

Information War: India's Disinformation Campaign Against Pakistan

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Abstract

India's disinformation campaign against Pakistan is not a new phenomenon. India has been engaged in undermining the internal stability of Pakistan by using multiple means since independence. It has used propaganda, disseminating fake news in the past, and disinformation and misinformation are spread through social media. There is considerable evidence suggesting that it is sponsoring the anti-state groups in Baluchistan. Spreading disinformation on social media against Pakistan is really a matter of concern. Since the number of social media users in Pakistan is considered large enough to affect the internal socio-political order. In addition, India tries to weaken the image of Pakistan in the international community by fanning out disinformation and fake news about Pakistan that the latter is a terrorist sponsor state in the region. This paper through the secondary data aims to highlight how India is spreading disinformation on social media and other media platforms against Pakistan and what kinds of tactics it is using to sabotage the internal and external political strength of Pakistan. Branding Pakistan as a defaulter, terrorist and irresponsible state are some of the main themes of India's disinformation war against Pakistan. What preventive measures Pakistan should take on the media front will be the major recommendations of this research paper.

Keywords: Disinformation War, India's Disinformation Campaign, Hybrid Warfare, Social Media, Indian Chronicles, EU-Disinfo Labs

I. Introduction

The information war is a constituent part of hybrid warfare, which includes different modes of engagement with enemies on multiple fronts. Carl Von Clausewitz, a

Prussian military strategist, concluded that war was more than a true chameleon that slightly changed its colors to the conditions on the ground (Strachan & Rothe, 2007: 1-13). Information warfare refers to the collection, distribution, modification, disruption, encouragement, corruption, and

degradation of information to gain an advantage over the enemy. Disinformation is deliberately produced with an aim to alter the perception of individuals of an issue so as to achieve desired objectives. The history of information warfare is traced back to the writing of Sun Tzu. He explained information war in various context including information terrorism and knowledge strategy (Fredericks, 1997: 79-85). Likewise, many historical figures such as Genghis Khan, the Medici, the Jomini, Von Clausewitz, and Mao Tse Tung exercised the information war during their political struggle. Information warfare turns more effective and result-oriented with the support of information technology and advanced computing system. Two main tactics are utilized in information warfare such as disinformation and fake news. Disinformation refers to the spreading of false information while fake news is propaganda camouflaged as a piece of real news.

In the annual brief of the United States Department of Defense in 2019, disinformation was declared as an incisive instrument of state policy (SMA, TRADoc, 2019). The misuse of information for achieving social, political, economic, and

religious objectives, the European Union also defined disinformation as "verifiably false or misleading information that is concocted, presented, and spread to intentionally deceive the public." (European Commission. 2018). Spreading disinformation in public has remained the state's most effective tool to control and operate the minds of people accordingly. During the Second World War, Hitler executed a propaganda war against the allies by disseminating fake and concocted information to the Germans (Hitler, 1924). It led to the feeling of hatred among German people toward non-German Europeans. Hence, Hitler in his era, received national support for his war campaign.

In the context of South Asia, Pakistan is facing a huge challenge from its arch-rival India due to a lack of requisite technological proficiency in the field of information sciences. India's Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) government has deployed all means and methods of information warfare to pursue its hostile objectives against Pakistan, to suppress the people of Jammu & Kashmir (J&K), and to manipulate the perceptions of its people. In its information war, India has sought to misrepresent Pakistan's image

globally by using fake Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) fictitious, online media outlets, voluminous false social media content as well as mass surveillance, and intimidation campaigns against foreign entities and individuals. The deliberate disinformation strategies make anti-minority myths against the Muslim minority in India more pervasive. In 2018, Amit Shah, India's current minister for home affairs, who was then BJP president, reportedly told a rally: "We are capable of delivering any message we want to the public, whether sweet or sour, true or fake." (Shah, 2018). Indian military doctrine underwent a paradigm shift in 1998 to adopt electronic warfare and information operations. It announced a comprehensive information technology policy for ten years. Moreover, a new National Defense University and Defense Intelligence Agency were established. It also planned to establish an information warfare agency under the umbrella of the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) with the purpose of carrying out cyber war and psychological operations (Panwar, 2020). In addition, the Indian defense ministry is honing network operations. Pakistan cannot afford to be susceptible to India's information war. It has been revealed from the Indian chronicle report that India is disseminating fake and

concocted news against Pakistan in order to smear Pakistan's reputation on the international forums in general and to disrupt the internal social cohesion in particular.

