ITJ | The International Tax Journal

News media as an actor of political intelligence

Ana Jikia
Caucasus International University, Student PhD educational program, Political science, Akaki Tsereteli State University, Invited lecturer
Email: ana.jikia@ciu.edu.ge

Davit Kukhalashvili
Associate Professor of Caucasus International University, Doctor of History, Doctor of Professional Safety
Email: davit_kukhalashvili@ciu.edu.ge

Abstract---The organization of modern political processes is unthinkable without information media. They, as disseminators of information, can appear to us as both a creator of a stable environment and a destabilizing factor. It should be taken into account that the states fighting for the role of a strategic partner or satellite state actively use mass media for dominance in the target states and on the international arena. Accordingly, the processes of information provision from the side of the mass media keep the perspectives of being used for intelligence purposes by the interested states. The news media, as an actor providing political intelligence, may serve to destabilize the target countries, and the dissemination of propaganda and disinformation of an intelligence nature is an important method used in organizing this process. As a result, to achieve political destabilization, operations of inspiring and inciting conflict between political, social, ethnic or religious groups can be used through mass media information activities. It should be noted that the destruction of democratic processes in the target state through surveillance strategies may call into question both statehood and challenge global security. Accordingly, the paper will identify the threats coming from information media as actors under the control of intelligence actors and will present the most important measures to neutralize the threat / minimize the risk impact.

Keywords---information media, intelligence activities, political intelligence, national security.

How to Cite:
Jikia, A., & Kukhalashvili, D. (2024). News media as an actor of political intelligence. *The International Tax Journal*, *51*(3), 110–116. Retrieved from https://internationaltaxjournal.online/index.php/itj/article/view/12

The International tax journal ISSN: 0097-7314 E-ISSN: 3066-2370 © 2024
ITJ is open access and licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.
Submitted: 21 Feb 2024 | Revised: 24 March 2024 | Accepted: 21 April 2024

Introduction

Political intelligence is an in-depth analytical and action-packed process that helps the decision-making group in the state to make safe decisions for the national interests of their state. In this case, it is possible to achieve political stability in one's own state. Analytical processing of information obtained by political intelligence, organization of processes based on them provides an opportunity to develop safe and successful intelligence strategies, both in the organization of domestic and global political processes.

In the 21st century, the development of information media - including news outlets, social media and online platforms - has expanded the influence of political intelligence on the part of interested states. News media are now seen as open sources for intelligence services, as well as segments of the spy country's narratives, which in turn influence public opinion and thus political discourse.

Political intelligence refers to the collection and analysis of data and operational processes related to the political environment, trends, actors and events. Traditionally, this type of intelligence is used by government agencies, such as the CIA in the United States or MI6 in the United Kingdom, to make informed decisions about national security, international relations, and domestic governance.* In this sense, political intelligence is both a domestic and an international practice that affects not only national political processes, but also shapes foreign policy and international relations. News media includes a wide range of mediums that disseminate information to the public, including newspapers, television, radio, social media platforms, and independent online news websites. The realm of news media has grown dramatically with the rise of the Internet, and social platforms such as Twitter (now X), Facebook, and YouTube now play an integral role in the real-time exchange of information.† Accordingly, all intelligence services have the possibility of rapid and large-scale dissemination of information for mobilizing public opinion corresponding to the interests of their own country.

The historical role of information media in political intelligence activities

Historically, the news media has been a source of both intelligence gathering and dissemination. Early on, the print press and radio provided an important, processed open source for the production of political intelligence.

In the 18th-19th centuries, governments and political organizations actively used newspapers for the formation of public opinion and the dissemination of information. Newspapers were considered an open source for intelligence (information gathering/investigation using open sources - OSINT).‡ It should be noted that during the American (1775-1783)§ and French (1789-1799)** revolutions, newspapers played an important role in the dissemination of revolutionary ideas.

In the 20s of the last century, radio played an important role in political engagement, as it allowed political and government leaders to speak directly to the population. Franklin D. Roosevelt's "Fireside Chat"†† is a good example of this, as he used radio during the Great Depression and World War II to inform Americans about their own country's interests. Accordingly, the radio was used for counterintelligence purposes. For the period in question, radio provided the US government with a strategic advantage and an important opportunity to defuse political tensions and conflicts.

