
Psychological Warfare: Call out Adversaries' Designs

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“If you twist your enemy’s perception of reality, you can manipulate him into strategic blunders that can be exploited for victory”.

—Sean Mcfate¹

Abstract

In the emerging security environment, psychological warfare has become a significant and a cost-effective non-lethal method to influence the target segment that is not controlled by any universally accepted laws, rules, usages and customs. What adds to it are the radical changes in the geo-political and geo-economic environment, information and communication technology (ICT), which is not only the predominant driver of change in the future conflicts, but it is a potent weapon of today and tomorrow. The paper aims to briefly study the historical perspective and application of psychological warfare (psywar) at all levels, including international, national, and military levels. With a brief look at different terms in vogue and the overall aim, it would also briefly analyse the psywar being waged by Pakistan and China against

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India at different levels and what should be India's actions to ensure an effective psywar policy and strategy.

Introduction

Since the recorded history of warfare, a wide variety of psychological, propaganda, deception, subversion methods and tools have been used to gain a position of advantage against an adversary with the aim to ultimately win, with or without the use of kinetic force. The subject has two distinct parts: one, psychological warfare (Psywar) and two, a war winning strategy. While psychology is the study of human mind and its effects on an individual's behaviour, attitude and perception, strategy aims to win by optimum utilisation of resources and achieving a position of advantage in different domains against an adversary.

Psywar refers to a planned use of information, propaganda and deception to achieve a position of psychological advantage against an adversary's cognitive domain by several methods like electronic and print media, and a wide variety of systems and tools available in the armoury of social media. George Gilder, author of *The Quantum Revolution in Economics and Technology*, emphasises on the significance of human mind, as he states, "The most valuable capital is now the capital of human mind and spirit."²² Therefore, the primary aim of psywar is to target the cognitive domains so as to inform, influence, persuade and shape the perception of the targeted population, leaders as well as rank and file of security forces.

Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, two senior colonels of PLA's Air Force, in their seminal book *Unrestricted Warfare* (1999) posited that:

"From a computer room or from the trading floor of a stock exchange, a lethal attack on a foreign country can be launched from anywhere. In such a world, is there anywhere that is not a battlefield? Where is the battlefield? It is everywhere."²³

Furthermore, they also mentioned that “[t]he nature of Information Warfare is all encompassing and unrestricted in time and space and scope,”⁴ suggesting that the battlefields are omnipresent, in all domains and walks of life. Hence, the scope and potential of information cum psywar is beyond imagination.

There are several terms like psywar, psychological operations (psyops), perception management, influence operations, public information, and propaganda in vogue with near similar meanings and functions. Psywar and psyops have been used interchangeably, as they complement each other. Even among the soft powers, it must be understood that psywar/psyops are an integral part of information warfare (IW). IW, in itself, is a dynamic concept, as its applications vary with the changes in ICT. Therefore, it does not really have a universally accepted definition. However, IW includes many offensive and defensive dimensions such as psywar/psyops, cyber, space, deception, electronic warfare (EW), information processes, networks, and physical structures. In the information age, IW and one of its important sub-sets called psywar is a vital element of national power to influence, persuade and dissuade the potential adversaries from taking any actions against its national interests. Simultaneously, it can mould or manipulate the perceptions of the target audience, at both home and abroad.

Information and psywar are immensely powerful weapon systems. It is evident, as Jaitner argues, “Information can be used to disorganise governance, organise anti-government protests, delude adversaries, influence public opinion, and reduce an opponent’s will to resist.”⁵ Therefore, information cum psywar is not confined to military forces in contact battle alone, but are conducted at three distinct levels: strategic, operational, and tactical. Wherein, at the strategic level psyops exploit the weaknesses of the adversary on political, economic, social, religious, military, and environmental domains. At the operational level, the aim is to target a military theatre/region with two-fold objectives: one, to

demonstrate integration, effectiveness and strength of own forces, and ensure information assurance; two, to demotivate and demoralise the adversary by running false narratives, misinformation and disinformation campaign against it. While in tactical missions, psyops can effectively give a psychological advantage against an enemy by demoralising and delaying decision making, provided a force has a trained organisation and resources to do so.

A Historical Overview

History is replete with examples from ancient, medieval and recent times, wherein deceit, propaganda and psywar, albeit with different names, have been used to achieve one's objectives against an adversary. Corollaries can be drawn from the Indian epics; wherein, in *Ramayana*, Hanuman speaks of Rama and his multi-dimensional strength and the futility of going to war with his force; while in *Mahabharata*, Lord Krishna persuades Arjuna, the Pandava warrior, to go to war against Kauravas. To argue, Krishna's philosophical themes of *Dharma* was nothing but psywar that finally convinced Arjuna to pick up his weapon.

