

**Critically Analyzing the Discourses of Pakistani
Newspapers Presenting Russia and US Role in Afghanistan
before and after 9/11**

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Abstract

The paper critically examines political cartoons' discourses of Pakistani English and Urdu newspapers to see how the role of Russia and US in Afghanistan was portrayed after 9/11. The linguistic and visual resources are deconstructed by employing (Machin, 2007) Van Leeuwen's (2008) and Fairclough's (2003) frameworks. Detailed analysis of political cartoons' discourses is done to uncover the hidden ideologies and to reveal the ideological construction of the subject. The findings of the study show that newspapers play pivotal role in the construction and dissemination of particular set of ideologies which ultimately influence and make readers' mind.

Keywords: Political cartoons, newspapers, 9/11, US, Russia, Afghanistan, MCDA, ideology

1- Introduction

In December 1979, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan to advance its interests in the region (Ahmad, 2010). Within the two weeks of the invasion, the Afghans were armed for resistance against the Soviet forces (Kuperman, 1999). The situation also signalled the intensification of the rivalries between the two superpowers (Ziring, 1980). The United States waged a proxy war against Russia through Mujahideen to protect its interests in the region (Ali, 2013). The Soviets were defeated after ten years of intense war in Afghanistan because

the Afghan Mujahideen were fully backed up by the US. “After the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, the de facto alliance of states that had backed different factions of the Mujaheddin soon fell apart” (Ali, 2002: 210). The result was a series of civil wars,. According to Durrani & Khan (2009) Kabul had faced eight years of civil war after Soviets’ withdrawal which completely devastated the infrastructure of the country. After 9/11 Afghanistan was pushed again into another proxy war. Afghanistan has been a very difficult war zone for all the invaders until now so American invasion is being looked in the Soviet perspective in the political cartoons. The political cartoons published on this theme in the selected newspapers look and judge American invasion in the light of Soviet defeat. The cartoonists used the images promoting America’s sufferings and defeat as well as the tragedy of another great war between the powers to gain control in Afghanistan. The images have the settings in which Russians are depicted defeated and lost and Americans adventure is portrayed in that context. The social actors performing the actions are generic people dejected and crushed representing Russia, whereas, Bush despite being aware of all this is set on path to war. The settings are dark and dim and contain much commentary on the issue. These are very ideological and revealing the actors’ plans and schemes for the accomplishment of the specific goals. The semiotic resources are created and designed to feel the US defeat and creating an imaginative world for the readers. These images signify concepts such as defeat, sufferings, action replay of Russians’ blunders and game of power between the super nations. The detailed analysis of the selected political cartoons is given in the analysis section.

2- Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis

It was realised by many researchers who had been pursuing their research in linguistics in the late 1980s and 1990s that meaning is generally not only transmitted through language but also through other semiotic modes. The images are used to express things that we can not say in language. Multimodal critical discourse analysis shows how images, graphs, diagrams, and photographs work to create meanings. Choices are made by the authors to communicate the idea in desired

ways. By using the tools carefully within this framework we can identify these choices. According to Machin and Mayr (2012) writings will utilize semantics and visual methodologies that seem ordinary or impartial at first glance, however which may in reality be ideological and look to shape the portrayal of occasions and people for specific closures. Kress and Leeuwen (1996) coined multimodal analysis to use set of tools that would allow us to study the choices of visual features, and also describe how the features and elements of images work together. The systematic analysis enhances our ability to understand meaning and buried ideologies in a text. The main purpose of MCDA is to recognize and uncover these choices through a cautious procedure guided by the devices given. Machin and Mayr (2012, p. 10) write that “multimodal critical discourse analysis views other modes of communication as a means of social construction therefore is not so much interested in the visual semiotic choices in themselves but also in the way that they play part in the communication of power relations”. It is significant to observe that MCDA is carried out to explore the way individual elements in images, such as setting and objects signifying discourses the way might not be clear at an initial viewing. Meanings are embedded in the visual choices and careful observations uncover the hidden meanings. Systematic analysis of the visual texts can help draw out the meanings and ideologies being communicated through semiotic choices both linguistically and visually. It is only through attention to visual and linguistic detail that we can reveal the hidden ideologies and implicit meaning as we know that much of the meaning lies at the implicit level.