---

* Bennett, W. L. (2012). News: The politics of illusion (9th ed.). University of Chicago Press.
† Chadwick, A. (2017). The hybrid media system: Politics and power (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
‡ What is what is Open Source Intelligence - https://scsa.ge/blog/open-source-intelligence/
§ The American Revolution and the Role of Newspapers. (n.d.). National Archives. Retrieved from https://www.archives.gov
** *The French Revolution and the Press. (2015). France24. Retrieved from https://www.france24.com*
†† Roosevelt, F. D. (1933–1944). *Fireside Chats* [Radio broadcasts]. United States government. https://www.nps.gov/articles/fdr-s-fireside-chats.htm

Especially in the First and Second World Wars, the media became both an instrument of foreign intelligence propaganda and an important source of intelligence information. During these periods, it became possible to spread information not only in one's own country, but also in the international arena through radio broadcasting. For example, during the Second World War, BBC radio broadcasts[#] were one of the main sources of information used by the British intelligence services to study the processes taking place in Germany and other occupied countries, to spread the desired information.

During the Cold War, the media became even more active as a source of intelligence. Against the background of the competition between the USSR and the West, the press, radio and television were used by both sides as a convenient means for political intelligence and ideological propaganda. Radio "Freedom" and "Radio Europe" created by the USA were the main tools for monitoring the current political events in the USSR and other communist countries, for digging out the roots of the communist system.

As for the visual impact on political perception, the 50s-70s of the last century stood out in this respect. To form the correct public opinion, the first televised presidential debate in the USA took place in 1960 between John Kennedy and Richard Nixon. These debates highlighted the influence of television on public opinion. In fact, in this process, television played a counterintelligence function. For this period, the role of the mass media as a significant component of psychological operations and information intelligence strategies was determined.

Let's look at one example that proves the superiority of television over other mass media. The psychological impact of visual media: Kennedy's calm, poised appearance contrasted sharply with Nixon's tired and tired countenance, which had a significant impact on television audiences. While radio listeners viewed Nixon as the debate winner, television viewers favored Kennedy, demonstrating how visuals would matter on the political battlefield.

The revealed advantage has placed on the agenda the special activation of research on the study of body language, which ensures the successful activities of political intelligence and counterintelligence. Accordingly, during the public speeches of politicians on the international arena, it would be possible to receive important information. At the same time, television, as a medium with the potential to spread strategic messages, became active in creating sophisticated techniques. In the end, states started using mass media within the framework of psychological operations/wars.

The spread of the Internet and digital media has greatly expanded the media's role in political intelligence. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter(X) and YouTube play an important role not only in the rapid dissemination of information but also in the live streaming of political events. These types of platforms create new opportunities for gathering information and influencing political processes. A good example of this is the events of the Arab Spring (2010-2012)[§§], where social media became one of the main tools for mobilizing, disseminating information and supporting opposition movements. All contained signs of use by foreign intelligence activities.

At the modern stage, with the investigation conducted by the media and the dissemination of politically sensitive information, there is an opportunity to reveal the secret actions of the concerned states, the misconduct and violations committed by high and low-ranking government officials, which presents the media as an important tool that can be used as the main intelligence and counter-intelligence actors. The mass media has the ability to propagandistically hold the internal and external actors of the state accountable, while influencing national and international politics. The interested national intelligence

[#] Barnett, C. (2004). *The Guardian: The BBC and the Second World War*. BBC Radio. Retrieved from https://www.bbc.co.uk

[§§] Howard, P. N., & Hussain, M. M. (2013). Democracy's Fourth Wave? Digital Media and the Arab Spring. Oxford University Press.

agency carries out political intelligence activities in the country through the media, taking into account strategic goals and tasks, financial and technical capabilities. The expected result of the mentioned activity may have a devastating impact on the target state.

The historical review emphasizes the need to develop strong legal levers, to create strong intelligence, counter-intelligence and scientific potential in order to prevent/reduce the risk of impact by mass media.

Information media as a source and actor of political intelligence

The role of the media in political intelligence is mainly manifested in two directions. The first is to collect information to be processed, and the second is to inform the public in accordance with the national interests of their own country. In the first case, the media allows the intelligence services to collect from open sources on the political events taking place in the international arena.

