analyzed in this paper.

### **Recommendations**

It is imperative to examine how journalists in Balochistan are perceived after 9/11 in order to comprehend the difficulties and complexities that arise when covering topics like terrorism, conflict, and sociopolitical changes in the area. Examine the news stories, essays, and editorials that Balochistan local and national publications have published. Analyze how, following 9/11, the media has covered important topics including terrorism, insurgencies, and governmental policies, and how this has reflected the views and challenges of journalists. Journalists covering other conflict-affected areas of Pakistan or adjacent countries should be compared with those in Balochistan regarding their experiences and perspectives. Note the parallels and divergences between the difficulties they encounter and the tactics they use to negotiate the intricate socio-political environment.



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