



Guest Lecture Report on

# ROLE OF MEDIA IN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT: CONFLICT REPORTING FROM FATA



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## Acknowledgement

FRC shows its gratitude towards the honorable guest speaker and the participants who took out their precious time to join the guest lecture on 'Role of media in conflict management and conflict reporting from FATA' at FATA Research Centre, Islamabad.

# Role of Media in Conflict Management: Conflict Reporting From FATA

*Media became the voice of public in the present world*

## Introduction

The guest lecture held by FATA Research Centre (FRC) at FRC Seminar Hall on 7<sup>th</sup> February, 2013 on the topic of “**Role of Media in Conflict Management: Conflict Reporting From FATA**” is the part of series of guest’s lectures to explore the ways to achieve peace. FRC invites guests who are specialists on subjects so that they may give a clearer picture of the issue. On the basis of the expert opinions, FRC suggests a way forward.

In this effort FRC organized a guest lecture on the aforementioned topic keeping in view the social, cultural and professional challenges to media in all of its spheres i.e. information gathering, processing and distributing in FATA.

Mr. Amanullah Ghilzai, an experienced journalist covering the conflict zones in Pakistan and Afghanistan, discussed the role of media and related issues and the specific hardships faced by media personnel. The speaker also talked about the partiality of the media and its impact on the effectiveness of the news reporting.

According to Mr. Ghilzai the western media has been run through proper mechanism though the state has a reasonable check on the reporting; but the conditions are quite opposite here in Pakistan where the freedom of media has often been misunderstood. The role of media can be improved by defining its role by the state.

The lecture generated a debate among the interested participants. The participants including field researchers associated with FRC, students and analysts raised many questions pertinent to the issue which were expertly replied by the speaker.

## Profile of the Guest Speaker

### Ammanullah Ghilzai

Mr. Ammanullah Ghilzai is Pakistan based British National and a seasoned producer, writer, editor, radio presenter, translator and political analyst having a profound professional background in the field of journalism.

In 1987, he joined the Associated Press of Pakistan (APP) as a reporter, and also worked as sub-editor and feature writer till 1994. In 1994 he joined BBC World Service and worked as a producer and news writer till 1999. He also created several feature programs in the BBC Pashto while writing features and articles on several topics, including Politics in Pakistan and the war in Afghanistan during his stay at APP. Mr. Ghilzai wrote more than 60 talks on the on-going developments in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Central Asia along with hundreds of news stories in the BBC Newsroom

In the year 2000, he received training from the London Institute of Technology (LIT) in Documentary and Film making for TV. He has been working as a managing editor and director at radio Mashaal, Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty, Prague; Czech Republic, VOA, Washington D.C from 2006 to 2010.

Ammanullah Ghilzai did his masters in English literature from Quetta University and also knows five languages including Persian, Pushtu, English, Urdu and Baluchi.

*Journalists need to make sure that both sides of a conflict recognize them as professional journalists who are not associated with any intelligence organization, and that they are fully aware of the journalist's impartiality. (Hamed Elmi)*

## Key notes from the speech of Amanullah

In this era media shapes the behavior of the people by introducing new discourses and novel trends. There is a flow of information on daily basis where everyone can access these pieces of information even through their cell-phones.

The role of media has been highlighted since past decade as it played positive role in conflict management. Undoubtedly media has to face a lot of obstacles in such conflict zones. The media personnel face variety of hurdles; some are **structural** while the others are **thematic**. These challenges to media can be categorized into three major challenges:

- Social challenges
- Cultural challenges
- Professional challenges

In conflict areas some of the issues, related to media, can be handled. On the other hand most of the problems faced by journalists in such areas are inevitable with which they live by using tactics to minimize the risks. In FATA the journalists can report but they must be careful of the cultural norms of the area along with other issues which include security problems, influence of other stakeholders, terrain challenges etc.

These media related issues in Pakistan and outside the world have been handled through different ways. In Pakistan there is improper check on media regarding its contents and reporting criteria. Most of the media reports on FATA are considered as half-truth due to the filtration process by certain institutions of state such as military and other stakeholders in the area. Therefore, it may be said that media in Pakistan is not 'responsible'.

Freedom without responsibility is very dangerous for both, the state and society. In the western world, media is free but at the same time it is also 'responsible'. So, while reporting from the conflicting areas media should be very responsible. There is a very little room for spreading miss-information during spans of violence and conflict because stakeholders are highly interested in their stakes in such

situation. If a journalist violates procedures laid down by the state, the one may face administrative or structural issues. On the other hand, if one harms the interests of the conflicting parties, it may cost one's life. In this case journalists need to make sure that both the conflicting parties are aware of professionalism and impartiality of the journalists.

Problems began with Pakistani media while reporting the information regarding war on terror specifically from FATA. Journalists, while describing the casualties from both sides of the conflicting parties, began terming military personnel death casualties as *martyr* while for the militants they simply used *dead* or even *killed*. These chosen phrases by the media itself depict partiality of the media while this partiality may lead to the loss of reporters and also may affect the whole process of reporting particularly from the conflicting zones<sup>1</sup>.

Keeping in view the above problems and challenges faced by the media in FATA one can understand the process involved in media reporting from FATA. Reporting is extremely difficult from FATA because the lives of the journalists are at risks. Most of the journalists covering FATA use to live in the nearer settled areas due to the security reasons. This may question the authenticity of the information they spread through their reports. This may be called professional dishonesty but the life of the reporter cannot be sacrificed. In other case, if the reporter is dead then the reporting is dead; and if the reporting is dead the flow of information stops. The ultimate result of this will be unawareness among the public at large. The people would not know what is going on in FATA. So, if reporter even reports while staying away from the scene of the story, still it generates an amount of useful information. To make it simple, reporting from a conflict zone may not be compared with the reporting from peaceful zones. To sum up, the reporter keeps in mind that 'something is better than nothing'.