II. The weaponization of Disinformation by India against Pakistan

Disinformation has been utilized as a political weapon by India by using different platforms to spread it, ranging from social media to TV news channels and Inter-governmental Organizations (INGOs). The digital Data Wing of Pakistan's ministry of information and broadcasting prepared a two years analytical report from June 2019 to August 2020, in which it was revealed that how social media had been used against Pakistan. Unsurprisingly, the majority of social media accounts were spearheaded by India and operated by people within the country (APP, 2021). It was also noted that Indian TV channels had uploaded videos demonstrating Pakistan as an unsafe country for women by alluding to the Noor Mukkaddam case, while the murderer of Noor Mukkaddam was already incarcerated.

Back in 2011, Indian media blamed Pakistan for supporting the Haqqani network (Sethna, 2013). To lend authenticity to the Indian news channels, it was followed by the statement reiterated by a professor of the London School of Economics and political science that Pakistan was sponsoring terrorist networks by providing them with shelter.

The motivation behind the spreading of fake news against Pakistan is dual in nature, such as destabilizing Pakistan internally and smearing the image of Pakistan in the international community with an aim to weaken its economic and diplomatic position. India is also countering Pakistan's position in South Asia with concocted information. For instance, India influenced the Ashraf Ghani regime in Afghanistan against Pakistan. It even inundated the Afghan population with anti-Pakistani narratives, in the same fashion as it did to Bengalis in 1971 which led to the separation of Pakistan's eastern wing. Consequently, India is also trying to build perception, both regionally and internationally, that Pakistan is a failed state and a fertile ground for non-state actors. Dr. Moed Yusuf the former advisor to Prime Minister Imran Khan reiterated that Pakistan would try to expose

everything with data related to India's clandestine operations in Afghanistan against Pakistan (Yusuf, 2021: 10-12). Such disinformation and propaganda campaigns by India against Pakistan not only smear its image but could also negatively influence those who are striving to project a soft image of Pakistan.

International media is also used against Pakistan. The concern media do not recognize the sacrifices of thousands of Pakistanis in the war against terrorism. More worrisome is the fact that there is no mentioning of handing of hundreds of Al Qaida personnel to United States (US) in any of the text. Although, India is supporting various separatist groups in Baluchistan by spreading disinformation against Pakistan and its armed forces. Tehreek-E-Taliban- Pakistan (TTP) was reportedly sponsored by India against Pakistan (Hassan, 2017).

(a) Misuse of social media

Given the massive proliferation of social media in people's lives across the world, YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter turn out to be the most effective sources of information,

at the same time, these social media platforms are considered big sources of disinformation as well. The Indian disinformation network is highly active on social media to spread its anti-Pakistan message, through fake news, narrative building by trolls and threads, and disseminating concocted stories about Pakistan and India's Muslim population. Thousands of Twitter accounts actively spread fake news, bigotry, extremism, Islamophobia, and nationalist and supremacist Hindutva slogans.

In 2021, many of India's disinformation campaigns were even debunked by fact-checking portals in India against Pakistan and the Muslim minorities residing within India (Sodhi, 2021). The International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) journal found that between 1st January 2020 to 1st March 2021, out of 9,657 instances of disinformation/misinformation originating from 138 countries, India produced the largest amount of disinformation on social media. According to International Fact Checker Network, "sectarian communalism" was the biggest trend this year in India leading to calls for genocide against Muslims (Sodhi, 2021).

In the midst of the Covid-19 Pandemic, RSS-BJP social media trolls unleashed a vicious online attack accusing Muslims of deliberately spreading the virus. Social media platforms, such as Twitter, WhatsApp and Facebook, were inundated with messages of hate and disinformation against India's Muslim population. Disgusting concocted videos, accusing Muslims of spreading the virus, were widely disseminated on the internet. The BJP's cyber activists fanned the flames of anti-Muslim bigotry on Twitter in a well-coordinated attack by using a number of hashtags, such as "Corona Jihad," "Nizamuddin Idiots" and "Covid-786" (a number that carries religious significance for Muslims). (This campaign was at least partly responsible for the anti-Muslims New Delhi pogrom in April 2020 (Perrigo, 2020).

