Pandemic Narratives and International Relations: How Pakistani Media Framed the U.S. and China During COVID-19

Tauseef Javed & Ayisha Khurshid

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an unprecedented impact on the modern world, from testing the health sector to changing the dynamics of international relations. The web of international relations is adorned with diplomatic etiquette, where all countries agree on the principle of equity, but practice denies this principle. In the case of Pakistan's foreign policy, national interest plays a vital role in the establishment of bilateral or close relations with big powers (the US and China). In this regard, the media serves as a tool to gauge a country's foreign policy inclination towards any specific nation, reflecting the strength of the press. Pakistani media's coverage of COVID-19, especially regarding major powers like China and the US, invites academic inquiry into how third-world countries such as Pakistan perceived these nations' approaches during the pandemic and its impact on Pakistan. Therefore, this research focuses on Pakistani print media's representation of the approach of the US and China towards the pandemic. The data was accessed through the *LexisNexis* database. The results have shown that the frames obtained are consistent, and Pakistani print media (*The Express Tribune, Dawn*) reflect a more pronounced political

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leaning towards China compared to the US. It means that even though the US helped Pakistan economically and with health equipment, in this epidemic, China is positioned as a role model and a fairy godmother that the Pakistani government can rely on.

Keywords: China, US, Pakistan, COVID-19, Foreign Policy

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted human lives and put a halt to every sphere of life. The scaremongering public remains uncertain about the spread of the virus to date. This fear and uncertainty, coupled with lockdowns, also led the world into economic chaos, with global economies experiencing the worst recession in history. Apart from the health and financial sectors, international politics is another area where the impact of COVID-19 has been seen (Bonotti & Zech, 2021). Among the major powers of the world, particularly the United States and China, the US has expressed concern over the spread of viruses from China since the very beginning as the US was one of the worst affected countries by COVID-19. It is observed that this pandemic is woven into the predicament of international politics. The critical factor that is making COVID-19 relevant to global politics is the art of communication. The role of media in covering COVID-19, particularly concerning the world's major powers, such as China and the US, invites academic scholarship to examine this aspect as well. It is intriguing to investigate how third-world countries, such as Pakistan, perceive the approach of the two world powers during and in response to this pandemic in times of crisis.

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This pandemic did not accentuate already existing competition in international politics; rather, it has aggravated big countries' approach towards maximising their optimum power (Gupta, 2022). Within their sphere of influence, as reflected in their approach, they shape public opinion. Media not only reflect such tensions but can also be used as a foreign policy tool to shift public opinion in favour of or against any country. This intricate relationship between media and foreign policy is evident from the fact that interests and perceptions primarily drive the latter (Hippler, 2000). whereas the latter is a perception-making machine.

The coverage of COVID-19 can be seen as a test case for Pakistan's foreign policy towards two critical countries, the US and China, to determine which country is presented in a positive light and serves as a role model for Pakistan. The purpose of this research is to explore how developing nations rely on the assistance of developed countries, and how this dependence is then reflected in their foreign policy relations and media coverage. This research takes the concept of the fairy godmother from the "Once Upon a Time" fairytale narrative, where the female protagonist needs dire assistance from a figure who has some superpowers to help her out of her wretched state. Using this analogy, the research considers the COVID-19 Pandemic as a deplorable state where a developing nation like Pakistan needs superpowers like the US and China to intervene, thus saving it from downfall. Therefore, this study reveals the final saviour for Pakistan through the media lens.

As the journalistic reporting regarding foreign policy issues raises serious concerns in Pakistan's policy-making circles, this research examines how the Pakistani media translates the government's aspirations in handling COVID-19 coverage with respect to the US and China. In addition to it, it explains the degree of congruence between the government policy and media agenda in Pakistan. The

present research, from a Pakistani perspective, will further delineate the efforts of the two major powers in their outreach to smaller countries and their responses to it.

2. Pakistan's Alliance with China and the US: A Historical Perspective

The reporting of COVID-19 in China and the US is directly linked to Pakistan's foreign policy issues (Khan, 2022) because it contains a historic connection with both countries due to geographic proximity as well as a strategic partnership with China. The trajectory of relations with the US shares crests and troughs conditioned to the one-sided domination of the US interest, explained by the theoretical support from media and internal relations domain in the next section. The diplomatic relations of Pakistan with the US and China rest on a different set of equations: bedrocked by the factors ranging from convergence to divergence of national interests. Relations with the US remain in a pendulum-like motion, lacking stability. This bilateral relation changes with time, like the Soviet war in Afghanistan, and again after 9/11, the War on Terror (Hussain, 2016). On the other hand, Pak-Sino relations achieved a gradual accumulation of a solid foundation. But, at the same time, Pakistan remained one of the essential allies of the US during the Cold War and in the War on Terror (Kronstadt, 2012). The role of Pakistan during these time frames was pivotal for the US to win against its adversaries. The relevance of Pakistan for the US is still significant due to the Afghanistan conundrum, which is still miles away from stability even after a peace deal between the Taliban and the US. Furthermore, China's emergence as an economic giant and its outreach through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to diversify its trade routes is raising serious concerns in the United States (Zimmerman, 2015). In recent years, the trade war has been one manifestation of the tug-of-war relations between the United States and China (Tellis et al., 2020).

3. Media and Foreign Policy: The Convoluted Relationship

Media has become a powerful tool in influencing foreign nations' public opinion in favour of achieving foreign policy objectives: "The media are instrumental in creating, perpetuating, and modifying images of foreign nations and international leaders" (De Beer & Merrill, 2008). The progress in the dissemination of information has made the media more powerful, pervasive, and encompassing. The mass media have paved the way for the formulation of national images through political discourse (Grossman, 2022). This can be relatable to the different sections of the masses, with media allowing them to voice their opinions, and in return, act as a watchdog in a country. Technological advancement has expanded the role of media in society. Media is not limited to means of gaining information; instead, it has acquired the power to act as a pillar of government (Wermiel, 2019), just like the US media was used during the Iraq war to maintain public order in favour of the war.

The coverage of foreign affairs in the media has influenced Pakistan's foreign policy choices by creating public opinion that navigates the discussions in mainstream media in Pakistan. Such output in terms of public opinion influences the thinking of decision-makers in Pakistan, particularly when it comes to formulating foreign policy towards major powers, such as China and the US (N. Khan & Aziz, 2023). However, another study examining the coverage of the US in Pakistani print media revealed that a partial correlation exists between the foreign policy agenda and the media agenda. This study shows that the audience's agenda is sometimes not fully or completely shaped by the media's agenda (Qayyoum, 2021).

Both public opinion and foreign policy are influenced by mass media, which has a double-edged effect (Ayowole, 2022)

Communication, interpretation, and advocacy are the three basic responsibilities of the media in the foreign policy process (S. P. Cohen & Dasgupta, 2001). From the perspective of setting the agenda, mass communication initiates debate on both domestic and international issues. Political activism has given it so much influence that the media is now drawing the political map (B. C. Cohen, 2016). Media's aspect of telling people not only to think but also what to think about elucidates the media's agenda-setting role (J. M. Cohen et al., 1985). As a result, governments attempt to manipulate or control media coverage of policy issues. The relationship between policy, media, and public agendas is explained by agenda formation theory.

