



## **The Relevance of Active Measures in the Indo-Pak Conflict**

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Active measures are actions taken by a government or other group to influence political, economic, and military decisions. They can also be used to disrupt or interfere with the internal affairs of another government or society. This can involve actions like propaganda, disinformation, and covert operations. The purpose of active measures is to alter foreign actors' views and behavior in a way that benefits the organization undertaking the measures. These measures are often described as "active" to distinguish them from more passive forms of influence, such as diplomacy or cultural exchange. Active measures are often associated with espionage and covert operations, but they can also include overt political efforts.

In active measures, overt political activities are actions that are openly carried out, acknowledged, and recognized by the government and other parties involved. These efforts are intended to influence the decision-making of foreign governments and populations in a visible and publicly acknowledged way. Examples of overt political efforts in active warfare include diplomatic efforts, economic incentives, public diplomacy, public relations campaigns, etc. These overt political efforts are more visible and transparent than covert efforts and are often used to complement or support covert operations. They are also more likely to be conducted within the framework of international laws and norms. However, covert operations are a more critical element of active warfare as they enable nations to achieve their goals without openly engaging in hostilities. This can include covert operations such as sabotage, assassination, and subversion, as well as the use of intelligence agencies and special forces to conduct operations in foreign countries. Additionally, covert activities offer

some degree of plausible deniability since, if they are discovered, they can be downplayed or denied. When a country wants to avoid political or diplomatic ramifications, this can be helpful.

In the digital age, active measures can be used to influence the decision-making of foreign governments and populations through the use of online platforms and social media. This can include the use of bots and fake accounts to spread false or misleading information, as well as the use of targeted advertising and micro-targeting to influence the behavior of specific groups or individuals. The ability to spread false information quickly and easily has created a new opportunity for bad actors to manipulate public opinion and deceive citizens. This phenomenon is not limited to elections or politics; it can be used in any context where public opinion matters. In the past, authoritarian governments have used active measures as tools of propaganda and deception. They are not new. The difference today is that they can easily be carried out by non-state actors, using modern technology.

Throughout history, active measures have been used by various countries and non-state actors to shape the political landscape in their favor and sow discord within societies.

## **Background**

The concept of Active Measures first surfaced in the 1920s in the Soviet Union as a policy tool. To weaken immigrant groups in Western Europe, the Soviet Union first employed active measures in the 1920s by propagating misinformation and luring people back to Russia. Prior to that, the Tsarist secret police used similar deceitful methods while working with foreign spies. These strategies proved to be quite effective, and the Soviet Union formalized them in the 1950s and created an intelligence division that specialized in disinformation. This was Department D within the First Chief Directorate of the Soviet intelligence organization. When Department D was renamed the Active Measures Department, or Department A for short, in the 1960s, the phrase "active measures" entered the lexicon. The phrase active measures is the English translation of "aktivnyye meropriyatiya", The Russian name of the Soviet KGB unit charged with implementing these tactics.

Active Measures were central to USSR foreign policy. Former Czechoslovak intelligence officer Ladislav Bittman wrote the book "The Deception Game" which offers an intimate look into the Cold War-era Soviet Union's use of active measures. The Soviet Union was very effective at influencing Western nations through these tactics, and these strategies were a crucial component of their intelligence operations, according to one of the book's main claims. The author also contends that the West was mostly ignorant of these operations and unprepared to adequately retaliate against them.

### **Active Measures in the Indo-Pak Conflict**

For decades, India's attacks on Pakistan's security apparatus have had the effect of destabilizing it both domestically and internationally. More recently, India has resorted to the use of active measures to create discord in Pakistani society. Lately, there has been increased attention regarding the Indian disinformation campaigns against Pakistan, yet, there has been limited analysis of the deceitful active measures taken by India against Pakistan and the toll it has taken on various facets of society. From government institutions to the common man, all have fallen prey to these measures to some extent.

