



Propaganda Warfare: Indian Disinformation Campaign against Pakistan

Pages: 32 – 46

Vol. VI, No. II (Spring 2021)

URL: [http://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gsssr.2021\(VI-II\).04](http://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gsssr.2021(VI-II).04)

Sumeera Imran *

Mohammad Ali Zafar †

Abstract

Access to sources of information has allowed states to use media as a tool of propaganda warfare. It can be observed that within the South Asian theatre, India and Pakistan are involved in propaganda warfare, spreading disinformation campaigns with the aim to disrepute the other's international image. To understand the techniques of propaganda warfare, Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky's propaganda model provides a befitting conceptual cushion to study propaganda warfare techniques using news media to propagate disinformation. This paper tends to focus on how New Delhi exercises control over news media to portray Pakistan as a failed state, a safe haven for terrorist organizations, installing anti-army information, building war hysteria in South Asia, and targeting Pakistan's stance on Kashmir and Balochistan. The paper argues that Indian news media has become a tool in the hands of the Indian political elite in generating false propaganda against Pakistan.

Key Words: Propaganda War, India, Pakistan, Media, Disinformation

Introduction

States use information technology to share information, shaping public perception in favour of national interest. Access to information technology and social media allows users to share information and explore the content available on the internet. This not only helps states in manufacturing citizens' consent but supports in their long-term planning against adversaries. As per German propaganda master Dr. Paul Joseph Goebbels, these actions are meant '*to win over people*' by making fake news look real, which is called propaganda. For Dr. Paul, if you keep on repeating a big lie, people will eventually believe it (Goebbels, 1941). Following this line of action, states pursue a double prong approach both at the domestic and international levels against their adversary.

The paper employs qualitative research methods and data analysis technique such as content analysis to understand how news media is acting as a state tool to generate disinformation campaigns. The paper is divided into four parts. The first part explains Chomsky's Propaganda model used as a conceptual framework to understand propaganda war. The second part discusses how Indian news media is infusing disinformation to build misperceptions against Pakistan. It further discusses the disinformation campaign that Indian news media has conducted during different conflicts to keep the ante of war hysteria active. The third part analyses the Indian attempt to shape the narrative on Kashmir and Balochistan. The fourth part discusses Pakistan's perspective on

*Assistant Professor, Department of International Relations, Faculty of Contemporary Studies, National Defence University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

†Research Scholar, Department of International Relations, Faculty of Contemporary Studies, National Defence University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

India's disinformation campaign and options for Pakistan.

Pakistan is subject to propaganda war from India since its inception, where Pakistan is shown as a “*failed state*” to gain support in international media. Exploiting the ethnic, religious, and cultural fault-lines, the systematic disinformation campaign run by India is with the underlying intent of creating dissent and domestic instability by misleading the masses. Edited videos and fake news have become common. It maximizes the impact and range of propaganda tools by targeting specific groups by employing data-driven strategies from teams that work round the clock and try to manipulate and alter facts wherever they can.

Propaganda Model - Conceptual Understanding

The availability of easy news has allowed media to emerge as the most effective tool to create narratives in global politics. The Propaganda model has been employed to study, explore, and analyze the Indian propaganda war against Pakistan. The model presented by Edward S Herman and Noam Chomsky explains how the interest of influential actors is projected by news media. The model incorporates five-filter propaganda models, first introduced in the book, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* by Edward and Chomsky ([Herman, 1988](#)).

For them, the Propaganda model focuses on the inequality of wealth and power and its multilevel effects on mass-media interests and choices. Its emphasis is on how money and power work in the mass-media industry to filter out the news through print and electronic media to get their message across to the public. For them, the factors that shape news filters; these filters, as a result, define **how** and **what** information will reach the general public. Five filters include Size, Ownership, and Profit orientation of mass media, Funding sources, Flaks, and Anti-communism. ([Boyd-Barrett, 2004](#)). These filters fall under the following category:

- i. The size, concentrated ownership, owner wealth, and profit orientation;
- ii. Advertising as the primary income source;

- iii. Reliance upon the information provided by the government, business, and ‘experts’ by primary sources and agents of power;
- iv. ‘Flak’ as a means of disciplining the media; and
- v. *Anticommunism* as a national religion and control mechanism.

The five-filter models provide an understanding of how structural constraints affect media operations. Media houses along with newspapers, TV, and popular journalist are working to further the organized agenda of the dominant elite. In the 21st century, with the increasing debate over 5th generation warfare and state-sponsored propaganda campaign against the adversaries, it is evident that many media houses are propagating false news which is attuned to elite interest. Not just this, but many powerful sources are “buying out” the mass media industry, which was further introduced as the sixth filter by Boyd-Barrett ([Barrett, 2004](#)).

Information warfare in the globalized world has allowed the world to have easier access to information and disinformation, thus used as a propaganda tool by the state’s adversaries. New Delhi’s lobbyists and media warfare networks have been instrumental in adding disinformation, consequently challenging the factual on-ground positions of multiple military clashes, national narratives, and the global state’s perception in the international arena. As a result, it compromises the media’s freedom of speech. Even N. Ram, Director of *The Hindu*, states that “*Modi government is trying to control the digital media* ([The Hindu, 2021a](#)).” He, in another statement, himself admitted that media in India is “*functioning as a wing of government* ([The Hindu, 2021b](#)).” All of this points towards the saturation of mass media in the hands of the Indian political elite to manipulate information by running disinformation campaigns against the adversary.

Indian lobbyists have a stronghold over media houses in India that are instrumental in disseminating propaganda against Pakistan worldwide. Prime Minister Modi once stated that “*we will leave no stone unturned to isolate Pakistan in the world*” ([Malik, 2018](#)). There exist a mixed blend of conventional and non-

conventional tools, negatively impacting Pakistan's international image and narrative on Kashmir and Balochistan as Terror financing state. All of these efforts have been in place since 1980s, when Pakistan entered the Afghan war ([Sehgal, 2021](#)). Pakistan's participation in the Afghan jihad has been manipulated by India since then, targeting Balochistan, FATA, Gilgit-Baltistan, and CPEC ([Akram, 2018](#)).

