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### **NEW MEDIA- MILITARY RELATIONSHIP: OVERVIEW AND CHALLENGES**

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New media includes all those platforms that empower a broad range of actors (individuals through nation-states) to create and disseminate near-real time or real time information with the ability to affect a broad (regional or worldwide) audience.<sup>i</sup> The present scenario has brought a bigger challenge before the defence organisations in terms of handling new media technologies, in the backdrop of its exponential reach, impact and the way in which the 'user' content generated on these platforms can be distorted, manipulated and circulated to millions in an instant, which can be used by the enemy to its advantage. The usage of new media technology like in Israeli-Hezbollah War of 2006 to in recent times Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant social media campaign provides us an examples on how the current information environment has impacted the way warfare is conducted today.<sup>ii</sup>

In order to get information dominance in any given environment, undermining the importance and strength of new media can prove detrimental to the defence forces. There is an immediate need to understand the 'new media' as a concept, its technological dimensions, its impact and set of challenges and prospects. In addition, there is a requirement to optimise new media technologies and synchronise them with the aims and objectives of military so that it can counter the adversaries' use of new media and subvert their aim. For example, the recent creation of a special force of 'Facebook warriors' in the British army, especially designed to undertake psychological operations and use of social media to engage in unconventional warfare in the information age. The 77th Brigade, to be based in Hermitage, near Newbury, in Berkshire, is about 1,500-strong and formed of units drawn from across the army. The brigade will be responsible for the non-lethal warfare in the backdrop of 24-hour news, smartphones and social media, such as Facebook and Twitter.<sup>iii</sup>



## Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS)

Forum for National Security Studies (FNSS)

The employment of this strategy by British defence forces not only highlights the growing importance of new media in military operations but also underlines the fact that adversaries are using the new platforms to their advantage. It also accentuates the immediate need to review the potential of new media and advocate changes in the stance of the defence forces the way they have been previously viewing media and its impact. For a better understanding, let's see some popular new media and how they have been exploited by various terrorist organisations time and again:

- **Abuse of Internet:** The Internet has been the first causality in the new media technology, which has been continuously abused by the terrorist organizations and adversaries to their advantage. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations said, "The Internet is a prime example of how terrorists can behave in a truly transnational way; in response, States need to think and function in an equally transnational manner."<sup>iv</sup>It is important to note that the World Wide Web, as a subset of the Internet, is essentially ungoverned, providing obvious freedoms and cautions. The web gives the individual a voice, often an anonymous voice...and a potentially vast audience.<sup>v</sup> This anonymity and unregulated freedom have been regularly exploited by the enemy, in terms of using internet for their own communication, false propaganda, raise funds, lure people to join their network, coordinating attacks, money laundering, using geo tags, Google earth for mapping, data collection etc.
- **Abuse of Websites and blogs:** As new media technologies become easier and cheaper to use, in terms of creation, content consumption, revamping and deleting the websites have become more easier than ever. This facility has given terrorist organisation easier ways to communicate from unknown locations to huge masses, surpassing geographical locations and time zones. Websites are easily established, dismantled and reestablished, making them valuable to extremist movements. Islamic extremist websites grew from twenty to over 4,000 in only five years.<sup>vi</sup>The enemies can use these websites as virtual training grounds, offering tutorials on building



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Forum for National Security Studies (FNSS)

ammunitions like bombs, assist as a guide in how to use weapons at their disposal, shooting at soldiers, and sneaking into prone areas from abroad, host messages and propaganda videos which help to raise morale and further the expansion of recruitment and fundraising networks.<sup>vii</sup>