3- Research Methodology

Machin’s (2007) multimodal critical discourse approach has been used for visual analysis of the political cartoons. The modal describes the following carrier of connotations in detail; participants, settings, poses and objects. Each explains the ideological underpinning of semiotic resources to convey desired messages. The analysis for the representation of social actors also draws on Leeuwen’s (1996, 2008) framework which offers a category of overdetermination, how the participants are presented physically overdetermined in order to communicate

particular ideology and also for recontextualisation of social practice. The aim of the analysis is to reveal what kind of ideologies are present in texts both implicitly and explicitly and how are they being represented through what kind of actions, persons, settings, poses and objects. Here, visual text is not simply a neutral vehicle of communication but a mean of social construction. Since, the representations recontextualize the social practice, so what kind of world is being created by text and what kind of ideologies, interests might this seek to perpetuate, generate or legitimate? For linguistic analysis, Fairclough (2003) modal has been employed. According to Fairclough (2003) in critical discourse analysis, the linguistic choices are analysed in terms of the details they contain which permit the analyst to uncover the broader meanings in these discourses.

3.1 Data Collection

The data for present study was collected from two Pakistani Urdu (Jang, Ausaf) and two English (Dawn, The Nation) newspapers from 11 September 2001 to 31 December 2001. Political cartoons were published daily in these newspapers on that time.

3.2- Research Questions

- 1- How do political cartoons' discourses of Pakistani Urdu and English newspapers portray Russia and the US role before and after 9/11?
- 2- What semiotic and linguistic resources have been used to portray the issue?
- 3- What ideologies are being communicated through these discourses?
- 4- Is there any ideological similarity or difference represented in Urdu/English political cartoons?

4- Analysis

This section deals with the meanings of visuals coming from the representations of participants, settings, poses and objects. How these all work together to transport particular meanings and ideologies in recontextualising the US attack on Afghanistan. The researchers have chosen four political cartoons from the selected newspapers addressing these issues,

US commandos entering Afghanistan, value of Russian and American currencies, Russia, America, Afghanistan (the triangular) and significance of Stinger missile.

4.1 Participants

The image in figure 1 denotes a commando. He is fully armed and engaged in the material process of moving forward, seemingly with some aim. He is individualized visually through being represented alone. Of course, it is unlikely that he would be out alone to carry out the duty. The visual depiction of the lone soldier resolutely walking up, serves to justify the US army's presence in Afghanistan. The US soldier wearing uniform and advanced technology emphasizes authority, power and control and also suggests that he is ready for the mission with all the latest weapons. The image depicts a commando in closer shot from the back. Where we see people from behind, this often serves to offer us their point of view Machin (2007, p. 114) says:

“It can have the effect of aligning the viewer with the represented person. We stand with them, viewing the world as they do”.

At this point it is important for the cartoonist to bring the viewers close to the real issue as part of his attempt to elucidate the move of the soldier in particular context. This move gets meaning when the viewers look at the board written on it ‘Russians’ action replay’. The soldier’s action carries with it the particular set of values. The representation with the help of other visual resources brings forth the buried ideology that the US repeating the mistake of Russia by landing its soldiers on Afghanistan soil as there is no cake walk there. According to Machin (2007) end product is designed or chosen, at some point in the process, to communicate particular ideas about the participants and a particular attitude towards them. He further says (2007:109)

