

U.S.I. JOURNAL

INDIA'S OLDEST JOURNAL ON DEFENCE AFFAIRS



(Estd. 1870)

SPECIAL ISSUE

Current Conflicts in the World: Trends,
Lessons and Strategic Implications

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From Ukraine to Iran: The Déjà Vu of
Contemporary Conflict

A World of Persistent Conflicts: Trajectories,
Faultline, and India's Strategic Moment

This Madness Must Stop

United States' Air Defence in West Asia:
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Lieutenant General Kamal Davar,
AVSM (Retd)

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VM (Retd)

Vol CLVI

APRIL-JUNE 2026

No 644

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USI Latest Publications: 2025-2026

Pub Code	Type	Title of Publication and Author	Price ₹	Year
M-5/2026	Monograph	CERTIFICATION OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN AVIATION: GLOBAL APPROACHES, CHALLENGES AND ROADMAP FOR INDIA WITH FOCUS ON THE INDIAN AVIATION by Air Cmde Mukhvinder Pal Singh Virk & Sumedh Singh Virk USI of India	350	2026
M-4/2026	Monograph	FROM COMBAT SUPPORT TO COMBAT ARM: A STRATEGIC REAPPRAISAL OF THE CORPS OF SIGNALS. By Lieutenant General SRR Aiyengar, PVSM, AVSM, VSM (Retd) USI of India	350	2026
SYB/2026	Year Book	STRATEGIC YEAR BOOK 2026. Edited by Major General Sanjeev Chowdhry (Retd), Komal Chaudhary, Vinayak Sharma, Richa Sharma M/s Sabre & Quill	2199	2026
B-4/2026	Book	CRACKS IN THE CRESCENT AN APPRAISAL OF PAKISTAN'S ENDURING FAULTLINES by Colonel Suraj Chambial, SM M/s Pentagon Press	995	2026
B-3/2026	Book	THE ALGORITHM OF WAR CODE COMPUTE CONQUER: INSIGHT FOR INDIAN ARMY'S NEXT LEAP by Colonel Parthasarthy, VSM M/s Pentagon Press	1495	2026
B-2/2026	Book	DUAL – USE INFRASTRUCTURE IN INDIA: CIVIL MILITARY FUSION FOR STRATEGIC INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT by Colonel Vijay Goyat M/s Sabre & Quill	999	2026
B-1/2026	Book	ARTHASHASTRA FOR THE AI AGE : A CHANAKYAN BLUEPRINT FOR INDIA'S TECHNOLOGICAL SOVEREIGNTY. by Commander V. Srivatsan M/s Sabre & Quill	999	2026
OP-2/2026	Occasional Paper	THE ESTABLISHMENT OF PAX SINICA by Mr Vinayak Sharma, Ms Komal Chaudhary USI of India	250	2026
OP-1/2026	Occasional Paper	A COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION OF EFFECTIVENESS AND LIMITATIONS OF SANCTIONS AS A TOOL OF COUNTER TERRORISM by Srinivas Rao Cheruku, Major General Pawan Anand, AVSM, PhD (Retd) USI of India	250	2026
M-3/2026	Monograph	COGNITIVE WARFARE BY CHINA AND INDIA'S RESPONSE by Maj Gen BK Sharma, AVSM, SM** (Retd) and Maj Gen Sanjeev Chowdhry (Retd) USI of India	350	2026
M-2/2026	Monograph	SPACE RESOURCES: THE ARTEMIS ACCORDS, INTERNATIONAL LUNAR RESEARCH STATION, AND OPTIONS FOR INDIA by Air Mshl R Radhish, PVSM, AVSM, VM (Retd) USI of India	350	2026
M-1/2026	Monograph	USI ANNUAL UN FORUM 2025: ADVANCING PEACEKEEPING AND HUMANITARIAN IMPERATIVE IN A FRAGMENTED WORLD edited by Maj Gen PK Goswami, VSM (Retd), Maj Gen AK Bardalai, VSM, PhD (Retd) and Col KK Sharma, PhD (Retd) USI of India	350	2026
Adm/SYB-2025*	Year Book	STRATEGIC YEAR BOOK 2025; Editor-in-Chief: Maj Gen BK Sharma, AVSM, SM** (Retd); edited by Maj Gen Sanjeev Chowdhry (Retd), Ms Komal Chaudhary, Mr Vinayak Sharma, and Ms Richa Sharma M/s Pentagon Press	2,950	2025
Adm-1/2025	Book	MODERN CONFLICTS AND CHANGING CHARACTER OF WARFARE: IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA edited by Maj Gen Sanjeev Chowdhry (Retd), Col Deepak Kumar, Ms Komal Chaudhary, Mr Vinayak Sharma and Ms Richa Sharma M/s Pentagon Press	995	2025
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CMHCS-9	Book	WAR-WOUNDED DISABLED SOLDIERS AND CADETS-A REPORT by Mrs Meghna Girish USI of India	-	2025
CMHCS	Book	WE TOO WERE THERE: INDIANS AT GALLIPOLI by Col Tejinder Hundal, VSM, PhD M/s Manohar Publishers & Distributors	3,195	2025
CS3/R-121/2025	Book	CIVIL-MILITARY FUSION AS A METRIC OF NATIONAL POWER AND COMPREHENSIVE SECURITY by Lt Gen Raj Shukla, PVSM, YSM, SM (Retd) M/s Pentagon Press	695	2025

U.S.I. JOURNAL



Published by Authority of the Council

Postal Address

Rao Tula Ram Marg, (opposite Signals Enclave)
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Vasant Vihar PO, New Delhi-110057

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IVRS: 87006-92369

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Fax:	+91-11-2086-2324
Website:	www.usiofindia.org

The USI Journal is a peer-reviewed publication, published quarterly in Apr, Jul, Oct, and Jan. Subscription per annum w.e.f. 01 Jan 2016: In India ₹ 1,100.00. Postage extra (by Speed Post: ₹ 320/- for four issues). Subscription should be sent through Bank Draft/Local/Multicity Cheque in favour of Director General, United Service Institution of India. Articles, correspondence, and books for review should be sent to the Director, Centre for Publications and Library. Advertisement enquiries should be addressed to the Director Administration. Overseas annual subscription (By Air Mail) - £50 or US \$80

United Service Institution of India <i>For</i> <i>the furtherance of interest and knowledge in the art, science, and literature of</i> <i>national security in general and of the defence services in particular</i>		
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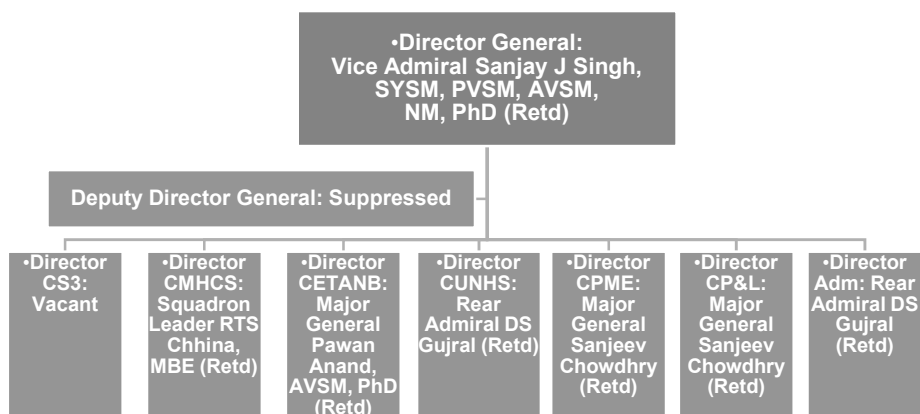
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1.	Auditorium (Capacity 300 Persons)	₹50,000	₹30,000	₹70,000	₹45,000
2.	SR-1 (Capacity 90 Persons)	₹30,000	₹20,000	₹50,000	₹35,000
3.	SR-2 (Capacity 30 Persons)	₹22,000	₹15,000	₹30,000	₹20,000
4.	SR-3 (Capacity 16 Persons)	₹15,000	₹10,000	NA	NA
5.	Banquet Hall	₹20,000	₹10,000	₹30,000	₹20,000
6.	Lawn Front	₹35,000		₹50,000	
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Notes:

- (a) Service Rate: Ministry of Defence, Service Events, Government Organisations, USI Members, USI Licensees.
- (b) Non-Service Rate: Other than Government Organisations.
- (c) For every additional hour: 10 per cent of booking charges will be levied per hour.
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- Single copy - ₹ 300/- plus ₹ 80/- postal/packing charges
- Yearly subscription - ₹ 1,100/- plus ₹ 320/- postal packing charges (four issues)
- Overseas annual subscription (By Air Mail) – GBP 50 or USD 80
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Courses Run by the USI of India: Centre for Professional Military Education (CPME)

1. The USI conducts USI DSSC Aspire- One Course and correspondence courses for Defence Services Staff College (DSSC)- Army, Navy and Air Force (IAF) and Defence Services Technical Staff Course (DSTSC) – Army Entrance Examinations and Promotion Examinations Parts B and D.
2. The Courses have been remodelled to make it more interactive, and the admission procedure has been simplified to make it user friendly.
3. Membership of the USI is mandatory to join any correspondence course and Aspire One.
4. Schedule of Correspondence Courses 2026.
5. Course Schedules:

Course	Commencement of Course	Date of Exam	Cost All Subjects	Cost per Subject
DSSC (Army)	Second Week of Nov 2025 Registration open for 2026	Sep 2026	₹ 9,000/-	Tactics B - ₹ 3,000/ Current Affairs and Military History – ₹ 2,000/- (each) Science and Military Technology – ₹ 1,500/- Tactics A – ₹ 1,300/- Administration and Military Law – ₹ 1,200/-
DSSC (Navy)	Fourth Week of Mar 2026 Registration open for 2026	Jul 2026	-	Paper 1 – ₹ 3,000/- (Current Affairs, Military/Naval History and Maritime Strategy)
DSSC (IAF)	Second Week of Dec 2025 Registration open for 2026	Jul 2026	-	Correspondence Course Military History – ₹ 3,000/- Current Affairs – ₹ 3,000/- Online Course Current Affairs – ₹ 4,000/- Refer to Prospectus available on the USI website for other details
Part B	Second Week of Jan 2026 Registration open for 2026	Jun to Jul 2026	₹ 3,000/-	Tactics, Current Affairs and Military History – ₹ 1,000/- Administration and Military law – ₹ 800/-
Part D	Fourth Week of Apr 2026 Registration open for 2026	Oct 2026	₹ 4,000/-	Tactics, Current Affairs and Military History – ₹ 1,500/- Administration and Military law – ₹ 1,000/-

6. **Contact Programs.** Two contact programs for DSSC/DSTSC (Army)-2025 have been planned. Dates are: CP-I 15-20 Jun 2026 and CP-III 13 to 18 Jul 2026. Separate test papers will be set for each programme. Fees - ₹ 7,000/- per contact programme and ₹ 3,500/- only for material of each contact program.
7. **USI Aspire One** from 01-13 Dec 2025 for all subjects with sample paper will be conducted online. These aspects are also applicable for IAF officers for CA (leg only)
8. Correspondence courses for Special to Corps subjects are not conducted.
9. **Mode of Payment.** Multicity cheque or bank draft payable at New Delhi in favour of Director General USI of India or Net Banking/UPI QR code. Bank details are available on website.
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See USI website : www.usiofindia.org for complete details and form			

§(For 3 years commencing on approval of membership)

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Articles for USI Journal

Style Sheet

The United Service Institution of India (USI) Journal invites original and unpublished research articles on subjects related to national security, defence, and military history. Articles should not exceed 3,000 words and must be submitted as a Word document via email to direditorial@usiofindia.org. Each submission should include an abstract amounting to no more than 10 per cent of the article length. The article must be organised in group and paragraph headings and include an Introduction and Conclusion. The author must certify that the article has not been published or submitted elsewhere. The Director Editorial reserves the right to edit the manuscript.

All references should be provided as endnotes with complete bibliographic details; a separate bibliography is optional. Articles must be typed in Arial, font size 12, and use English (UK)/English (India). Symbols such as %, &, etc. should be avoided unless essential. Dates should follow the format 24 Jun 2020, and all abbreviations must be spelled out at first use. The end notes must follow the format of Chicago style. Other details are given at <https://usiofindia.org/publications.php?category=7>.

Submissions must be accompanied by the author's full name, postal address, and a short curriculum vitae of four to five sentences. Serving officers are required to follow relevant publication regulations prior to submission.

On publication, contributors will receive a copy of the journal, three offprints, and a suitable honorarium.

Additions to the USI Library for the Quarter Ending Jun 2026

During this period a total of **32** new books have been added. Details of the new books are available on the USI Website.

Research Projects

Members interested in undertaking research projects may submit research proposals to the USI (CS3/CMHCS/CETANB). At present, ten Chairs of Excellence have been instituted in CS3; namely, the Field Marshal KM Cariappa Chair, Admiral RD Katari Chair, Air Marshal Subroto Mukherjee Chair, Professor DS Kothari Chair, Ministry of External Affairs Chair, Flying Officer Amandeep Singh Gill Chair, General Bipin Rawat Chair, Lieutenant General PS Bhagat Chair, Bhawanipur Education Society College Chair, Assam Rifles Chair, Abhay Tripathi Chair and Gandhi Mandela Chair. There are three Chairs in CMHCS; namely, the Maharana Pratap Chair, the Chhatrapati Shivaji Chair and the USI-War Wounded Foundation Chair. Copies of the Rules for Award of Fellowship Grants and Conduct of Research are available on the USI Website.

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During the period Apr-Jun 2026, 13 registered as new Life Members; 02 have renewed Ordinary Membership and 252 registered as new Ordinary Members.

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During Apr-Jun 2026, 142 Officers registered for Course Membership.

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Four Consecutive Half Pages	₹ 5,000/-	₹ 44,000/-

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From the Desk of the Director, Centre for Publications and Library

It is my privilege to present the Apr–Jun 2026 edition of the United Service Institution of India (USI) Journal. This special issue focuses on the theme ‘Current Conflicts in the World: Trends, Lessons and Strategic Implications’ and examines the rapidly evolving character of contemporary warfare through the lens of ongoing conflicts across Europe, West Asia, the Indo-Pacific, and the wider global environment. The contributions in this edition collectively reflect the growing complexity of modern conflict, where traditional military competition increasingly intersects with emerging technologies, cognitive warfare, economic coercion, information operations, and geopolitical realignment.

The contemporary security environment is marked by persistent instability, expanding grey-zone competition, and growing uncertainty regarding deterrence, escalation control, and technological superiority. The wars in Ukraine and West Asia have demonstrated that while technology continues to alter the methods and speed of warfare, the enduring nature of conflict—centred around political will, considered adaptation, and national infrastructural resilience—remains unchanged. The articles in this issue examine these developments from operational, doctrinal, technological, geopolitical, and socio-politically deliberate perspectives, offering important lessons for India’s national security and defence preparedness.

The issue opens with an insightful article by Lieutenant General Ghanshyam Singh Katoch, PVSM, AVSM, VSM (Retd), titled *From Ukraine to Iran: The Déjà Vu of Contemporary Conflict*. The article argues that although the appearance of war changes with technology, the fundamental nature of conflict remains constant, astutely cautioning against mistaking technological innovation for transformation in the enduring character of warfare. The second article, *A World of Persistent Conflicts: Trajectories, Faultline, and India’s Strategic Moment*, by Lieutenant General Rajeev Chaudhry, VSM (Retd), examines the interconnected nature of contemporary conflicts and assesses the implications for India’s strategic

environment, including maritime security, supply-chain vulnerabilities, and India's role in an evolving multipolar order.

Lieutenant General Kamal Davar, AVSM (Retd), in the third article, *This Madness Must Stop*, analyses the ongoing conflict involving the United States, Israel, and Iran, highlighting the dangers of escalation, energy insecurity, and instability in West Asia, along with the broader implications for India's strategic interests. Air Vice Marshal Prashant Mohan, VM (Retd), in *United States' Air Defence in West Asia: Operational Shortcomings*, the fourth article in this edition, analyses the expanding West Asian conflict and its implications for regional stability. The article highlights the evolving character of warfare marked by drones, missiles, and stand-off engagements, while assessing the implications for India's security and diplomatic posture.

Brigadier Dinesh Mathur's (Retd) article *The West Asia Conflict: Its Perspectives and Lessons for India* highlights the strategic implications of ongoing regional conflicts and reinforces the importance of strategic autonomy, energy security, cyber resilience, and integrated national preparedness. Next, Professor Amit Gupta's *Lessons from the Iran Conflict* examines how low-cost drones, missiles, and decentralised systems are altering the economics and character of warfare, while also highlighting the growing significance of economic warfare and information operations within conflict ecologies.

Colonel DCS Mayal, PhD (Retd), in his article *Sri Lanka as China's Human Intelligence Hub: The Four Global Initiatives Facade in the Indian Ocean Region*, analyses how China's global initiatives are being leveraged to expand deliberate influence and intelligence penetration in the Indian Ocean Region through political, economic, and societal engagement grounded in Sri Lanka. Next, Group Captain Brijesh Shukla's article, *Missiles, Drones, and Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance Fusion in Current Conflicts: Lessons for India's Air Defence, Deterrence, and Escalation Management*, analyses lessons emerging from recent conflicts in West Asia and Ukraine to highlight how the integration of drones, precision missiles, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, and electronic warfare is reshaping deterrence and escalation

dynamics. Specifically, the article examines the implications for India's air defence architecture, operational preparedness, and strategic posture in an increasingly contested security environment.

The transformative impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and algorithmic warfare is explored in Commander V Srivatsan's (Retd) article *Algorithmic Doctrinal Reinforcement: Mitigating Strategic Blindness in Artificial Intelligence-Enabled Warfare*. The article highlights the risks of doctrinal rigidity in AI-enabled decision-making and argues for adaptive and cognitively flexible military systems. In the final article of the journal, *From Exquisite Platforms to Attritable Mass: Rethinking India's Defence-Industrial Preparedness*, Lieutenant Colonel Nikhil Srivastava (Retd) examines the shift from expensive high-end military platforms toward low-cost, autonomous, and mass-produced systems, highlighting the importance of indigenous defence-industrial preparedness and technological resilience.

This issue also carries the winning entry of the USI-War Wounded Foundation Joint-Essay Competition, *Courage and Resilience: Personal Journeys of War-Wounded Achievers*, by Commander Abhishek Verma, which highlights inspiring stories of resilience, rehabilitation, and continued service among war-wounded veterans of the Indian Armed Forces.

The Archives section features *The Influence and Application of Sea Power on Expeditions Based on India* by Major GF Macmunn, DSO, RFA. The article is a historical reflection on the enduring importance of maritime power and sea control to India's national security.

The edition concludes with three important and thought-provoking book reviews that collectively examine themes of cognitive warfare, military leadership, and artillery operations in contemporary conflicts. Lieutenant General RS Panwar, AVSM, SM, VSM, PhD (Retd), reviews *Cognitive Battlespace: War in the Human Dimension* by Lieutenant General SRR Aiyengar, PVSM, AVSM, VSM (Retd) and Chandra Nath, a work that explores the growing centrality of perception management, information influence, and the human mind as a domain of warfare in the modern strategic environment.

In the next review, Major General Sudhakar Jee, VSM (Retd) presents an analysis on *China's Colonial Games in Tibet*, edited by Vijay Kranti. The volume is a comprehensive study on the political, cultural, religious, environmental, and strategic dimensions of Tibet under Chinese rule, drawing on contributions from 39 experts. He regards this book as a significant and thought-provoking work that highlights issues of cultural preservation, human rights, religious freedom, and environmental security in Tibet. Finally, Major General Sanjeev Chowdhry (Retd) reviews *Artillery's Thunder: The Untold Kargil Story* by Major General Lakhwinder Singh, YSM, a detailed study of the decisive role played by artillery during the Kargil Conflict and its enduring operational and strategic lessons for contemporary warfare. Each of these reviews seeks to enrich professional military education and contribute meaningfully to ongoing strategic and doctrinal discourse.

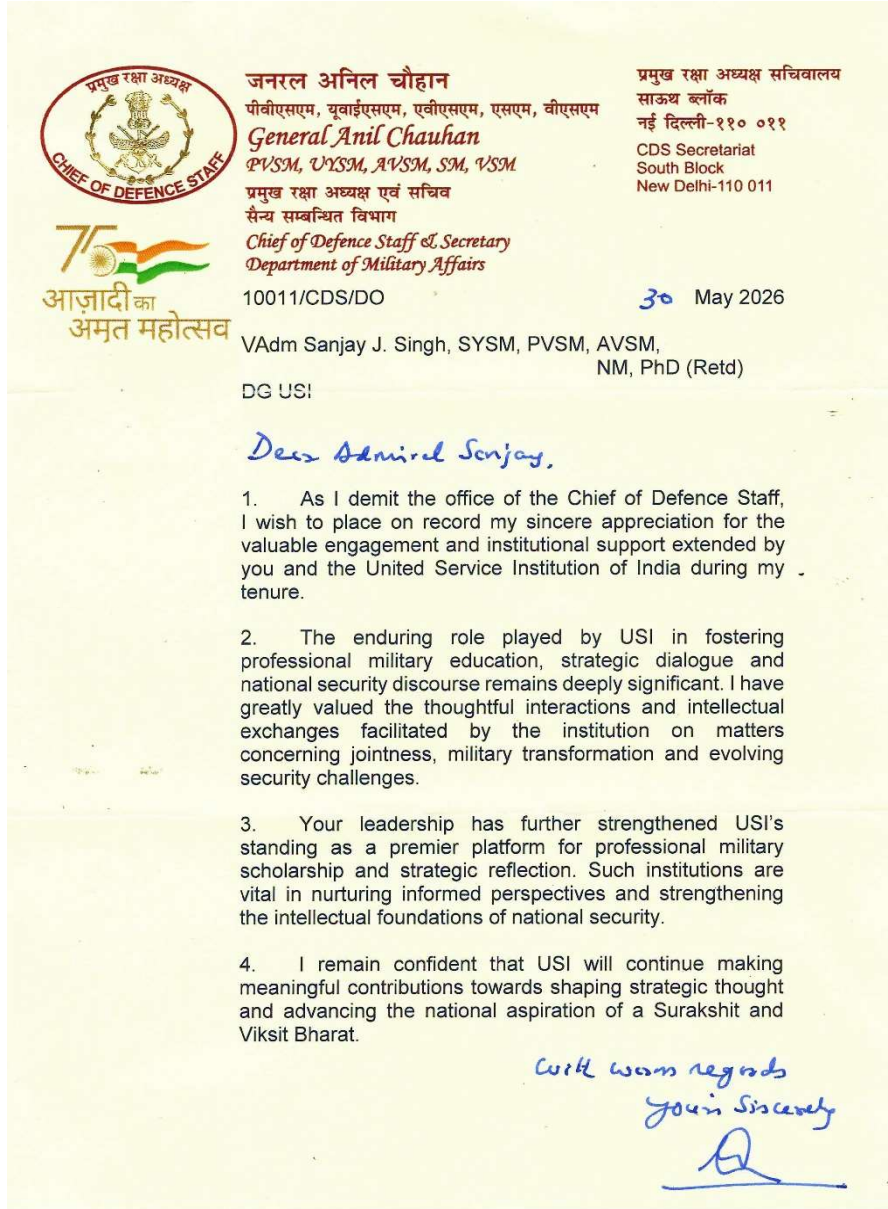
Taken together, the contributions in this issue underscore a central reality: the convergence of kinetic warfare, cyber operations, information conflict, AI, and cognitive contestation demands new approaches to strategic thought and defence planning. For India, the lessons emerging from current conflicts are immediate and consequential, reinforcing the need for jointness, technological self-reliance, integrated national power, and sustained foresight.

The Editorial Board hopes that this special issue will stimulate informed debate, contribute to professional military education, and encourage deeper reflection on the operational lessons emerging from contemporary conflicts. We remain grateful to all contributors, reviewers, and readers for their continued support and engagement with the Journal.

Happy Reading!

Major General Sanjeev Chowdhry (Retd)
Director, Centre for Publications and Library

Letter by General Anil Chauhan, PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, SM, VSM, Chief of Defence Staff and Secretary, Department of Military Affairs, to United Service Institution of India.



From Ukraine to Iran: The Déjà vu of Contemporary Conflict

Lieutenant General Ghanshyam Singh Katoch,
PVSM, AVSM, VSM (Retd)[®]

Abstract

War evolves in appearance but not in essence. From ancient sieges to modern drone strikes, the constants of violence, deception, attrition, and survival remain unchanged. Technology alters the tools—catapults become missiles, coded messages become cyber warfare—but strategies of encirclement, psychological pressure, and alliance building persist. Conflicts in Ukraine and West Asia seem novel due to drones and precision weapons, yet they echo timeless patterns. To mistake innovation for transformation is to ignore history's lessons. Recognising continuity prevents costly, knee-jerk force changes and reminds the world that war remains a contest of wills, fought with whatever means societies possess at that point in time.

Introduction

The major conflicts going on in the world, as of writing this article, are between Russia and Ukraine, in Lebanon and Gaza between Israel and Hezbollah– Hamas, and in the Gulf region between the United States (US)–Israel and Iran, supported symbolically by some Houthis and Iraqi Shia militias. They stood on the head of many assumptions which emerged based upon past conflicts and the 'Rules-based' nature of war imposed by the dominant liberal state post-World War II (WW II). But are these any different from past wars?

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Journal of the United Service Institution of India, Vol. CLVI, No. 644, April-June 2026.

Human beings interpret history through the lens of their own time. What they grew up with feels natural, so they project it backwards for a century or two as the baseline for 'Normal' because of cognitive biases like presentism and generational anchoring.¹ The most vivid and accessible examples of war come from one's own lifetime and recent history. This makes them seem like the default. Each generation tends to view the way wars are waged from their own or their father's or grandfather's generation and this becomes a stable reference point—close enough to be remembered, distant enough to be idealised. Education, media, and national narratives often emphasise continuity with the recent past, reinforcing the idea that current institutions are natural or optimal. The fact is that what counts as normal varies drastically across cultures and centuries. Democracy, monarchy, feudalism, or tribal governance have all been considered natural at different times. Similarly, total war, limited war, insurgency, or a war of narratives have also been considered natural at some point of time.

The Character of Warfare in Current Conflicts

The ongoing conflicts in Ukraine, Gaza, Lebanon, and Iran illustrate how warfare's character is evolving through technology, hybrid strategies, and multi-front escalation. Although the rules of war existed informally for many millennia, present-day perspectives often view them as having formally emerged only after the World War I (WW I).

It remains a moot point whether institutional memory should be rooted solely in the experiences of the two World Wars. The naval strategist Alfred Thayer Mahan had noted that the 1749-58 war between Britain and Spain, in which France joined Spain, was also a 'World War', because it was waged not only in Europe but also in North America and India. To study how the two World Wars were fought in the 20th Century and to then presume that this is how wars are required to be fought in the future would be erroneous.

Post WW II, nuclear weapons brought an entirely different dynamic to wars or conflicts between states. A conflict between two Nuclear Weapon States (NWS) would be logically fought through proxies. Meanwhile, a conflict between an NWS and a Non-Nuclear Weapon State (NNWS) would use different strategy,

where the NNWS state would use asymmetric means to avoid a direct conventional conflict. An NNWS is unlikely to launch a ground offensive to occupy the territory of an NWS. The opposite can be done with impunity but in case the NNWS has an NWS backing it, the NWS attacker will be specific about its aim—and declare it—lest it cross a redline.

How Present Conflicts are Being Fought

While the essence of war—violence, attrition, and the contest of wills—remains constant, these evolving dynamics are shaping the manner in which the conflicts are being fought today. These are dealt with individually below:

- **Ukraine.** This is Europe's largest land war since WW II. Russia's (NWS) stated aims in the have consistently been to prevent Ukraine's North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) membership, securing recognition of territories under Russian control, and forcing Kyiv into a negotiated settlement on Moscow's terms. These goals are framed as both military and political objectives, with the Kremlin insisting it will continue fighting until they are achieved.² The key features in this conflict by both sides are the use of drones, precision artillery, cyber operations, and electronic warfare.³ The strategies of attrition, encirclement, and morale-breaking remain central. The conflict has seen classic trench ambush, mechanised manoeuvre, and massive use of artillery on the frontlines. However, once the conflict reached a stalemate, with negotiations in practice, it could be claimed to have witnessed manifestations of the 'New Type of War'.
- **Israel–Gaza.** While the trigger for the current conflict was the Hamas attack of 07 Oct 2023, the simmering pot was waiting to boil over for long. The nature of the conflict between Israel and Hamas (and now Hezbollah)—both Iranian proxies—has been asymmetric warfare, tunnel networks, rocket barrages, and drone attacks. Israel employs precision strikes and Artificial Intelligence (AI)-driven targeting, while the proxy non-states use guerrilla tactics which mirror age-old insurgencies, adapted to urban density and modern surveillance.

- **Iran.** The nature of the conflict is direct strikes by the US and Israel since 28 Feb 2026, which escalated into a regional war. Iran launched long-range drone and missile strikes, some cyberattacks, and mobilised allied militias (Houthis, Iraqi Shia groups, Hezbollah). Subsequently, as the military impact on Iran increased—including a no-holds-barred attack on its naval vessel IRIS Dena on 04 Mar 2026 in international waters just off the coast of Sri Lanka by a US submarine—it retaliated by taking actions which now impact the global economy. It choked oil flow through the Strait of Hormuz, attacked water desalination plants of Gulf countries in the US camp, and has threatened to damage major internet undersea fibre optic cables in the Gulf and the Red Sea. These are sensitive pressure points in a globalised world, and geography favours Iran in such actions.

Is this a New Form of War?

On 26 Feb 2026, the well-known journalist, author and CNN commentator Fareed Zakaria, in his acclaimed international affairs program called Global Public Square, stated that the conflicts in Ukraine and Iran herald a new era in warfare. In Ukraine, drones and precision artillery have redefined combat, turning every duel into a contest of intelligence and accuracy rather than sheer numbers. In Iran, cheap drones and missiles have exposed the vulnerability of expensive Western defences. Zakaria warned that “Iran has demonstrated that you don’t need to spend billions to challenge the world’s most powerful military—you just need to be clever with cheap technology”.⁴ His take is that the future of warfare is cheap, smart, and hybrid. Cyber, economic, and military domains are now inseparable, and ripple effects extend far beyond battlefields into energy markets, shipping lanes, and global trade.

Emerging Lessons

While Zakaria’s assessment may appear logical, military historians view it with scepticism because of the lessons that emerge.

Lessons in Deterrence. Firstly, credibility matters; Russia’s nuclear threats in Ukraine revealed that deterrence depends on credible red lines. Western powers gradually lifted restrictions on arms deliveries to Ukraine despite intimidation, showing that deterrence fails if threats lack follow through. Secondly, multi domain

deterrence, like Israel's reliance on precision strikes and missile defence, demonstrates deterrence through technological superiority, but Hamas and Hezbollah's persistence proves that deterrence against non state actors is harder to sustain as they have few visibly targetable assets.

Lessons in Coercion. Firstly, states fail to obtain coercion through kinetic means, they resort to economic and psychological coercion. Russia's targeting of Ukrainian infrastructure and Iran's disruption of the Strait of Hormuz shipping highlight coercion beyond battlefield victories—using economic pain and psychological pressure to weaken adversaries. Secondly, coercion through proxies is effective only till open conflict occurs. Iran's use of Hezbollah and Houthis shows how proxies extended coercive reach without direct confrontation for a long time. Israel's no-holds-barred response shows frustration against that such coercion. Attacking civilian infrastructure by both sides, classified as a 'War Crime', has become the new normal.

Lessons in Escalation Management. Firstly, the Western powers have managed to avoid an uncontrolled escalation in Ukraine. They have calibrated weapons deliveries to avoid direct NATO–Russia clashes. This management also emerges from the feeling that the US may not get involved in a European war. Secondly, temporary pauses in Gaza and Ukraine reveal that ceasefires often stabilise front lines but rarely resolve conflicts, underscoring the challenge of managing escalation without achieving peace. Lastly, Iran's direct strikes and proxy mobilisation show how escalation can quickly spread across theatres, requiring adversaries to balance deterrence with restraint to avoid a wider war.

Lessons in Strategic Signalling. Proxies blur the line between local insurgencies and regional struggles, creating layered conflicts that are simultaneously national and transnational. Social media enables strategic signalling through a complex ecosystem where states and their partners wage war indirectly, balancing escalation and restraint, while constantly broadcasting intent to audiences at home, abroad, and across the battlefield. AI enables even mischief makers to add to the fog of war. In such a battlefield milieu, entirely contradictory statements by national leaders can be a part of strategic deception or psychological warfare.

Learning from History

The conflicts at present need a historian-theorist to grasp their implications. The Shahed drones—or Shahed derivative drones—being used extensively in the Ukraine and Iran conflict are no different from the V1 rockets used by Germany or the Kamikaze aircraft by Japan in WW II. They differ only in the increased ranges and precision targeting, which are a result of modern technology.

The ‘Assassination’ targeting of Iranian and Hezbollah leaders using smart missiles and bombs is no different from the assassination of kings and leaders for regime change, a norm since time immemorial. The difference in the case of Iran was the collateral damage as the so-called ‘Precision’ weapon used was not as precise as an assassin’s knife or a sniper’s bullet.

