Analyzing Psychological Operations: A Case Study of Indo-Pak Hostility (2010-2024)

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Abstract

Psychological manipulation refers to the strategic effort to influence and alter the attitudes and behaviors of a target audience. This study examines India's use of Psychological Operations (PSYOP) and information warfare since 1947, highlighting how these tactics have jeopardized Pakistan's sovereignty, national security, and international reputation. Framed through the lens of neo-imperialism, the research evaluates India's intelligence and cyberspace operations, which have employed persuasive techniques to influence Pakistan's decision-making, including its nuclear program, during critical incidents. The study identifies diverse methods used by Indian nationalist movements and propaganda campaigns to manipulate international perceptions of Pakistan. These include media and publications, support for separatist movements, counter-propaganda initiatives, and deception operations—all aimed at undermining Pakistan's global image and influencing the international community. The findings emphasize that exploiting an adversary's vulnerabilities is central to the success of PSYOP campaigns. India's strategic use of these tactics underscores the effectiveness of psychological operations in achieving targeted outcomes. The study's results have significant implications for understanding the mechanisms underpinning PSYOP and provide a foundation for assessing current and future PSYOP capabilities in South Asia. Overall, this research offers valuable insights into the efficacy of PSYOP in influencing audiences and contributes to the broader understanding of persuasion theory in the context of modern information warfare and national security.

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Introduction

The systematic use of communication, propaganda, and other psychological techniques to influence the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of target audiences is referred to as psychological warfare (PSYOP) or psychological operations. The primary objective of psychological operations is to alter the psychological state of individuals or groups to achieve specific outcomes. Governments, military organizations, intelligence agencies, or non-state actors may utilize these operations. PSYOP can be conducted during peacetime, amid conflict, or post-conflict scenarios and may target domestic or international audiences.

PSYOP has become increasingly critical for nation-states in the information age, mainly where socio-psychological risks are more pronounced. Psychological warfare is as significant as its physical dimension in modern conflicts. It is especially vital in countering terrorism, as terrorists themselves engage in psychological warfare, using violence as a tool to instill fear and exert psychological pressure rather than solely causing physical harm. The success of psychological operations often outweighs the tactical execution of military operations. As the renowned strategist Sun Tzu remarked, 'If you know your enemy and yourself, you will never be at risk in a hundred battles.' Understanding both the strengths and weaknesses of adversaries is essential to effective engagement.

Information warfare (IW), a key component of modern PSYOP, focuses on undermining the enemy's information systems to create fear, suspicion, and confusion. Through misinformation, propaganda, and fake news, IW can elicit significant and often unexpected behavioral responses from adversaries. The primary targets of IW are the foundational elements of a state, such as ideology, public opinion, and national security structures.

Historical Context: PSYOP Between Pakistan and India

Since their independence, Pakistan and India have employed various psychological techniques, particularly in the context of the Kashmir conflict. During the 1948 war, both states used media to advance their respective claims over Kashmir, portraying the other as the aggressor. Similarly, during the skirmishes over the Rann of Kutch in 1965, both countries utilized media to boost national morale through patriotic songs and news while seeking to demoralize their opponent.

The liberation of East Pakistan in 1971 (leading to the creation of Bangladesh) also involved significant psychological warfare tactics. India effectively highlighted Pakistan's military actions as human rights violations on international platforms, shaping global opinion against Pakistan. In the same vein, the Kargil War in 1999 and the Mumbai attacks in 2008 provided opportunities for both nations to leverage media as a tool of psychological warfare. During the Kargil conflict, India spread the narrative that Pakistan had infiltrated the region, while during the Mumbai attacks, India accused Pakistan of state-sponsored terrorism. These strategies aimed to secure diplomatic support and influence global opinion in favor of India.

