United Service Institution of India (USI)

'USI Gold Medal Essay Competition 2025'

Subject: Cognitive Warfare: India's Approach to Influencing Perception and Behaviour

Concept Note

1. Cognitive warfare targets the mind as the primary battlefield, influencing perceptions, decision-making, and behaviour. India is in the process of developing a comprehensive approach for countering these threats by leveraging strategic, technological, and cultural strengths. However, the lack of an institutionalised approach and fragmented strategies hinder its effectiveness.

2. India has been combating cognitive warfare for decades, primarily against its nuclear adversaries, Pakistan and China. Pakistan's Inter-Services Public Relations has executed Operation Influence, utilising advanced technologies and social media platforms to incite social strife and exploit societal fault lines. China's Public Works Department and Information Support Force are past masters in influence operations.

3. India's cognitive warfare strategy combines information operations, psychological ploys, and technological innovation, leveraging Artificial Intelligence (AI) and machine learning to counter disinformation, predict behaviours, and craft targeted messaging. With over 700 million internet users, India's digital ecosystem serves as a key battleground for both defensive and offensive cognitive tactics.

4. India needs to adopt a multi-layered cognitive warfare strategy across military, intelligence, cyber, and societal domains to effectively manage perceptions and counter adversarial influence. To address cognitive threats, India must integrate strategy, structures, systems, and skills into its military doctrine, adopting a whole-of-nation approach. Bharat must strengthen technological capabilities, information operations, and public-private partnership to counter cognitive threats. Investing in AI-driven analytics, cyber forensics, and machine learning will help detect and neutralise adversarial narratives. Enhancing strategic communication,

counterintelligence operations, and counter-propaganda will reinforce national security, while leveraging cultural diplomacy and digital literacy initiatives will bolster resilience against misinformation.

5.   India struggles to institutionalise cognitive warfare due to the lack of a centralised doctrine, coordination gaps, and weak legal frameworks. To address this, it must integrate cognitive warfare into military strategy, establish a task force, and enhance global cooperation. Strengthening indigenous technology, regulatory frameworks, and ethical AI-driven strategies is crucial for maintaining a strategic edge. A robust and adaptive approach will bolster national security and position India as a global leader in cognitive resilience and responsible information warfare. In addition, a holistic approach integrating technology, policy, and capacity-building is essential for securing India's information ecosystem and global influence.

6.   Suggested headings are given below:

(a) Introduction

(b) The Strategic Threat Landscape

(c) India's Cognitive Warfare Strategy

(d) Key Pillars of India's Cognitive Warfare Approach

(e) Challenges in Institutionalising Cognitive Warfare

(f)   The Way Forward: Strengthening India's Cognitive Warfare Capabilities

(g) Conclusion

Rules

7.   The competition is open to all **commissioned officers of the Armed Forces of India, officers of the Territorial Army, Assam Rifles, the Senior Division cadets of the National Cadet Corps, and Gazetted Officers of the Civil Administration in India including retired officers**.

8.   Essays must be between 3,000 and 4,000 words in length, including endnotes. The word count should be mentioned in brackets at the end of the essay. **Entries that do not specify**

the word count or exceed the prescribed limit are liable to be rejected.

9.   The essay must be an original work by the author. Proper citation of sources is mandatory in the prescribed format. **Jointly authored essays will not be accepted**. **Entries found guilty of blatant plagiarism will be disqualified, and disciplinary action may be recommended**.

10.   A panel of three judges appointed by the USI will evaluate the essays based on the following criteria:

(a)   The extent to which the essay provides **fresh insights** into the subject.

(b)   Whether the essay, in whole or in part, **is suitable for publication.**

(c)   Understanding of the subject.

(d)   **Logical development of the theme** and coherence of thought.

(e)   Quality of **language and expression.**

(f)   Proper use of footnotes and bibliography, as applicable. **Essays lacking footnotes or a bibliography will be rejected.**

11.   The decision of the judges will be final. They may recommend a **First Prize, which includes a Gold Medal, cash award of ₹ 15,000 and a certificate**, and a **Runner-up Prize, which includes a cash award of ₹ 10,000 and a certificate**. Winners will also receive **gratis Life Membership of the USI**. Additionally, the winning essay(s), if recommended by the judges, will be published in the USI Journal.

12.   The Institution reserves the right to withhold awards **if the submitted essays do not meet the required standard.**

13.   Copyright **of all submitted essays will remain with the** United Service Institution of India**.**

14.   Essays must be written in English, printed on one side of the paper, and double-spaced. Hard copies should be submitted in **triplicate**, along with a soft copy sent via email. **The essays will**

be evaluated only after receipt of both hard and soft copies to enable plagiarism check.