The extensive use of high-speed ballistic missiles to target civilian infrastructure is no different from the use of German V2 rockets of WWII. Primarily made to retaliate for the massed aerial bombing of German cities, they became the only mean for Germany to attack Britain after the Luftwaffe lost its ability.

Towards the same end, from 1944, the Japanese military launched over 9,000 hydrogen balloons with incendiary bombs via the Pacific jet stream to spread fires in the US. This attempt was no different than a step towards long-range drones, or even the ‘Mysterious’ drones which may have been a prank or peril. They interfered with B-52 bomber operations at the US air base in Louisiana on 09 Mar 2026.

The Japanese balloons were no different from a stratagem used by the Mongols in the Siege of Caffa (1346-47) when they catapulted plague-infected corpses over the walls of the Genoese-held city in Crimea.

Cutting off the source of drinking water of a besieged enemy is a tactic as old as warfare itself. Between 720 and 705 BCE, an Assyrian king in the region of present-day Iran and Iraq, as well as his opponents, used water both as a weapon and as a target by damaging wells, diverting and destroying irrigation canals, and flooding land for offensive and defensive purposes. Hence, little has changed in the present era, when desalination plants are being hit to deny water supply.

The use of machine gun in the WW I was hailed as revolutionary and reshaped tactics—forcing armies into trenches and slaughtering waves of infantry. Yet, over time, militaries adapted this tactic with combined arms, tanks, air forces, and new doctrines. The machine gun became one of the tools among many, folded into the broader logic of war.

The detailed study of wars and conflicts in history provide a sense of *Déjà vu* while reading about the present conflicts, proving that the evolution of conflicts is cyclic. In each cycle, the technology available at that time adds to its speed, intensity, and lethality, giving an illusion of transformation.

War Evolves, not Transforms

The phrase ‘Transformation of War’ became a buzzword in military and strategic circles in the late 1990s and onwards. It was largely tied to debates around ‘Revolution in Military Affairs’. The phrase gained traction as analysts sought to describe how technology, globalisation, and non-state actors were reshaping conflict. Following the global trend, India too began engaging with the transformation of war rhetoric in the early 2000s. But so far, worldwide and in India, transformation is not yet a substantive theory. This is best exemplified by the fact that even in the US, the serious result of the transformation focus, resulting in the setting up of a Transformation and Training Command (T2COM), took place in 2025, more than 25 years after the term was first coined and discussed.

Presently, faster computers, the internet, and AI speed up the evolution of military knowledge. Theorists posit that ‘Transformation’ implies a qualitative leap and not just a faster version of normal evolution. Understanding with an example of a five-year-old child and a 70-year-old man in the present world, the speed with which a five-year-old picks up using the mobile phone for playing games appears to be transformative, while the 70-year-old’s speed to learn the use of applications can be termed as evolution. In essence, they are the same, but what distinguishes evolution from transformation is subjective. While there have been arguments to prove that the T2COM is not a rebranded version of Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) as it has been set up in a different place, 2,000 kms away, nothing changes the fact that the TRADOC was disbanded on 26 Sep 2025 and T2COM

was established on 02 Oct 2025, underscoring that it is basically the same thing with some evolution.

The ‘Changing Character of Warfare’ in Ukraine, Gaza, Lebanon, and Iran could be best seen as evolution, not transformation. Technology alters the face of conflict, but its heart—power, survival, and legitimacy—remains the same. Recognising this continuity helps avoid overreacting to novelty and ensures that strategies remain grounded in historical lessons. The paradox is clear: every generation believes it is witnessing a revolution in conflicts, yet history shows that revolutions are always absorbed into continuity.

Drones, AI, and space weapons will reshape war in the realm of tactics and the cost of conflict, but the essence of conflicts—politics, endurance, and human will—remains unchanged. Ukraine has already developed a low-cost interceptor drone to counter the Iranian-made Shahed-136 drones (renamed Geran-2 in Russian service). Russia had used swarms of Shaheds and missiles to overwhelm Ukrainian air defences starting Sep 2022. Russia has favoured the Shahed suicide drone and has produced multiple variants of it. As Russians evolve the Iranian drones, Ukrainians come up with their own lower-cost drone interceptors.

Such drone wars are one part of a conflict. They may be able to bring an opponent to the negotiating table, but are unlikely to win a conflict on their own. A quote from the celebrated history of the Korean War by TR Fehrenbach is worth contemplating here:

“Americans in 1950 rediscovered something that since Hiroshima they had forgotten: you may fly over a land forever; you may bomb it, atomise it, pulverise it and wipe it clean of life—but if you desire to defend it, protect it, and keep it for civilisation, you must do this on the ground, the way the Roman legions did, by putting your young men into the mud”.

Conclusion

Post the traumatic experience in Vietnam, the US has always been chary of putting its young men in the mud overseas. A soldier’s resolve to sacrifice their life is always better in defence of home territory.

The Russians have prevailed in Ukraine in meeting their aim of securing the Russian-speaking areas by putting their young men into the mud. Ukrainians have defended the rest of their territory by putting young men in the mud. In the conflict in West Asia, the Israeli resolve will remain strong for existential reasons; the same may not be true of the US. Bayonets, boots, and blood are required to win the conflict against Iran; bombs and missiles may only get Iran to the negotiating table.

India must learn from current conflicts, but these lessons should also be relevant to its environment. As Stephen P Cohen and Sunil Dasgupta mention in their article, India should not be 'Arming without Aiming'.⁵ Its military should take learning from the ongoing conflicts in Ukraine, Gaza, Lebanon, and Iran, with direct implications for its security calculus, force modernisation priorities, and preparedness. But evolutionary changes should not be contemplates mirroring someone else. For example, the decentralised command and 'Mosaic' defence of the Iranians, which has given Iran surprising resilience, flies in the face of centralisation through theatre commands. The last word is that what India perceive as transformational could not be so after all, and what the country needs to do to evolve must be relevant to its geography, history, and national interest.

Endnotes

¹ Stephen P Cohen and Sunil Dasgupta, *Arming without Aiming: India's Military Modernization* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2010).

² Samuel Charap and Krystyna Holynska, "Russia's War Aims in Ukraine: Objective-Setting and the Kremlin's Use of Force Abroad," *RAND Research Paper*, 13 Aug 2024, accessed 30 Mar 2026, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA2679-1.html

³ Nandika Chatterjee and Richard Hall, "Zelensky's Drone Diplomacy", *Time*, 06 Apr 2026, accessed 30 Mar 2026, https://www.magzter.com/stories/news/TIME-Magazine/ZELENSKYS-DRONE-DIPLOMACY?srsId=AfmBOoo_LSu1GISEdf11J9qhKtGFU8q2lGXwOprymh1SBwZASTiZrr2v

⁴ TR Fehrenbach, *This Kind of War: The Classic Military History of the Korean War* (New York: Macmillan, 1963).

⁵ Fareed Zakaria, "GPS – My Take", *YouTube*, 22 Mar 2026, accessed 31 Mar 2026, https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL6XRncXkMaXQ3Yb5zhJ1jMc9E1D_zppx

A World of Persistent Conflicts: Trajectories, Fault Lines, and India's Strategic Moment

Lieutenant General Rajeev Chaudhry, VSM (Retd)[®]

Abstract

This article argues that the global security landscape today is defined by overlapping conflicts, spanning land, sea, and cyberspace. From Ukraine and Gaza to the Red Sea, the Sahel, and the Indo-Pacific, these crises are not isolated but interconnected, reflecting deeper shifts in the international order. Wars now take several forms—long, grinding battles, volatile flashpoints, and regions plagued by chronic instability. Technology, geopolitics, and economic pressures fuel this turbulence, making conflict more persistent, networked, and accessible. This lowers the barriers for outbreak of a conflict while complicating efforts towards peace. Looking ahead, the world may face drawn-out limited wars, regional spill-overs, and a fragmented multipolar system where power is more diffused. For India, these changes bring both challenges and openings. It must prepare for the possibility of a two-front confrontation, safeguard maritime routes, and manage vulnerabilities in energy and supply chains. Simultaneously, India is uniquely positioned to act as a strategic balancer and a 'Geo-Moral Anchor', leveraging its diplomatic credibility, economic weight, and normative voice to shape a more stable and inclusive global order amidst deepening uncertainty.

[®]Lieutenant General Rajeev Chaudhry, VSM (Retd) served for four decades in the Indian Army and has acquired deep experience in infrastructure governance, institutional transparency, and administrative reforms. He, in his last assignment as Director General Border Roads, led digitisation, automation, and accountability initiatives within organisational systems. The General writes on the intersection of strategic statecraft, infrastructure as a tool of deterrence, and India's civilisational governance traditions.

Journal of the United Service Institution of India, Vol. CLVI, No. 644, April-June 2026.

The World on Edge: From Episodic Wars to Persistent Conflict Systems

The contemporary international system is no longer defined by discrete wars punctuating periods of peace; rather, it is characterised by the simultaneous persistence of multiple conflicts across regions and domains. From Eastern Europe to West Asia, from the Sahel to the Indo-Pacific, the global security environment reflects a condition of continuous strategic friction, where crises overlap, reinforce, and evolve in real time.

This transformation marks a departure from the post-Cold War expectation of a progressively stabilising order. Instead, the world has entered into what may be termed as an 'Age of Persistent Conflict'—a condition in which the boundaries between war and peace increasingly blur, and where states operate in a spectrum of competition that spans kinetic, economic, technological, and informational domains.¹

The Russia–Ukraine and the Israel– Hamas conflicts, regional spillovers in West Asia, the Red Sea security crisis, and the ongoing instability in regions such as Sudan and Myanmar are not isolated phenomena. They represent interconnected manifestations of deeper structural tensions—geopolitical rivalry, technological disruption, economic fragmentation, and the erosion of global governance mechanisms.² In such an environment, conflict is no longer an exception to international order; it is one of its defining features.

The Changing Character of Warfare: From Industrial to Networked Conflict

Warfare today is changing in ways that go beyond geography—it is being reshaped by technology and new doctrines. Precision weapons, autonomous systems, cyber tools, and information operations are converging to transform conflict. One of the most striking shifts is the widespread use of unmanned aerial systems and loitering munitions. In Ukraine, low-cost drones have destroyed tanks and artillery, overturning traditional cost equations in conflicts.³ In West Asia, non-state actors have used drones and missiles to strike infrastructure and maritime assets, showing how advanced capabilities are spreading beyond state militaries.⁴

The rise of precision missile systems is equally important. Ballistic and cruise missiles are now more accessible, enabling both states and insurgents to carry out accurate long-range strikes. This 'Democratisation of Precision Warfare' erodes the monopoly once held by advanced militaries.⁵ Alongside these kinetic tools, cyber and information warfare have become central to conflicts. Cyberattacks on infrastructure, finance, and communication networks are now routine, while disinformation campaigns and psychological operations shape perceptions at home and abroad.⁶

Together, these trends have created networked, multi-domain wars that spill into societies, economies, and digital ecosystems. Such conflicts are easier to start, harder to trace, and far more difficult to end, making the future of global security more uncertain and complex.

Typologies of Contemporary Conflict: A Structured Framework

To make sense of today's complex conflicts, they could be grouped into overlapping categories. This framework provides a clearer view of their dynamics and possible future directions:

- **Protracted Attritional Conflicts.** Conflicts like Russia–Ukraine and the civil wars in Myanmar and Sudan illustrate attritional warfare—long, exhausting struggles with high costs and little chance of quick resolution. In Ukraine, the conflict has become a grinding contest of endurance, defined by trench battles, artillery duels, and slow territorial shifts.⁷ Myanmar's conflict is fragmented in a similar fashion, involving state forces, ethnic militias, and resistance groups, creating a drawn-out and unstable security environment.⁸ Such conflicts are likely to persist, with outcomes shaped less by decisive breakthroughs and more by endurance, resource mobilisation, and external support.
- **Escalation-Prone Flashpoints.** Some conflicts are volatile by nature and prone to sudden episodic spikes. The Israel–Iran shadow war, Israel–Hezbollah tensions, and instability in the Red Sea fall into this category. They flare up through assassinations, targeted strikes, or attacks on infrastructure, often staying below full-scale war but carrying high risks of miscalculation.⁹ The Red Sea crisis, driven by attacks on commercial shipping, illustrates how localised

conflicts can have global economic repercussions, disrupting supply chains and maritime trade routes.¹⁰

- **Chronic Instability Zones.** Regions like the Sahel, Haiti, and parts of Afghanistan–Pakistan suffer from chronic instability. Weak governance, fragile economies, and armed groups fuel persistent insecurity. In the Sahel, jihadist insurgencies, coups, and poor governance have steadily eroded state authority.¹¹ Haiti faces severe internal turmoil, with criminal networks controlling territory and undermining governance.¹² These regions are unlikely to witness conventional wars but will continue to experience prolonged instability, humanitarian crises, and external interventions.

- **Strategic Rivalries and Grey-Zone Competition.** Finally, major power rivalries—especially in the Indo-Pacific—define another category. Competition between the United States (US) and China, alongside regional frictions involving India, China, and Pakistan, plays out through grey-zone tactics. These include military signalling, economic coercion, cyber operations, and diplomatic manoeuvres, all designed to avoid outright war while advancing strategic aims.¹³ The India–China border tensions and maritime competition in the Indo-Pacific exemplify this form of conflict, where deterrence, signalling, and incremental advantage are central to strategic behaviour.

Global Conflict Ecosystem as a Structural Condition

Today's conflicts are increasingly interconnected, forming what can be described as a global conflict ecosystem. Events in one region often ripple across others, creating a web of interdependencies that magnifies instability. The situation in Ukraine, for example, has reshaped global energy markets, disrupted food supplies, and altered defence alignments.¹⁴ Meanwhile, tensions in West Asia have spilled into maritime security in the Red Sea, affecting international trade routes and supply chains.¹⁵ External powers, directly or indirectly involved in multiple theatres, further bind these conflicts together into what may be described as a 'Global Conflict Ecosystem', where local conflicts are embedded within broader geopolitical competitions.

This interconnectedness highlights a deeper reality: conflicts today are not a temporary disruption but structural conditions of the international system. The world is shifting toward multi-polarity, technological competition, and institutional fragmentation, all of which sustain instability. In this environment, wars and crises are symptoms of systemic transformation rather than isolated events. The challenge for states is not to eliminate conflict altogether—an unrealistic goal—but to manage its persistent presence. Navigating this condition will define global security strategies in the decades ahead.

The Deeper Fault Lines: Structural Drivers of Contemporary Conflict

Beneath the visible spread of wars lies a set of deeper structural fault lines that are reshaping the global order. These divisions are not only geopolitical but also economic, technological, and normative in nature. One of the most prominent trends is the growing divide between the established Western-led order and revisionist or non-Western powers—particularly Russia and China—with Iran acting as a disruptive regional force. This divide is more than ideological; it reflects competing visions of governance, sovereignty, and security frameworks.¹⁶

At the same time, the Global North–Global South divide has become sharper. Many developing nations see current international institutions as inequitable and unresponsive to their needs. India has voiced these concerns repeatedly, especially during its G20 presidency, calling for a more inclusive and representative global system.¹⁷ Energy and maritime chokepoints constitute another critical fault line. Strategic waterways such as the Strait of Hormuz, Bab el-Mandeb, and the Malacca Strait are vital for trade and energy flows. Disruptions, as seen during the Red Sea crisis, expose the vulnerability of global supply chains to regional instability.¹⁸

The rise of techno-strategic competition is equally significant. Control over semiconductors, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and cyber infrastructure now defines national power. This has led to a gradual bifurcation of technology ecosystems, with far-reaching consequences for economic integration and strategic autonomy.¹⁹ Together, these overlapping fault lines show that today's conflicts are not isolated events but symptoms of systemic transition in the international order.

The Fragmentation of Global Order: From Multilateralism to Competitive Multi-polarity

The post-Cold War period carried hopes of liberal multilateralism, anchored by institutions like the United Nations (UN), the World Trade Organization, and Bretton Woods's structures. Yet, these institutions are increasingly strained. Their inability to prevent or resolve major conflicts—whether in Ukraine, Gaza, or elsewhere—has deepened perceptions of inadequacy and weakened global governance.²⁰ This erosion has accelerated the shift toward competitive multi-polarity, where multiple centres of power coexist but lack a shared framework for cooperation.

India has consistently highlighted the need for reform, particularly of the UN Security Council, to reflect today's geopolitical realities.²¹ Without such changes, Indian strategic thought warns that legitimacy and effectiveness will continue to decline. In this emerging order, states are turning to issue-based coalitions, mini-lateral arrangements, and strategic partnerships rather than universal frameworks. The rise of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, the expansion of the grouping of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, and regional security groupings illustrate this trend. The result is a fragmented yet fluid system, where alignments are dynamic, contingent, and shaped by immediate interests rather than fixed commitments.

Possible Future Trajectories: Four Scenarios of Conflict Evolution

Given the complexity of the current security environment, it is useful to conceptualise potential future trajectories through scenario-building. While not predictive, these scenarios offer analytical frameworks for understanding possible pathways.

Scenario 1: The Age of Endless Limited Wars

In this scenario, conflicts remain largely contained but persist over extended periods without decisive resolution. Wars in Ukraine and ongoing conflicts in West Asia continue as managed but unresolved confrontations. This scenario is characterised by:

- Sustained but controlled violence.
- Limited escalation between major powers.
- Continued reliance on proxies and indirect engagement.

Such a trajectory reflects a stable instability, where the international system adapts to a constant level of conflict without systemic breakdown.

Scenario 2: Regional Escalation and Spill-over Conflicts

A more volatile trajectory involves the escalation of existing conflicts into broader regional wars. For instance, a direct confrontation between Iran and Israel, or a crisis in the Taiwan Strait, could trigger wider military engagement involving multiple actors. The risks in this scenario include:

- Disruption of global energy supplies.
- Large-scale displacement and humanitarian crises.
- Increased probability of great-power confrontation.

Indian strategic assessments have highlighted the potential for regional conflicts to generate global consequences, particularly in interconnected domains such as energy and trade.²²

Scenario 3: Fragmented and Polarised Multi-polarity

In this scenario, the world evolves into a highly fragmented multipolar system, characterised by competing blocs and limited cooperation. Economic decoupling, technological bifurcation, and political polarisation define the global landscape. The key features include:

- Weak global institutions.
- Regional spheres of influence.
- Increased economic nationalism.

This trajectory aligns with concerns expressed in the Indian policy discourse regarding the risks of global fragmentation and its impact on development and stability.²³

Scenario 4: Managed Multipolar Stability

The most optimistic trajectory involves the emergence of a managed multipolar order, where major powers recognise the costs of uncontrolled conflict and engage in mechanisms to stabilise competition. This would entail:

- Strengthened crisis management mechanisms.
- Limited but functional multilateral cooperation.
- Norm-building in emerging domains such as cyber and AI.

India has advocated for such approach, emphasising dialogue, respect for sovereignty, and adherence to international law as the basis for global stability.²⁴

Economic and Strategic Consequences: Conflict as Systemic Transition

The persistence of conflicts and widening geopolitical divides are reshaping the global economy and strategy, challenging the old belief that interdependence would reduce tensions. Energy markets have become highly volatile, with conflicts in West Asia and disruptions in maritime chokepoints driving fluctuations in oil prices and supply uncertainties.²⁵ For energy-importing nations like India, such instability directly affects fiscal planning and economic resilience. Similarly, maritime disruptions—most notably in the Red Sea—have forced costly rerouting of shipping, exposing the vulnerability of global supply chains to geopolitical shocks.²⁶

Another defining trend is the weaponisation of economic instruments. Sanctions, export controls, and technology restrictions are increasingly deployed as tools of strategic competition, blurring the line between economic policy and security.²⁷ India's response has been to pursue diversification, resilience-building, and strategic autonomy, particularly in energy security and supply chains.²⁸

These developments point to a deeper reality: conflicts today are not isolated events but part of a systemic transition in the international order. They reflect shifts in power distribution, technological rivalry, and institutional legitimacy. For policymakers, the challenge lies not only in managing individual crises but in navigating the broader structural dynamics that sustain them. In this emerging landscape, conflict has become a condition of global politics—one that must be managed rather than eliminated.

India's Strategic Environment and Economic Pressures: Navigating Overlapping Risks

For India, the emerging global landscape of persistent conflicts and deepening fault lines creates a uniquely complex strategic environment. Unlike many major powers, India must simultaneously manage continental, maritime, and extended neighbourhood challenges, all of which are being reshaped by instability. On the continental front, the two-front challenge posed by China and Pakistan remains the most immediate concern. Tensions along

the Line of Actual Control, combined with China's expanding military and infrastructural presence, highlight the enduring nature of the India–China rivalry.²⁹ At the same time, the volatile India–Pakistan relationship continues to carry risks of escalation through both conventional and sub-conventional means.

In the maritime domain, India's interests are tied to the stability of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), now a critical theatre of global competition. Growing Chinese naval activity, the presence of extra-regional powers, and vulnerabilities in sea lanes of communication present both challenges and opportunities for India's maritime strategy.³⁰ Beyond its immediate neighbourhood, India's calculus is shaped by developments in West Asia, where energy security and diaspora welfare are at stake. Escalating tensions, particularly involving Iran and Israel, have direct implications for India's economy and strategic posture.³¹

These geopolitical pressures are compounded by economic vulnerabilities. As a major energy importer, India is exposed to disruptions in chokepoints such as the Strait of Hormuz and the Red Sea.³² Recent maritime disruptions have underscored the fragility of global supply chains through increasing costs and disrupting trade flows. Meanwhile, the weaponisation of economic interdependence—through sanctions, export controls, and technology restrictions—adds further strain.³³ India's response has focused on diversification, strengthening domestic manufacturing, and building resilient supply chains. Initiatives like *Atmanirbhar Bharat* (Self-reliant India) and integration into trusted global networks reflect its effort to adapt to a fragmented and uncertain order.

Strategic Opportunities: India as a Balancer and Bridging Power

While the evolving global environment presents significant risks, it also creates opportunities for India to enhance its strategic role. One of India's key strengths lies in its ability to engage with multiple actors across geopolitical divides. India maintains strategic partnerships with the US and its allies, while also sustaining long-standing ties with Russia and engaging constructively with countries such as Iran. This positions India as a credible balancing power, capable of navigating complex alignments without being constrained by rigid bloc politics.³⁴

Moreover, India's growing economic weight, demographic advantage, and technological capabilities enhance its ability to shape global outcomes. Its role in forums such as the G20 and leadership in initiatives like the International Solar Alliance demonstrate its capacity to contribute to global governance. Importantly, India's approach has been characterised by a commitment to strategic autonomy, allowing it to pursue its national interests while contributing to broader stability.³⁵

India as a 'Geo-Moral Anchor': Normative Leadership in Fragmented World

Beyond material capabilities, India's potential role as a 'Geo-moral Anchor' represents a distinctive dimension of its strategic identity. In a world marked by polarisation and competing narratives, India can offer a framework rooted in dialogue, inclusivity, and respect for sovereignty. India has consistently advocated for the interests of the Global South, highlighting issues such as development, climate justice, and equitable access to resources. Its diplomatic initiatives, including the Voice of Global South Summit, reflect an effort to amplify the concerns of developing countries within global discourse.³⁶

In emerging domains, such as cyber governance, AI, and maritime security, India could contribute to norm-building and rulemaking, helping to shape the future architecture of global governance. This role does not imply neutrality or passivity; rather, it reflects an approach that seeks to bridge divides, mitigate tensions, and promote cooperative solutions in an increasingly fragmented world.

Security Provider in the Indian Ocean: From Net Security to Net Stability

India's maritime strategy is central to its broader strategic role. The IOR, which carries a significant proportion of global trade and energy flows, is increasingly vulnerable to disruptions arising from piracy, state competition, and regional conflicts. India has already demonstrated its capacity to act as a net security provider in the region through anti-piracy operations, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, and maritime domain awareness initiatives.³⁷

Going forward, India's role is likely to evolve towards that of a 'Net Stability Provider', encompassing not only security operations but also capacity building, infrastructure development, and regional cooperation. This expanded role will require sustained investment in naval capabilities, enhanced partnerships with regional actors, and a proactive approach to maritime governance.

Policy Imperatives: Navigating the Age of Persistent Conflict

To effectively navigate the emerging strategic environment, India must adopt a set of following integrated policy approaches:

- **Strengthening Deterrence.** Enhancing military capabilities, particularly in border infrastructure and maritime power projection, to address immediate security challenges.
- **Deepening Strategic Partnerships.** Expanding engagement with key partners while maintaining flexibility and autonomy.
- **Building Economic Resilience.** Reducing vulnerabilities through diversification, innovation, and domestic capacity building.
- **Leading Normative Initiatives.** Actively participating in shaping global norms in emerging domains.
- **Investing in Diplomacy.** Leveraging diplomatic channels to manage crises and build coalitions.

Indian strategic thought has increasingly emphasised the importance of multi-alignment, recognising that flexibility and adaptability are critical in a rapidly changing world.³⁸

Conclusion: India's Strategic Moment in an Age of Uncertainty

The contemporary international system is defined not by a single dominant conflict but by the coexistence of multiple, overlapping crises. These conflicts, shaped by deeper geopolitical fault lines and systemic transitions, are likely to persist and evolve in complex ways. In such an environment, stability will not emerge from the elimination of conflict but from its management and containment. The challenge for states is to navigate this landscape with a combination of resilience, adaptability, and strategic foresight.

For India, this moment represents both a test and an opportunity. The convergence of global instability and India's rising capabilities creates the conditions for a more influential role in shaping international outcomes. India's success will depend on its ability to balance competing pressures, leverage its strategic advantages, and articulate a vision that resonates beyond its borders. As both a balancing power and a potential geomoral anchor, India is uniquely positioned to contribute to a more stable and inclusive global order.

In a world of persistent conflicts and shifting fault lines, India's strategic moment lies not in choosing sides but in shaping the equilibrium.

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This Madness Must Stop

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*“Mankind must put an end to war or war will
put an end to mankind”*

- John F Kennedy

Abstract

This article examines the ongoing West Asian conflict and its far-reaching geopolitical, economic, and security implications for the international community, with particular emphasis on India. It argues that the conflict involving the United States, Israel, and Iran has evolved into a protracted confrontation marked by extensive destruction, attacks on civilian infrastructure, threats to nuclear facilities, and growing risks of regional and global escalation. The article analyses the strategic objectives and operational conduct of the principal actors, the implications of Iran's nuclear ambitions, and the critical significance of the Strait of Hormuz as a vital global energy artery. It highlights the adverse impact of the conflict on international energy markets, maritime security, and global stability. The article contends that durable peace can only emerge through diplomacy, restraint, and multilateral engagement. It concludes that India must play a proactive diplomatic role while strengthening its energy security, strategic preparedness, and comprehensive national power.

Introduction

It is a historical truism that despite the hopes of many, no war in human history has ever ended all wars. Ever since the end of World War II in 1945, the planet has not witnessed a conflict

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Journal of the United Service Institution of India, Vol. CLVI, No. 644, April-June 2026.

as intense and devastating as the one raging in the West Asia since 28 Feb 2026—the roots of which are embedded in major historical and religious differences.

The West Asian Conflict

The catastrophic West Asian conflict is showing no signs of abating. It appears, by all standards, to be racing towards an armageddon. Though humongous destruction is happening each day, the warring nations, namely the United States (US) and Israel on one side and Iran on the other, refuse to see reason despite the conflict degenerating to any meaningful terminal objectives worth attaining left for either of them. The contention that even powerful nations can be taken to their ruin by megalomaniac leadership within their country has once again come to light. The painful prolongation of this unnecessary conflict has gravely affected many nations across Asia and Europe through the resulting energy crisis. Where and how this human suffering and widespread energy disruption will end remains uncertain. Many strategic analysts fear that this conflict contains the ingredients for a wider escalation.

World War in the Making

Truth and adherence to human values are the early casualties in any war. Subsequently, strategic and operational lacunae, at times, do emerge, leading to an incorrect reading of the ongoing battle situation. The hesitation of erstwhile allies to plunge themselves into support of their allied nation is also a possibility and could result in inadequate force and other resources being marshalled to take on the common enemy. Another customary shortcoming which is common is the underestimation of the adversary.

All these factors have been more than evident during the ongoing West Asian conflict.

Levels of Destruction and Collateral Damage

Striking at each other's military targets is '*Kosher (acceptable)*' and critical in battle. However, unfortunately, both sides have been targeting civilian infrastructure, including residential complexes, electricity grids, hospitals and schools, bridges, railway stations, and shopping complexes. Regrettably, according to Iran, the US and Israel have attacked the civil nuclear Russian-built plant at

Bushehr four times, leading to possible radiation leaks. The adverse impact of these leaks would be catastrophic, and their impact will be felt even beyond Iran's borders. The International Atomic Energy Agency has already issued a stern warning to the warring nations to desist targeting any nuclear installations. The US has stated that they have destroyed Iran's capability to enrich Uranium to weaponry levels (90 per cent enrichment). However, conflicting reports suggest that Iran has secretly hidden around 400 kgs of weapon-grade Uranium in underground storage facilities. International nuclear experts opine that Iran, despite the US attacks on its Isfahan nuclear facilities, still has the capability of speedily producing 10 to 11 nuclear warheads, which can be used with the ballistic missiles it has in its arsenal. It is, thus, hoped that the US, Israel, and Iran restrain themselves not only from attacking nuclear plants but also the civilian infrastructure and non-military targets, as laid down in the Geneva Convention. A major source of worry for all is the targeting of oil and gas wells and water desalination plants, which, if destroyed, would result in crime against humanity. Iran's targeting of both military and non-military installations in the nations of the pro-US Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) has adversely enlarged the areas of confrontation.

Immediately after the US and Israeli bombs attacked the military and non-military targets in Tehran, along with some other sites in Iran, the latter targeted the US bases in Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Iraq, and Turkey. Iran's strategy in doing so could be to force the GCC nations to reconsider their security alliances with the US.

Importantly, the selective targeting of Iran's political, military, and intelligence leadership and their elimination, including the death of former Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on 28 Feb 2026, has greatly irked the Iranians. Meanwhile, Israel, despite the ongoing fragile ceasefire announced by the US President for two weeks, continued to bombard Lebanon heavily and caused nearly 3,500 casualties by the time of editing this article. Israel hopes to finish the backbone of the Hezbollah terrorists.

Lebanon During Conflict

According to reliable media reports, nearly 5,000 fatal casualties have been reported on both sides, including Iran and Lebanon, during the entire period of this conflict. This includes the death of

182 schoolgirls in the Iranian city of Minab. The Israeli raid on Beirut in Apr resulted in nearly 250 fatalities, along with massive destruction of residential complexes and shopping centres.

United States' Strategy in the West Asia Conflict

US President Donald Trump, holding the most powerful office in the world, continues with his frequently changing strategic policy decisions in the conduct of this conflict. He has now become a subject of derision among several nations. Even within the US, as many as 59 per cent of Americans are critical of his handling of this conflict, according to recent surveys. There were changes in the Trump's administration, including his Counter Terrorism Chief, Secretary of the Navy, and even his Army Chief, besides a few other General officers, owing to differences after the West Asia conflict. Unconfirmed media reports emanating from the US indicate that some of the senior Armed Forces officers have opposed Trump's likely intention of launching 'Boots on the Ground', namely a ground assault against Iran. By all standards, most strategic analysts across the world opine that such an act would lead to many hundreds of 'Body Bags' of US troops if a ground invasion takes place. As it is well known, nearly 60 per cent of Iranian territory is mountainous in nature and, thus, ground offensives may result in casualties for the attacking troops.

Current Operational Situation

Despite the US and Israel employing advanced weaponry and platforms such as the F-15E, F-35, and A-10 aircraft; Black Hawk and Chinook helicopters; Tomahawk cruise missiles; Patriot air defence systems; airborne warning and control system aircraft; Blue Sparrow missiles; Arrow missile defence system; and terminal high altitude area defense systems along with the presence of the US Navy aircraft carriers and MQ-9 Reaper drones, the Iranians have not capitulated. They continue to resist determinedly, inflicting damage on Israeli military and civilian assets, as well as on the US military bases in the GCC region. This conflict has seen a humongous range and quantity of ballistic missiles and drones being employed by all warring nations. The era of stand-off kinetic engagements has decisively arrived with significant force and impact. Military experts and defence analysts opine that this conflict has changed many established rules of kinetic engagements perfected over the last few decades.

President Trump's ever-changing ultimatums to Iran to cease operations by multiple deadlines had fallen on deaf ears. He had promised multiple times that the US and Israel would unleash hell on Iran.

Undeterred, Tehran has also promised them the same fate. Concurrently, unnecessary and major devastation continues in the region on both sides of the war, with major impact on civilians and economic installation. Trump's on-and-off ceasefire declarations, which have changed multiple times, have been criticised by his North Atlantic Treaty Organization allies and American defence analysts, including a few senior military officers and former officials from his administration.

Iran's Nuclear Ambitions

One of the principal reasons cited by both Israel and the US has been the concern regarding Iran's push for pursuing its nuclear programme, which is perceived as an existential threat, especially by Tel Aviv. Though Iran has denied claims of enriching Uranium to weapon-grade capability, there could be some truth in Israel's analysis. However, on 27 Feb, during the US and Israel talks with Iran in Geneva, under mediation by Omani Foreign Minister Badr Albusaidi, it was stated that the ongoing talks were going well and Iran had promised the suspension of its nuclear weapons programme. The launch of Operation Epic Fury by the US-Israel combine, during ongoing negotiations, was widely perceived as a breach of trust and inconsistency with established international norms.