While other significant exemplars from world history include instances, such as: the ancient Greek civilisation's (800 BCE) use of the famous Trojan horse to deceive and defeat Troy; Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* (500 BCE), that advocated the method of attacking by stratagem and said, "He who is skilled in war subdues the enemy without fighting [...] War is a game of deception [...];"⁶ and Kautilya's *Arthashastra* (320 BCE); wherein, great emphasis is laid on *Kutayuddha*—a concealed warfare using psywar by ways of disinformation, manipulation of public opinion and treachery in the enemy camp.⁷ In the Chapter on 'Defence and War', psywar covers methods of propaganda by way of advertising and announcing the ill effects of bad omens in the enemy camp.⁸ These tactics are played on the cognitive domains of the enemy's soldiers. To cite an example, two

centuries later, to prevent his adversaries from pursuing his army which was left with depleted strength, Alexander the Great of Macedonia had created fear among the local forces by leaving behind oversized armour plates, breast plates and helmets.⁹

In the 13th century, Genghis Khan, the Mongol military commander and a pioneer of IW, used unique techniques to carry out psyops and deception to create an illusion of invincible numbers and their brutality; thus, targeting their decision-making process. Techniques used included “agents of influence” to move in advance of his armies for face-to-face psyops, using a network of horsemen called “arrow riders” to communicate quickly with his commanders, and simultaneously targeting enemy messengers to prevent enemy commanders from communicating with each other.¹⁰ The Mongols used espionage to plan their campaigns and deliberately used rumour and other means to exaggerate accounts of their own huge numbers, stupidity, and ferocity.¹¹

Psywar was used extensively during World Wars I and II. To suggest two brief accounts of Psyops: first, during World War I, aerial leaflets were dropped by unmanned balloons over German trenches containing postcards from Prisoners of War narrating their humane conditions, surrender notices and general propaganda against the Wilhelm II, the German Kaiser (Emperor) and the German generals. And second, during World War II, several new tactics of deception and psywar were devised for the lead up to the Allied invasion of Normandy on June 6, 1944. The plan for the said operation (Operation Bodyguard) set out a general strategy to mislead German high command of the exact date and location of the invasion by multiple methods like fake radio messages, aerial reconnaissance in different sectors, etc.¹² Psyops and deception campaigns that preceded the Normandy invasion and the German invasion of Russia are in common knowledge.¹³ Thereafter, psyops and deception strategies continued to persist using different tools of electronic and print media, until the Gulf War I in 1991.

The Gulf War I, namely the United States' "Operation DESERT STORM" in 1991, has been the most recent war in which IW was integrated with the kinetic operations—often described by a few as the "First IW". The US-led coalition forces had a quantum advantage over the Iraqi forces in terms of ICT, innovations, and technology-enabled systems. Psyops and deception strategies were employed extensively across the entire spectrum of the War, which included 18 hours of daily Arabic broadcasts and 66 loudspeaker teams deployed at the brigade level with coalition forces.¹⁴ To facilitate operations of the Allied Forces, cumulative effect of the electronic, radio, TVs (CNN and other news networks), print, leaflets, and loud speakers were central to manipulating behaviours, attitudes and perceptions of the people. Thus, with the clever use of 'media' as a tool, psywar and propaganda played key to the 'war winning strategy'.

According to the US Department of Defense, it spends more than US\$ 250 million per year on efforts to inform, influence, and persuade.¹⁵ However, in assessing the negative results of US intervention in Afghanistan, it can be argued that the effectiveness of the US psyops and military information operations have progressively declined overtime, as noted between 2001 and 2010. To which, one of the major weaknesses that can be cited is that of America's inability to counter the Taliban propaganda campaign against US and the coalition forces on the theme of 'civilian casualties.'¹⁶

Different Syllables but Near Similar Terms: Seeking Clarity in the Ambiguity

Several strategic analysts have given certain interesting definitions or explanations to the terms like psychological operations, psychological warfare, propaganda, perception management, and influence operations based on their experiences, perceptions and application in the varied operational environments. Here, the imperative lies in de-coding the

existing ‘overlap’ in the understanding of these terminologies. The explanations of which are as follows:

Psychological Warfare: According to Robert Longley, a historian and government expert, psywar can be explained as a planned tactical use of propaganda, threats, and other non-combat techniques during wars, threats of war, or periods of geopolitical unrest to mislead, intimidate, demoralise, or otherwise influence the thinking or behaviour of an enemy.¹⁷ As per the US Army Field Manual 33-1, published in August 1979; psywar is defined as, “the planned use of propaganda and other psychological actions to influence the opinions, emotions, attitudes, and behaviour of hostile foreign groups in such a way as to support the achievement of national objectives.”¹⁸ However, despite the radical changes to the systems and tools of communication, the concept still remains relevant, even today. In a broad assessment, the US Joint Chiefs of Staff defined psywar as one that “employs *any* weapon to influence the mind of the enemy.”¹⁹

Psychological Operations: As per the US Army’s Field Manual 33-1, psyops include psywar and encompass those political, military, economic, and ideological actions planned and conducted to create in neutral, friendly, and non-hostile foreign groups the emotions, attitudes, or behaviour to support the achievement of national objectives.²⁰ Wherein, the purpose is to create in foreign groups the emotions, attitudes, or behaviour to support the achievement of national objectives in which, the planned use of communication can be as simple as spreading information covertly by word of mouth or through any means of mass media.²¹

Perception Management: Simplistically put, based on the stimuli, information and projections, perception would refer to how we think about a person, organisation, military strength or weaknesses, political or economic situation, or social cohesion in a society.