### **Political Influence Operations**

#### **Active Measures Through Political Fronts**

Active measures through political fronts describe the use of front groups, such as political parties, NGOs, or media outlets, to sway the beliefs and conduct of foreign governments, groups, and people. Front organizations can be used to conceal the involvement of a foreign government or group in active measures, giving the impression that the acts are being undertaken by independent parties. Moreover, they may be used to feign public support for particular policies or ideologies. The widely discussed EU DisInfo Lab Report of 2020 revealed that the Srivastava Group, a conglomerate with headquarters in New Delhi, controls 10 UN-accredited NGOs, the majority of which have been "resurrected," and nine of which currently frequently address the UNHRC NGOs were used to spread propaganda against Pakistan

internationally. The World Environment and Resources Council (WERC), another extinct NGO revived by the network, is an illustration of similar fronts. This organization's name was used in the media to protest the building of a dam in Pakistan in addition to speaking at the UNHRC<sup>1</sup>. Another interesting example is the African Regional Agricultural Credit Association (ARACA), which instead of proposing ways to help farmers, has used Geneva for anti-Pakistan activities. The EU DisInfo Lab discovered that this was a 15-year-long operation that used several fronts to harm Pakistan's international image and promote friction among various communities of Pakistani society. The investigation was first triggered when a US-based NGO was resurrected in 2005, and its previous Chairman Louis B. Sohn, who died in 2006, seemingly attended a UN Human Rights Council conference in 2007 and a "Friends of Gilgit-Baltistan" event in Washington D.C. in 2011. This loophole may have exposed the operation, but significant damage had already been done.

Figure 1: Indian Disinformation Campaign in a Nutshell



Source: EU DisInfo Lab

It is also interesting to note that in October 2022, a mere few days before Pakistan exited the FATF Grey List, two senior American legislators presented a resolution in

<sup>1</sup> EU DisInfo Lab, "Indian Chronicles: a total abuse of the UN Human Rights Council" <https://www.disinfo.eu/publications/indian-chronicles-a-total-abuse-of-the-un-human-rights-council>

the House of Representatives urging the US President to declare the alleged atrocities committed by Pakistani armed forces against ethnic Bengalis and Hindus in 1971 as genocide.<sup>2</sup> This farcical resolution was strategically brought up at a time when Pakistan was engaging with FATF members after completing all substantial, technical, and procedural requirements of both the 2018 and 2021 Action Plans, making it evident that it was an active measure to harm Pakistan's economy and international standing.

### **Active Measures Through Political Lawfare**

Lawfare can be used as an active measure by employing legal arguments or principles to defend or legitimize the acts or policies of a state, thereby eroding the legitimacy of the opponent's actions or policies. However, it is worth noting that laws can easily be bent by states in their favor, rendering their actions illegal. The repeal of Article 370 of the Indian Constitution is a prime illustration of this. The Indian government revoked Article 370 on August 5, 2019, and declared Jammu and Kashmir a Union Territory directly ruled by the Indian government. This move sparked tremendous outrage and condemnation. Many people in Jammu and Kashmir considered the repeal of Article 370 as a violation of their autonomy and rights, and there were fears that it might lead to more human rights violations in the region. Pakistan fiercely criticized the decision, viewing it as a violation of UN Security Council resolutions on Jammu and Kashmir, which demand a plebiscite to decide the region's will.

Another example of active measures for economic ends through lawfare can be found in India's claims of CPEC is an illegal project. India, backed by the US, alleges that the CPEC project is illegal because it crosses disputed territory. "CPEC crosses across territory that we consider to be ours," India's Foreign Secretary stated. This adds to the US-India alliance's resistance to CPEC and the ramifications for re-aligning

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<sup>2</sup> Pakistan Army Committed Genocide: US Resolution On 1971 Bangladesh Atrocities, NDTV <https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/pakistan-army-committed-genocide-us-resolution-on-1971-bangladesh-atrocities-3433361>

geopolitical realities. China, on the other hand, has categorically denied any such assertions.<sup>3</sup>

### **Active Measures Through Agents of Influence**

India has often sought to deploy intelligence personnel in Pakistan for covert operations, such as the Jhadav affair, but they have since discovered that this form of "black" active measure is far more difficult to implement. As a result, they have recently been using a more "grey" form of active measures, such as supporting dissident groups, providing them with asylum, and helping them to spread propaganda through social media. A Pakistani dissident, Mehran Marri, also known as Mehran Baluch, who has more than 27,000 followers on Twitter, has spoken on behalf of ARACA, an organization that has repeatedly been spreading anti-Pakistan sentiments abroad. Marri, who supports Balochistan's secession from Pakistan, has also served as the President of Balochistan House, an organization linked to Ankit Srivastava of the Srivastava Group. Such agents of influence have been aggressively deployed for destabilizing Balochistan in recent years.

