ON WAR BY DECEPTION-MIND CONTROL TO PROPAGANDA: FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

Mahroona Hussain Syed

Abstract

Instead of reaping Pyrrhic victories, the governments all over the world realized the benefits of employing non-kinetic means of warfare, after the two World Wars. A war by deception, provided a more pragmatic and practical solution to the problem. Since then, all the related theories have evolved while being embedded in the idea of deception, from covert action, in the form of diplomacy and intelligence, to different forms of propaganda, in attempts to exercise mind control on the target audience. The idea is only to bring their behaviours, attitudes and decisions in line with the initiator’s national interests. In this backdrop, this research paper aims at exploring the interconnection between these intertwined concepts and deriving some conclusions keeping in mind their applications in the prevalent situation in Pakistan.

Introduction

And thus I clothe my naked villainy,
With odd old ends stolen out of holy writ;
And seem a saint, when most I play the devil.

(William Shakespeare, Richard III)

In a strictly Darwinian sense, the ‘Survival of the Fittest’ symbolizes a unique characteristic of mankind in general and the states and societies in particular since times immemorial, leading to a popular belief that this survival can somehow only
be ensured at the expense of others. This distinctive characteristic essentially translates into a burning quest in most human beings to triumph over the ‘others’, or to get hold of or overpower the ‘other’, the ‘enemy’. Hence, the concept of warfare sets in, satisfying the Freudian primary instincts of mankind in the process. Since ancient times we hear tales of wars and conquests, where the rivals employ ingenious methods to outclass their enemy, conquer its land and property and plunder the bounty. However, with the passage of time, as organized governments started emerging in human societies, the techniques of warfare and engaging with the enemy took new forms and dimensions. Governments realized that arms and ammunition backed by a thriving war industry are not the only means that can ensure the achievement of desired ends; there are other ‘softer paths’ too, by means of ‘covert actions’ that can be used to achieve the ends. There was a growing realization that instead of reaping Pyrrhic victories through the force of sheer physical might, other ‘non-kinetic’ means may be devised to achieve the same results, but somehow in a less costly way. Thus, we see the advent of the art of Diplomacy and Intelligence, the two highly intertwined concepts in the early history which came to be differentiated only after the Treaty of Vienna at the end of Napoleonic Wars in 1815. The United States, for example, raised its diplomatic corps in 1924 and organized specialized intelligence agencies in 1940.
According to Dr. Jeffrey T. Richelson, “Covert action, also known as “special activities,” includes any operation designed to influence foreign governments, persons, or events in support of the sponsoring government’s foreign policy objectives, while keeping the sponsoring government’s support of the operation secret. Whereas in clandestine collection, the emphasis is on keeping the activity secret, in covert action the emphasis is on keeping the sponsorship secret.”

Without delving deep into the ethical debate, whether or not such manipulative machinations symbolize the moral decadence of the homo sapiens; and despite increasing demands of the masses on transparency in democracies according to the international norms and treaties; covert actions are still in vogue and performed with varied deceptive actions like mind control and propaganda, politico-economic operations and at the same time espionage, counter espionage and even sabotage. The primary aim of this paper is, thus, to point out basic concepts related with the notion of deception, including, by necessary corollary, the concepts of Mind Control (Brainwashing) and Propaganda; and also come up with some possible recommendations keeping in view the blatant use of these techniques against Pakistan.

**Whither Deception?**

Deception is evident in many ways in the scheme of working of this universe, be it in the shape of colour changing animals or feigning of death by some insects to protect
themselves against danger, or the illusive mirages in hot deserts. However, the stark difference between this type and the one devised by human beings lies in the nature of intent behind it. The deception found in natural phenomena is largely defensive, only to protect the endangered. On the other hand, man uses deception not only for self-defence but also offensively in order to dupe the enemy. Dr. Michael Handel (1989) defines deception as "the process of influencing the enemy to make decisions disadvantageous to himself by supplying or denying information". 3