Propaganda: Prima facie, propaganda gives a negative connotation by its very usage, as it is generally directed against an adversary. The purpose

of propaganda is to bring about a change in behaviour and perception of the adversary or targeted audience, in favour of the propagandist. It is noted that to accomplish its purpose, propaganda must fit within the cultural context of the audience; and should avoid direct attacks on the core beliefs and traditions of the target audience.²²

Influence Operations: This refers to the means used to influence attitudes, behaviours, and decisions, that is “win hearts and minds” of the target audience, without resorting to (or excessive reliance on) the use of force.²³ Information operations and warfare, also known as influence operations, includes the collection of tactical information about an adversary as well as the dissemination of propaganda in pursuit of a competitive advantage over an opponent.²⁴

Owing to these perspectives, it is to note that while one of the definitions above suggests that ‘psywar is a part of the psyops’; here, it merits a mention that the term ‘warfare’ is a prolonged process in which operations and battles are a part of it. Similarly, psywar, though a subset of IW, is considered by nature as ‘all-encompassing’; but it is essentially comprised of two key elements: First, planned use of communications, information, propaganda, and deception measures against political, economic, military, social, psychological landscapes. And second, aims to achieve the key objective of influencing opinions, attitudes, and emotions of targeted audience/groups—both within and outside the country, to serve its national interests.

To put into perspective, by ‘psywar,’ William Lind looked at shattering the enemy’s psychological cohesion to act—wherein, the focus should not be on physical destruction.²⁵ In essence, with information superiority, the psywar calls for achieving key aims, such as: first, to demotivate and demoralise an enemy, and degrade the will to fight; second, to sustain and boost the morale of own troops, both on the front line and in the hinterland; third, to influence the emotions, morale, attitudes, behaviour of people, or manipulate the perception of targeted people; and fourth,

to shape the perception of audience at the global level. However, in the long-term perspective, ‘credibility’ acts as the fundamental principle to achieve success in psyops, wherein, information being provided should be based on truthfulness, to the extent feasible.

Psywar and Hybrid Warfare: New Ways of the Game

One of the key query remains: Can psywar or psyops achieve their objectives in a standalone mode? The answer to which is, ‘No’. To argue so, as given the radical changes to the geo-politico-economic-strategic-technological environment, the warfare has evolved from clear territorial wars to uncertain, ambiguous, and irregular wars. In its new *avatar*, information, psychological and cyber threats have emerged as the most potent tools of future wars. Not only is psywar a subset of the overarching IW, it is also a part of the hybrid warfare—a term that gained prominence since 2005, mainly against the 34-day Israel - Hezbollah war of 2006. As the 36th Chief of the US Army, General George W. Casey posited that a new type of war that would become increasingly common in the future will be “*a hybrid of irregular warfare and conventional warfare*”.²⁶ Hybrid warfare, also known as ambiguous warfare, is a blend of economy, military, information, psychology and cyber, with a view to achieve political objectives.²⁷ The range of hybrid tools continue to increase with changes in the geo-political environment, with new innovations in technologies and new ideas to serve one’s national interests. In this process, information, psychological and cyber warfare are central to achieving the objectives of a hybrid warfare.

For instance, several analysts have considered China’s application of “Three Warfares”²⁸ concept in the South China Sea (SCS) as synonymous to Beijing’s ‘hybrid warfare.’ Therefore, hybrid threats are the new battle grounds of the future, as they pose a huge challenge to the national security of a country. IW and psywar are very much a part of the hybrid warfare, which is evident from the following contexts: Sean Sullivan writes about the use of mass communication networks, as it is one of the most powerful

psychological and propaganda tools in the world. Wherein, examples of hybrid warfare include dissemination of disinformation or fake news via social media, cyber-attacks on the IT systems or as the case in conflict in Ukraine, disinformation and the use of anonymous men, dubbed ‘Little Green Men.’²⁹ Interestingly, Patrick Cullen *et al.*, have identified the vulnerabilities being exploited in which information is a vital element: “Hybrid warfare is designed to exploit national vulnerabilities across the political, military, economic, social, informational and infrastructure (PMESII) spectrum [...].”³⁰ While Greg Grant emphatically suggests that as part of the situational awareness, it is easier to know about own troops, but does not solve the problem of finding the “*low signature*” enemy.³¹ Thus these understandings clarify that the most potent threats emanate from information, psychological and cyber domains, as these can affect a large portion of the population in a short time.

Exploitation of Vulnerabilities by Adversaries

“*Tactics flow from a superior position,*” Bobby Fischer (Chess Player).

It may be fair to say that hybrid warfare is a strategy which employs blends of conventional warfare, irregular warfare, cyber warfare, communication networks and psywar with other influencing methods—directly or indirectly, to exploit vulnerabilities and thus achieve its political, economic and strategic objectives. In consonance with these objectives, it can be posited that in case of India, its adversaries have been exploiting its vulnerabilities in multiple domains and methods through fake news, false narratives, morphed images, videos, maps, blocking information dissemination systems, creating friction and social dissonance, communal disharmony, exhibition/demonstrating superiority, and others. More specifically, the adversary’s psywar strategy is distinctly directed against four select segments: forces on conventional battlefield; leadership, population on both sides; and global community, as noted in Figure 1. It highlights the broad contours of the psywar, especially by China.

