

Review Articles and Book Reviews

Grey Zone Warfare: Way Ahead for India

Lieutenant General Dushyant Singh, PVSM, AVSM (Retd)

Introduction

Grey Zone has become the preferred choice of countries to secure their national interests due to its low cost and deniability. The book 'Grey Zone Warfare: Way Ahead for India' written by Lieutenant General Dushyant Singh has attempted to demystify the grey zone and examined the way countries are indulging in this as well as highlighted the threats being faced by India. Warfare has changed and technology has been the prime driver of change, in a widened spectrum where the dimensionality is expanding to include multiple domains, as the distinctions between war and peace are blurring. Terms such as political war, economic war, cyber war, lawfare, information war fourth and fifth generation war, irregular war, proxy war and hybrid war are now all part of the lexicon. The book, while examining the complexity of this form of warfare also suggests the level and nature of response and has given out suggested structural changes in the security architecture.

About the Author

Lieutenant General Dushyant Singh, PVSM, AVSM was commissioned into 9 MARATHA Light Infantry in Dec 1981 and subsequently commanded the battalion. He has held numerous command, staff and instructional appointments and served in varied terrains including command of his Brigade and Division in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) and the prestigious 11 Corps in Punjab. An alumnus of the National Defence College, he attended the Defence Counter Terrorism Programme at the Naval Post Graduate School in the United States (US) where he specialised in terrorist operations and financing and has served twice in the National Security Guard. A scholar and prolific writer who headed the Army War College, is presently the Director General Centre for Land Warfare Studies.

Grey Zone Warfare: Way Ahead for India by Lieutenant General Dushyant Singh PVSM, AVSM (Retd), Pages 274, Price ₹ 1450/-, ISBN 978-81-19438-02-0, Vij Books.

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About the Book

The book has eight chapters and six appendices. The first Chapter talks about 'Grey Zone being the Emerging Frontier in War'. The author gives an example of the targeting of the Mumbai electricity grid, which started on 10 Oct 2020. He says that the "COVID-19 crisis complicated the grey zone conflict space with countries creating unproven narratives to play the blame game or to meet national interests". He further questions if "India's weak response in this domain and wonders whether it is due to idealism, a lack of capability or a lack of will by our national leadership".

In the Chapter 'Demystifying Grey Zone Warfare', the author states that 'The name is slightly misleading' as it is not a zone that can be defined geographically but owes its origin to a 'Colour-based Metaphor'. While explaining various terms, he says that the difference compared to 'Hybrid Warfare' is that it is a "State between war and peace where an aggressor aims to reap either political or territorial gains associated with overt military action without crossing the threshold of open warfare".

"War in the 21st Century is conducted at a roughly four-to-one ratio of non-military and traditional military tools and tactics" is a quote from General Gerasimov and, thereafter, the author tells us about 'Russia being an adept practitioner'. The six stages of the Gerasimov Doctrine are explained and an interesting dimension of the denial of the doctrine itself by Michael Kofman of the Wilson Centre. The author also gives examples of Russian action in the grey zone ranging from its 'Nuclear campaign to maintain a strategic advantage with the US' to expanding its influence across the globe. Russia 'Has played the grey zone with all instruments of statecraft'.

In chapter four, the author terms 'US the Subtle Player' and quotes a study by Lindsey O'Rourke, where he says that between 1947 and 1989, the US attempted 72 regime changes of which 64 were covert. Lately, they have been involved in the 'War on Terror' in Afghanistan and removing dictatorial regimes in Iraq and Libya. While overtly the reasons for intervention may seem simplistic, they were primarily linked to securing US interests. The activities range from proxy wars and economic coercion to information operations, the last of which have a major advantage of a 'Lack of Attributability'. This includes the media campaign launched against India to back which he has quoted articles from various US newspapers.

Quoting a maxim of Sun Tzu, 'Subdue the enemy without fighting', the author states that "The Dragon is not far Behind in the Grey World". Its 'Favoured tools being information operations' that include stifling criticism of the Chinese Communist Party by dissidents abroad. He states, "Unrestricted Warfare appears to be the overarching concept of conduct and 'The three-warfare strategy' is the means to operationalise this". The Peoples' Liberation Army Strategic Support Force is at the forefront of this, especially through its Network Systems Department. Quoting Colonel Xiangsui, he says, "All means will be in readiness, that information will be omnipresent and the battlefield will be everywhere. It means weapons and technology can be superimposed at will and the boundaries between military and non-military and war and peace will be destroyed". There are no rules, ethics or limits. The author says that "China considers India as its major challenger in regional dynamics, therefore, it aims at keeping India unsettled".