Deception has been known to warfare since ages and forms the heart and soul of the intelligence activities that are so important for winning battles. Sun Tzu declared it about 2000 years ago, one of the six principles of the art of war⁴. Therefore, it has captivated human imagination in many ways. From the centuries-old tales of Trojan Horses to the romantic fantasies of Pied Piper and the heroic antics of Umro Ayyar, in the fascinating Dastaan- e- Amir Hamza or the ingenious and crafty spy, James Bond 007 or the real life ‘Lawrence of Arabia’, to the modern day thrillers like the Manchurian Candidate; the art of deception has enjoyed much romantic appeal in the world of fiction. However, one may add that deception is not all about fables and legends. It is a highly sophisticated multipronged art which has become a niche for itself in terms of winning battles. It accentuates intelligence activities and becomes a force multiplier. As its weapons, it
employs both ‘denial’ and pure ‘deception’, with the first cleverly masquerading the reality and the latter presenting the fake in order to manipulate the Target Audience’s (TA) perception of the reality, often playing upon their instinctual fears, hence, jeopardizing their ability to think independently and indulge in rationally informed decision-making. Having both kinetic and non-kinetic applications, in fact, “Military deception is an umbrella term that includes both denial and deception. Denial and deception are operations; propaganda and disinformation are the products” (Department Of Defence, Background Briefing: 3 in Johnson and Meyeraan, 2003). It “occurs when someone manipulates perception. It is much easier to manipulate than to change, and it is easier to play on an existing fear or concern than to create a new fear or concern” (Johnson and Meyeraan, 2003). In case of military deception (MILDEC), it is carried out at all levels, including the operational, tactical and strategic levels. The choice is usually between using active or passive; A-type (Ambiguity Increasing) or M-type (Misleading Variety). Historically speaking, camouflage, decoys and honey pots are among the most popular tactical level means of deception.

History is replete with examples of use of deception by Genghis Khan, Mongols, Indians and Muslims during warfare. However, the siege of Troy by the Mycenaean Greeks “provides us with our first recorded example of deception in warfare, the famous Trojan Horse” (Caddell, 2004). Subsequently, one finds evidence of Alexander, The Great’s
use of deception tactics to show a size of the army larger than the real and spreading stories of savage brutality of its soldiers to create fear among the enemy ranks. The mysterious tales of the Fidayeen or The Assassins of Hassan Bin Sabah, turned into legend through Abdul Haleem Sharar’s novel “Firdaus-e-Bareen” find place in the Muslim history. More recently, as Taveres (2001) explains, the Operation Bodyguard utilizing the Plan Jael led to the strategic level successful deception by the Allied forces during the World War II, ultimately leading to the complete outmanoeuvring of the Germans on the D-Day in the Battle of Normandy. In more recent examples, lavish use of deception during the Operation Desert Storm has been observed, in which for example, the Task Force Troy successfully outmanoeuvred the Iraqi forces, by giving an exaggerated impression of the total strength of the coalition forces at critical times. Similarly, the US-led invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan owe their successes in terms of the achievement of the desired objectives to a planned use of deceptive techniques, not only in the battle field but also even through the ‘embedding of journalists’ for propaganda purposes.

Apart from its purely military applications, deception operations or maskirovka, as the Russians would call it, is used in numerous ways during peaceful times, on the Target Audience which may be the members of the initiators’ own society or other states. It may range from purposeful
disinformation to fabrication (false information presented as true) and manipulation (simply withholding or otherwise an out of context presentation of truth). Examples abound in, from political and economic to the purely military domain. For instance, advertising is a form of economic fabrication for the intended consumers, while economic sanctions are slapped to bring the states to own terms, just like the ones Pakistan faced time and again from international community, under various pretexts and those on Iran these days, in order to force compliance with regards to its nuclear programme; creating dependency in the under developed third world by giving dollars under the garb of foreign aid, dumping etc. On the political front, President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s claim in 1941 of having a German-made map, indicating Germany’s plans to invade North and South America, only to gain public sympathy is another good example, although he knew well that the map was the brainchild of a British MI6 agent ‘Intrepid’. Similarly in cyberspace, through Social Engineering, fundamental characteristics of human psyche are used to get the information that the deceptor needs, using various deceptive techniques, including dumpster diving, phishing (i.e. fraud emails), persuasion, reverse social engineering, online scouting/hacking etc.

At this point curiosity makes one wonder how come deception is so effective in achieving its targets even in the modern world, or simply speaking what impairs people’s judgement of events. In a layman’s language, ‘people are
deceived because they do not systematically consider alternative explanations for the evidence they observe’ (Johnson et al, 2001). Also the natural limitations on human memory lead to being more judgemental about the facts instead of rational and logical weighing of alternative hypotheses, thereby, prematurely discarding often the most valid and relevant evidence (George 2004).

However, “To effectively employ the art of deception, the deceiver must know and understand the mind of the enemy” (Johnson and Meyeraan, 2003). Thus, by necessary corollary, here the role of mind control, crudely called ‘Brainwashing’ and sociologically put, ‘persuasion’, rather ‘coercive persuasion’ comes into action.