The presence of nearly 800 licensed satellite TV stations within which half are news-based outlets and around 12000 newspaper titles work from India ([BBC News, 2017](#)). These outlets, along with the support of international media, are portraying a one-sided approach with biased research studies to malign Pakistan's global image. Western scholars move with Indian hypothetical assumptions creating a wrong perception about Pakistan. The emerging challenges have been highlighted by General Qamar Bajwa as part of the Hybrid warfare techniques used where '*focus is shifting to subversion on religious, sectarian, ethnic and social issues*' ([Malik, 2018](#)).

Indian Media: Political Affiliations and Paid Media

There exists a relation between media owners and the political elite. Since news media companies make a profit from their advertisement, therefore media houses cater to the desires of advertisers who prefer to support news companies that will maximize profit and support their political prejudices. This, as per Chomsky, leads to "political discrimination" due to advertisers' preferences. In India, large conglomerates in news media have political affiliations; thus, the interlinkage between the first and second filters is evident. The BJP sponsored Zee News owner Subhash Chandra's candidacy to join Rajya Sabha ([The Indian Express, 2016](#)). BJP MP Rajeev Chandrasekhar and Rajya Sabha MP Brinda Karat, for instance, have ties with the Indian news media industry. Similarly, the former was a member of the board of Republic TV's parent company, while the latter is the sister of Radhika Roy, ex-co-chairperson of NDTV.

Other than the direct political affiliation of large conglomerates with the political elite of India, many are indirectly linked to government policies as well, because of which they have to

keep their tilt towards the government's agenda. This is evident from the case of the Network 18 group – India's largest news conglomerate – owned by Reliance industries ([Bahree, 2014](#)). The investment of Reliance network expands to petroleum, energy, telecom, and many other sectors, which reflect preferred governmental economic policies. This shows many media outlets dependency on the government.

Moreover, there exist many scandals where Indian news media emerged as paid media. Cobrapost, an Indian digital outlet, exposed several Indian news corporations for their involvement in a deal worth Indian rupees 500 crores to promote the 'Hindutva Agenda,' influencing elections. (Reference needed) The Zee group, the Hindustan Time's group, the new Indian express group, and many more were part of this deal ([Cobrapost.com, 2018](#)). In 2010, the Press Council of India (PCI) compiled a report of paid news in India. The report did name the occasions when paid news was published. However, PCI did not share the full report ([Press Council of India, 2010](#)). All of this has remained to be the case with Indian Media as per S.Y. Qureshi, who in the chapter "*Elections and the Media*," in Handbook of Journalism: Media in the Information Age, explains how media houses gain payments from politicians to publish news that favours their interest ([Quraishi 2018](#)). Therefore, the cycle of advertisement allowed advertisers with political affiliation to cooperate with the Indian political elite in shaping the news or publishing fake news.

Building Misperception; Indian news agencies

- To create misperception against Pakistan, India has formulated a collective strategy by infusing threat hysteria through print and electronic media. The effect of globalization is that now any news from Indian media is just around the corner. As per the fifth filter, a discourse is built to support the state agenda of disrupting the adversary's image internationally. It is precisely the case against Pakistan by India. The use of specific phrases such as "*safe heavens*", "*failing state*", and "*anti-army*

slogans” are three of the most famous words that are used to build a negative miss perception through Indian electronic news agencies against Pakistan (Statista, 2021). This anti-Pakistan filter supports Indian state action against Pakistan; if anyone opposes the official action, they are sacked (Suchitra, 2019). At the same time, it supports right-wing populist leaders such as Modi to build threat hysteria in building his vote bank.

- As per this study, more than 30 articles were found to be published in India (See figure 1) in the year 2020, which reported Pakistan as a “safe heaven” for terrorists. These words support Indian terror hysteria against Pakistan---a typical case in BJP’s government under Modi. Moreover, this results in a negative impact on Pakistan’s global efforts to reshape perceptions. Pakistan has fought against terrorist organizations in the shape of Zerb-e-Azab, operation Zalzala, Operation Radul Fisad, and many more, but despite these actions, Indian media has kept on pushing threat hysteria through a disinformation campaign.
- Another important aspect used by states against adversaries is to prove that the opponent state is a failed state. India has time by time called Pakistan a failing state. By raising concerns over religious freedom, financial instability, terrorist foothold, governmental instability, FATF and Pakistan’s dangling position in multiple areas to project a mal image of Pakistan to the world. It is observable as our empirical evidence shows how India is calling Pakistan a failing state. More than 30 articles were published in 2020 (see figure 1) to target these areas

mentioned above, pointing towards Indian propaganda war efforts in building a misperception against Pakistan. However, Pakistan successfully manages the Covid situation at home, banning terrorist organizations (TLP) and fulfilling 26/27 of the requirements set forth by FATF.

- Pakistan army is the main target of Indian propaganda warfare. As per Clausewitz, for an army to win any, it is important to have the “faith of the people” for whom they are to fight (Clausewitz, 1989). It is exactly where states target the adversary; if an army loses support at the domestic front, it cannot fight its adversary. The Indian strategy is to raise the anti-Pakistan narrative by using internal challenges Pakistan faces to target the strong public support that Pakistan Army enjoys within the state. Chomsky states that such actions are aimed to ‘mobilize the populace’ against an adversary, which can be communism, terrorism, or in the Indian case – Pakistan, by infusing anti-Pakistan ideology.

As per our survey, only in 2020, more than 60 articles have been published by many Indian news agencies with baseless arguments and linking different counterinsurgency acts as atrocities committed by the Pakistan army against Baloch people (see figure 1). Analyzing these, one can point out how such news, once aroused, suspend the demand for evidence. *The defectors, informers, and assorted other opportunists move to the central state as experts.* This has emerged to be the case in India, where Anti-Pakistan news without credible sources is viewed as credible even if it is highly unreliable.