This research study assesses the psychological operations between India and Pakistan from 2010 to 2023 and how they have impacted the relationship between the two states. The asymmetrical relationship between India and Pakistan has made the region more politically unstable. This is because both states have often engaged in conflicts and returned from the brink of full-scale war. Both states have been using conventional and non-conventional warfare against each other. A major concern is now the psychological operations taking place between India and Pakistan, as this shows

how technological advancement has impacted both military and civilian life in both states. As propaganda is used as a medium of communication in psychological warfare, the target audience, which is mainly civilians, is getting most of the influence. Indeed, as both states possess nuclear weapons, the possibility of direct, devastating conflict has been eliminated in favor of psychological warfare. However, threats of war due to the instability of deterrence still exist. This type of warfare has increased uncertainty about the future of South Asia, as maintaining peace in the region can become very difficult.

The concept of Neo-imperialism combines state-level and systemic-level influences to analyze the use of IW through media and propaganda. Pakistan is frequently portrayed as a 'terrorist-harboring,' 'problematic,' and 'erratic' country by international media, foreign think tanks, global academia, and even government representatives. This negative portrayal is primarily attributed to persistent lobbying and support from adversaries, particularly India, against Pakistan. Both national and international media have perpetuated this narrative, with the majority of significant news reports and analytical commentary about Pakistan being hostile and antagonistic.

The principle that 'truth is the best PSYOP' has been effectively exploited by India in its psychological operations against Pakistan. Over the years, India's deliberate use of PSYOP has succeeded in altering global and regional perceptions of Pakistan, thereby diminishing its psychological resilience. India has skillfully integrated psychological warfare with conventional and non-conventional military tactics. Notable examples include statements by Indian officials regarding their nuclear program, allegations portraying Pakistan as a terrorist and problematic state, efforts to sow mistrust between Pakistan's civilian population and its military, the encouragement of separatist movements, the fostering of anti-Pakistan sentiment, and the leveraging of deception in Afghanistan to depict Pakistan as a perpetrator of conflict.

These principles form the foundation of all psychological operations. As highlighted in the Applied Joint Doctrine for Psychological Operations (NATO,2007), effective PSYOP can erode an opponent's psychological resistance by positively altering their mindset. This principle underscores the enduring advantages of PSYOP as a strategic tool: By targeting the opponent's psychological state, resistance can be reduced, ultimately diminishing their capacity for sustained opposition.

When employed with political or military operations, PSYOP acts as a force multiplier, amplifying their overall impact on the target audience. In the case of Pakistan, India's strategic deployment of psychological operations alongside conventional warfare has demonstrated the effectiveness of this approach, shaping perceptions and influencing global narratives to its advantage.

Significance of the Study

This research is significant as it examines the psychological impacts of psychological warfare between India and Pakistan on national identity, civilian perceptions, and the broader dimensions of conflict between the two nations. It contributes to the existing literature by analyzing the role of media narratives and misinformation and disinformation strategies on social media in fostering collective insecurity, influencing emotions, and shaping generational perceptions of the India-Pakistan conflict.

The study focuses on the period from 2010 to 2024, highlighting the volatility of psychological warfare in the context of modern technological and digital advancements, which have profoundly influenced nearly all aspects of the conflict

between the two countries. In conclusion, the research explores the responses of both states to historical animosities, mainly through efforts to shape public perceptions, understanding, and attitudes toward the ongoing conflict.

Methodology

This study adopts an exploratory research approach, focusing on the impacts of psychological warfare tactics on the perceptions, attitudes, and responses of India and Pakistan toward their historical hostility. It examines the domino effect of misinformation and disinformation campaigns on both countries' political and social landscapes within their historical political dynamics. Secondary research methods were employed, utilizing sources such as books, journals, articles, and newspapers to fulfill the objectives of this study.

Historical Development of Psychological Operations

Early Psychological Operations

PSYOPs are as old as warfare itself despite being perceived as a contemporary innovation. In ancient times, empires employed techniques designed to instill fear and gain a psychological advantage over their adversaries. For example, Roman soldiers used shock and awe tactics, repeatedly striking their swords against their shields to intimidate enemies. During the Battle of Pelusium in 525 BC, Persian soldiers exploited the Egyptians' religious reverence for cats by holding them hostage, forcing them to surrender to avoid harming the sacred animals.