The second order of agenda-setting, framing, is concerned with how news takes shape including layout formulation, creation of the news treatment, structure, arrangement, word choice, and story making (Alonso, 2014). The impact of media interpretations of political communication is linked to foreign policy and the ultimate goals of foreign policy set by the media. The media can help or hinder the implementation of foreign policy by promoting or marginalising specific discourses (Eijaz, 2012a). In Pakistani media, for example, coverage of Hong Kong protests is disregarded or suppressed, while the Chinese government's narrative of "one country, two systems" is praised (Memon et al., 2020).

In the realm of political communication, numerous research studies have been conducted to support discourse analysis. Schneider defines discourse as all types of communication that influences the reality we live in. Discourse analysis is similar to forensic analysis in the communication process when examining texts. Discourse analysis is used when the reader must create emphasis for its messages by building a narratology (Kivle & Espedal, 2022). Classic methodologies such as "content analysis" are also referred to as discourse analysis. News headlines provide readers with a clear

meaning based on their views, directing them about what and how to think. The way they give the information makes it easy for readers to remember the information. Given the nominal meaning of news, which speaks truths, news discourse is intrinsically quantitative. Still, while news delivers information based on different perspectives obtained from sources, political discourse rests on the angles and views expressed in the news gathering (van Dijk, 1983). Media, however, selects features of occurrences, especially to openly display them by attaching a predetermined perspective via framing (Entman, 2007). Framing analysis of the media, which demonstrates news treatment, is an essential facet of how government and public opinion are interconnected. In the context of international politics, mainstream media have a tremendous impact on readers' perceptions of the outside world. People's minds were captivated by the media's influence, which created a narrative in their thoughts regarding international events. Because of their physical inability to experience it firsthand, the audience remained reliant on media (Grube, 2010). Similarly, readers use the supplied frameworks to shape their perceptions of facts.

The case study of framing Pak-Sino links in global media and its dependence on foreign policy was investigated by Bakht Rawan et.al. This study examines the treatment of China-Pakistan bilateral relations from the perspectives of the United States and India, focusing on their foreign policy obligations tied to their strategic interests (Rawan et al.,2001). The negative portrayal of the Sino-Pak equation, particularly in the context of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), confirms the geostrategic insecurities of the United States and India in South Asia. Those insecurities emanating from their foreign policy and their respective media are bound to serve the obligations of foreign policy. This case of scholarly work underpins the stance that media rummage public diplomacy into society, spreading national issues to the international level by framing them within their own constructed narratives. Those frames are the mouthpiece of a state's foreign policy agendas. Therefore,

state-media interaction is the alpha and omega of creating the ripple effect of official outreach to advance their stance on national interest and security. It may be projected that the media does not influence the state's decision-making process; instead, it is a one-directional relationship. On the contrary, one could argue that the relationship between media and states is more complex, comprising multiple layers rather than a single one. Their interaction is situational and confined by the interplay of a range of factors during the coverage of an issue.

Media and foreign policy relations have been discussed in the literature from atypical perspectives, previous studies have not investigated the matter at the disposal of this research. In research by Abida Ijaz, the relationship between foreign policy and media is scrutinised by taking the case of Pakistan (Eijaz, 2012b). This research highlights the indifferent nature of the relationship between media and foreign policy that has existed throughout Pakistan's history. In a similar vein, Muhammad Aftab and Shen Hui's (2019) study on the Hong Kong crisis and the role of Pakistani media in coverage provides a framing analysis of the problem (Memon et al., 2019). Their approach to gauge the war/peace journalism frames sheds light on the handling of China in Pakistani print media. It indirectly uncovers the different media influences on journalistic practice. The research finds a neutral approach towards the Chinese government's tackling of the issue.

Jude Nwakpoke Ogbodo and Emmanuel Chike Onwe, along with their research group, presented their research on COVID-19 from the perspective of framing in various global media (Ogbodo et al., 2020). Their research is relevant to communicating health crises by crafting them into separate frames to impact their cognition. Malik Adnan touches on the critical issue of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and its representation in the US and Indian print media (I. Khan et al., 2016). The analysis is conducted through a

framing analysis to present their interpretation of the economic project.

4. **Conceptualization of a Shift in Pakistan's Foreign Policy**

Pakistan's foreign policy during 2001-2010 remained pro-US, and Pakistan has enjoyed the status of a non-NATO ally of the US against the backdrop of the 9/11 attacks (Sohrab & Choudhry, 2012). However, in the second decade, 2011-2020, Pakistan and the US struggled to carry on smoothly because of the trust deficit over specific issues like instability in Afghanistan and the US operation against the OBL in Pakistan (Sohrab & Choudhry, 2012). Furthermore, China's move to Pakistan in terms of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in 2013 (S. Hussain & Khan, 2017) showed changes in the conception of Pakistan's approach to foreign policy in later years, resulting in Pakistan's official announcement in 2022 that the country is pivoting to geoeconomics, with CPEC playing a critical role in it (Asia, 2021). From the perspective of international relations, Pakistan has consistently safeguarded its national interests. Since its founding, Pakistan has given significant importance to the US and China. However, with the rise of a multipolar world, international politics have undergone substantial changes in recent years. The US and China are in competition with each other in various areas, including economics and technology, and this competition is having a lasting impact on international politics (Tellis et al., 2020). Pakistan attempts to view its relationship with China and the US as independent of each other; however, due to the complex nature of international politics, Pakistan faces challenges when aligning its national policies concerning the US and China. Pakistan's special diplomatic relations with China are often referred to as "relations between the iron brothers" (Vandewalle, 2015). Pakistan and the US have had a complex relationship, marked by ups and downs, and it appears that they struggle to work together in a long-term manner (M. Hussain, 2016).

The globalized world, through international politics, is connected in many ways. Because of this interdependence, foreign policy is sometimes unable to provide the proper guidance to any country; however, a country's behaviour can be judged in a particular direction by how it is portrayed in its media. Similarly, this is the case with the representation of the US and China during the COVID-19 pandemic in Pakistan's print media. Officially, Pakistan seeks to maintain a balance between the two countries. Still, in reality, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a multi-billion-dollar investment project from China in Pakistan, has a significant influence on the government and people of Pakistan, leading them to lean more toward China than the United States. Therefore, one could infer that the prioritization of China in the media is going to affect the foreign policy of Pakistan in the future. It would help Pakistan to create public opinion towards China that will eventually help mould foreign policy towards it, but on the other hand, Pakistan recently said that it would prefer "no camp politics" (Khar, 2022). This official stance would annihilate what print media is depicting. In such a case, it would be challenging for a foreign audience to trust the official stance of the Pakistani government in formulating its foreign policy during times of crisis.

