



## Indian Hostile Narratives and Counter Narratives of Pakistan

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### ABSTRACT

*In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, international relations and communication have been interacting with each other in an ineffable manner. It is hard to find that how international relations are conducted and which actors are involved. This all happened because of the new media ecologies with the modernization of technology. Communication has to play a very crucial role in today's world especially in international relations. The work of Manuel Castell "Communication Power" explains how communication and new media ecologies have shaped our world in twenty first century and how relationships of power can be defined and reconfigured through communication. Manuel uses the term of "network society" & "mass self-communication". In a "networked society" new networked pattern of relationships emerge that may be political, social and economic. "Mass self-communication" that emerged during 2000's encouraged everyone to have their own views of the world around them and broadcast online. The power of "mass self-communication" cannot be neglected in today's world as this phenomenon helped toppled governments in the Arab Spring starting in 2011. Now communication is not controlled by elites in society but is available to all and its power cannot be undermined. Changing media ecologies gave rise to a concept of narrative building which political actors use in order to achieve political and other policy goals.*

**Keywords:** Strategic Narratives, Identity, Strategic Communication

## What are Narratives?

Anne Marie Slaughter cites “Narrative is basically a kind of story”, a story that should be crafted in a manner that everyone being addressed should believe upon. Narratives require certain variables to work effectively that are it must contain an *actor*, *action*, *a goal or intention*, *a scene* that is of vital importance and *the instrument* through which the narrative is conveyed. Narrative can be identified into three phases, *initial order* of the system, *problem that is direct threat to that order* and *action that reestablishes order* that may differ a little from the previous order.

Narratives are important to change the nature of international relations and shape the behavior of others whilst defining oneself; helps understand power relationship within the international arena. Hans Morgenthau cites “In the struggle for existence and power; what others think about us is as important as what we actually are”.

Actors are central to narrative building which can be a state or international organization framing long term narratives for themselves and the international system. Certain events, crises and summits themselves become narrated. These are short term narratives which some scholars defined as “stories of episodes”. O Tuathail uses the term *Storylines*, “*story lines are sense making organizational devices tying the different elements of a policy challenge together into a reasonably coherent and convincing narrative.*”<sup>1</sup>

Framing narratives is another important part of narrative building that is considered as an act of “*selecting and highlighting some facets of events and issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation and/or solution*” According to Robert Entman, Framing is usually done by elites, political leaders or journalists.

In order to understand international relations, it is necessary to bifurcate narratives into three different types i.e., *issue narratives*, *identity narratives* and *system narratives*. *System narratives* are mostly about the nature and structure of international affairs. *Identity narratives* are about the identity of actors in international arena or affairs. Truly strategic in

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<sup>1</sup> Alister Miskimmon, Ben O’Loughlin and Laura Roselle. *Strategic Narratives: Communication Power and the New World Order* (London: Routledge, 2013)

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sense are the *issue narratives* that seek to change the nature of policy and along which discussion might take place.

## Why Are Narratives Created?

Narratives are always crafted in order to achieve a set of political objectives. These political objectives might be long term and short term and are as follows but not limited to,

1. Sharing opinion about a particular event and shaping the future of targeted audience.
2. Giving a legitimacy to events and provide meaning to those particular events.
3. It may be a prelude to a grand design and may be directed towards a long-term policy objective
4. Building unity among masses; mostly regarded as a national narrative in which feelings of the masses can be incited and bring them more towards nationalism through shared identity and common history.<sup>2</sup>

Countries float strategic narratives in order to maintain influence in the international system it can be floated by a potential hegemon willing to dominate at regional level.

## Strategic Narratives

Strategic narratives are a mean that political actors use to construct a collective meaning of international politics to shape the actions of internal and global actors. Strategic narratives define past and present and shaping the future. With the help of strategic narratives, states can promote their interests to achieve policy ends. Strategic narratives are the means to achieve that end; which encompasses the following components

- Strategic narratives are always future oriented. It may discuss past or present but the end goal is to shape the future.
- Strategic narrative is a direct claim to identity of an actor. It gives a different point of view on a specific issue, domain of policy within the political world existing in the international system.
- The content of strategic narrative is not fixed and has flexibility and can be changed according to time keeping in view the political object.
- Audience can be both external and internal. Narratives are used to unify public through an identity claim.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Hidayat Ur Rehman, "Global Narratives," A Journal of Armed Forces War College, Vol.2, no.1 (June 2014):3-4.

