

# Information Warfare & Digital Counter-Terrorism on the Cyber Fronts

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Islamic Theology of Counter Terrorism  
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Since ages propaganda is being exercised for ideological, political, and geostrategic purposes. It's as old as war itself but presently besides with vast ranging electronic media, multiple forums of social media have allocated Information Operations (IOs) a scope, speed and reach that were formerly unthinkable. At present various techniques are being used to aim at influencing a target audience's value system, emotions, faith or belief system, motives, reasoning or behaviour. It is exercised to induce confessions or buttress attitudes and behaviours that are surely complimentary to the originator's objectives — sometimes coupled with false flag tactics or black operations. It also provides work for destroying the spirits of enemies through psychological tactics that seek to depress troops by propagating rumours and misinformation. Paintings, posters, films, pamphlets, cartoons, radio & TV shows, and websites are employed as media to disseminate disinformation while the social and digital media has accelerated the spreading of false and fake stories. Likewise, multiple social networking sites have come up as strong platform for speedy interaction, sharing opinion and carrying out debate.

All across the world, there are easily available countless internet websites that knowingly distribute fake news—propaganda, hoaxes, and disinformation claiming to be real—often incorporating social / digital media to steer web / net traffic and augment their effect. Unlike news satire, hoax news websites purposely seek to be supposed as valid — often taken at face value either for political and financial gain. Previously, such sites have sponsored political falsehoods in Indonesia, Germany, Philippines, Myanmar, United States and, Sweden. More importantly, many sites either instigate in, or are endorsed by North Macedonia, Romania, Russia and United States.

In fact, propaganda is manipulative approach that is incorporated to support particular synthesis of narratives with emotional response rather than rational response by using loaded language consisted of selective and half-truth facts — for instance, recent Indo-Pak escalation that took place in wake of Pulwama terrorist attack in Indian held Kashmir, militant group Jaish-e-Muhammad apparently claimed its responsibility — but Indian electronic and social media served as fuel on fire. For instance, #AvengePulwama and #surgicalstrike2 like hashtags were indication of extremist narrative of India that was prospering in her public. After the Pulwama attack, most of the Indian media reports were turning out to be fake, contradictory, predisposed, provocative and uncorroborated. Furthermore, the day after the attack, an eminently aggressive Indian news anchor, Arnab Goswami thundered, “We want revenge, not condemnation. ... It is time for blood, the enemy's blood.”

Besides, at a critical time while Indian society was evidently strained along religious, ideological (Hindutva) communal and caste lines, an Indian media had been baying for blood, as had common citizens on fronts of social media. Also, all Indian news channels were appallingly cramming these edgy divides deeper and further. Indeed, it's quite embarrassing for India to see her media industry trading for cheap sensationalism at the cost of ethics and news values. In fact, the abysmal and terrible standard of journalism has been witnessed in the coverage of recent Indo-Pak escalation by Indian media.

This major discrepancy is evidence of confusion, and propaganda that were spreading in the public by intensely blemished media reports. Hitherto the diplomats and ex-army men commentating on the issue have been found nowhere next to pugnacious or bellicose—establishing that it's generally either experience-less or jingoistic people who are mainly eager about war. As India hasn't gone through a full-on war since ages, hence they seemed to be quite short of experience look and it has left India with precariously mislaid ideas about the grandeur of victories and battles.

Unlike India, quite mature media response (very credible and sensible information sharing) and of course entirely different dynamics from Pakistan were coming into global sight that Pakistani government and military are not aspirant of war. But it's India that is holding a martial whip in hand — also where armchair jingoism could be extremely risky not only for South Asia but for whole world indeed.

It's noteworthy that because of social media, terrorist attacks could now put on a hype which formerly was seemed to be impossible — and it could also lead to a full-on war between nations as depicted from recent Indo-Pak escalation where Information Operations (IOs) played a lethal role. Though, it's not a novel factor at all rather it has been introduced and heavily exercised in previous wars across the world. Throughout the First World War, concerned governments brought colossal amount of resources and efforts into play to generate global narrative of their own choice and also to silhouette actions and opinion internationally. In fact, the most potent propaganda was ever shaped in order to substantiate their conducts and to assemble international support. Likewise, in the years subsequent to end of the first world war, they contour attitudes those were found to be influenced strongly by propaganda because it takes decisive part in winning the politics of war as far as broader military and political strategies are concerned.

Soon after, with swift modernization of highly sophisticated and autonomous self-directed Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has stimulated a revolution in military related affairs, which take in nations bringing ICTs into play — both the physical battlefield and cyberspace to wage war against their foes and adversaries. Also, a subtle nature of correlation has been made out between Psychological

Warfare (PW) and Information Warfare (IW) as both of these intended for manipulating a target audience's belief system, sentiments, motives, value system, interpretation and reasoning, or behaviour. Autonomous robots, cyber-attacks and communication management are taken as more ubiquitous and omnipresent kind of exhibits of revolution in military affairs.