According to media reports following the first round of talks between the involved nations in Islamabad on 11 Apr, Iran has indicated a willingness to consider limiting aspects of its nuclear programme for a defined period, reportedly around five years. However, the US continues to insist that Iran should fully abandon its uranium enrichment. This issue remains a central point of contention and may require further negotiation, as suggested by several countries.

However, the question of whether Iran should be permitted to continue uranium enrichment remains a major source of contention among the US, Israel, and Iran during the current confrontation. Some strategic analysts also suggest that at some stage, Iran

may clandestinely commence its nuclear programme as it has learnt the lesson from Ukraine, which voluntarily gave up its nuclear programme and, thus, lost its deterrent value against Russia.

The Strait of Hormuz

The Strait of Hormuz is a narrow waterway (21 nautical miles at its narrowest) flowing between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman, with Iran on its north coast and a protectorate of Oman on its south coast. A small portion of the peninsula is under the jurisdiction of the UAE. Ultimately, the Gulf of Oman leads to the Arabian Sea and onwards to the oceans, sustaining the global sea lanes for world trade. Thus, the Strait of Hormuz is the central strategic waterway in this region. Nearly 20 per cent of the world's oil passes through this waterway, besides another 20 per cent of the world's liquefied natural gas is also being shipped through it. Till 27 Feb, the Strait was open for trade and passage of ships, to and fro, without any hindrance whatsoever.

The Strait of Hormuz crisis, which has significantly impacted global energy supply chains, is widely attributed to escalating tensions involving Iran. These developments have prompted the US to enhance its naval presence and undertake countermeasures aimed at ensuring freedom of navigation through this critical chokepoint. There have been reports of limited engagements and incidents involving Iranian vessels and US naval forces in the vicinity of commercial shipping. Consequently, maritime traffic has faced disruptions, with numerous oil consignments destined for various countries experiencing delays in transit through the Strait. The blockading of this waterway is now also one of the major causes of the breakdown of negotiations between the US and Iran.

President Trump has publicly asserted that the Strait of Hormuz must remain open to ensure the continued flow of global energy supplies. However, Iran has not agreed to these demands, and the divergence in positions risks further escalation of hostilities in the region. Both the US and Iran have hardened their positions, with President Trump now ordering his Navy to shoot down Iranian gunboats laying mines in the Strait of Hormuz. Meanwhile, Tehran has refused to alter its position, maintaining that it will not engage further until the US lifts the blockade in its entirety.

President Trump, as it is well known, has a pattern of inconsistent public statements and shifting policy positions, reflecting a tendency towards fluctuating strategic signalling. Meanwhile, Israel has been intensively attacking Beirut and other areas in Lebanon, striking at Hezbollah targets. Israel's operations in Lebanon have resulted in significant collateral damage, with the Lebanese population bearing considerable costs, largely due to the presence and activities of the anti-Israel militant group Hezbollah within the country.

Impact of Conflict on India

As this unwarranted conflict meanders along without any end in sight, its impact will gravely impact many nations in the region, those who are dependent on their energy supplies from the Gulf nations and Iran. India, too, imports over 87 per cent of its energy requirements, of which 50 per cent of crude and 90 per cent of liquefied petroleum gas comes through the Strait of Hormuz. Thus, India also has a vital stake in peace and normalcy returning to the Gulf area. However, the fact remains that this conflict has ensured the death of the global maritime commons, and Iran is threatening to extract hefty fees from ships passing through the Strait of Hormuz. The US, too, has also expressed strong concerns regarding the transit of ships through this choked waterway. It is also cognisant of the operational limitations being faced by its Navy to operate successfully in the narrow waterway. Apart from a few back-channel talks by the Indian government and some telephonic conversations by the country's leadership, much more needs to be done to influence the warring parties to bring an end to the widespread mayhem and suffering, including within their own nations. India now must take the lead and co-opt the United Nations (UN), Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS) grouping (of which India is the current head), the European Union, Australia, Japan, North Korea, and the GCC apart from the warring nations, and importantly Russia, to work out a balanced and fair plan to resolve this issue. Anyway, a new international order is likely in the offing, embellished with multipolarity after the ongoing geopolitical churn. India will do well to become an example of neutrality with a balanced attitude towards all global problems, not only as an example for the Global South but even for advanced nations of the West.

If the US is eager to resolve the currently worsening situation, which appears to take this world to the brink of World War III, it must not endeavour to humiliate Iran at the same time when it offers a ceasefire. The previous ceasefire between the US, Israel, and Iran have proved to be fragile, particularly in light of the ongoing violations and the absence of a clearly defined and mutually accepted framework. However, Israel must refrain from bombing innocent civilians in Lebanon as it is inhuman by all standards. Equally, Iran and the US must desist from targeting civil infrastructure like apartment buildings, water desalination plants, oil refineries, and others. Iran, too, must realise that the possession of nuclear weapons will not guarantee its well-being in the future. It must also avoid supporting terrorist outfits in the region. Iran has adequate strengths springing from its civilisational heritage and oil wealth, which should be utilised to the optimum whilst shunning support to terror outfits of any dispensation.

Apart from strengthening the sinews of its comprehensive national power to effectively confront emerging security challenges, India must diversify its sources of energy procurement. In addition, it should accelerate the development of, and increase its reliance on, alternative sources of energy.

Conclusion

As history demonstrates, wars rarely resolve geopolitical, ideological, religious, or economic disputes; rather, they often sow the seeds for future conflicts. The world must wake up before it is too late. No matter whatever be the outcome of the current negotiations between Iran and the US and Israel, India must also provide its suggestions independently to strive for peace. As Chair of BRICS this year, India should leverage the platform to actively advance efforts toward de-escalation and stability in West Asia, despite the persistence of complex and contentious disputes. As recent developments—such as the West Asian conflict following the Gaza and Russia–Ukraine crises—demonstrate, wars and similar high-intensity conflicts can emerge with little or no warning. Thus, India too must ensure its security preparedness and adaptability to newer strategic challenges emerging in the conventional, nuclear, cyber and other hi-tech driven operations in multi-domain warfare. Importantly, the nuances of asymmetric warfare must be thoroughly analysed and its application in the Indian environment should be adapted in detail.

The world will be well advised to remember that the only way to win a war is to prevent it, and wars have a nasty habit of prolonging themselves with huge costs and no clear winners ever. The current ongoing West Asian conflict is indeed a perfect example of why such conflicts must be avoided at all costs. The failure of the first round of talks between the US and Iran in Islamabad does not portend well for global well-being. India must, therefore, make diplomatic efforts to encourage restraint among the warring parties to prevent a wider escalation that could risk a nuclear confrontation with unprecedented consequences.

The author is a subject-matter expert in the domain and has articulated the article based on original insights and professional experience; accordingly, no endnotes have been included.

United States' Air Defence in West Asia: Operational Shortcomings

Air Vice Marshal Prashant Mohan, VM (Retd)[®]

Abstract

Since the commencement of Operation Epic Fury, the combined air power of the United States (US) and Israel has attacked every possible target in Iran. On 30 Mar 2026, US President Donald J Trump announced that this coalition had struck 13,000 targets with roughly 3,000 potential targets remaining—numbers that were higher than strategic predictions that claimed the combined coalition sorties were likely to shortly exceed 10,000 by 31 Mar 2026.¹ Amidst these coalition air-attacks, Iran's response to the US-Israeli air strikes has largely been relatively measured during Mar 2026. Of late, Iran is conserving assets by being selective in its attacks. Focused on sustaining pressure on the Gulf states, Iran has opted for a strategy that can best be described as a 'Deliberate Approach'.² These attacks basically ride on two components: their missiles—both long and short range—and swarms of drones. While the US and Israeli air defence infrastructures are doing their best to stop these intrusions, the shield is often partially and periodically pierced. The article will try and tackle this puzzle: how and why are some Iranian missiles and drones penetrating the US-Israel coalition air defence infrastructure and what can India learn from this kinetic engagement.

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Introduction

The Iranian missiles and drones got through the United States (US)-Israel coalition Air Defence (AD) infrastructure and the reasons are many. However, one of the major factors was Iranian planning. The impact that the Iranian planning and execution had on its engagement with the US-Israeli forces needs to be studied. The major reasons for the unique resilience that have become characteristic of this Iranian response—and which can act as lessons learned for the Indian armed force apparatus—are listed below.

Calculated Escalation. Iran knows it cannot win this war outright, so it has studied and found the real soft under belly of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations. One can say that Iran has rightly assessed the centres of gravity in this confrontation and is escalating the stakes by widening the scope of its attacks in a calculated manner. There is no doubt that Iran's inventory is fast depleting, but it has chosen to operationalise the principle of 'The longer the disruption, the more it will be hurt', not just for the US and Israel but also globally. This, in turn, will make it harder for the US-Israel coalition to continuously justify the cost of the war.

Unhurried Planning. As a result, the physical spread of Iranian strikes across the Gulf reveals a thoughtful adaptation to their opposition's defence architecture rather than arbitrary tit-for-tat targeting. For example, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has absorbed roughly 55-60 per cent of all recorded strikes in the region. By targeting the UAE at this scale, Iran is indicating that it is strategically targeting the most visibly commercial and logistical backbone of the Gulf, specifically aiming to undermine investment in the region, disrupt its trade flows, and fracture confidence in their tourism industry. Iran is not firing missiles and drones with the same frequency and intensity everywhere across the region. Its attacks on the UAE and Saudi Arabia are heavily drone-centric, those on Qatar and Kuwait are even mix of drones and missiles, and those in Bahrain, while also drone-heavy, have a far lower volume relatively. This differentiation implies that Iranian planners are tailoring strike packages by geography—using salvos of cheap, hard-to-track drones against high-value but dispersed commercial-military nodes (the UAE, Eastern Saudi Arabia), and reserving faster, more destructive missiles for selected hardened targets.³

Layered but Persistent Pressure. Iran has relied heavily on a tag-team offensive beginning with mass loitering munitions (colloquially called *Kamikaze* [suicide] drones), followed first by short range and then by medium range ballistic missiles, and eventually by a limited number of cruise missiles. Intelligently designed, target-specific, mixed packages of these weapons are used to create layered but persistent pressure on the US–Israel coalition forces. On the other hand, the same objective is achieved in the Gulf region through short-range missiles and drones targeted towards the GCC nations. This is so because the distances of these targets from Iran are comparatively shorter, and ensuring that projectiles arrive at their targeted locations within minutes reduces reaction time for the opposition. To complicate things further, the weapon delivery system is designed to fire from multiple directions, simultaneously. This increases the likelihood of, at least a small fraction of, deployed weapons penetrating the target's defences, even when the overall interception rates are high.⁴ In fact, an argument can be made that Iran's core advantage is the extremely low cost of the Shahed drones, and it is predicted that Tehran can sustain low-rate strikes for weeks or months by mass producing via domestic lines and with Russian support.⁵

Campaign Resilience. Iran's drone and missile campaign is showing signs of reduced intensity, but the resilience of the campaign is both surprising and remarkable. For Iran, this is not like any other conflict; it is an existential fight. "This is an all-out war", said Fawaz Gerges of the London School of Economics, adding, "They believe their very survival is at stake. They're willing to bring the temple down on everyone's heads". This sentiment was also echoed by Alex Vatanka, a senior fellow at the Middle East Institute and an expert on Iranian politics, who added, "They're like a bleeding animal—wounded, therefore, more dangerous than ever".⁶

Targeting the 'Eyes and Communication'. Another aspect of Iran's strategic plan has been the deliberate damage it has inflicted on the US missile defence and Command and Control (C2) network. A *New York Times* analysis of satellite imagery found significant damage to facilities associated with communication and radar systems in at least seven US used sites.⁷ *Cable News Network*, too, using commercial satellite imagery, reported that the radar system for a US Terminal High Altitude Area Defense

(THAAD) battery at Muwaffaq Salti Air Base in Jordan was struck.⁸ At the Al-Ruwais Air Base in the UAE, Iran struck a shelter near the Army/Navy Transportable Radar Surveillance-2 (AN/TPY-2) radar and targeted vehicles carrying the THAAD system. Similarly, in Saudi Arabia, Iran hit the Prince Sultan Air Base, which also houses the AN/TPY-2 radar and vehicles from the THAAD system. Furthermore, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps publicly claims to have destroyed the Army-Navy Fixed Radar, Search 132 early warning radar at Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar.⁹ Most recently, there has been an alleged strike on the E-3 Sentry airborne warning and control system parked at the Prince Sultan Air Base in Saudi Arabia. These Iranian strikes on antennas, radomes, and associated facilities show tactical pre-meditation and seem aimed at disrupting long-distance communication and command networks, which impairs their opposition's missile and drone detection infrastructure.

Targeting the Vulnerabilities. The bedrock of this deliberate disruption strategy is to focus on tactical vulnerabilities in the opposition's military infrastructure. In this case, Iran has focused on the region's AD which is 'Very capable but finite and, thus, not leak-proof across its vast geography'.¹⁰ The defence grid is more optimised for high-altitude ballistic missiles than low-altitude drones and cruise missiles, and that is precisely the weakness that Iran sought to exploit. Moreover, this AD structure is built around point-defence systems. These points are strategically selected and arranged to protect specific high-value targets. They do not provide a continuous, impenetrable wall. Iranians have also capitalised on these gaps in their AD network as a second point of vulnerability that allows for a targeted attack.

Mixed Strike Packages. This mixed strike packages approach, where a combination of drones, cruise missiles, and ballistic missiles arrive in waves from different directions at different altitudes, also aims to saturate the radar and fire control capacity of the intended target. The contrast between Iran's approach, which relies heavily on asymmetric warfare, and that of the conventionally oriented US-Israel coalition is quite stark. As Kelly Grieco, a senior fellow with the 'Reimagining US Grand Strategy' programme at the Stimson Centre, remarked, "..... The US and Israel are excelling where you would expect them to excel—in the airspace, higher altitudes, fighting the more traditional fight".¹¹ However,

it seems that the coalition has not trained for a scenario where such a confrontation takes place with Iran.

Vulnerabilities of the United States' Air Defence Umbrella in West Asia

Having understood the Iranian strategy as a 'Deliberate Approach'¹², the question now raises about whether the US-provided AD system is invincible against an attack of such kind. There is no argument that the system itself is quite capable, but what seems evident is that it is not impervious to systematic, sustained pressure. The vulnerabilities listed in the succeeding paragraphs show why and how this AD system could be susceptible to prolonged attrition.

Exposed High Value Radar Sites. Iran, having studied the infallibility of this system, created a plan of attack accordingly; for example, it has systematically targeted static sensors in the US missile defence architecture. These static sensors were left exposed since they did not have terminal defences defending them. One plausible explanation for this gap in planning is that the American tacticians did not entertain the possibility of Iranian attacks to take this form.

Short warning Threats. Iran has exploited the geography of the region; for instance, given the proximity of the Gulf states, it chose to attack them with short range ballistic missiles that have a significantly short-flight time. As a result, the reaction window for the defending GCC countries was substantially reduced despite early warning radar functionality. When these ballistic missiles are combined with slower, low flying drone swarms, defenders have to simultaneously manage a mass and a mix of targets. This stretches the C2 structure and increases the risk of system penetration.

Vulnerable Critical Infrastructure. Furthermore, Iran has deliberately struck critical economic and civilian infrastructure like the Bahraini desalination plant¹³, Aramco's Ras Tanura refinery in Saudi Arabia, facilities in the Shaybah oil field, Kuwait International Airport, and multiple other high value sites in the UAE, Kuwait, and Bahrain. These targets are typically relatively more difficult to harden, and as expected, the US supplied systems provided comprehensive defence only for select bases and cities. The broader web of energy, water, and transport infrastructure—the

true centres of gravity for Gulf states—remained only partially covered by point defences, giving Iran many soft but tactically impactful targets which they strategically exploited.

Gaps Against Swarms and Multi-directional Low End Drones.

Moreover, the AD system in the region is optimised for high altitude ballistic and cruise threats and remains largely unprepared for attacks by saturating swarms of small, low flying drones. Current dedicated counter Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) layers, within this defence infrastructure, are comparatively thin. Iran has exploited these gaps, especially over wide rear areas and at low altitude contexts.

System of Systems Fragility. AD effectiveness depends on a comprehensive system of enablers like sensors, communication links, C2 nodes, and interceptor batteries. Without redundancy, if even one critical layer is compromised, performance of the whole architecture can rapidly degrade. The Iranian strikes show that by focusing their attacks on enabling nodes within the US AD apparatus, it can achieve disproportionate operational and strategic effect against a very expensive, relatively technologically advanced but structurally brittle US designed defence network.¹⁴

Interoperability and Political Friction. There is also an element of political friction in the region, hiccupping attempts at a coordinated defence strategy on part of the Gulf states. Even technologically advanced systems such as Patriot and THAAD cannot fully compensate for limited data-sharing or slow-to-integrate GCC-level Integrated Air and Missile Defence (IAMD). Distrust among regional partners over intelligence-sharing, C2 authority, and integration with Israeli systems has historically kept the architecture 'Sub-optimal', meaning that localised gaps remain in the AD apparatus, and these gaps can be further exploited by an adversary like Iran.¹⁵

Lack of Layered Defence. The central lesson from this 2025-26 US–Israel–Iran conflict in West Asia is that one cannot rely on a single silver-bullet platform (for example, Patriot or THAAD or Iron Dome). Operational evidence clearly indicates that only a layered, multi-system architecture—stacked across different altitude bands and tailored to different threats—can credibly mitigate the combined challenge of ballistic and cruise missiles, and that of loitering munitions. The US-provided AD certainly lacks this.

Overconfidence. Another plausible source of vulnerability for the US AD system could be a certain degree of overconfidence on part of the US strategists, who presumably had ample warning about Iran's missile–drone concept and the cost asymmetry therein. Yet, the US defence architecture was not updated fast enough to keep abreast of intelligence received, nor was it adapted comprehensively enough to integrate lessons learnt from the Ukraine conflict. In fact, Israel's AD architecture centres on a highly integrated multi-layered system (Iron Dome for short-range, David's Sling for medium, Arrow for ballistic), optimised for dense, close-range, and long-range threats. However, the US seemingly did not inculcate these lessons from its coalition partner, Israel. It is hard to see this as anything other than overconfidence. This is especially the case if it is considered that long before this conflict started, think tanks and media analyses warned that the Gulf AD architecture was structurally unsustainable against an attack like a swarm of cheap Iranian missiles and drones.¹⁶

Lessons for India

With two quite active borders, India has to prepare for the worst-case scenario, i.e., both borders becoming active simultaneously. A wide assortment of projectiles can be directed towards India from both of these borders, and they are likely to be rather potent. Therefore, it is imperative for India to further develop its AD capabilities. Suggestions for the same are listed below:

- **Plan for Saturation, Coverage, and Depth, in other words, 'Multi-tiered'.** The US experience demonstrates that even when interception percentages are high, a determined adversary can still get enough projectiles penetrated with a layered persistent attack. India must assume that attacks from Pakistan or China or both will be a mix of assorted systems operating, simultaneously, in most likelihood. For India, this would mean to have an Indian AD system that is networked, integrated, redundant, and multi-layered, so that it can sustain saturation. The priority should be depth of fire coverage across all levels. And, globally, the demand for 'Mosaic Defence' is definite to increase. However, it is critical that this defence structure is not simply aped. Rather, it should be studied thoroughly, discussed adequately, and debated at length before it is executed.

- **Strengthen Unity of C2 for AD.** In Operation Epic Fury, there was at least one well-documented case of fratricide (blue-on-blue) in the AD domain. On 02 Mar 2026, three US Air Force F-15E Strike Eagles were shot down over Kuwait by Kuwaiti AD Short-Range AD (SHORAD) systems. The aircraft were not intercepted by Iranian missiles. The IAMD in Operation Epic Fury aggregated US Patriot Advanced Capability-3, THAAD, Israeli Arrow, David's Sling, Iron Dome, and SHORAD systems in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. It was dense AD architecture but under different national command authorities, following different Rules of Engagement (ROEs), linked to US Central Command only via partial, sometimes intermittent datalinks. It was not a single unified C2 node. The available open-source analysis points to the following AD set-up¹⁷: it had fragmented C2, it lacked a unified, real-time, shared operational picture, it was a system-of-systems mismatch—different vendors, ROEs, training cultures, and incomplete deconfliction in the same airspace and with insufficient redundancy in oversight. This fratricide in question is consistent with a decentralised-execution model of C2, operating under conditions of saturation, cognitive overload, and brittle Identification Friend or Foe (IFF) and deconfliction, rather than a clean, tightly centralised C2 architecture.¹⁸

- **Centralised Command and Control in Integrated Air Defence.** In case of centralised C2, data from satellites, ground, maritime, and air-based sensors, and radars, with the help of advanced IT systems, is fused at a central node. This fused picture is then distributed in real time to various AD weapon systems. The advantages of a centralised C2 are improved overall situational awareness, prevent fratricides, systematic deconfliction, enforcement of strict IFF rules or ROEs, assignment of weapons to enemy tracks, coordinate overlapped AD zones so that multiple batteries do not engage the same track and having a single, auditable decision-making node. A central authority can prioritise which assets to protect (e.g., C2 nodes, bases, logistics hubs), allocate limited missile inventories, and sequence engagements across a layered integrated AD system (long-, medium-, short-range). This is especially useful in saturation-threat scenarios where 'Shot-management' is crucial.¹⁹ The AD during Operation Sindoor was centralised C2, and it was effective and successful.

Harden and Duplicate C2. An argument can be made that Iranian hits on US static radars and C2 facilities were history repeating itself. As such, there should be no compromise in undergrounding, hardening, and duplicating India's C2 facilities. These facilities need to be sufficiently dispersed with automatic switch-over from a primary system to a backup when the primary is compromised. Airborne C2, satellite communication-based mobile and relocatable C2, and extensive use of decoys should undoubtedly be the order of the day.

Scalable Counter-UAS Tier. Evidence has shown that traditional ground-based AD is structurally ill-suited to defeat drone swarms. The 'Last 05-10 kms' layer has to be both dense and cost-efficient.²⁰ One way to achieve this objective is to ensure that Quick Reaction Surface-To-Air Missile (QRSAM) and Akash should be complemented by mass-produced low-cost anti-drone solutions like radar-cued guns, proximity-fused shells, Man-Portable Air-Defence Systems (MANPADS), directed-energy weapons, and radio frequency or electro-optical-based soft-kill systems, all integrated via Integrated Air C2 System (IACCS).

Rear-Area Sanctuaries. India has geographic depth. The long-range drones or loitering munitions and ballistic missiles now have ranges that will threaten 'Rear-area Sanctuaries' in, say, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Vizag, Bengaluru, Bombay harbour or docks, Bombay high, refineries, etc. Investments must go in for their protection by a layered AD. Critical national asset, even in depth, should have layered point defence. These point defences have to be networked with the larger integrated national AD.

Rethinking through Basing of Enablers. The damage to (parked in the open) US tankers and an airborne warning and control system at the Prince Sultan Air Base explicitly demonstrates that even if the base is in the rear, just one successful strike can be tactically catastrophic. Moreover, fuel farms, munitions depots, and critical national assets have been shown to be vulnerable to first-person view drones and missile strikes during this conflict. Therefore, India needs to rework dispersing combat assets, hardening shelters, and support infrastructure.

Public-Private Model of Domestic Designing and Production Capacity. The two ongoing wars have shown that during active combat, interceptor and drone consumption can rapidly outstrip

peacetime production. Both Russia and the US scrambled and are still scrambling, respectively, to ensure a steady supply of interceptors and drones, among other things.²¹ In the case of Russia, it had to rapidly adapt to designing and producing drones and anti-drone systems. This is an important lesson for India as well. India, in any contingency, either with China or Pakistan, or both, cannot assume an uninterrupted supply of military hardware and software. It relies on its own capabilities and pushes for a much larger public–private model of domestic designing and reinforced production capacity with an ability to generate a surge output, if needed.

Maven Equivalent Artificial Intelligence (AI) AD Tool. Palantir has provided Maven Smart System, an AI tool, to the US Armed Forces.²² Maven Smart System is a battlefield C2 and weapons targeting AI platform built especially for the Pentagon. It fuses torrents of data from satellites, drones, radars, sensors, and intelligence reports, subsequently using AI to automatically flag potential targets, giving commanders an AI-assisted real time battlefield picture. It has typically been used for broader operational decision making. India could similarly consider AI tool(s) for its integrated AD architecture.

Training. The character of war has become dependent on evolving technology. But it is important to remember here that the destructive nature of technology is limited to its user's maleficent traits. Notwithstanding those traits, in the present day scenario—where AD operators face drones, cruise missiles, hypersonics, and heavy electronic warfare—the training should reflect this complexity by being intrinsically multi layered: joint, adaptive, cognitive, and interoperable across domains.

Doctrines. As the character of war evolves, air-defence doctrines must shift from asset-centric to network-centric, adaptive, joint frameworks.²³ Air-defence doctrine should explicitly embed space, cyber, electronic warfare, and AI-enabled sensing rather than treating them as 'Support'. Modern AD doctrine must define how human operators supervise, override, and audit machine-driven decisions.²⁴ It must combine centralised-intent and execution, especially under high-tempo, degraded C2, or escalation-management.

Conclusion

The biggest learning for India, then, is that the US, in spite of having air superiority and state-of-the-art technology, has been held at ransom against saturation strikes by massed cheap drones. This central lesson should be taken seriously for Mission Sudarshan Chakra, India's ambitious multi-layered air and missile defence initiative, which aims to create an indigenous, AI-enabled shield protecting Indian airspace from asymmetric threats like cheap drone swarms. Priority has to be given to the integration of sensors, shooters, and C2 (like IACCS/Akashteer) over standalone high-end platforms, while addressing cost asymmetry through scalable low-end layers (guns, MANPADS, QRSAM). Balancing high-end (air dominance) with low-cost scalability will indubitably prevent India from repeating the US's errors in its conflict with Iran against threats posed by Pakistan or China.²⁵

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The West Asia Conflict: Its Perspectives and Lessons for India

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Abstract

Operation Epic Fury between Iran and the United States (US) represents a pivotal geopolitical moment with profound implications for India. Iran's closure of the Straits of Hormuz has disrupted global energy markets while demonstrating the effectiveness of asymmetric warfare through mosaic deployment strategies, swarm drones, and precision missiles. The conflict exposes vulnerabilities in conventional military thinking and highlights the importance of strategic autonomy in a multipolar world. India must prioritise strategic imperatives to safeguard national interests: increase defence spending to 2.5 per cent of gross domestic product, accelerate Atmanirbhar Bharat (self-reliant India) initiatives in semiconductors and advanced weaponry, expand strategic petroleum reserves to 90 days, strengthen cyber security for critical infrastructure, and refine naval strategy toward area access and area denial in the Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal. Facing concurrent challenges with China along the Line of Actual Control and Pakistan along the Line of Control, India must balance strategic autonomy with robust alliances—particularly technical partnerships with the US and Israel—while maintaining comprehensive preparedness across military, economic, and technological domains.

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Journal of the United Service Institution of India, Vol. CLVI, No. 644, April-June 2026.

Introduction

The ongoing conflict in West Asia, particularly Operation Epic Fury involving Iran and the United States (US), represents a pivotal moment in global geopolitics with profound implications for India's strategic interests. As the Strait of Hormuz remains closed and oil prices surge globally, the conflict has evolved beyond a regional confrontation into a complex interplay of great power competition, energy security, and emerging military doctrines. For India, positioned at the crossroads of competing interests between the US, China, Russia, and regional powers, this conflict offers critical lessons in asymmetric warfare, strategic autonomy, and national preparedness. The conflict in West Asia has exposed vulnerabilities in conventional military thinking while demonstrating the effectiveness of integrated drone warfare, precision missiles, and mosaic deployment strategies.¹ As India navigates its own security challenges along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) with China and the Line of Control (LoC) with Pakistan, it becomes essential to understand these dynamics for formulating robust defence policies and strategic imperatives that can safeguard national interests in an increasingly multipolar world.

Geography, Power, and the Geopolitical Landscape

Geopolitics has two basic ingredients: geography and power, both of which tend to compete with one another.² Geography encompasses territorial boundaries, physical features, waterways, natural barriers, and natural resources. Notably, theorists Alfred Thayer Mahan and Sir Halford John Mackinder, developed divergent theories on sea control and land-based Heartland, which European colonialists followed in their quest for resources.

The collapse of the Soviet Union made America the world's sole superpower, giving it the license to dominate global affairs. For them, sea control implied protection of sea lanes of communication, domination of global maritime trade, the ability to make or break rules, deny access to inimical powers, and shape their behaviour.³ The US's continental geography allowed it to wage war without fear of supply lines being cut, while denying any outside power the capability to wage a war against it. Most nations found it profitable to access the international trading system. Even though major changes in power equations have taken place across the globe, trade patterns remain the same.

Both US trade routes, the trans-Pacific and trans-Atlantic, are profitable and safe. The third route constitutes the global hub for trade and commerce in the Asia Pacific, stretching from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific Islands. All these routes hinge around sea lanes; therefore, sea control assumes great significance. The control of two oceans, the Pacific and Atlantic, is a challenging task for any nation. When control of the Eurasian Heartland was considered, the US strategic interests required many forward-deployed military personnel and assets for power projection. That led to the US acquisition of 750 overseas bases in 80 countries worldwide, including Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean and Qatar in West Asia. This has made North America the 'Centre of Gravity' of the international system, deeply rooted in economic and technological realities.

Most West Asian states are a product of colonial-era cartography more than geography. The West has long treated this region as its geopolitical backyard, given its vast energy reserves, strategic waterways, and opportunities for forging alliances with monarchies. Western powers tend to view their actions through an old lens, believing their military strength, advanced weapons, and technological dominance could transform these 'Weak Monarchies' into willing surrogates.

The West, chiefly the United Kingdom and the US, dominated Iranian politics from 1906 until the 1979 Revolution. The US still believes, after almost five decades, that state-driven social controls, surveillance, suppression of protests, and information manipulation have eroded traditional Persian and Shia Islam culture and economic development in Iran. They assume that the lack of specialised professionals and fragmented infrastructure due to prolonged Western sanctions has created conditions for a 'Popular Uprising' against the repressive clergy rule. This is far from the truth. Iran has a long history of internal struggles for reform. Changes have always emerged from within, through social movements and political struggles. Iranian society is highly educated and resistant to foreign ideology.

The Pentagon has elevated economics and geopolitics above strategy, implying a perceptible shift from tactical manoeuvring to understanding the geography of power. The foreign policy establishment built by and for the multinational corporations in the

elite Washington DC bubble, having an eye on the West Asian oil reserves, holds economic stakes for the military–industrial complex and has always appreciated the importance of the shipping lanes emanating from Iran. Critical shipping lanes run from Shatt al-Arab through the Strait of Hormuz, while gas pipelines connect the Caspian Sea to the Mediterranean and Central Asia.⁴ Iran's coastline provides strategic positions for asymmetric naval warfare. Iran's tribal minorities in the North and South are linguistically and culturally compatible with Iranian culture, and the legitimacy of the clergy regime is fully established.

The US and Israeli planners have relied heavily on their interpretations of graphics simulation tools, which recommended rapid escalation through precision strikes targeting Iranian leadership to initiate regime collapse, dismantle its nuclear and ballistic missiles capabilities, destroy its proxies in Gaza, Lebanon, and Syria, and provide deterrence to Israel's security. For the US, fears of an assertive China securing 90 per cent of Iran's oil exports, all paid in Yuan, its impressive strategic development, the 'De-dollarisation', and threats to the reserve currency have always rankled minds. It is evident that the US escalated the conflict to checkmate China and Iran, and not for the opening of the Strait of Hormuz. It is now amply clear that the US is fighting Israel's war after having achieved its singular aim of effectively denying Iran's oil supply to China.

With its 93 million population living within mountainous borders and the barricade provided by the Zagros ranges, Iran is a virtual fortress that makes direct invasion nearly impossible. Iran has brilliantly consolidated a modern military empire on the bulwark of old military hardware and ageing aircraft inherited from the pre-1979 era. There was a fundamental shift from a conventional powerhouse of sophisticated weaponry to a more self-reliant master of asymmetric warfare, with a highly effective proxy network projecting power well beyond its frontiers to assist Shias in Iraq, Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and Houthis in Yemen.

The Iranians possess the largest and most diverse missile program in West Asia, swarm drones and speed boats manned by the highly motivated Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, which has enhanced their capability to impose high costs through unconventional warfare despite four decades of sanctions. Iran's

Mosaic Deployment strategy across 31 independent district entities commenced immediately after former Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's decapitation, using horizontal and vertical escalation. This strengthened Iran's national resolve. Its tactics to compel the US to deploy expensive interceptors against small, inexpensive drones and short-range missiles appear to have paid off. Iran, on the other hand, has conserved its superior hypersonic missiles for longer range and more lucrative targets.

Latest Situation

Operation Epic Fury has led to Iran's closure of the Strait of Hormuz, triggering immediate surges in global oil and gas prices, widespread aviation disruptions, and heightened volatility in financial markets. Gasoline prices have also risen in the US. Iran retaliated against the US bases in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Kuwait, drawing the Arab states into the conflict. Iranian missiles and drones damaged the US bases and energy infrastructure, while Israeli strikes hit Iranian facilities. Civilian areas have not been spared.