Chapter six is regarding Israel, who he calls the master of grey zone warfare, but it has a chink in its armour. Their grey zone warfare tactics largely target countries such as Lebanon, Syria and Iran as well as non-state actors such as Hamas and Hezbollah. Israel has consistently mixed its warfighting with grey zone actions. This includes assassinations and the book covers in detail the elimination of Mohsen Fakhriadeh, a nuclear scientist, by "A high tech computerised sharpshooter kitted with artificial intelligence and multiple camera eyes operated via a satellite". Though Israel did not claim the act, many believe they were responsible.

He also tells us how they carried out a cyber-attack disrupting the Iranian nuclear weapon development programme by the 'StuxNet' virus. However, he states that Israel has been constantly under attack in the information domain from the Palestine Liberation Organisation and Hamas. They then countered this with a concept named 'Hasbara' and this has been refined by a new policy that was more centralised and incorporated a greater number of social media platforms.

Chapters seven and eight are the essence of the book and give out the author's views on 'India's Challenges' and 'How it should organise itself'. While writing about the threats posed by China, the author states that "China perceives the Quadrilateral

Security Dialogue to be directly linked to its security interests so it is unlikely to escalate border skirmishes into a major conflict”, and is likely to continue playing in the grey zone by salami slicing and various other means including cyber-attacks, regime changes in India’s neighbourhood, Myanmar being a present case, information operations and leveraging countries against India, as was done by Nepal, raising the Lipulekh border dispute during the Galwan crisis.

Pakistan, he states is a ‘Past Master’ and has spent ‘Minuscule sums in terms of military and finances’ in waging a proxy war. Disproportionate outcomes below the threshold of war ‘Have consistently encouraged Pakistan to consistently resort to non-military goals to achieve its objectives’. Punjab and J&K stand out as examples and in the latter, they are using the diplomatic domain to make it a ‘Multi-lateral rather than bilateral issue’. The Inter-Services Intelligence, Pakistan’s intelligence agency, controls its terror groups which they use against India.

Strategic communication forms an important component of grey zone warfare. Social media and digital manipulation are the new tools of misinformation. Social media is the ‘Domain for the future’. He even gives out case studies including the Shaheen Bagh protest to support his argument.

At the core of information warfare is ‘Building a strong narrative’. He then goes on to suggest various communication strategies for social media, print media and traditional electronic media. Quoting Lieutenant General Ata Hasnain, he talks of the need to establish a body to handle information warfare, this was reinforced by Lieutenant General PS Rajeshwar who said, “If the handling of security related information domain is perceived as saddling the Information and Broadcasting Ministry with too many tasks, perhaps it’s time to look at a National Strategic Communication Authority”.

There is a need to evolve solutions both for offence and defence in the grey zone. A requirement of greater synergy is necessary between all components of the security architecture dovetailed with our foreign policy objectives. The whole nation’s approach to national security matters. However, there cannot be a traditionally laid down black-and-white document on the grey zone policy.

Comments

Due to the inherent advantages of operating in shades of grey, various nation-states are using it as a favoured tool to secure a strategy and the advent of technology has made it a preferred form of combat. There is no doubt that the way forward to tackle the grey zone threat is an 'All nations approach' which has been brought out by the author. This includes integrating all agencies dealing with the grey zone while at the same time not compromising on our stated stand of a rules-based international order.

Galwan was by far the most skilful grey zone activity of China. The Chinese are upset with India due to its stand on the spread of the Corona Virus, the abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A and the construction of the Leh-Darbuk-Shyok-DBO Road, decided to test the Indian resolve to defend its territory.

The book, which is meticulously researched is a work of scholarship whose arguments are backed by adequate references. It will be extremely useful to the practitioners and policymakers in the security fraternity in getting clarity on the complexities of grey zone warfare.

The ambiguity of grey zones will continue to be exploited at multiple levels by nations to overcome international laws and create an ambiguous world order. The challenge is how to preserve the values and rules of combat in an environment where 'There are no rules and nothing is forbidden'.

Major General Jagatbir Singh, VSM (Retd)