In the 13th century, Genghis Khan, the Mongol emperor, devised multiple PSYOP strategies to terrify opponents. He ordered each soldier to carry three lit torches at night to create the illusion of a much larger army. He also developed whistle-producing arrows with grooves to unsettle enemies and gathered severed heads to display on the walls of conquered villages as an extreme form of shock and terror.

During the American Revolutionary War, British soldiers attempted to intimidate George Washington's Continental Army by wearing bright red uniforms, signifying dominance and power. However, the conspicuous uniforms became a liability, making British soldiers easy targets for American snipers, ultimately turning the tactic into a strategic mistake (Robert, 2019).

Modern Psychological Operations

The use of modern PSYOP strategies began during World War I, enabled by advancements in technology and mass media. Governments leveraged mass-circulation newspapers to disseminate propaganda, while aerial advancements enabled dropping pamphlets behind enemy lines. Non-lethal propaganda shells were also developed. For example, British pilots dropped postcards written by German prisoners of war, praising the humane treatment they received to demoralize German troops.

World War II marked the peak of PSYOP usage, which was extensively employed by both the Axis and Allied powers. Adolf Hitler's propaganda campaigns, which helped him rise to power, focused on delegitimizing political rivals and fueling national pride while blaming Germany's economic struggles on external groups. Japan used psychological broadcasts through 'Tokyo Rose,' a radio program combining music with misinformation about Japanese victories to demoralize Allied forces. Germany employed a similar approach with 'Axis Sally.'

A notable PSYOP success during World War II was the Allied deception strategy leading up to D-Day. By leaking false orders, American commanders

convinced the German high command that the invasion would occur at Calais rather than Normandy, significantly aiding the success of the actual operation.

During the Cold War, psychological operations played a critical role. U.S. President Ronald Reagan announced the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), commonly known as 'Star Wars,' which aimed to intercept Soviet nuclear missiles before they re-entered the atmosphere. Whether feasible or not, the perceived threat of the SDI forced Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev to revive détente-era negotiations, leading to progress in nuclear arms control.

In the post-9/11 era, the United States launched a major 'shock and awe' campaign in Iraq to weaken the Iraqi military's resolve and undermine support for Saddam Hussein. Beginning with two days of continuous bombing on March 19, 2003, the U.S.-led coalition quickly took control of Baghdad by April 5, facing minimal resistance. Within a month, the campaign concluded with the U.S. declaring victory on April 14.

Contemporary Psychological Operations

In the ongoing War on Terror, psychological operations have evolved with technological advancements. The Islamist terrorist organization ISIS has used social media and internet tools extensively to recruit sympathizers and combatants worldwide, demonstrating the role of digital platforms in modern psychological warfare (Robert, 2019).

Theoretical Framework

Neo-imperialism is a theory that emerged in the late 20th century to describe a modern form of imperialism distinct from classical colonialism. It posits that certain powerful nations, particularly Western countries and multinational corporations, exert dominance and control over less developed or weaker nations through economic, political, and cultural means rather than direct territorial exploitation. According to the theory, direct military invasions are no longer necessary to influence and control other nations. Instead, tools such as literature, culture, and economic mechanisms can shape the perceptions and ideas of *target* populations.

It is important to note that the theory of neo-imperialism is not universally accepted among scholars, and there are varying perspectives on the nature and extent of contemporary imperialism. Critics argue that neo-imperialism oversimplifies complex global dynamics and often overlooks weaker nations' agency and autonomy in shaping their destinies. Unlike traditional forms of imperialism, which relied on direct territorial control, neo-imperialism seeks to maintain dominance indirectly, leveraging economic, political, and cultural mechanisms (International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, 2023).

