

Rumors and Fourth-generation Warfare "Definition, Impact and Response"



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In this era, war changed and took a new form that relies on the strategy of destroying and undermining a state from the inside, targeting all the components of the civil sectors as the main goal rather than targeting the armed forces of such state. This form of war is known as the Fourth-Generation Warfare (4GW), which use the psychological operations to a great extent. Psychological operations are implemented by trained individuals and groups to create unrest and disturbances in the target state citizens and attempt to culturally invade them in such manner adversely impacting them to destroy their morale.

Difference between Psychological Operations and Psychological Warfare

Some people confuse "psychological operations" for "psychological warfare" and use them interchangeably. Psychological operations mean "planning for the operations of disseminating information using the selected methods for the target societies to influence their feelings, motives and objective logic for the purpose of changing the behavior of such societies as well as the target organizations and governments". Psychological operations denote a planned and methodological use of propaganda and different psychological techniques to affect the opinions, feelings and behaviors of the target addressee; they are launched at the time of peace and war alike¹. On the other hand, psychological warfare is waged against the armed forces of the hostile state during war time only at the battlefield. Psychological warfare focuses on attacking the mind and heart of the adversary's fighters to get them to reach a state of despair and surrender, convincing them that it is futile to be involved in war because they are unable to understand or comprehend the series of fast-moving events and psychological pressures that outdo the level of their thinking; thus, such fighters lose the willingness

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or enthusiasm to fight at the war.

As for the goal, psychological operations aim at affecting the opinions, feelings and behaviors of individuals and groups at economic, social and military levels. On the other hand, psychological warfare aims at breaking the morale of the hostile armed forces to reduce their efficient capability to fight at war. Regarding the element of continuity, psychological operations continue at all times including peace, tension and war. Psychological warfare is limited to the times of tension and armed conflict only. Hence, psychological operations are no longer a means used during war time only; rather, psychological operations have become independent of the military conflict to an extent that the latter has become one of its elements.³

Technological advancement provided psychological operations with resources that never existed before through three main dimensions: (1) ability to establish network connections that allow instant communication with societies and individuals; (2) multitude of means of influence on societies and individuals; and (3) the development of social sciences that focus on identifying the stimuli influencing the human behavior. Mass media have become one of the key tools to deliver the messages of psychological operations to the recipient anywhere and

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at any level. Conventional and unconventional mass media, of all forms and types, plays an instrumental role in the light of scientific and technological advancements since mass media is always available and instantly accessible during any event in real time. They cover a large sector of the target addressees. Psychological operations are the means through which the objectives of the media messages are determined and through which the public are guided to achieve a certain goal within a specific timing, serving the interests of the aggressor states.

Rumors as the Most Important Methods of Psychological Operations

A rumor is a term given to a certain point of view or plausible statement that is disseminated from one person to another whether orally or through any means of online and offline communication. It is usually circulated by people without verifying it against a reliable source. Rumors are dedicated towards influencing a person's thinking and imagination in such a manner causing them to believe something that does not exist, and the target addressee also adds to its content, making it be quickly circulated and widely spread.⁴

Rumors are the most seriously influential psychological operations because they could rest on a source that confirms they are true. As a result, they are rapidly and widely circulated; rumors are the most frequently used and influential techniques of psychological operations due to their characteristics and features, causing the target addressee to lose confidence in their leaders and their strength as well as lose their confidence in gaining victory and in their ability to overcome trials and tribulations. Rumors are carefully and meticulously planned and developed, and the methods of publicizing rumors are selected by the relevant bodies in charge of psychological operations. They are then disseminated through psychological campaigns to adversely affect the target state.

Rumors need a fertile soil for growth and expansion. Therefore, the planners of rumors seek to identify the vulnerabilities of the target state citizens to carefully select the themes of rumors. The more the content of rumors is away from direct insult and offense, the easier the rumors could fulfill their goal; they could be widely received and become more popular in the target society. The main components of the rumor include the following:

Content of the rumor;

Psychological attitudes of the individuals towards this rumor;

Motives driving the individuals to make up and circulate the rumor.

Most Significant Goals of Rumors:

Sowing the seeds of despair among the target state citizens and underestimating their capacities and capabilities.



Overestimating the faults of leaders at different levels, to cause citizens to lose confidence in their leaders.

Debilitating the internal front and creating loopholes by encouraging defections among the opponent groups and sects, and the opposition to the ruling regime as a result of causing the citizens to distrust the ruling regime in the target state. Consequently, the morale of the morale of the target state citizens is undermined.

One of the most important goals of rumors is to distrust the integrity of the state institutions, attempt to show the state regulatory and administrative authorities as unable to implement the legal and behavioral rules to minimize the violations and breaches of the law and minimize the abuse of influence. This adversely affects the overall investment atmosphere and, in turn, exerts pressures on the citizens.