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Formation of strategic narratives is a complex phenomenon that involves understanding the strategic objectives a state is seeking, actors and mediums of communication through which narratives have to pass.<sup>4</sup>

## Strategic Narratives Process

A strategic narrative must pass through a process that will define its success or failure. This process is very crucial in terms of a narrative to have some level of persuasion and shape the future for which it is being created.

## Formation

During the process of formation, a general understanding is developed under what conditions or circumstances a narrative need to be formed. Analysis is to be done on following points during the formation process

1. Policy goals
2. The role domestic politics plays in narrative formation
3. Constraints extracted from preceding narratives
4. Events around the world

## Projection

It takes under consideration that when a particular narrative needs to be disseminated. Projection of strategic narratives is time bound and needs to be carefully analyzed; can have negative policy implications if the timing is not right. Analysis includes following points

1. New technology in order to disseminate information/narrative
2. Timing of the narrative
3. Networks involved in circulating information

## Reception

Analysis is done under reception that under what circumstances narrative is received by audience and how it is interpreted. Following points should be brought under consideration under this domain

1. Credibility of a particular narrative. i.e., should coincide with policy goals.

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<sup>3</sup> Alister Miskimmon, Ben O'Loughlin and Laura Roselle." Forging the World: Strategic Narratives and International Relations". Centre of European Politics. (London 2012):4-5 doi: 10.3998/mpub.6504652

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

2. Effects of other narratives in international system.
3. Different types of reception.
4. Factors that are underplaying effects of the narrative <sup>5</sup>

## **Strategic Communication**

Strategic communication is an idea of floating a process, data or concept that satisfies long term policy objectives. It helps preserve government objectives and is a tool through which strategic narratives are communicated to the masses. It is a set of plans, programs, messages and themes that are synchronized with the elements of national power to achieve the required results and benefits vital to the state.<sup>6</sup>

## **Battle of the Narratives**

In a globalized world and introduction of mass self-communication, it is very easy to hear a competing narrative that has a potential of nullifying the effects of a strategic narrative as British Ministry of Defense (MoD) cites “In the global information environment, it is very easy for competing narratives to also be heard. Some may be deliberately combative—our adversaries for example, or perhaps hostile media. Where our narrative meets, the competing narratives is referred to as the battle of narratives, although the reality is that this is an enduring competition rather than a battle with winners and losers”.

## **Connection of Narratives with Policy Objectives**

Narratives and policy are closely linked through Narratives Policy Framework (NPF). NPF has been under immense scrutiny and development since 2004. It was developed under the impetus of linking policy narratives with policy goals and is a quantitative approach to measure the power and influence of a policy and its subsequent narrative. Policy narratives have a set of assumptions that needs to be taken care of such as

- In a policy process; policy narrative holds a central position on which all the objectives of policy are based.
- It operates at three levels of analysis.
  - Micro (individual).
  - Meso (policy sub-system).

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<sup>5</sup> Alister Miskimmon, Ben O’Loughlin and Laura Roselle, “Forging the World: Strategic Narratives and International Relations”, Centre of European Politics, (London 2012):6-7 doi: 10.3998/mpub.6504652

<sup>6</sup> Hidayat Ur Rehman, “Global Narratives,” A Journal of Armed Forces War College, Vol.2, no.1(June 2014):2

- Macro (cultural/institutional).
- It has a broad set of actors. (Political elites, media and interest groups)
- Policy narratives are beliefs of a policy or programs by governments.<sup>7</sup>

## Indian Identity Narratives & Politics of Security

In recent years many observers have noticed a shift in Indian nationalist discourse focusing more on Hinduism and departing away from secularism and diversity. This rhetoric has been promoted by Bhartaiya Janta Party (BJP), giving a new identity to India and moving to more religious dimension. Narratives are being put forward deliberately in order to shape the future of Indian society as a whole and linking those narratives with Indian security policies.<sup>8</sup> Why is India undertaking such a policy in which it is moving away from secularism and tilting towards religion?