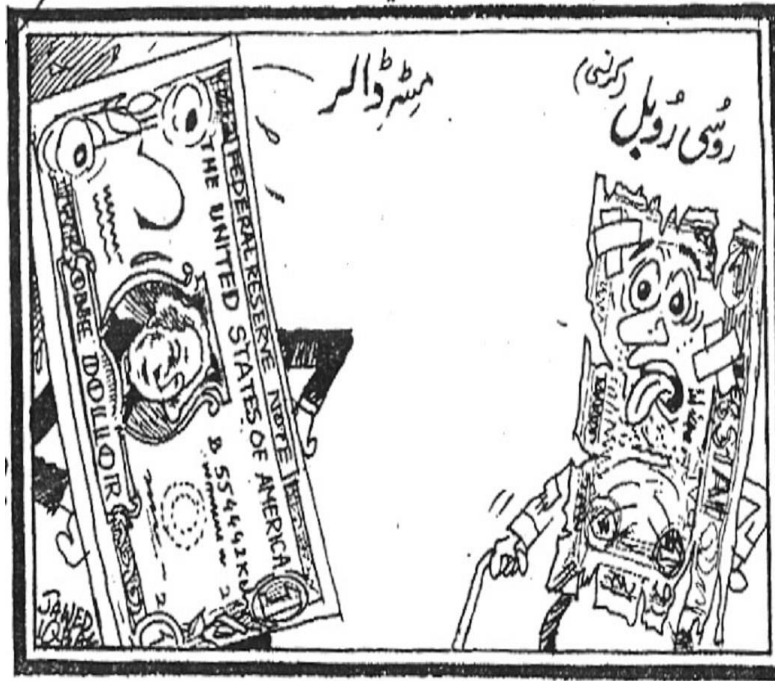
“Also important is what people are depicted as doing”.



Figure.1 taken from daily 'The Nation' Dated: 20-10-2001

Figure 2 presents two participants Mr. Dollar and Mr. Ruble. The inanimate objects represent their countries as the living beings. The currencies are used to personify the two characters from the USA and Russia. Machin and Mayr (2012) point out when human qualities or abilities are assigned to abstractions or inanimate objects; this can obscure actual agents and processes. The image of Mr. Ruble denotes an old man, appears weak and resting his hand on stick. He is engaged in material process of walking by using the stick in order to keep balance. His fragile old body, tattered clothes and facial expressions, all reflect sufferings and miseries and support the fact that he had been through the difficult time. He is left with the feelings of bitterness and despair. On the contrary, the image of Mr. Dollar denotes a young man with high spirit. He is fresh, energetic and healthy. His striking posture also connotes vigour and audaciousness. Visually, both images are powerful connotors of

meaning in the cartoon. They symbolize Russian defeat in Afghanistan and American new adventure which may lead to the same end.



اگر زیادہ عرصہ افغانستان میں رہنا پڑا تو تمہاری حالت بھی میرے جیسی ہو جائیگی

Figure 2 taken from daily 'Jang' Dated: 16-10-2001

In figure 3 two hands playing the game of chess are seen. The players are labelled as America and Russia and the board on which this game is being played is named as Afghanistan. The half cut hands symbolize the two world's leading powers playing as the opponent on both sides of the board (Afghanistan). Here, it refers to the idea how the players take their desired moves on both sides. In the cartoon, it is seen that participants are represented only through half hands not through full bodies which lead to the idea that both countries control the moves but select the players available on the board to materialize their dream. The actual game is hidden behind the game of chess. It symbolizes the great game that had been played between the US and Russia and also stands for the new one going to be played between them. Figure 4 denotes a man holding a missile and girls in the right corner at the bottom are

looking at the man. The audience views them from the side. This reduces our involvement. We are simply witnesses to a scene. The man is shown wearing civilian clothes. This emphasizes that he belongs to a particular cultural and categorized as non-official soldier. As Machin (2007, p. 120) says that:

“Cultural categorization is realized through standard attributes of dress, hairstyle, body adornment, etc”.