Figure 1: Broad Contours of Psywar
(Mainly as used by China against India)



Source: Created by the Author.

Similarly, cartographic aggression is also a form of hybrid cum psywar, which is used by an opponent to indulge in intentional misrepresentation of national/international boundaries on maps as to lay claims to additional territories in continental and maritime domains as well as influence public opinion at all levels. An example of which is cited in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Misrepresentation of the Map of India



Source: Adapted from Raghunandan and Shukla.³²

Repeated publication of such incorrect maps by adversaries form a larger part of the psywar with an aim to not only influence perceptions to its advantage but also to facilitate legal claims later.

China's Psywar: Fight and Win 'Informationised Local Wars'

Due to lack of adequate information and analysis of China's IW and "Three Warfares Strategy," there remain critical gaps and some form of ambiguity in the understanding of China's psywar. However, China wants to achieve information superiority, as seen in the Gulf Wars, to maintain battlefield supremacy. Based on Chinese President Xi Jinping's military reforms of 2015, the PLA has developed a potent non-kinetic capability in its new Strategic Support Force (SSF), which comprises of space, cyber, information (psychological) and varied other dimensions to support its IW capabilities. In keeping pace with the US and Russia, Beijing has developed necessary cyberwarfare capabilities, which are consistent with its military strategy and national security objectives.³³ China aspires to become not only the world's largest nation in cyberspace but also among the most powerful.³⁴ It realises that psywar is not only effective in military campaigns, but also holds far greater relevance to vital elements of national power. It is a powerful tool to change the social, political, and psychological landscape by its influence operations.³⁵

An important component of it is the so-called "media warfare," which has been an unequivocal part of China's strategy. Beijing is buying up media outlets and training scores of foreign journalists to 'tell China's story well'—as part of a worldwide propaganda campaign of astonishing scope and ambition.³⁶ Media organisations involved in selling the China story to the global audience are the international arm of China Central Television (CCTV), China Global Television Network (CGTN), China Radio International (CRI), Global CAMG Media Group, and Oscar, to name a few.³⁷ They propagate in several languages.

Of the many institutions within the Chinese party-state involved in influence operations is the ‘Chinese Influence Operations Bureaucracy,’ fully committed to extending China’s global influence. Broadly, there are three types of bureaucratic organisations included in the structure: (1) policy coordination; (2) policy formulation and implementation; and (3) organisations with specialised functions³⁸—all aimed at propaganda management of China, both home and abroad.

China’s ‘Three Warfares Strategy’: Hyper-active Psywar Strategy

Having seen the impact of IW along with kinetic operations in the Gulf Wars (1991 and 2003), the Kosovo Conflict (1998-99), and the role of mass media, China studied the concept and the method of war fighting in detail. In 2003, China introduced “Political Work Guidelines of the People’s Liberation Army,” which was subsequently revised in 2010 and called the “Three Warfares Strategy.” The revised strategy comprises three main components: public opinion warfare, psychological warfare, and legal warfare.³⁹ China’s PLA, the armed wing of the Communist Party of China (CPC), has effectively used the “Three Warfares Strategy” in its assertive designs against Taiwan and against its neighbours in the South China Sea. As Peter Mattis summarises the role of CPC, by arguing, “The party leads, the PLA follows. The purpose of influence operations is political power.”⁴⁰

While the fundamental aim of China has been to achieve information superiority, the essential elements of China’s strategy have been: first, to gain political-economic-strategic advantage, it exploits the adversary’s fault lines by using information cum psywar; second, wherever it sees any adverse effect on its core interests, including illegal claims on territories that gives it strategic advantage, it has been aggressive in its actions on the ground and has applied the “Three Warfares Strategy” against the adversary; third, to achieve optimum dividends, psywar is coordinated with deception and cyber-attacks, which can paralyse nation’s finances,

transportation, health care, education, trade, military networks, and communication systems; fourth, China aims to shape the public opinion by playing the ‘victim card’, so that use of force or a military action would be acceptable to the global community; fifth, psywar gets enmeshed with China’s three-pronged strategy: Debt Trap, Wolf Warrior and The Three Warfare.

