

Chapter 37

Print Media's Role in Securitization: National Security and Diplomacy Discourses in Nepal

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ABSTRACT

This chapter attempts to understand the inter-relationship between the media and the national security/foreign affairs sector in Nepal, particularly unfolding the perceptions between each other and the resultant impression in the print media – thereby carrying forward the “securitization” discourse. Through the process of content analysis and expert opinions, this chapter advocates for the “desecuritization” of sensitive issues such as national security and diplomacy, promoting peace and cooperation rather than polarization of ideas and perspectives.

INTRODUCTION

In Nepal, national security became a national political agenda, particularly since the ‘People’s War’¹ commencing from mid-1990s. On the diplomatic forefront, the transformation was also huge in terms of Nepal’s internal political change affecting the regional geo-politics. There were polarized notions of the rise of the Maoists with regards to their political gain within Nepal and the message that would spread.

At the national level, with the roots of the conflict going back to the early democratic era where the seeds of the dissatisfaction were laid with the ‘discriminatory’ attitude and behaviour towards the marginalized sections of the society, the voices for political and social change gradually became strong. The civil war that the country went through, apart from the political dimension also had a ‘media’ angle. Local media was extensively used by the Maoists to spread their word to securitize that the oppressed and the marginalized are under existential threat. On the other hand, there was extensive use of national and international media by the state and other power centres highlighting and in some cases, exaggerating the extent of bloodbath that took place in Nepal. Particularly after the end of the civil war ending and

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the formalization of the peace process with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Accord in 2006 by the two conflicting groups, the agenda of peace building was established.

It is therefore, a matter of significance to understand the interrelationship between media and national security and diplomacy issues that led to the development of public and intellectual discourses. For a nation-state to ensure that people's perception regarding national security and its diplomatic relations, especially at the South Asian region is a positive one, it should see to it that the discourses carried out within its territory give a positive indication so that it is disseminated in the same manner as government's 'diplomatic duty'. It is also imperative to understand the duality whether print media in Nepal is securitizing issues or just reacting to the discourses carried out by NGOs/INGOs and academicians in various public forums. Hypothetically, there could be a range of factors determining this such as the establishment motive, ideological affiliation, funding or donation, agenda preference and interest of the leadership.

Although Nepal hasn't remained aloof in the technological advancements in the media sector, print media is still the dominant force in carrying out the security discourse in Nepal. The readership culture of print media is quite encouraging. Newspapers are popular amongst office workers and the educated elite in Nepal's towns and cities and in nearby rural areas (Internews, 2011). The daily newspapers and the magazines published on a weekly and fortnightly basis are the most preferred sources for news. Latest annual report of Press Council Nepal (2016) shows that there are 3795 registered print media sources in Nepal with 644 dailies, 2749 weeklies and 402 fortnightlies. It's a common sight to find people gathered in the local stationery shops and debating on news items printed. Nowadays, with newspapers available in online editions, there are lots of debates and discussions on various socio-political issues through social media such as Facebook and Twitter.

Henceforth, the analysis of role played by print media in the development of national security and diplomacy discourses is very important in Nepal, especially considering the threat that could be posed by media securitizing various contentious issues through the stories published.

Through this chapter, the author seeks to understand three pertinent issues surrounding national security and diplomacy discourses in Nepal:

1. Nature of messages print media are carrying to the intellectual circles/academia and general public in terms of building a discourse about national security and diplomacy issues
2. Level of prioritization/importance given by the print media in its coverage of those national security and diplomacy related issues
3. Extent of securitization by print media whether stories are blown out of proportion and building a case of an existential threat or has it just been a factual reporting – without elements of any exaggeration

BACKGROUND

It is believed that the theory of securitization, which rests on the principle of media manipulation was conceptualized by Ole Waever (1997) in the mid-1990s and later developed in his co-authored book *Security: A New Framework of Analysis* in 1998. Guzzini (2011) defines securitization as “the positioning through speech acts (usually by a political leader) of a particular issue as a threat to survival, which in turn (with the consent of the relevant constituency) enables emergency measures and the suspension

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