Taliban and Al-Quaida are culturally categorized through clothes, turban and beard. According to Machin (2007) such categorization used to invoke both positive and negative connotations. The participant is involved in the material process of pulling the trigger. It connotes war as these weapons are only used in the state of war. It is important to see that he is holding a particular kind of weapon named as “stinger” made by the US. Here, it reveals the ideology that the US had created freedom fighters and armed them with weapons to defeat Russians, is now being challenged by the same lot. The children represented in the corner connote innocence and peace in the war zone. A similar kind of ideology is portrayed in the figure below

4.2 Settings

In Figure 1 the setting that is denoted is mainly mountainous and a commando is seen to be entering into the region. This is a particular region- where mountains dominate the landscape. The mountain therefore is used for its associations with difficulty, complexity and mystery. Here, setting is used to create the context of the happening, especially the board is very important in understanding the hidden ideology. What is foregrounded is the perplexity of the soldier’s move, as he has been transported to accomplish the mission impossible. Both dark and white colours dominating the setting have different connotations. White lighting on the part of soldier suggests optimism and hope while dark suggests hopelessness.

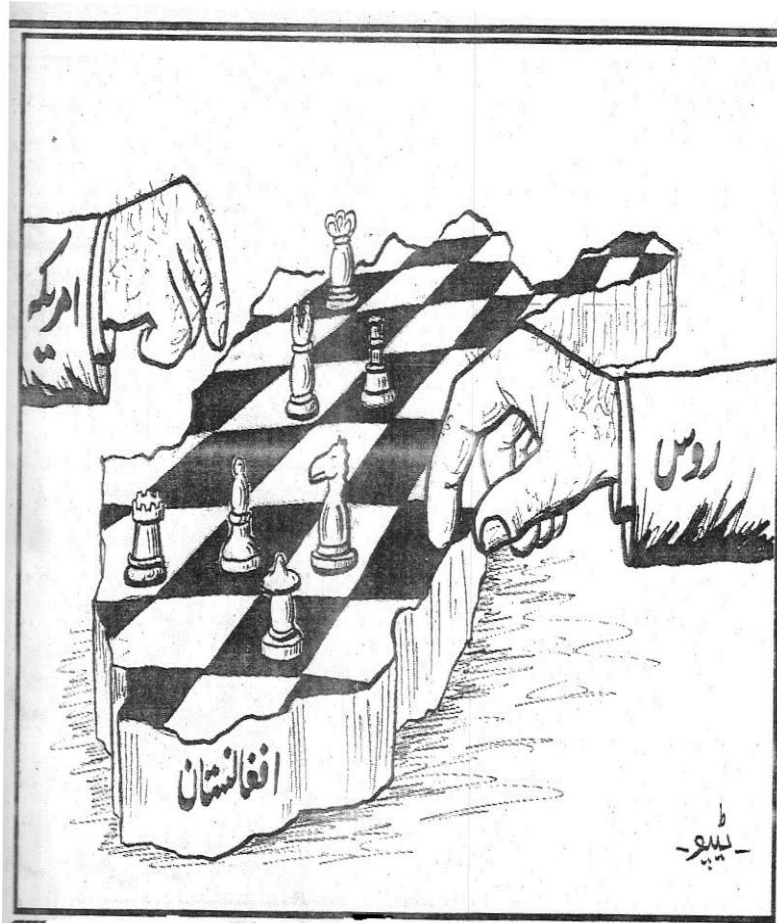


Figure 3 taken from daily 'Ausaf' Dated: 19-11-2001

There are no settings in figure 2. There is just a blank space, whiteness. Here attributes stand for the meanings in an abstracted way. The setting is decontextualised and its significance lies in the use of symbolic images. Machin (2007, p. 35) explains decontextualised settings as:

“Decontextualised images show not so much a particular moment in time, or a particular event, but symbolize an idea or concept”.