Since 138 countries, across the world, have joined the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) of China, it has invested heavily in the media companies of its BRI countries, to counter the narratives that highlight its (BRI) ills and the ‘debt trap’ diplomacy in the long run. It went on to organise a Belt and Road Journalist Forum in Beijing on 20 June 2018 to achieve multiple objectives.⁴¹ Pro-China content has been carried as paid inserts/supplements by *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and the UK *Telegraph*. Although the western social media platforms like YouTube, Instagram, Twitter may be blocked in China, it invests heavily on foreign social media to carry, in a subtle manner, their psyops cum propaganda. In addition, at the global level, China is investing in training of journalists (largely from BRI countries) and creating job opportunities, apart from research conducted at Chinese universities and think tanks to project its image.⁴²

China Using Psywar in the Himalayas: Military Stand-offs along the India-China Border

China has remained hyperactive in its application of “Three Warfares Strategy” during the 73-days Doklam stand-off in 2017, and with much greater vigour during the recent transgressions across the Line of Actual Control (LAC) at multiple points in Eastern Ladakh and stand-off between the two forces. The military stand-off since May 2020 in Nakula in Sikkim and Eastern Ladakh, followed by violent clashes in the Galwan Valley on night 15/16 June 2020, unleashed a blistering information-cum-psywar on electronic, print and social media. Twitter, Instagram,

Facebook, and YouTube carried morphed images, videos, maps, fake news, and false narratives with a view to influence the population and forces on both sides and gain a psychological superiority.

Simultaneously, the state-owned newspaper *Global Times* and the state broadcaster *CGTN* have been using customised narratives and false news as their main strategy to change the perception of the international audience. Few instances to highlight China's psywar strategy against India are noted below.

For instance, on 1 June 2020, *Global Times* reported, "Since the Doklam standoff with India in 2017, the Chinese military has expanded its arsenal with weapons ... that should give China the advantage in high-altitude conflicts, should they arise."⁴³ It further mentioned, "With a powerful engine, the Type 15 lightweight main battle tank can effectively operate in plateau regions (that is) difficult for heavier tanks, and with its advanced fire control systems and 105 mm calibre armour-piercing main gun, it can outgun any other light armoured vehicles at high elevations."⁴⁴ However, it did not mention that while the Indian Army's relatively heavier tanks like the T-72 and T-90 are better protected, with automatic fire control systems, and more heavily armed with 125 mm smooth bore gun to engage the Type 15 at longer ranges. Also, these tanks and infantry combat vehicles (ICVs) complement each other to effectively manoeuvre in mountainous terrain of Eastern Ladakh. It also described the positioning of the unmanned heli-drones along the LAC, and the Z-20 as a medium-lift helicopter that "can adapt to all kinds of terrain and weather and can be used on missions including personnel and cargo transport, search and rescue and reconnaissance." The publication also quoted an official's statement that mentioned, "The Z-20 can operate in oxygen-depleted plateaus thanks to its powerful homemade engine."⁴⁵ While it maintained its tempo of psywar when it suggested that the Z-8G is a 'large transport helicopter' that focuses on 'plateau operations'. It claimed, "The Z-8G is the first of its kind in

China and can take off from 4,500 metres above sea level with a ceiling higher than 6,000 metres.”⁴⁶

With reference to the deployment of French-made Rafale fighter jet by India, *Global Times* noted, “Chinese experts said that the Rafale is only a third-plus generation fighter jet, and does not stand much of a chance against a stealth, fourth-generation one like the J-20.”⁴⁷ Even when the diplomatic and senior military level talks were doing rounds, China continued to state that the PLA held high-altitude exercises on the Tibetan Plateau and that the TMC organises artillery exercises, during the day and night. It also reported that artillery firing produced a single shot precision effect at the target. The aim was to test the long-range precision strike and fire assault capabilities of the troops in the high-altitude regions. However, what China seems to ignore is that the Indian Air Force with its Rafale, Sukhoi Su-30 MKI, C17 Globemaster transport aircraft with strategic airlift capabilities, Chinook and Apache helicopters, and other advance facilities, has an edge over the PLA Air Force that operates from the Tibetan Plateau.⁴⁸ The primary considerations are the fact that Chinese airfields are at high altitudes, which results in certain operational drawbacks in terms of payload carrying capacities and their weapon systems, as well as the air defence cover on the ground.⁴⁹

China continues to blow hot and cold to make India succumb to its coercion and intimidation tactics. Two days after the horrendous violence on night of 15/16 June 2020, the *Global Times* reported, “From a global perspective, China is India’s biggest opportunity.” Whom are they trying to woo or fool? Often, during the standoff, the Chinese officials including China’s Ambassador to India continued to say that “both countries must avoid differences escalating into disputes.”⁵⁰ This very statement is regressive in nature. In fact, it would have been more appropriate to suggest that the differences should be resolved, as part of long-term solution of the unsettled borders.

On 6 September *Global Times* expressed its disappointment at India's actions that are detrimental to China's economic interests, including banning 224 Chinese apps in India; and how this could adversely affect investment of 'capital, technology and experience' to bring up IT and infrastructure related projects. While on 9 September, it warned saying that "[...] if the Indian army fires the first shot at the PLA, the consequence must be the annihilation of the Indian army on the spot. If Indian troops dare to escalate the conflict, more Indian troops will be wiped out."⁵¹ Similarly, an editorial read, "Indian border troops bravado will backfire."⁵² Also, the State Broadcaster *CCTV* reported that the military was conducting "long distance manoeuvres deployment exercises and live fire drills." China's Psywar campaigns have been propagating their war preparedness, and that Indian troops cannot withstand the rigours of winters, poor logistics preparations, poor economy, and inability to control COVID-19.