**From The Theory of Mind Control to Propaganda**

In general terms, what a sociologist would call “Coercive Persuasion”, is in military jargon known as ‘Mind Control’ or simply ‘Brainwashing’. Scientifically speaking, there is no *a priori* reason to believe that mind control techniques have not been developed over the years and refined in one form or the other because of ample evidence available, beginning from simple ‘indoctrination’, a common practice with almost all religions, cults, and totalitarian regimes to common street magicians, clairvoyants, hypnotists, orators and ideologues. Russians know it as Psychopolitics, the Chinese as thought reform, however, the earliest accounts of Brainwashing of war prisoners are attributed to the Chinese communists (deemed
by some scholars as alleged propaganda warfare to deride them) during Korean War in early 1950s. In 1955, L. Ron Hubbard\textsuperscript{13} claimed getting hold of *The Russian Textbook on Psychopolitics* or what came to be commonly known as the *Brainwashing Manual*\textsuperscript{14}. Later on, Dr. Margaret Singer worked on the role of religions and cults in terms of brainwashing.\textsuperscript{15}

In the modern times, there are several approaches to mind control/ perception management, including medical (for example the use of chemicals like truth serums), psychiatric (techniques like sleep –deprivation, meta communication, diet controls, exposure to stressful and fear- igniting situations), economic and diplomatic approaches to mind control along with the specialized propaganda techniques. The ‘Gunboat diplomacy’ pursued by the big powers over the decades is nothing but an attempt at ‘perception management’\textsuperscript{16} which is more of a sophisticated euphemism for ‘mind control’ of masses. Once complemented with the ‘Dollar diplomacy’, it becomes a very effective tool to pool up compliance. For instance, Pakistan has been subjected to this classic ‘carrot and stick’ policy throughout its roller coaster ride in Pak-US relations over the decades. In the words of Harwood L. Childs, “The distinguishing feature of the strategy of persuasion, therefore, is the attempt to bring about favourable responses without bringing into play serious mental activity” (1940).\textsuperscript{17}
Essentially the purpose of such methods in modern times is to subtly induce the Target Audience into believing that they really ‘want’ to mould their behaviours and policies in line with those of the initiator, most preferably without their ever realizing it themselves. “The most successful tyranny is not the one that uses force to assure uniformity but the one that removes the awareness of other possibilities”, (Alan Bloom, 1987).\(^\text{18}\)

As Clausewitz would say, “war is an act of violence whose object is to compel the enemy to do our will”, to which Sun Tzu had retorted 2000 years ago that “to subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill”. Therefore, from a synthesis of both the ideologies, we can decipher the true intent of mind control operations, referred to as Psychological Operations (PSYOPS) in military terms i.e “Planned activities of propaganda and psychological actions in peace and war directed towards foreign enemy, friendly and neutral audiences in order to influence attitudes and behaviours in a manner favourable to the achievement of national objectives—both political and military” (US Department of the Army, 1987). For such purposes, Propaganda, in all its shades of black (attributed to wrong source with deceptive lies), white (correctly identified source with a view to creating biases) and grey (both accuracy and source are non-identifiable)\(^\text{19}\); is the most effective tool of non-kinetic warfare; traditionally used not only to subjugate mentally and mould perceptions and
behaviour of the adversary according to the initiator’s scheme, but also to mould domestic public opinion in favour of the doctrine and policies of those holding the reins of power in that country. For example in case of media, the famous ‘Propaganda Model’ developed by world renowned scholars Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman mentions five ‘Filters’ created by capitalistic economies through which ‘raw’ news are passed successively per force in order to churn out the news that is “fit to print, marginaliz(ing) dissent, and allow(ing) the government and dominant private interests to get their messages across to the public.”, presenting all things dichotomously, in order to obtain favourable response as for instance in the War on Terror ‘with us’ or ‘against us’ dichotomy presented by the US. Chomsky(1998) reveals very analytically the propaganda that is cleverly launched by modern governments all over the world, against their own public when he says that “The smart way to keep people passive and obedient is to strictly limit the spectrum of acceptable opinion, but allow very lively debate within that spectrum – even encourage the more critical and dissident views. This gives people the sense that there’s free thinking going on, while all the time the pre-suppositions of the system are being reinforced by the limits put on the range of debate.”

Needless to say that the term ‘Propaganda’ is used somewhat pejoratively and means the intentional dissemination of skewed information to manipulate to desired
effect the behaviour, views and decisions of the Target Audience by altering their perceptions of reality. It is essentially a coercive manipulation of the perceptions, opinions, behaviours, attitudes, decision–making power and the Will to fight of the target audience in order to sway them, mould them according to the initiators’ favoured stance.