Table 1

Misperception through specific words	Indian news agencies	Number of articles found (2020)
Pakistan as a “safe heaven” for terrorist organizations	Economic times, DD News, Hindustan Times, New Indian Express, Hindustan Today, Gandhara, Business Standard, India Today, The Quint, Zee news, ANI, NDTV, UNI, Sirf News, Livemint, The Hindu, rediff.com, Calhoun, Tolo news, CFR, The statesman, Op India, Shamshad News, The north lines, Zee5 and Heart of Asia.	31

Misperception through specific words	Indian news agencies	Number of articles found (2020)
Pakistan is a failing state	Business Standard, Zee Business, News Laundry, DNA India, Doubtnut, Sunday Guardian live, Refidd.com, Times now news, Indian defense review, IDSA, Business world, Garhawal post, The Quint, The Statesman, Takshashila institution, Samvada world, The North Lines, South Asia Monitors, The Week, Drishtiiias, OpIndia, Livelaw, Jagran, Times of India, Frontline.the Hindu, The Print, Statecraft, Economic times, The wire, Claws, First Post, and India Today	33
Anti-army rhetoric through Pakistan Army's genocide in Kashmir/ Bangladesh/Balochistan/Sindh	Peace for Asia, News18, Times of India, ANI news, The Print, Hindustan Times, Business World, The wire, Indian defense review, Indian express, Defence exp, Indus research, South Asia Monitor, Arunachal24. In, Swarajya, The Quint, Economic Times, Business Standard, Sunday Guardian Live, OpIndia, India TV News, India blooms, IDSA, News 18, The week, She the people, News24online, IBT, Free Press Journal, Zee Business, Daily Hunt, The Daily Guardian, ETV Bharat, News On Air, the news now, Lokmat, Rauias, Boomlive, India TV, The Wire, DNA India, Republic World, Money Control, and The Better India.	60

Source: Compiled by Author

Historical Disinformation Campaign; Building war Hysteria

The Indian disinformation campaign has intensified the state's security dilemma (Safi, 2016). Media cells used via TV programs, newspapers, editors, breaking news, and journalists, such as Arnab Goswami, who said after the Pulwama attack, "*we want revenge, not condemnation. It is time for blood, the enemy's blood*" (Chandrashekar, 2019) are title towards creating a war hysteria that promotes the state's sponsored information. Without cross-border joint reporting and having no Indian news outlet in Pakistan, these stories are based on a one-sided stance. The promotion of jingoism by facilitating war-mongering information infuses the world with an anti-Pakistan narrative.

Kargil conflict

India shaped the conflict that challenged the deterrence equation between the two neighbours against Pakistan to fuel war hysteria. Besides, the media portrayed Pakistan as "Treacherous," "rogue state", and "terrorist state." At the international level, India was able

to propagate the official Indian position and gain support abroad. This is evident from the support New Delhi gained from international channels, including BBC and CNN (Khawaja, 2018). Indian media coverage of the event revealed that media could set certain agendas and impact the perceptions of the public (Khawaja, 2018). Filter three is right drawn-down here, where the government acts as a central node for media houses. It allows the government to feed information of its choice, and irrespective of its credibility, it is viewed by the media houses as "objective", thus unquestioned.

However, the actual factual agreements point out that the Indian media campaign vis. a vis. The Kargil event denied the truth. Kargil is unfinished agenda of the Simla agreement. To achieve the ends of the state's political elite, the media side-lined the agreement terms that both states must return those territories they captured during the war. Kargil and Siachen were part of Pakistan before 1971 and were part of the Ceasefire line of the Pakistan side formulated by the UN in 1949. Thus, the Indian propaganda that Kargil is their land is itself vandalization of the Simla agreement.

Composite Dialogue 2003–2007

The Indian media manipulated the effort to place the hostile relations back on track to support the interest of *political* elites in India's power structure. In an article, *Times of India* wrote, "*India has clearly stated that if Pakistan stops **terrorists**' infiltration into Kashmir, then the ceasefire can become 'durable'*" ([Times of India, 2003](#)). At the time of peace, states prefer to open the door to future roads by removing enmity. The affiliation of the word terrorist with Pakistan has become a new normal for Indian media. The existing mistrust and alienation increased when peace dialogues were shaped into a game of narratives by the parties. Although Kanwal Sibal, a former Indian foreign secretary, appreciated these dialogues, he argued that Islamic insurgents' infiltration must end from the Pakistani zone ([Daily News, 2018](#)). This 'us vs. them' debate remains to be another pawn in the Indian propaganda war to keep war hysteria on track while targeting the religious lines in Pakistan by linking terrorist insurgency in India with Islam.

Uri Incident

To keep the propaganda on track, states tend to affiliate any insurgent activity with their adversary to bolster the grand national narrative. Portraying Pakistan as a terror financier in India led them to link the death of 17 Indian soldiers with Pakistan ([Khan, 2016](#)). The 2016 event was reported by the Times of India with titles such as "*Army to turn on the heat, asks government to consider cross-border strikes.*" In a similar report, they aimed 'to bleed Pakistani troops without crossing the borders' ([Pundit, R. 2016](#)). The war hysteria approach using media fits in the Indian Army's planned approach to lead limited cross border strikes to convey an unequivocal message to Pakistan. 'War is inevitable, PM clears effective response,' Army says it's ready and willing to hit back,' 'jihad strike on an army camp in Uri,' and many other headlines were in 'Times of India' ([Raha, 2016](#)). All this centered, India's Propaganda war to dismantle Pakistan's image internationally. These efforts were further supported by many other news agencies, News X, Zee News, ([Zee News India, 2016](#)), NDTV, and the Indian Express, to create an unfavourable

environment, while using false assumptions to promote a negative image of Pakistan and its armed forces.

However, Indians were unsuccessful to portray the image. Indian news speculated that the EU is imposing sanctions on Pakistan, which was not the case ([Chaudhary, 2016](#)). India further stated that because of the event, Russia had canceled joint military exercises with Pakistan ([The Economic Times, 2018](#)), which was refuted by Pakistan's foreign ministry. Later these exercises were held as scheduled ([The Express Tribune, 2017](#)).