Key features of Neo-imperialism

Neo-imperialism emphasizes economic control and exploitation as primary methods of maintaining influence over other countries. This control is often exercised through trade agreements, foreign investment, debt dependency, and resource extraction. Powerful nations and multinational corporations exploit the economic vulnerabilities of weaker nations, perpetuating an unequal distribution of wealth and resources. The theory highlights how economic dominance serves as a tool for maintaining global hierarchies.

In addition to economic exploitation, neo-imperialism involves exerting political influence by powerful nations over weaker ones. This influence often manifests through political interventions, support for authoritarian regimes aligned with

the interests of dominant powers, and the manipulation of international institutions to advance their agendas. Neo-imperialism can also take the form of neocolonial practices, wherein powerful nations retain significant control over the political structures and decision-making processes of less powerful states.

The concept further extends beyond economic and political control to include the spread of cultural influence. Dominant nations frequently export their cultural products, including media, entertainment, and consumer goods, which shape the beliefs, preferences, and lifestyles of populations in other countries. This cultural hegemony often leads to the erosion of local cultures and contributes to the homogenization of global culture (Zalava, 2022).

According to neo-imperialism theory, inequality, and dependency inherently characterize the relationship between dominant and weaker nations. Weaker nations often rely on dominant powers for investment, technology, and market access, resulting in a loss of economic sovereignty and limited policy autonomy. This dependency perpetuates underdevelopment and prevents weaker nations from achieving sustainable growth (Ansari, 2022).

Neo-imperialism also highlights the persistence of existing global power structures and the concentration of power in the hands of a few dominant nations and corporations. These structures reinforce the dominance of select nations while creating significant barriers to the economic and political development of weaker states.

Case Study

The origins of propaganda warfare between India and Pakistan can be traced back to their independence in 1947. Since then, both states have been psychologically preoccupied with each other, engaging in various conflicts to achieve their national interests. This dynamic aligns with the framework of neo-imperialism, which suggests that dominance can be maintained not through direct territorial exploitation but through control of media, publications, and literature to influence perceptions and perspectives.

Key issues such as the Kashmir dispute, water conflicts, territorial disagreements, and the nuclear arms race have long provided a foundation for competition between India and Pakistan in South Asia. This rivalry underscores their efforts to assert dominance and power in the region. Psychological warfare has become an entrenched reality in South Asia, fueled by the increasing use of cyberspace, artificial intelligence, psychological operations, propaganda, and disinformation campaigns.

Controlling the narrative has emerged as a strategic tool within neo-imperialism. By shaping media narratives and influencing publications, states can mold public opinions and national perspectives in their favor. India has allegedly interfered with Pakistan on numerous occasions, capitalizing on moments of instability to create further disruption and chaos (Dummett, 2011).

Historical challenges for Pakistan

Kashmir Issue

The Kashmir issue has been intertwined with elements of propaganda and disinformation since the time of independence. Maharaja Hari Singh, the ruler of Jammu and Kashmir, acted as a decoy, aligning with Indian authorities and spreading misinformation about the region's fate. Despite having a Muslim-majority population of over 70%, Maharaja Hari Singh sought independence for his princely state, disregarding the preferences of the majority. Pakistan immediately contested this

decision, while India deliberately delayed its response. Following the announcement of the draft agreement, a massive genocide against Muslims occurred in Jammu and Kashmir. British Viceroy Lord Mountbatten denied this violence.

With the assistance of Sikh and Hindu migrants from Pakistan and members of the hardline Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Maharaja Hari Singh systematically orchestrated the massacre of thousands of Muslims in the Jammu region as they fled to Pakistan (Malik & Akhtar, 2021).

Separation of East Pakistan
Another example of India's use of information warfare against Pakistan is seen during the separation of East Pakistan. In April 1971, Awami League leaders in exile were housed at a residence on Theatre Road in Calcutta, India, where Indira Gandhi established the first government of Bangladesh in exile. According to Zaki, Infantry, and Army (2011), a former Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) official, the Mukti Bahini organization was fully operational by 1971 and trained extensively in guerrilla tactics, sabotage, and armed resistance. Mukti Bahini's objectives included disrupting communication routes, destroying power plants, halting exports, and depleting the Pakistan Army's resources before direct intervention by the Indian Army.