### **Media and Public Opinion Influence Operations**

#### **Disinformation Operations through Media**

In the digital age of information, spreading propaganda through different facets of media remains the most effective active measure. The rise of social media and other digital technologies has made it easier to conduct disinformation operations, and they are becoming an increasingly prevalent tool of active measures. The volume of data provided about the disinformation effort by India in the EU DisInfo Lab report is astonishing and its long-term intent adds weight to the phrase "active measures". Such a campaign aims to reinforce pro-India attitude while spreading anti-Pakistan emotions around the world by manipulating the media, i.e. by proliferating online negative content about countries in conflict with India, such as Pakistan, through the repackaging and distribution of op-eds and articles via the renowned Indian news

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<sup>3</sup>"Does the China-Pakistan economic corridor worry India?", Al Jazeera (2017)  
<https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2017/2/23/does-the-china-pakistan-economic-corridor-worry-india>

agency, ANI. An analysis of previous disinformation campaigns provides insight into India's propaganda techniques:

1. High-volume, multi-channel approach: The use of Twitter “trends” to propagate a false idea or disinformation is an example of this high-volume, multi-channel approach. Fake accounts, posing as Pakistani citizens when they are being operated from foreign lands, often indulge in mass-tweeting so a particular idea can be brought among the global top trends on Twitter.
2. The number of arguments is more important than the quality of the arguments: The goal of these disinformation campaigns is to initially confuse and overwhelm rather than convince the masses.
3. Attacking a vulnerable community or sensitive idea, and lowering the trust environment further: It is typical practice to identify sensitive areas for a community or a nation and then amplify those vulnerabilities through propaganda and deception.

These active measures are sometimes employed subtly through films, television shows, and documentaries. India has one of the biggest film industries in the world and they have repeatedly produced films based on falsehood and lies in attempts to rewrite the history of the India-Pakistan conflicts in their favor. These films are then promoted and watched by people all over the world greatly influencing the masses and not only creating anti-Pakistan sentiments but also furthering Islamophobia in the world. Moreover, the Indian state supports independent analysts who are active propagandists spreading disinformation and fake content as part of active measures against Pakistan. One such example is Major (R) Gaurav Arya who is also a member of the Indian disinformation network identified in the EU Disinfo Lab Report. He is known to gather false information from fraudulent websites and post it using his verified Twitter account. Furthermore, in 2020, Digital Rights Pakistan published a detailed report of Pro-India accounts disseminating disinformation ahead of the Pakistan FATF review.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> “Disinformation Campaign on Twitter: Pro-India accounts disseminating disinformation ahead of Pakistan FATF review”, Digital Rights Foundation, October 21, 2020

## Cyber Attacks and Cyber Terrorism

Cyber attacks are the most recent form of active measures employed by foreign actors to spread their message, steal personal information, and create division within a nation. There have been numerous cyber attacks in Pakistan in recent years, and cybersecurity threats are growing. The costs and risks connected with cyber-attacks are rising. In 2020 and 2021 alone, the Federal Board of Revenue's website was hacked, data of a couple of banks released, the music streaming website "Patari" was also attacked and hackers released the data of 257,000 users on the dark web, K-Electric's system was hacked and ransom was demanded, and most importantly, a number used by former Prime Minister Imran Khan was hacked by Israeli software "Pegasus" which was also being used by the Indian government.