Surgical Strikes 2016

On 29th September 2016, the Indian army conducted surgical strikes against Pakistan. Despite the Indian army's claim to hit terrorist targets in Pakistan, it remained a discredited claim in itself. The media was used to filter out information that supported India's claim. The media showed that India had targeted terrorists working from Pakistan against India. One of the stories from the Indian Express stated, "Surgical Strikes: Significant Casualties among the terrorists and their Backers, says Indian army" ([Singh, 2016](#)). Further, "Surgical strikes across LoC: Terrorists no safer in Pakistan" was the heading in the articles by the Times of India ([The Times of India, 2016](#)). This hate speech with the intention to add fuel to the animosity between the two was further sponsored to share disinformation in International media against Pakistan.

Balakot Strakes 2019

In Balakot strikes, 2019 ([Ali, 2020](#)), Indian media claimed the death of killing 300 militants ([Economic Times, 2019a](#)), although Reuters challenged the news that no such event took place ([Scarr, 2019](#)). "*The airstrikes have delivered a clear, robust message; the follow-up must be restrained*" ([The Hindu, 2019](#)) "*on terrorism, Balakot airstrikes sent a clear message*", ([Times of India, 2019a](#)) "*...Pakistan will think 100 times*", ([Times of India, 2019b](#)) "*the Jihadi Proxy war by Pakistan*", ([Singh, 2019](#)) and many other headings were circulating in Indian media. They aimed to hide the poor performance of the Indian Airforce by keeping national media intact.

Pulwama Attack

In 2019, Suchitra Vijayan and Vasundhara Sirmate Drennan, in their article for *Washington Post*, argued that the Indian claim of the Pulwama attack was “*contradictory*.” Yet, India infused the media with a disinformation campaign (Vijayan, 2019). Despite the influx of disinformation in international media, Pakistan tried to keep war hysteria in control by showing returning IAF Wing Commander Abhinandan as a gesture of peace. However, Indian media kept on publishing the picture otherwise.

Shaping the Kashmir Narrative through Information Warfare

India has been shaping the Kashmiri narrative through media manipulation. The perspective they propose as reality is that Kashmir is part of India. This is evident from Amit Shah’s statement that the “*entire Kashmir is ours*” (The Economic Times, 2019). Historically, they had tried to manipulate the Kashmir narrative when Mukherjee said that “*Ek desh mein do Vidhan, do Pradhan aur do Nishan nahi challenge [There cannot be two Constitutions, two Prime Ministers and two flags in one nation]*” and the recent abrogation of Article 370 and 35 A paved the way for Mukherjee’s ideology which is supported through disinformation campaigns against Pakistan’s Kashmir narrative (India Today, 2019).

Factually, the matter of Kashmir is decades-long. It was taken to the UN Security Council by Jawaharlal Nehru, the then Indian Prime Minister, United Nation Security Council (UNSC), recommended holding a plebiscite – giving authority to Kashmiris to decide their fate – and withdrawal of forces. Later, India violated the UN resolution, and India also rejected any future UNSC proposals for the plebiscite. Despite Indian atrocities against Kashmiris, for which the Genocide Watch has given warning of pending ethnic cleaning in IOK, India has continued planning demographic changes, and false information is infused to portray the image of normalcy in Kashmir (The Nations, 2019).

Despite numerous questions, India kept on publishing articles showing abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A as a welcoming act for

Kashmir in 2019. (Times of India, 2019c) As per the statistics collected, more than 30 articles (see figure 2) have been written, which highlighted how Kashmiris and Indians are viewing this act as a welcome act for the future of Kashmir. The reasons given include that it would prove beneficial for economic development both within and beyond Kashmiri land, Kashmir’s inclusion would allow more investment opportunities to the Indian population, and it would create better job and economic opportunities within Kashmir. Further, the political scene in Kashmir was claimed as full of profit-hungry politicians. Thus the step taken would help counter corruption (Economic Times, 2019b). It would further end the discrimination between Kashmiris and the rest of the Indian population and bring an environment of equality and opportunity for all. Modi, in his address, claimed how the provisions regarding Kashmir had given rise to the formation of sects in the country and encouraged nepotism and corruption that could not be fought and had become widespread over time (Dhume, 2019).

From the statistics of different media outlets (see figure 2), a sharp decline in the number of articles written in 2019 and 2020 on the abrogation of Articles 370 and 35 A is observed. Such actions being part of the propaganda game are infusing disinformation by building a picture that Kashmiris are accepting the abrogation and, secondly, showing that the abrogation of articles is an internal matter, thus showing a picture of normalcy. This is evident even from Amit Shah’s claim of how the situation in Kashmir was normal in 2019 (Times of India, 2019d). Furthermore, Sanjana Rajgarhia’s research on media manipulation in the context of response on Twitter regarding the Abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A shows that Amit Shah made fake claims. Her research found that Shah’s claims of normalcy in Kashmir were part of pro-government propaganda, and the information he provided could not be verified (Rajgarhia, 2020). In response to Amit Shah’s false claim, Congress leader Digvijay Singh said that “*If everything is alright in the Valley, why to impose a curfew and imprison political leaders*” (Hindustan Times, 2019). All of this points towards the lack of consensus between the state’s political elite over the disinformation

advisor of India, point who once said that if *Pakistan somehow to do another 'Mumbai', Pakistan would lose Balochistan* ([India Today, 2015](#)). His statement projected that Indian has been backing and financing terrorist activities in the province of Balochistan as an anti-Pakistan agenda. The argument put forth by India in support of these insurgent groups is that Balochis are marginalized both economically and socially, also that their resources are taken away, making them live a poor life.