5. Framing Theory

The intended study applies framing theory to test the approach of Pakistani media in representing China and the US in the wake of COVID-19. Framing approach does not rest on the assumption of the agenda-setting approach of media that emphasises the "what to think" aspect, but rather it tries to communicate the message by emphasizing "how to think". This aspect has a more substantial cognitive impact on the masses, causing them to believe what is being narrated as reality. Therefore, it is evident that by adopting this course of communication, media contributes to the mental construction of reality in the social world. This intrinsic ability of

mass media does not work apart from external stimulus (Grall & Finn, 2022). The external stimuli always act under the nature of the subject matter being reported.

While creating agendas related to framing in media, the study broadens its scope by concentrating on the vitality of the matter rather than the topic. Framing theory confines itself to media's ability to select by choice from the world of information (Goffman, 1974). According to framing theory, how something is presented to an audience (referred to as "the frame") has an impact on the audience's decisions to digest that information. Fixed notions or meanings attached to messages lead to framing of them that can help the intended audience contextualise them. The most prevalent application of frames is in the news or media's framing of the information they transmit ("Framing Theory," 2011). According to framing theory, media creates this frame by delivering news items that have preset and narrow contextualization. The use of frames can be intended to improve understanding, or they can serve as cognitive shortcuts that connect stories to the larger picture (Price, Tewkbury, & Powers, 1997). Whilst there is a clear conceptual intersection between the concept of framing and the concept of agenda setting (Weaver, 2007), the idea of framing is similar to the "second level" of agenda setting, which "examines the relative salience of attributes associated with different issues," as McCombs (2005) and Ghanem (1997) have described in detail. They are referred to as "the second level," in contrast to "the first level," which has typically concentrated on concerns (objects), despite the fact that the term "level" implies that attributes are more detailed than objects Weaver, 2007). When confronted with the news, people do not choose a frame in which to process the information; instead, they view the world through their frames and try to make new information fit into those frames. Contrary information is often dismissed as an exception to the rule or distorted to fit the frame in question. Consequently, people are more likely to notice information that

corresponds to their frames of reference and ignore information that does not (Goffman, 1974).

The frame building has been strategically designed to give prominence to those who can influence a large-scale audience in Pakistan due to their position, official status, economic condition, and connections to ordinary people. Thus, media then confers status on individuals who are mostly politicians, business tycoons, and activists, as they have a public presence and hold a certain amount of authority. Framing in newspapers is confined to the premises of foreign policy, the internal affairs of the US and China, and domestic policy in Pakistan regarding COVID-19. Journalistic framing contains elements of priority in the selection that confirm the aspect that newspapers, *The Express Tribune* and *Dawn*, have given voice to a whole lot of stories and people.

6. Complex Interdependence

The very nature of this research necessitates an examination of international relations as well. The lens of complex interdependence is primarily concerned with the relations between China, the United States, and Pakistan from the perspective of political economy (Oatley, 2019). The economic interdependence of Pakistan with China, resulting from the multibillion-dollar investment in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, defines a relative foreign policy tilt in favour of China compared to the US as an alternative (Abid & Ashfaq, 2015). The current study also draws theoretical motivation from this perspective, owing to Pakistan's economic reliance on China. Additionally, China is diversifying its trade routes to realise its vision of reviving the old Silk Road, ensuring that both countries' current economic needs are met reciprocally. Geographic proximity exacerbates the situation (Huang, 2016). On the other hand, the United States remains the world's most powerful country, and Pakistan allied with it during the Soviet war in Afghanistan, the Cold

War, and the War on Terror. This alliance was entirely consistent with a realist definition of national interest, in which Pakistan was left with no choice but to join the US alliance. The present era has taken on a new dimension due to the Chinese factor as a guarantor of Pakistan's economic future (Haq & Farooq, 2016). Thus, the complex interdependence that has existed since the inception of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is the only academic lens that adequately explains the strength of affinity between Pakistan and China. In comparison, the United States and Pakistan experienced highs and lows in their relations, with strategic obligations and security concerns dominating their approach (Hussain, 2005). Thus, the convergence of national interests between China and Pakistan is far more promising than the convergence of national interests between the US and Pakistan.

7. Methodology

To achieve our research objectives, we have sourced data from two leading newspapers in Pakistan, namely The *Express Tribune* and *Dawn*. The former newspaper has been selected because it is the first-ever Pakistani English newspaper with an international affiliation (*The Herald Tribune*) and is the second most widely circulated English newspaper in Pakistan. However, the latter (*Dawn*) is Pakistan's oldest English daily, with the largest number of readers. Regarding the period of coverage, we have included the first wave of COVID-19 in China (December 29, 2019, to July 30, 2020) and the US (January 20, 2020, to July30, 2020). We have utilised the LexisNexis database to retrieve data by searching for the terms "Pakistan" and "Coronavirus" in the archive section of the newspaper under study. Furthermore, to examine how China and the US have been portrayed in relation to Pakistan during the COVID-19 pandemic, we utilised the collocation software LancsBox version 4. It is worth noting that we employed an interdisciplinary methodology to examine the major frames associated with the countries mentioned above.

In the field of linguistics, when linguists retrieve data in electronic form in bulk to be studied via software, they call it a "corpus". We have used the same term consistently throughout this paper when referring to our data. The second thing which needs scrutiny and clarification is the use of the term "collocates". The term implies the occurrence of a word (not by chance) in the adjacency of any search word in the corpus. We have employed frame-based collocation analysis for our project, suggesting that collocates open the door to frame analysis. Therefore, we searched for the words "US" and "China" in the Graph Coll tool of the software as mentioned earlier.

Then, we analyzed the data using both quantitative and qualitative methods. For the purpose of obtaining pure statistics-based results, we selected a threshold level (covering 5 words to the right and left of the search word), used the MI 2 test, and also set statistical values to ensure our results had strong ties to the search word. We have presented our results in both tables and have visualised this data via figures. Then, for qualitative analysis, we used the KWIC (Keywords in Context) tool in the software. The benefit of using this tool is that it retrieves every possible occurrence of the search word in the corpus, making a repository for qualitative analysis. For both search words, we expanded the sentences and then qualitatively assigned them to two basic frames: domestic and foreign policy, where each is further subcategorized. The immediate and broader contexts are then analysed. The reason for using this approach is that when we opt for pure statistical analysis, there is an objection that it yields unreliable results because the context is not fully taken into consideration. Similarly, when we conduct pure qualitative-based research, one encounters the problem of bias. To overcome these objections, we have employed both methods to present more reliable, objective, and contextually oriented results. In conclusion, we have attempted to summarise the differences between the two countries and the potential reasons behind them. Thus, this research

draws on linguistic methods, merging them with media analysis, and presents results that reveal foreign policy aspects concerning Pakistan, China, and the US, set against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic.