In the case of above cartoon, the images are used to symbolize the worst effects of being in the battle field in Afghanistan in terms of heavy economic losses for Americans like the one experienced by Russians before. So, through these images the

public would see the results of the US invasion in Afghanistan. Settings in figure 3 are loaded with a particular set of values. These are the props and participants which indicate a type of activity. The props and participants are symbolizing the game that is being played between the two actors. In figure 4 apart from attributes and participants, there is little in settings to speak off. In the background, few lines are drawn in spiral shape. Perhaps it is a kind of vortex that suggests spinning. Here, it signifies that the US had made a background in which certain actions are continuously spreading and accelerating. These symbolic representations load the image with the ideology that the man portable stringer missiles made and supplied by the US to Afghan Mujahideen to combat war against USSR in 1980s, are now posing great threat to the US itself. The US set a trap for others but got caught itself. In the right bottom corner, one could see the children holding the writing board and a crowd, all are looking up at the man, observing his action, and they are standing here for peace and love.

4.3 Poses

In figure 1 the commando strikes the pose that suggests action, mission and discipline. He wears a proper military uniform and appears as a proper army. His pose shows his confidence and commitment to the task. A viewer watches him from behind so it can't be guessed that what he is thinking actually. He is simply there engaged in the activity as the posture suggests that he set out with his expedition to explore the region. He is ready for the action and sacrifice. The poses that the participants strike in figure 2 take up little space and emphasize curvature. The participant on the right has one hand on hip, whereas, the other participant on left has both hands on hips. Here, the connotations are different for both. Machin (2007, p. 28) says:

“Attitude is depicted not through a person's stance on, say, a particular political issue but rather by the way they stand”.

The right hand participant's posture connotes old age, obstructions and frustration whereas, the later stands for energy, determination and liveliness of spirit. Mr. Dollar strikes this pose in order to appear daring and courageous, ready to

take challenge and also communicating a little bit of attitude. He is taking up space with hands on hips posture in order to show his boldness and it also gives the impression of assertiveness. On the contrary, Mr. Ruble appears troubled, used, dejected and haggard. Here, he is pleading not to practice what he had done. His tongue is hanging out of the mouth with the sufferings of the mission and sets as a frightful example for the new comer. In terms of visual, the reader is not informed about the details of the war, but they are encouraged to evaluate the condition of both currencies in order to put them in the context.

In figure 3 the poses are used to suggest the activity. The position of the hands suggests that the participants are about to start a game. It is a relaxed pose not showing any hurry or haste. The participants are moving in with patience, thought and plan. The man in figure 4 strikes an action pose. He is holding a portable missile and about to pull the trigger. We are viewing him from the side. It is more like an exhibit of a weapon. The person looks cool and calm showing off the technology. He is looking up to the right of the frame but expressionlessly. Machin (2007, p. 112) says:

“When those represented do look off frame there is also meaning potential in terms of where they look. This has simple metaphorical association of up and down where up is positive, powerful, high status and down is negative, low energy, low status”.

The soldier is looking upward into the distance where this missile would fly and hit. He doesn't look worried, aggressive or rigid. This type of representations are found during the war where people are seen being attacked. The way he looks and the relaxation of the body suggests that he has been into this activity since long and taking it as a routine matter. There is no restlessness and it suggests that he knows how to operate the missile and target the enemies.

4.5 Objects

The last carrier of connotation is object. In figure 1 a commando carries a particular kind of weapon, kalashnikov

AK-47. This is the weapon which is carried out by the official force so it connotes official duty being done in the organized way. The soldier has all other technology along with this gun that indicates professionalism, discipline and proper army. The technology itself connotes authority. In order to understand the whole meanings, it is needed to see how it combines with other objects in the cartoon. According to Machin (2007) in the visual compositions, designers use semiotic resources to connote particular discourses that allow them to define reality in a particular way.

The most remarkable object in the cartoon is the board. It is a direction/sign board which is placed against the mountain. It denotes the way to some action. Text which is written the sign board is making it meaning-potential. In this context, it becomes a special sign board which is for-telling the result of the commando's move. So, the positioning of the direction board in a prominent place is highly ideological especially