Indian Prime Minister has used Baloch Card multiple times against Pakistan, stating that Balochistan's basic rights are being abused by the state ([The Quint, 2016](#)). It's no secret that India supports Balochistan's independence, for which it uses its media outlet and other social networks to prove its misinformation against Pakistan ([Ahmed, W, 2021](#)). As per the findings, only in 2020, more than 43 articles have been written on Balochistan in India, with many articles written by ANI News which EU DisinfoLab declares as a fake news propagator. As shown in figure 3 states, that the death of Karima Baloch – Baloch activist – in Toronto was highlighted along with a significant chant regarding Baloch rights, Baloch atrocities, and Modi as the saviour of Balochistan were raised. Despite the Toronto police statement that the death was "non-criminal" and "no foul play is suspected", Indian media highlighted the news as murder while linking the case with Pakistan ([Toronto Police, 2020](#)). These propaganda tools are all in line with creating discontent within Pakistan while raising a false flag in the international arena against Pakistan.

Indian news agencies are active in Baloch liberation propaganda by publishing against Pakistan ([Khan, 2020](#)). They provide biased data and interviews of paid Baloch separatists, who are trying to challenge the state, by recording their interviews in which they tell that they want India to help Balochistan as they helped Bangladesh in the 1970s ([Economic Times, 2018](#)). Those Baloch leaders are actually against the

state of Pakistan, and their words are taken as a lead by Indian media, such as supporting the surgical strike, intervention, seeking help from India, Pakistan atrocities, and many more ([Economic Times, 2018](#)). India uses these statements to mislead the world about Pakistan's wrongdoing, and Baloch people want separation. Even Baloch flag and posters raised in Switzerland in 2017 were given much coverage, and these outlets misled Pakistani Diplomat Hussain Haqqani's interview, especially ANI.

They have even started web radios and live podcasts in the Balochi language to target Baloch people so as to promote its narrative. India has also inaugurated an office, "*Free Balochistan*", which is run by Baloch separatists under RAW supervision ([ANI News, 2017](#)). India creates NGO's that show themselves to be working in favour of Pakistan at the Human Rights level, but when one goes to the deep roots of these organizations, they had nothing to do with Pakistan in their first. These NGOs first gained accreditation from the UN, which made them more credible. When they spread fake news regarding Pakistan, they are mostly taken as severe and accurate, but in reality, it is all false and misleading when one investigates.

The fact has been exposed to the world that the Indian government's assistance for the separate Balochistan movement has been at its peak. India is highlighting the issue of Balochistan at the International level by initiating a Hindu-Baloch forum and creating unrest in the province of Balochistan ([Business Standard, 2019](#)). Similarly, in Delhi, on June 28, 2018, the office of "*Free Balochistan*" was inaugurated after the delegation of Free Balochistan Movement (FBM) with BJP's ex-MLA, Vijay, in London ([MOFA, 2018](#)). Indian interference in Pakistan is a fact. Indian statements threatening the territorial integrity of Pakistan are on record, indicating their hegemonic designs. The inauguration of such an office is only reflective of India's nefarious designs against Pakistan.

Table 3

Word Used	Indian News Agencies	Number of articles (2020)
Death of Karima Baloch, Modi is going to save Balochistan	ANI News, Rediff.com, Indian defense review, Naukrinama, Afternoon voice, Daily hunt, The India Express,	43
Baloch atrocities	Hindustan Times, The Economic Times,	

Word Used	Indian News Agencies	Number of articles (2020)
	the republic world, The Times of India, News18, Zee Business, India TV, Free press journal, TimesNowNews.com, Op India, Eurasian times, India Today, Scroll.In and the Daily Guardian.	

Source: Compiled by Author

India's disinformation campaigns; Pakistani perspective

On several occasions, India has been accused and exposed for orchestrating such campaigns against Pakistan by using disinformation as an asymmetrical tool to generate propaganda. A report last year in October 2020 by the Islamabad Institute of Policy Research (IPRI) revealed data that showed systematic engagement of the Indian media in generating propaganda against Pakistan, highlighting how this propaganda has significantly increased post-2018 elections. Two months later, in December, during an interview with Global Village Space, the chief of ISPR, Maj. General Babar Iftikhar claimed that Pakistan was being subjected to fifth-generation warfare (network-centric warfare) by India, which has been constantly trying to disrupt the international image of Pakistan ([Global Village Space, 2021](#)). Indeed, for any domestic issue of Pakistan, such as the recent protests by TLP and students, even though both had different agendas, but they were still explicitly labeled by the Indian media as being a civil war ([Hussain, 2020](#)).

All sectors ranging from the economy to the armed forces are targeted by the propaganda war machines of India. Any fake news that is against state institutions is widely dispersed online without proper fact-checking or verification. Some of these portrayed Pakistan as being oppressive and intolerant towards women and minorities, in particular. Indian media outlets often show fake statistics and images of young girls, that are forced to marry Muslim men after forceful conversion to Islam, what they term as love-jihad ([Apoorvanand, 2020](#)). This is not to say that there are absolutely no forceful conversions in the country, but the Indian media heavily exaggerate the details and figures to alter Pakistan and the international image of Islam.

Just days after the interview, as mentioned above, an investigation by EU DisInfoLab substantiated Gen Iftikhar's claims of India engaging in fifth-generation warfare against Pakistan. Findings revealed that since 2005 an extensive Indian network had been operating with the dual purpose of promoting disinformation which would garner pro-India sentiments on the one hand and spread anti-Pakistan and China sentiments on the other. These findings were not surprising as India has often been found making baseless accusations against CPEC and trying to push its manipulated narrative of Indian illegal Occupation Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJ&K). However, what was surprising was the sheer extent of this network, which was revealed by the investigation. To advance its anti-Pakistan and Pro-Indian narrative, this network employed think tanks, NGOs, over 750 fake media outlets, and identity theft of a dead professor. Furthermore, it advanced anti-Pakistan content in almost 100 countries worldwide through less mainstream media outlets.

This evidence-based analysis by EU DisInfoLab underscores that claims of Indian-generated propaganda against Pakistan are not merely voiced by domestic Pakistani officials or highlighted by reports of Pakistani think tanks but backed by foreign investigations from independent western organizations that are dealing with sophisticated disinformation campaigns ([Rej, 2020](#)).

