

CRISIS PERCEPTION ON CPEC: HOW INDIA IS USING REGIONAL AND PAKISTAN'S DOMESTIC ISSUES IN MANUFACTURING GLOBAL PSEUDO DISCOURSE

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Abstract

India is trying to create misperceptions against Pakistan at the international level through an information campaign as revealed by European Union DisinfoLab. The main aim behind Indian information operation is to discredit CPEC at the domestic as well as global level. To explore this, based on the secondary data, the paper considers the issues related to Pakistan's domestic and regional politics. The crisis perception model of Billings et al. is employed as a theoretical framework. The findings of the study reveal that if the situation of crisis perception will prevail at the global scale, it could significantly influence the cost of the project; the perceived probability of the loss could be in the form of human loss and security situation in Balochistan. Moreover, it is need of time to sense the crisis perception based on contributory factors and magnitude, define these factors as the crisis which indicates the significant extent of the crisis perception prevails at global perception. Pakistan must solve these issues indigenously which need dialogue or security enforcement. However, on a global scale, Pakistan and China must coordinate and allocate a certain percentage of funds and human resource to counter the false perception created by the Indian deep dive operation against CPEC and Pakistan.

Keywords: Crisis, Perception, Regional Issues, Domestic Issues, India, Global Pseudo Discourse.

Introduction

China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a massive \$62 billion-dollar investment in Pakistan's infrastructure and energy sectors i.e. tourism, agriculture, Gwadar port, energy, economic zones and many other projects. The first phase of CPEC is now completed, and the second phase has begun. Even though China and Pakistan have always had exceptional strategic and diplomatic ties, CPEC has transformed the relationship into one that is purely economic in nature. Gwadar, in Balochistan, will be connected to Kashgar, in China, via this project thus it provides China with an alternative route to obtain oil and energy.¹ Due to the dispute over the South China Sea between China, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Malaysia,

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US fleets are always present in the region. It is feared that the United States and its allies could block the Strait of Malacca, effectively paralysing China's economy. Gwadar and the Strait of Hormuz will be bypassed entirely by CPEC. Only 1500 km separates Gwadar from Kashgar, it will also cut the route of energy supplies by 12,000 kilometres.

Many countries, which are not in favour of this project, try to disrupt CPEC, especially India which is busy in developing an enormous perception crisis on CPEC with different campaigns. India uses online media at the mass level for the proliferation of pseudo perception on CPEC and anti-state content through YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and weblinks.² The European DisinfoLab, in December 2020, found that India is destabilising Pakistan through fake information. It has been revealed that India has used clone global think tanks, pseudo local media outlets, clone global supranational organisations related to UN human rights and websites to spread the discourse and narrative against Pakistan.³

During 21-23 October 2020, when the status of Pakistan was being discussed in the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), trends of the Indian campaign include targeting CPEC, labelling Pakistan with terrorism, civil war, and unrest in Pakistan.⁴ Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) also reported anti-state tweets to Twitter authorities. Moreover, the cloned Think Tanks mainly based in Brussels and New York tried to label CPEC as a new form of East India Company and neo-colonialism of China in Pakistan.⁵ The cloned forums indicated CPEC as a debt trap for Pakistan, created doubts about leasing of agriculture land and creation of the Chinese market for agricultural products of Pakistan.

DisinfoLab also revealed that Baloch separatist groups were used by India as an instrument to malign Pakistan's human rights, glorifying their militant activities and projecting heroic depictions of separatist leaders.⁶ However, the opening of Confucius centres in various cities and educational institutions is disseminated as neo-colonialism, rather cultural exchange, or educational cooperation. It shows that CPEC/BRI, which is an economic and global connectivity project, is under the crisis of perception developed by the adversaries of this project.⁷ This study discusses the varied variables that India used in regional and international public opinion for the creation of crisis perception on CPEC.