15.   All hard copies of the essays should be sent to the Director General, United Service Institution of India, Rao Tula Ram Marg, Post Bag No.8, Vasant Vihar PO, New Delhi - 110 057, with a submission deadline of **15 September 2025**. Soft copies must be emailed to **usiessaycompetition@gmail.com**. **The subject of the email should be the MOTTO which is defined in Paragraph 14 above. There should be No Signature Block in this email.** The email should just state '**My entry for the USI Gold Medal Essay Competition is attached'. Essays received after last date will not be accepted**. The envelopes should be clearly marked as.

16.   Hard copy submissions must remain **ANONYMOUS**, with no identifying details of the author included in the essay or the covering letter. The individual is to select a **MOTTO** (which should not be more than ten words) and type it on the first page of all the copies of his essay. One sealed envelope is to accompany the essay with a paper indicating the MOTTO, personal number, rank, name, date of commission and Unit Address (as applicable), e-mail and contact number of the individual written on it. On the outside of the envelope, only the MOTTO is to be written. These envelopes will be opened during the USI Council meeting, after the judges have given their decision. **Essays violating the anonymity rule will be rejected.**

17.   **For any queries or clarifications, please contact the** Director Editorial**, at** usiessaycompetition@gmail.com

Style Sheet

18. General

(a) Font style should be Arial, Size -12 (Font size 10 for endnotes), and Spacing- double.

(b) All diagrams, charts and graphs should be referred to as 'Figure/Table/Graph' and consecutively numbered. Tables should carry only essential data and should complement the text rather than repeat what has already been said. These should carry a short title, be numbered and carry the source at the bottom.

(c) The essay should have group, paragraph, and subparagraph headings to make it more reader-friendly. An introduction and a conclusion as group headings is a must. It must also have an abstract of about 150 to 200 words before the introduction.

(d) Use English (UK)/English (India) spellings.

(e) Write dates beginning with the day followed by the month and the year (e.g., 11 Sep 2014). Only the first three letters of a month should be written e.g., Jan, Feb, Sep.

(f) There should be no para numbering and only bullets must be used where required. Nothing should be underlined.

(g) In the text, write numbers in words till number nine and then in numerals (e.g., two, four, nine; then 10, 11, 12 and so on).

(h) Write 'per cent' and not % or percent.

(i) Acronyms and abbreviations should carry the full form at the first mention with the acronym in bracket; and thereafter use the abbreviated version. No need to create acronym if word is used once.

(j) Any text written in a language other than in English will be in italics with the meaning alongside in brackets.

(k) While referring to currency, use INR 2,000 cr, not 2000 crores of rupees. Similarly, USD 8.5 mn, not 8.5 million dollars. Currency will be mentioned as, Million-mn, Billion-bn, Crores-cr.

(l) For emphasis, the words should be written in single quotation marks for the first time only. The first letter will be in capital if only two words are written, white more than two words will only have the first letter of the first word capitalised.

(m) Statements by another person should be within double quotes. Punctuations mark should be within quotation mark, whereas full stop will be placed outside.

19. References/End Notes

(a) It is desirable that the author furnishes complete details of the articles/books/journals referred to in the article as endnotes. This includes full name of writer of article or book referred to, title of book/article, journal in which it was published (in case of articles); issue details, and page numbers. Besides end notes, if the author so desires, bibliography may also be included.

(b) While referring to a book, follow the example below:

Lt Gen CK Kapur, *Chinese Military Modernisation,* (New Delhi: Manas Publications, 2003), 17-18.

(c) While referring to an article in a journal, follow the example below:

Lt Cdr Neeraj Malhotra, "Pratap Singh of the Indian Legion". *The Journal of the United Service Institution of India,* Vol. CXXXIV, No. 556, p.283.

(d) While referring to a website, follow the example below: "Escalation Control in a Nuclear Environment", Report of a Seminar organised by the *Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies* on 17 Nov 2004 at New Delhi. Available at: www.ipcs.org. Accessed on 08 Feb 2005. Use of Wikipedia as reference must be avoided. Entries quoting Wikipedia as reference are liable to be penalised.

(e) If two successive citations/references refer to the same source, use Ibid.

(f) If the same reference is to be cited after a few other references or citations, write the name of the author followed by the citation number e.g.: Imran Khan, op. cit.

(g) The style sheet available at https://www.usiofindia.org/publications.php?category=7 can also be referred to.