Indian citizens, particularly Bengalis, funded and supported the Mukti Bahini, while media outlets played a crucial role in conducting psychological operations. These operations aimed to portray Pakistan negatively on a global scale, creating a humanitarian narrative that isolated Pakistan internationally (Rashid, 2022).

Additionally, journalists like Anthony Mascarenhas and Abdul Bari were instrumental in shaping international opinion. Mascarenhas, a foreign writer, documented the humanitarian crisis in East Pakistan, while Bari, a Pakistani journalist, heavily criticized Pakistan's actions in his writings. Their work significantly influenced global public opinion, rallying international support for Bangladesh's independence.

Nuclear Arms Race Between India and Pakistan
The foundation of India's nuclear weapons program was rooted in its defeat during the 1962 Indo-China War and China's acquisition of nuclear weapons in 1964. Following India's 'Peaceful Nuclear Explosion' in 1974, authorization was granted for the construction of nuclear weapons. Over two decades, India developed its nuclear weapons infrastructure, delivery systems, and a sizeable military force, culminating in establishing the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) and the construction of its largest nuclear power plant at the time.

In 1998, both India and Pakistan conducted their first nuclear tests, triggering a nuclear arms race that severely threatened the region's strategic stability. This escalation underscores how India's nuclear ambitions have influenced Pakistan's strategic decisions, compelling it to respond and attempt to maintain regional equilibrium (Waseem & Sajjad, 2022).

Contemporary Strategic and Security Challenges for Pakistan

Balochistan Issue
Balochistan represents one of the most critical internal challenges for Pakistan. The primary issue stems from the perception among locals that the region's natural resources are not benefiting its inhabitants. While this political and economic issue is inherently resolvable, India has exacerbated the situation by deliberately creating regional conflict. Utilizing Afghan soil, India has allegedly supported terrorist activities

and fueled separatist movements in Baluchistan. Pakistan has repeatedly presented evidence of India's involvement, particularly after the capture of Kulbhushan Yadav, a RAW agent, in 2016, who remains in Pakistan's custody. India's alleged actions to destabilize the region include instigating Baloch dissidents residing abroad and leveraging them to initiate separation movements. By destabilizing Baluchistan, India aims to inflict economic and political damage on Pakistan, leveraging psychological warfare to exploit internal vulnerabilities and undermine Pakistan's sovereignty and stability (Waseem & Sajjad, 2022).

Uri Attack and Propaganda in the Digital Age

The digital age has transformed the internet into a potent tool for propaganda. The 2016 Uri attack and subsequent claims of 'surgical strikes' by India generated significant propaganda through digital platforms. Hashtags, trending tweets, and bots were employed to shape narratives, influence public attitudes, and provoke retaliatory sentiments. Experts hired by propagandists designed intelligent bots to amplify the BJP government's narrative, enhancing its political standing and bolstering its nationalist rhetoric. Additionally, videos exaggerated the significance of the surgical strikes, showcasing India's supposed military prowess (Saud & Kazim, 2022).

While India may not rank among the world's most advanced cyberwarfare nations (such as the U.S., Russia, or China), its use of social engineering, disinformation, and hacking espionage highlights its ability to manipulate narratives and create regional instability. India employs cyber tactics, including spear phishing and zero-day vulnerabilities, to collect sensitive data and strengthen its strategic posture in South Asia.

Sidewinder and Zero-Day Research

Research conducted by AT&T Alien Labs has revealed the activities of Sidewinder, a highly active group in South and Southeast Asia supporting Indian political interests. The group engages in spear phishing and document exploitation to assert regional dominance. Similarly, Exodus Intelligence, a Texas-based firm, investigated India's use of zero-day vulnerabilities in Windows to conduct surveillance against Pakistan and China. India reportedly modified these vulnerabilities for hostile purposes. Following these findings, India was barred from acquiring further zero-day research from Exodus, which collaborated with Microsoft to address the exploited vulnerabilities (Brewster, 2021).