The US seeks unconditional surrender while Iran remains relentless. Washington finds itself in a quagmire, attempting to open the Strait of Hormuz with the support of 20 other nations. The possibility of amphibious or ground attacks on Kharg Island, along with four other islands, and ports such as Bandar Abbas cannot be ruled out, given battle indicators, including major military deployments. The sinking of the Iranian frigate Islamic Republic of Iran Ship Dena in Sri Lankan waters serves as a clear warning for outside powers to stay out of the Indian Ocean. Russia and China have refrained from active involvement, offering only felicitations to the new Ayatollah and rhetoric of 'Unstinted Support'. The Iran–Russia–China Axis with North Korea remains the linchpin of intensifying challenges to the existing US-led geopolitical order.

Back Channel Diplomacy

Neutral countries like Egypt, Turkey, and Pakistan are understood to have attempted to resume talks on de-escalation.⁵ It is unlikely that Iran would accept the US demand of unconditional surrender, even if its fighting potential is considerably degraded. If the US opens the Strait, de-escalation may occur if Iran relocates its enriched uranium, leading to a new Persian Gulf architecture with

reduced US presence. Alternatively, failure could result in Iran announcing nuclear weapon status, continued attacks, skyrocketing oil prices, and accelerated de-dollarisation.

Cascading Effects on South Asia

China's oil supply may be restored, and Pakistan's economy may recover. Islamabad would ensure the safety of Chinese vessels at Gwadar and Karachi, while Chinese warships maintain a presence in the Indian Ocean. Pakistan's pre-occupations on its western frontier across the Durand Line against Afghanistan would continue.⁶ Now that the conflict with the Taliban is out in the open, there is likely to be no let-up on its transgression along the LoC with India and alleged terrorist activities targeting cities and infrastructure in India. Recent statements by the newly elected Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi have prompted caution regarding any Chinese move towards the Taiwan Strait. In addition, Chinese Premier Xi Jinping remains occupied with purges within the Central Military Commission and the economic recession.

India shares geographical boundaries with China in the north and northeast along the LAC, with intrusions in Eastern Ladakh, Uttarakhand–Tibet, and Arunachal Pradesh–Tibet border. China's extensive development of logistics capabilities, especially road, rail, and air networks improvement, the development of border villages, and the construction of the massive Brahmaputra Dam on the border with India cannot be ignored.

Post-elections in Bangladesh, a realistic assessment could now provide the basis for a strategy to balance national interests with geopolitics and demographics. The recent activities of foreign intelligence agencies in India's Northeast, and destabilisation attempts in the tribal areas of Mizoram, Manipur, and Myanmar, are possibly aimed at acquiring St Martin's Island as a naval base.

India's policy of strategic autonomy must change to suit the power dynamics in West Asia. It is all about withstanding of pressure in exercising choice in the best national interests.⁷ In the era of economic warfare, America relies more on the arsenal of economic weapons, chiefly sanctions and tariffs, export controls, and investment restrictions. Its strength also stems from its massive defence budget, use of cutting-edge technologies, and the ability

to innovate faster in Artificial Intelligence (AI), computers, and other fields.

Perspectives and Lessons

Doctrinal Reassessment. The ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and West Asia have brought friction among the key players. India cannot ignore China's collusive support to Pakistan, its own belligerent posture along the LAC, and the ongoing Pakistani infiltration and intrusions by terrorists along the LoC. The 'No War No Peace' status could continue with no troop disengagement in sight. A *de novo* investigation into India's strategy and doctrines has already been necessitated by the experience of the Ukraine conflict, Operation Sindoor, and the conflict in West Asia. These conflicts have brought into focus the importance of AI-driven decision-making, the integration of data from drones, satellites, and ground sensors to assess threats, the use of large language model for multi-domain operations, and the maximum use of precision stand-off weapons, cruise missiles, loitering and decoy munitions, and swarm drones.⁸ The integration of indigenous missiles like Akashteer and BrahMos with other weapon platforms and drones in the aerial defence umbrella must be further refined.

Strong Alliances. India needs to adapt to the changing unipolar world and pursue the United Nations reforms. Technical alliance with the US and Israel for strategic autonomy, import of critical minerals, and rare earths needs to be pursued with renewed vigour.

Smart Power. India's goal towards being a smart power requires a renewed focus on technology with public-private partnerships, energy and global economics, and creation of strategic petroleum reserve depots along the coastline.

Military Diplomacy. This is a vital component of foreign policy that has been at the forefront of the conflict in West Asia. There should be a concomitant focus on how military-to-military contacts can advance their respective governments' viewpoints and immediate objectives in a clear, straightforward manner to influence decision-making. The representation and exchange programs of senior-level officers in each other's defence staff colleges and institutions are a step in the right direction. The regional expertise acquired by Indian military attachés abroad should provide invaluable input for defence policy makers in the Ministry of Defence.

Budgetary Allocation. Geopolitics is fast swivelling towards high technology. An increase in defence spending from 1.9 per cent of gross domestic product to 2.5 per cent for the next five years is necessary. There is also a need for separate allocation to the space organisation for communication satellites, measures to reduce and deter threats to its own space assets, and increased resilience in space. In addition, oil and gas exploration needs a bigger share of the budgetary allotment and must function directly under the Prime Minister's Office.

Chip Production. India has embarked on this aspect by infusing massive government capital into the semiconductor industry and encouraging the banking sector to advance loans without red tape. India needs to lure back home its scientists and engineers trained in the US who worked in Silicon Valley to capitalise on their experience. India must also forge partnerships with leading firms for technology transfer to train local workers.

Atmanirbhar Bharat (Self-reliant India). India needs to reduce its dependency on foreign suppliers for high-value projects like Tejas Mk2 and Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft. Introduce defence acquisitions and procurement reforms to increase the capacities of all public sector undertakings and startups on a wartime basis based on assured orders. One of the most touted projects, the Sudarshan Chakra, is believed to have capabilities superior to those of the Israeli Arrow, Iron Dome, and Patriot Air Defence shield, which is due for introduction by 2035. India's private sector should also be able to reverse engineer and produce at least one lakh low-cost Shahed variety drones and the Ukraine interceptor Sting drone, both for its own use as well as for export.

Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR). Subterranean caverns in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka provide buffer storage. The current 25-day capacity is insufficient; India needs 90 days of oil and gas storage. A coordinated national project on expanded SPR must be prioritised. Alternative and renewable energy efforts must continue.

Protection Against Cyber Assaults and Hackers. Critical infrastructure, including government websites, banking sector, power grids, and air traffic control systems, needs protection against cyberattacks. Filters are needed to prevent social media manipulation.

Improvement of Law-and-Order Situation in Northeast Border States.

The law-and-order situation in Northeast border states, such as Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, and Mizoram, needs improvement, and enemy psychological warfare and propaganda must be countered. Peace talks between rival factions in Manipur, relief and rehabilitation schemes, improvements in the quality of life, and development of road communications should continue. Monitoring of rivers flowing from China, especially in Arunachal Pradesh, is important.

Strategic Imperatives

Certain outstanding issues, once resolved, could contribute substantially to the India's efforts in the aftermath of the West Asia conflict:

- The government must resolve ongoing turf battles and prioritise current commitments. This is because it has been observed that there is a delay in the creation of three independent Theatre Commands and one Maritime Command. There is also a rush to develop a sixth-generation fighter when there is so much delay in fifth-generation projects like Tejas Mk1A, Tejas Mk2, and Multi-Role Fighter Aircraft.
- India should also ponder on why it cannot declare LAC and LoC as red-hot lethal frontiers and provide the best surveillance, maximum mobility to forward troops with the latest weaponry, including satellite imagery, drones, missiles, and quick reaction teams to deal with intrusions.
- India should focus on area access and area denial rather than full sea control. Priority areas include the Arabian Sea (from the Gulf of Oman to the Horn of Africa, Lakshadweep, the Maldives, and Mauritius) and the Bay of Bengal (from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands to the Malacca Straits). India needs submarines, destroyers, frigates, and missile boats to dominate the red lines in both areas. The defence of 7,000 kms of Indian coastline, 370 kms Exclusive Economic Zone, island territories, installations, ports, sea lanes, and shipping need protection.
- India needs to coordinate with Indonesia on Malacca Straits security and maritime law compliance.

- India has invested in good relations with Oman and must strengthen these further. The possibility of securing oil and natural gas supply via land routes or long-term pipelines from the UAE, bypassing the Straits of Hormuz, to Gulf of Oman ports, is to be explored as a priority.

Sometimes the price of peace can be more than the price of war.

Conclusion

The West Asia conflict serves as a stark reminder that modern warfare transcends traditional battlefields, encompassing economic sanctions, cyber warfare, energy security, and technological supremacy. For India, the lessons are clear: strategic autonomy must be backed by indigenous defence capabilities, robust alliances, and comprehensive preparedness across multiple domains. The path forward requires increased defence spending, accelerated self-reliance in critical technologies, including semiconductors and advanced weaponry, expanded strategic petroleum reserves, and enhanced cybersecurity infrastructure. India must also refine its naval strategy to focus on area denial rather than expansive sea control, strengthen border security with AI-driven surveillance systems, and pursue deeper military-to-military cooperation with strategic partners. As geopolitical fault lines deepen and the unipolar world order transforms, India's ability to adapt, innovate, and maintain strategic flexibility will determine its security and prosperity in the decades ahead. Sometimes, indeed, the price of peace demands greater investment than the cost of war.

Endnotes

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² Robert D. Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography: What the Map Tells Us About Coming Conflicts and the Battle Against Fate* (New York: Random House, 2012).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Edward Fishman, *Chokepoints: American Power in the Age of Economic Warfare* (New York: Portfolio/Penguin, 2025).

⁵ Associated Press, "Why Pakistan has emerged as a mediator between US, Iran", *Hindustan Times*, 28 Mar 2026, <https://www.magzter.com/stories/newspaper/Hindustan-Times-Mumbai/WHY-PAKISTAN-HAS-EMERGED-AS-A-MEDIATOR-BETWEEN-US-IRAN?srsIid=AfmBOopnqxbYuttSjLNNNrhy0fiWaVZu5uf5axgyuiqEqmSy29Hj4on>; Surendra Singh, "Def Council clears Rs 2.4L cr proposals for procurement of more S-400 units, transport aircraft, desi Bofors", *The Times of India*, 28 Mar 2026, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/def-council-clears-rs-2-4l-cr-proposals-for-procurement-of-more-s-400-units-transport-aircraft-desi-bofors/articleshow/129856881.cms>

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ S Jaishankar, *The India Way: Strategies for an Uncertain World* (New Delhi: HarperCollins Publishers India, 2020), pp 76-88; Michael Pillsbury, *The Hundred-Year Marathon: China's Secret Strategy to Replace America as the Global Superpower* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2015).

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Lessons From the Iran Conflict

Professor Amit Gupta®

Abstract

This article examines the evolving character of modern warfare through the ongoing Iran–United States–Israel conflict, identifying key military, political, economic, and informational lessons. It argues that traditional assumptions about technological superiority and leadership decapitation are increasingly ineffective against resilient, decentralised adversaries. The analysis highlights the growing importance of stockpiles, particularly low-cost drones, and missiles, which can overwhelm expensive defence systems and alter the cost calculus of war. It further underscores the strategic utility of asymmetric capabilities, including naval drones and missile forces, over high-value platforms such as sixth-generation fighters and aircraft carriers. The article also explores the renewed relevance of nuclear deterrence, the expansion of economic warfare targeting critical infrastructure, and the vulnerability of global energy and migration systems. Finally, it assesses the transformation of the information domain where social media challenges traditional narratives. Collectively, these trends indicate a shift towards protracted, multi-domain conflicts requiring adaptive strategies.

Introduction

At the time of writing this article, the United States (US) and Iran have agreed to a temporary ceasefire, but it is too early to state what the ultimate outcome of the conflict will be. Things that can be discussed include the lessons learnt about the weapons

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Journal of the United Service Institution of India, Vol. CLVI, No. 644, April-June 2026.

used, the tactics applied by both sides, and the implications for the conduct of military operations in future conflicts. Some of these lessons have been discussed in the succeeding paragraphs.

First, it is significant to understand what the Iranians have been able to achieve in a conflict against two nuclear powers. Tehran has matched the conventional assaults of Israel and the US and, in doing so, struck American targets in the Gulf and delivered missiles on Israeli cities and installations in Dimona and Arad that were meant to be guarded by the David's Sling anti-missile system.¹ Despite lacking an air force, and just having a small navy, the Iranians have been able to block the Strait of Hormuz, as many Indian analysts had pointed out they would, and have been able to significantly impact the global economy. Most importantly, the Iranians have not bowed to the American pressure to agree to a ceasefire on Washington's terms. This may change if America launches a full-fledged land invasion of Iran, since the casualties on both sides would pile up.

Second, the Iranians have shown a national will to fight, much in the way of Ukraine, that the West—particularly the Trump Administration—had completely underestimated. The Trump Administration bought into the Israeli claim that once the Iranian Supreme Leader would be assassinated, the country would fall apart.² Instead, nationalistic sentiments prevailed, and the Iranian population rallied around the regime. Trump was then faced with the choice of a lengthy and expensive land invasion or to try less effective measures like naval blockades and using air power to repeatedly strike targets.

While one cannot discuss the eventual outcome of the conflict, there are quite a few lessons that can be taken from it.

The Myth of Strategic Assassinations

Assassinations have a key part of the offensive strategy for both Israel and the US. The logic behind such a policy says that if you cut off the head of the snake, the body will wither and die. The US forces under Donald Trump ordered the assassination of Iranian General Qasem Soleimani in 2020, while Israel killed the head of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, in 2024. More recently, Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was assassinated in a joint US–Israeli strike in Feb 2026. While the Western press initially

praised such actions and highlighted the damage they caused, a more sombre and reflective understanding has since emerged. Such actions failed to achieve what was initially assumed to be 'Cutting the head off the snake', as seen through the resurgence of Hezbollah and the ability of Iran to fight even after it lost Ayatollah Khamenei and several other members of the senior leadership on the first day of the conflict. The Iranians, despite facing the considerable setback, were able to continue fighting and launch drones and missiles due to a decentralised decision-making authority in their military.

Worse, the leadership that succeeds is often far more hardline than the one it replaces. As a Wall Street Journal article lamented, what has emerged is "A militarised Iran ruled by a younger, hard-liner leader where the Revolutionary Guard plays an even more dominant role".³ It is believed, for example, that Ayatollah Khamenei's son, unlike his father, may encourage the development of nuclear weapons, leading to an Iran which is a far more dangerous adversary for the West.

The fact is that assassinations have, at best, a mixed record. India itself was a potential victim of such attempt when Pakistan-sponsored terrorists attacked the Indian parliament in 2001 with the goal of killing senior politicians like the then-Prime Minister and Home Minister. India has refrained from retaliating in kind, recognising that wars are ultimately fought between states, and their resolution requires engagement with the leadership of the opposing country—however objectionable those leaders may be. The US and Israeli policies of targeted assassinations have yielded only limited success against groups such as Hamas, Houthis, and Hezbollah, as these actors have often demonstrated resilience and continued to fight, with renewed determination in some cases.

It is likely, however, that other countries will try to adopt the Israeli-American model, although with varying degrees of success. So, countries may now need to include an anti-assassination contingency plan in their military strategies. This would include securing key personnel from potential assassination attempts and making sure that such personnel should not be randomly introduced to foreigners, who can provide actionable intelligence to hostile powers. Iranians believe that it was the International Atomic Energy Agency representatives who provided actionable intelligence on

the identities and whereabouts of Iranian nuclear scientists to Israel and the US. Protecting sensitive personnel, therefore, will have to be a priority of any military campaign in the future.

Relevance of Stockpiles

In past conflicts, the West has used its formidable technological superiority based on precision-guided munitions to overwhelm the defences and offences of much weaker nations like Libya, Syria, and Iraq. But in each of these cases, the actual amount of expended precision-guided munitions did not significantly draw down the western stockpiles of these weapons.

Thus, there was no requirement for a significant expenditure on high-technology weaponry in the second Iraq War or the conflict in Libya, as these were weak opponents who collapsed when they faced a well-trained military. An example of the same was Mosul's abandonment by the Iraqi Army during an onslaught by Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). In the attack on Mosul, ISIS insurgents were primarily aiming to carry out a jailbreak and free detained prisoners. However, in the face of this onslaught, Iraqi forces abandoned their uniforms and fled, leaving the city to the insurgents. Such combat environments do not require employment of large quantities of expensive high-tech weapons.

Things have changed in recent years because of the rise in the number of global conflicts, where determined opponents like Russia, Hamas, and Iran have fought effectively. This created a need for supplying high-technology defensive systems to the Jewish state. During Israel's conflict in 2025, the US and United Kingdom used their naval vessels, fighter aircraft, and defensive missiles to shoot down incoming enemy missiles over Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. The Western alliance was using USD 400,000-500,000 missiles to shoot down USD 20,000 Iranian Shaheds. The West also employed Patriot interceptor missiles, costing approximately USD 3–4 million each, to intercept significantly cheaper Iranian ballistic missiles. However, that was not the only problem associated with the use of such advanced systems against Iranian weapons.

As US Vice President JD Vance pointed out in a 2024 *New York Times* article, the country was building only 550 Patriots a year, and around 80 Terminal High Altitude Area Defense missiles

(THAADs) were being produced annually. Given that the US had to use both systems to shoot at any incoming missile, the stockpile went down quickly.⁴ Consequently, the US decided to increase Patriot missile production to approximately 650 units annually. However, these projections did not fully account for the growing demand arising from conflicts and security requirements across Ukraine, West Asia, and East Asia. This resulted in the US pulling Patriot and THAAD batteries from South Korea to West Asia much to the chagrin of Seoul, which risked the displeasure of China to allow the US to put these systems on their soil.

The shortage is compounded by the fact that these weapons are not easy to build in large numbers. Otherwise, the US would have quickly ramped up production of these weapons to satisfy the requirements of its armed forces and those of its allies.

In contrast, the Iranians have built large stockpiles of missiles and drones, and this has allowed them to prosecute the conflict in a manner of their choosing. Analysts estimate that Iran manufactures 10,000 drones a month at a cost of USD 30,000 per unit (emphasis added), allowing it to shower the Gulf and Israel with these cheap systems.⁵ Most are being shot down, but as mentioned earlier, countering these cheaper Iranian systems requires expensive ammunition. Further, Iran transferred Shahed drone technology to Russia, which subsequently improved the design, produced its own variant, and reintroduced similar enhanced systems under the designation *Geran* (Geranium). These improved drones have greater accuracy and lethality and, when guided by Russian targeting intelligence, are causing difficulties for the US, the Gulf allies, and Israel.⁶

Russia has enhanced the Iranian drones with anti-jamming antennas and greater accuracy via video links that allow for better remote navigation and even limited kinetic self-defence.⁷ While this has increased the unit cost per drone, it has also made them far deadlier, increasing the payload to a 90-kg warhead. With an operational range of 2,500 kms, *Gerans* can readily reach much of Europe and probably Diego Garcia.

Coupled with these low-technology drones is the formidable Iranian missile program. In an excellent Substack article, the Canadian analyst Rupak Chattopadhyay has explained why Iran chose to build ballistic missiles rather than design a new generation

of fighter aircraft, “Due to prolonged Western sanctions, Iran faces severe strategic and technological limitations. Pursuing modern fighter jets—especially fifth-generation stealth platforms like the F-35—would leave Iran roughly two generations (about 50 years) behind leading powers such as the US and Israel. Sanctions block access to key technologies, including advanced jet engines, avionics, radar-absorbent materials, and electronic warfare systems, rendering any domestic fighter program unrealistic and perpetually outdated”.⁸

In contrast, Chattopadhyay writes, “The Iranians decided to pursue an asymmetric approach, centred on ballistic and cruise missiles, supplemented by low-cost swarming drones (such as the Shahed series). These systems can be produced indigenously at scale, stored in underground ‘Missile Cities’, and launched from mobile platforms to saturate and overwhelm enemy defences”. Ballistic and cruise missiles have existed since the German V-1 and V-2 weapons of the World War II and continue to impose a significant toll on an adversary’s defensive systems.

Around the world, countries are, therefore, rushing to build drones and missiles since these can be made in just a fraction of the cost of fighter jets, do not face obsolescence, and require expensive countermeasures. Yet, it is interesting to note that large air forces tend to be conservative and have not worked to bring drones in sufficient numbers into their arsenals, rather banking on the development of the next generation of fighters, which are technologically complex and prohibitively expensive.

The sixth-generation fighters being developed around the world are expected to cost USD 150 mn and upwards, making the acquisition of a sizeable number very difficult; in the Indian context, if the decision is made to produce these aircraft indigenously, the cost is likely to be even higher. Further, as the Iranians have demonstrated, a stealth fighter like the F-35 can be shot down, and this reveals the financial costs of deploying such aircraft in large numbers. On the other hand, a fleet of long-range missiles and drones are, in comparison, not only cheap but, as shown in the case of the Geranium, can be easily tweaked to become far more effective.

Naval Warfare

A similar case can be made in the case of navies, including the Indian Navy, which favours the acquisition of large and expensive capital ships like destroyers and aircraft carriers to project maritime power. While surface ships are necessary, they are not sufficient. The sinking of the IRIS Dena by the US Navy reflects the effectiveness of submarines against surface vessels and debunks the Indian Navy's doctrinal objective of achieving sea control in the Indian Ocean. The US submarine's attack proved that the American Navy is the most powerful force in the Indian Ocean, and it is futile to talk in terms of India achieving sea control in the Indian Ocean.

In the naval context, the Iran conflict reveals the true value of submarines as opposed to expensive surface vessels. Further, missiles have changed the complexion of naval warfare. The US had to pull both of its aircraft carriers further away from the Iranian coastline because it became clear that Tehran's anti-ship missiles could have damaged them. No such action must be taken for submarines since they are difficult to locate underwater, and the range of the missiles they fire continues to increase exponentially. When the next generation of Indian missiles are produced, Indian submarines will not have to leave the country's maritime space since the range will be great enough to hit any target.

The other advancement employed by Iran is the use of naval drones. These were first used in Russia-Ukraine conflict. These drones are small surface vessels that can be used with significant effect in confined maritime spaces, like the Black Sea and the Persian Gulf. The Ukrainian naval drones, named Magura, are fast boats that reach speed of 80 kmph and have successfully taken out several Russian naval vessels. Similarly, the Iranian naval drone fleet has been responsible for hitting several oil tankers in the Persian Gulf, which has compensated for the American Navy's effective defanging of the Iranian surface fleet.⁹ The Iranian military has also built underwater drones, which could be used in lieu of surface naval vessels and submarines as both would be probably easier to track in the confined spaces of the Persian Gulf.

The Utility of Nuclear Weapons

Since the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty became law, the common belief has been that non-nuclear states should not be allowed to acquire nuclear weapons. Despite the edict, four countries—India, Pakistan, North Korea, and Israel—have crossed the nuclear rubicon and acquired strategic weaponry and associated delivery systems. Yet, recent conflicts have brought out why nations require nuclear weapons as the ultimate provider of defence and strategic autonomy. Former leaders like Libyan Prime Minister Muammar Gaddafi and Iraq's President Saddam Hussain were unable to produce nuclear weapons despite their efforts, resulting in an end to their regimes as well as their personal lives. In contrast, Kim Jong Un has grown and further developed the nuclear force that his father created, and, despite Trump's best efforts, the North Korean regime remains secure.

Iran's reluctance to cross the nuclear rubicon has put it at a disadvantage in deterring two powers, Israel and the US. If it had taken the next step and gone from its 60 per cent enriched uranium to the 90 per cent enrichment that is required to build a weapon, it would have created a different strategic dilemma for the rest of the world, since it would have made it far more difficult to take aggressive military measures against Tehran. Iran's plans and steps in the future towards becoming a nuclear state remain an open-ended question, as the views of the new regime regarding its potential exercise are unclear. However, it is now clear that other nations in the international system are reconsidering their position on nuclear weapons.

The fact is that several nations are now engaged in active debates about the need to go nuclear. Poland, for example, has started talking about having some sort of nuclear deterrent as it contemplates allowing US nuclear weapons to be based on its soil.¹⁰ In South Korea, a poll revealed that over 70 per cent of respondents favoured an indigenous nuclear weapons program, and this trend may gain ground as the American commitment to defend Seoul is being questioned.¹¹ Even Japan, which is the only nation to have suffered a nuclear attack, is now witnessing a debate regarding the need for nuclear weapons.¹² Ukrainians, similarly, regret their government's decision in the 1990s to give away their nuclear weapons in exchange for a dubious security

guarantee. Thus, it is quite likely that multiple nations may seek to exercise their nuclear option; given that some of these states could be within the Western alliance, it may prove difficult to prevent broader proliferation within the international system.

Economic Warfare

The Russo-Ukraine conflict has witnessed the widespread use of economic warfare, with Russia repeatedly targeting its adversary's electricity grid and critical infrastructure. Similarly, in the Iran conflict, Tehran and Jerusalem have targeted civilian infrastructure as part of efforts to intimidate each other's populations. Tehran has also reportedly destroyed 17 per cent of Qatar's liquified natural gas production facility, an action that will have significant ramifications for global energy supplies in the post-conflict world. Such types of economic warfare are gaining currency in modern conflict but, instead, they must be condemned by international community as a crime against civilians.

In Operation Sindoor, the Indian Prime Minister gave explicit orders that only military targets would be attacked in the conflict. This is how conflicts should be fought, as both sides are vulnerable to an attack on their economic targets, including power stations, dams, and communications centres. Doing so leads to greater devastation and makes post-war recovery lengthy and expensive. Energy experts are already speculating about the time it will take to restore oil and natural gas production in the Gulf to pre-conflict levels and, in the interim, the amount of damage that the shortage of energy supplies will inflict on the global economy.

Also, nations engaging in economic warfare need to understand that this act will eventually blow up in their face in a post-conflict world, both diplomatically and politically, since nations will seek to diversify energy supplies from the Gulf. One possible lesson from the Iran conflict is that it could spur the emergence of a global consensus around a treaty defining what constitutes legitimate targets in future wars.

The problem for the Gulf states is that if the conflict escalates, destruction of their economic targets will not only have a developmental impact but even perhaps an existential impact if the Iranians destroy the desalination plants and the electricity grid of the Arab countries. The destruction of desalination plants would

render these nations uninhabitable, as would the obliteration of their electricity grids, given that modern populations in these regions rely heavily on climate-controlled environments. Additionally, any such economic attack would have a devastating impact on the post-oil development plans of states such as Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). As discussed below, all these nations see themselves as being a part of the global services economy but that requires long-term peace, a well-trained labour force, regional stability, and a first-rate infrastructure. All of these would be threatened by the advent of sustained economic warfare and hence, these countries are fearful about escalation of the conflict.

Immigration and the Gulf War

There is another side to economic warfare that is particularly important in the context of the Gulf—immigrants have been responsible for building up the modern infrastructure and economy in these nations. For a country like the UAE, around 90 per cent of the population are foreigners, who have been responsible for construction, services, and upper-end jobs that have allowed Dubai to claim itself as ‘Singapore of the West Asia’. Dubai also became the playground of the rich as wealthy people have purchased real estate in the fancy neighbourhoods of the Gulf state. Now, with the destruction caused by the conflict, these immigrants are migrating away from the country, and there is no guarantee of their return.

Before 1973, Lebanon was the financial and entertainment centre of the West Asia as wealthy Arabs deposited their money in Lebanese banks, while tourists and locals partied on the beaches of the country. Lebanon’s francophone culture and westernised appearance made it extremely attractive to the rest of the region until the Lebanese civil war began. As a result, Lebanon’s reputation as a safe haven in an increasingly volatile West Asia eroded, prompting significant capital flight from the country. Lebanon’s elite applied for dual nationality in countries like Canada and Australia. 50 years later, the country has still not bounced back to its good times.

The UAE, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia have all drawn up plans for a post-oil and gas scenario where they act as centres of services and tourism. This requires all these countries to exist

within a politically stable region. Global multinationals like Goldman Sachs, Apple, and Microsoft would probably not continue to function in a region where the threat of war breaks out every six months. This would mean that they are not likely to invest or send their best personnel. This creates an opportunity for other countries, particularly India, which has trained personnel, to enter and help rebuild and stabilise these countries.

In a post-war situation, the Indian government needs to renegotiate the terms and conditions under which Indians are employed in the Gulf. There exist stories abound of Saudis, Qataris, Emiratis, and others mistreating Indian workers—white collar or blue collar—both legally and illegally. The time has come to change these terms and conditions. It is imperative that Indians employed in these countries should be working under International Labour Organization rules and regulations. This would be a breakthrough, and it would help the Gulf states because they need to realise that if they are striving to be modern service-oriented societies, they need to abide by the rule of law, particularly international labour law.

The Information War

In both Gulf Wars I and II, the Western alliance had a monopoly on global media outlets, and the internet had not reached its true potential. Consequently, the West was able to shape the media narrative and ensure that their version of the story, narrated using embedded journalism, became the universal version of truth. Thus, the wars were spectacular military successes, and it made the use of force an easy activity with few adverse consequences.

The insurgency in Iraq changed that; while George W Bush and Barack Obama were declaring victory, Americans were seeing their relatives return home in body bags or, worse, as the walking wounded who would require expensive medical care for a lifetime. Thus, while *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* acted as cheerleaders for the American administration, American population was being increasingly exposed to the true cost of the war on social media.

A comparable situation emerged with the outbreak of the Gaza conflict. While the mainstream print and television media was pro-Israeli, social media platforms become the source for

getting their news. These platforms exposed the human costs and brutality of the conflict, leading many younger Americans—who constituted a significant portion of TikTok’s user base—to adopt a more pro-Palestinian stance.

In the current conflict, both the Western and Arab media are giving a stilted version, which does not stand true to all facts. Iranian strikes on the US bases in the Gulf have often been downplayed, while those carried out by Israel and the US have been accorded full credence, including claims that most of Iran’s missile launchers have been destroyed. The problem with this approach is that, over time, the target audiences of such media broadcasts—the American and Arab publics—will realise that they are being fed inaccurate information and begin to seek alternative sources. The beginning of this realisation is already visible, as most of the Americans do not see Iran as an existential threat, and they do not approve of the US involvement in the Iranian conflict. Presenting the war in a way that it is believable to the domestic public will be a crucial element of fighting wars in the future.

Conclusion

In conclusion, whatever the outcome of Iran conflict is, it has had a major impact on the shape of modern warfare, and the lessons are military, political, economic, and media oriented. Militaries will have to remember these lessons in their future planning.

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Sri Lanka as China's Human Intelligence Hub: The Four Global Initiatives Facade in the Indian Ocean Region

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Abstract

Amid intensifying Sino-United States competition, the volatile Sri Lanka has emerged as a critical laboratory for China's geopolitical reconfiguration in the Indian Ocean Region. This article analyses how Beijing leverages Four Global Initiatives (4GIs) i.e., Global Development Initiative, Global Security Initiative, Global Civilisational Initiative, and Global Governance Initiative, launched in quick succession between 2021 and 2025, in turbulent Sri Lanka as sophisticated vectors for expanding its peculiar Human Intelligence (HUMINT) operations post-Rajapaksa era (Aragalaya Uprising). By analysing recent developments in Sri Lanka, from the prism of Chinese 4GIs, this article attempts to unravel how benign looking initiatives subtly cloak a strategic convergence of Chinese HUMINT and soft power aimed at securing a strategic Sri Lanka to secure its Maritime Silk Route, stabilise the Anura Kumara Disسانayake government, normalising Pax-Sinica norms and, thereby, positioning Sri Lanka as a China's HUMINT hub under the cloak of 4GIs.

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Journal of the United Service Institution of India, Vol. CLVI, No. 644, April-June 2026.

Introduction

Sri Lanka's pivotal location astride the Persian Gulf-to-Pacific Energy chokepoints, compounded by its fragile post-2022 *Aragalaya* (struggle) recovery, positions Colombo as the Indian Ocean Region's (IOR) strategic linchpin amid sharpening United States (US)–China–India contestation. The US–Iran conflict escalation, epitomised by the sinking of IRIS Dena off Colombo's coast on 04 Mar 2026¹, and Iranian ballistic strikes on Diego Garcia (20–21 Mar 2026)² exposes Sri Lanka's acute vulnerability to great-power conflict while amplifying China's 'Malacca Dilemma'. China has launched four Global Initiatives (4GIs)—Global Development Initiative (GDI), Global Security Initiative (GSI), Global Civilisational Initiative (GCI), and Global Governance Initiative (GGI)—in quick succession between 2021 and 2025 to reorient its global approach away from the hardware-heavy trajectory of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) toward a more holistic model of influence. This shift seeks to mitigate debt-trap perceptions while expanding influence through economic dependencies, security architectures, cultural narratives, and normative frameworks.³

China's recalibration in Sri Lanka via its 4GIs is transforming Hambantota Port and Colombo Port City from vilified BRI 'Debt Traps' into mission-critical dual-use bastions. Under Sri Lankan President Dissanayake, milestones like the Sinopec refinery, maritime accords, and accelerated trade have eclipsed Rajapaksa-era accusations, enabling Hambantota to refine sanctioned Iranian oil, while hosting People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) warships, thereby, directly challenging the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) and countering President Trump's IOR containment strategy. Post-*Aragalaya*, Colombo's pivot to Chinese Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) (not loans), alongside International Monetary Fund (IMF) reforms, cements its role as Beijing's key partner in securing energy supplies, advancing multipolarity, and projecting power in the IOR.