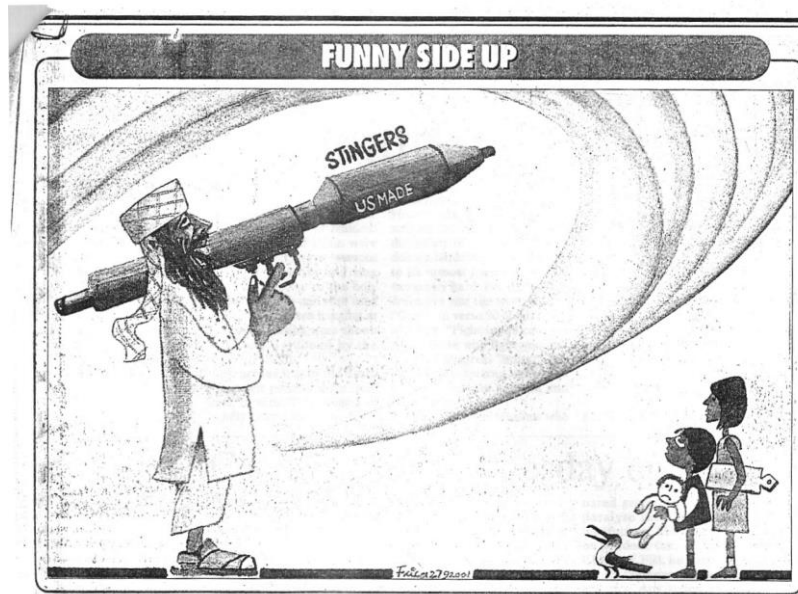


Figure 4 taken from daily 'Dawn' Dated: 28-9-2001 as it gives direct view to the commando moving forward in the same direction. Much of the idea is not explicitly drawn in the cartoon, but it is revealed clearly through the board text that exposes what the consequences of the commando's move could be. This prop is particularly required to connote a particular

idea. If this prop is dropped then one might lose the main idea and see only the commando entering into the region. The board's text places the commando's move in a special context and it is highly ideology revealing.

Figure 2 contains a few props like currencies of America and Russia and a stick. The currencies are used to signify power and economic supremacy of both states. In fact, the currencies are chosen to show the economic interests of both countries in the region and its effects on their economy. The Ruble currency is worn and weathered that connotes the side effects of its long stay in Afghanistan whereas, the dollar seems to be preparing to a new business enterprise. The stick is being used by Mr. Ruble that connotes old age, weakness and inability to stand straight without support. It suggests the deteriorated and impaired state of Ruble currency due to its long stay in Afghanistan and as a result it has lost its value.

In figure 3 it was found that the checkerboard and pieces of the game of chess were depicted. These all connote the game being played between the two players. The checkerboard is meaning potential as it is shown in the shape of a map. It connotes here Afghanistan's map. The checkerboard carries meanings that help to remind the viewer that it is something else, something far more important and critical. The props therefore, transport meanings that connote the whole idea. Afghanistan is presented as the checkerboard where players come and play the games of their own choice. As the two opponents, America and Russia are shown in the image taking moves to capture and control the game in Afghanistan. This suggests the nasty game of war conceived by the superpowers to attain their long-term benefits in the region.

In figure 4 there are objects such as a missile, a writing board and weird clothing. The participant is carrying a particular kind of weapon Stinger. This is the weapon which is associated with militia and non-official force. The weapon was given by the US to freedom fighters (Mujahideen) in Afghanistan to fight against Russia in 1980s. In this cartoon, the civilian clothes are also important. They combine with the weapon to connote an unofficial force and therefore could not be considered as the legitimate army. It signifies that the force and the weapon were prepared by the US for its own interest in the region. The

clothing and beard are emphasizing the particular non-official force. Taliban. In the cartoon, the writing board connotes peace and it brings a softer impact in the war settings.

4.6 Linguistics Analysis

In figure 1 the use of word Russians' action replay connotes that something is going to be done which is the replay of the action that has already been performed. It is basically Russians' action replay. So, the actors whose actions are being repeated are the Russians. The given linguistic text is ideologically loaded at locutionary act (concerned with the meaning). The use of verb enter implies that the US soldier is now stepping into the region to experience what Russians had already experienced. Gee (1999, p. 88) says that 'language simultaneously reflects the reality (the way things are) and constructs it to be a certain way'. The discourse of linguistics text under analysis shows that the US attack is a kind of an action replay to the Soviet invasion. This constructed reality is shown to the world.

