

Media a critical element of National Security and a Force Multiplier for Military

In this new age of information revolution, Media has become an important pillar of national Power, with power to influence public opinion. Media shapes the perception of decision-makers and people. In addition, based on these perceptions the political decision-makers formulate policies, choose lines of actions. Abraham Lincoln, the 16th President of the US, who also led his country through its bloodiest civil war in history, stated, "Public opinion is everything. With it nothing can fail, without it nothing can succeed."

Another complex issue in the media-national security connection is the new media or the so-called social media considered by some specialists a challenge for democracies. Because social media channels such as social networks and blogs present powerful tools to spread information to the masses.

Social media platforms like YouTube, Facebook and Twitter have also become important for terrorists to further their goals and spread their message, because of its convenience, affordability and broad reach of social media. Al-Qaeda has an Internet presence spanning nearly two decades. Al-Qaeda terrorists use the internet to distribute material anonymously or 'meet in dark spaces'. The Czech Military Intelligence Service commented that Al-Qaeda are spreading its ideology among the Muslim community in Europe, mainly through the means of social media. ISIS use of social media platforms has been as phenomenal as its successes in the battlefield.

Social media has also become element of Psychological warfare that involves the planned use of propaganda and other psychological operations to influence the opinions, emotions, motives, reasoning, attitudes, and behavior of opposition groups. Psychological operations target foreign governments, organizations, groups and individuals.

The most recent incident was comprehensive psychological warfare campaign unleashed by China in recent India-China Doklam crisis. Beijing tried to exploit the political divisions to sow dissensions in India by calling Sushma Swaraj a “liar”, reaching out to Modi’s opponents, including Rahul Gandhi, and attacking his “Hindu nationalism.” The aim was to use Indians to put pressure on the Indian government and get them to withdraw, largely by doubting India’s own assertions. In J & K, Social Media has been used to rally people against the State and the Armed Forces.

Social Media is all pervasive and at the professional level it impacts operations, administration, motivation, morale, functioning and fighting at all levels from the lowest to the highest, said Lt Gen Vinod Bhatia, PVSM, AVSM, SM (Retd), Director CENJOWS. He wondered whether the armed forces are ready to face this new warfare and said that the truth is somewhere in between. He emphasized that for the Indian Armed Forces to effectively exploit Social Media there was a requirement to look into the existing procedures, policies and structures

Therefore experts feel it is imperative to develop a coordinated strategic communications strategy and a specific

agency to deal with these media threats and efficient media management. There is also need for armed forces to use Social Media as a effective force multiplier in the security domain.

Media management

However the management of media has become increasingly difficult due to wide proliferation of media in the form of number of TV channels, print and social media. There are also challenges due to increasingly commercialization of media through business houses and politicians having a variety of interests of its own and set goals to be achieved. The news media also functions independently, without rules, regulations or code of conduct because of lack of clear legal guidelines and conflicting interests.

The leaders have called for countering radicalisation conducive to terrorism and the use of internet for terrorist purposes. The counter terrorism actions must continue to be part of a comprehensive approach, including combating radicalisation and recruitment, hampering terrorist movements and countering terrorist propaganda.

Management of media is also vital for Military in both peace and conflict situations. Armed forces want to control media since any leaks can be used by adversary to gather intelligence and jeopardize the mission. Deception and surprise is the most potent weapon in the commander's armoury which requires careful media management. There is need for greater understanding between media and armed forces, in understanding each other's objectives and work together in harmony.

Experts point to the requirement of clear and concise information dissemination policy and establishment of Department of Sentiment Analysis to gauge the sentiments and thereafter choose the best methodology to shape the sentiments favorably.

The public information, media management, information warfare and social media are closely inter-related and need close coordination and management and require a dedicated agency according to experts.

References and Resources also include:

<https://dailytimes.com.pk/105980/media-and-national-security/>

<https://cenjows.gov.in/seminar-12.html>

http://cks.univnt.ro/uploads/cks_2013_articles/index.php?dir=3_Administrative_and_Political_Sciences%2F&download=cks_2013_administration_004.pdf