The information gathering process involves not only the direct perception of the events reported by the media, but also the analysis that helps the intelligence countries in the in-depth analysis of political events, identify threats, neutralize the threat / minimize the impact of the risk. In the second case, the media is used to achieve political goals, especially through propaganda, for the formation of desired public opinion in the home and target countries, as well as in the international arena. It should be noted that the formation of public opinion provides an opportunity to support the justification of political decisions of a strategic nature or to weaken public opinion affecting the state's security.

Political intelligence has traditionally been gathered through physical espionage and/or diplomatic missions,[***] however, the growth of news media – which includes social media platforms and digital content – has expanded the scope of intelligence services. As large amounts of information are generated, distributed, and consumed digitally, media outlets are both reservoirs of intelligence material and players capable of influencing global narratives.

It turns out that in political intelligence activities, the media is no longer just a means of passive transmission of government information, it is the primary source of data and analysis. At the modern stage, intelligence agencies increasingly rely on the so-called Open Source Intelligence (OSINT), which involves gathering data from publicly available sources. For example, the Arab Spring (2010–2012)[†††] demonstrated the power of the media, particularly social media platforms, in shaping public opinion, large-scale and operational mobilization of protesters, and ultimately political outcomes. As individuals and news outlets reported events in real time, the media became the primary tool for both insurgents and state actors to provide analysis of information related to political events.

The role of the media as an actor in political intelligence is particularly important in relation to national security issues. In times of crisis, the media can contribute to the stabilization of a dangerous situation in a country by providing accurate information, or can exacerbate tensions by focusing on sensationalism, including the spread of disinformation. It is possible that news media actively cooperated with intelligence services based on state interests. For example, during counter-terrorism operations, authorities may require media outlets to withhold specific information in order to prevent threats from an act of terrorism.

[***] Kukhalashvili, D. (2011). Historical foundations of intelligence and counterintelligence (T. Endeladze, Ed.). Informational Center for Security Studies and Analysis.

[†††] Howard, P. N., & Hussain, M. M. (2013). Democracy's Fourth Wave? Digital Media and the Arab Spring. Oxford University Press.

In order to conduct effective political intelligence activities, it is of great importance for the intelligence country to obtain information through the news. In this direction, the subject of intelligence and counter-intelligence services analysis may be:

- organized activities related to dissemination of politically sensitive information in the target country;
- Information about the creation, dissemination and influence of political narratives, propaganda campaigns or information warfare strategies, which may cause destabilization of the target country, region;
- within the framework of the monitoring and analysis of the information network, such information resources important for political intelligence, which form the basis of political compromise of the leadership of the target country;
- about the election situation in politically unstable regions, especially when it comes to the influence of the election results on foreign relations;
- Collecting information about journalists, media organizations and think tanks operating in the target country that may affect public opinion in terms of geopolitical, economic or social stability.

We will analyze several cases on the basis of the discussed theoretical materials.

Case I. According to open source information,[##] social media was a critical tool in the Arab Spring.
The result of the analysis: the analysis of the implemented processes confirms the active use of the media in intelligence activities of a political nature towards the target states, through which the interested states achieved success in the face of geopolitical competition. The 2010-2012 Arab Spring uprisings highlighted the important role of news media, especially online platforms and social media, in mobilizing and coordinating protests in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Syria. Through large-scale coverage of processes in the media, analysis of accepted positions, political intelligence actors received information on the motives, organizational structure, and support systems of opposition movements. It should be noted that the role of scientific-technical intelligence and counter-intelligence of any country within the framework of the organization of appropriate studies to control and influence these types of processes is particularly important, the political, economic and military interests of intelligence countries are satisfied by the implementation of the planned result.

Case II. According to open source information,[§§§] The Washington Post's investigative journalism revealed details of the Watergate scandal (Watergate scandal 1970s), which led to President Nixon's resignation. Washington Post investigative reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein played a key role in breaking the Watergate scandal.

Analysis Result: This case represents an important example of the media acting as an actor facilitating political counterintelligence activities, revealing an action that raises the issue of high-ranking official responsibility and the possibility of influencing public policy. It should be noted that news coverage containing signs of obstruction of justice and abuse of power has become a favorable condition for the political intelligence of interested foreign countries, from the point of view of compromising the US government.

