Role of ICT in International Relations: Some Emerging Dimensions

[1] **Nilay Tiwari**

[1] Assistant Professor, Political Science, Gautam Buddha Govt. Degree College, Ayodhya, India

Abstract

Nobody ever imagined that information and communication technology (ICT) will play such a major role in our lives. In fact, ICT now days encompass each and every aspect of our lives and that is the reason why we can't even imagine our existence without it. Information is now days regarded as a major form of power and communication technology acts as a tool for enhancement, enrichment and dissemination of this power. Nations and non-state actors are trying to empower themselves with latest and updated infrastructure to play a major role in international relations. This gives a strategic dimension to ICT and lures the nations to be on the top in possession and implementation of latest ICT infrastructure. ICT based power politics allows for both use and misuse of information guided by superfast and sophisticated communication technology and this is the reason why even after accepting the indispensability of ICT we should adopt a cautious approach towards it.

Keywords: Role of ICT, International Relations, New dimensions to international relations.

Introduction

ICT has not only affected the relations between states but has also given a wider role to non-state actors and civil society as a whole. "ICT widened the scope and role of the global civil society and enabled greater networking and more room for influence in international institutions like the United Nations, where over 20,000 NGO's now have a formal advisory role. Recently, the internet provided an effective platform for the voice of global civil society during the Copenhagen summit on climate change. Even individuals had unbounded possibilities to take part in debates that took place then." (Sammut: 2010). As with other resources the development and access of ICT has also been unequal. This inequality can be witnessed both at inter-state and intra-state level. There is need to bridge this gap so

that use of ICT can also acquire a democratic dimension. "While ICT facilitates a global two-way flow, some people are still marginalized. There is still a glaring digital divide that excludes underdeveloped populations who are mainly based in poor rural areas. Hence, the internet has opened greater possibilities but it has exacerbated some old international divides between the North and South. Efforts are being made to include more and more people, for instance with the development of 100-dollar-laptop, as it is now acknowledged that the internet does not merely empower to interact but it also has a great developmental potential." (Sammut: 2010)

ICT has added a new dimension to international politics in the form of 'public diplomac'. This form of soft power is increasingly gaining importance with increasing acceptance of democracy as a way of life. "…the widespread diffusion of new technologies such as the internet and mobile telephony and their rapid convergence with the old media like TV, radio and newspapers…is transforming political communication strategies and public diplomacy. We are living in the era of 'soft power' where states acknowledge the need to win the hearts and minds of foreign publics. In 'public diplomacy', states communicate with these external publics. There are efforts to move towards a new public diplomacy, where the world audiences can interact with states." (Sammut: 2010)

The widespread use of ICT has also led to increase in security threats in the form of terror networking and consequent increase in terror attacks. "Moreover, we have seen extremist movements using ICT to threaten international security, as experienced in the case of Al Qaeda. There is also widespread concern that the internet can be a channel for the radicalization of Diasporas and of second-generation immigrants in the west. The attacks in Madrid and London engendered fears that Al Qaeda was using ICT to recruit and maybe even train cell groups. Furthermore, while it is widely acknowledged that the internet provides great opportunity for international dialogue and understanding, there are concerns that the internet is also a tool to spread racial and ethnic hatred. Such fears grew after the incidents of the Danish cartoons and also after Geert Wilders disseminated his incendiary movie Fitna through YouTube." (Sammut: 2010)

Here it becomes relevant to mention Gandhi's observation of the increased use of machinery and technology in the modern way of life. In his book *Hind Swaraj,* written in 1909, Gandhi observes that the new modes of transport and communication technology have taken us beyond our immediate social environment and have both quantitatively and qualitatively escalated the problems arising out of multiculturalism. People of the world are increasingly coming in contact with different religions and cultures and are getting confused with the question: which way of life is best for them? It becomes easy

for radical and extremist leaders to mobilize and radicalize the already confused youth, for their ulterior motives. In fact, extremist mobilization and radicalization has become one of the major issues of international concern. The use of ICT has facilitated the extremist outfits to have a far reaching and immediate impact. Another problem is that modern man's love and 'idle curiosity' towards the physical world has made him more and more materialistic and acquisitive. The scarceness of resources being a fact of nature, the modern philosophy of possessive individualism is increasingly making men immoral and violent. In fact, Gandhi believes that violence is inherent in the very idea of modernity. In this context, the increased use of ICT has resulted in perpetuation of inequality and violence at the global level.