European Union DisinfoLab

The European Union have 27 member states and 705 members of parliament. EU DisinfoLab mission is to highlight the propaganda against EU countries and EU parliament members. It started its investigation after seeing the

news about the fake visit of EU members in Kashmir with fake identities and fake twitter accounts used by India on the human rights situation of the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK). This visit was organised by a fake think tank.⁸ DisinfoLab disclosed that the Indian propaganda operation against Pakistan started in 2005. Based on the investigation, the Lab published its report in 2019 named as Indian Chronicles. The basic purpose of this operation is to discredit Pakistan at the international level in terms of minority and women rights. Srivastava group runs this operation. Ankit Srivastava is the head of this operation. Madi Sharma is another key factor in this operation. EU DisinfoLab uncovered 265 fake media outlets working in 65 countries to serve Indian interests, as well as various dubious think tanks and NGOs. This fake network amplifies the information majorly by ANI (Asian news international) News agency, Unews agency, as well as the big news network and some digital internet marketers to damage Pakistan and influence policymakers to support Indian objectives. The perpetrators of this heist used other people's identities as a ruse. Fake editions of the European Parliament's official gazetteer, the Economist, and Voice of America were distributed to UN officials, and publishing companies were set up to produce the publications of think tanks under their control. The fake Indian publications have been publishing EU parliament members' views on Pakistan and China in Brussels. The identity of the Commission to Examine the Organisation of Peace (CSOP), which had lain dormant since the 1970s, was stolen and used against it in 2005.⁹ The misperceptions spread through fake news to sabotage CPEC are discussed in detail for informed conclusions.

Misperceptions/ Fake News to Sabotage CPEC

East India Company

CPEC is a mega project which has attracted foreign direct investment (FDI) into Pakistan from China under the Chinese investment plan. However, Indian propaganda has tried to project CPEC as the erstwhile East India Company which is far from the truth. Contrarily, Chinese investment would help in boosting up the economy of Pakistan. For this, Chinese companies have received a variety of tax incentives across the entire CPEC projects as an incentive to operate in problematic areas. When it comes to Chinese industrial parks or exclusive economic zones, they'll have a wonderful investment infrastructure, as well as Chinese workers who match specific specifications. On the other hand, China would be dependent on Pakistan to have access of a deep-water port in the Arabian Sea.¹⁰

Sri Lankan Port

These anti-CPEC perspectives have been mostly promoted by western experts and a couple of Pakistani scholars, leaning more toward the west. They

anticipate a quick change in the world order, power shifts from the West to the East and a loss to their hegemony due to China's development, as a new power which challenges its position. Their perception becomes stronger when their historical friends shift in the case of CPEC to China, like Pakistan. So, they are taking methods to resist any China-sponsored project to secure their hegemonic position and influence in their allies. In order to re-establish its power in Pakistan, Pakistani government is strongly pressurised by various tactics.¹¹

Agricultural Lands

China claims the world's largest 1.386 billion people and is one of the world's greatest agricultural economies. However, there is a scarcity of adequate agricultural land and so, Indian researchers assumed that China wishes to seize Pakistani territory by means of the CPEC project to meet their farming demands. In this sense, they have proposed various road and railway projects connecting their landlocked Xinjiang province with the Arabian Sea from the port of Gwadar. In addition to ideological opposition, Indian international relations are virtually intended to impede the construction and operation of the CPEC. It can empirically examine that India's participation in Chabahar port to limit Gwadar's efficiency. Gwadar can be regarded as a Perl in an ancient series of Perl theories in which India seems to assume that China will surround India to climax in its regional fatherhood.¹² But the reality is by making it easier to grow hybrid wheat, Chinese agricultural input companies like Sinochem Group replace farmers' traditional wheat varieties. For now, the company plans to expand into Uzbekistan and Bangladesh with its Chinese hybrid wheat that was successfully cultivated on 2,000 hectares in Pakistan.¹³

Indian Claim of PLAAF Aircraft Presence in Pakistan

According to an Indian journalist Arun Joshi, Chinese troops were reported to have been deployed to Gilgit-Skardu Baltistan Air Base in Gilgit-Tsarabgan after a recent conflict between China and India in Ladakh Galvan Valley.¹⁴ However, the Pakistani Army strongly denies the presence of Chinese troops in Pakistan. Repudiates claims by India that 'The People's Liberation Army Air Force' aircrafts are based in Pakistan. In such allegations and claims, India intends to prove to global perception that Skardu Baltistan is a place that could potentially harm to India and China-Pakistan Economic alliance is strategic and military, rather than economics and connectivity which is far from the reality.