Options for Pakistan & Future Prospects

The first option is to file legal actions against Indian disinformation campaigns. For this, Pakistan must request the Internet Assigned Numbers Authority (IANA) to stop giving licenses to any Indian media member who is claiming to be a Pakistani media outlet (friendsofkashmir.eu, friendsofPakistan.eu, jammukashmir.eu) because they are part of the bigger Propaganda war campaign. Pakistan

must build its own 'official sites' in all countries, as emphasized by Mr. Tariq Malik, Former Chief Technology Officer, GHQ, in a recent conference on the Indian disinformation campaign. He believed that these official sites should publish news about Pakistan, and Pakistan embassy should host events to highlight Pakistan's stance (CGSS, 2021). This will allow Pakistan to build an international discourse by furthering the reports that have emerged from EU disinformation Lab.

Secondly, Pakistan must focus more on the two-national theory. Major General ® Shahid Hashmat, in the same conference, highlighted the need to focus more on two-nation theory because this is the main target of Pakistan's adversary (CGSS, 2021). For this, the role of media is important. Freedom of speech is everyone's right, but not at the expense of National interest. This is why Pakistan must work on internal cohesion by overcoming the existing challenges, which are viewed as soft-spots by Indian media.

Thirdly, to counter this, ISPR, along with Pakistani media, has been able to produce drama's such as Ehd-a-Wafa, Sipahi Maqbool Hussain, Alpha, Bravo, Charlie, Wilco – Call of Duty, Dhuyan, Dastaan, Khuda Zameen Se Gaya Nahi Hai, Jaan Hatheli Par, Sunherey Din, Faseel-e-Jaan Say Agay, and many other are all aimed at building internal consensus. All of this supports the strategic culture of Pakistan. It supports countering the "anti-army", "Pakistan as a "safe heaven" for terrorist organizations, and Pakistan as a failed state discourse that is part of Indian's propaganda against Pakistan. The internationalisation of these dramas will support Pakistan in eradicating prejudices against Pakistan.

Fourthly, to counter such sophisticated disinformation campaigns either by Indian-backed media outlets or on social media, Pakistan needs to ensure transparency and credibility of information passed on to minimize any voids that might be exploited to generate fake news by enemies of the state. DG-ISPR General Iftekhhar, while endorsing this option, highlighted that Pakistan is taking action following this line of action (Global Village Space, 2021). As per him, Pakistan has

submitted a dossier to the United Nations Secretary-General which included not only the names of Indian intelligence agents involved in backing TTP and Baloch insurgents which carry out attacks on Pakistani soil, but also specific details of intercepted phone conversations, dates of meetings and documents of bank transfers (Nichols, 2020).

Futuristically, Pakistan must devise a strategy for coherent action against 5th generation warfare elements targeting the social fabric of Pakistan and creating discontent between Pakistanis and state institutions. For this, a Whole National approach must be formulated, which should be a complete observation pose. This will include states' global, regional, and domestic actions; from this, short-term, mid-term, and long-term measures are required.

Conclusion

Media has become a modern-day instrument of the state which has provided a platform to counter the adversary through 'mind games'. The same is the case against Pakistan at the national, regional, and international levels. These propaganda actions will create multiple challenges for Pakistan if unaddressed, so Pakistan needs to reorganise its policies to counter disinformation campaigns. Actions such as portraying Pakistan's soft image through building peace in the region by supporting peace talk require the support of its media; along with this, policymakers must devise a counter disinformation strategy.

From being viewed as a safe haven for terrorists and declared a terror-financing state, Pakistan has been subject to such propaganda, thus leading towards a disrupting international image. Despite initiating multiple counterterrorism and counter-insurgent operations, Pakistan is still viewed by the great powers as a state who must stop terror financing. All of this has resulted in the portrayal of a negative image of Pakistan and led to a trust deficit between Pakistan and International actors. Such actions raise challenges for Pakistan and raise questions for the stability of the South Asian region. Therefore, it is for the officials in both states to re-engineer their approach towards stability in the region.

References

- Ahmed, W. (2021). *Indian-funded terrorism in Balochistan*. The New. <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/770909-indian-funded-terrorism-in-balochistan>.
- Akram, M. (2018, Decemeber 9). *Hybrid Warfare*. Dawn. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1450346>.
- Ali, S. (2020). *Timeline: Events Leading up to the Feb 2019 Pak-India Aerial Combat*. Dawn. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1536224>.
- ANI News. (2017). *Baloch posters in Switzerland to isolate Pakistan more Hussain Haqqani*. <https://www.aninews.in/news/world/europe/baloch-posters-in-switzerland-to-isolate-pakistan-more-husain-haqqani201709222319010001/>.
- Anirban. S. et al. (2018). *Empirical Analysis of the Presence of Power Elite in Media*. the 1st ACM SIGCAS Conference. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/325892435_Empirical_Analysis_of_the_Presence_of_Power_Elite_in_Media.
- Apoorvanand. (2020). *India's 'love jihad' laws: Another attempt to subjugate Muslims*. Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/1/15/indias-love-jihad-laws-ano>.
- Baabar, M. (2017). *India funding BLA activities in Geneva: FO*. <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/231777-India-funding-BLA-activities-in-Geneva-FO>.
- Bahree, M. (2014, May 30). *Reliance Takes Over Network18: Is This The Death Of Media Independence?*. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/meghabahre/2014/05/30/reliance-takes-over-network18-is-this-the-death-of-media-independence/?sh=c07e4e465c18>.
- Barrett, O.B. (2004). Judith Miller, The New York Times, and the Propaganda Model. *Journalism Studies*, 5(4), 436.
- BBC News. (2017, May 9). *India profile – Media*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-south-asia-12557390>.
- Boyd-Barrett, O. (2004). Judith Miller, The New York Times, and the Propaganda Model. *Journalism Studies*, 5(4), 435.
- Business Standard. (2019). *Indians contributing to Balochistan's freedom struggle: Hind Baloch Forum*. https://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/indians-contributing-to-balochistan-s-freedom-struggle-hind-baloch-forum-119081100475_1.html
- CGSS. (2021). *Digging Deep into EU Disinformation Lab*. *Center for Global & Strategic Studies*. <https://cgss.com.pk/publication/Publications/pdf/Online-Conference-Report-Digging-Deep-into-EU-Disinformation-Lab-Revelations.pdf>. 31.
- Chandrashekar, V. (2019, March 1). *India's Media is War-Crazy*. Foreign Policy <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/03/01/indias-media-is-war-crazy/>.
- Chaudhary, D. R. (2016, September 24). *EU threatens to impose sanctions on Pakistan over human rights violations in Balochistan*. The Economic Times. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/eu-threatens-to-impose-sanctions-on-pakistan-over-human-rights-violations-in-balochistan/articleshow/54490011.cms?from=mdr>.
- Clausewitz, C. V. (1989). *On War*. Princeton Univeristy Press. 89.
- Cobrapost.com. (2018, May 25). *Times of India: Proposal accepted for a 500 crore deal*. <https://cobrapost.com/blog/Timesof-India/1066>.
- Daily News. (2018, 14 July). *Guns fall silent in Kashmir as a ceasefire takes effect*. <http://archives.dailynews.lk/2003/11/27/wor01.html>.
- Dhume, S. (2019). *The Duelling Narratives of India's Kashmir Crackdown*. The Atlantic. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/09/the-dueling-narratives-of-indias-kashmir-crackdown/597457/>.
- Economic Times. (2018). *India should help us like it did for Bangladesh Baloch activist*. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/india-should-help-us-like-it-did-for-bangladesh-baloch-activist/articleshow/62609508.cms>.
- Economic Times. (2019a). *Indian Air Strike in Balakot Killed 300 Militants*. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/indian-air-strike-in-balakot->