8. Data Analysis

Generating Frames via Collocation Analysis: Case of China

Generating Frames via Statistical Score

Rank	Collocate	MI2 Score	Rank	Collocate	MI2 Score
1	Coronavirus-free	15.8	12	Italy	12.1
2	Proximity	15.8	13	Us	11.9
3	Wuhan	15.6	14	Students	11.9
4	Emerged	14.4	15	Pakistan	11.9
5	26	14.3	16	coronavirus	11.5
6	February	14.3	17	imported	11.5
7	Central	14.0	18	Pakistani	11.5
8	Remained	13.6	19	Iran	11.4
9	Close	13.6	20	Flights	11.2
10	Originated	13.6	21	December	11.0
11	City	13.3			

This section examines the collocates of the word "China" in the Pakistan Corpus of COVID-19 and identifies statistically which frames may be potentially overused in the corpus. To strengthen this quantitative analysis, the following section then studies the collocation sentences qualitatively to align the quantitative and qualitative studies and to reinforce the notion that both quantitative and qualitative results are consistent. The qualitative section further enriches the analysis. These frames are generated through *Express Tribune* data.

To identify the strong collocates of China, we utilised the MI2 score at the set threshold level. The software generated 33 collocates after removing function words (see Table 1). The significance level is maintained at p>0.05.
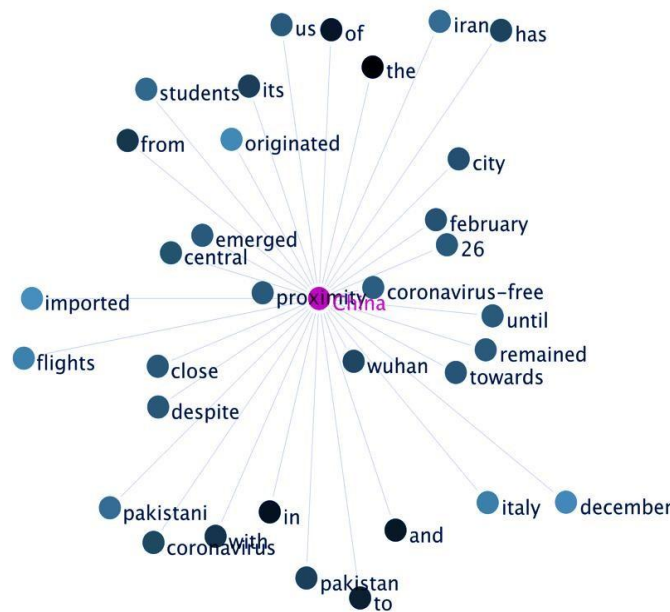
Table 1: Strong Collocates of *China* Denoting Strongest Frames (*Express Tribune*)

*(Search Term: China| Statistic: 04 - MI2| Span: 5-5| Collocation freq. threshold: 15.0| Statistic value threshold: 11.0| CPN: 04 - MI2 (11.0)/ L5-R5/ C: 15.0-NC: 15.0)

The words at ranks 1 and 16 signify the aspect of China being engulfed by the Coronavirus, as well as its efforts to make the country free from the deadly disease. The collocates at ranks 12, 13, 15, and 19 signify China's international relations with the respective countries. Mainly, the nationality marker "Pakistani," if combined with the country marker at rank 15, implies that the base word Pakistan* carries much more collocation strength than any other word in the list. The qualitative analysis sheds light on the details of how these countries are linked to China within the foreign policy framework. Three additional vital collocates worth discussing are: the word "China" at rank 14, connecting it with education on either the domestic or international level, and the collocates "imported"

and "flights" at ranks 17 and 20, which open the frame for the economic domain. The rest of the collocates refer to time, emergence, and epicentre of the disease. These collocates are also visualised graphically (see Fig. 1), where the length of the lines represents the strength; the closer the collocates are to the node (the search word), the stronger their connection. However, one aspect that needs to be kept in mind is that function words also appear in visualisation, but as they are not part of our analysis, we have not discussed them.

Fig1: Visualization of Strong Collocates of *China* (M12)

Generating Frames via Qualitative Method

Using the LancsBox, the search term "China" generated 1293 instances. Analysing the sentences manually, we divided the cases into two basic frames: Foreign Policy and Domestic Policy, which are further discussed in subframes to delineate them qualitatively.

Foreign Policy: The foreign policy framework encompasses various sub-frameworks. The most frequent one is associated with the issue of stranded Pakistani students in China, which articulates a foreign policy frame explicitly to exhibit Pak-China relations. The covered news items show the cohesive and conclusive approach of the Pakistani government at a time when the rest of the countries were trying to speed up the evacuation of their citizens and students from China. Pakistan demonstrated composure in its planning, and the following examples illustrate the points discussed above.

> 'Coordination is in progress to airlift all these Pakistanis students,' the ambassador said. 'She defended the government decision of not repatriating its students from China during the lockdown. 'This decision proved useful as there is no case of virus transmission from China to Pakistan,' she added.

> 'Treating stranded students like our own', China assures Pakistan. At Saturday's presser, Dr Mirza.(*Dawn*, January 30,2020)

The final excerpt from a news story vividly illustrates the warmth of bilateral relations between Pakistan and China, particularly in their efforts to care for stranded students in China during the COVID-19 crisis: "The Senate appreciated the governments of China for treating Pakistani citizens, especially students in Wuhan, just like

their own citizens, and providing them protection and comfort" (Junaidi, 2020).

This example highlights one of the government pillars, the Senate in Pakistan, to commend the Chinese government's efforts to implement safety measures for Pakistani students and citizens in China. This example from the data shows that news coverage is not limited to individual official actors from both sides, but also encompasses whole governing bodies, positively appreciating mutual exchange during COVID-19. This aspect not only enjoys the foreign policy aspect in a broader perspective but also signifies the holistic political narrative of the Pakistani state, which defines the security of national interests.

Domestic Policy of China: The corpus reflects China's domestic policy coverage since the outbreak of the pandemic. Apart from foreign policy, the covered news stories demonstrate that *Express Tribune's* scope includes Chinese domestic policies and news to inform the Pakistani public. One of the rationales is that the pandemic originated in China. As a result, it is entirely logical that people living outside China would be interested in hearing from the country. However, how China's internal struggle against COVID-19 was portrayed in Pakistani newspapers will help determine whether the Pakistani government's official policy overrode it. The analysis of news items reveals that *Express Tribune's* focus in this frame is on health, travel, education, the economy, deaths, and the fight against deadly viruses. The examples that follow will help to conclude the preceding discussion.

> China has expanded drastic travel restrictions to contain the viral contagion that has killed 56 people and infected nearly 2,000, as the United States and France prepared to evacuate their citizens from a quarantined city at the outbreak's epicentre (Desk, 2020).

China has locked down the hard-hit province of Hubei'(Hussain, 2020).

The two examples above fall under the category of travelling. According to the data, China immediately placed its citizens under lockdown and imposed travel restrictions to halt the spread of the disease. These initial steps taken by the Chinese government in mobilising the populace are being practised in the rest of the world. Pakistan initially chose a lockdown and then a smart lockdown to deal with the pandemic's early emergence in Pakistan. These aspirations of the Pakistani government demonstrate their understanding of the Chinese system, particularly in the area of pandemic preparedness, as a model to be emulated.