Afghanistan Issue

After the takeover of Taliban in Afghanistan, Indians have been trying to propagate that Pakistan is supporting Taliban and making a negative view on a

global scale that Pakistan supports Taliban and Al Qaeda. For this, India has been pressing hard for economic sanctions on Pakistan. India has gone to an extent by saying that “If the US and the EU do not take economically and diplomatically very tough measures, then that is politically impossible in Pakistan to forbid Pakistan to stop harbouring terrorism”.¹⁵ However, analysis of the English press of Pakistan shows that Taliban, in the first six years after the US invasion in Afghanistan, have been treated as a security threat and their perception has been developed significantly negative or neutral.¹⁶ Also, Pakistan has been significantly affected by the terrorism wave with the loss of 80,000 casualties and significant economic loss.¹⁷

Akhtar argues that the changing dynamics of security in Afghanistan, the opposition by India in the corridor and the rise of the Baloch militant actions are the great obstacles for the CPEC project.¹⁸ It is important to understand that the substantial adverse effect of instability in Afghanistan would be in Pakistan. Balochistan is the CPEC’s pivot shares which connect with Afghanistan border. Therefore, militancy in Balochistan can endanger the entire project. As a result, Pakistan wants to preserve the significant political, human rights, and security gains made in Afghanistan. In addition, if neighbouring countries do nothing, domestic instability, a major exodus of refugees, and a growing humanitarian crisis might have regional ramifications.¹⁹

Balochistan Issue

Balochistan issue has a long history. It started soon after the independence of Pakistan. So far, it has witnessed five waves of militant activities. Currently, the militants are attacking developmental projects under CPEC, Chinese workers, civilian population, and the governmental infrastructure.²⁰ The militancy in Baloch was used as a proxy by India to sabotage and destabilise the CPEC and province of Balochistan.²¹ In November 2018, the most notable attack occurred against China. BLA gunmen assassinated two Pakistani security personnel at the Chinese Consulate in Karachi. Before that the Baloch militants were concentrated in Balochistan and only targeted Chinese and Pakistani workers.²² However, CPEC is constantly under threat through targeting Chinese nationals in Pakistan. In another attack, 4 Chinese Professors were killed including one Pakistani driver in Karachi University’s Confucius Centre. The Indian media reported this incident as “[...]in the restive Balochistan province have claimed attacks on Chinese nationals who work in large numbers in different parts of Pakistan particularly Balochistan and Karachi because of the USD (60) billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) projects[.]”.²³ It shows how India is glorifying the militant actions against Pakistan and CPEC.

It was in Balochistan's troubled province that Indian Navy Commander Kulbhushan Jadhav, a member of the RAW, was apprehended in 2016. Jadhav disguised himself as a Muslim businessman and operated from Iran's Chahbahar port. Jadhav actively promoted terrorism and was involved in the sabotage of CPEC. He established contacts with the Baloch militants and motivated them directly to take up arms and take on anti-state activities. Jadhav had been sentenced to death by a court martial. India approached the International Court of Justice (ICJ), but it had only got consular access. Regardless of what happened to Yadav, it is a fact that he illegally crossed the border and sow the seeds of hatred among Balochistan's youth.²⁴

Security Threats to CPEC

Indian Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar has openly declared the tactic of proxy warfare in Pakistan by funding terrorism as a state policy while granting the terrorist organisation involved in acts of terror a double financial budget as a strategy of proxy wars by India. Afghanistan is, in fact, frequently exploited by India to undermine Pakistan. Zahid Umar et al. assert that the international community must take note of Delhi's reckless utterances and RAW's involvement in terrorist attacks in Islamabad in this backdrop.²⁵ It is important to distinguish between the types of terrorists. Pakistan has exposed the network of hostile agencies working against CPEC. The captured Indian RAW officer, Kulbhushan Jadhav has confessed to run a terrorist network in Balochistan to undermine the CPEC. The poor people are their easy targets as Balochistan is one of the poorest and most backward areas in the country with people living in poor conditions. However, the declining security situation and uncertainty are negatively impacting Afghanistan's entry into the CPEC. In Pakistan, concerns about ISKP (Islamic State Khorasan Province) relations with the Pakistani Taliban are widespread and are the potential threat to Pakistani interests not only in Pakistan, but also in the region which can be easily exploited by the Indian connection in Afghanistan.²⁶