[##] Lynch, M. (2011). *The Arab Uprising: The Unfinished Revolutions of the New Middle East*. PublicAffairs.
[§§§] Sideman, J. (2018). "The Watergate Scandal: Timeline of Key Events." *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com

Conclusion

Analyzing the role of news media as a political intelligence and counterintelligence actor, we can conclude that:

- ✓ Intelligence and counter-intelligence services monitor and analyze media and social platforms, assess vulnerabilities in political, economic and security issues, after identifying threats plan measures to neutralize threats / prevent risk exposure;
- ✓ Information media gathers data around the target country and on the international arena, both on domestic politics and international security issues, which makes it easier to influence public opinion and political stability;
- ✓ When intelligence on a target requires active intervention, the media can be used as both an overt and a covert tool to shape public opinion, to shape narratives that support the spying state's political, economic, or security agenda / or, on the contrary, weaken and disrupt support, which is a threat. Intelligence object for the state.
- ✓ Object, in vulnerable countries/regions where the achievement of geopolitical goals depends on the manipulation of public opinion, the establishment of control over media channels by the spy country is of crucial importance;
- ✓ Production of scientific-technical intelligence activities, in order to study social media algorithms or broadcasting technologies, is necessary, which plays an important role both in studying the activities of the information media of the target countries, as well as in the distribution and reception of manipulative information;
- ✓ By exploiting legal loopholes and loopholes in regulatory frameworks, intelligence services can facilitate so-called Access to media outlets of countries subject to foreign intelligence. They can support a spy country's intelligence goals by spreading false narratives.

In order to reduce the influence of the news media as a political intelligence actor, the following recommendations can be considered:

- ✓ States, within the framework of ensuring their own and global security, should implement active intelligence and counter-intelligence monitoring of information media content, especially foreign-supported media and social media platforms, against the background of the existence of an appropriate legal framework;
- ✓ In order to reduce threats from foreign intelligence activities, authorities should introduce, develop and/or tighten regulations on media funding and transparency, especially for foreign-owned or supported entities, to eliminate the threat of political destabilization;
- ✓ Intelligence and counterintelligence services should prioritize the development of OSINT (Open Source Intelligence) capabilities to proactively identify and plan counter-intelligence campaigns to influence manipulative news;
- ✓ It is necessary to refine the data privacy policy, so that the spying state and private organizations cannot use the data of the citizens of the target country for manipulative activities;
- ✓ It is necessary for the government to focus on the development of a strong cyber security system for journalists and media organizations, which will reduce the risk of intelligence penetration by foreign countries;
- ✓ It is necessary to increase the level of media literacy in the society, which will help citizens to distinguish between media manipulation and the real story. In this case, there is an opportunity to exclude the influence of the intelligence narratives of the countries concerned on public opinion.

References

Endeladze T. (2007)."Foreign intelligence services" Tbilisi.

Kukhalashvili, D. (2011). Historical foundations of intelligence and counterintelligence (T. Endeladze, Ed.). Informational Center for Security Studies and Analysis.

Kukhalashvili d. "Decision-making process of foreignin politics". Tbilisi. 2020.

Bennett, W. L. (2012). News: The politics of illusion (9th ed.). University of Chicago Press.

Chadwick, A. (2017). The hybrid media system: Politics and power (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.

What is Open Source Intelligence? - https://scsa.ge/blog/open-source-intelligence/

The American Revolution and the Role of Newspapers. (n .d.). National Archives. Retrieved from https://www.archives.gov

The French Revolution and the Press. (2015). France24. Retrieved from https://www.france24.com

Roosevelt, F. D. (1933–1944*). Fireside Chats* [Radio broadcasts]. United States government. https://www.nps.gov/articles/fdr-s-fireside-chats.htm

Barnett, C. (2004). *The Guardian: The BBC and the Second World War*. BBC Radio. Retrieved from https://www.bbc.co.uk

Howard, P. N., & Hussain, M. M. (2013). Democracy's Fourth Wave? Digital Media and the Arab Spring. Oxford University Press.

Lynch, M. (2011). *The Arab Uprising: The Unfinished Revolutions of the New Middle East. Public Affairs.*

Sideman, J. (2018). "The Watergate Scandal: Timeline of Key Events." *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com