- **Abuse of YouTube:** YouTube can empower individuals to achieve strategic political and military effects where easy upload of their videos, without editorial oversight, allows access to a nearly unlimited audience. Thus, the use of the improvised explosive device (IED) by insurgents shifts from a military tactical weapon to a strategic information weapon when the IED detonator is accompanied by a videographer.<sup>viii</sup> But the question is if these platforms are continuously used by the terrorist organisation to do terror propaganda then why are they allowed to put these videos in the first case? The answer can be summarized in two points, first is the lack of will to do so. Despite the serious threat posed by extreme and violent videos, neither the big Internet companies nor the European Union appear willing to take on a legal battle to enforce their removal.<sup>ix</sup> Second, the videos of YouTube in terms of data is colossal, 'about 300 hours of video material is being uploaded to YouTube every minute, making it virtually impossible for the company to filter all images.' Internet giant Google accepted the fact that its video-sharing website YouTube is so inundated that staff cannot filter all terror related content, complicating the struggle to halt the publication of terrorist propaganda and hostage videos.<sup>x</sup>

To conclude, new media is one of the main forces in accelerating the trend of globalisation in human society.<sup>xi</sup> Due to the thrust of new media, the global trend creates new social networks and activities, redefines political, cultural, economic, geographical and other boundaries of human society, expands and stretches social relations, intensifies and accelerates social exchanges<sup>xii</sup>, and involves both the micro-structures of personhood and macro-structures of community.<sup>xiii</sup> Given its indispensable nature, unchallenging presence, infinite reach, deep impact, it becomes paramount for the defence organisation to understand it from the core and optimise its potentials for achieving the military objective.



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***(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies [CAPS])***

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<sup>i</sup>Murphy, Dennis M. "Introduction." In *Fighting Back: New Media and Military Operations*. (Pennsylvania: U.S. Army War College, 2008).p.4

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iii</sup> MacAskill, Ewen. "British Army Creates Team of Facebook Warriors." *The Guardian*, January 31, 2015, UK News sec. <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/jan/31/british-army-facebook-warriors-77th-brigade>. accessed on May 18, 2015.

<sup>iv</sup> "The Use of the Internet for Terrorist Purposes." *United Nations Office On Drugs And Crime*.2012. [http://www.unodc.org/documents/frontpage/Use\\_of\\_Internet\\_for\\_Terrorist\\_Purposes.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/frontpage/Use_of_Internet_for_Terrorist_Purposes.pdf).accessed on May 18, 2015.

<sup>v</sup>Murphy, Dennis M. "Introduction." In *Fighting Back: New Media and Military Operations*. (Pennsylvania: U.S. Army War College, 2008).p.4

<sup>vi</sup>Ibid

<sup>vii</sup>Kaplan, Eben. "Terrorists and the Internet." *Council on Foreign Relations*. January 8, 2009. <http://www.cfr.org/terrorism-and-technology/terrorists-internet/p10005>. accessed on May 17, 2015.

<sup>viii</sup>Murphy, Dennis M. "Introduction." In *Fighting Back: New Media and Military Operations*. (Pennsylvania: U.S. Army War College, 2008).p.6

<sup>ix</sup> "YouTube Too Overloaded to Filter Terrorist Videos." *Cbsnews.com*, January 28, 2015, News sec. <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/youtube-too-overloaded-to-filter-terrorist-videos/>. accessed on May 19, 2015.

<sup>x</sup>Ibid

<sup>xi</sup> Chen, G. M., & Zhang, K. New media and cultural identity in the global society. In R. Taiwo (Ed.), *Handbook of Research on Discourse Behavior and Digital Communication: Language Structures and Social Interaction*. (Hershey, PA: Idea Group Inc. 2010). pp 801-815.

<sup>xiii</sup>Chen, Guo-Ming. "The Impact Of New Media On Intercultural Communication In Global Context'.*China Media Research* 8, no. 2 (2012): 1. [http://digitalcommons.uri.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1012&context=com\\_facpubs](http://digitalcommons.uri.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1012&context=com_facpubs). Assessed on March 11, 2015

<sup>xiii</sup>Steger, Manfred. "Globalization: A Contested Topic." In *Globalization: A Very Short Introduction*, 1st ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).p.15