While India is home to the largest number of Facebook users, i.e., more than 300 million, Internal Facebook documents, leaked in 2021 as part of the Facebook Papers and shared with a consortium of media outlets, showed that the social media giant's own employees were "increasingly worried about the company's ability to curb the spread of religious hatred and calls to violence in India" (Shiyji, 2021). In an internal

document called Adversarial Harmful Networks: India Case Study, Facebook Researchers wrote that there were groups and pages “replete with inflammatory and misleading anti-Muslim content”. The report said that there were a number of dehumanizing posts comparing Muslims to “pigs” and “dogs,” and misinformation claiming that the Quran, the Holy Book of Islam, calls for men to rape their female family members. Much of the material circulated around Facebook groups promoting Islamophobia was spread by RSS zealots linked with the ruling BJP Government. Despite the fact that Facebook considered designating “RSS as a dangerous organization but it hesitated because of “political sensitivities.” (Frenkel & Alba, 2021).

In India, conspiracy theories, including narratives that scapegoat minorities, are heightening hostility between social groups, paving the way for further polarization and violence (Badrinathan, 2021). Neelanjan Sircar who is a Visiting Scholar at the Center for the Advanced Study of India at the University of Pennsylvania is of the view that disinformation is a new type of “state-sponsored violence” against Muslims in India (The India Forum, 2021).

In February 2021, a well-organized campaign spreading the presence of so-called terror networks and terror financing in Pakistan was launched on social media. This particular spike coincided with the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) plenary meeting. The narrative was weaved in a manner that portrayed Pakistan as a country that was heavily indebted and unable to meet its international financial obligations. Similarly, in September of the same year, Indian media outlets inundated social media with doctored video clips from video games and fake images alleging Pakistan’s involvement in the fighting in Panjshir, Afghanistan. Experts were quick to debunk the claims. “Some Indian TV media have used video game images instead of real footage (of which there is very little available) to depict the assault in Panjshir,” said Wilson Center’s Michael Kugelman on Twitter shortly after the doctored visuals surfaced on the microblogging site (Sarfaraz, 2021).

According to senior experts and a digital media expert Dr. Imran who also maps online trends, said that in Pakistan, disinformation has become a permanent tool of Indian government’s policy manual related to Pakistan. “While the government

in India denies any link to the spread of misinformation about Pakistan, all Internet Protocol addresses can be traced back to New Delhi.”. He claimed more than 500 domains including baluchday.org, baluchistantoday.com, baluchday.com, JammuKashmir.eu, friendsofKashmir.eu, foreignaffairs.times.com, and several others were traced to 208.73.210.140, an Indian IP address used to disseminate hate speech, fake news and in many cases propaganda (Sarfaraz, 2021).

The proponents of Hindutva ideology are promoting the culture of disinformation to advance their ideology, create deep fissures in society by targeting Muslims and build the anti-Pakistan narrative. Keeping in view the alarming levels of info-demic in India, British Broadcasting Cooperation (BBC) news has recently launched a new “Disinformation Unit” in India to uncover, analyse and report on the spread of fake news. A team of dedicated journalists will focus on highlighting false information, debunking viral social media content and investigating how and why it spreads (BBC Launches, 2021).

According to the Global Disinformation Index report on India, in which operations of

random 56 online sites were studied, India demonstrated a media market that presents an elevated level of disinformation risks for its online readers (Sarkar, Bidare & Grover, 2021). No site in the sample was shown to have a minimum disinformation risk. Only eight news sites in the study were rated as having a low risk of disinforming their readers. Over half of the sites had a medium disinformation risk rating (30 sites) while one-third presented high disinformation risks (18 sites). Indian websites performed poorly across all metrics on the operations pillar, such as disclosure of the beneficial owners, funding sources, and other operational and editorial policies (Sarkar, Bidare & Grover, 2021).