Even in the past, propaganda has worked wonders on many fronts. The Germans’ use of propaganda to maintain cohesion and strong bonding among their troops specifically and the people in general, by portraying Hitler as their godfather is well known.23 Similarly, after the start of the War on terror, in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks in USA, the dropping of leaflets and arranging flying radio stations were a part of grey propaganda operations launched by the US army24. But today, the prime targets of propaganda warfare include the defence, information, politics, economy, cyberspace especially social media and internet etc. For any propaganda operation, usually heterogeneous, secondary groups are recommended to be chosen as target audience, however, in PsyWar, cultural set-up and social systems are equally considered to ensure their effectiveness. Whether through employment of organic or non-organic assets, Propaganda is carried out with a very selective censorship25. Examples include Pakistan being portrayed by international media, as a dystopia instead of utopia and a ‘failed state’ (once caught in the midst of terrorism and a breakdown of law and
order) on favoured channels. The flagrant use of pamphlets by the US in Afghanistan, launching of Al-Arabia channel allegedly out of US funding and Chinese and US bans on those TV channels not toeing their lines etc. denote selective censorship of information.

Identifying Propaganda

Propaganda is distinct by several characteristics as outlined by John Black (1977) which include: dissemination of information by some authority figure (2) heavy use of rhetorics, clichés and jargons (3) dichotomy-ridden determinism (4) instead of multiple, giving unidirectional view of a cause-effect relationship in all events (5) heavy reliance on historical analogies and linking present circumstances to the events of the past in such a way that it seems like a linearly progressing chain of events, thereby, creating severe errors of judgment. In fact most commonly, one may find a deliberate and lavish use of rhetoric in the speeches of public orators, politicians and sometimes even diplomats, without sound logic or supporting quantitative, empirical facts or evidence, deliberately creating ambiguity. In the words of Browne and Keeley (1998), “Political language is often loaded and ambiguous. For example, *welfare* is often how we refer to governmental help to those we don’t like; when help from the government goes to groups we like, we call it a *subsidy* or an *incentive*”.  


Some Implications and Possible Pitfalls

It is pertinent to note that, not all attempts at deception, propaganda and mind control are successful, certainly not always. In such a case as Dr. Caddell (2004) warns, a heavy price is to be incurred. For example, the Soviets had a hay day after shooting down within the Soviet Union’s territory and putting on trial the pilot of a U-2 reconnaissance sortie after it had been claimed by President Eisenhower as a weather research flight by NASA in 1960. Similarly, loss of vital information on national security plans, intelligence and strategic operations, even cryptographic keys in USA during relatively peaceful times in Cold War through spy networks like the Walker group and the Conrad ring etc as mentioned, for example in the National Counterintelligence Strategy of the United States (2005), alarams us of the vagaries of the art of deception.

Then, whether the plan turns out to be a resounding success or an exacerbated failure, an overarching, dire cost is the loss of credibility accrued by the government. This credibility gap is detrimental to the long term interests of the state, because it entails that the audience may discount any future stance taken by the government as disinformation.

Also, a Deception may be interpreted incorrectly by the Target Audience, to the advantage of the initiator as for example, the German misinterpretation of a genuine
settlement as deception, following Operation Mincemeat by the Allied forces.\textsuperscript{30}

Self-Deception is another possibility that can wreak havoc to the initiators’ plans. In 1938, Mussolini’s exaggerated estimates of the size of his army divisions caused him to miscalculate the actual number of his forces on ground\textsuperscript{31}.

Jacques Ellul’s thesis that propaganda is replacing religion as the uniting force of the society under empiricism and positivism of the West is a warning sign about the looming vulnerabilities we may experience in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century.\textsuperscript{32} A comparison of both clarifies their role in the society, as John Stempel (2007) writes, “Politics was still very much an elite game, when America’s Kermit Roosevelt helped restore Iran’s Shah to power in 1953. But, by 1979, the mobilization of that country’s Islamic population by Khomeini and others made covert action almost impossible”, implying that when masses are united, covert action becomes virtually ineffective.

During conflict-ridden encounters, acts of perfidy may be committed which are illegal, because they undermine the real meaning of genuine symbols of peace, for instance, feigning surrender by raising white flags etc.