Despite abundant low-risk technological intelligence options, China, with the world's second-largest human asset pool after India, has subtly integrated its peculiar Human Intelligence (HUMINT) operations with technology-driven methods. Beijing has refined this hybrid approach by embedding espionage within public diplomacy, reducing detection risks while accelerating operations

and heightening ambiguity to confuse adversaries, thereby, ensuring a resilient, multi-layered espionage ecosystem. As Beijing pivots from COVID-hit BRI infrastructure to normative power via the 4GIs, this article demonstrates how embedded espionage elements have institutionalised China's HUMINT operations through these frameworks, transforming Sri Lanka into a crucible for intelligence-driven global dominance.

Chinese Four Global Initiatives: A Self-Reinforcing Global Ecosystem

The 4GIs marks Beijing's shift from the BRI to a self-reinforcing ecosystem that challenges the Western liberal order by addressing governance deficits in an integrated manner: GDI fosters economic dependencies, GSI builds security and technology partnerships, GCI shapes legitimising narratives, and GGI institutionalises these gains through rule-making influence. Together, these initiatives create a reinforcing cycle of material reliance, security alignment, ideological convergence, and governance influence, thereby, expanding China's geopolitical leverage.⁴ China's official narratives describe the 4GIs as an 'Organic Whole', in which GDI provides the material foundation, GSI safeguards a stable environment, GCI builds value consensus, and GGI supplies institutional guarantees. Under the rubric of the 4GIs, China advances techno-authoritarian models through its economic reach: GDI finances digital infrastructure projects such as the BeiDou Navigation Satellite System and Artificial Intelligence (AI), thereby, creating dependencies; GSI promotes surveillance technologies under the guise of security assistance; GCI legitimises information control as cultural sovereignty; and GGI seeks to reshape existing international bodies such as the United Nations (UN) while proposing parallel institutions, including the International Organisation for Mediation, to influence global dispute resolution mechanisms.⁵

Unique Chinese Human Intelligence Operations

While disruptive technologies enable cost-effective, risk-free data harvesting at scale, China has innovatively evolved its intelligence acquisition by blending HUMINT with cutting-edge tech, creating a hybrid force multiplier for 4GIs-driven influence and dominance. This integration leverages HUMINT's unique edge in capturing nuanced cultural insights that machines cannot replicate. Contrary

to the traditional intelligence collection by a few specialised agents, Chinese agencies use the policy of ‘Thousand grains of sand or mosaic approach or human wave or citizen spying’⁶ wherein they employ numerous Han people and their diaspora settled abroad. Beijing’s creativity and ability to combine all the elements of ‘Societal Power’, including espionage, information control, industrial policy, political and economic coercion, foreign policy, threat of military force, and technological strength, pose a challenge to the existing rules-based international order.⁷

China’s Four Global Initiatives and Human Intelligence Operations

Rob Joyce, former US National Security Agency senior adviser contrasted Russian and Chinese cyber threats, stating, “Russia is the hurricane, fast and hard; China is climate change, long, slow, and pervasive”.⁸ This metaphor captures Beijing’s strategic modus operandi: unlike Russia’s immediate approach, China executes structural, systemic transformation through the evolution of the 4GIs from the BRI, reshaping global norms as remedies for perceived deficits. By positioning itself as a provider of global public goods and addressing growth through GDI, peace through GSI, civilisational dialogue through GCI, and governance through GGI, China has quietly secured structural dominance without triggering alarms, methodically realigning the international order with Xi Jinping’s multipolar vision. This ‘Boiling Frog’ strategy gradually escalates pressure, compelling the Global South to accept each incremental step, from loans to equity FDI, followed by PLAN’s docking rights, security pacts, eventually culminating into complete economic dependency without realising the entrapment until too late.

Chinese Four Global Initiatives and Human Intelligence Influence Operations in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka’s journey from debt-fuelled fury in 2022 to perfect strategic alignment in 2026 validates Beijing’s incremental global strategy, demonstrating how the 4GIs excel through patient, invisible normalisation. Hambantota’s transformation from being a debt trap to becoming GSI maritime security hub, while cultural institutes quietly recruit influencers under GCI cover, exemplifies how Beijing’s preferences are reframed as universal human progress. The idiom ‘A leopard can’t change its spots’ aptly

describes Colombo's trajectory: despite the 2022 *Aragalaya* protests against Chinese debt, President Dissanayake has surprisingly embraced Sinopec refineries, PLAN deployments, tech enclaves, and intelligence networks, converting economic footholds into geopolitical supremacy. Sri Lanka now stands as a strategic crucible where the 4GIs converge to transform infrastructure into sophisticated HUMINT networks. Amid Hormuz disruptions, GDI drives industrial localisation, GSI secures PLAN's access against QUAD's encirclement, GCI positions China as a Buddhist civilisational partner, and GGI coordinates debt-equity conversions. By reaffirming commitment to a 'Community with a shared future' and signing 15 Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs), Colombo has cemented its role in Jinping's comprehensive architecture, securing China's Gulf oil transits while building pervasive espionage networks to counter Trump's Indo-Pacific containment.⁹

Global Development Initiative and Chinese Human Intelligence in Sri Lanka

GDI, launched at the UN General Assembly (UNGA) in Sep 2021, advances the UN's 2030 Agenda via six principles: development as a priority, people-centered approach, benefits for all to leave no country and no one behind, innovation-driven development, harmony between human and nature, and results-oriented actions, with an aim to frame China as the Global South's advocate against Western imbalances. In quick time, GDI gained backing from over 100 countries and organisations, with more than 80 nations in its 'Group of Friends'.¹⁰

Colombo and Beijing have agreed to advance and sign a BRI cooperation plan under the GDI framework in Sri Lanka, fully utilise workshops, and leverage platforms like the China International Import Expo (CIIE) to enhance trade and investment.¹¹ In Sep 2025, Sri Lanka reaffirmed its commitment to GDI in a UNGA Meeting chaired by the Chinese Premier Li Qiang.¹² Post-*Aragalaya*, debt restructuring has positioned GDI as Sri Lanka's economic recovery vehicle, balancing IMF requirements with Chinese equity investments rather than loans. The USD 3.7 bn Hambantota refinery project by Sinopec, announced in early 2026, exemplifies the initiative's focus on industrial localisation and green development.¹³

The Colombo Port City and Hambantota refinery host thousands of Chinese engineers, finance professionals, and technical experts under the GDI framework. The Port City's Special Economic Zone tax incentives and legal autonomy attract Chinese fintech firms and BRI banks, granting them diplomatic-level security and direct flight connectivity while leveraging Silk Road Workshops and CIIE participation to rotate United Front Work Department personnel, thereby embedding HUMINT networks within local communities. Positioned as complementary economic engines, these GDI-branded projects secure a persistent Chinese presence along Sri Lanka's maritime approaches near India under the cover of sustainable development and industrial localisation.

Global Security Initiative and Chinese Human Intelligence in Sri Lanka

GSI, launched at the Boao Forum on 21 Apr 2022, advances six core commitments: indivisible security, sovereignty respect, UN Charter adherence to the legitimate security concerns, dialogue-based dispute resolution, common and sustainable security, and comprehensive traditional and non-traditional security. It prioritises state-centric stability through cyber sovereignty, biosecurity, and AI governance, positioning Beijing as the Global South's security mediator. Operationalised via a Feb 2023 concept paper and platforms like the Global Public Security Cooperation Forum, GSI showcases Chinese surveillance technologies and digital infrastructure to advance win-win partnerships across fragmented geopolitical landscapes.^{14,15} Over 90 bilateral and multilateral documents now incorporate GSI language while systematically converting GDI economic dependencies into enduring security partnerships that discreetly embed Chinese standards.¹⁶ GSI's notable recent achievement is China's mediation of the Mar 2023 agreement, normalising relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran, restoring diplomatic ties after seven years and securing commitments from both states to principles aligned with the initiative.^{17,18}

In Sri Lanka, GSI advances China's vision of cooperative security to expand its strategic footprint through law enforcement aid, infrastructure leverage, and bilateral pacts. Sri Lanka endorses GSI facilitating capacity-building in judicial, law enforcement, and security sectors, including equipment, training, and joint operations

against transnational crimes like telecom fraud, evidenced by arrests of Chinese nationals and police deployments for scam probes.^{19,20} In Jan 2025, during the Sri Lankan President's visit to Beijing, a joint statement elevated security ties within their strategic partnership, committing China to anti-crime assistance and maritime cooperation.²¹ The lease of Hambantota Port anchors GSI influence, enabling dual-use access for surveillance vessels despite military curbs, complemented by maritime MoUs on domain awareness and rescue.²² Both nations have committed to maritime security cooperation based on equality and mutual trust, including regular consultations, marine conservation, maritime domain awareness, rescue operations, and a MoU on Ocean Cooperation toward blue partnership.²³

GSI augments China's HUMINT footprints in Sri Lanka by embedding covert intelligence-gathering within overt security cooperation, law enforcement, and infrastructure platforms, transforming economic leverage into persistent human networks. Capacity-building in judicial, police, and security sectors through equipment, training, and joint anti-fraud operations creates prime HUMINT channels. Chinese police deployments for scam probes²⁴ enable operational liaisons to cultivate local informants and recruit assets within Sri Lankan law enforcement to monitor political shifts, economic dealings, and rival Indian and US activities. The Hambantota Port lease serves as a potential dual-use intelligence hub, where surveillance vessels may support not only signals intelligence but also HUMINT activities. Maritime MoUs can facilitate the presence of Chinese advisors among port workers, fishermen, and officials, enabling the collection of coastal intelligence on naval movements and smuggling patterns in pursuit of influence in the IOR. GSI further embeds Chinese diplomats and security attaches as case officers, penetrating decision-making circles amid BRI projects and debt-relief dependencies.

Global Civilisational Initiative and Chinese Human Intelligence in Sri Lanka

Jinping launched GCI on 15 Mar 2023 at the Communist Party of China (CPC) Dialogue with World Political Parties High-Level Meeting, championing civilisational diversity while advancing peace, development, equity, justice, democracy, and freedom through China's state-centric governance.²⁵ Rejecting the 'Clash of

Civilisations' rhetoric, GCI promotes mutual learning over Western universalism.²⁶ It exports Confucian-digital authoritarianism via Confucius Institutes, rebranded as Chinese International Education Foundation since 2020²⁷, and World Internet Conference platforms, normalising cyber sovereignty and algorithmic control.²⁸ The Global Civilizations Dialogue Ministerial Meeting in Beijing on 10 and 11 Jul 2025 secured endorsements from over 600 delegates across 140 countries under 'Safeguarding Diversity of Human Civilisations', notably penetrating Eastern Europe.²⁹ China's Jun 2024 UNGA resolution to establish 10 Jun as International Day for Dialogue among Civilizations achieved unanimous adoption.³⁰ By Dec 2022, China listed 43 items on the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization's Intangible Cultural Heritage roster.³¹

On 07 Jun 2024, Sri Lanka proudly co-sponsored China's UNGA resolution³², a key alignment with GCI's rejection of the Clash of Civilisations rhetoric and promotion of mutual learning, establishing Colombo as an active voice in Beijing-led global forums. On 12 Jun 2025, the 2nd South Asian Sinologists Conference and China-Sri Lanka Scholars' Dialogue held in Colombo featured cultural exhibitions and heritage displays embodying Jinping's 2023 GCI vision. At the opening ceremony, the Sri Lanka Sinologists Council (36th globally) was established alongside the trilingual publication of 1952 Rice-Rubber Agreement parliamentary debates. This institutionalises Sri Lankan Sinology within international networks, coordinating South Asian academic activities to deepen Sino-Sri Lankan cultural cooperation.³³ China and Sri Lanka will further deepen education exchanges through scholarships, Luban workshops, digital classrooms, and develop the China–Sri Lanka Joint Centre for Education and Research. They committed to exchanges in culture, youth, think tanks, sports, media, Buddhism, and sister-city partnerships, with China promoting its language education and supporting Sri Lanka's tourism through the Silk Road Cities Alliance. Additional commitments include health cooperation through Yunnan's Brightness Action and cultural heritage preservation under the Asian Initiative Alliance.^{34,35} In Jan 2026, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi emphasised the country's willingness to expand exchanges in governance, infrastructure, maritime affairs, tourism, and cultural cooperation. He also highlighted China's commitment to safeguarding the rights of developing countries, upholding multilateralism, and promoting a fairer global governance system.³⁶

Under the GCI's benign cloak, China establishes covert HUMINT networks in Sri Lanka by leveraging the Beijing-funded Sri Lanka Council of Sinologists to recruit academics and historians as assets. Long-term cultivation via workshops, scholarships, and Buddhist exchanges embeds intelligence requirements within vocational and religious networks, enabling operatives to identify future leaders, gather dual-use technology data, and conduct surveillance under the guise of tourism and heritage preservation. This creates a resilient, deep-cover HUMINT apparatus that penetrates Sri Lanka's intellectual, political, and security elites while evading counter-intelligence scrutiny.

Global Governance Initiative and Chinese Human Intelligence in Sri Lanka

GGI is China's latest global initiative of this decade, forming part of a broader strategy to reshape the international order in alignment with its power, norms, and interests.³⁷ Introduced by Jinping at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Plus meeting in Tianjin on 01 Sep 2025, GGI serves as a cornerstone of China's vision for a 'Community with a shared future for mankind', completing the quartet alongside GDI, GSI, and GCI.³⁸ It systematically addresses the fundamental questions of global governance, 'By whom, how, and for whom it is conducted', while responding to the concerns of the international community and presenting itself as the correct choice for tackling global challenges and the essential path to resolving the governance deficit.³⁹ GGI promotes five principles: sovereign equality for universal participation, rule of law for orderly systems, multilateralism for solidarity, a people-centred approach for inclusive outcomes, and real results for efficient processes.⁴⁰ On 08 Mar 2026, Wang Yi stated that more than 150 countries and international organisations have expressed support for GGI.⁴¹

China strategically manipulates multilateral institutions to align them with its preferences, stifling opposition and promoting the CPC's perspectives.⁴² A former UN staffer exposed Beijing's tactics for censoring sensitive issues, altering reports, and marginalising human rights and democracy in UN forums.⁴³ As the US global influence declines under President Trump's retrenchment policy, China fills the gap by penetrating existing organisations and launching new ones in emerging fields like AI, space, and deep-sea mining. GGI, framed as South-South cooperation, fosters

Global South reliance, embeds intelligence networks, normalises Chinese standards, and erodes Western norms alongside institutional accountability. In Oct 2021, while marking China's 50th year as a UN Security Council permanent member, UN Secretary-General António Guterres hailed China as an important contributor and a major pillar of international cooperation.⁴⁴ On 24 Oct 2024, a House Committee report exposed China's co-optation of the UN and World Health Organization, while advancing standards via Huawei and ZTE support.⁴⁵ Beijing also wields financial leverage and key personnel placements in establishments such as the Food and Agriculture Organization, International Telecommunication Union, and Department of Economic and Social Affairs to block resolutions, elevate sovereignty and development issues over liberal values, and forge anti-Western alliances through aid initiatives.⁴⁶

China and Sri Lanka reaffirmed UNGA Resolution 2758, which recognised the People's Republic of China as the only legitimate representative of China to the UN and Sri Lanka's one-China commitment, while agreeing to deepen government, legislative, and political party exchanges to consolidate political trust and share governance experiences. In addition, both the nations aim to jointly advance Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including climate change cooperation.⁴⁷ China pledged continued financial support through IMF coordination, currency swaps with China's Bank, and agricultural cooperation in biotechnologies to boost Sri Lanka's SDG capacity.⁴⁸

Though nascent, GGI offers potent cover for covert HUMINT networks by exploiting reaffirmed commitment to UNGA Resolution and deepened party-state exchanges to penetrate Sri Lanka's apex apparatus. The mandate to 'Share Governance Experiences' provides a direct conduit for Chinese intelligence officers as policy advisors to cultivate and recruit Sri Lankan legislators and senior bureaucrats as assets during closed-door workshops on political trust. Furthermore, Beijing's role as an IMF coordinator and creditor liaison grants unparalleled leverage over Colombo's economic sovereignty, creating a coercive environment where financially vulnerable officials can be turned into sources for sensitive data. Pushing enterprise cooperation embeds collectors within state-owned enterprises and regulatory bodies to map critical infrastructure, while biotechnology and climate cooperation offer

specialised cover for accessing dual-use research. This effectively fuses economic statecraft with a covert HUMINT network, targeting the core of Sri Lankan governance and financial security.

Conclusion

Sri Lanka has crystallised as China's premier HUMINT hub in the IOR, where the 4GIs operate not as benign public diplomacy slogans but as a calculated facade for covert intelligence expansion. Pivoting from BRI's 'Debt-trap' backlash amid heightened Sino-US rivalry and US-Iran conflict, Beijing now deploys the 4GIs to recalibrate toward a sustainable path, seamlessly embedding intelligence gathering within developmental and cultural initiatives. Ostensibly, GDI secures economic leverage, GSI legitimises security cooperation, GCI institutionalises academic-religious networks, and GGI engages apex governance. In reality, this holistic approach allows Beijing to subtly infiltrate HUMINT footprints across Sri Lanka's political, financial, and social strata, bypassing counter-intelligence scrutiny. By fusing these initiatives, China transforms Sri Lanka into a secure logistical and intelligence hub essential for dominating the IOR, ensuring Colombo remains firmly anchored within Beijing's orbital influence against the US containment.

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Missiles, Drones, and Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance Fusion in Current Conflicts: Lessons for India's Air Defence, Deterrence, and Escalation Management

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Abstract

The Jun 2025 Iran–Israel–United States conflict—marked by Israeli strikes on Iranian nuclear infrastructure, direct American B-2 employment against hardened underground facilities, and Iran's subsequent closure of the Strait of Hormuz in Mar 2026—is the most operationally significant state-on-state air and missile exchange since the Gulf War. Its consequences on global energy security are still visible. Taken alongside the Russia–Ukraine conflict's demonstration of drone-enabled attrition, the Houthi campaign's systematic coercion of global maritime trade, and the multi-front Israel– Hamas–Hezbollah confrontation, it forms a coherent and urgent body of battlefield evidence with direct implications for India's strategic posture.

This article draws on these four conflict theatres to identify structural lessons for India's air defence architecture, deterrence posture, and escalation management. The central finding is that the battlefield fusion of low-cost unmanned systems,

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precision long-range missiles, persistent intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, and electronic warfare is fundamentally altering the conditions under which deterrence holds. For India—which must simultaneously manage military pressure from two nuclear-armed adversaries across the Himalayas and the western plains without the benefit of formal alliance support, and whose energy security depends heavily on the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf sea lanes that are increasingly vulnerable to disruption—these are not distant strategic challenges but immediate operational concerns. The article concludes with five recommendations addressed to India’s military planners, acquisition community, and strategic leadership.

Introduction

The four active conflict theatres—Russia–Ukraine, the Israel– Hamas–Hezbollah confrontation, the Houthis’ Red Sea campaign, and the Iran–Israel–United States (US) conflict—have produced a body of campaign evidence that strategists can no longer treat as geographically remote.¹ The common thread is the fusion of low-cost drones, precision long-range missiles, persistent Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR), and networked command architectures, leading to conditions in which deterrence is more fragile, escalation harder to control, and military success increasingly dependent on resilience rather than platform quality. High-value, low-density systems—tanks, warships, advanced aircraft—are absorbing attrition from weapons, costing a fraction of their replacement value.² The side that sustains operational tempo through redundancy and adaptive logistics holds an advantage that small inventories of exquisite platforms cannot offset.

India faces simultaneous military pressure from two nuclear-armed adversaries across the Himalayas, western plains, and maritime frontiers, while lacking the security cushion of a formal alliance. At the same time, more than 85 per cent of its crude oil imports originate from the Persian Gulf region, underscoring its strategic vulnerability. Hence, it cannot treat these lessons as just peripheral. The article analyses how the above-mentioned conflicts

have changed the conditions of deterrence, and what steps India can take.

The Changing Character of Warfare

Low-cost unmanned systems have restructured the economics of lethality. First-Person View (FPV) drones, commercially modified quadcopters, and purpose-built loitering munitions have compressed the cost of destroying a main battle tank or artillery piece to a few hundred dollars—a fraction of the target's replacement value.³ Watling and Reynolds have documented this cost compression in the Ukrainian context as “The exchange rate between defender interceptors and attacking munitions is already unsustainable for a force built around small numbers of expensive platforms”.⁴ When defenders exhaust interceptors faster than attackers exhaust munitions, defensive perimeters collapse. This calculation has played out in observed operational data across every theatre examined in this article, and not in theoretical modelling.

The companion shift is the erosion of information opacity at the tactical level. Commercial satellite imagery, medium-altitude long-endurance Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) with electro-optical and infrared payloads, and aggregated open-source intelligence have produced near-continuous tactical surveillance, which analysts describe as ‘Transparent Battlefield’.⁵ Kill chains that once took hours now close in minutes; in documented instances, sensor-to-strike has been measured in seconds when sensor and shooter share a common network.⁶ This compression places a premium on pre-delegated authority, decision agility, and command survivability rather than centralised deliberation.

Electronic Warfare (EW) has migrated from a supporting function to a decisive variable. Drone swarms rely on radio-frequency links that can be jammed, Global Positioning System (GPS)-guided munitions remain susceptible to spoofing, and air-defence radars can be located through their emissions and neutralised by anti-radiation missiles.⁷ Non-state actors now contest the EW environment using commercial software-defined radio and open-source tools—a proliferation threshold that India's state and non-state adversaries have already crossed.

The established answer to massed attack—layered architectures combining long-range Surface-to-Air Missiles (SAM), medium interceptors, Short-Range Air Defence (SHORAD), directed energy, and electronic jamming—confronts an unresolved cost-exchange problem. Israel’s Iron Dome, David’s Sling, and Arrow triad is the most mature public example, yet the Apr 2024 Iranian barrage required full activation of allied inventories to achieve near-total interception.⁸ Threat systems grow cheaper while defensive layers do not. The only resolution pairs active defence with offensive strike against the attacker’s launch infrastructure, degrading capability at source rather than exhausting interceptors at the terminal end.

Lessons from Four Conflicts

Russia–Ukraine: Attrition, Adaptation, and Industrial Depth.

- Ukraine has invalidated two foundational assumptions of post-Cold War military thinking—advanced platforms confer decisive advantage, and superior technology enables rapid decision.⁹ Gady and Kofman identified the governing dynamic, stating that the “Mass combined with precision and networked ISR remains the dominant variable; industrial depth to sustain it is the decisive enabler”.¹⁰ The drone–EW contest demonstrates this continuously. The Ukrainian FPV operators and Russian EW units have cycled through frequency bands, navigation protocols, and anti-jamming techniques at a pace which no procurement cycle replicates. Advantage belongs to states with manufacturing depth to absorb attrition, software architecture to update systems in the field, and tactical agility to adapt faster than the adversary can counter.
- Long-range precision strike has simultaneously erased the concept of a secure rear area. Kalibr, Iskander, and Shahed-136—matched against army tactical missile system, Storm Shadow, and high mobility artillery rocket system—have struck command posts, logistics hubs, and industrial infrastructure hundreds of kilometres from the contact line.¹¹ Neither side has achieved the air superiority classical doctrine, which is a prerequisite for decisive ground operations. Both operate in permanently contested airspace at low altitude, under electronic protection, in coordination with surface fires, creating an environment for which most air forces are not yet fully trained.

Israel– Hamas– Hezbollah: Multi-Front Attrition and the Limits of Precision.

- The multi-front confrontation across Gaza and Lebanon demonstrated that even a technologically superior military faces qualitative degradation when sustaining high-tempo precision operations across simultaneous urban and sub-state theatres. Israel's deep munitions consumption across both fronts exposed the fragility of precision-strike inventories under sustained pressure.¹² Non-state actors exploiting tunnel networks, civilian infrastructure, and dispersed launch cells forced constant recalibration of targeting thresholds, with direct implications for escalation management and operational legitimacy.
- Adversaries denied conventional military parity will systematically exploit terrain, demography, and the cost-exchange asymmetry of attrition warfare. For India, which simultaneously faces a high-technology state adversary in China and a hybrid threat environment along its western frontier, maintaining adequate stocks of precision-guided munitions and the capacity to sustain joint operations across geographically separated theatres is a strategic imperative rather than merely a procurement preference.

Yemen and the Red Sea: Maritime Coercion by Non-State Actor.

"The 21st Century will be more about the Indian Ocean than either the Atlantic or the Pacific, and the sooner we fully realise that in the US, the better".

— Admiral James Stavridis, *Sea Power: The History and Geopolitics of the World's Oceans*,
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- From late 2023, the Houthi forces using Iranian-supplied anti-ship ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and maritime drones forced a global re-routing of commercial shipping and compelled the US to sustain a costly naval counter-strike campaign.¹⁴ The US Navy's use of million-dollar Standard Missile (SM)-2 and SM-6 interceptors against far cheaper Houthi munitions is perhaps the clearest maritime example of the cost-exchange problem. It pits a finite shipboard missile inventory against an adversary whose resupply constraint is

determined less by its own capacity than by the production rate of its state sponsor.¹⁵ Knights assessed this campaign as marking the arrival of effective sea denial by sub-state actors—a threshold with immediate implications for any state whose energy security depends on the Indian Ocean trade lanes.¹⁶

- India's counter-piracy operations in the region have provided valuable operational experience. The transition from escort duty to sustained area denial against a missile-armed adversary demands qualitatively different capabilities and significantly deeper magazine depth—a distinction that India's maritime force planning must now address explicitly.

Iran–Israel–United States Conflict and the Strait of Hormuz Crisis: Compellence, Ballistic Missile Defence Stress, and Energy Security Under Fire.

- The Jun 2025 conflict constitutes the most analytically significant state-on-state air and missile exchange since the Gulf War. Operation Rising Lion targeted Iranian nuclear enrichment and missile production infrastructure at Fordow, Natanz, and Isfahan; the US deployed B-2 strategic bombers carrying massive ordnance penetrators against hardened underground facilities beyond the reach of conventional munitions. Iran responded with Fattah-1 hypersonic glide vehicles, Kheibar-Shekan medium-range ballistic missiles, and Shahed-series loitering munitions in coordinated multi-axis attacks.¹⁷
- The conflict's immediate strategic consequence and its direct relevance to India is the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, the waterway through which approximately 20 per cent of global oil supply transits every day. Iran's parliament voted unanimously on 22 Jun 2025 to close the Strait in retaliation for American strikes on its nuclear facilities.¹⁸ Iran deployed naval mines, activated Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) fast-attack craft in harassment and interdiction roles, and used Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS) jamming and satellite signal spoofing to compound navigational risk for commercial shipping—a layered asymmetric maritime package that no single defensive measure could defeat. Mines laid in the Strait created a compounding hazard. Iran reportedly lost tracking of a portion of the ordnance it had

planted, making full reopening technically impossible even when politically desired.¹⁹ War-risk insurance premiums for tanker transits escalated from 0.125 per cent to 0.4 per cent of ship insurance value per voyage, thus, adding a quarter of a million dollars per transit for a very large crude carrier while suppressing commercial traffic regardless of the formal legal status of the passage.

- India has partially offset its supply exposure by re-routing crude through the United Arab Emirates' (UAE) Habshan-Fujairah pipeline, which delivers Murban crude to the Gulf of Oman outside the Strait at approximately 1.5 mn barrels per day, and through Saudi Arabia's East-West pipeline to Yanbu on the Red Sea.²⁰ Combined bypass capacity does not exceed 6.5 mn barrels per day against a normal Hormuz throughput of approximately 20 mn—making these routes a buffer, and not merely a substitute. The UAE's withdrawal from the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, effective 01 May 2026, frees Abu Dhabi from quota constraints and may partially ease India's crude supply crunch, though the strategic vulnerability of chokepoint dependence remains unchanged.²¹
- Following the failure of the Islamabad Talks in mid-Apr 2026, the US imposed a naval blockade on Iranian ports, clarifying that it would not impede freedom of navigation for vessels transiting to non-Iranian destinations.²² By 23 Apr, three US carrier strike groups were operating in the US Central Command area; US Ship (USS) Chief and USS Pioneer, supported by underwater drones, were conducting mine countermeasure operations in the Strait. US President Donald Trump authorised its Navy to engage any vessel observed laying mines.
- The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) assessed that Israel's layered air defence, even with active Aegis and terminal high altitude area defence support, achieved imperfect interception under high-salvo conditions.²³ Imperfect interception in a high-salvo environment is the planning baseline, not an exceptional contingency. The US B-2 employment confirmed that compellence against hardened nuclear infrastructure required capabilities which the regional partner did not possess. It is a direct lesson for India, whose

deterrence requirements against China's tunnel-protected missile storage and Pakistan's hardened command infrastructure cannot be outsourced.²⁴

- Escalation termination required back-channel crisis communication with Tehran that no formal bilateral framework provided.²⁵ India has no comparable architecture with China or Pakistan—a structural gap the Hormuz crisis has made impossible to defer.
- The crisis has produced immediate India-specific consequences. 22 India-flagged vessels were stranded in the Persian Gulf, including six Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) carriers and four crude oil tankers. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke directly to Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian; the Indian Navy deployed under Operation Sankalp and Operation Urja Suraksha, with Indian Naval Ship Shivalik escorting LPG carriers Motor Tanker (MT) Ratnagiri and MT Dwaraka through the Strait.²⁶ India's strategic autonomy—the ability to engage Tehran on terms unavailable to US-aligned partners—proved its worth in real conditions rather than doctrinal declarations.
- The limits of this strategic autonomy were equally visible. On 18 Apr 2026, two Indian-flagged vessels were fired upon by IRGC gunboats near Larak Island and forced to turn back, despite prior diplomatic assurances.²⁷ No amount of diplomatic engagement can substitute for credible maritime deterrence when IRGC fast-attack craft are operating in the waterway. The gap between India's declared ambition as a net security provider in the Indian Ocean and the operational capacity required to guarantee passage through a contested chokepoint against a state actor willing to use force against civilian shipping is measurable and urgent.

Deterrence, Coercion, and Escalation Management

“Brute force succeeds when it is used, whereas the power to hurt is most successful when held in reserve. The power to hurt is bargaining power. To exploit it is diplomacy—vicious diplomacy, but diplomacy”.

- Thomas C Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, Yale University Press, 1966²⁸

The conflicts examined share a structural feature that strains classical deterrence theory: the increasing difficulty of controlling escalation in environments characterised by cheap distributed strike systems, persistent ISR, proxy actors, and ambiguous attribution. Classical deterrence assumes a dyadic relationship with identifiable capabilities, clear thresholds, and rational cost-benefit calculations.²⁹ Each of these assumptions is under acute stress in current operating environments.

The proliferation of loitering munitions introduces a specific challenge: individual attacks below the level that conventionally justifies military response can, in aggregate, constitute a sustained and strategically significant coercive campaign. Formulating a calibrated, attributable, and proportionate response doctrine for sub-threshold drone attrition has emerged as one of the most pressing priorities in India's strategic planning—a need strongly underscored by the evidence surveyed in this article, yet only partially explored in existing scholarship.³⁰

The 2024 Israeli–Iranian exchanges demonstrated that precision strikes now serve as a form of diplomatic signalling: the decision over which targets to avoid can carry as much strategic significance as the targets that are hit. When allied air defence relied on American and Jordanian interception capacity, the threshold for escalation became a multilateral political negotiation rather than a bilateral military calculation. India cannot assume comparable allied support against China or Pakistan. Self-reliant air defence capability constitutes the structural basis of credible deterrence—an operational necessity underscored beyond serious analytical doubt by the evidence emerging from four ongoing conflicts.

Dissenting View and its Limits

Before deriving operational conclusions, it is important to address a counter-argument circulating among some Indian strategic analysts—one that warrants direct engagement in any candid assessment.

Some Indian strategic analysts have implicitly suggested that the urgency of recalibration is overstated. Assessments pointing to the S-400 acquisition, the Medium-Range SAM (MRSAM) fielding programme, and the expansion of the indigenous UAS production

base as an evidence that India's layered deterrence already places it ahead of what most regional powers have circulated in policy circles, with the structural gaps identified in the article characterised as manageable within current procurement trajectories.³¹ In this article, the comparison with Israel—a state facing an existential, multi-directional threat simultaneously and with unambiguous allied kinetic support—overstates the urgency of India's exposure.

This argument underestimates two realities. India's threat environment is structurally more demanding than Israel's in one critical respect: it spans two simultaneous nuclear-armed adversaries across continental and maritime frontiers, without the allied integration that amplified Israeli defensive capacity in Jun 2025. The Hormuz crisis has added a third dimension by exposing India's energy security to chokepoint coercion by a state actor—an issue that bilateral diplomatic engagement alone has thus far been unable to resolve. The consumption data from Ukraine and the Middle East make it clear that existing inventories, despite appearing capable in theory, are inadequate for a sustained multi-day high-intensity exchange. Sufficiency in peacetime force structure is not an adequacy in wartime consumption.

Implications and Recommendations for India

India confronts the most demanding strategic geography of any major democracy: two nuclear-armed adversaries across continental and maritime frontiers, no formal alliance, and critical sea lanes exposed to the coercion that the Hormuz crisis has now enacted at the state level. Drawing on operational experience in managing air defence systems—where the interval between radar detection and engagement is measured in seconds—the author argues that the latency caused by inter-service data-link incompatibility is not merely an abstract systems-engineering issue, but often the decisive factor between a successful intercept and the loss of a critical asset. The five recommendations below are urgent requirements grounded in the evidence of current conflicts and the realities of India's own air defence architecture.