(b) Creation of Fake Online Media Outlets

EU DisinfoLab a Brussels-based investigation organization, in its 2019 Report, “Influencing policymakers with fake media outlets, an investigation into a pro-Indian influence network”, uncovered a vast network of 265 coordinated fake local media outlets in 65 countries as well as multiple dubious think tanks and NGOs propagating India’s narratives (Alaphillipe, Adamczyk & Gregoria, 2020). This network was active in

Brussels and Geneva in producing and spreading content designed primarily to denigrate and defame Pakistan. The “network” even impersonated regular media and press agencies such as the EU Observer, the Economist and Voice of America.

The next year (2020), in another startling report, “Indian Chronicles”, the EU DisinfoLab revealed, after a thorough investigation, that more than 750 fake media outlets had been operating for the past 15 years in 116 countries through dubious networks, including, Big News Network and the World News Network, to build an anti-Pakistan narrative. This network of fake media outlets was created by the New-Delhi based “Srivastava Group,” which also operated “EP Today,” a fake European Parliament magazine, active in Brussels since 2006, serving Indian interests and undermining Pakistan. After the report of Disinfo Lab in 2019, “EP Today” was closed by the Indians (Carmichael & Hussain, 2019).

In addition to fake media outlets, such as “Times of Geneva” and “4 News Agency”, EU Chronicle was launched in May 2020 (Alaphillipe, Adamczyk & Gregoria, 2020:3-6). The low quality of the content

syndication provided by EU Chronicle, the absence of transparency about who was operating this media outlet and the absence of any evidence that the journalists contributing to EU Chronicle do, in fact, establish that it is yet another propaganda tool created to propagate Indian objectives and disseminate disinformation about Pakistan. Almost all the “op-eds” produced by EU Chronicle project India’s twisted narrative. The BBC reported that two Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) named in the DisinfoLab report – Angel Dzhambazki from Bulgaria and Grzegorz Tobiszowski from Poland—denied having written the op-eds which were published in the EU Chronicle. The BBC also asked, “Asian News International” (ANI, 2019), and nine MEPs who have written op-eds for the EU Chronicle regarding their credentials but, received no response (Hussain & Menon, 2020). Al-Jazeera also tried to reach out to the ANI for a response regarding the fake media outlets created by India but did not receive any response.

A special focus of India’s disinformation campaign is to denigrate and misreport the Kashmir issue. By spreading fake news through state-sponsored and fake media

outlets, more than 70 years of freedom struggle of the Kashmiris have been portrayed as “terrorism”. As reported by Al-Jazeera, the content of the organization of India’s disinformation operations, the Srivastava Group, came under the spotlight for arranging a visit of far-right wing Members of the European Parliament to Indian-occupied Kashmir in October 2019. This orchestrated visit to Kashmir which was under strict lockdown was characterized by the BBC as “nothing more than a PR stunt.” (MEPs, 2019).

The fake media outlets created by India’s disinformation network also propagated its narrative on social media. For instance, in July 2020, a new Twitter account “@eu_chronicle” was created for the fake media outlet of EU Chronicle. This new account uses synchronization and shares tweets promoting Indian propaganda. The EU Chronicle Twitter account usually posts two types of videos, i.e., Videos of MEPs congratulating Narendra Modi (e.g. on Independence Day or the Indian Prime Minister’s birthday) and videos about alleged abuses against minorities and terrorism in Pakistan (Archive, 2021).

“Think tanks” were also created by the Srivastava group to promote India’s agendas in international institutions, such as Human Rights Council (HRC) and the European Parliament (iins. academy, iins.org, in. uno, iinsmail.com, .net, .org for IINS - ICE-online.org and ice. uno for Indian Council of Education). These so-called “think tanks” have provided regular partisan reports projecting the Indian narrative and organizing or sponsoring controversial anti-Pakistan events (Pro-India EU, 2020).

(c) Use of Fake and Dormant NGOs

Taking full advantage of the public support for civil society organizations, India has used a number of INGOs to advance its narrative against Pakistan. As revealed by EU DisinfoLab’s report “Indian Chronicles”, nine (9) NGOs, with Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council have been used for disinformation campaigns against Pakistan: (1) The International Institute of Non-Aligned Studies, (2) Indian Council of Education, (3) International Association for Democracy in Africa, (4) the Commission to Study the Organization of Peace, (5) World Environment and Resources Council, (6) United Schools International, (7) Center for

Environmental and Management Studies, (8) Canners International Permanent Committee and (9) Pan African Union for Science and Technology.