ISIS Threatens China-Pakistan Economic Corridor

On July 13, 2018, a suicide bomber detonated his explosives at a political rally in the District of the Mastung in Pakistan's Balochistan province, which was one of the country's deadliest terrorist assaults. The blast left 149 people dead and another 186 injured. Terrorist attacks in Pakistan's southwest province have never been as deadly as this one. Since 2005, militancy has ravaged in Balochistan, and terrorist strikes are not uncommon.²⁷ However, the Mastung incident has left even the inhabitants of Balochistan afraid. The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has claimed responsibility for the attack, which was carried out by an adolescent boy whose four brothers and sisters all were fighting in Afghanistan for ISIS. CPEC,

Pakistan's declared economic saviour, was in jeopardy because of rising extremism among the country's youth. China's interests in Pakistan are still under threat from the Islamic State (IS), which regards China as violating the human rights of its Muslim people and has so targeted Chinese citizens in Balochistan. ISIS seized a Chinese couple in Quetta, the capital of Balochistan, in May of 2019. The couple was rescued by Pakistani commandos in a surprise operation on an ISIS hideaway in Mastung. As a result of this operation, 12 ISIS militants were taken out, including their Balochistan leader, however, the Chinese couple, who were slaughtered in revenge, did not survive. As a result of the incident, Chinese nationals in the province of Balochistan have been unable to travel freely. This situation is extensively exploited by the Indian media outs, their lobbyist groups working in industrial countries and clone think tanks. They referred militancy in Balochistan because of the presence of Chinese nationals in Balochistan and reporting the context that militant activities are because of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor project.

Changing Global & Regional Politics

The changing global and regional politics have also impacted the BRI and CPEC. In terms of regional politics, the economies of China and India are expanding at a rapid pace, fuelling an increase in seaborne trade and energy imports, much of which passes through the Indian Ocean. Areas bordering seaways connecting Iran's energy-rich Gulf with Asia's energy-dependent nations look to have a new strategic focus. Any interruption in this supply will have negative consequences for the US economy as well as the world economy as a whole. For this reason, China's "Malacca Dilemma" (or "Seaborne Trade and Energy Dependency") was coined after the Malacca Strait, the main strategic choke point in Chinese trade and energy flows.²⁸ From the beginning, the Indians were hostile to the idea of BRI and CPEC which was launched to invest billions of US dollars for regional connectivity. European and global infrastructure investments have been done in conjunction with the Silk Road. India is a vocal opponent of the BRI. However, despite China claiming that it has billions of dollars in investments, India believes that it doesn't care about money and instead fears the CPEC route via Pakistan will be a security risk.²⁹

In terms of global politics, the US-China contestation is a source of concern for Pakistan. The optimistic Pakistani policymakers aspire to bridge the gap between the US and China. However, more pragmatic assessments call for proactive management and risk mitigation from the broader US-China strategic competition environment that is likely to persist in the coming years. Some of Pakistan's mitigation measures to reduce its increasing reliance on China include the implementation of CPEC projects within the country as well as proactively

identifying opportunities to supplement Chinese financing for the US and other international investors. Moreover, Russia and Pakistan have re-established their strained relations, which worsened when Pakistan became a US ally during the cold war. However, CPEC appears to be an emerging economic plan because other countries throughout the world have expressed an interest in joining CPEC.