The data sorted for research purposes also included the subframe of deaths in China, as evidenced by the examples above. It was noted that *Express Tribune* published regular data on casualties in China, adhering to the fundamental principle of "informing" the populace.

> "The World Health Organisation puts the number of confirmed cases reported from mainland China at 1,975. 'This includes 324 severe cases and 56 people who have died," the WHO added (Hussain, 2020).
>
> The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has now infected almost 100,000 people in nearly one-third the world, with more than 3,300 deaths recorded. Even though China remains the worst-affected country with 80,000 cases, more than 5,000 cases have been detected in Europe, mostly in Italy, and thousands more in Iran, the Far East, and North America (Editorial, 2020).

However, it is worth noting that not a single Pakistani newspaper or government official has expressed reservations about the accuracy of the data provided by the Chinese government. This aspect has been covered and given prominence in the Western and the American press. Thus, the uncovered aspect of this subframe raises a point about the newspaper's policy of avoiding offending the Pakistani government's official sentiment.

China's domestic policy toward COVID-19 is projected in the *Express Tribune* within the context of the economy. This frame is portrayed positively in the Pakistani newspaper to convince the reader that economic life in China has returned to normal. This sign of factory reopening demonstrates to the world that China has effectively slowed the spread of the virus.

> However, market sentiment improved as factories in China started to reopen and the government eased its monetary policy (Hussain, 2020).

> This gives a signal that China has contained the virus and the number of new cases is falling gradually (Hussain, 2020).

Within the Chinese domestic policy framework, the health subframe encompasses information on vaccine development, foreign patient treatment, and plasma techniques for patient treatment. In all of these areas, the Chinese government's projections and efforts are encouragingly optimistic. The treatment of this subframe (Health) is explicit in that it includes detailed accounts of China's stable and effective health conditions. The following news items substantiate the claim as mentioned earlier:

> 'Doctors have saved hundreds of lives with the help of this technique in China since February,' he added (Ahmad, 2020).

> There was some rare bright news on the Covid-19 front this week as two separate vaccine trials in the UK and China have shown promising results in human trials (Ahmad, 2020).

> Till now, there are 19 foreign NCP patients in China and two of them have been cured (Ahmad, 2020).

The corpus contains numerous news items related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The examples below illustrate this well by breaking it down into different levels of combat against the disease, accepting it as a challenge and responding at the metropolitan and municipal levels. Additionally, *The Express Tribune* published the World Health Organisation's recognition of China's fight against a deadly virus. This has made a significant contribution to China's positive image-building in the minds of Pakistani readers. Acceptance of China as a model in the fight against pandemics psychologically moulds Pakistanis toward the fundamental idea of Pakistan's national interests being aligned with those of China.

> Governments at all levels in China have taken epidemic control and prevention as the top priority (Jing, 2020).

> WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom visited China recently and commented that the Chinese government's measures are beyond WHO requirements, and China is actually setting a new standard in terms of outbreak response (Jing, 2020).

All of these examples demonstrate that by covering China's domestic policy toward COVID-19, the Pakistani media under study intended to convey two messages: that whatever happens in China on a domestic level is significant for Pakistanis, and that the country itself is portrayed positively.

Domestic Policy of Pakistan: The next frame of Pakistan's domestic policy is also derived from various subframes, such as travel, coronavirus cases, political wrangling, and precautions in Pakistan. This frame is significant because Pakistan and China are inextricably linked not only through international relations but also through geography. Thus, the factors mentioned earlier are responsible for Pakistan's domestic policy considering COVID-19.

The data indicates that the subframe of travel receives significant coverage in news stories. Pakistan is focusing considerable attention on the influx of people from China. Apart from that, domestic travel is regulated via a series of lockdowns and intelligent lockdowns.

> Pakistan's opposition parties have criticised the government for 'abandoning' its citizens stranded in China as students are posting video appeals on social media for their evacuation (*Dawn, 2020*).

The subframe of Coronavirus cases is reported interestingly in *The Express Tribune*. The reporting trend for this frame demonstrates a comparison of Coronavirus cases between Pakistan and China. Thus, one could interpret this as a signal that China has served as a yardstick for determining whether Pakistan is at risk of contracting the coronavirus. The following exemplifies this observation:

> As the authorities eased the lockdown restrictions, Pakistan's tally of coronavirus cases has surpassed China, crossing the 85,000 mark (Ahmed, 2020).

To summarise, the coverage of domestic politics in Pakistan is presented through the lens of travel and aid, both of which are informed by the discourse of regional political parties and their concerns and opposition to the issues mentioned above.

Generating Frames via Collocation Analysis: Case of the US

To identify the frames for US coverage in our corpus, the analysis is divided into two sections: finding frames via statistical scoring and qualitative analysis.

Index	Collocate	MI 2	Index	Collocate	M1 2
1	Donald	14.1	18	elections	10.2
2	Dollar	14.0	19	our	10.1
3	Trump	12.7	20	help	9.9
4	Europe	12.6	21	dollars	10.4
5	Uk	12.1	22	war	9.7
6	China	11.9	23	we	9.7
7	Wells	11.9	24	countries	9.6
8	European	11.9	25	us	9.5
9	President	11.5	26	japan	9.5
10	Presidential	11.4	27	example	9.3
11	Candidates	11.4	28	he	9.2

12	France	11.4	29	think	9.1
13	Gives	11.1	30	said	9.0
14	Rupee	10.9	31	citizens	9.0
15	Spain	10.8	32	allow	9.0
16	States	10.4	33	pakistan	9.0
17	Taliban	10.4	34	crude	9.0

Generating Frames via Statistical Score

At the fixed threshold level, we have searched for the term *US* in our corpus. Considering the strongest collocates, the table below lists them in order of the MI2 score.
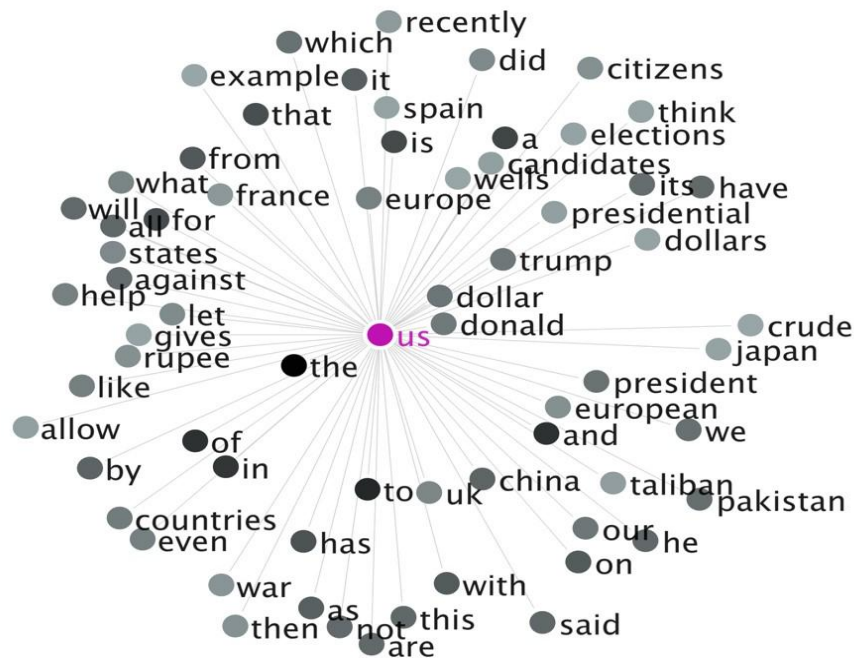
Table No. 2: Strong Collocates of *US* Denoting Strongest Frames)