Despite the talks between the foreign ministers of India and China at Moscow on 10 September, *Global Times* reported on 15 September, that "if India does not leave (meaning the LAC) and all diplomatic attempts fail, the PLA will be left with no choice but to push India out by force."⁵³ Chinese social media, websites, print and electronic media have been actively using the lessons of the 1962 War to shape public opinion and reiterate PLA's operational readiness against the current impasse. Such actions suggest that besides building public opinion worldwide and shaping the political landscape, China aims to create political friction, ideological differences, divide population as hyper-nationalists and moderates, to demotivate and demoralise its armed forces and thus implant doubts in India's capabilities both on the borders and in other spheres. By suppressing positive information and highlighting the weaknesses in governance of another country, China glorifies its economy and GDP, physical and technological infrastructure, software capabilities, innovative culture, communication systems and their applications. The aim is to coerce and intimidate neighbours, gain

strategic advantage, capture markets, and thus improve its own economy. True to the ‘Unrestricted Warfare’ constructs, it is evident that the Chinese government has been using all available tools and unconventional means to be aggressive to influence the target audience. Undoubtedly, China is not keen to settle the boundary dispute. Therefore, it is imperative for India to now re-calibrate its China policy involving political, economic, trade, investment, diplomatic, military, embedded technologies, information and psywar domains.

In response to China’s incessant psywar campaign, at least four messages must be clearly given out: first, that Indian troops are battle hardened, both physically and psychologically, and are highly proficient in mountain warfare, and that any military misadventure by China will be dealt with severely; second, Chinese cannot gauge the motivation and morale of Indian soldiers—the man behind the weapon; third, an often quoted statistics has been that Indian military is no match to China’s as the latter’s economy and GDP is minimum five times that of India. History is replete with examples, including China’s conflict with Vietnam, that suggests that outcomes of military conflicts are not dependent on economy and GDP differential alone. Fourth, no matter what, India will not compromise on its sovereignty and territorial integrity, and that China should be prepared for a bloody nose.

Pakistan’s Psywar Strategy

“Whether it be Rafale or S-400, Pakistan Army is fully prepared and ready to thwart any Indian aggression.”

—DG ISPR, Maj Gen Babar Iftikhar, 13 August 2020⁵⁴

Along with proxy war and state-sponsored terrorism, Pakistan has used all available tools and government machinery to wage information cum psywar to undermine India’s political, religious, ideological, societal,

economic, and military strength. While Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) has been the epicentre of *raison d'être*, its broader aim has been to destabilise India and to prevent development of India's comprehensive national power (CNP). The all too powerful organs, the Army and the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), and the military media organisation called Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) have used all tools of social media and several platforms to carryout propaganda and psywar against India. The media in Pakistan is managed and controlled by the ISI. ISPR was formed in 1949 as the public relations (PR) and media wing of the Pakistan Armed Forces. In recent times, it has shown its hyperactive presence on social media platforms, such as Twitter and YouTube, and has evolved into a well-organised psywar cum propaganda machinery, operating under the aegis of the military hierarchy.

ISPR's actual role and charter is much more than what is stated on its website (ispr.gov.pk). It is a tri-services organisation with a political mission, whose system of funding and utilisation continues to remain 'dark'. It manages Pakistan's entire propaganda through a huge network of influencers and foot soldiers in civvies.⁵⁵ It passionately believes that 'victory' is not only about the armed forces, it is determined as much by 'whose stories win.' Simultaneously, it aims to connect with the Indian Muslims through religious and cultural connections and their institutions.

An analysis suggests that the ISPR builds up its narratives logically, wherein: first, it creates a perception, and then convert perceptions into convictions by building better ideas, narratives, and reinforcing repeatedly. It controls and runs national narrative using ISI and Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority⁵⁶ (PEMRA).⁵⁷ Both ISI and PEMRA exploit a huge network of WhatsApp, internet, and Twitter 'warriors'. According to the ISPR website, 'ISPR produces movies, publishes books, stages dramas'; resultantly, it cultivates influencers and organises rallies across the world to propagate anti-India stance. ISPR coordinates military-

diplomatic efforts, and several civil luminaries help to maintain a facade of civil participation in government. It runs vast network of think-tanks headed by retired military officers and a few favoured civilian experts. ISPR has requisite resources and authority to run newspapers, TV, and radio programmes, like the state-run/sponsored Pak Observer, The Nation, ARY, Pakistan TV, FM 96, FM 101 and others. More than 3,000 interns join the ISPR every year.⁵⁸

In April 2020, Pakistan Army released the *Green Book 2020*, which specifically calls for information warfare on Kashmir, threatens to derail Afghan peace process to prop up J&K and slams blackout in Valley.⁵⁹ Unsurprisingly, the policy recommendations have been made to counter India's action of 5 August 2019, to abrogate Article 370 and 35A in the state of J&K. As the *Green Book* suggests, "Pakistan will have to take the war into non-kinetic domains: Information/Cyber Warfare and Electronic Warfare (EW) Spectrum."⁶⁰ Besides recruiting and training several young people, Islamabad's propaganda machinery utilises millions of bots, motivated youth in the form of hackers, social media influencers; strategic think tanks and renowned journalists amidst their ranks. Besides, Pakistani terrorists consider deaths, destruction, violence, and its widespread publicity as a potent psychological weapon to terrorise the population at large.