Indian establishment is bringing up such hostile narratives in order to seek a position in international system. Regional and rising powers try to seek identity in international system and that is done through identity narratives in order to understand the international order. But what if they achieve independence and power to act independently in the international system is a matter of serious concern. Rising power like India and its hostile identity narratives can make region unstable as it will seek open-ended power through these narratives.<sup>9</sup>

## Strategic Narratives against Pakistan

There are a number of strategic narratives globally circulating and Pakistan has been deliberately the target of these hostile narratives. Some of these narratives against Pakistan are

- i. Rogue State: Pakistan is many a times considered as a rogue state which was involved in nuclear proliferation, hostility towards India.
- ii. Irresponsible State: Pakistan is also depicted as irresponsible state that is harboring terrorism and sponsoring state terrorism against India. After United

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<sup>7</sup> Elizabeth A. Shanahan, Michael D. Jones and Mark K. McBeth. "Policy Narratives and Policy Process", The Policy Studies Journal, Vol.39, No.3 (2011):539-540, doi: 10.1111/j.1541-0072.2011.00420.x

<sup>8</sup> Gitika Commuri, Indian Identity Narratives and the Politics of Security, (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2010),1.

<sup>9</sup> Alister Miskimmon, Ben O'Loughlin and Laura Roselle, Strategic Narratives: Communication Power and the New World Order (London: Routledge,2013),39

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States manhunt (Osama Bin Laden) was over in Abbottabad, Pakistan; serious allegation was put on Pakistan depicted as a state accomplice to terrorists.

- iii. Failing State: used to cast shadows on Pakistan internal situation; though it might not be the case on ground but narrated in such a manner by hostile media that shows Pakistan as a failed state.
- iv. Nuclear Proliferation & Security; Pakistan has been blamed previously of slipping nuclear material to other countries like Libya, Iran and North Korea; serious questions has also been raised on Pakistan's security measures of nuclear installations and weapons.
- v. Minority rights: Pakistan is thought of being a state where minority rights are not exercised at all; many non-state actors have found a loop hole in judicial structure and exploit minority rights. Lynching of accused in the name of blasphemy is one of the new threats Pakistan is facing these days.<sup>10</sup>

### Identity Narratives to secure Jammu & Kashmir

Jammu & Kashmir is the best example in order to examine the relationship between security policy and identity narratives projected by Indian elites. The status of Kashmir is contested in three ways and each hold different connotation for the Indian government. Pakistan take Kashmir as their integral part; Indian Union take Jammu & Kashmir as their part for strategic purposes and it is also claimed by the Kashmiris who want to have their own autonomous body to govern the area. Jammu & Kashmir has been the bone of contention since 1947 between India and Pakistan. Both countries have fought four wars (1948, 1965, 1971 and 1999 limited war Kargil) over the control of this particular region. Jammu & Kashmir holds a special position as per Indian Union constitution; under Article 306A.<sup>11</sup> In the constitution, it was stated that Jammu & Kashmir will have autonomy but the right has always been objected by Hindu nationalists in India. India's shift from secular to religious self has a lot to do with its stance on Kashmir. For Hindus who are espoused with the cultural and religious identity take creation of this very state as a Hindu legend and RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) resolution asserts "a land that was brought onto the map of the world by Kashmiri pundits and Hindus in this particular region where forcefully converted to Islam."<sup>12</sup> RSS also asserts that "land of Kashmir is an integral part of India morally,

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<sup>10</sup> Hidayat Ur Rehman, "Global Narratives", A Journal of Armed Forces War College, Vol.2, no.1(June 2014):8-9

<sup>11</sup> Gitika Commuri, Indian Identity Narratives and the Politics of Security, (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2010)

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

culturally and constitutionally.”<sup>13</sup> Indian strategic punchline for Kashmir is “*Kashmir Bharat ka Atoot Ang hai*”.

### **Terrorism**

Indian state and officials have always linked terrorism to Pakistan many a times claiming that Pakistan is a terrorist safe haven; a narrative denied by the Pakistani officials. Indian narratives against Pakistan have been mostly because of the issue related to Kashmir as stated by V.P Singh who was leading the National Front Government in 1990 “the present state of Kashmir is just because of the hostile forces operating beyond the borders of India have re-emerged with greater virulence and severity”.<sup>14</sup> This was a reference that Pakistan is sponsoring state terrorism in Indian held Kashmir. Another hostile narrative against Pakistan was given by Home Affairs Minister in Lok Sabha “because of Pakistan the security situation in State of Kashmir is very critical and aiding terrorism in the valley” saying Pakistan’s name out loud.<sup>15</sup>

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his Republic Day speech on 26<sup>th</sup> January 2016 said “What kind of a life is Pakistan living that is inspired by terrorism, what kind of a setup of government is this that is inspired by terrorism”.

In the same speech he also cited “we cried when children in APS Peshawar were killed, this is our nature, but the world should look at the other side Pakistan glorifies terrorists”.