According to “Indian Chronicles,” the Commission to Study the Organization of Peace (CSOP) which became inactive in the late 1970s, was resurrected, and its identity hijacked in 2005, by the New Delhi-based Srivastava Group. According to the website of the Union of the International Associations, the NGOs “World Environment and Resources Council” and “Canners International Permanent Committee” have ceased to exist (Alaphillipe, Adamczyk & Gregoria, 2020). Although these NGOs have become dormant, they have been resurrected by the Indian disinformation network as fake entities and fraudulently made to participate regularly in the HRC sessions for organizing anti-Pakistan “side-events” on human rights.

NGOs like the “European Organization for Pakistani Minorities (EOPM),” “Baluchistan House” and the “South Asia Democratic Forum (SADF)” based in Brussels were created directly by the Srivastava group. Tarek Fatah, the executive director of Baluchistan House, told the Canadian

Broadcasting Communication (CBC), a news channel that the Srivastava Group pays him to reproduce his Toronto Sun op-eds (targeting Pakistan) in the Srivastava – owned New Delhi Time (Yates & Bellemare, 2019).

The findings of EU DisinfoLab, and open-source information available on the internet, reveal that thousands of domains were bought by the Indian propaganda machine to launch one of the largest disinformation operations in the world against Pakistan. For instance, more than 400 domain names were bought through Mr. Ankit Srivastava's private email address or through email addresses belonging to his organizations. Dubious NGOs, “United Schools International” and “Pan African Union for Science and Technology” used the domain of the Srivastava Group, which was registered on 20 January 2016, along with other dubious NGOs domains, on the same day (Alaphillipe, Adamczyk & Gregoria, 2020: 13). The name of Professor Edward S. Ayensu was hijacked to register the domain name even though he was not part of the organization anymore (Alaphillipe, Adamczyk & Gregoria, 2020: 22)

To operate fake and dubious NGOs, India also indulged in identity theft and created fake identities. The BBC reported on December 10th, 2020 that the NGO “The Commission to Study the Organization of Peace” (resurrected by Indian Chronicles) showed the “grandfather of international law in the US,” Louis B. Sohn, as its current chairman.

However, Mr. Sohn had passed away in 2006. Yet, the India-resurrected NGO listed him as attending an HRC meeting in 2007 and participating in an event organized in Washington DC in 2011 (Alaphillipe, Adamczyk & Gregoria, 2020: 24-26).

The domain name of the “International Club for Peace Research (ICPR)” is registered under the name of “J. Mfouatie,” which refers to a former representative of the real NGO (J. Mfouatie). According to his LinkedIn profile, J. Mfouatie was working for ICPR during 1998-1999 and has been working at the United Nations since 2000. It is unlikely that Mfouatie misspelled his own surname when registering a domain name. Obviously, “Indian Chronicles” was once again responsible for hijacking his identity. Moreover, the archived ICPR website states that it was created in 2004, which is false since it was created in 1995 in Cameroon

(Alaphillipe, Adamczyk & Gregoria, 2020: 17).

Ever since the creation of the Human Rights Council in 2006, thousands of statements have been made against Pakistan by Indian-sponsored, fake and dubious NGO representatives. The aforementioned 9 ECOSOC-accredited NGOs, as well as others, continue to provide their platforms to dissidents and terrorists. The list of authorized representatives of ECOSOC - accredited NGOs, provided by NGO Committee Branch of ECOSOC, clearly demonstrates that persons having no linkage with the represented NGOs continue to make statements at the HRC as their representatives. For instance, the BBC reported in March 2019, that during the HRC's 40th session, “United Schools International (USI)”, another ECOSOC - accredited NGO with direct links to Indian disinformation operations, allowed its speaking time to be used by Yoana Barakova, a “research analyst” at the “European Foundation for South Asian Studies (EFSAS)”, to criticize Pakistan (Hussain & Menon, 2020).

The Indian disinformation campaign even created fake staff for the EU Chronicle,

including Stephen Ciccoli, Paul Riley, Rita Storen, and Tony Faber. A Google search for a “journalist” named “Rita Storen” returns no results except the reference to a “EU Chronicle.com” website (Storen, 2020). For these Indian disinformation operations, an incredibly high number of letter inversions and changes in names into surnames demonstrate the design to hide traces and identities.