Such actions by Pakistan fail to cease even in the disruptive times of the COVID-19 pandemic, as it continues to increase the intensity of psyops against India. With several internal challenges in hand, Pakistani leaders, including its Prime Minister, have been using all forms of media as well as social media to express: anti-India sentiments by highlighting oppression of the Muslims in India to maintain its political legitimacy. This is with a view to draw concessions from the world at large and the OIC, in particular. *The EurAsian Times* reported that Modi Government is quietly working to revoke the Indus Water Treaty (IWT) with Pakistan.⁶¹ India's action to abrogate Article 370 and 35A in J&K has become the pivot of

psywar strategy of Pakistan. DG ISPR, be it Major General Asif Ghafoor (2016-20) or his successor Maj Gen Babar Iftikhar since February 2020, have been obsessed with hate India ideology, leading to vigorous psywar campaigns. In a circular issued by Pakistan, a year after the abrogation of Article 370, it declared that henceforth, IOJK will be referred to as IIOJK; thus, adding the word 'illegally' for so-called greater impact. Yet another psywar tactic! On 13 August 2020, DG ISPR drew attention of the media, by stating, "Indian occupation forces are committing genocide against the people of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK)." Speaking against India has become an article of faith, in order to retain political legitimacy. Pakistan uses all platforms and social media to generate false news, narratives, and misinformation on alleged human rights atrocities, depriving people of digital connectivity and communication facilities, violation of ceasefire on the Line of Control (LC), killings of civilians, etc., to arouse anti-India sentiments. To note, social media platforms have seen an exponential increase in messages, videos, images, hashtags since the abrogation of Article 370 in J&K.

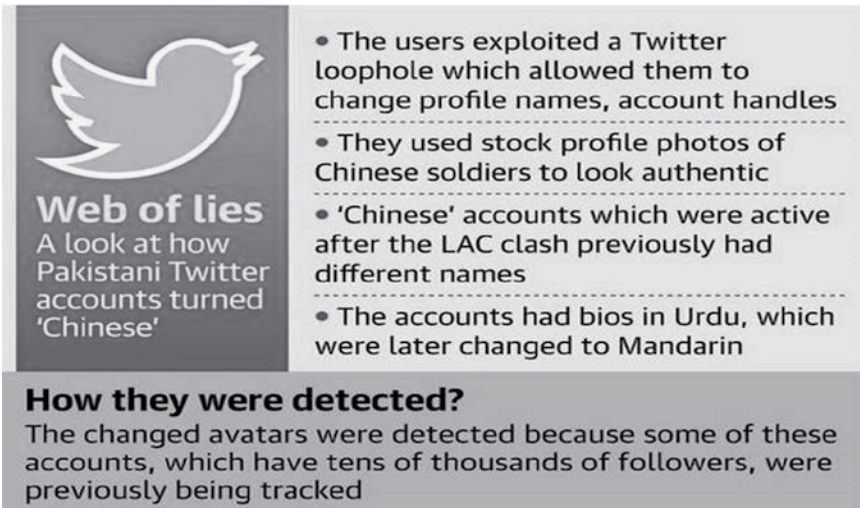
Moreover, to build up the tempo to mark 5 August 2020, as the 'Black Day,' Pakistan authorities released a flowchart of activities to be undertaken by various nominated agencies and platforms, both within and outside Pakistan.⁶² These activities included organising visit of foreign media and United Nations Military Observers Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP) to LC, statements to be issued by ISPR in support of Kashmiris in their 'just' struggle, special editions of Kashmiris struggle against the Indian occupation, instituting special fund with domestic and global sources to support Kashmiris struggle, initiation of special supplements/transmissions to suggest indigenous insurgency, and composition of songs depicting resilience of the Kashmiris. Globally acknowledged as the epicentre of terrorism, Pakistan, as part of psywar, awarded its highest civilian honour—*Nisban-e-Pakistan*—to India baiter and Kashmiri Separatist leader Syed Ali Shah Geelani in August

2020. In addition, it announced establishment of Pakistan University of Engineering and Emerging Technologies after his name,⁶³ and the name of the country's main highway, Kashmir highway, was renamed 'Srinagar highway' (by renaming a highway, Pakistan may note that it will not take them anywhere). Again, ahead of the 75th session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA), on 19 September, Pakistan launched an online anti-India and free Kashmir propaganda on various social media platforms, carrying the hashtag "*#KashmirWantsFreedom*."⁶⁴ These activities only highlight how heavily Pakistan is invested in waging an anti-India campaign, all across.