Asking such questions, he propagated a well-conceived narrative against Pakistan showing to the world that Pakistani establishment is sponsoring state terrorism in Kashmir and elsewhere in India.

### **Pakistan Army & Inter-Services Intelligence**

Indian political and military establishment has always been uttering hostile words against Pakistan Army and ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence). Indian establishment has linked every terrorist attack to ISI and Pakistan Army starting from Kargil to Mumbai attacks in 2008. Indian National Security Advisor Ajit Doval told media sources on 19<sup>th</sup> September 2016 that “we are going to avenge the deaths of our soldiers, who died in Uri attack, but will do at a time of our liking”

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> Ibid



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Indian Northern Command senior military sources said they have been devising a plan for a surgical strike against terrorists and Pakistan army who have been blamed to help the infiltrators inside Uri Headquarters. Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his speeches have been provoking Pakistan army and blaming recent Uri attack on Pakistan. “Pakistan has learned its lesson, a brave response by Indian soldiers to Pakistan army an act they won’t dare to repeat again”.<sup>16</sup>

## **Balochistan**

There has been a number of cases and evidence which shows Indian involvement in Balochistan. India has been involved in Balochistan in order to incite Baloch population so that they resort to insurrection. India on number of occasions have shown keen interest in Balochistan issue as stated in a recent speech by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He glorified the Balochistan issue from the walls of Red Fort saying “People of Balochistan thanked me for our support, we will morally support the people of Balochistan”; and went a step further by granting asylum to notorious Baluch leader Brahamdagh Bugti. Indian strategic punchline for Balochistan is “*Balochistan is Brahmastra of India against Pakistan*”

## **Trade with Pakistan**

Pakistan and India’s total trade back in 2010/11 stood at US\$ 2.6 Bn according to a report by State Bank of India. The bilateral trade between Pakistan and India was falling by 30% year-on year. The absence of trade relation is because of the animosity and absence of constituencies; the recent development was that of giving India the status of MFN (Most Favored Nation). Both countries are quite reluctant over trade relations that can give leverage over the other state and compromise one’s position; if both are economically interdependent. Pakistan in this regard might lose more by looking at the economic growth in India.<sup>17</sup>

## **China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) & Pakistan-China Relations**

A number of articles have been published and written by Indian defense analysts about CPEC, a project that has been a bone of contention since its inception. A project that has been giving sleepless nights to Indian policy makers. According to an article by Adarsh Singh in Indian defense review namely “*CPEC Killing two birds with one stone*”

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<sup>16</sup> Parveen Swami, “Uri Terror Attack-Security meeting: Will avenge death of our soldiers... at a time of our choosing”, Indian Express, 19 September 2016, <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/uri-terror-attack-ajit-doval-security-meeting-will-avenge-death-of-our-soldiers-at-a-time-of-our-choosing-3038242/>

<sup>17</sup> Gareth Price, “India & Pakistan: Changing the Narratives”, (Paper presented at Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs July, 2012).

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CPEC is termed as “game changer” for Pakistan when completed. It will increase China’s clout in IOR (Indian Ocean Region) and will make Pakistan wealthier and decrease Indian clout in Indian Ocean with negative strategic implications for India. There is a feeling in Indian political elites that China has been neutral up till now over the issue of Jammu & Kashmir but CPEC might change all that with Chinese economic interests will be linked to CPEC.<sup>18</sup>

This article also stated that “India should try to incite populace in Gilgit Baltistan and Balochistan against CPEC and make it un-implementable. Try to induce into the minds of individuals that CPEC is another form of East India Company”. This and many articles show how India is using narratives against CPEC and trying to make it a lost cause for China and Pakistan

## Analysis

### Indian Geopolitical Narratives

Geopolitics have three dimensions Geo-Strategy, Geo-Economics & Geo History. Indian establishment is using state policy and narratives and targeting Pakistan across full spectrum of geopolitics. India has geo strategic and economics narratives against CPEC and Balochistan. Geo historical narratives against Muslims and Pakistan is another dimension that can be found in Indian RSS ideology that tries to inculcate the Hindu ethos across the subcontinent.