Exploitation of Muslims During COVID-19

During the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a significant rise in hate speech and misinformation targeting Indian Muslims. False narratives depicted Muslims as 'super-spreaders' intent on infecting Hindus, leading to widespread discrimination. This misinformation, fueled by BJP IT cells and Hindutva supporters, was disseminated through WhatsApp, social media platforms, and propaganda-laden content. As a result, Muslims were denied access to residential settlements, hospitals, and other essential services, leading to unnecessary deaths. Additionally, the Indian government imposed a ten-year ban on the entry of 2,550 foreign Tablighi Jamaat supporters, further marginalizing the Muslim community (Banaji & Bhat, 2022).

EU DisinfoLab Revelations

In 2022, Brussels-based EU DisinfoLab exposed a vast network of 265 fake media outlets, NGOs, and think tanks operating in 65 countries to serve Indian interests. This

network, known as 'Indian Chronicles,' was dedicated to spreading anti-Pakistan and anti-China narratives globally. It aimed to enhance India's international image at the expense of rivals, leveraging fake identities of journalists, activists, and media organizations. These entities disseminated misinformation through registered websites and impersonated established outlets such as *The Economist* and *Voice of America*. ANI, an Indian news agency, frequently amplified these fabricated stories, publishing 13 anti-Pakistan and anti-China articles in 2022 alone (Jahangir, 2020).

Impacts of Psychological Warfare on Pakistan

India's psychological warfare tactics have had profound social, political, and economic impacts on Pakistan. Key consequences include:

- *Civil-Military Divide:* India's propaganda campaigns have fostered mistrust between civilians and the military, eroding public confidence in Pakistan's institutions.
- *International Defamation:* Misinformation campaigns have damaged Pakistan's global reputation, portraying the country as unstable and a sponsor of terrorism.
- *Cultural and Economic Unrest:* India has targeted Pakistan's socio-cultural fabric through its media and film industry, portraying Pakistanis as smugglers and terrorists. These narratives undermine Pakistan's cultural identity and foster anti-Pakistani sentiment globally.
- *Support for Separatist Movements:* By aiding groups such as the Baloch Republican Army (BRA) and the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA), India has intensified insurgency and violence in Baluchistan, according to evidence linked to Kulbhushan Yadav.
- *Economic Strain:* India's tactics have forced Pakistan to mobilize large numbers of troops along its borders with India and Afghanistan, imposing significant economic costs.
- *Double-Front Conflict***:** Pakistan faces the challenge of maintaining security on both its eastern and western borders. India's non-conventional warfare tactics keep Pakistan engaged in low-intensity conflicts, which, though below the threshold of nuclear escalation, remain costly and destabilizing.
- *Global Misinformation Campaigns:* Mercenaries hired by India have been implicated in discrediting Pakistan internationally, as seen in the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) activities since 2014 (Mughal, 2021).

India's continuous engagement in psychological and non-conventional warfare has placed Pakistan in a precarious position. These tactics not only destabilize Pakistan but also risk escalating into a full-scale conflict, potentially leading to devastating consequences for the entire region (Mirza & Babar, 2021).

Psychological Operations and International Law

Psychological warfare has been a part of armed conflicts throughout history, with different civilizations developing their interpretations of the concept. Western militaries view psychological operations (PSYOP) as tools of influence and communication designed to shape the thoughts, behaviors, and perspectives of adversaries or civilian populations. In contrast, the Chinese military conceptualizes PSYOP as using specific information and media to influence behavior through deterrence, propaganda, and emotional guidance for strategic purposes. Similarly, the Russian military regards psychological warfare as a 'war of minds,' targeting the mental framework of adversaries. Non-state actors also employ psychological operations to achieve their objectives.