- [killed-300-militants-sources/articleshow/68165466.cms](#).
- Economic Times. (2019b). *PM Modi Reaches Out to J&K, says Revocation of Article 370 'Historic'*. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-andnation/article-370-has-given-separatism-terrorism-in-jk-pm-hails-its-revocationhistoric/articles>.
- Global Village Space. (2021). *DG ISPR Gen. Babar Iftikhar on Pakistan & fifth generation warfare*. <https://www.globalvillagespace.com/dg-ispr-gen-babar-iftikhar-on-pakistan-fifth-generation-warfare/>.
- Goebbels, J. (1941). *Churchill's Lie Factory, Original: Aus Churchills Lügenfabrik, Die Zeit ohne Beispiel*. Zentralverlag der NSDAP, 364-369.
- Herman, E. & Chomsky, N. (1988). *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2.
- Hindustan Times. (2019). *PM Modi, Amit Shah making false claims on Kashmir: Digvijay Singh*. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/modi-shah-making-false-claims-on-kashmir-digvijay-in-mathura/story-rQCtYSDdbCuqBfwQuAOsdN.html>.
- Hussain, A. (2020). *India buzzes with fake news of the 'Civil War' in Pakistan*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-54649302>.
- India Today. (2015). *Ajit Doval Makes Headlines On Pakistan Media*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SINn6TYUoSg>
- India Today. (2019). *Ek desh mein do vidhan nahi challenge: BJP realises founder Shyama Prasad Mukherjee's dream*. <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/ek-desk-mein-do-vidhan-nahi-chaleinge-bjp-realises-founder-shyama-prasad-mukherjee-dream-1577345-2019-08-05>.
- Khan, M. A. (2020). *Indian disinformation campaign*. <https://nation.com.pk/28-Dec-2020/indian-disinformation-campaign>.
- Khan, M. I. (2016, October 23). *India's 'surgical strikes' in Kashmir: Truth or illusion?* BBC World. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-37702790>.
- Khawaja, A. S. (2018). *Shaking Hands with Clenched Fists: The Grand Trunk Road to Confidence Building Measures Between Pakistan and India*. National Defence University, 222-223.
- Malik, A. A. & Hussain, N. (2018). Indo-US Nexus to Isolate Pakistan: Options and Responses. *Journal of Political Studies*. 25 (1), 114.
- Malik, M. (2018, November 24). *Pakistan's Faultlines and Hybrid War Challenge*. the Nation. <https://nation.com.pk/24-Nov-2018/pakistan-s-faultlines-and-hybrid-war-challenge>.
- MOFA. (2018). *Record of the Press Briefing by Spokesperson*. <http://mofa.gov.pk/record-of-the-press-briefing-by-spokesperson-on-19-july-2018/>
- Nichols, M. (2020) *Pakistan gives UN a dossier on India after India submits one on Pakistan*. US <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-india-pakistan-un-idUKKBN2843EC>.
- Press Council of India. (2010). *PCI, Report on Paid News*. New Delhi: Press Council of India. <https://presscouncil.nic.in/OldWebsite/CouncilReport.pdf>.
- Pundit, R. (2016, September 19). *Army to turn on the heat, asks govt to consider cross-border strikes*. Times of India. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Army-to-turn-on-heat-asks-govt-to-consider-cross-border-strikes/articleshow/54397656.cms>.
- Quraishi, S. Y. (2018). *A Handbook of Journalism: Media in the Information Age*. In *Elections and the Media*, edited by V. Eshwar Anand and K. Jayanthi. Saga, 88.
- Raha, S. (2016). *War and peace: how the media covered the Uri attack*. The Hoot. <http://asu.thehoot.org/media-watch/media-practice/war-and-peace-how-the-media-covered-the-uri-attack-9654>.
- Rajgarhia, S. (2020). *Media Manipulation in the Indian Context: An Analysis of Kashmir-Related Discourse on Twitter*, *Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Business & Government* (Harvard Kennedy School), No. 147. <https://www.hks.harvard.edu/centers/mrcbg/publications/awp/awp147>.