Search Term: US| Statistic: 04 - MI2| Span: 5-5| Collocation freq. threshold: 8.0| Statistic value threshold: 9.0| CPN: 04 - MI2 (9.0)/ L5-R5/ C: 8.0-NC

In contrast to what appears to be significant frames concerning China, here one can see that the US is more represented by its President, Donald Trump (see ranks 1, 3, and 9). It implies that the President of the US is more prominent in terms of COVID coverage when it comes to Pakistan. It is interesting to note, however, that in terms of the US's foreign policy, the country is more closely linked to European countries (see ranks 5, 6, 8, 12, 15, 24, 26, and 33). The major frame, apart from this, can be seen in terms of economics if one examines the words at ranks 2, 14, and 21. All these words hint at the economic power of the US over the Pakistani rupee. The

words at ranks 13 and 20 imply US assistance to other countries, most likely Pakistan (as discussed in the next section through qualitative analysis and with concrete remarks).

The above results are also visualised via the following figure. The shorter the line in the network graph, the stronger its connection to the US.

Fig. 2: Visualization of Collocates of the US (M12)

Foreign Policy: The *Express Tribune* data is also used to portray and report on the United States' response to COVID-19. Frames and subsequent subframes are constructed qualitatively. Foreign policy is divided into two subframes: China's relationship with the US and the US's relationship with China. This subframe explains why China's perspective on the US was reported during the pandemic crisis. The examples below further illustrate this point.

China's subframe relationship with the US has encompassed a variety of facets. The article examines the most significant aspects of China's allegations and the US's inadequate response to the pandemic crisis. These examples demonstrate that China is the primary actor, and the US is the primary beneficiary of the former's actions. The reporting of these news stories aims to highlight China's positive image development in *The Express Tribune*. One of the critical strands of' responding to the superpower is evident in this image-building of China. This reinforces the general perception of China as the world's next superpower in a newspaper from a developing country. Thus, China's treatment of the US during the COVID-19 crisis is explicitly attributed to China's efforts to build a positive image, demonstrating Pakistan's foreign policy inclination toward China. The following exemplify the preceding discussion:

> Owing primarily to Trump's inept handling of the Covid-19 crisis, the US has been pummelled by the pandemic: there are 3.24 million confirmed cases and 136,000 confirmed deaths (*Express Tribune*, 2020).

> China says US creating, spreading fear after virus outbreak (*Express Tribune, 2020*).

The first example cites criticism from a Chinese official regarding the US's inept handling of the outbreak of the disease. The second example examines the conspiracy theory that the US is responsible for the virus outbreak in Wuhan. All of these examples portray China as the primary actor and represent the US as a superpower

that is both a schemer and a bioterrorist, as well as a country that is incapable of adequately responding to a pandemic.

The next subframe of foreign policy is the United States' relationship with China. This subframe explains how the US government views China, as reported in *The Express Tribune*. Travel-related issues, US accusations against China, and US trade policies during the pandemic are discussed in the context of the US-China relationship. The data analysis reveals that newspapers have chosen to portray the US as a neutral to a slightly negative actor, particularly when reporting on travel restrictions to blame China for the pandemic. According to the analysis of news stories provided below, newspapers have created the impression that the US is losing its trade war and internal politics as a result of the upcoming US election. The US has acted as the villain in the COVID-19 crisis to avoid the spillover of all these factors. The following examples substantiate the preceding assertions"

> The United States began evacuating US citizens from the central Chinese city of Wuhan, where the virus is believed to have first emerged late last year, on January 28 (Editorial, 2020).

> Meanwhile, age-old rivalries are standing in the way of a unified global response.Conspiracy theorists in the US are claiming the virus was a Chinese biological weapon (*Express Tribune*, 2020).

The data uncovered another subframe of the US's relationship with Pakistan. This subframe covers travel and US assistance to Pakistan. The examples below will help explain the nuances of the subframe under discussion:

> The US citizens have been stranded in the country due to the ongoing lockdown and travel restrictions imposed in the wake of coronavirus pandemic (Ahmed, 2020).

> PIA's 7th special flight to repatriate citizens from US (*Express Tribune*, 2020).

The Express Tribune reported on US citizens being evacuated from Pakistan as well as Pakistani students and residents who were stuck in the US. The reporting of these news stories reflects the emergency repatriation of citizens from both countries via special flights. This emergency response during a pandemic crisis demonstrates the strength of Pakistan's bilateral relations with the United States. While analysing this subframe, it was noted that the newspaper took an objective approach, mentioning pertinent details without using flowery language.

Additionally, the corpus sheds light on the United States' assistance to Pakistan during the COVID-19 pandemic. The analysis of data reveals that the newspaper adequately covered the American assistance to Pakistan during this time of the pandemic. The aid covers everything from emergency medical equipment to ventilators, supplementing Pakistan's underdeveloped healthcare infrastructure. The reporting of US assistance reflects the existing foreign relations between the two countries. While the approach taken qualifies the standard for reporting information in and of itself, it has been observed that it lacks the element of persuasion for the public. This discrepancy in reporting is attributable to Pakistan's foreign policy orientation.

> According to them, the longstanding Pakistan-US health partnership started to train healthcare providers and procure urgently needed lab and emergency supplies with $2 million in US funding (*Express Tribune*, 2020).

> With the latest contributions, the US has now committed nearly $15 million in new funding to joint efforts to fight coronavirus and its economic impacts, the statement read (*Express Tribune*, 2020).

US Internal Affairs: Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the *Express Tribune* covered US domestic affairs. It addressed the US's domestic policy regarding travel, health, and the tackling of COVID-19. This frame is pertinent to the subject of this research paper because it will reflect how US domestic policy is discussed in a Pakistani newspaper. The examples below elaborate on these strands of a larger frame. The example is provided below.

> The IMF said that the US economy will contract by 5.9% in 2020 and grow by 4.7% in the year that follows, leaving it still worse off than was the case when Covid-19 arrived (*Express Tribune*, 2020).

