

PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE – DEFENCE

NEWS: Pakistan is indulging in psychological warfare with the spread of misinformation across social media platforms aimed at misrepresenting India's military actions and preparedness.

And, the PIB fact-check unit reviewed widely circulated fake videos and claims, allegedly originating from Pakistani social media handles.

WHATS' IN THE NEWS?

Definition and Core Concept

- **Psychological Warfare (PsyWar):**
It refers to the deliberate and strategic use of propaganda and psychological operations (PSYOPs) to manipulate the perceptions, emotions, reasoning, and behaviour of target groups—often adversaries—in order to gain a tactical or strategic advantage.
- **Purpose:**
The goal is not just physical defeat, but psychological domination—breaking the enemy's will to resist, sowing confusion, creating division, or lowering morale without direct confrontation.

Key Methods of Psychological Warfare

- **Propaganda:**
 - Involves dissemination of biased, exaggerated, or misleading content intended to glorify one side and vilify the opponent.
 - Often takes the form of posters, broadcasts, speeches, or digital campaigns to shape public opinion in favour of the propagating side.
- **Fear and Intimidation:**
 - Utilises threats, demonstrations of overwhelming force, or violent imagery to instill fear in opponents or civilian populations.
 - The intent is to create psychological fatigue and weaken resistance through panic or hopelessness.
- **Misinformation and Deception:**
 - Involves spreading false or manipulated information about troop movements, capabilities, or strategic intent.

- Aims to mislead enemy leadership and force misallocation of their resources.
- Disruption of Decision-Making:
- Targets the command and control systems of the adversary by creating confusion, distrust, or delays in the leadership chain.
- May involve fake orders, planted messages, or psychological manipulation of commanders.

Common Tactics and Tools

- Leaflets and Loudspeaker Broadcasts:
Used to directly reach enemy soldiers or civilians with messages intended to demoralise, convince surrender, or incite doubt about their leadership.
- Cyber PSYOPs:
- Modern psychological operations involve social media manipulation, hacking, deepfakes, and fake news, aimed at creating internal unrest or distrust in institutions.
- Target both domestic and international audiences.
- Rumours and Whisper Campaigns:
- Spread subtle, unverifiable disinformation designed to undermine social cohesion, trust in authorities, or morale—difficult to trace but highly effective in closed environments.
- False Flag Operations:
- Involves conducting deceptive acts disguised as the work of another group, to mislead or provoke targeted responses and confuse attribution.

Historical Examples of Psychological Warfare

- World War II (1939–1945):
- The Allied forces dropped millions of leaflets over Axis territories to erode troop morale and encourage surrender.
- Germany's "Lord Haw-Haw" radio broadcasts were designed to demoralise British soldiers and civilians.
- Cold War Era (1947–1991):
- Both the United States and the USSR engaged in massive propaganda battles via radio, print, and covert media to influence global public opinion.

- Cultural messaging, sponsored artists, and ideological broadcasts were common tools.

Modern Applications Beyond the Battlefield

- In Business:
 - Corporations may engage in aggressive public relations campaigns, leaking damaging information or circulating false narratives to discredit competitors and shape consumer behaviour.
- In Politics:
 - Political parties or candidates may deploy targeted disinformation, manipulated content, or emotional appeals to discredit opponents and sway voters, especially via digital media platforms.
- In Interpersonal Settings:
 - Tactics like gaslighting, emotional manipulation, or covert intimidation are forms of psychological warfare used to control or dominate others in abusive relationships or toxic environments

Countermeasures and Government Response in India

- PIB Fact Check Initiative:
 - The Press Information Bureau (PIB) has established a fact-checking unit to actively identify, debunk, and report fake news or misleading content circulating online and in mainstream media.
- Advisory to the Public:
 - The government has urged citizens to trust only verified sources, such as official government portals, helpline numbers, or authenticated news outlets.
 - The public has been advised not to forward unverified content on messaging platforms, especially during times of crisis or unrest.
- Fighting Misinformation on Social Media:
 - The government is increasingly relying on digital surveillance, reporting mechanisms, and public awareness campaigns to counter cyber-PSYOPs and maintain social harmony.

Conclusion and Way Forward

- As information becomes a powerful tool of both empowerment and manipulation, psychological warfare poses significant risks to national security, social cohesion, and individual well-being.
- A multi-layered approach involving public education, digital hygiene, and robust institutional response is necessary to counter its evolving forms.
- Citizens must act responsibly, critically evaluate information, and resist emotional manipulation to preserve democratic integrity and mental resilience.

Source: <https://www.businesstoday.in/amp/india/story/psychological-warfare-govt-debunks-pakistani-disinformation-on-missile-drone-attacks-on-jalandhar-amritsar-475445-2025-05-09>