There are many other questions in mind of general public where they ask about the reporting from war and conflict zones. Such questions are often related to the partiality of the journalism under the influence of the security forces or conflicting parties. In such case the journalism is called embedded journalism where journalist has to travel with the conflicting parties, especially with the security forces. There is, no doubt, the journalist has very little space for impartiality but this does not mean that it is not totally impartial.

Just to counter the impartiality and manipulation of the government for flow of information the state must have proper media laws. Such laws exist in Western Europe and America where the information has often been balanced by the enforcement of state laws for media. In such case the government or any institution of government cannot propagate its own cause or cannot manipulate information. Unfortunately such laws are absent in Pakistan. Therefore, due the absence of affective laws and regulations for media, information has often been considered manipulated by certain institutions of government in Pakistan. For instance, there is distrust among people regarding the reporting from the FATA where people consider that information has been filtered or even distorted and messed up by the security forces in FATA.

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<sup>1</sup> According to a journalists from FATA, once Taliban commander based in Wana, South Waziristan Agency, named as Mullah Nazir threatened all the journalists in Wana that they should not report Taliban as *killed* because military personnel have been reported as *martyr* otherwise none of the journalist will be allowed to report from Waziristan.

Media organizations have their internal mechanism to gauge the authenticity of reporting. In conflict zones, the reporters have certain limitations where they cannot follow the same criteria of judging the impartiality of the journalist which has been used in non-conflicting areas. So, in case of FATA such organizations have very little room for un-hurdled analysis or judgment of information. In majority of cases, in FATA, media organizations have been accessed to information through irregular and/or freelance journalists due to the security situation prevailing there.

Now talking about the rising prominence of international media in FATA, we can say that the gap has been left by the state where there is limited access of national and local media. This gap is usually filled up by the international media, and as mentioned earlier the international / foreign media have to rely on the freelance journalists. Foreign media has to face many challenges such as the cultural constrains, ethnic and religious constrains. Foreign media cannot understand the level of sensitivity with the fore-mentioned things in Pakistan in general and in FATA in particular.

Apart from this, the international media such as Radio Mashaal, Voice of America and BBC are focusing on the issues being faced by the people of FATA. This may be one of the reasons<sup>2</sup> of their popularity among the people of FATA.

On the other hand state or national media has advantages over foreign media where the national media can broadcasts through FM channels.

In FATA media organizations are often headed by the military personnel (retired and/or serving) this itself is controversial and generates partiality<sup>3</sup>. In this case, the validity and impartiality of information from FATA is a big question among the general public and analysts.

There is also a big problem with the media in organizational confirmation and analysis of the news reports. In Pakistan news are rarely been processed for confirmation due to the unhealthy competition of *breaking news*.

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<sup>2</sup> There are also some technical advantages of these foreign media as compared to the national or local media

<sup>3</sup> FM 96 broadcasting from Islamabad and covering Waziristan is headed by a serving army major



## Recommendations

- There should be effective media policies to have check on the process of information gathering, information processing and information distributing.
- The journalist should assure the conflicting parties that he/she is impartial because any sort of distrust may harm the access and flow of information in crisis laden areas.
- Reliability on freelance journalists should be minimized; so that the credibility of reports can be maintained. There must be effective internal policies within media organization to analyze and judge the information.
- Media organizations should give up the culture and competition of breaking news because it may affect the credibility of the information.
- The foreign media may harm the national interests while reporting the conflict in FATA. So, to minimize this risk the state of Pakistan should fill the gap by improving and installing local media in FATA. But it should be attractive to the people of FATA, because State run media channels are considered as unattractive to the people both *contents wise* and *presentation wise*.
- The contents and presentation of media determine the role it plays in the society. So, this role can be improved by investing more *money* and by providing *security*.
- By investing state money on media does not mean that the state influences it and by providing security does not mean embedded journalism where media reports what the military wants to be reported.
- Media in Pakistan sometimes ignores certain ethnic population while reporting nationwide which leads towards the feelings of deprivation among certain ethnicities. Such feelings further lead to the ethnic differences. So, media either intentionally or unintentionally creates ethnic difference while at the same time it can also play a very positive role in integrating various ethnic populations into one single nationality.

## Appendix

### List of participants

**Date:** 7<sup>th</sup> February, 2013

**Time:** 3:15 pm – 5:00

**Venue:** FRC Seminar Hall

**Guest Speaker:** Ammanullah Ghilzai

#### Participants:

Name	Title/ Organization
Dr. Ashraf Ali	President FRC
Mansoor Mehsud	Director Research and Admin FRC
Saifullah Mehsud	Executive director FRC
Birg. Said Nazir	Security Analyst
M. Zaheer Khan	Programme Manager
Zakia Rubab Mohsin	Asst. Manager Programme
Sharaf Ali Chaudhry	Editor/ Research Coordinator
Mehran Ali Khan	Senior Research Analyst
Nawaf Khan	Asst. Researcher
Taimur Ali Khan	IT Engineer
Umair Zahid	Finance Assistant
Maaz ur Rehman	IIUI
Zohaib Khan	IIUI
Adeel Gohar	IIUI
Badshah Jan	IIUI
Hikmatullah	IIUI

## Lecture at a Glance