These examples include casualties, a track record of positive COVID-19 cases, economic setbacks, and joblessness resulting from the pandemic. By analysing reported news on domestic affairs in the United States, it was discovered that *the Express Tribune* took a somewhat biased approach, backed up by statistical data, to paint a bleak picture of the US. The newspaper emphasized that the US was functionally incapable of dealing with the situation. *The Express Tribune's* approach immediately impacted Pakistan's already somewhat negative perception of the US. The average reader has psychologically convinced himself or herself that the US government is inept at managing its affairs, particularly Pakistan-US relations, but also at home.

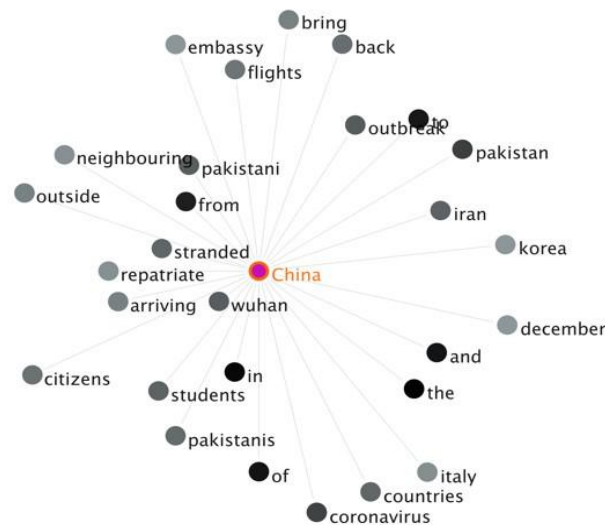### *Generating Frames via Collocation Analysis: Case of China*
Generating Frames via Statistical Score

To identify the strong collocates of China, we utilised the MI2 score at the set threshold level. The software generated 28 collocates after removing function words (see Table 3). The significance level is maintained at $p > 0.05$.

Rank	Collocate	MI2 Score	Rank	Collocate	MI2 Score
1	Wuhan	14.2	11	neighbouring	11.7
2	stranded	13.6	12	Pakistan	11.6
3	Pakistani	13.1	13	Korea	11.5
4	arriving	12.9	14	citizens	11.4
5	repatriate	12.8	15	embassy	11.4
6	students	12.7	16	December	11.4
7	outbreak	12.4	17	countries	11.3
8	Pakistanis	12.2	18	coronavirus	11.3
9	Iran	12.2	19	Italy	11.1
10	Flights	11.9			

Table 3: Strong Collocates of *China* Denoting Strongest Frames (*Dawn*)

*(Search Term: China| Statistic: 04 - MI2| Span: 5-5| Collocation freq. threshold: 9.0| Statistic value threshold: 11.0| CPN: 04 - MI2 (11.0)/ L5-R5/ C: 9.0-NC: 9.0)

Fig3: Visualization of Strong Collocates of *China* (M12)

Generating Frames via Qualitative Method

Using the LancsBox, the search term "China" generated 1010 instances. After manually analysing the sentences, we divided the cases into two basic frames: foreign policy and domestic policy, as we did for Express Tribune. These frames are further discussed in subframes to provide a qualitative delineation.

Foreign Policy: The foreign policy framework encompasses various sub-frames, which are also explored. The most frequent one is associated with the bilateral relations and friendship between Pakistan and China amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The subframe of the economy, where the effects of supply chain disruption were

highlighted in the *Dawn*, and its impact on the Chinese economy was the least significant. The subframe of coronavirus cases was also covered in the *Dawn* stories. Still, qualitative analysis revealed that Pakistan's government officials were more eager to learn from the Chinese experience dealing with epidemics. Additionally, *Dawn* has addressed the issue of the emergence of a virus in the context of conspiracy theories. *Dawn's* coverage of one senator 's condemnation of the US allegation that a virus was created in a lab in Wuhan emphasises the importance of bilateral relations and Pakistan's foreign policy orientation. The examples given below support the preceding discussion:

> Punjab Health Minister Prof Dr Yasmin Rashid welcomed the delegation and thanked them for helping the government in a difficult time. She said 'At this time of crisis, it is very important for us to learn from China (Reporter, 2020).

> The Chinese leadership has received solidarity messages from the president and prime minister of Pakistan with deep welcome and appreciation (Reporter, 2020).

> The ADB said depending on how the outbreak evolved, the magnitude of economic losses in the developing Asian economies would range from 0.1pc to 0.4pc of the global GDP. China alone could face about 0.8pc of its GDP, it estimated (Kiani, 2020).

Domestic Policy of China: Since the pandemic outbreak, *Dawn* has reflected China's domestic policy coverage. The covered news stories in *Dawn* include Chinese domestic policies amid the pandemic and news to inform the Pakistani people. The pandemic originated in China, and it is entirely logical that people living outside China would be interested in hearing from the country. On the other hand, the portrayal of Chinese domestic news stories in *Dawn* will help to identify the tilt of Pakistan's official policy. The

analysis of news items reveals that *Dawn's* focus in this frame is on travel, education, the economy, deaths, and the fight against deadly viruses. The examples that follow help conclude the preceding discussion:

> On March 28, China began lifting the lockdown in Wuhan. By April 8, the restrictions were completely lifted (Dawn*, 2020).

> The slowdown of manufacturing in China due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak is disrupting world trade and could result in a $50 billion decrease in exports across global value chains, according to estimates published by UNCTAD (Dawn, 2020).

The two examples above fall under the main frame of "domestic policies of China," but each represents a different subframe. The first example shows the lifting of the travel ban within the city of Wuhan, where the epidemic started. This gives the public the impression that China has successfully dealt with the disease and that life in the country is returning to normal. The second example illustrates the substructure of the Chinese economy and its subsequent impacts globally.

Domestic Policy of Pakistan: The next frame of Pakistan's domestic policy is also derived from various subframes such as travel, coronavirus cases, emulation of the Chinese experience, precautions, and geographic proximity in Pakistan. This frame is critical, owing to the nature of bilateral relations. Furthermore, it will reveal whether a country's domestic policy is dependent on the foreign policy of another country during a crisis, such as a pandemic.

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The sorted data reveal that *Dawn* has covered stories that can be framed under the categories of "economy," "coronavirus cases," and "government policy to counter the pandemic domestically," using China as an example (Dawn,2020). The tone suggests that, overall, *Dawn* has portrayed China as a country worth befriending and emulating in terms of crisis management. The following examples support the above discussion:

> The governor said Pakistan needs to learn from China which has successfully fought this war through drastic measures.

> PM IK said 'the government's decision not to bring Pakistani students back from Wuhan despite the pressure from parents and the media was difficult, but it went well as not a single case was reported in the country from China.

> The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) has included Pakistan in the list of 20 economies across the world that have been affected the most after China suffered a slowdown because of the novel coronavirus (Dawn, 2020).

Generating Frames via Collocation Analysis: Case of the US

To identify the frames for US coverage in our corpus, the analysis is divided into two sections: finding frames via statistical scoring and qualitative analysis.