Disinformation campaigns are often precursors to a cyber attack, and cyber attacks are now leading to cyber terrorism. Cybercrime and attacks can be associated with non-political, non-social, non-religious, or non-ideological goals, such as hacking, fraud, forgery, money laundering, and illicit data interception, which can jeopardize the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of information. However, Cyber terrorism can be defined as the spread of fear among communities through various acts such as jeopardizing state security, destroying important assets, displacing habitats, killing individuals, and causing financial damage to countries. The number of social media users in Pakistan has increased dramatically over the previous decade, with the majority of users being young people aged 15 to 35. They are easy prey for terrorist influencers who use religion and separatist ideologies as a tool to manipulate them. Terrorist, extremist, and radical organizations have accounts on Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. Organizations like TTP and BLA, for example, use social media channels to broaden their reach. Twitter and Facebook removed hundreds of thousands of accounts for allegedly aiding terrorist organizations. However, many continue to operate from a foreign land, and the Indian state provides refuge to these actors.



## Active Measures Through Climate Change Policies

Pakistan, albeit having one of the lowest carbon footprints in the world, remains highly vulnerable to climate change-induced catastrophes. On the other hand, Pakistan's eastern neighbor is the third-highest CO<sub>2</sub>-producing country in the world, right behind U.S. and China, according to Forbes<sup>5</sup>. Moreover, BBC published a report in 2019 that revealed that the drastic decrease in the air quality in cities like Lahore was greatly affected by a large amount of stubble burning by farmers at that time of the year in the Indian states of Haryana and Punjab<sup>6</sup>.

Figure 2: CO<sub>2</sub> Emissions by Country

Country	2018 CO <sub>2</sub> Emissions in Billion Metric Tons	Global Share	Change Since Kyoto Protocol
China	9.43	27.8%	54.6%
U.S.	5.15	15.2%	-12.1%
India	2.48	7.3%	105.8%
Russia	1.55	4.6%	5.7%
Japan	1.15	3.4%	-10.1%
Germany	0.73	2.1%	-11.7%
South Korea	0.70	2.1%	34.1%
Iran	0.66	1.9%	57.7%
Saudi Arabia	0.57	1.7%	59.9%
Canada	0.55	1.6%	1.6%

Source: Forbes (2019)

Pakistan has always been greatly affected by India's failure to adhere to international laws and policies on water, the environment, and climate change. However, despite being one of the highest CO<sub>2</sub> emitters in the world, India's stance on the Loss and Damage Fund created to assist climate change-affected countries remains that India must receive their share from the fund rather than contribute to it.

<sup>5</sup> "The World's Top 10 Carbon Dioxide Emitters", Forbes <https://www.forbes.com/sites/rpapier/2019/12/04/the-worlds-top-10-carbon-dioxide-emitters/?sh=2ace7b182d04>

<sup>6</sup> "Is India's crop burning polluting Pakistan's air?", BBC News <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-50333985>

## **How best to respond?**

There are several examples throughout history of geographies being altered as a result of such active measures. To demonstrate its authenticity, relevance, and might, Pakistan must confront India on all fronts. Proactive policies and correct actions at the right moment are required to create favorable results. Pakistan must raise the issue of using international organizations and NGOs as fronts at international forums, and these organizations must be blacklisted. The government must proactively deal with the grievances that exist within various communities before they become dissidents and a weak link in the hands of the adversary. As far as disinformation campaigns are concerned, the most effective way to combat these operations is through a steady, and voluminous flow of factual information to expose active measures. The competing message must be drowned out by the sheer volume and authenticity of the information. Pakistan also lacks adequate legislation to combat cyber threats. The Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016, was passed in Pakistan in 2016, yet it does not cover many critical issues of cybersecurity. Stronger cybersecurity legislation is required in Pakistan, requiring businesses and organizations to protect their computer systems and information from cyber-attacks. Most importantly, a robust cyber defense system must be created with the help of private industry. Russia wisely established a robust defense before going on the offense on social media. *Roskomnadzor*, Russia's Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology, and Mass Media, methodically implemented measures to restrict opposing content outlets on the Internet, resulting in the world's most extensive and effective social media monitoring system. Similarly, Pakistan must build the capacity to coordinate a plethora of cyber security technologies such as firewalls, systems management, identity management, and encryption management. The Indian state has been at the deception game for a long time and there is no end in sight unless an effective, long-term strategy is designed and implemented.