Regardless of the fact that the PSYOPS are employed against many states and target audience, the time is ripe for us, to look at this issue from the perspective of the people of Pakistan. It is an open secret that there is no dearth of examples or available evidence to prove that Pakistan is one of the prime targets for such operations, owing to its unique geo-
strategic position. However, instead of opening the Pandora’s Box of incriminating evidence, it will be pertinent to look pragmatically into the possible solutions to the issue at hand.

**Bailing Out Pakistan**

Considering the nature and extent of the propaganda warfare launched against Pakistan, the first safeguard against it can only be provided by a universal access to education, in such a way that the people of Pakistan are able to make rational and informed decisions, especially in those fields which concern the future of Pakistan. On the other hand, although ideally every society would like to have a free media, but it is recommended that this freedom should not be unlimited. The state should identify, through a formal policy directive, specific areas concerning our vital national interests on which the media should exercise extreme caution in the dissemination of information. Media controls are exercised even by those societies which claim to be great democracies. The banning of Al-jazeera in the US, and the Chinese government’s ban on certain social media-related websites (e.g. Facebook) offer relevant clues in this connection. Nevertheless, the state should use the media as a vital tool to bring its people on board on all issues of national interest and also to increase national cohesion and promote pragmatic and futuristic approach for the betterment of its people, instead of creating despondency and presenting doomsday scenarios, as the international media is quite sufficient to do the latter job.
skilfully. However, the yawning credibility gap needs to be addressed first in case of our government. Similarly, justice should not only be done, it should be ‘seen’ being done also and the culture of elitism needs to be done away with, as indeed all men are born equal. Pakistan in fact needs a strong middle class, as this class is universally regarded as the real driver of a robust economy.

From a purely academic point of view, it has been observed that no scientific research is being carried out in this field by our learned scholars, although it is directly concerned with the future stakes of Pakistan. The people belonging to academia come up with proper research, in order to find solutions to current problems and also to effectively counter the propaganda launched against Pakistan both domestically and internationally. Pakistan should have trained scholars and researchers, and not only practitioners, working as propagandists, in media and its embassies abroad, to launch defensive and offensive PSYOPS, especially at strategic levels.

**Conclusion**

The ingenuity and creativity with which modern techniques are being utilized to bring about subtle, albeit friendly changes in the Target Audience, demands that there should be a vertical as well as horizontal integration of economic, diplomatic and military objectives while policies are being framed. National cohesion and unity, coupled with sound socio-economic development, benefitting all and a strict adherence to the fundamental principles of honesty,
justice and Rule of Law will be a guarantee against any malafide intentions of the enemy and the same recipe needs to be adopted in case of Pakistan too.

In the light of the above discussion, it is suggested that uniform, coherent and clear, foreign and national security policies be framed along with national guidelines for all stakeholders on how to manage affairs on national and international fronts, which should be followed at all costs.

End Notes

1 Dr. John D. Stempel’s is a senior Professor at the University of Kentucky and has an experience of twenty three years in the United States Foreign Service. He has also worked as Director of the State Department’s Operations Center. John D. Stempel, “Covert Action and Diplomacy”, *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, 20:1 (2007), 122-135. Retrieved from: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08850600600829924.

2 See Dr. Richelson in *The US Intelligence Community,* (1989)


6 See details with special emphasis on information systems in Fred Cohen’s *The Use of Deception Techniques: Honey Pots and Decoys.* Retrieved from: http://all.net/journal/deception/Deception_Techniques_.pdf

7 Dr. Joseph Caddell teaches Military History at North Carolina State University in Raleigh, USA.


10 Major Mark Johnson and Major Jessica Meyeraan were serving as heads of intelligence-related programmes in 2003.


13 A few years later, Hubbard was also credited with founding ‘Scientology’.


15 Dr. Margret Singer was a world renowned expert on Brainwashing and a clinical psychologist. Her groundbreaking work in this field, won her worldwide accolades. As a professor she remained associated with various institutes including University of California, Berkley, USA.


17 For an insightful study, read HARWOOD L. CHILDS, *An Introduction to Public Opinion*, 1940.


23 David Smith’s (2002) article, ‘The Freudian trap in Combat Motivation Theory’ is insightful for a detailed analysis on effects of primary group relations and propaganda on motivation of soldiers.


30 See Dr. Stech and Dr. Elsaesser’s research paper written under the aegis of the MITRE Corporation for further detail. Frank J Stech & Christopher Elsaesser, Deception Detection by Analysis of Competing Hypothesis, research Project 51MSR111, by MITRE Corporation.
31 See Headrick, Deception for Operational Commander, 1994.