Traditionally, men got accustomed with the way of life they were born with and usually led their led their whole life on a defined path, without getting confused. The biggest problem modern man is facing is where to go and what to do. His whole energy and resources get exhausted in finding answers to questions which were non-existent in the traditional way of life. Another problem with the craze for machinery and technology is that man starts worshipping these false Gods and forgets his real Master. In fact, this is the biggest tragedy modern man is facing. Gandhi observes: "Man is so made by nature as to require him to restrict his movements as far as his hands and feet will take him. If we did not rush about from place to place by means of railways and such other maddening conveniences, much of the confusion that arises would be obviated. Our difficulties are our own creation. God set a limit to man's locomotive ambition in construction of his body. Man immediately proceeded to discover means of overriding the limit. God gifted man with intellect that he might know his Maker. I am so constructed that I can only serve my immediate neighbours, but in my conceit I pretend to have discovered that I must with my body serve every individual in the universe. In thus attempting the impossible, man comes in contact with different natures, different religions, and is utterly confounded. According to reasoning, it must be apparent to you that railways are a most dangerous institution. Owing to them, man has gone further away from his Maker." (Gandhi: 1939, p. 48)

States today have to increasingly deal with cyber security in the face of increasing number of cyber-attacks and the possibility of extensive damage such attacks can do. "…the unequal access to information in international relations is the major reason behind the emergence of rich and developed countries and poor ones which have no access to information. The internet has also made access to information a possibility and in the process giving rise to information wars and cyber-attacks. Some countries which were militarily inferior to world powers have found the cyber to offer them leverage as they use it to attack great powers or even gain political and economic mileage. Furthermore, wars are

being conducted on the cyber in the same manner they were or are being conducted in combat…information has become a very key element in international relations and it therefore needs to be managed meticulously to protect a country's intellectual property, citizens, security and health inter alia. Information and or cyber security has become a critical issue as nations are being exposed to more and more attacks and espionage."(Khumalo: 2018)

States have increasingly come under threat of cyber-attacks and this scenario requires a continuous promptness to prevent or reduce the damage done by such attacks. "Information has become a very important resource in international relations. However, some governments and their leaders have not fully comprehended the importance of information in international relations. This ignorance has led to the low attention given to information security, privacy and being prone to cyber-attacks, and the failure to exploit information and information communications technologies to further their national interests in international relations." (Khumalo: 2018)

The concept of territoriality that played such an important role in the modern era is now facing a major change as ICT is facilitating a non-territorial world with its new set of interactions among non-state actors and people at a large. "Technology and politics have conspired to reduce the degree to which territory translates into power and wealth. Cities like Hong Kong and Singapore, like Venice and Florence a millennium ago, flourish in the absence of a significant territorial base, and are again becoming 'central places where the work of globalization gets done.' Additionally, corporations, terrorists, religions, and advocacy and humanitarian groups among others have non-territorial conceptions of space."(Mansbach: 2009)

The increased use of ICT in public relations has led to the re-emergence of traditional identities and loyalties, which often surpass national boundaries. This poses a challenge to the very concept of the modern nation-state. In the process of decolonization, the imperialist powers often disregarded the traditional identities and loyalties and drew arbitrary national boundaries in the continents of the South. This arbitrariness often led to inter-state and intra-state conflicts in the post-colonial world. Now with increased level of interaction among people of these countries, the traditional identities are resurfacing and are trying to mark their presence and legitimacy at the international level. People are trying to gather international support, for their cause, through the use of internet and social media platforms. "The European era in global politics that has lasted more than three centuries is drawing to a close. In the developing world especially but not solely, identities and loyalties that were submerged by the imposition by Europeans of the Western concept of 'citizenship' defined by territoriality are re-

emerging. Many of those identities, especially those based on ethnicity, religion, or profession, are not easily anchored in territory. Partly for this reason, they are not easily influenced by the conventional diplomatic and military practices used by states, but they are available for manipulation by political entrepreneurs. If we are, as Rosenau claims, entering a post international epoch, then that epoch is also post-territorial…Recognition that citizenship is only one of many possible identities available to individuals should also remind us that state boundaries are often incompatible with other politically relevant boundaries. The boundaries of cultures, markets, ethnicities, and religions generally cut across and often stretch beyond state boundaries. Economic and environmental issues are essentially non-territorial."(Mansbach: 2009)

We have witnessed that the increasing role of ICT has definitely altered and added new dimensions to international relations. This requires that states, non-state actors and people at large to cautiously use ICT to further their interests. The role of states in protecting themselves from cyber-attacks and terror networks is increasingly becoming indispensible. The role of nation-states is still important in this regard. Even after the emergence of the concept of global citizenship, the nation-states are currently responsible for the protection and promotion of the interests of their citizens. Like any other resource, ICT can both be a boon or a curse. It is up to us how intelligently we handle it.

References:

- Gandhi, M K (1939). *Hind Swaraj*. Navjivan press: Ahmedabad.
- Khumalo, Njabulo Bruce and Miniyothabo Baloyi (2018). 'The Importance of Information in International Relations'. Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal).1842.
- Mansbach, R W (2009). 'International Relations and Information Technology' in International Relations, Vol.-II, Encyclopedia of Life Support Systems.
- Sammut (2010). 'ICT: Shaping International Relations'. Times of Malta, February 11, 2010.