Continuously casting doubt on the political, economic, military and social data announced by the institutions of the target state. This causes the citizens to lose confidence in the transparency and credibility of these institutions and creates an environment of anxiety and distrust inside the target state, which adversely impacts the citizens' positive behavior.

Examples for Types of Rumors:

Slow Rumor: It is publicized slowly, in whisper and in a confidential fashion. This reticence causes the recipient to believe it is true. It is circulated under a shroud of secrecy. This includes, for example, the hostile rumors that attack the reputation of prominent figures.

Fast Rumor: It is a rapidly spread and also rapidly disappearing rumor. It is often launched with sudden events.

Recurrent Rumor: It is a rumor that is publicized and then disappears. It reappears if there are favorable circumstances or at the times determined by the person who launched the rumor.

Attack Rumor: It is a rumor that is launched to target a certain person or category to disparage and diminish

their standing.

Bogie or Fear Rumor: It aims at arousing anxiety, fear and horror in the society. It relies, in its dissemination, on people's fear from the future especially during wars, and economic and political crises.

Rancor and Hatred Rumors: These rumors are issued as an expression of hatred and grudge feelings, and destructive motives that some people could have. It is not necessary for a person who creates this type of rumors to be aware of what he/she really does; rather, he/she unconsciously issues them to let out negative feelings towards a certain situation. A rancor and hatred rumor is the most serious type of rumors because it fuels dissension among people.

Exploratory Rumor: Rumors may be spread for identifying the extent to which the public opinion or its attitudes are mobilized (as a trial balloon to take the temperature of the public opinion) towards a certain issue, or as an attempt to explore the reaction of the public street towards a certain event.

Types of Rumors by Source:

Personal rumors: The rumor-monger aims to achieve personal gains.

Local rumors: These rumors revolve around an issue of a certain town or society.

National rumors: These rumors revolve around public national issues and crises encountered by the state, weaknesses or strengths to encounter them.

International rumors: These rumors are spread in case of international crises, during the spread of epidemics or disasters.

Scientific Method for Addressing Rumors:

Rumors about a certain issue are spread according to the importance of such issue as well as its ambiguity. The more a certain issue is considerably ambiguous and highly important, the more highly influential the rumor is about it. Noticeably, ambiguity results from the poor performance of mass media or the lack of reliable news. Therefore, the strength of a rumor relies on the

importance and ambiguity of the issue.

During the First World War (WWI), Gordon W. Allport and Leo Postman, two psychologists, noticed the impact of rumors on people's morale, ideas, attitudes, feelings and behavior. They also noticed that rumors are quickly circulated at pressure-exerting circumstances or at worrisome ones such as accidents, wars, calamities and crises of different types. They also noticed that rumors are more rapidly circulated when there is a media blackout or ambiguity. In addition, they conducted numerous experiments in 1945 and their scientific efforts were culminated by the publication of a book entitled "Psychology of Rumor" and put down the following formula in their book:⁵

Rumor Intensity (R) = Importance of the issue (I) X degree of its Ambiguity (A)

With view to this formula, when ambiguity or importance reaches zero, the rumor intensity becomes zero. Therefore, the best way to put out rumors is by disseminating true information about the issue the rumors revolve around. Also, through identifying the future interests of people, it is possible to expect the subject of a rumor.

Rumors could take other forms other than that of a written text or a familiar narrative text. Other methods may be used, such as a propaganda and a joke, where the latter is the most serious form of spreading rumors. A joke significantly influences the public opinion, particularly in low cultural and social level settings, which may be easily affected by humor and jokes. Caricature may be used for disseminating rumors because absorbing, attractive and of a long-lasting influence; it may also be spread among the different cultural levels. Its influence might exceed the local or national scale to a larger scale, where individuals use multiple languages with whom the dissemination of the written or oral rumor would not fit. Therefore, the

multiple forms of rumors must be taken into account to address them efficiently and influentially.⁶

Conclusion

Psychological operations are a combat that targets morale and an intellectual conflict that involves concepts and thoughts, leading to the destruction of the opponent by undermining the intellectual cohesion. They are flexible and developing operations in which all the legitimate and illegitimate means are used. Rumors are the most influential psychological operations because they considerably affect the communication between the government and its citizens and affect the immaterial and intellectual connection between them. They also influence social values and national satisfaction. Also, rumors help spread corruption and complicate the process of combating corruption. They shift a society from a state of powerful cohesion to a state of absolute weakness and

wreck, causing the society to lose resistance and survival, thus facilitating to impose dependence on it.

It is of paramount importance to comprehend and understand rumors within their wider and more comprehensive context as one of the influential methods of psychological operations. Scientific methods must be adopted by professionals to encounter and

pursue rumors. The most appropriate method for encountering rumors is by creating mechanisms for monitoring and awareness-raising, then conducting periodical measurements to determine the extent of psychological impact and identify the rumors that became deeply instilled within the minds of the recipients. However, such mechanisms must be adopted in all the civilian sectors where mass media of all types would take part.

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