In figure 2 this linguistic text is used 'agar Afghanistan mein zyada arsa rehna para to tumhare halat bhi mere jaise ho jayenge' means 'your condition will be like me if you stay longer in Afghanistan'. The use of suggestive language is showing the concept of equal power relationship in which one is advising other and alarming about the consequences of the move being taken. The conditional word 'agar' means 'if' carries various meanings. It suggests that the person, who had already stayed longer in Afghanistan, faced the consequences of long stay therefore guiding the new one to avoid this mistake. The word *if* is seen to be used to indicate the warning that is being given to the US and thus it is seen to be diverting towards an advice not to enter in Afghanistan as it would be better for the US. Here, the condition 'tumhare halat bhi mere jaise ho jayenge' is expressed by the clause 'agar Afghanistan mein zyada arsa rehna para'. The personification of the currencies gives lifeless or inanimate objects human characteristics to convey a certain idea. In the cartoon, they are perceived as real persons representing their country. Like human being, they are interacting, advising and entering into social relationship which seems neither friendly nor hostile. Therefore, the linguistic text represents the social constructions of both countries. The

linguistic text is seen to be very interesting and influencing as it provides the basic idea of the cartoon to the person who first sees the cartoon and then read the caption given to it.

In figure 3 the names of states are used Afghanistan, Russia, and America. These all are connotors of particular meaning and ideology. Together they indicate that the great power game is being played between the superpowers at Afghanistan's soil. One has finished expedition and another is about to start. These are not mere the names of the states but together they communicate certain ideologies. The synchronic use of three suggests the interplay of power, control and defeat. The main idea to invade any country is to use the resources of that country and to show the power to other states. America and Russia both wanted to rule the world and therefore they displayed the power show to the other countries.

In figure 4 the symbolic use of US made Stingers conveys the secrets of war against terror being fought in Afghanistan. The US made weapon is being used against the US. The use of the proper noun stingers suggests that this missile was given to the freedom fighter by the US in the war against the Soviets. Now it is being used by the terrorists (previous freedom fighters) against the US. Stinger is not only a word it conveys a sense of war, of control, of power, of interests without actually stating apparently. The given text is highly ideological as it documents the events since 1979.

Conclusion

The analysis reveals that much of the meaning lies at the implicit level. It is only through attention to visual and linguistic details that the buried meanings are manifested. The analyses show how specific semiotic choices are, through quoting lexes, gazes and poses, implicitly communicating the motives of the different actions of the participants and serve to position those represented in relation to the viewer/reader. The choices of the semiotic resources are significant politically and socially. The visual and language discourses construct and reinforce a calamity in a dramatic way. Through the depiction, the whole story of Russian defeat is recontextualised with regard to America's upcoming move in Afghanistan. Russian defeat and American move in this context is given great salience. Social actors are classified as the Russians losers or

defeaters and Americans as the perpetrators. Thus, the representations have a tendency to represent events through abstraction and generalization.

Social actors are mainly activated for controlling others and so forth is accentuated and when they are passivated, what is accentuated is their subjection to the process. On the landscape of war in Afghanistan, America is represented as the dynamic force seeking for control and hegemony in the region. The events are evaluated in the sense that reflects the presupposed results of the particular action.

In broader perspective, the discourses carry values; these are assumed and embedded in the representations like in figures 1 and 2 cartoon's visuals and texts referring to the imagined/desirable results. It triggers the evaluative presupposition that may have been done to satisfy the viewers or to set the public mind to perceive the happenings in specific context. It may also be recontextualised in this way that goes to the heart of public, feeling resentment over Western control of our policies. They wanted to become the mouthpiece of public therefore shaping their views through these potentially powerful discourses. The discussion discloses the fact that discourses silently inculcate desired ideologies in their readers thus having a great influence to the readers.

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