The Nexus against India

Both China and Pakistan have information cum psywar organisations at the apex level. Since the stand-off between India and China at multiple points on the LAC in May 2020, Pakistani agencies have coordinated and given further impetus to 'Chinese psywar campaign,' by propagating fake news, narratives, images and misinformation through social media. For instance, a few social media accounts with Chinese characters like '*Zeping*' (with handle '*sawaxpx*'), '*xiuying637*' and '*Yasifxi*' that tweeted on the border violence were traced back to Pakistan as using Chinese names and tweets, the messages were received with greater reliability and credibility. This strategy has not just been limited to adopting Chinese identities. Pakistani accounts have also recently adopted Nepali and Sri Lankan avatars, all with the same motivation: posting information aimed at creating an unfavourable narrative about India.⁶⁵ The nexus between China and Pakistan, is outlined in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Nexus Between China and Pakistan on Information War against India



Source: Adapted from Krishnan.⁶⁶

An analysis of Pakistan's psywar cum propaganda campaign suggests that they continue to exploit the 'two nation theory', which pivots on lies, deceit and deception. It has the involvement of several organisations and agencies: Pakistan Army—the deep state, the ISI, and the ISPR. ISI enforces decisions and plans of Pakistani Army using MI, Investigative Bureau, Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), National Accountability Bureau (NAB), and Anti-Narcotics Force. The deep state is facilitated by the military-run-business, ISI and ISPR. While ISPR works under the Joint Headquarters, but it is effectively controlled by the Pakistani Army. As an organisation, it is well-resourced, well-equipped, and well-staffed which has expanded exponentially with the advent of information revolution and digital age. It has a multitude of skill sets which include creative directors, psychologists, audio specialists, animation experts, cartoon and meme creators, mimics, musicians, and speech writers, etc.⁶⁷

India's Response Architecture

Looking at the contours of the psywar campaigns holistically, it becomes abundantly clear that India has largely been reacting and responding to the propaganda or psychological messages unleashed by China and Pakistan. Their strategies, objectives and *modus operandi* have already been discussed earlier. Being more defensive, India has predominantly aimed at shaping the perceptions of the domestic audience, which is not good enough. Although several measures were initiated to inform and counter Pakistan's proxy war and state-sponsored terrorism at the global level, such as the United Nations, India needs to develop a robust strategy—pivoted on pro-activity—against both China and Pakistan. In this process, India's media strategy should form an important part to pro-actively counter its adversaries' psywar and keep the global audience informed.

This brings in the pertinent question: What does the formulation of a successful Psywar Strategy involve? The fundamental elements required for psyops cum propaganda to be successful are: unambiguous psyops objectives in consonance with the national interests; identification and analysis of intended target segments; detailed study and intelligence; most effective method of dissemination of psyops material; credibility and impact of media; most appropriate language and priority of interests of targeted audience; analyse credibility and effectiveness of communications, and others. In addition, a detailed knowledge of the beliefs, likes, dislikes, strengths, weaknesses, vulnerabilities of the target segment or the military force would help to formulate a national policy and strategy.

According to the CIA, knowing what motivates the target is the key to a successful psyops. McFate says, "Pentagon spends US\$ 120 million on a single F-35 which never flies in combat." He emphasises the significance of influence operations, and lays down three steps to influence and shape public opinion: first, monitoring intelligence agencies to know the enemy; second, discrediting fake news, alternative facts, bots, trolls, false narratives, etc.; and third, counterattacking by having more weapons in influence arsenal.⁶⁸

One of the most significant measures to nullify our adversaries' psywar cum propaganda campaign is that we, as a country including all political parties, institutions, and people, should support and show solidarity with the government in power. It needs to be understood that psywar is a vital subset of IW; hence, it would require integration and coordination with other elements of the IW. Yet, there is dire need to have a comprehensive strategy and organisation to conduct psyops, which should include media strategy as well. One of the main components to facilitate success of a psywar campaign is to know the core values, and then identify and exploit the fault lines of the adversary. Therefore, the proposed organisation should have experts from psychology, sociology, media, language experts, legal, armed forces, political science specialists, foreign affairs, country experts, communication, and social media. In addition, they should be disciplined, diligent to keep abreast with the latest events and have high level of general awareness to formulate ideas and narratives.

Here, it is significant to note that the fundamental principle of psywar is that the planning should be centralised at the apex level because it addresses politico-socio-economic-psychological threats in all its manifestations. It must coordinate and integrate with vital elements of national power. The key objective lies in knowing: 'How do we really influence others?' This would then require developing capabilities such as public diplomacy, strategic communications, information operations, public relations (PR), discussions at different levels, and influence operations, by a wide variety of means. In addition, they should be disciplined, diligent to keep abreast with the latest events, and high level of general awareness to formulate ideas and counter narratives.

It would be prudent for India to formulate an integrated strategy, which must address all facets of psywar at all levels—international, national and military. Therefore, the need lies in establishing a psywar coordination agency at the apex level for providing guidance and implementation of national psywar actions. This would also include actions at the strategic,

operational, and tactical levels. Wherein, the operational level would entail war campaigns and major operations that are planned, conducted, and sustained to accomplish military objectives within a theatre or other operational areas.

Since psywar aims at targeting the cognitive domains, the strategy must also aim to promote awareness among the population at large and the armed forces. The document could be in two parts: classified and unclassified (available in public domain). Militarily, India must aim to gain information superiority that will provide information assurance to own forces, and have the capability to disrupt information system of the adversary. This would ensure cardinal principles of situational awareness and battlefield transparency, which would further help nullify the psyops campaign of our adversaries.

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