All what is done by Indian establishment against Pakistan is done for a reason a shift from secularism to religious self is being felt across the region. Indian geopolitical narratives against Pakistan involves Balochistan, CPEC and Kashmir. All of these issues are being exploited by Indian establishment in order to show Pakistan as a terrorist state and fix Indian narrative against Pakistan with the narrative of Global War on Terror. Indian idea is to isolate Pakistan in order to become a regional hegemon as India has always opposed Pakistan since its inception and take this part of sub-continent as their own. Indian political elites have been speaking out loud against CPEC and Pakistan. Inciting Baluch population against the state of Pakistan so that the state explodes from inside.

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<sup>18</sup> Adarsh Singh, “CPEC: Opportunity of killing two birds with one stone”, Indian Defense Review, March 29, 2017, <http://www.indiandefencereview.com/news/cpec-opportunity-of-killing-two-birds-with-one-stone/>

## Connection of Indian Narratives with Direct & Indirect Strategies

Above stated narratives can be linked to direct and indirect strategies of the Indian establishment. The narratives it is directing towards Pakistan state and the armed forces along with Inter-services intelligence (ISI) are all part of direct strategy in order to expose Pakistan and its armed force as evil beings who are sponsoring state terrorism in India. India has always been directing hostile narratives against Pakistan and linking insurgency in Kashmir with state sponsored terrorism.

Narratives directed towards Balochistan, Gilgit Baltistan and CPEC are all indirect strategy to incite rebellion in both provinces; and to fail the CPEC project so that Indian clout is maintained in Indian Ocean Region. India has a security dilemma regarding Gwadar port as well that has a potential to become a military port of China which can oversee Indian movements and minimizing Indian sphere of influence in IOR

## Indian Information infrastructure

Information infrastructure refers to the protocols and structures through which information is stored and transmitted into the mind of target audience. Nowadays societies are dependent upon massive data servers where all the information is stored and segregation can be done in order to select a target audience.<sup>19</sup> Information infrastructure is very crucial for a state these days because it helps a state and political elite to propagate their narratives and needs to control the narratives so that it does not backfire. Indians, for a couple of years, have been showing progress in information technology industry which also helps them in controlling information and what to propagate and what not to. Bollywood has to play an important role in this regard, apart from propagating Hindu philosophy in different states, it is also disseminating information into masses against Pakistan. A number of movies depicting Pakistan as a terrorist state, showing Pakistani establishment as an accomplice to terrorists. Indian soft power seems to be more effective as compared to Pakistan only because of the Bollywood industry that is known all over the world. It is very easy for Indian establishment to slip in their policy narratives through movies around the world.

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<sup>19</sup> Alister Miskimmon, Ben O'Loughlin and Laura Roselle, *Strategic Narratives: Communication Power and the New World Order* (London: Routledge, 2013), 150

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Indian mass self-media has also been important in this regard with anti-Pakistan narratives floating all around World Wide Web. India has been doing this for years linking terrorism to the state of Pakistan.

## Conclusion

This article elucidates the idea of narratives and how they are formulated and placed in a well-defined policy objective. In 21<sup>st</sup> century and changing media ecology worldwide have made the propagation of narratives easy as well as complex. It is very easy for hostile narratives to take over and change the perception of masses to whom that particular narrative is directed. Narratives are directed to shape the future of the target audience and is always linked with a situation in hand. A narrative on Global War on Terror was linked to 9/11 attacks on New York. The most strategic narrative of all time that was poised to change the future of million receivers worldwide.

India has been projecting narratives against Pakistan for decades and trying to portray Pakistan as a terrorist state that is sponsoring terrorism in the state of Jammu & Kashmir. Indian information infrastructure is very sophisticated and has influenced many through their narratives. Pakistan does in its capacity try to counter these narratives through their own competing narratives but have to work a lot in this domain in order to counter Indian threat.

## Recommendations

In the light of above discussion there are certain recommendations that needs to be considered in order to deal with hostile narratives of Indian establishment against Pakistan,

- i. Pakistan should develop an effective information infrastructure that deals with Indian hostile narratives.
- ii. Pakistan should not respond to the hostile narratives without a strategy; because responding abruptly to a hostile narrative is an indication of paranoia which is the prime objective of a narrative.
- iii. Pakistan should not claim innocence repeatedly because it will give publicity to a particular narrative; target audience will actually start believing in it.
- iv. It would be better for Pakistan to simply ignore narratives that do not have spectrum of persuasion.
- v. Pakistan when responding to a narrative should see what is the purpose, originator and theme of that particular narrative is it really worth responding?

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- vi. Should come up with own narrative in order to minimize the effects of hostile narrative originated from India. It is called “counter narrative” which gives a new direction to target audience.