In its disinformation campaign, the Indian network has blatantly used fictitious addresses, emails, and numbers for the entities which it surreptitiously created. For instance, the address provided to the UN by the “Commission to Study the Organization of Peace” i.e., 113, Forest Hills, New York, does not exist. Forest Hills is a neighborhood of New York City and there is no Forest Hills Street/avenue/boulevard in that neighborhood. Similarly, the “United Schools International” and “Center for Environmental and Management Studies” also provided fake addresses and numbers to the UN. Some of the dubious NGOs taking the floor in HRC were registered in bogus offices. (Alaphillipe, Adamczyk & Gregoria, 2020:71).

One individual has been making statements in the HRC from the platform of several different NGOs. This calls into question his or her relationship with the NGO concerned. The President of “Balochistan House” (an NGO created for a disinformation campaign by India), Mehran Baloch, who is a declared terrorist, has been making anti-Pakistan statements from the platform of “African Regional Agricultural Credit Association” and “United Towns Agency for North-South Cooperation” at the HRC. Stephan Ciccoli represented the “European Union of Public Relations,” the “International Club for Peace Research,” the “World Peace Council,” and the “Commission to Study the Organization of Peace,” at different sessions of the HRC. Tatiana Pachova also represented both the “Pan African Union for Science and Technology” and the “Center for Environmental and Management Studies.”. The only thing common in these statements, made from the platform of different NGOs by these unauthorized representatives, was their anti-Pakistan narrative (HRC, 2020).

(d) Mass Surveillance

India continues to engage in mass surveillance and communications interception, domestically and

extraterritorially, collecting, storing, and analyzing the data of all users from emails, telephone, and video calls, text messages, and visited websites with the view to distort information and facts, and build the anti-Pakistan narrative. This surveillance system has been uncovered by revelations of the Pegasus Project. The Indian Government has violated the privacy of millions of individuals, the safety of human rights defenders, journalists, and vulnerable populations through mass surveillance, interception of digital communications, using and retaining personal data, and manipulation of open data and big data.

The Pegasus Project, which examined the Israeli spyware, is a ground-breaking collaboration by more than 80 journalists from 17 media organizations in 10 countries coordinated by Forbidden Stories, with the technical support of Amnesty International, which conducted cutting-edge forensic tests on mobile phones to identify traces of the spyware (Amnesty International, 2020). Forbidden Stories and Amnesty International had access to a list of more than 50,000 numbers and shared it with news organizations, which conducted further research and analysis. Pegasus (the spyware) has extensive capabilities, i.e., can be

installed remotely on a smart phone without requiring any action by its owner (Pegasus, 2021)

The startling revelations of the Pegasus Project, corroborated by the investigative report of Amnesty International, have established that the government of India conducted mass surveillance of its own people and foreign persons utilizing the Pegasus infrastructure, which primarily consists of servers hosted at data centers, three of which are in India (Amnesty, 2021). The phones of hundreds of Indian journalists, activists, opposition politicians, government officials and business executives in India have been subjected to intrusion by the Pegasus spyware (NSO, 2021).

According to the Pegasus Project's findings, 40 journalists from nearly every major media outlet in India were selected as potential targets between 2017-2021. Forensic tests revealed the phones of Siddharth Varadarajan and MK Venu, co-founders of independent online outlet, The Wire, were infected with Pegasus spyware as recently as June 2021 (Amnesty, 2021). In addition to numerous human rights defenders and journalists, the current Indian

Government also hacked phones of opposition leaders, including former Congress party President, Rahul Gandhi. Among others targeted was a top virologist, a woman who had accused a former chief justice of India of rape, a former election commissioner who oversaw the 2019 national polls, and a leading political strategist, Prashant Kishor (Kuchay, 2021).

In violation of all diplomatic norms governing international relations, it has also been established that India blatantly carried out surveillance extraterritorially. In addition to hundreds of Pakistani numbers, one of the phone numbers of Pakistan's Ex-Prime Minister Imran Khan was also subjected to surveillance by India.

Journalists, human rights defenders, and politicians in the Indian Occupied Kashmir are also under surveillance further enabling the Indian authorities to intensify the repression against the Kashmiri people and suppress the news of India's grave and systematic violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in Indian Occupied Kashmir.