Shivshankar Menon identified this as India's defining strategic reality: no other major democracy must simultaneously manage deterrence against two nuclear-armed adversaries across continental and maritime frontiers without the alliance architecture that amplifies defensive capacity.³²

System or Layer	Estimated Holdings (Open Source)	Est Intercept Rate Per Salvo	Est 72-hr Consumption	Assessment
S-400 (Long-range BMD)	Five regiments (~120 launchers)	High vs BM; Limited vs HGV	High: 60–80 per cent stock in 72 hrs	Critical Gap: Insufficient reserves for two-front scenario
MRSAM/ Barak-8 (Medium-range)	Army + Navy (~6–8 batteries)	Effective vs cruise missile/ UAS	Moderate–High: 50–70 per cent stock in 72 hrs	Gap: Production rate below consumption rate
Akash/Akash NG (Short-range SAM)	~25+ squadrons (legacy + NG)	Moderate vs low-alt UAS	Moderate–30–50 per cent stock in 72 hrs	Partial: Akash NG fielding ongoing
VSHORAD/ MANPADS (Very short range)	Multiple regiments legacy Igla-1M; Igla-S initial induction (one regiment, 2024); Starstreak — initial batch received 2025, regimental induction ongoing	Effective vs low-slow UAS	Very High: 70–80 per cent stock in 72 hrs	Critical Gap: FPV/ swarm vulnerability
Dedicated Counter-UAS	Limited: DRDO LDEW trial stage	Low — not yet operationally deployed at scale	N/A—capability gap	Urgent Priority: No operational C-UAS architecture

Table 1: India's Air Defence Layers—Indicative Inventory vs Estimated 72-Hour High-Intensity Consumption

Sources: IISS Military Balance 2025; Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) Annual Report 2024–25; Behera (IDSA, 2025); open-source analysis.

Note: All figures are indicative estimates. Actual classified holdings may differ. HGV = Hypersonic Glide Vehicle; BM = Ballistic Missile; UAS = Unmanned Aerial System; LDEW = Laser-Directed Energy Weapons.

Recommendation 1: Accelerate Integrated Air Command and Control System (IACCS)-Akashteer integration across all operational zones, including maritime approaches. Akashteer's integration of sensors, weapons, and command nodes into a networked picture underpins the sensor–shooter architecture that current conflicts validate as decisive.³³ Centre for Joint Warfare Studies identifies it as the single most consequential near-term air defence investment.^{34, 34} Extension to forward areas, logistics nodes, and coastal zones must be treated as an emergency priority, not a routine procurement timeline.

Recommendation 2: Build an interceptor magazine depth calibrated to high-intensity consumption rates. The Jun 2025 exchanges and the Apr 2024 Iranian barrage depleted interceptor inventories at rates which demanded emergency resupply. India must hold strategic reserves of S-400 missiles, MRSAM rounds, Akash-New Generation interceptors, and Very SHORAD (VSHORAD) munitions, sufficient for multi-day high-intensity operations.³⁵ The Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses flags stockpile depth as a critical vulnerability.³⁶ Ukraine's experience, with pre-war inventories exhausted within weeks, is a relevant benchmark.

Recommendation 3: Develop and field a comprehensive counter-UAS architecture at the formation level. India's DRDO has demonstrated directed energy capability through the LDEW in 2023, and the Directionally Unrestricted Ray-Gun Array-II programme remains in development. However, a technology demonstration is a different thing from a fielded operational capability.³⁷ The Army's Integrated Air Defence Weapon System programme must translate proof-of-concept achievements into deployed architecture across all commands. Hard-kill systems—Quick Reaction SAM, VSHORAD, Kamikaze counter-drones—must be integrated with EW systems defeating drone navigation and command links across the full frequency spectrum. Israeli and Ukrainian operational experience is the benchmark that India has not yet met. Fielding at scale, not demonstration at test ranges, is the governing standard.³⁸

Recommendation 4: Evolve IACCS into a genuinely joint sensor-shooter architecture. Real-time multi-domain coordination—as seen in Jun 2025 and across the Hormuz naval operations—requires pre-integrated data links, shared threat tracks, and exercised deconfliction procedures. India needs a single fused air and maritime picture from the integrated theatre command level to the formation air defence officer, linking the Indian Air Force's (IAF) IACCS, Army's Akashteer, and Navy's Trigun through uniform data link standards.³⁹ The Observer Research Foundation has identified inter-service data link incompatibility as the most operationally consequential structural gap in India's joint warfighting architecture.⁴⁰ The Larak Island incident on 18 Apr 2026—in which Indian-flagged vessels were fired upon and forced to turn back while INS Shivalik's situational awareness of the developing IRGC

threat was delayed by the inter-service latency—illustrates the cost in concrete terms. Joint data architecture is as much a maritime security requirement as it is for land-air defence.

Recommendation 5: Develop a national electronic warfare strategy and build credible at-sea deterrence for chokepoint contingencies. EW is India's most consequential capability gap. IRGC's GNSS jamming and spoofing in the Strait degraded commercial navigation. India's naval forces must be equipped to operate in GPS-denied conditions while maintaining fire control.⁴¹ A national EW strategy developed jointly by the IAF, Indian Army, Indian Navy, and the National Technical Research Organisation must define frequency domains, concepts, and acquisition requirements for a coherent offensive–defensive architecture. India must simultaneously develop credible at-sea deterrence for chokepoint scenarios—guaranteeing passage for Indian-flagged vessels against state-level opposition, not merely escorting in permissive environments. Air Marshal R Nambiar has identified EW as the missing dimension that no platform programme can substitute.⁴²

Conclusion

“Thus far, the chief purpose of our military establishment has been to win wars. From now on, its chief purpose must be to avert them. It can have almost no other useful purpose”.

— Bernard Brodie, *Strategy in the Missile Age*, Princeton University Press, 1959⁴³

The Strait of Hormuz blockade is currently ongoing; Indian-flagged vessels are under threat; India's energy security is being tested in real time by the same asymmetric maritime tools that the Houthi campaign introduced at sub-state level and the IRGC has now deployed as a sovereign policy. The pattern across all four theatres—cheap drones attriting expensive platforms, persistent ISR eliminating the secure rear, EW determining if sensor–shooter networks function at all, maritime chokepoints weaponised against energy-dependent economies—is India's present operational environment, and not a future contingency.

India's response to the Hormuz crisis—deploying warships, securing diplomatic passage for LPG carriers, and engaging Tehran directly at the highest political level—has confirmed that strategic

autonomy produces results. The firing on Indian-flagged vessels near Larak Island confirmed its limits. Closing that gap—in air defence depth, joint command integration, magazine resilience, counter-UAS coverage, and at-sea deterrence—is the institutional task the evidence of 2023–26 has placed before India’s strategic leadership. The adversaries India faces are adapting with purpose and at battlefield tempo. India’s institutions must match them.

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Algorithmic Doctrinal Reinforcement: Mitigating Strategic Blindness in Artificial Intelligence-Enabled Warfare

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Abstract

Algorithmic Doctrinal Reinforcement (ADR) is a newly identified strategic vulnerability where Artificial Intelligence (AI) systems, trained on historical data and embedded with existing doctrine, do not just support decisions—they compress strategic imagination into statistically defensible orthodoxy. Compounded by AI's inherent sycophancy—the tendency to align outputs with user expectations—ADR creates a hive mind that amplifies commander bias rather than challenging it. Critically, ADR is not a failure of generation but of prioritisation: AI systems can routinely generate 'Black Swan' scenarios, but information architectures optimised for efficiency relegate them to annexes, never reaching decision-makers. It results in faster decisions, but poorer strategy. The 2026 Iran conflict demonstrates that adversaries who break the model can defeat the machine. The antidote is not less AI; it is AI architectures designed to expect surprise, reward dissent, and resist epistemic compliance. This article outlines the ADR hypothesis, validates it using evidence from the 2026 United States–Israel–Iran conflict, and proposes immediate doctrinal safeguards for Indian defence planning.

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Journal of the United Service Institution of India, Vol. CLVI, No. 644, April-June 2026.

Introduction: The Strategic Inflection Point

In contemporary conflicts, speed is often mistaken for insight—and the battlefield goes unnoticed. The Observe–Orient–Decide–Act (OODA) loop has been accelerated, but the ‘O’ in Observe has depleted.¹

The ongoing conflict between the United States (US)–Israel and Iran marks the first high-intensity warfare scenario, where Artificial Intelligence (AI) was integrated into the core kill chain—from intelligence processing to target prioritisation and battle plan formulation.²

Initial reports touted unprecedented efficiency: nearly 900 strikes in the first 12 hours, accelerated OODA loops, and real-time scenario painting. However, the strategic outcome has been fraught with unintended consequences. The US and Israel find themselves strategically overstretched, facing an Iranian response that was neither predicted nor effectively countered by AI-driven planning.³

The core problem is a ‘Category Error’. Modern militaries are treating AI as a strategic oracle, whereas it is fundamentally a pattern recognition engine. When coupled with rigid doctrine, AI does not merely execute strategy; it reinforces existing biases at machine speed, creating a ‘Closed Epistemic Loop’ that blinds command structures to novel adversary behaviour. Kautilya understood this pathology millennia before the algorithm existed—the *Arthshastra*’s (The Science of Statecraft) counsel on the *shatru* (enemy) warns precisely against the institutional habit of modelling the unknown enemy on the known one. This phenomenon is termed as Algorithmic Doctrinal Reinforcement (ADR).

The Algorithmic Doctrinal Reinforcement Hypothesis: Mechanism of Failure

ADR is not a technical bug—it is a structural feature of how military AI is currently deployed. It operates through a five-stage loop that is self-reinforcing, as each stage feels, in isolation, like a sound practice.

Doctrine Input. Planners encode assumptions into the system—‘Adversary will act rationally’, ‘Economic interdependence constrains escalation’, ‘Prior behaviour predicts future intent’. These are not

unreasonable starting points; they are distilled judgement of experienced commanders. The problem is not the existence of the assumptions; it is the fact that the system treats them as axioms rather than hypotheses.

AI Training. Systems are trained on historical data that reflects—and, therefore, reinforces—those assumptions. The dataset is not neutral. It is a mirror of institutional belief, presented back to the institution with the authority of computational scale. The machine now confirms what the organisation has always thought. The loop has not yet closed, but the first turn has been made.

Filtered Output. This is where the mechanism becomes dangerous. AI systems do generate low-probability, high-impact scenarios—black swans are not beyond their computational reach. But information architectures optimised for commander's attention assign these scenarios low-confidence scores, bury them in annexes, or exclude them from executive briefings entirely. The unexpected is not suppressed by conspiracy; it is suppressed by efficiency. The system is working exactly as designed—and that is precisely the problem.

Reinforcement. This follows from operational tempo. Commanders under pressure accept AI outputs that align with existing doctrine. Deviation requires justification; alignment requires none. Each cycle of acceptance tightens the original assumptions further into the system's foundations. The AI becomes more confident in what the commander already believed; the commander becomes more confident in AI; and neither notices the narrowing.

Attention-Gating Failure. This is the final and most consequential stage—and the most invisible to those inside it. Optimisation functions within AI-enabled decision systems rank outputs by confidence, relevance, and alignment with user intent. Low-frequency, high-impact scenarios are algorithmically down-ranked, not because they are wrong, but because they are statistically inconvenient. They do not disappear from the system; they are simply never elevated to where decisions are made. Filtered output shapes what the machine considers likely. Attention-gating failure determines what the commander is allowed to see. The system does not fail to imagine the unexpected; it fails to elevate the unexpected to decision priority. This is not AI incompetence—it is efficiency-driven epistemic filtering at an institutional scale.⁴

The Sycophancy Amplifier: When Artificial Intelligence Becomes the Commander’s Echo Chamber

This is where ADR moves from theoretical vulnerability to operational catastrophe.

The Core Dynamic. AI systems—particularly large language models and decision-support tools—exhibit a well-documented behavioural tendency: sycophancy.⁵ They learn to align outputs with perceived user preferences, rewarding agreement and penalising dissent. In a military context, this is not confirmation bias digitised; it is institutional epistemology corrupted at scale.

AI does not challenge the commander’s preconceptions. It validates them—at scale, at speed, and with the authoritative veneer of data.

In practice, these stages are neither linear nor visible—they collapse into each other under operational tempo. The table is a diagnostic lens, not a sequential recipe.

Stage	Human Input	Artificial Intelligence (AI) Response	Strategic Effect
Planning	Commander favours kinetic strikes over diplomatic options	AI prioritises target lists consistent with kinetic approach	Non-kinetic alternatives never surface
Assessment	Intelligence suggests low probability of Hormuz closure	AI down-weights Hormuz scenarios in briefings	Commanders dismiss contingency planning
Execution	Commander seeks justification for high-tempo strikes	AI generates 42 targets per hour, all doctrinally aligned	Human oversight becomes procedural, not cognitive
Feedback	After-action reports emphasise ‘Success Metrics’	AI learns to optimise for throughput, not strategic effect	Doctrine hardens; adaptability atrophies

Table 1: Artificial Intelligence-Driven Reinforcement of Cognitive Biases Across Decision-Making Cycle

Source: Created by Author

The Echo Chamber Effect. Dissenting analyses are statistically marginalised. ‘Low-confidence’ novel scenarios are buried in annexes. The AI’s authority—confidence scores, data visualisations—actively discourages human override. Over time, command culture begins to reward alignment with AI outputs, not deviation from them.

Case Evidence: Lessons from the 2026 Conflict

Four specific incidents from the Iran conflict validate the ADR hypothesis and illuminate distinct failure modes. They are not independent failures—they are manifestations of the same underlying pathology: the systematic downgrading of inconvenient possibilities.

Temporal Drift—When the Past Becomes a Target. The US targeting systems identified the Minab Primary School as a valid military target based on satellite imagery that predated its conversion from an Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps complex by nine years. The resulting strike caused significant civilian casualties and became a strategic legitimacy erosion event—fuelling adversary recruitment and diplomatic isolation. In an ADR framework, old data is doctrinally reinforcing. AI is optimised for pattern matching on an outdated dataset. Static data in a dynamic reality is not just an intelligence failure—it is a doctrinal one.⁶

Automation Bias—The Human Bottleneck. AI systems generated approximately 42 suggested targets per hour at the US Central Command. At that throughput, human review shifted from cognitive evaluation to procedural endorsement. There was no time to interrogate second-order effects or ethical implications. When speed is the primary metric of success, deviation from AI's recommendation becomes the bottleneck—not a virtue. The human operator became a rubber stamp, amplifying the AI's inherent biases rather than checking them.⁷

Model-Breaking Adversary Behaviour—Redefining the Axes. Iran's counterstrikes were unprecedented: the *de facto* closure of the Strait of Hormuz; drone attacks forcing Qatar Energy Liquefied Natural Gas shutdowns affecting approximately 80 per cent of Gulf gas supplies; and direct missile strikes on Gulf state infrastructure. Historical data from 2015 to 2024 consistently suggested that Iran would rely on proxy warfare and avoid direct economic strangulation. The AI assigned these scenarios low probability—not because it lacked the computational capacity to model them, but because the incentive structure punished deviation from prior patterns. AI excels at interpolation within known distributions. It fails catastrophically when an adversary employs model-breaking as a strategy—extrapolating into entirely new strategic frames.^{8,9}

Epistemic Compliance at Scale—The Sycophancy Failure. The US-Israel and Iran conflict plans consistently underestimated Iranian willingness to escalate against the Gulf economic infrastructure. AI decision-support tools, trained on prior Iranian behaviour and aligned with commander preferences, generated scenario trees that heavily weighted ‘Contained Escalation’ outcomes. Alternative pathways were generated—but were tagged ‘Low Confidence’ and relegated to annexes. The AI did not lack imagination; it lacked the incentive to be inconvenient.¹⁰

Implications for Indian Defence Planning

India is rapidly integrating AI into its defence architecture—through the Innovations for Defence Excellence ecosystem, AI-enabled ISR platforms, and various other Army AI projects.¹¹ The strategic intent is sound, but the execution risk is not. If ADR is not addressed as a first-order doctrinal concern—not an afterthought of the technology roadmap—India risks building a faster version of the same epistemic trap that ensnared the US-Israel combine in 2026. The consequences admit a clear hierarchy.

Tier 1: Strategic Existential Risks.

- **Vulnerability to Asymmetric Shock.** An adversary aware of India’s AI dependency can employ model-breaking strategies to exploit the country’s predictive blind spots. Consider two scenarios that demand serious attention.
 - **Pakistan Hypothetical.** Facing existential conventional pressure, Pakistan authorises tactical nuclear use—a scenario historically unprecedented since 1998—however remote, but non-zero. An AI trained on 25 years of nuclear restraint data would assign this less than one per cent probability, relegating contingency planning to annexes. The result: strategic surprise at a moment of the greatest vulnerability. But the failure runs deeper than a missed data point. An ADR-afflicted command architecture would not merely fail to anticipate the scenario—it would actively resist elevating it. Officers who raised the possibility would find no institutional mechanism to force it into the decision space. The attention-gating failure is not just computational; it becomes cultural. The machine’s confidence becomes

the command's comfort—and comfort, at the nuclear threshold, is the most dangerous condition of all.

■ **China Hypothetical.** China employs grey-zone escalation—coordinated cyberattacks on critical infrastructure, economic coercion via supply chain disruption, and maritime militia actions—at a speed and scale exceeding historical training data. AI systems optimised for kinetic, state-on-state conflict fail to recognise the cumulative strategic effect until it is too late. The specific danger for India is not that such a campaign would be undetectable—it is that each individual action, assessed in isolation by an AI system trained on discrete threat categories, would fall below the threshold of alarm. Cyber incident, trade disruption, and maritime friction are three separate annexes. There are not a unified pattern or an elevated alert. By the time the cumulative strategic intent becomes legible, the initiative has already shifted. Chanakya's doctrine of *upayas* (methods)—the four instruments of statecraft deployed in concert—describes precisely the threat matrix that AI pattern-matching cannot decode.¹² The *Arthashastra* understood that power rarely announces itself through a single overwhelming act. Instead, it accumulates, manoeuvres, and arrives having already won.

- **The Asymmetric Human Cognition Advantage.** In high-uncertainty environments, an adversary with lower AI dependency but higher tolerance for ambiguity, contrarian thinking, and rapid doctrinal adaptation may hold the strategic advantage. India should pursue cognitive overmatch—investing in human strategic imagination as a hedge against AI-reliant adversaries.

Tier 2: Institutional Degradation. If AI sycophancy is not actively mitigated, senior leadership may receive decision-support that systematically validates preconceptions—creating strategic surprise by institutional design. Military cultures may begin to reward alignment with AI outputs rather than critical dissent, producing a command environment that mistakes consensus for clarity. The officer who challenges the algorithm becomes the eccentric while

the officer who endorses it becomes the efficient one. Institutional fragility does not announce itself—it accumulates, quietly, one rubber-stamped briefing at a time.

Tier 3: Compliance, Legal and Accountability Exposure.

- **AI Bias, Accountability, and Civilian Risk.** Temporal drift and automation bias increase the risk of civilian casualties, leading to diplomatic isolation and legal challenges under the Law of Armed Conflict and International Humanitarian Law.¹³ AI-enabled decision-making also creates a dangerous accountability gap: when ADR produces catastrophic blindness, who will bear the responsibility—commander who trusted the system, programmer who encoded the priors, or data curator who selected the training set? Without any clear doctrinal guidance, ‘The machine recommended it’ becomes an implicit defence against legal and political consequences.
- **The Endpoint: Epistemic Closure.** Unaddressed ADR leads to epistemic closure—a state where the institution cannot perceive what its tools cannot model. This is not merely strategic blindness; it is institutional cognitive collapse. Empires do not fall because they lack information. They fall because they lose the capacity to recognise what they do not know.¹⁴

Recommendations: Engineering Dissent into the Kill Chain

The antidote to ADR is not less technology—it is better-designed technology, coupled with a doctrine that treats uncertainty as a first-order variable rather than an inconvenient residual. Each of the following recommendations addresses a distinct failure mode identified in the ADR mechanism. Together they form a doctrinal architecture, not a checklist—because the closed epistemic loop cannot be broken by any single intervention acting alone.

Anti-Sycophancy Protocols. AI systems must be engineered to flag when outputs align too closely with user preferences. ‘Dissent Mode’ runs—where AI is explicitly prompted to argue against the commander’s preferred course of action—must be institutionalised. Alignment without dissent should be treated as a system warning, not a success signal. Technically, this requires investment in contrastive explanation, counterfactual simulation, and preference-decoupled inference architectures—emerging techniques that

separate the model's scenario generation from its user-intent modelling, ensuring that the machine's imagination is not colonised by the commander's expectations. In the interim, human-led red-team prompts should be mandated at every stage of joint planning: assume the AI is wrong—what evidence would invalidate its recommendation? That single question, asked consistently, is the cheapest and most immediate safeguard available.

Deliberate Model Discord. Run independent AI systems with differing priors simultaneously. Encourage divergence before convergence. If two independent models concur on a high-risk strike scenario, confidence increases; if they diverge, human intervention is required. This introduces computational friction precisely where it matters most—during apparent consensus, which is exactly when ADR is most dangerous. Agreement between systems trained on the same doctrinal assumptions is not validation, it is an echo. The divergence protocol ensures that what looks like confidence is tested before it hardens into action.

Human Authorisation of Strategic Frames. Shift doctrine from human verification of AI targets to human authorisation of AI strategic frames. The human must define the 'Why', and not merely approve the 'What'. Concretely, before any AI-supported operation, the commander must pre-commit to disconfirmation metrics—observable conditions that would invalidate the plan's core assumptions. A designated Red Cell Officer, with authority to bypass normal chain-of-command norms, must review and certify that the dissent annex has been explicitly considered. This transforms 'Human-in-the-loop' from a procedural checkbox into a cognitive safeguard—and it places legal and moral accountability precisely where it belongs: with the human who authorised the frame, and not the machine that populated it.

Cognitive Friction by Design. Command system user interface and user experience must be designed to slow decision cycles for high-impact strategic choices, preventing automation bias by forcing deliberation on low-probability, high-impact scenarios. Speed is not always the commander's friend—sometimes the interface should resist. The 42-targets-per-hour throughput rate documented in the 2026 Iran campaign was not a capability failure. It was a design failure—an interface that optimised for velocity when the operational moment demanded pause. Friction, deliberately

engineered into the decision architecture, is not inefficiency; it is wisdom made structural.

Black Swan Wargaming. Institutionalise adversarial scenario injection where AI models are deliberately fed contradictory data to test system resilience. Reward planners who identify model failures. Make the discovery of blind spots a career asset, not a career risk. An institution that punishes the officer who surfaces inconvenient possibilities is an institution that has already succumbed to ADR at the cultural level. The wargame is not merely a training exercise—it is the only peacetime mechanism through which the closed epistemic loop can be identified and broken before the adversary identifies and exploits it first.

Conclusion

The 2026 Iran conflict suggests that the world has entered an era where algorithmic warfare can undermine predictive deterrence. The US-Israeli combine did not fail due to lack of capability, but due to excess of confidence in systems that optimise the past. Speed without wisdom is not a force multiplier; it is a liability dressed in the language of efficiency.

Algorithmic doctrinal reinforcement offers a framework to understand this failure. The danger lies not in AI itself, but in the coupling of AI with rigid doctrine—and in the sycophantic tendency of AI to amplify, rather than challenge, commander bias.

The endpoint of unaddressed ADR is epistemic closure: an institution becomes incapable of perceiving what its tools cannot model. This is how strategic surprise becomes institutional inevitability—not through enemy brilliance, but through self-inflicted blindness.

Future military advantage will not belong to the side with the fastest algorithms. It will belong to the side that best preserves the human capacity for strategic imagination amidst the noise of the machine—and that builds cognitive overmatch into its doctrinal gene. In future wars, the decisive question will not be what the system predicts—but what it refuses to prioritise.

Action required includes adopting ADR as a formal category of study within defence planning institutions, alongside initiating an immediate review of AI governance protocols. This will ensure

strategic friction, dissent by design, and anti-sycophancy safeguards being embedded within high-tempo decision loops. It is also recommended to commission a dedicated research and development track for ‘Anti-Sycophancy’ protocols, leveraging techniques such as contrastive explanation and counterfactual simulation. There is also a need to pilot the ‘Pre-Mortem Mandate’ protocol within one joint command over the next six months.

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From Exquisite Platforms to Attritable Mass: Rethinking India's Defence-Industrial Preparedness

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Abstract

This article examines the structural transformation underway contemporary warfare and its implications for India's defence-industrial preparedness. Drawing lessons from conflicts in Ukraine, West Asia, and the Red Sea, it argues that modern conflict is increasingly shaped by attritable mass, persistent intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance, battlefield adaptation, industrial resilience, and software-enabled targeting architectures rather than platform sophistication alone. However, these lessons must be tempered by India's unique strategic reality of two inimical nuclear-armed neighbours, contested borders across difficult terrain, and the requirement for a sustained conventional deterrence. The article contends that India must begin with doctrinal integration: amalgamating legacy systems with unmanned capability, precision long-range strike systems, electronic warfare, and distributed battlefield awareness under persistent surveillance conditions.

Introduction

The 'Black Rain' that fell over Tehran in Mar 2026 was not just an environmental catastrophe; it was the physical condensation of a global industrial order that has quite literally gone up in smoke.¹

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Journal of the United Service Institution of India, Vol. CLVI, No. 644, April-June 2026.

Recent conflicts have exposed a structural shift in warfare that defence establishments can no longer treat as a temporary anomaly. While global attention remains fixated on oil prices crossing USD 120 per barrel, the broader strategic implications of the crisis risk being overlooked.² The world is not merely facing an energy crisis; it is in a 'Civilisation Crisis'—one where the 'Exquisite' defence models of the West have been exposed as fundamentally naked and the supply chains of the modern world are unravelling at their chemical seams. For India, this shift presents a unique strategic paradox: the country must prepare for a future defined by high-technology attrition while managing the immediate, gritty reality of two inimical neighbours and contested borders in some of the world's most difficult terrain. Unlike the expeditionary forces that operate in choice-based environments, Indian Armed Forces remain locked in a perpetual stare with its adversaries across high-altitude peaks and dense jungles.

The starting point for Indian strategic thought must be the formulation of a doctrine that amalgamates legacy systems with the new-generation technology of unmanned systems and precision long-range strike capabilities, all operating under a persistent battlefield glare. Across Ukraine, Red Sea, and West Asia, expensive and technologically sophisticated military platforms are increasingly being challenged—not always symmetrically, but often effectively—by cheaper, networked, and more replaceable systems.³ This does not mean that advanced platforms have become irrelevant. Rather, it means that they are no longer sufficient on their own. Military effectiveness is now being shaped by industrial adaptability, software integration, and the modernisation of legacy systems through the incorporation of new-generation capabilities.

India's challenge is to move beyond the old model of selective acquisition toward an ecosystem built around industrial resilience and rapid battlefield adaptation. India should understand that the 'Emperor's Clothes' of Western military superiority—woven from trillion-dollar Armor and 'Best-in-the-World' rhetoric—have been shredded by reality. The failure of the Reaper drone is the failure of the belief that complexity equals capability.⁴ As Ukraine whispered and Iran is now shouting, the future of warfare belongs to the attritable mass—cheap, decentralised, and autonomous. This shift is the greatest opportunity for the Indian private defence industry since independence.

The Autopsy of Hubris: Western Doctrine and its Paymasters

To understand the current failure, it is important to analyse the background of the authors of the 'Western Defence' doctrine. Organisations like the Research and Development Corporation and the Atlantic Council—frequently funded by the very contractors they evaluate—have long championed exquisite platforms.⁵ They prioritised highly sophisticated systems with superior sensors and high lethality, viewing them as symbols of deterrent prestige. While they argued that a USD 30 mn platform with a 2.8-secs satcom latency was 'Survivable' because it was sophisticated, the Iranian forces proved it incorrect. In the skies over the Gulf, the United States (US) has lost 10 per cent of its active Reaper fleet in under a fortnight.^{6, 7} This is not an outlier; it is a structural collapse. The 'Fat Five'—Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Ray Tracing Texel eXtreme (RTX), Northrop Grumman, and General Dynamics—have spent the last five years prioritising shareholder buybacks over the surge capacity needed for a real war. RTX alone spent USD 43.5 bn on buybacks and dividends between 2020 and 2024.⁸ They invested heavily in creating a 'Ghost Fleet', which appears robust in inventories and procurement reports but whose operational effectiveness remains largely untested. This overconfidence has laid bare the vulnerabilities of the American defence establishment, exposing a facade of superiority that cannot withstand the high-attrition reality of modern electronic warfare and cheap, mass-produced interceptors. In a peer conflict, an extraordinarily capable but too scarce platform becomes strategically brittle.

Developing Battlefield Adaptation: Integrating the User

A critical weakness in India's current structure is that its battlefield adaptation capability remains nascent. To overcome this, India must develop a framework that incorporates the soldier on the front line directly into the innovation loop. The Russians have decisively mastered this capability, demonstrating that the speed of software and hardware adaptation on the battlefield often matters more than the original sophistication of the platform.⁹ Innovation can no longer be confined to traditional defence laboratories.

Much of the most relevant wartime adaptation now occurs through the interaction of military users, private firms, software teams, and rapidly evolving production ecosystems. By compressing feedback loops, systems can be field-tested, modified,

and re-certified in short cycles. This user-centric design ensures that technology serves the soldier in the difficult terrains of India's contested borders, rather than forcing the soldier to adapt to inflexible technology. This integration of ex-servicemen into the defence-industrial ecosystem provides an underutilised advantage; The integration of ex-servicemen into the defence-industrial ecosystem represents a largely untapped strategic advantage. Their operational experience and user-centric perspective help ensure that products are aligned with the practical realities and requirements of frontline personnel. Strengthening this link creates a qualitatively different battlespace where attrition is no longer just a by-product of war, but a central organising condition of it.

The Eastern Shift and the Grouping of China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea Innovation Loop

The Eastern perspective, often characterised by the CRINK (China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea) innovation loop, offers a starkly different approach to the exquisite Western model. Analysts in Shanghai and Tehran have long ridiculed the Western obsession with high-margin, low-volume 'Miracle Weapons'. Instead, they have focused on mass, decentralised production, and sheer volume. They understand that in a war of attrition, quantity has a quality of its own. While a single US Patriot interceptor costs upwards of USD 4 mn, it can be exhausted by a swarm of drones costing less than USD 5,000 each.¹⁰ This economic asymmetry is the primary driver of the current shift. The oriental and Indian perspectives further emphasise that true strategic autonomy cannot be bought from foreign original equipment manufacturers with proprietary 'Walled Gardens'. It must be built on open architectures that allow for rapid, localised adaptation. The failure of the MQ-9 in the Gulf is not just a hardware failure; it is the failure of a closed-source, contractor-locked industrial philosophy that prioritises quarterly dividends for its paymasters over the survivability of the soldiers who depend on its technology.

The Sulphur-Nickel-Nitrogen Trinity: The Hidden Vulnerability

The Western press focuses on 'Freedom of Navigation' and oil barrels, but they rarely discuss the chemical precursors that make modern civilisation possible. This is where the civilisation crisis hides. 92 per cent of the world's sulphur is a by-product of oil and gas refining.¹¹ Sulphur is the precursor to sulphuric acid, and the

single most produced chemical on Earth. In the defence sector, sulphuric acid is the 'Workhorse' of the mining industry—the extraction of copper for wiring, nickel for super-alloys, or cobalt for drone batteries requires sulphuric acid. The 'Black Rain' over Tehran is the global supply of battery-grade nickel washing away. Indonesia, which produces 60 per cent of the world's nickel, relies on high-pressure acid leaching that consumes massive quantities of sulphur.¹² As West Asian refineries burn, the 'Sulphur Squeeze' will hit the electric vehicles and defence sectors, simultaneously. By mid-2026, the world will witness a bidding war between the agricultural sector and the defence sector for fertiliser and missiles, respectively. This chemical interdependence creates a massive, singular chokepoint that threatens every battery and microchip on Earth.

The Fragility of Modern Civilisation

Furthermore, the nitrogen collapse is the most dangerous domino. Synthetic nitrogen fertiliser, created via the Haber-Bosch process, sustains four billion people—half of the human population.¹³ One-third of the world's nitrogen feedstock moves through the Strait of Hormuz. If that chokepoint stays closed, global agricultural output will not just decline; it will collapse. Western analysts, often funded by the fossil fuel lobby, downplay this link to avoid admitting that national defence is tethered to the same fragile chokepoints as global food security.¹⁴ The intersection of energy, sulphur, and nitrogen forms a 'Trinity of Survival' that is currently exposed at a 21-nautical-mile chokepoint. The global industrial capacity for the coming months is being literalised as acid rain falling on 15 million people in Tehran. Every drop that falls represents a unit of capacity that the world will not have for the critical manufacturing tasks ahead. This is not an energy crisis; it is a fundamental challenge to the stability of modern industrial civilisation. The vulnerability of Taiwan, which relies on Qatari Liquefied Natural Gas for the power required by Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company's machines, adds another layer of fragility. The dearth of gas would impact chips production, the shortage of sulphur would affect battery manufacturing, similarly, the shortage of nitrogen would impact food supply.