Kashmir Conflict and Water Dispute between India and Pakistan

The Kashmir conflict overlapped with water disputes and India brought Kashmir to the UN Security Council by January 1948 (UNSC). A resolution was adopted on 21 April, 1948 demanding a ceasefire and the withdrawal of all troops. The dispute between Kashmir and the division of water resources are interconnected. From independence to today, the two main challenges in standardizing relations between India and Pakistan remain.³⁰

Theoretical Framework

The crisis perception model of Billings et al., (1980) explains the crisis is managed without a thorough understanding of the crisis. However, the crisis perception model elaborates the situation in which the crisis occurred which is identified in sensing of the problem. There are eight situations that labelled in the crisis situation model which are identified the state of the problem, desired state of the problem and it connects to evaluate the size of the discrepancy. However, perceived significance of the problem area contributes in the perceived probability of loss. The confidence indicators of the desired state of the problem, alternate explanation of apparent discrepancy and response the uncertainty including inaction, routine solution or original solution, and these indicators connect with the perceived probability of loss. Moreover, the factor perceived negative consequences if the probability of loss disregarded and perceived time search for satisfactory solutions link with perceived time pressure for solving of the problem. However, all three factors that defining a problem a crisis indicates the extent of perceived crisis (See Figure 1).

In this study, the crisis perception of CPEC indicates that India is using regional and Pakistan's domestic issues in creating a global discourse with the power of digital media. However, in the review of issues, the paper accesses the potential issues of regional and domestic security which are exploited by India to malign Pakistan at the international level and potentially cause damage not only to its reputation but to create an extensive loss to its foreign direct investment of CPEC. This article analyses the extent of perceived crisis to the economy of Pakistan and as well as the probability of damage to the project by India. However, specific predictions on the nature, the magnitude and extent of crisis could be made through using this model.

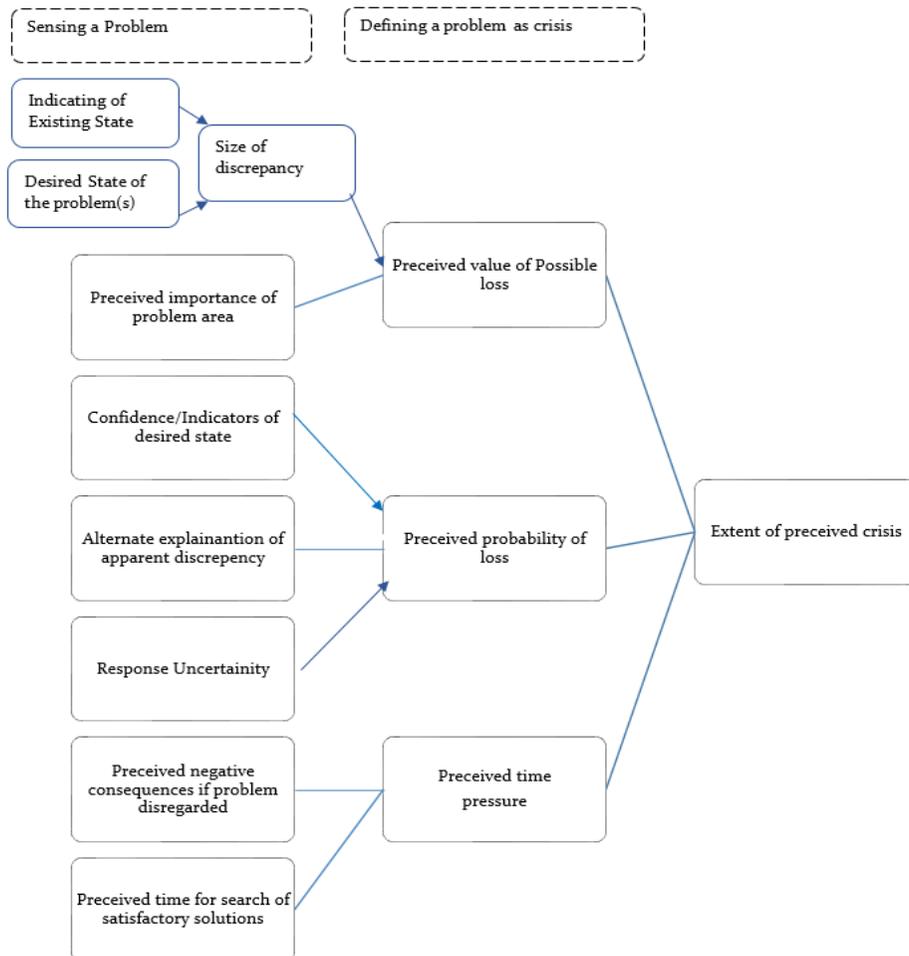


Figure 1: Crisis perception model modified from Billings et al.