In case of a competitive lead over an opponent, the crucial concept of Information Warfare (IW) has been brought in, and it may engage exclusively hotchpotch of assuredly valid information, tactical information, dissemination of disinformation and propaganda to deflate or influence the targeted public and enemy — irrespective of quality of Conflicting Force Information (CFI) and rebuffing of information-gathering breaks to opposing forces. More significantly, IW is deemed to be strictly correlated to psychological warfare.

Owing to this rapid modernization of war related tactics and communication, presently propaganda has emerged as a basic war plan for all; terrorist organizations or states on fronts like electronic and social media — in forms of a post either on Twitter or Facebook, a piece of comment or even a video uploaded to YouTube — has sweeping effect to circulate certain philosophies and values and to assemble a definite narrative. By dint of its infinite access it is being profoundly relied upon by terrorist organizations, politicians, and governmental agencies also to publicise junk / scrap news in their favour as we all have witnessed in case of Islamic States (IS), that has been extremely reliant upon its terror videos to proliferate the spectrum of the terror of IS — also role of propaganda sponsored by Indian media in recent Indo-Pak escalation that took place in wake of a terrorist attack in Indian held Kashmir.

Undoubtedly, terrorism has turned to be a grave kind of threat as a result of rapidly emerging worth of social media – also it helps in accelerating the situation as it provides work for militant organization in terms of training, recruiting and off course communicating with their supporters, followers, and donors, as it is the faster, easier, cheaper and efficient mode of communication. By bringing in use the potential of social media platforms, these terrorist organizations are scattering their fake propaganda, extremist ideological thoughts and their violent activities to the whole world.

The ICT technology and deeply engrained nature of social media that allow the globalized world to intermingle regardless of corporeal location or distance is also employed, adapted, and exploited by terrorists and their terrorist organizations to reach candidates, ensure organizational longevity, and to conduct their operations.

While more or less all terrorist organizations have their official websites, Al Qaeda has been noted being the first one to take full advantage of the internet — and employed social media more widely regardless of the threats imposed by extreme manhunts, and its leaders have been communicating frequently by means of audio and visual messages. Also, Islamic State is going ahead of Al Qaeda in following the brutal trends of propagating terror by releasing menacing videos of beheadings.

Since 2011, the Taliban has been found to be very active by using social media / Twitter via twitter handle @alemarahweb which is currently suspended. Soon after, in 2011 it came into notice that Al-Shabab that is Somalia-based terror cell was also actively using Twitter via handle @HSMPress but now its status is also suspended. Also, Boko Haram that is a very active Nigeria-based militant group has released its statement by uploading video on YouTube shortly after bombings in Nigeria in year 2011. Attacks in Paris (November 2015) however, are deemed to be form of propaganda that is old-fashioned mode of communication emerged in Europe in earlier 19<sup>th</sup> century.

More importantly, amongst the militant organizations IS considered to be positioned as most potent consumer of social media. IS has learnt their actual propaganda craft in many respects from al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. Though, IS swiftly casted a shadow on its mentor by installing a full range of images, political proselytizing and narratives all the way through various platforms of social media. Terrorist attack however, in Christchurch, New Zealand that took almost 50 people, marked a major shift in previous terrorism trends as terrorist no longer requires a mainstream media as ‘oxygen of publicity’ — they can get an easy and rapid access to millions of other people to upload their content for them instead on a number of platforms of social media.

More than 1.5 million edited versions of the terrorist’s live video feed of Christchurch mosque attack were allegedly deleted by management of Facebook. Besides, other social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram and Twitter equally struggled to hold down the multiplication of the grisly footage. Simultaneously, global users examined through the terrorist’s manifesto — he laid out his radicalized worldview in a Q&A format at his Facebook account before carrying out terrorist attack at mosque. However, this gruesome example of recent terrorism has turned moral dilemma — where are the limitation lines being drawn at our personal capacities being responsible social media users; between responding about a terrorist attack to denounce it — moreover inadvertently helping to proliferate a perpetrator’s thoughts in the process?

More to the point, presently as history shows there are limited options to prevent people from focusing on suspect — in the 1970s a news embargo was introduced by the government when Germany's left-wing militants started mass kidnapping in the country. In other countries, however, terrorism or militancy suspects were charged in covert trials to evade publicity.

In crux, in order to develop Information Operations or Psychological Operations (PSYOPS) from the angle of collective behaviour, social media is very effective to be used – it endows with closer insight into potentials of terrorist organizations as well as to those working on to avert their risk. More importantly, a wider range of educational aspects; civics, values, critical thinking, cultural norms, traditions, ethics, worldviews, friends and family circles, personal know-how and character start to grow at a juvenile stage. Despite going through process of formal education they start getting mature, their worldview and personal experiences may alter, enhancing their susceptibility to extremist narratives that needs to be checked.

Generally social media users do not seem to be interested in any a philosophy or conviction, but rather fascinated by catchy phrases or naive slogans. While social media itself retains powers to generate a hype-permeated culture of resentment by having a greater number of likes and followers, however, this conduction or infusion of information into social media is quite similar to misinformation tactics of old school deception. So therefore, in order to prevent the wider spreading of misinformation / lethal psychological operations / baseless propaganda by anyone; either by media, governmental or terrorist's organizations our conscious self-check and over-vigilance is really needed for making the world more peaceful for the generations to come.

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