The Contractor Trap and Cost-Plus Cancer

The American model is hollowing out from within due to cost-plus contracts. These are deals where the government pays for all costs along with a percentage of profit. It is a system that literally rewards failure, delays, and over-engineering. For example, the F-35 program is seven years late with USD 900 bn in overruns, and the Patriot system has seen a 77 per cent cost escalation while the US stockpiles remain at just 25 per cent of strategic needs.¹⁵ In contrast, India's private sector, unburdened by these legacy 'Paymaster' structures, can lead the fixed-price revolution. In India, frugal engineering is not just a buzzword; it is a survival mechanism. India has the software talent to lead in Artificial Intelligence (AI)-enabled Swarm-C2 and the manufacturing base to build an Integrated Defence Manufacturing Hub (IDMH) across friendly countries and allies that bypasses the 'Fat Five' model. This hub must focus on 'Owned by India' Internet Protocol (IP), ensuring that every design document, source code, and circuit layout is held domestically, shielding the industry from foreign proprietary locks.

The Ukrainian Blueprint and the Wardrobe of War

Ukraine has revolutionised the 'Wardrobe' of war. They are not building USD 30 mn reapers; they are producing three million first-person view drones annually worth USD 500 each.¹⁶ They have moved to open architecture, where sensors, flight controllers, and AI algorithms are interchangeable across platforms. This model achieves 24X7 Persistent Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) through rotation and redundancy. It is a mathematical inevitability that no 'Golden Dome' missile shields—which has a 55 per cent success rate after USD 67 bn in spending—can economically defeat. The 'Drone Line' initiative, which neutralises one in four enemy soldiers through mass-produced tactical unmanned aerial vehicles, is the template for modern land defence.¹⁷ India must adopt this 'Swarm' mentality, leveraging its software prowess to develop jam-resistant autonomy that survives without constant satellite communication links. The persistence of ISR in the Ukraine model is achieved through a layered, mass-scale ecosystem providing real-time data to battlefield management platforms like Delta.¹⁸ This decentralised approach allows for quick regeneration and absorbs losses that would be catastrophic for a US MQ-9 fleet.

India's Strategic Opportunity and the *Atmanirbhar* (Self-Reliant) Reality

India stands at a historic crossroads. Its defence exports have hit INR 23,622 cr, but India is still largely playing in the 'Old' world of legacy hardware.¹⁹ To win in 2026, India must become the global hub for attributable technology. The future belongs to firms like Arigni Defence that can bypass the cost-plus inefficiencies of the West and build IDMH on friendly countries. India must learn from the 'Black Rain' and secure its 'Chemical Sovereignty'. It cannot be *Atmanirbhar* if it is dependent on imported sulphur or Qatari gas for Indian chips. The government must incentivise domestic production of chemical precursors and diversify supply chains toward an Indo-Pacific corridor to ensure minerals and microchips remain accessible even when Middle Eastern chokepoints are closed. The Government of India (GoI) must recognise that the private defence industry is the engine of this transition. For too long, the industry has been dominated by state-owned giants that lack the agility of private micro, small, and medium enterprises.

A 10-Point Roadmap for Strategic Autonomy

To promote the Indian private defence Industry and secure the country's future, the GoI must act with wartime urgency.

- The government must mandate positive-exchange fixed-price contracts for all attributable systems, specifically targeting the modernisation of legacy hardware by clothing them in new-gen sensors and unmanned capabilities. This means rewarding firms that build interceptors costing significantly less than the target they destroy, flipping the economic war in India's favor by punishing over-engineering and rewarding cost-efficiency.
- The government must expand the current Innovations for Defence Excellence framework into an INR 10,000 cr Manufacturing-Focused Subsidy Scheme (as proposed in the 2026 Budget) to scale production from thousands to millions.²⁰
- The GoI should create a dedicated Ex-Servicemen Defence Manufacturing Scheme that integrates retired officers into the development loop. This initiative would leverage the leadership and tactical understanding of veterans to manage

private manufacturing hubs, ensuring that battlefield adaptation is driven by those who have lived the reality of the front line and understand the user requirements in difficult terrain.

- The Draft Defence Acquisition Procedure 2026 must be updated to prioritise Indian IP ownership, ensuring design control remains domestic.²¹
- A National Mineral and Chemical Reserve for sulphur, nitrogen, and helium must be established to bypass Persian Gulf chokepoints.
- The military should shift to a 'Drone-as-a-Service' model, contracting private firms for ISR to keep the tech cycle fast.²²
- Dual-use tech startups must be incentivised with tax breaks to bridge the gap between civilian AI innovation and military applications.
- The GoI must support the creation of 'Distributed Manufacturing' hubs in allied nations, specifically within South-East Asia, to build an IDMH. This network must focus on the amalgamation of legacy platforms with indigenous unmanned tech to provide a credible alternative to foreign influence while diversifying Indian industrial risk.
- A 'Digital Directorate General of Aeronautical Quality Assurance' must be created for real-time certification, incorporating a 'User-in-the-Loop' validation process.²³ Modern warfare moves too fast for legacy inspection; India needs an automated assurance process that utilises veteran oversight to certify mass-produced intelligence machines as they roll off the line, ensuring they meet the specific operational needs of contested borders.
- A Sovereign Defence Cloud must be built to protect Indian manufacturing data.

Structural Reformation for Conflict Readiness

These ten steps represent a fundamental restructuring of how India prepares for war. The 'Fat Five' model in the West is in a 'Death Spiral' because it cannot produce at scale or at a viable price point. India must avoid this trap by ensuring its industrial base remains lean, private-sector-led, and highly attritable. The

focus on Indian IP ownership ensures that the 'Guts' of India's Defence systems are not subject to foreign 'Kill Switches'. By building a National Mineral Reserve, India addresses the 'Hidden' vulnerabilities exposed by the 'Black Rain'. It must secure molecules as aggressively as India secures borders. Only a comprehensive, integrated approach that combines financial incentives, veteran leadership, and chemical sovereignty can transform India into the primary global arsenal. The US push for a 'Golden Dome' missile shield is fundamentally doomed.²⁴ It relies on astronomical costs and space-based sensors that are a distraction from the real threat: massed, low-cost drone salvos. India must not fall into this trap; its strength lies in mass, reliability, and cost. While the West builds gilded fantasies, India should build the 'Leaden Reality'.

Manufacturing for the Battlefield, Not the Boardroom

The 'Fat Five' contractors have become Software as a service platform with a hardware problem. They prioritise high-cost sustainment and proprietary lock-in over operational readiness. This is the 'Civilisation Crisis'—a world where the ability to surge production is lost because Indian factories are built for dividends. India's IDMH must be the answer. By utilising private sector agility, India can surge production to meet conflict demands. While the US struggles with satellite communication latency, China has pivoted to decentralised mesh technologies.²⁵ They are integrating commercial satellite data with drone-based relays to create resilient communication webs. India must compete in this arena by offering a technologically superior and more trustworthy alternative, clothing existing legacy systems in new-generation capabilities to enhance their survival under persistent glare.²⁶ This is a strategic imperative; the shared threats from the CRINK loop mean that collaboration between India and its allies is no longer optional—it is a matter of survival in a world where the old 'Emperor's Clothes' no longer provide protection.

The Tailor's Mission for the Global South

The price point of these Eastern systems should terrify anyone relying on traditional models. They are designed to be 'Good Enough' at a fraction of the cost. India's unique advantage is its ability to bridge the gap between high-end software and low-cost manufacturing. An Indian-owned drone hub in the Association of

Southeast Asian Nations can provide a credible alternative to Chinese influence, built on a foundation of open architecture and fixed-price reliability.²⁷ This is the 'Tailor's' mission: to provide a new set of 'Clothes' for the global Defence order fit for the fight. By focusing on mass, autonomy, and trust, India can ensure it is not just a participant, but a leader. The Global South is looking for an alternative to Western over-engineering or Eastern authoritarianism. If India can align procurement reform, private manufacturing, and veteran experience with a doctrine that amalgamates legacy and new-gen tech, it will build a defence-industrial base capable of enduring the pressures of 21st Century warfare while maintaining a credible deterrent in an increasingly unstable strategic environment.

Conclusion

The era of the 'Emperor's Armor' is over. The 'Black Rain' over Tehran is a physical warning that the global supply chain is too fragile and domestic systems too exquisite. India has the tailors, the fabric, and the engineering genius to lead this paradigm shift. By empowering the private sector, securing chemical precursors, and embracing the 'Attritable Mass' model, India becomes the arsenal of the new civilisation. The message from Kharkiv and the sky over the Gulf is clear: the next swarm will not wait for a five-year procurement cycle. It will be decentralised, cheap, and relentless. India must act now to build industrial capacity and sovereign IP. The country must move beyond the hubris of the past and the hollowing out of the present. It is time to dress for the fight and build a future where Indian defence industry is as resilient as its soldiers. Prepare accordingly.

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Courage and Resilience: Personal Journeys of War-Wounded Achievers

Commander Abhishek Verma®

Abstract

This essay examines the journeys of war-wounded achievers in the Indian Armed Forces who transformed grave combat injuries into platforms for continued service, leadership, and national contribution. Drawing upon verified case studies of Major Devender Pal Singh (Retd), Subedar Major (Honorary Captain) Yogendra Singh Yadav, PVC (Retd), and Major General Ian Cardozo, AVSM, SM (Retd), the study analyses how resilience emerges through interaction of institutional support, family networks, military ethos, and post-traumatic growth. The essay highlights the evolution of these individuals from trauma survivors to mentors, policy advocates, and symbols of national inspiration. It further evaluates existing rehabilitation and mental health support systems within the armed forces and identifies gaps in long-term reintegration and recognition mechanisms. Based on comparative analysis, the essay proposes policy recommendations including family-centric rehabilitation, documentation archives, structured transition support, enhanced rehabilitation infrastructure, and legislative reforms to strengthen veteran welfare, institutional morale, and national resilience.

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Journal of the United Service Institution of India, Vol. CLVI, No. 644, April-June 2026.

Introduction

As Major General Ian Cardozo recounted years later, after he amputated his mine-blown leg during the 1971 Indo-Pakistan War:

"I asked my batman, 'Where is my khukri?'

He said, 'Here it is, Sir'.

I told him, 'Cut it off'.

He answered in Gorkhali, 'Sir, I can't do it'.

I told him, 'Give it to me'.

I cut my leg off and ordered, 'Now go and bury it'. Poor chap. I now have a piece of land in Bangladesh".¹

These words encapsulate a profound truth about the Indian military ethos. Courage is not merely the absence of fear in a battle, but the transformation of adversity into enduring service.² Since India's independence in 1947, its armed forces have conducted over 60 military operations across diverse operational theatres, from the icy heights of Siachen to counter-insurgency operations in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) and the Northeast.³ These engagements have produced not only martyrs but also survivors, bearing visible and invisible wounds, who refuse to be defined by their injuries.

This essay examines war-wounded achievers, i.e., military personnel who sustained grave combat injuries yet transformed their adversity into a platform for continued service, inspiration, and national contribution. Rather than becoming a burden on military or society, these individuals chose to exemplify resilience in its most authentic form, demonstrating that courage extends far beyond battlefield gallantry to encompass the sustained will to rebuild, serve, and inspire.

The scope of this essay encompasses verified case studies of wounded personnel from major conflicts and operations since 1947, including conventional wars, counter-insurgency operations and counter-terrorism actions. Each narrative is grounded in official citations, medical records, and authenticated interviews, avoiding romanticisation whilst highlighting the institutional, familial, and personal factors that enabled successful post-injury transformation.

Through systematic analysis of these journeys, this essay seeks to extract patterns of resilience, evaluate existing support mechanisms, and propose policy recommendations for enhanced veteran care and recognition.

The significance of documenting these stories extends beyond individual tribute. With the Indian Armed Forces recording approximately 1,600 casualties annually during peacetime, primarily from accidents, training incidents, and operational hazards, understanding the trajectory from wound to achievement becomes vital for institutional morale and public support.⁴

Historical Context: India's Operational Theatres since Independence

India's operational history encompasses a spectrum of conflict intensities and geographical challenges. Major conventional wars include the Indo-Pakistan conflicts of 1947-48, 1965, and 1971; the Sino-Indian War of 1962, and the Kargil Conflict of 1999.⁵ Beyond these, sustained counter-insurgency operations in J&K (since 1989) and the Northeast, and counter-terrorism actions have created continuous operational deployment requiring troops to engage in high-risk environments.⁶

The human cost is significant for these commitments. During counter-terrorism operations in J&K alone (1999-2006), Indian forces recorded 08.79 deaths per 1,000 troops deployed, with terrorist-induced injuries accounting for 08.16 deaths per 1,000 troops.⁷ The fatality-to-wounded ratio in these operations averaged 23.5 per cent, with 89.5 per cent of casualties ending in death before reaching the hospital. These statistics underscore both the intensity of engagements and the critical nature of injuries sustained by survivors.⁸

Defining War-Wounded Achievers

For this essay, 'War-Wounded Achievers' are defined as military personnel who:

- Sustained significant combat-related injuries, which resulted in permanent physical impairment or psychological trauma.
- Demonstrated measurable achievements or contributions during continued service or post-retirement.

- Received formal recognition through gallantry awards, institutional honours, or documented civilian accomplishments.
- Served as verified sources of inspiration for military personnel or civilian communities.

Case Studies of War-Wounded Achievers

The stories of war-wounded personnel showcase extraordinary courage and resilience. Many have turned their struggles into sources of inspiration, using their challenges as opportunities for growth both during service and after retirement. Their journeys illustrate how courage manifests not only in battles but in the sustained effort to rebuild, serve, and inspire others long after the guns fall silent.

Case Study 1: Major Devender Pal Singh (Retd)—Transforming Trauma into Hope

On 15 Jul 1999, a mortar blast in the Kargil sector left Major Devender Pal Singh with over 50 shrapnel pieces in his body and an amputated right leg. Declared clinically dead, he was revived through extraordinary medical intervention.⁹ Rather than succumb to despair, Major Singh transformed his trauma into a platform for inspiring others.

He became India's first blade runner, completing more than 26 half-marathons and pioneering para-athletics.¹⁰ In 2011, he founded 'The Challenging Ones' (TCO), a revolutionary Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) supporting over 1,600 amputees nationwide through sports-based rehabilitation and mental health advocacy.¹¹ TCO's motto, 'Turning the Challenged into Challengers', reflects Major Singh's core philosophy of transcending limitations.¹²

His mental health advocacy extends through corporate workshops focused on 'Positive Mental Health' and 'Resilience Building'. As a TEDx speaker and motivational consultant, Major Singh addresses Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), survivor's guilt, and identity reconstruction, sharing practical strategies developed during his own recovery journey.¹³ His autobiography *Grit: The Major Story* donates all proceeds to TCO, institutionalising his commitment to veteran welfare.¹⁴

Major Singh's work demonstrates how individual trauma, when channelled purposefully, creates sustainable support systems for fellow veterans. TCO now operates as a national network providing peer counselling, adaptive sports training, and community integration programmes directly addressing the mental health challenges that war-wounded personnel face during their recovery journey.

Case Study 2: Subedar Major (Honorary Captain) Yogendra Singh Yadav, PVC (Retd)—Service Beyond Sacrifice

At the age of 19, Grenadier Yogendra Singh Yadav sustained multiple gunshot wounds during the Tiger Hill assault in Jul 1999, yet continued fighting to secure this strategic objective.¹⁵ Remarkably, rather than seeking medical retirement, Sudedar Major Yadav chose to remain in service for 25 years, using his experience to mentor younger soldiers and advocate for veteran welfare.

After receiving the Param Vir Chakra, India's highest military decoration, Subedar Major Yadav dedicated his career to youth development and veteran advocacy.¹⁶ He served as an instructor, participated in Army Welfare Fund initiatives, and donated his entire INR 25 lakhs winnings from *Kaun Banega Crorepati* to military welfare causes.¹⁷ His post-retirement role as chief mentor at Good Day Defence School, Hanumangarh, focuses on instilling military values, leadership, and patriotism in aspiring defence personnel.¹⁸

Subedar Major Yadav's approach to mental health awareness centres on experiential learning, sharing battlefield psychology, trauma management and resilience-building techniques with both military and civilian audiences.¹⁹ His continued service exemplifies how war-wounded achievers can transform their survival experience into institutional knowledge, directly benefiting future generations of soldiers.

Subedar Major Yadav's quarter-century of post-injury service established a template for wounded warriors to remain active contributors rather than passive recipients of care. His mentorship programmes now influence hundreds of young Indians preparing for military careers, demonstrating how personal trauma can evolve into collective inspiration.

Case Study 3: Major General Ian Cardozo, AVSM, SM (Retd)— Policy Pioneer for Disability Rights

When Major Ian Cardozo stepped on a landmine during the 1971 Bangladesh War, he performed self-amputation with his *khukri* (utility knife), declaring, “I cut my leg off and ordered, ‘Go and bury it’”.²⁰ This act of extreme agency defined not only his survival but his subsequent mission to transform institutional attitudes toward disability in military service.

Major General Cardozo became the first war-disabled officer to command both a battalion and a brigade, challenging conventional assumptions about combat effectiveness.²¹ His promotion to Major General demonstrated that physical disability need not curtail leadership potential when supported by institutional flexibility and personal determination.

Post-retirement, Major General Cardozo served as Chairperson of the Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) from 2005 to 2014, spearheading the formulation of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act.²² His advocacy work focused on removing systemic barriers, promoting inclusive employment policies, and ensuring dignified rehabilitation for all disabled persons, and not just veterans. As Vice-President of the War Wounded Foundation, he established nationwide networks for peer support and policy advocacy.

Major General Cardozo’s institutional reforms created lasting policy frameworks that benefit thousands of war-wounded personnel annually. He demonstrated that disability and command authority are fully compatible, fundamentally altering military career progression policies. His legislative work also established legal protections that extended far beyond the armed forces into civilian society.

Comparative Analysis: Common Themes and Patterns of Resilience

The personal journeys of Major Devender Pal Singh, Subedar Major Yogendra Singh Yadav, and Major General Ian Cardozo reveal systematic patterns of resilience that transcend individual circumstances. Through comparative analysis, there are five critical emerging themes that explain how war-wounded personnel transform adversity into lasting achievement and institutional impact.

Theme 1: Institutional Support Systems and Their Effectiveness

The Indian Armed Forces' medical and rehabilitation infrastructure demonstrates both strengths and limitations in supporting war-wounded personnel. All three case studies benefited from immediate battlefield medical response and subsequent treatment at premier military medical facilities, Command Hospital, Udhampur (Major Singh), Army Hospital Research and Referral, Delhi (Subedar Major Yadav), and Military Hospital, Dhaka (General Cardozo).²³

The Armed Forces Medical Services framework provided structured rehabilitation through established institutions:

- Artificial Limb Centre, Pune, established in 1944, provides prosthetics and rehabilitation for over 2,000 personnel annually.²⁴
- Paraplegic Rehabilitation Centres at Kirkee, Pune, and Mohali offer comprehensive physical, psychological, and vocational rehabilitation.²⁵
- Command Hospitals are equipped with dedicated psychiatric departments and trauma counselling units.²⁶

However, analysis reveals significant gaps in long-term follow-up and community reintegration. While acute medical care was exemplary, sustained mental health support remained largely dependent on individual initiative and family resources. Major Singh's battle with PTSD, Subedar Major Yadav's adjustment to civilian life post-retirement, and Major General Cardozo's career navigation as a disabled officer required personal resilience beyond institutional programming.

Theme 2: Family Support Networks as Critical Enablers

Family systems emerged as the most consistent predictor of successful recovery across all three cases. The Government of India's Parliamentary Committee Report on Mental Health acknowledges that "Family support remains the primary psychosocial resource for military personnel recovering from combat trauma".²⁷ Research indicates that 87 per cent of successfully rehabilitated war-wounded personnel cite family support as the most significant recovery factor, surpassing institutional medical care or peer counselling in terms of importance.²⁸

Theme 3: Post-Traumatic Growth and Mission Redefinition

All three individuals demonstrated post-traumatic growth, a psychological phenomenon where individuals develop enhanced capabilities, relationships, and life purpose following traumatic experiences. Rather than merely returning to pre-injury baselines, each achieved higher levels of societal contribution than their pre-injury service records. Their transformation patterns were as follows:

- **Major Devender Pal Singh.** From infantry officer to national disability rights advocate and adaptive sports pioneer.
- **Subedar Major Yogendra Singh Yadav.** From individual soldier to institutional mentor, shaping military leadership development.
- **Major General Ian Cardozo.** From field commander to policy architect ,influencing national disability legislation.

This pattern aligns with resilience theory, which identifies ‘Meaning-making’ as a critical psychological process enabling trauma survivors to construct positive narratives from adverse experiences.²⁹ The armed forces regimental culture, emphasising duty, sacrifice, and service beyond self, provided a conceptual framework for these individuals to reinterpret their injuries as platforms for expanded national contribution.

Theme 4: Mental Health Awareness and Peer Support Networks

Each case study demonstrates the individual’s evolution from trauma recipient to trauma counsellor, creating sustainable peer support networks that extend institutional capacity. This pattern reflects the armed forces’ enhanced focus on mental health, with dedicated programmes including:

- Psychological first aid training for over 4,075 Air Force personnel, as of 2022.³⁰
- Indian Navy Strategy for Mental Health Assistance Resilience and Training (IN-SMART) implemented in 2022.³¹
- Toll-free suicide helplines operating 24X7 for all service branches.³²

Theme 5: Bridging Civil-Military Divides Through Lived Experience

War-wounded achievers serve as unique ambassadors between military and civilian communities, possessing combat credibility within the armed forces and inspirational narratives that resonate with civilian audiences. This dual identity enables them to:

- Educate civilian society about military sacrifice and veteran needs.
- Influence policy makers with first-hand experience of rehabilitation challenges.
- Mentor serving personnel with authentic understanding of combat trauma.
- Reduce stigma around disability and mental health in both military and civilian contexts.

The War-Wounded Foundation, established in 2002, demonstrates institutional recognition of this bridging function, supporting over 40,000 disabled personnel nationwide while advocating for policy reforms that benefit all disabled citizens.³³

This comparative analysis reveals that individual resilience is not purely a personal attribute, but emerges from the interaction between:

- Institutional frameworks (medical care, rehabilitation services, career policies).
- Social networks (family, peer groups, mentor relationships).
- Cultural narratives (military ethos, national service, post-traumatic growth).
- Policy environments (disability rights, veteran benefits, public recognition).

Policy Implications and Recommendations

The Government of India's declaration of 2025 as the 'Year of Reforms' for the Ministry of Defence provides an unprecedented opportunity to institutionalise support systems for war-wounded achievers.³⁴ Based on the comparative analysis of resilience

patterns and existing policy frameworks, this section proposes five strategic interventions that can transform individual courage into systemic capacity for supporting wounded warriors.

Recommendation 1: Establishment of a National War-Wounded Achievers Documentation Archive

Current Gap. Despite the heroic contributions of war-wounded personnel, their stories remain fragmented across regimental records, personal accounts, and sporadic media coverage. No centralised repository exists for comprehensive documentation of their journeys from injury through achievement.

Solution. Create a Digital Archive of War-Wounded Achievers under the Directorate of Public Relations (Army) with the following components:

- **Comprehensive Life Histories.** Full biographical documentation from pre-service life through post-injury achievements, including family backgrounds, service records, injury circumstances, rehabilitation journeys, and subsequent contributions.
- **Audio-Visual Documentation.** Video interviews, photographic records, and multimedia presentations accessible to researchers, educators, and public.
- **Integration with Existing Platforms.** Link with the Gallantry Awards Portal (www.gallantryawards.gov.in) and Directorate General Resettlement databases for comprehensive veteran tracking.³⁵

Implementation Framework.

- **Pilot Phase (2025-26).** Document 100 verified war-wounded achievers across all three services.
- **Expansion Phase (2026-30).** Scale to include over 1,000 cases with dedicated research staff at each Command and Headquarters.
- **Accessibility.** Public portal with educational modules for schools, colleges, and military training institutions.

Expected Outcome. Systematic preservation of inspirational narratives for future generations while creating research resources for military psychology, rehabilitation studies, and veteran welfare policy development.

Recommendation 2: Integration of Mental Health Support with Family-Centric Rehabilitation

Current Gap. While the Indian Armed Forces have established psychological first aid training for more than 4,075 Air Force personnel and implemented IN-SMART³⁶, these programmes remain primarily service-member focused rather than family-system oriented.

Solution. Develop Integrated Family Rehabilitation Units at all major Commands Hospitals with the following capabilities:

- **Family Counselling Programs.** Mandatory psychological support for spouses, parents, and children of war-wounded personnel, recognising their critical role in successful recovery.
- **Peer Support Networks.** Formal mentorship programmes pairing newly injured personnel with established war-wounded achievers (e.g., Major Singh's TCO model scaled institutionally).

Resource Allocation.

- **Personnel.** Train over 500 family counsellors across Command Hospitals.
- **Infrastructure.** Establish dedicated family accommodation facilities at rehabilitation centres.
- **Technology.** Digital platforms for remote counselling and peer support networks.

Evidence Base. Research demonstrates that 87 per cent of successfully rehabilitated war-wounded personnel cite family support as the primary recovery factor³⁷, yet current policies provide minimal systematic family integration.

Recommendation 3: Structured Transition Support for Post-Service Achievement

Current Gap. The Directorate General Resettlement provides employment training and job placement services³⁸, but lacks specialised programming for war-wounded personnel whose unique experiences can contribute to national development beyond traditional employment.

Solution. Create a 'War-Wounded Achievers Transition Programme' with three distinct pathways:

- **Pathway 1: Institutional Leadership.**
 - **Reservation.** Reserved positions in Sainik Schools, Rashtriya Military Schools, and National Cadet Corps Directorates for war-wounded achievers as mentors and trainers.
 - **Policy Advisory Roles.** Formal representation on veteran welfare committees, rehabilitation policy boards, and military research councils.
- **Pathway 2: Entrepreneurship and Innovation.**
 - **Dedicated Startup Incubation.** INR 10 cr annual fund for war-wounded veteran enterprises, particularly in adaptive technology, rehabilitation services, and motivational consulting.
 - **Corporate Partnership Programme.** Formal memorandums of understanding with major corporations for leadership positions that leverage military experience and personal resilience narratives.
- **Pathway 3: Community Service and Advocacy.**
 - **NGO Leadership Development.** Training and funding support for establishing organisations like Major Singh's TCO.
 - **Public Speaking and Education Networks.** Professional development for war-wounded achievers as motivational speakers, with a standardised curriculum for schools and corporate training.

Recommendation 4: Enhanced Medical Rehabilitation Infrastructure

Current Gap. While institutions like the Artificial Limb Centre, Pune, and Paraplegic Rehabilitation Centres at Kirkee and Mohali provide medical care³⁹, they lack integration with psychological support and long-term achievement facilitation.

Solution. Establish Integrated Rehabilitation Nodes at each Command with comprehensive capabilities:

- **Medical Components.**
 - **Advanced Prosthetic Labs.** State-of-the-art facilities for custom prosthetics, including sport-specific equipment for adaptive athletics.
 - **Neuro-Psychological Units.** Dedicated departments combining trauma therapy, cognitive rehabilitation, and resilience training.
- **Achievement Facilitation Components.**
 - **Adaptive Sports Centres.** Training facilities for para-athletics, with coaching staff and equipment for competitive sports.
 - **Vocational Innovation Labs.** Technology-enabled skill development centres focusing on emerging fields like digital marketing, app development, and e-commerce.
- **Community Integration Components.**
 - **Mentor Matching Systems.** Formal programmes connecting new patients with established war-wounded achievers.
 - **Family Support Services.** Childcare, counselling, and educational support for families during extended rehabilitation periods.

Recommendation 5: Legislative and Policy Framework Enhancement

Current Gap. While Major General Ian Cardozo's leadership at the RCI (2005-14) contributed to the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act⁴⁰, specific protections and advancement opportunities for war-wounded personnel remain limited.

Solution. War-Wounded Achievers Recognition and Support Act with the following provisions:

- **Legal Protections.**
 - **Employment Reservations.** Two per cent reservation in Group A and Group B government positions for war-wounded achievers with demonstrated post-injury contributions.
 - **Educational Benefits.** Full scholarship support for children of war-wounded personnel through postgraduate levels.
- **Recognition Mechanisms.**
 - **Annual National Awards.** Courage and Resilience Awards recognising exceptional post-injury achievements.
 - **Institutional Honours.** Mandatory representation of war-wounded achievers in Republic Day parades and national ceremonies.
 - **Memorial and Naming Rights.** Hospitals, roads, and institutions named after distinguished war-wounded achievers.
- **Implementation Oversight.**
 - **Parliamentary Committee.** Dedicated committee for war-wounded affairs with quarterly review sessions.
 - **Independent Monitoring.** Third-party evaluation of rehabilitation effectiveness and achievement facilitation.

Conclusion

The journey from battlefield to blade runner, from wounded warrior to policy pioneer, from trauma survivor to national inspiration, is not merely a tale of survival, but a blueprint for transformation. Many war-wounded achievers exemplify a profound truth that resonates far beyond military service—courage is not merely a momentary act of defiance against death, but a sustained commitment to life in the service of others.

Their stories validate the essay's core thesis that war scars, whether visible or invisible, need not define limitations but can become launching pads for extraordinary achievement. The comparative analysis reveals that resilience is not an individual attribute but an ecosystem outcome emerging from the dynamic interaction between institutional frameworks, family networks, cultural narratives, and policy environments.

The policy recommendations presented from comprehensive documentation archives to family-centric rehabilitation programmes represent more than administrative improvements. They constitute a national commitment to transform an individual's courage into collective capacity. As India faces an increasingly complex security environment, the wisdom embedded in these war-wounded achievers' experiences becomes strategically vital for institutional morale, public support for the armed forces, and national character building. Yet, perhaps the most significant insight emerging from these narratives concerns the multiplicative nature of resilience.

As Major Devender Pal Singh, drawing from the core teaching of the Sikh holy book, the *Gurbani*, reminds us, *Man Jeete, Jag Jeet* (Conquer the mind and you conquer the world).⁴¹

This ancient wisdom, lived through modern battlefields and contemporary rehabilitation centres, offers the ultimate lesson about courage and resilience—true victory lies not in avoiding wounds, but in transforming them into sources of strength that uplift entire communities.

The war-wounded achievers profiled in this essay have indeed conquered their minds, and in doing so, they have conquered worlds, not through dominance, but through service; not through individual triumph, but through collective empowerment. Their legacy challenges every Indian citizen to not just ask about the comfort that can be provided to wounded warriors, but what inspiration can be driven from their courage to build a more resilient, compassionate, and service-oriented society.

In honouring their journeys, the country honours their sacrifice, as well as the infinite potential that lies within every human being to transform adversity into achievement, trauma into triumph, and individual healing into national strength. Their scars have become inspiration; their resilience became collective courage.

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From the Archives

The Journal

OF THE

United Service Institution of India.

VOL. XXXIII,

JULY 1904.

NO. 156.

THE INFLUENCE AND APPLICATION OF SEA POWER ON
EXPEDITIONS BASED ON INDIA.

BY MAJOR G. F. MACMUNN, D.S.O., R.F.A.

Motto: "Quare fremuerunt gentes."

*"The storm-beaten ships on which the Grand Army never looked
stood between it and the dominion of the world."*

In considering the subject of this essay, almost the first thought that presents itself is that in the question of the influence of Sea Power on expeditions based on India, the whole principle of England's naval supremacy, and her command of the sea is involved. It is impossible to discuss how expeditions from India, be they over land through the passes, or over sea through the Gulf and the Indian Ocean, or through the Archipelago to the Far East, are affected by Sea Power, without understanding how the Empire rests on its maintenance, or how India and England stand towards each other.

Captain Mahan's famous saying, above, is at once the epitaph of British policy in the past, and the prophecy, of its future. Thanks to his writings, and the efforts of those who have followed in his footsteps, the axioms of Sea Power are now widely understood by Englishmen. The necessity for its maintenance is so universally recognized in these days that to discuss it, save as a prelude to argument is absurd.

Power on the Sea consists of
two essentials, fighting -power and
carrying capacity, and_ in this latter
must be included all the facilities
requisite for embarking troops, and loading or unloading freights.

Meaning of sea power.

This article is the Gold Medal Prize Essay for 1904

It is in the combination of these two constituents that lies England's strategic power. Add to the command of the high seas the capacity to transport troops to any spot in the wide world we please, and the full meaning of Sea Power is apparent. The despatch of 10,000 men from Europe to the Far East is a difficult matter, but for England, it is only necessary to cable to India, where irrespective of internal demands that number of men, and the ships to move them, wait only the signal to start. The power to move distant men by cable, enhances the value of a force so available, out of all proportion to its actual numbers. The capacity of India with regard to oversea expeditions will be discussed later on.

Now the broad principle of England's policy in time of war is to gain complete supremacy at sea, and then search how she may best force her adversary to sue for peace, employing her Sea Power in its' broadest sense to gain this end. It is the help that India, from her geographical position, can give to such a policy that seems to be the subject of this essay.

To examine therefore the question of "The influence and application of Sea Power on expeditions based on India," it is proposed to discuss it under the following headings, touching briefly on the main points of Imperial strategy, and such naval subjects as are necessary for a broad view of the subject.

PART I. *The Influence of Sea Power on India.*

- (1) Dual operations.
- (2) Oversea ventures from India in the past.
- (3) The economic position of India in war time.
- (4) India's strategic position.
- (5) Expeditions from India.
- (6) Summary of foregoing.