Generating Frames via Statistical Score

At the fixed threshold level, we have searched for the term "US" in our corpus. Considering the strongest collocates, Table 4 below lists them in order of the MI2 score:

Rank	Collocate	MI2 Score	Rank	Collocate	MI2 Score
1	Donald	13.9	8	dollar	11.3
2	Trump	13.4	9	flights	10.2
3	UK	13.1	10	pandemic	9.7
4	Europe	13.0	11	China	9.5
5	embassy	12.3	12	India	9.4
6	Italy	11.9	13	states	9.2
7	president	11.5	14	world	9.1

Table No. 4: Strong Collocates of *US* Denoting Strongest Frames *(Dawn)*

Search Term: US| Statistic: 04 - MI2| Span: 5-5| Collocation freq. threshold: 8.0| Statistic value threshold: 9.0| CPN: 04 - MI2 (9.0)/ L5-R5/ C: 8.0-NC

Fig. 4: Visualization of Collocates of the US (M12)

***Foreign Policy*:** The *Dawn* data is also used to portray and report on the United States' response to COVID-19. Frames and subsequent subframes are constructed qualitatively, as sorted out by analysing *The Express Tribune*. Therefore, after sorting out the data, it was found that *Dawn's* data reflects the main frame of foreign policy, which is divided into three subframes: China's relationship with the US and the US's relationship with China, as reflected in *The Express Tribune's* data. Still, the third subframe of bilateral relations is also covered in the data of the second newspaper (Dawn). This subframe explains why China's perspective on the US was reported during the pandemic crisis. The examples below further illustrate this point.

> Mr. Trump has multiple times dubbed Covid-19 the 'Chinese virus' and US officials have indulged in a racially tinged blame game over the origins of the virus.

> It was about the novel coronavirus being created at a biohazard military lab in the US to bring down China's flourishing economy.
>
> US President Donald Trump calling coronavirus a 'Chinese virus' has sent a chill down the world's spine and invoked a great deal of anger.
>
> During the conversation, PM Khan also sympathised with Mr. Trump and offered his condolences on the loss of precious lives in the US due to coronavirus (Dawn*,2020*).

China's subordinate relationship with the US has encompassed a range of facets during the COVID-19 pandemic. The article examines the most significant aspects of President Trump's allegations regarding the alleged creation of a virus in China. It refers to it as the "Chinese virus," as shown in the above examples 1 and 4. Furthermore, as shown in Example 3, China's response was portrayed through the publication of the same fake news, which claimed that the virus was created in a US lab and was intended to harm the Chinese economy. The bilateral relations between Pakistan and the United States were discussed in the following example.

US Internal Affairs: During the analysis and creation of frames from qualitative data in Dawn, it has been noted that the newspaper has consistently covered news stories related to the internal affairs of the US administration amid the pandemic. It addressed the subframes of the US's domestic policy regarding travel, health, and the tackling of COVID-19. The rationale for this mainframe analysis is to examine how Pakistani newspapers have portrayed the US in the eyes and minds of their audiences, with particular consideration given to *Dawn*, the oldest English newspaper in Pakistan and the one with the highest readership among its contemporaries. The examples below elaborate on the strands of protests in the US, coronavirus

cases, steps to control the epidemic, and the severity of the variant virus in the US:

> Over the past few weeks, the US has seen a wave of protests claiming that 'Covid-19 is a lie'.

> In *the* US, the death toll from coronavirus has reached 12.

> Mutated virus in US threatens vaccine effectiveness, says study

> The federal minister also claimed that the US state of New York is planning to follow the concept of contact tracing and "smart lockdown" (Dawn,2020).

The Dawn's coverage of US internal affairs is filled with the element of "fear" when it comes to the severity of the variant. The coverage of protests in the US amid the epidemic reflects that the US was inept in dealing with the crisis at home. Such news stories have a substantial impact on the average reader in Pakistan, who may now consider the US a weak country amid the COVID crisis.

Conclusion

The coverage of COVID-19 as a global pandemic in Pakistani print media included China and the United States, demonstrating that the representation of both countries on the same subject differs. This has become increasingly clear since the launch of the Belt and Road Initiative's (BRI) flagship program, CPEC, in Pakistan. A middle-income country like Pakistan has not initially been able to go against the wind when it comes to choosing to support the US or China; instead, the print media has built, shaped, and paved the way towards one side. In this research, it was found that a crisis, such as a pandemic, was reported and fabricated for Pakistani audiences based on the domestic counterstrategies of major powers (the US and China) to demonstrate how well they could handle

unprecedented crises like COVID-19. So, The Express Tribune and Dawn, in their coverage of the US and China during COVID-19, played a significant role in getting people to think of China not only as Pakistan's true friend in times of crisis but also as a good example of how to handle the unprecedented pandemic crisis that aligns with the recent shift of Pakistan towards China over the official policy of geoeconomics. The conclusion adheres to the evaluation of the intention referred to at the beginning of this research, which frames building and foreign policy as having a direct bearing in this case. The Express Tribune and Dawn have presented a more positive image of China during the pandemic crisis, as compared to the coverage of the US.

In the case of China and the United States, the frames identified through statistical scoring and qualitative means are consistent, and the latter provide additional insight into the identified frames. When it comes to statistical tests, in the case of China, the primary focus of The Express Tribune appears to be the efforts made by the Chinese government to eradicate the Coronavirus, as the strongest collocate seems to be "coronavirus-free," and the issues of stranded Pakistani students in China. The second aspect links Pakistan's domestic concerns with China. On the other hand, in the case of Dawn, the focus seems to be geared more towards the latter aspect mentioned in The Express Tribune. When considering the case of the US and the statistical tests, the most substantial and most frequent collocates in both datasets appear to be the US President, Donald Trump, and economic factors related to the dollar. The research revealed a plethora of findings that have a direct bearing on Pakistan's foreign policy orientation. These bearings include foreign policy directions that stem from economic dependence, national interest convergence, and assistance in times of crisis. These factors demonstrate that The Express Tribune and Dawn explicitly followed the State's lead in framing the United States and China. The favourable portrayal of China in the context of COVID-19 leads the

public to believe that China has effectively addressed the pandemic. Additionally, it reinforces the widespread perception among Pakistanis that China has provided timely and generous assistance to Pakistan. In comparison to China, research confirms that both newspapers, The Express Tribune and Dawn, have limited coverage of the United States. Additionally, despite the American government's provision of significant aid during the pandemic, the reporting lacks persuasive content and a positive image-building for the US. The US is portrayed as a country that has failed miserably in its efforts to contain the disease, and the pandemic has resulted in widespread unemployment and protests in the US. The study's findings attest to the inextricably linked relationship between media and foreign policy. In the case of Pakistan, the research reflected the state of bilateral relations at the time and the country's political leanings. It demonstrates that Pakistani media views China as a friendly country on which Pakistani citizens can rely in times of crisis. As a result of the study, it can also be concluded that the relationship between the Pakistani government and the media is advocative in nature.

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