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Report on Speaker Session (August)

Theme: Information Warfare and Sharp Power in National Security

In conversation with Expert Speaker **Dr. Shruti Pandalai** on the pertinent issue of **Information Warfare and its role in dealing with national security**, she opined that Information warfare has emerged as a critical element in modern national security strategies. As nations leverage digital platforms to spread influence and manipulate narratives, the implications for global stability are profound. This speaker session explores the role of information warfare in reshaping conflicts and the strategies nations like China employ to advance their geopolitical goals through disinformation and psychological operations.

The Strategic Importance of Galwan Valley: Disinformation as a Weapon

The Galwan Valley clash between India and China in 2020 marked not just a physical confrontation but also an intense battle of narratives. This incident underscores how disinformation is strategically employed to alter global perceptions and shift the blame for aggressive actions. China's efforts to frame India as the aggressor while positioning itself as the protector of peace had far-reaching consequences for India's international standing.

- **Reputational Damage:** The fallout from the Galwan clash saw India's global image impacted, influencing its diplomatic relationships and standing in multilateral forums. This aspect of information warfare shows how targeted disinformation can have long-term strategic costs, even beyond the immediate military engagement.

- **Cyber Operations:** Following Galwan, India experienced a surge in cyber-attacks, particularly targeting critical infrastructure. These attacks, reportedly exceeding 40,000, were part of a broader psychological operation aimed at destabilizing India during a vulnerable time, further illustrating the intersection of cyber warfare and information manipulation.

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China's Information Warfare Strategy: A Multi-Faceted Approach

China's approach to information warfare extends beyond immediate conflict zones. It involves a coordinated strategy to influence regional stability and create favorable narratives, particularly in areas where China's territorial claims are contested, such as Arunachal Pradesh.

- United Front Work Department (UFWD): A key player in China's information warfare strategy, the UFWD orchestrates efforts to sway public opinion and political dynamics in target nations. By portraying adversaries as unstable or belligerent, China seeks to secure its strategic interests through non-military means.

- Psychological Operations: Beyond disinformation, psychological operations aim to weaken the resolve of a nation's populace and erode trust in its institutions. China's post-Galwan actions, including cyber-attacks and targeted disinformation campaigns, illustrate how these strategies can be used to undermine a nation's internal stability.

Global Responses and Countermeasures

As information warfare becomes a central component of international conflicts, nations and international institutions face the challenge of developing effective countermeasures.

- Collaborative Defense: Democracies like India must consider forming alliances with like-minded nations to counter the threats posed by information warfare. This could include sharing best practices in cybersecurity, developing joint strategies to combat disinformation, and enhancing media literacy among their populations.

- Role of International Institutions: The session has explored the potential role of international institutions in setting norms and standards for information warfare. What responsibilities do global bodies like the United Nations have in mitigating the risks posed by these non-conventional warfare tactics- one of the key component in the discussion.

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Implications for India’s National Security Strategy

The lessons from Galwan are critical for shaping India’s future national security strategy. This section delves deeper into how India can strengthen its defenses against information warfare, enhance its cyber resilience, and develop a coherent response to disinformation campaigns.

- Strategic Resilience: Building long-term resilience involves not just immediate countermeasures but also developing the infrastructure and capabilities needed to withstand future information warfare tactics. This includes investing in technology like artificial intelligence for cybersecurity, as well as fostering a culture of critical thinking and media literacy within the population.

- International Collaboration: The potential for collaboration with countries facing similar threats, such as Taiwan, has been discussed as a means to develop shared defense strategies and exchange best practices.

Conclusion

Information warfare represents a growing challenge to global security, with nations like China employing sophisticated strategies to advance their geopolitical objectives. The session provides insights into how these tactics are shaping the future of conflict and what it means for the international community. By understanding and responding to these threats, countries can better safeguard their sovereignty and maintain stability in an increasingly interconnected world.

Event Details

- Date & Time: Monday, August 12, 2024, 5:00 PM – 6:00 PM (India Standard Time)
- Location: Virtual via Zoom



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Speaker

We were honored to have Dr. Shruti Pandalai, a distinguished Associate Fellow at the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies, New Delhi, as our speaker. Dr. Pandalai is an expert in strategic communications and information warfare, with extensive research on the evolving nature of conflict in the digital age. Her insights provides a deeper understanding of the strategic use of information in national security and the implications for India and the broader international community.



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