Findings and Discussion

In order to obtain the desired objectives of this article, the key focus is to review the literature on CPEC in terms of perception crisis created by India on CPEC and how India is using regional and Pakistan's domestic issues in manufacturing global pseudo discourse. The data covers significant issues that disseminated through cloned Indian sponsored global think tanks, 750 fake media networks operating in 116 countries, 550 websites and lobbyist groups, the renaissance of eminent dead people and NGOs and more than 10 human rights NGOs accredited with the UN human rights council. This was reported by the EU DisinfoLab in "Indian Chronicles: deep dive into the 15 years operation of targeting the EU and the UN to serve Indian Interests", to create a global disinformation drive against Pakistan to discredit it at the international level. The data is gathered from the different secondary sources especially from the different online websites, research journals, books, magazines and official communications. In online Google search bar, the data collected with the key words "CPEC", "India on CPEC", "CPEC and Pakistan's domestic Issues", "Balochistan and CPEC" and "Regional Politics and CPEC". The relevant results are studied according to key areas identified by the EU DisinfoLab.

There are 24 domestic and regional issues that India is exploiting at global level for the creation of the global perception crisis which identified. While the indication of the existing state of the problem is that the Chinese nationals are targeted in Balochistan and Karachi which indicates that India intent to project both parts of Pakistan place where law enforcement is not properly functioning, and foreign nationals and companies may not invest. It also tried to create a wedge between the civil government and federal departments. India reported through its fake networks that the civil administration of Pakistan has attempted to sell Balochistan to China while the federal agencies have remained neutral. Accumulatively, the overall discrepancy of crisis perception on CPEC is the significant which has been created by the Indian deep dive operation. These 24 issues indicate the importance of the problem area which needs prompt rectification. However, in this situation, the delay in the CPEC project could increase the cost of the project or halt the development in Balochistan, so the perceived value of possible loss to this project could define the problem as crisis.

CPEC is an economic integration and regional connectivity framework. It is not for regional security or economic competition rather than it helps in regional connectivity for economic gains. Moreover, it also focuses development and poverty eradication in Balochistan. Pakistan and China both have reiterated that this project is not against India or any other state. Notwithstanding the opposition from other

countries Pakistan should take into confidence all the CPEC stakeholders in local communities to mitigate the perceived negative consequences of the project at the global public sphere. If problem is disregarded, then it can decrease the acceptance of CPEC in Pakistan.³¹ Accumulatively, the extent of crisis perception is significant at global scale which needs a counter strategy through engaging local people in economic activities, facilitating them through corporate social responsibility activities and requiring extensive awareness campaigns on the significance of this project not only at the national level but also at the international level.

Conclusion

CPEC is a wonderful opportunity for Pakistan to become the hub of Asian trade, increase exports and boost up economic activities. Since 1947, the relations between Pakistan and India have less than cordial, due to Kashmir and Kashmir issue. India does not want to see the Pakistan prosper, progressive and a developed state therefore the Indians at international level try their best to isolate Pakistan, and to put the label of terrorism on Pakistan. For this purpose, India established fake media outlets and run fake campaigns against Pakistan across the world, despite the fact that if Indian invest in his country, then they can solve several problems of their own people. India is supporting Baloch militants for terrorism activities. The real purpose behind this negative propaganda is to stop Chinese investment, isolate Pakistan and to increase Indian hegemony in the region. Pakistan and China must develop the strong strategies to counter this fake propaganda at the international and regional levels. To promote the benefits of CPEC and to satisfy the local population, small advertisement campaigns and strategies can be used to reduce the misunderstanding about CPEC. Hence, it is a dire need for Pakistan to sense the crisis perception based on the contributory factors and define these factors as the crisis which indicates the significant extent of crisis perception. Pakistan must solve those issues indigenously which need dialogue or security enforcement. However, on a global scale. Pakistan and China must coordinate and allocate a certain percentage of funds to counter the false perception that has created by the Indian deep dive operation against CPEC and Pakistan.

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