- Rej, A. (2020). *EU non-profit unearths massive Indian disinformation campaign*. The Diplomat. <https://thediplomat.com/2020/12/eu-non-profit-unearths-massive-indian-disinformation-campaign/>.
- Reporters Without Borders. (2019). *India: Two Kashmiri newspapers deprived of state ads in bid to apply pressure*. <https://rsf.org/en/news/india-two-kashmiri-newspapers-deprived-state-ads-bid-apply-pressure>.
- Reporters without Borders. (2018). *India: Well-known newspaper editor gunned down in Kashmir*. <https://rsf.org/en/news/india-well-known-newspaper-editor-gunned-down-kashmir>.
- Safi, M. (2016, October 24). *Blasting and breathless: fears over India's fledgling 24-hour news media's march to war*. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/24/hype-india-march-to-war-media-24-hour-news-culture-coverage-pakistan>.
- Scarr, S., Inton, C. & Huang, H. (2019). *An Air Strike and its Aftermath*. Reuters Graphics. <https://graphics.reuters.com/INDIA-KASHMIR/010090XM162/index.html>.
- Sehgal, I. (2021, April 9). *Hybrid warfare strategic coercion against Pakistan*. Daily Times. <https://dailytimes.com.pk/743301/hybrid-warfare-pandemic-style/>.
- Singh, S. (2016, September 30). *Surgical Strikes: Significant Casualties among the terrorists and their Backers, says Indian army*. The Indian Express. <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/surgical-strikes-indian-army-pakistan-terror-groups-casualties-pok-loc-3057013/>.
- Singh. (2019). *Balakot: Why was the Air Strike Successful*. IDR. <http://www.indiandefencereview.com/news/balakot-why-was-the-air-strike-successful/>.
- Statista. (2021). *Number of social network users in India from 2015 to 2018 with a forecast until 2023*. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/278407/number-of-social-network-users-in-india/>.
- Suchitra,V. & Drennan, V. S. (2019, March 5). *After Pulwama, the Indian Media Proves it is the BJP's Propaganda Machine*. Washington Post. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinion/2019/03/04/after-pulwama-indian-media-proves-it-is-bjps-pr>.
- The Economic Times. (2018). *Joint exercise with Pakistan not right, India tells Russia*. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/joint-exercise-with-pakistan-not-right-india-tells-russia/articleshow/54806951.cms?from=mdr>.
- The Economic Times. (2019). *Amit Shah holds roadshow in Ahmedabad, says 'entire Kashmir is ours*. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/elections/lok-sabha/india/amit-shah-holds-roadshow-in-ahmedabad-says-entire-kashmir-is-ours/articleshow/68757291.cms>.
- The Express Tribune. (2017, September 25). *DRUZBA 2017: Pakistan, Russia Hold Anti-Terror Exercise*. <http://tribune.com.pk/story/1515661/pakistan-russia-begin-military-drills>.
- The Hindu. (2019, February 27). *Pushing boundaries: on Balakot air strikes*. <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/pushing-boundaries-on-balakot-air-strikes/article26379272.ece>.
- The Hindu. (2021a, July 8). *Modi govt. trying to control digital media, which is more defiant than mainstream media: N. Ram*. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/modi-govt-trying-to-control-digital-media-which-is-more-defiant-than-mainstream-media-n-ram/article35207398.ece>.
- The Hindu. (2021b, February 24). *Media functioning as wing of govt., says N. Ram*. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/media-functioning-as-wing-of-govt-says-n-ram/article33917553.ece>.
- The Indian Express. (2016, June 11). *Birender Singh, Subhas Chandra win Rajya Sabha seats from Haryana*. <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/politics/zee-chairman-subhash-chandra-elected-to-rajya-sabha-2847744/>.
- The Nations. (2019). *Genocide Watch calls upon UN to warn India not to commit genocide*. <https://nation.com.pk/22-Aug->

- [2019/genocide-watch-issues-a-genocide-alert-on-kashmir](https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/genocide-watch-issues-a-genocide-alert-on-kashmir).
- The Quint. (2016). *Baloch Leaders Thanks Modi for Backing Their 'Freedom' Struggle*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wzLG0Hpk6BM>.
- The Times of India. (2016). *Army Surgical Strikes: Surgical Strikes across LoC: Terrorists No More Safe in Pakistan*. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/surgical-strikes-across-loc-terrorists-no-more-safe-in-pakistan/articleshow/54595169.cms>
- Times of India. (2003, November 25). *Annan welcomes India's response in Siachin*. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/us/Annan-welcomes-Indias-response-in-Siachin/articleshow/302342.cms>.
- Times of India. (2019a). *Balakot airstrikes sent out clear message on terrorism*. http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/article/show/74372589.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst.
- Times of India. (2019b). *After Balakot, Pak will think 100 times before a misadventure*. http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/article/show/74409577.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst.
- Times of India. (2019c). *Kashmir situation normal, people happy with Article 370 abrogation: Prakash Javadekar*. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/kashmir-situation-normal-people-happy-with-article-370-abrogation-prakash-javadekar/articleshow/71464893.cms>.
- Times of India. (2019d). *Situation is normal in J&K, says Amit Shah*. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/situation-is-normal-in-jk-says-amit-shah/articleshow/72138968.cms>.
- Toronto Police. (2020). *The circumstances have been investigated and officers have determined this to be a non-criminal death and no foul play is suspected*. https://twitter.com/TorontoPolice/status/1341571534830395392?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwtterm%5E1341571534830395392%7Ctwgr%5E%7Ctwon%5E1&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.voanews.com%2Furope%2Fcanadian-police-declare-dissident-pakistan-activ
- Vijayan, S. & Drennan, V.S. (2019). *After Pulwama, the Indian Media Proves it is the BJP's Propaganda Machine*. Washington Post. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinion/s/2019/03/04/after-pulwama-indian-media-proves-it-is-bjps-pr>.
- Zee News India. (2016, September 23). *Has Pakistan Army selected 'targets' in India?* https://zeenews.india.com/news/india/has-pakistan-army-selected-targets-in-india_1932704.html.