III. Suggestion and Recommendations

Firstly, it is difficult to expose disinformation or fake news in real-time. However, some news agencies are slowly adopting measures of debunking disinformation by fact-checking initiatives such as Agence France-Presse (AFP). It is unfortunate in the case of Pakistan that many of the news agencies are not following the fact-checking procedure of countering fake news owing to lack of sufficient staff or resources or limited access to digital knowledge. With regards to the fake news flooding on social media, it is not feasible to filter and downgraded. Social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook have a lot of fake accounts running by people both within the country and outside who are less vulnerable to state regulatory agencies for their unknown identity. Impersonation of accounts on social media must be countered and disbanded with immediate effect.

Secondly, Pakistan should initiate efforts to undertake not only kinetic operations but also Counter Disinformation Offensives (CDO) in the domain of social media in order to stop the "cognitive blowout" of its citizens. In the information era, the cognitive battle plays a more effective role in deciding

the outcomes of a conflict in comparison to kinetic ones.

Thirdly, inoculation theory proposes a preventive measurement to disinformation. It aims to protect the public against misinformation and disinformation by providing them with means to build resistance to propaganda, reducing their sensitivity to disinformation. Pakistan should inoculate its people from disinformation and propaganda by India. The people must be educated on how to verify the information being presented to them. It is necessary to judge the sources of information thoroughly before relying on them

Fourthly, disinformation could be challenged with the help of education. The knowledge regarding how disinformation is being created and spread is mandatory to learn in order to combat it precisely and in a timely manner. The people start believing the disinformation once released, it spreads so fast that it becomes difficult to counter it with real information. Therefore, the tactics regarding how to neutralize the impacts of disinformation timely and precisely are essential to learn.

Fifthly, national cybercrime awareness campaigns should be initiated by the state both at the central and provincial level, in addition to filtering fake news by applying various methods before reaching out to the public. In this regard, strict regulations of both print and electronic media including social media by state media regulatory bodies are highly recommended.

Sixthly, it is important to educate online users about the negative impact of disinformation and fake news, and the importance of secure and safe usage of the internet. The addition of media and information literacy into the education system plus the public awareness campaigns can enlighten the public on how to react to disinformation.

Seventhly, the uneducated segment of the population is also vulnerable to disinformation in several ways such as through social networks, particularly Facebook and WhatsApp. These segments of society also need special attention. For them, the government should produce different Media Information Literacy (MIL) programs, that can educate them about the positive usage of the internet and how to respond to disinformation.

Last but not the least, Pakistan needs to mobilize the international community to work consensually in preventing the proliferation of disinformation and fake news on social media, online or offline both in the public and private domain.

IV. Conclusion

Among his 10 priorities for 2021, UN Secretary-General Guterres called for seizing “the opportunities of digital technologies while protecting against their growing dangers”. One of the principal dangers are the misuse of these technologies by some governments and organizations to unleash information warfare through the use of mass disinformation campaigns and surveillance.

The High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Privacy in their reports to Human Rights Council (HRC) have expressed concern regarding surveillance and violation of the

right to privacy of individuals by states in contravention of international law. The Special Rapporteur on the Right to Privacy has stated that a number of States, even some leading democracies “treat the Internet in an opportunistic manner” and treat the Internet as their “own playground, over which they can squabble for spoils.”

Recently, resolution 76/227 “Countering Disinformation for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms” recognized the responsibility of states in countering disinformation which undermines peaceful and friendly relations and cooperation among states. Resolution 75/267, “Global Media and Information Literacy Week” highlighted “the global concerns about the exponential spread and proliferation of disinformation and misinformation”. Similarly, resolution 75/176, “the Right to Privacy in the Digital Age” emphasized that unlawful or arbitrary surveillance and/or interception of communications, as well as the unlawful or arbitrary collection of personal data and hacking violate human rights and fundamental freedoms.

In the light of overwhelming evidence of India’s mass disinformation war against

Pakistan and the surveillance and suppression of the Kashmiris and Indian Muslims, the United Nations should establish a Commission of Inquiry to investigate and report on India's illegal activities and prescribe suitable measures to bring these to an end.

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