As the speed and range of PSYOP increase in the digital age, they pose significant concerns due to their potential impact on humanity. While International Humanitarian Law (IHL) permits the use of psychological operations within the bounds necessary for military objectives, it explicitly prohibits operations that harm civilians or target military personnel outside the scope of combat (Rodenhäuser, 2023).

Disinformation, Propaganda, and International Legal Frameworks

Disinformation and hate speech have historically been used by states during armed conflicts. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression has repeatedly raised concerns about these practices. IHL addresses psychological operations and information warfare through two primary frameworks:

1. *Lawful Use of Misinformation:* IHL permits the use of specific misinformation as a tactic of war but prohibits propaganda and pressure targeting civilians to achieve voluntary objectives. The distinction between lawful and unlawful propaganda is crucial, as lawful propaganda may promote peace, whereas unlawful propaganda can incite violence.

2. *Impact-Based Rules*: IHL focuses on the effects of psychological warfare and mandates adherence to five key rules to minimize harm to humanity:
   - Avoid actions compelling individuals to violate IHL prohibitions.
   - Maintain loyalty to lawful tactics of war.
   - Prohibit threats and terror against soldiers and civilians.
   - Prevent inhumane treatment that violates dignity, such as exposing prisoners of war for public curiosity.
   - Protect medical and humanitarian personnel and ensure the free conduct of relief operations (Rodenhäuser, 2023).

Psychological operations are not classified as 'attacks' under IHL, as their non-physical nature does not always result in direct violence. However, Additional Protocol I requires states to limit PSYOP to military objectives and protect civilian populations from harm. Article 48 of the protocol emphasizes the distinction between civilians and combatants, and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) clarifies that PSYOP should exclude ideological, political, or religious motives, focusing solely on combat-related objectives (Dunlap, 2000).

Way Forward

To establish robust checks and balances, Pakistan must develop institutions capable of combating cyber warfare and disinformation tactics. While the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) has been in effect since 2016, it requires enhancement and revisions to address contemporary challenges. A comprehensive National Information Operations Policy should also be devised and made public, with collaboration between the Ministry of Information Technology (MoIT), the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA), the Pakistan National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA), and relevant defense committees.

This policy must include measures to prevent the domestic use of political propaganda via journalists and social media. To achieve this, new regulations tailored to the digital age should guarantee media independence and promote constructive journalism. Alongside domestic legislation, fostering ethical awareness is crucial to limiting the misuse of social media and the internet. Rather than adopting a fragmented approach, stakeholders—including legislators, armed forces, think tanks, and citizens—should collaborate to project a cohesive nationalist image. Media outlets

should adopt better narratives to adhere to regulations, avoid fear-mongering content, and present an accurate portrayal of Pakistan through international frameworks.

Additionally, it is essential to improve analogies between Hindutva ideology and other forms of extremism, such as terrorism and Nazism. Extremist ideologies, whether rooted in religious fundamentalism or political agendas, must be treated equally. To counter Indian propaganda, intelligence agencies, and response units must devise strategies to process and manage genuine information effectively while leveraging expert opinions and public sentiment (Saud & Kazim, 2022).

For the Pakistan Army, it is imperative that the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) actively develop themes and perspectives to rebuild its image as a vital pillar of national security. This can be achieved through the effective utilization of electronic and print media. In the era of information warfare, where limiting the spread of news or information is nearly impossible, the focus should shift to minimizing damage rather than attempting to suppress information or resorting to reactive measures.

Addressing Electromagnetic Warfare
The advent of advanced technology, such as E-bombs capable of paralyzing a state's military communication through massive electromagnetic waves, poses a significant threat. Pakistan must prioritize developing and implementing Transient Electromagnetic Pulse Emanations Standards (TEMPEST) to counter such attacks. Additionally, Pakistan needs to centralize its cyber network and bolster its capacity to counter offensive tactics, particularly those emanating from India (Khan, 2012).

Incorporating Cybersecurity in Education
Improvements in education must complement support for technical advancements. Cybersecurity principles should be incorporated into educational curricula to prepare a workforce equipped to combat modern threats. Emphasis should be placed on intangible domains, as non-kinetic warfare cannot be entirely avoided but must be mitigated. Furthermore, policies must discourage propagandists, journalists, and political actors from misusing media for personal or political gain.

Using smart bots could help Pakistan enhance its social media presence and project a more positive image. Training think tanks, media organizations, and other institutions to promote constructive narratives is essential for countering negative portrayals of Pakistan. Social media should also be leveraged to advocate for good governance, foster a positive reputation, and combat corruption. Addressing socioeconomic disparities is equally important to reduce the vulnerability of marginalized communities to manipulation by adversaries. Empowered communities are less likely to succumb to narratives suggesting their rights have been infringed.

Raising Awareness and Promoting Media Literacy
Raising media literacy among educators, businesses, technological institutions, and the media industry is critical. Awareness programs and university conferences should focus on identifying risky websites and advertisements often used by identity thieves and scammers. These efforts should also target cyberbullying and other cybercrimes at their source. Public awareness campaigns must highlight the risks of information security breaches and the dangers of opening suspicious links or websites (Saud & Kazim, 2022).

Analysis

Pakistan and India have a long history of conflict, repeatedly approaching the brink of full-scale war. Each confrontation heightens concerns about the potential failure of deterrence in South Asia, particularly as both nations continue to conduct periodic missile tests. These actions underscore the dual impact of such advancements on military and civilian spheres, which cannot be overlooked.

Following the development of nuclear weapons programs in both states, the prospect of direct conflict diminished, giving way to psychological warfare (Psywar). Substantial evidence of Psywar tactics employed by both countries, often linked to traditional and modern forms of media, exists. The media, particularly mass media, has become a weapon in this context, enabling the dissemination of targeted content to achieve specific objectives.

Despite avoiding full-scale war, both nations remain in a tense standoff, perpetuating regional instability. This persistent threat of conflict exacerbates uncertainty in South Asia, making establishing peace exceptionally challenging. The disputes between Pakistan and India are deeply rooted in issues of identity and power dynamics, which both administrations have consistently demonstrated.

Historically, the conflict has oscillated between overt warfare on the battlefield and covert hostilities manifested through psychological operations. This ongoing engagement in Psywar further complicates the prospects for peace, highlighting the entrenched animosities and complex dynamics that define the relationship between these two adversarial states.

Conclusion

PSYOPs have transcended their traditional role within conventional military settings, gaining prominence in both war and peace. These operations have garnered support from advocates and neutral communities. Investments in understanding the psychological influence on populations have led to developing advanced techniques to refine and enhance their application. During the interwar years, manipulation methods became widely recognized, and the advancement of psychological sciences significantly influenced societal norms, organizational processes, and collective thought.

In the modern era, Neo-imperialism posits that powerful states wield control over the minds and behaviors of other societies, eliminating the need for direct territorial control. Psychological warfare has become an everyday reality, shaping mental and behavioral patterns not only in the West but globally. The tactics used by India to undermine Pakistan's sovereignty and national interests extend beyond PSYOP, encompassing advanced technologies, nuclear arms races, logistics, support for terrorist organizations, intelligence operations, deception, and propaganda.

The misuse of propaganda involves manipulating public opinion through media, leveraging the principles of public relations and psychology. Psychological warfare operates through propaganda as its medium and communication as its content, with the primary objective being to persuade the target audience with carefully crafted messages. Modern media, with its ability to target specific groups or individuals precisely, is a powerful tool in this domain.

Artificial intelligence, in particular, has transformed perceptions across South Asia and amplified regional tensions. Intelligence agencies are instrumental in achieving this precision by collecting data on target audiences, thereby increasing the

psychological impact on adversaries. However, these strategies also heighten the risk of unintended conflicts by provoking responses from opposing forces.

Addressing the evolving fronts in the Indo-Pak rivalry, including psychological warfare and its associated technologies, is crucial to mitigating these risks and achieving regional stability. Effectively managing these issues fosters peace and reduces South Asian tensions.

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