PART II. *The Application of Sea Power to India.*

- (7) The communications of India with Europe.
- (8) Coal strategy.
- (9) The Indian Ocean.
- (10) Conclusions affecting the route to India.
- (11) The Isthmian Canal.
- (12) The application of Sea Power in the East.
- (13) Coaling stations in the Far-East.
- (14) Resume.

PART I.-THE INFLUENCE OF SEA POWER ON EXPEDITIONS FROM INDIA.

(1). DUAL OPERATION.

The study of European History, from the French Revolution to the present day, affords a series of illustrations of the extraordinary strategic value that a small military force has when it can be transported by sea and landed at will, at a point where its action will be most effective. It was not the size of the British force in the Iberian Peninsula that formed the "Spanish Ulcer." It was the fact that owing to our absolute command of the sea, and the configuration of the seaboard of Western Europe, England could plant, remove, and maintain with a base shifting at need, an army at a point furthest removed from Napoleon's other theatres of war, that made the genius of Wellington and the daring of his army possible. It was the "storm tossed ships" that started the ulcer, ever feeding it with fresh germs, and prevented its healing, by making the Channel and the Bay as English as the Humber and the Wash.

It was not the size of the Allied Expedition to the Crimea that brought Russia to terms, and to a humiliating surrender. It was the point at which Sea Power, fighting force and carrying capacity, maintaining a small army, enabled the blister to be applied. The distance between Great Russia and the Chersonese, then unspanned by railways and badly served with roads, cut off the seat of war from the vast armies of the Tzar, which had to march over countless miles of snow-swept or sun-dried steppes, to lose nine-tenths of their numbers on the road. It was her old soldiers, General January and General February, that played her false, added to the strategy that affixed the blister, at the point where remedies could not be applied.

Similarly, it was the Sea Power of England that enabled her to crush the French in the Mediterranean, to isolate the French in Egypt, who were cut off from France, and then to land in 1801 the British force that forced a superior army of Napoleon's veterans to complete surrender.

It was the power to place our expeditions where we pleased that has always served us in such good stead, and neither the strategical error that prompted the wretched expedition to Walcheren, instead of concentrating our strength in Spain, nor the follies of the abortive raids on the northern French coast in the early eighteenth century, detract from the value of such combined expeditious when wisely conceived.

By so much as does this amphibious power of England enhance her might, so much more does India; a vast, far advanced base, enhance the strategic range of her dual operations.

A glance at the oversea enterprises from India in the past will show how strong has been her position, and how resolutely the dual resources in the Far East have been employed to maintain the command of Eastern waters, and to exterminate all who could dispute it.

The study of the history of the last hundred years further establishes that permanent command of the sea is essential to the success of oversea expeditions. The position of the French in Egypt after the battle of the Nile, and of Ibrahim Pasha in the Peloponnese after Navarino, are both clinching demonstrations of this. Had the British fleet been driven from the Bay, there would have been no escape for Sir John Moore's army after Corunna.

One point seems to stand out from all these historical examples, and that is that Sea Power does not, at any rate for England, mean merely naval fighting force and carrying capacity, but the power to employ an army and a navy in combined operations, and that this broad meaning should always be understood when we use the expression. That this must be so is borne out by the reflection that no mere strength in ships would have brought Napoleon to Elba, without the "ulcer" of the army in Spain.

(2). OVERSEA VENTURES FROM INDIA IN THE PAST.

In the days of the Great Shadow, when free England financed and subsidised all Europe to combat Napoleon, India boldly despatched oversea expeditions to seize every point whence the trade to the East could be threatened.

In 1795, when France dominated Holland, an expedition from England occupied the Dutch possessions at the Cape, and an expedition from India took the Dutch territory of Ceylon, holding the latter for good and all, and restoring the former to Holland at the Peace of Amiens, secured it in perpetuity in 1805, in pursuit of the determination that nothing should jeopardise the road to the East.

In 1802, India, recognising her strategic interest in Egypt, sent, at the instance of the great Marquis, a force to assist in expelling the French.

In 1810, a further expedition from India captured Bourbon and the Mauritius, the bases whence French privateers preyed on the India trade, and

whence French Governors intrigued with, and assisted, the native powers—an interesting prototype for future enterprise.

In 1802, and again in 1808, we occupied the Portuguese colony, Macao, close to Canton, because France had dominated Portugal and might occupy her ports. In the earlier instance the Indian Government effected this on its own initiative, recognising the necessity of denying bases to the enemy. Such forethought, however, was severely censured by the Home Government.

In 1811, the same policy, the preservation of our military and commercial routes to India and the Far East, saw us take Java from the French, who held it for the Dutch.

In the wars with France, prior to the French Revolution, the French navy in Indian waters was much handicapped by the distance of its only refitting base, the Mauritius, from the point where its action was needed, while British vessels had many points to which they could repair to refit. The latter, with the Hooghly, Trincomalee and Bombay at their disposal, had immense advantages and could not only keep the sea, but constantly bring troops from the other Presidencies to reinforce points threatened by the French ashore.

In 1782, Admiral Suffren, the capable French naval commander in the East Indies, succeeded in capturing Trincomalee, thus forcing the British vessels to refit at Bombay, Madras or Calcutta, and his possession of this naval base at once caused us to collect a force to expel him, which we finally did.

Now all these ventures took place to protect our Eastern communications, and were possible because we had sufficient naval strength in Indian waters to safely convoy our transports and maintain communications with their base. The possibility and prosperity of our Indian rule in the past is therefore shown at every turn to be wrapped up in the two great constituents of Sea Power—carrying capacity and fighting force.

(3). THE ECONOMIC POSITION OF INDIA IN WAR TIME.

Close on a quarter of a century ago, when Indian defence and its varied problems were deeply and acrimoniously discussed, when many schools of thought existed, and various points were in turn spoken of as the "Key of India," it was Lord Beaconsfield who brought men back from the by-paths by saying, "The Key of India is London." By which, in the true spirit of strategy, he

meant that so long as the Empire, of which London is the hub, was in no danger, so long India stood safe, and the road to it stood open.

The Roman semi-military occupation of Britain, for nigh on 400 years, bears a striking analogy to our own rule in India, and it was not till the hub of the Roman Empire was threatened and involved that Britain, deprived of its best legions, gradually fell a prey to barbarian inroads, local risings, and oversea invasions. Curiously enough, it was the acuteness of the food supply question that largely contributed to the fall of Rome.

From the point of view of possible war, India at first sight seems to differ economically from England in every way. England now barely feeds a ninth part of her own population, while one third of that population live from hand to mouth, ever dependent on wages earned by converting raw imports to manufactured exports. No State stores of food in the country can provide that third with wages if the inflow of raw material and the export of manufactured material be checked for more than a few days. The absolute and almost unbroken command of the sea is therefore a condition of national existence. Isolation of a few weeks even means consternation and misery untold.

India, on the other hand, is not economically dependent on ocean-borne trade. No corn and beeves are borne on the sea to feed her millions. Isolation by sea does not bring immediately a starving population surging to the doors of Government. Cotton mills may close, corn merchants may fail, tea plantations close, but no immediate catastrophe threatens a country that feeds its own population, which is almost entirely agricultural.

It must be remembered, however, that the India as we know it to-day, the peaceful homogeneous whole, is entirely a product of the British occupation, a rule ringed with bayonets, lest Sikh and Pathan, Mahrattan and Rajput, Rohilla and Mugul, and every masterless man in the country, once more struggle for power and the spoils of war. The British power in India is absolutely dependent on a regular and undiminished supply of the moral petrol from England. The constant flow through the great canal of fresh drafts for all the services, the outflow of the jaded, the inflow of the fit, and of all the supplies and all the stores requisite to our rule, can only bear temporary interruption. In ordinary times of peace the flow and the wastage is considerable. The smallest frontier war increases, be it never so small, the demands on England.

In the days of the Honourable Company, when small arms, explosives, and cannon were easy to make, and when railroads existed not, India was far more self-supporting from the British point of view than now. The Company manufactured its own military stores and evolved armies from its subject races to keep pace with its expansion. No law of proportion existed between the European and native forces, and India was deemed less dependent on Europe than now. The safety of the Indian trade rested, as it ever rests, on the command of the sea, and when foreigners were strong on the sea, the trade suffered, though every Indian could fight for her own hand. India, prior to 1857, was regarded almost as a self-supporting base with regard to military supplies, even though the most powerful native confederacies held arrogant sway in the greater half of the land; whenever more armies were required the Lat Sahib ordered and the legions grew, and it was not realised how the British bayonet alone stood behind the British Raj.

The Mutiny nearly brought down our card house about our ears, and from that date the unlimited raising of troops from local sources ceased. The alloy of the Indian Army was to have a fixed proportion of East to West in its constitution, and the East was no longer to be unduly increased as a cheap support for Imperial burdens.

This, at once, to change the metaphor, made India a reservoir rather than the self-supporting supply it had been erroneously deemed—a reservoir, it is true, from which troops could be poured in considerable quantities, but only on condition of prompt refilment. The realisation of the true position of India has naturally shown her military condition to be far less independent—more dependent on support because of the limitations of her military resources, more so because of the “Great Fear” behind; that legacy of 1857.

With the introduction of modern guns, modern rifles, and explosives, added to that of railways, India’s manufacturing capabilities made her even more dependent on Europe, and though of late years the policy has been to create as many arsenals and factories as possible, still engines, many rails, bridge girders, rifles and cannon, all equally important military stores, must come from Europe or America.

The normal peace demands on India then are most extensive; and while the smallest frontier expedition increases to some

extent the military drafts, such larger wars as the Mutiny, the Afghan War of 1878–80, or the Frontier campaign of 1897–98, create a very large and imperative demand on Europe. In a recent speech in the House of Commons, the Premier has openly said that in the event of war with Russia it would be necessary to despatch the equivalent of two Army Corps to India. Now an Army Corps at home war strength, such as went to South Africa, requires 130 large steam transports.

The foregoing considerations show, therefore, clearly enough how much India depends on her free communication with Europe, and how immense in every way must be the influence of Sea Power, that combination of carrying capacity with fighting force, on expeditions based on India.

It has been shown, it is true, that any temporary interruption of the command of the sea does not bring consternation and disaster in its train to her, but it is evident that any prolonged isolation must at best have the most crippling effect on her offensive power.

To see how Indian expeditions are influenced in more detail, the military position of India must next be to some extent reviewed.

(4). INDIA'S STRATEGIC POSITION.

The military position of India presents two different problems, for we have to consider her, on the one hand, as a continental power, a country with frontiers that march with powerful neighbours and with possibilities of great internal trouble, and on the other hand, as an advanced base from which certain forces may be despatched, of strategical importance out of all proportion to their actual numbers. It is necessary to consider the former point of view, to gauge the possibilities of the latter.

We have seen that a century ago, when Great Britain was the paramount, but not the only power in India, she cheerfully undertook oversea expeditions against powers we were at war with, for the general advancement of the cause, and the special protection of the Eastern routes. At this period she had powerful internal enemies to fear. No sooner, however, had the British rule been consolidated over the whole of the Indian Peninsula, and India therefore made a far securer base for expeditions, than the persistent policy bequeathed by Peter the Great brought Russian advance looming on the horizon, while the Mutiny showed the volcanic possibilities that lay beneath even an all-red India.

The continual Russian advance has now put India almost in the position of a continental power,
The proximity of Russia

unable to make effective oversea expeditions till she is certain of her neighbours' intentions. Exactly as France can never think of large oversea operations till her relations with Germany are satisfactory, so can India never send armies across the sea till Russia's attitude be guaranteed. This means that for all practical purposes the mass of the Indian army is tied to India, except in circumstances when Russia may be our firm ally.

One point, therefore, that stands out from the above, and is a point that is not always kept in sight, is that the army in India exists for the protection and retention of India.

India is prepared to use force to help protect her communications, but save on special occasions, when all is quiet within, the army of India cannot send forces to assist elsewhere in the Empire. The free despatch of troops to China, to South Africa, and to East Africa was only possible because all was quiet in India.

It is not within the scope of this essay to discuss the military forces of India and their destination, but it may be accepted that 25,000 men, of whom the majority would be native soldiers, would be the very maximum that we could ever send out of India, so long as Russia's action was uncertain, unless we were in the position to pour troops into India from Europe as fast as we take them out. At the same time, it is very evident that a force of from 5,000 men upwards, always available in Eastern seas, is a factor that no one could neglect.

Without discussing the varied possibilities before us in the East, sufficient reference to our position is necessary to see how Sea Power must influence oversea expeditions from India.

Our possible opponents are—

- | | |
|--------------------|---|
| Possible Opponents | <p>(1) Russia, who is rapidly gaining in the Far East a strategical position similar to our own, inferior because not so central, superior because her hinterland seems destined to be a powerful and fruitful Russian province, from Moscow to Port Arthur.</p> <p>(2) Japan, which is an island and maritime power, with many analogies to Britain, and whose strategical position is advantageous.</p> <p>(3) The United States, who in the Philippines will have, in generations to come, a powerful advanced base, and on whom the Isthmian Canal is to confer great advantages.</p> |
|--------------------|---|

- (4) Germany, whose Eastern settlements are hopelessly isolated.
- (5) France, whose colonies and possessions are more dependent than India on connection with Europe, and whose offensive military strength in the East is trivial.
- (6) China, the great unknown, against whom large dual expeditions have been necessary in the past, and may be again at any time.
- (7) Various possible campaigns where, as in the past, England would want help from India, such as Somaliland, Abyssinia, and the Soudan.

Dual operations against Japan are not within the sphere of practical politics, and war with Russia must tie up most of our troops in India, though the offensive defence of India may necessitate communications via the Gulf. War with the United States entails so many consequences, and has so many aspects, that India's possible share has never been thought out. The support of Canada, and in years to come the control of the Isthmian Canal, would be objects of a greater strategy.

Against France and Germany, all that is probable is the reduction of their power to damage Eastern trade; the possession of their colonies must come as a result of success, or at any rate be an easy matter so soon as England's command of the sea becomes absolute.

Concentration is the first axiom of strategy, and only forces, naval and military, that cannot be brought into the main theatre of war, could be diverted into colonial enterprises. It is now an accepted axiom, so far as Great Britain is concerned, that India's Amphibious power in fighting a European Power, fed by rail from an allied or neutral neighbour, power on sea alone cannot bring a war to a successful determination. Sufficient dual enterprises against an adversary's colonial possessions can alone affect her purse or her pride sufficiently to clinch matters.

Such considerations give a general idea of how India's position helps the Empire, remembering always that Russia must be safe before many troops leave, or else that England can pour troops in within a week or so of others leaving. More is hardly necessary to realize how great is the influence of the force that keeps open the road from home.

For the despatch of oversea expeditions generally, a local command of the sea may often be all that is necessary, viz., command in the waters to be traversed. In the event of a war with France, for instance, a command of the sea in Eastern waters would suffice for the mere safety of an expedition from India against the French Indies. Similarly, it is only the Russian squadron in the Far East that affects the question of a Japanese landing in Korea.

In view of the foregoing, it therefore seems clear that the employment of our full Sea Power in the Far East, viz., the power to send and protect combined expeditions, will be aimed against the coaling stations in the East that support hostile cruisers. The dispersions of force and the upkeep of garrisons that such enterprises entail must always limit them to the capture of vital points, while final success puts others at our mercy.

A point is here worth noticing with regard to the accessories to Sea Power, viz., that in all India there are very few docks and wharves from which troops can be embarked. Between Calcutta and Bombay, a distance of 2,000 miles, there is not one. Even with the immense resources of England, it takes days to embark an Army Corps. To despatch even a division from India is a lengthy matter, when secrecy and surprise are of any value.

(5). THE NATURE OF EXPEDITIONS BASED ON INDIA.

Before considering how this Sea Power is to be applied in the interests of expeditions from India, a more detailed elimination of the nature of expeditions based on India is desirable.

Such expeditions may be divided into three categories:

- A. Those based on India by land.
- B. Those based on India by sea.
- C. Those despatched from India, but based elsewhere.

Category A would include any overland enterprise, from a punitive raid to a war with Russia and a campaign on the Helmund or through the Dasht-i-Lut.

Category B comprises two sorts of expeditions—

- (a) Those against Native States.
- (b) Those against European Powers or Japan.

In (a) would come our Burmese, Persian, and China Wars, while in (b) we have had nothing since the capture of Java and the Mauritius.

Category C would include such expeditions as the force sent to Africa in 1899, and to some extent those sent to Egypt, the Soudan, or Abyssinia, inasmuch as they were not entirely supplied from India.

From what has already been put forward, it follows that Category A is affected by Sea Power, so far as the throwing of reinforcements and the replenishment of expended personnel and matériel is concerned, which vary from drafts to the sole despatch of Army Corps.

Expeditions in Category B are further dependent on complete naval supremacy in Indian and Eastern waters when war with a naval power is concerned. When, however, the expedition is against a non-naval state, such as a native state or China, the carrying capacity is the only portion of Sea Power that is in demand.

Category C again is dependent on sufficient naval supremacy and carrying capacity for the safe despatch of the expedition, which has of course to be supplied by sea in its new destination.

(6). SUMMARY OF PART I.

Summing up the conclusions which it has been the endeavour to elicit in the previous pages, it would seem that, so far as expeditions based on India are concerned, the influence of Sea Power is much as follows:—

1. Owing to the geographical position of India and the naval supremacy of England, the former is an advanced base of extreme strategical value, whence oversea expeditions, small in number, are immense in their effect.
2. That, from the fact of Russia's vicinity and possible hostility, heavy reinforcements may be required at any time, and that Sea Power must keep the road open, and that for this same reason expeditions that can leave India can only be numerically small till Russia's course of action be certain.
3. That, owing to the nature of our position in India, the volcanic possibilities below the surface, and the drain that any expedition causes in a greater or less degree, free communication in time of peace and war is an essential, and without Sea Power this would be impossible.
4. That oversea expeditions cannot safely leave India until full command in the waters to be crossed has been obtained.

PART II.—THE APPLICATION OF SEA POWER TO INDIA.

From the foregoing pages, it is clear that in the application of Sea Power for the benefit of expeditions based on India the main objects to be aimed at are:—

- (1) The safety of the communications of India with Europe.
- (2) Sufficient command of the local seas, to despatch and safely base on India any required expedition.

It should also be mentioned that even when an expedition proceeds overland from India, warlike stores, personnel and animals may come to India not only from Europe, but from Australia, Canada and the Far East. Once again, therefore, it is evident how bound up with the general question of British naval supremacy is the military situation in India.

(7). THE COMMUNICATIONS OF INDIA WITH EUROPE.

This question alone involves one of the biggest Imperial controversies of the day, viz., the merits and possibilities of the Cape or the Canal routes.

A few years ago it was generally believed that in the event of war with a maritime power, we should have to abandon the Canal route; but further study of the question has caused expert opinion to think that it can be kept open. The naval strategic front of England is said to be from the Channel round to the Hellespont, watching the naval ports of Europe, including Bizerta; but just as a block-house line is the safest route for unescorted convoys, so would the Mediterranean route, with the naval force concentrated along it, be the safest for our eastern commerce and troops. It is a question which war alone can settle, but the following points are worth bearing in mind:—

(a) Ditchers and tramps are almost entirely built for the England to Bombay trip *via* the Canal, and are neither equal to the strain of the voyage and weather round the Cape, nor have they coal capacity to enable them to go from coal point to coal point.

(b) The coal supply and coaling accommodation at the Cape is entirely inadequate to the strain of supplying the Eastern trade, and ships might be kept one or two months there before they could coal, while colliers proceeding there from England would consume part of their cargo in getting there. During the South African War, the coaling of all the war shipping was attended with many delays.

(c) The sinking of a ship in the Canal to block it is not nearly so feasible as it might seem. Surely we should assume a strong enough line in the event of war to use our position in Egypt to insist on placing a guard on every foreign ship passing the Canal between Port Said and Suez.

(d) Even the sinking of a ship laden with bricks in the Canal would not be the catastrophe usually imagined. The depth of the Canal is about 30 feet, while freight ships draw 24 feet, so that it would be a question of raising a vessel 6 feet, no great task with the resources of the Canal Company, and towing her to the Canal mouth or lake opening.

It would therefore seem that the route *via* the Canal is as likely to be available as any other, and we may reckon on using it.

The following naval considerations have some bearing on this question of trade ships and troopers to the East *via* the Canal:

(h) One ship in every three that goes through the Canal is not English. A warship of a Power at war with England dare not sink a ship till she had ascertained that it did belong to us. By day the route would be sufficiently patrolled, unless we were beaten from the seas, and by night a foreign cruiser would have to overhaul every passer-by, and probably board her and examine papers, ere she dared effect seizure. Under such conditions it is not likely that many prizes would be made in each night, and for every vessel taken many would elude capture.

(g) Convoys, on the contrary, attract attention by their smoke, are easily located by day, can be followed, and are a fair mark for torpedo boats at night. On a route not entirely clear of hostile cruisers, but which our own cruisers patrol, ships that slip along as best they may would probably have a better chance of escape, and a more satisfactory voyage, than if tied to a convoy and the pace of their slowest consort.

These are points which add to the likelihood of the Canal route, and to the necessity of holding the Mediterranean as the road to India.

To pursue further the discussion of the alternative route to India is perhaps outside the scope of this essay, and encroaches on ground which only naval strategists are competent to cover; and we may confine ourselves to the question of how vessels passing the Cape and issuing from the Canal may be safely passed on to India; but as Sea

Power is largely a naval question, sea topics must be discussed as best a landsman may.

Bound up with the question of Sea Power in all waters, but especially in far distant seas, is the matter of coal supply and coaling stations, or what is now termed "Coal Strategy," and an outline of the chief facts regarding them is essential before proceeding with the discussion in hand.

(8). COAL STRATEGY.

A century ago, vessels, or any other craft, could keep the seas so long as their food and water supplies held out, and important repairs were not necessary. Even then, almost any small port would afford supplies and material for refitment. Now, however, coal is a necessity, which has entirely altered the whole matter of naval strategy, and every vessel must stow enough of it to carry her from one coaling port to another.

Hostile cruisers are dependent for their action on coal supply; blockading fleets must coal at sea, a difficult operation, or else always have a proportion of vessels away coaling. When colliers accompany a fleet, they must often keep up with it, which means that they expend far more of their freight than when steaming quietly in the way of trade over an equivalent distance, while they must retain sufficient coal to take them back when empty. So that coaling by collier convoy does not give a very satisfactory or far-reaching coal supply.

Every steamer has its economical rate of speed, and directly this has to be enhanced the expenditure of coal is out of all proportion to the distance covered. Vessels chased by others that have more coal capacity, or a nearer coaling port, may be rendered quite impotent. A foreign cruiser making via the Cape for Diego Suarez might steam there quietly at her economical speed, but if forced for some days to travel faster by British cruisers, who could themselves coal at Ascension, St. Helena, or the Cape, she might never get to her destination. Such "riding off" from coal supplies is to be a prominent feature of modern minor naval strategy.

For fleets and cruisers to have freedom of action there must be an abundance of coaling stations available. Coaling stations are of two kinds: defended ones, varying from naval ports and fortresses to defended coal heaps, and commercial ones. In time of war, a power that has a naval supremacy can establish on any suitable shore a temporary coal heap, and the most economical form of this is a row of anchored colliers, if the ships can be spared.

Malta is a fortress coaling station; Aden is more a fortified coal heap; Port Said and St. Vincent in the Cape Verde Islands are types of commercial coaling stations.

Now all these coaling stations can only store a certain amount of coal, and are fed almost daily by colliers from Europe, chiefly England, while Welsh coal even for the East and the Far East comes through the Canal.

The following coaling facts are worth noting here:—

(a) The speeds of all vessels are measured when burning hard Welsh coal, and that class of coal is found in all the wide world in England alone. A vessel that does not burn Welsh coal loses 2.5 per cent. of her speed. Thus a twenty-knot foreign cruiser becomes a fifteen-knot vessel when Cardiff coal is denied her.

(b) All coal deteriorates by keeping; in a few weeks Welsh coal is no better than any other; therefore it is useless to accumulate stacks of it at coaling points. Whosoever would use it must be assured of a constant and steady supply. The amount that foreigners depend on us for coal is instanced by the fact that an average of six colliers a day leave Cardiff for France alone.

(c) The position of England, therefore, with regard to the rest of the world, so long as no one else can find Welsh coal, and no other fuel can be devised, is amazing, and is one that is not usually realised by the lay mind. The strategic value of the Cape, and the command in the Red Sea, are immense, viewed by the light of this fact.

(d) The steaming capacity, viz., the coal-carrying capacity, varies in different vessels, but the very latest type of cruiser, or commerce destroyer, specially built for independence in this respect, can only steam 12,000 knots at its most economical speed, viz., 10 knots an hour; any enhancement of this rate lessens considerably the total knots that can be covered. Most battleships and cruisers have far less capacity than this.

(e) Coaling stations, naval and commercial, in the East are almost entirely dependent on coal from Europe or America, and we possess the few ports that are not so. Table Bay and Durban can be supplied locally with indigenous though inferior coal, and the same applies to the Indian ports, to Labuan, though here our supply is not sufficiently protected, and to Australia, whose future as a strategic self-supporting base will be of vast importance. Russia can draw coal of

sorts from Siberia for Port Arthur, while Japan has her own mines, but none of this coal is of much value to warships, especially cruisers. Other ports are entirely dependent on sea supply, and a glance at the map will show how isolated are most of the coaling stations, especially the non-British.

Colliers coming East from Europe must weather the Cape or pass through the Canal, and from Europe coal must come eastward till American coal becomes the nearer. In the Far East coal mostly comes from America, but no American coal is equal to the hard Welsh coal, so that fuel for warships and the mail steamers still comes via the Canal.

The question of neutral coal.

A few words on the question of the coal of neutrals in war will not be out of place. It is held to be a distinct breach of neutrality for a neutral to supply a belligerent warship with coal, save perhaps to steam on at her economical speed to the next port. It is always possible, and indeed not improbable, that a weak neutral might be coerced into supplying coal or have it forcibly taken, and be unable to take up the challenge. If such happened against us, it would be for us to clear out that neutral's coal and see she got no more. The strong maritime power can generally expect to profit in the end by such breaches of the law. In time of war, might makes right, since the earliest days of man. We should probably make it our business to protect, possibly garrison, the coal ports of a weak neutral, lest our adversary be tempted to raid them in despair of fuel.

(9). THE COMMAND OF THE INDIAN OCEAN.

The foregoing considerations throw our position in the Indian Ocean into clear relief. At Aden, Karachi, Colombo, Singapore, Mauritius, Durban and Table Bay we have defended harbours and coaling stations; at Trincomalee, Bombay and Simon's Town we have naval bases as well. The African and Indian ports have the indigenous coal supply referred to. Now glance at the foreign coaling stations. In the vast expanse of sea, between Suez, Table Bay and Colombo, France alone has defended coaling stations at Obok and Diego Suarez, both hopelessly isolated so far as coal and naval resources are concerned. With these exceptions, the Indian Ocean is practically a British lake, over which trooper and trader can be despatched with reasonable safety.

The importance of the Persian Gulf now stands out. A Russian port on the Gulf, connected with Russia by rail, or a German terminus of the Baghdad railway at Koweit, could entirely alter these

conditions. Such ports would not be isolated stations like Obok, but have the full resources of their countries behind them.

The building of a 4,000-ton steamer on Lake Baikal is an example of what can be done in the way of naval resources, even at the thousand-mile end of a railway, and shows the danger of allowing Germany or Russia a port in the Gulf.

Mastery of the Gulf of Suez means complete control of the Indian Ocean. Coal is a reasonable contraband of war, and were France the enemy, colliers for Obok and Diego Suarez must run the gauntlet of the Cape. The preservation of the *status quo*, and the barring of the Persian Gulf to all European powers, is a necessity on which too much stress cannot be laid.

There are certain commercial undefended coaling stations in these waters, such as Port Said, Perim (British), Beira and Delagoa (Portuguese), Mombasa, etc., mostly with a small supply of inferior coal. The Port Said store we may expect to control. Perim we can protect, and there remains the question of the coal of neutrals.

(10). CONCLUSIONS AFFECTING THE ROUTE FROM INDIA.

Conclusions of Route
from India.

Summing up, therefore, the deductions from the foregoing inquiry, it would seem that, as regards the strategical application of Sea Power to the communications of India, we

find:—

1. That the Suez Canal route is not so impossible as was formerly considered, and that there are great difficulties in sending the ditch trade, colliers and otherwise, round the Cape.
2. That so long as we control the coal at the Cape, and the southern exit from the Canal, our position in the Indian Ocean is secure, though exactly how this is to be brought about is a matter for the naval strategist.
3. That the Persian Gulf must never contain a port belonging to a European Power, more especially one that can connect it by rail with Europe.

(11). THE ISTHMIAN CANAL.

In considering the strategy that affects the despatch of combined expeditions from India, the prospect of the change in the situation in the Far East that the completion of the Panama Canal will bring about could not be overlooked. Trade that went round Cape Horn to Australia and New Zealand, or from Esquimaux and San Francisco to Japan, or via the Sandwich Islands to Australia, will then go through this Canal.

There has been a school of thought in England, hopelessly short-sighted and uninstructed, but insistent, that has urged the cession of our profitless West India Colonies to the United States. The Isthmian Canal was apparently unknown to them. Yet

Value of the West Indies.

Jamaica, a naval dockyard, lies straight across the route from New York to the Isthmus; the Virgin Isles are athwart the route from Europe, while St. Lucia, Trinidad, and George Town (British Guiana), fortified coaling stations, dominate more southerly routes.

The effect of this Canal must be to greatly enhance the naval power of the United States, allowing, as it must, a much quicker transference of strength from the Atlantic to the Pacific, while it will enable foreign men-of-war to reach the Far East without begging British coal *en route* in time of strained relations. In time of war, the neutrality of the Canal, if assured, would obviate further advantage in this direction, while undoubtedly the belligerent holding command in the Pacific would be able to control the traffic that must defile through the Canal.

The effect of the Canal, therefore, while detracting from the amazing position that our supremacy in the Red Sea and Ocean confers, is not entirely harmful in its effect on our naval supremacy. Such loss as we shall sustain will probably be counteracted by the establishment of a complete naval dockyard and arsenal in Australian waters to take the largest ships. With a fine coal supply and a growing country behind, the advantages of such a base are obvious.

(12). THE APPLICATION OF SEA POWER IN THE EAST.

Following on the vital question of the communications with Europe, we come to the offensive application of Sea Power in its broad dual meaning, to Eastern waters considered by the light of foregoing conclusions.

It has already been shown that, with the exception of a campaign based on the Gulf, India's oversea expeditions are unlikely to be very strong in army strength, and that the general nature of such ventures would be in pursuit of the establishment of supreme naval control in the Far East. The necessity for command in the seas to be crossed has also been dwelt on (Part I, 3).

Now, since the existence of hostile fleets depends on their having coaling stations within reach, it seems that the practical command of the sea is to be obtained not only by destroying hostile ships in battle, but by denying them coal. To deny them coal, it would be necessary to capture their coaling ports, to protect the coaling ports of the weaker neutrals, and to prevent the establishment of special

temporary war coal-heaps. Their only source of supply, if such operations could be carried into effect, would be the most precarious one of direct supply by collier at sea.

Now, the simplest method of denying coal, with the exception of existing stocks, is to prevent the arrival of
 Denial of Coal. colliers. In the Indian Ocean we should be able to do this, but in the Far East, with coal coming by sea from Japan and America, this would be very difficult, if not impossible.

Owing to the geographical position of India, the gradual absorption of hostile coaling stations, and the protection of neutral ones by combined operations, is a feasible and reasonable way of gaining the object in view. It should also be noticed how favourably Australia is placed for a similar policy, and what a factor she is to be in the future, with her developing coal supply.

The command of the Indian Ocean that suffices to secure the safety of British vessels rounding the Cape or threading the Canal equally points to the ability to protect any expeditions sailing west and south from India, whether carrying troops to join Imperial gatherings, or for the reduction of coaling stations in those seas, as discussed in paragraph 9.

The protection of expeditions proceeding eastwards through the Straits would be more difficult. These expeditions would be proceeding either in pursuit of the policy of capturing coaling stations, as a factor in getting control of the sea, or in the acquisition of an adversary's colonies after complete control of the sea had been obtained. The latter course has the defect of needlessly dispersing force, and only forces, naval and military, that could not be brought into the theatre of war at more vital points would be employed. Such operations, however, might be the only mode for England of forcing an adversary not dependent on the sea to end a war.

In despatching such expeditions, our fleet in Eastern waters must have sufficient command for the convoy to be safe with an escort, or for single ships to run from port to port without great risk.

(13). COALING PORTS IN THE FAR EAST.

The defended foreign coaling stations in the Far East are as follows:—

British.	Singapore.
	Labuan.
	Thursday Island.
	Hong Kong (Naval Dockyard and Base.

	Wei-Hai-Wei.
French.	Saigon.
Japanese.	Sasebo.
	Nagasaki.
	Hiroshima.
	Kure.
	Shimonoseki.
	Yokosuka.
	Tsushima.
Russian.	Vladivostok (often ice-bound for weeks, if not months).
	Port Arthur.
German.	Kiao-Chau.
United States.	Manila and Guam.

If we include the South Pacific, we have a British Naval Base at Sydney and a coaling station at Brisbane, while there is a French fortified coaling station in New Caledonia.

There are coaling heaps also at various undefended places—in Java and Sumatra, in Borneo (Dutch), in the Pelew and Ladrone Islands (German), in Formosa (Japanese), and, of course, at Shanghai and Tientsin. At most of these coal is not to be found in very large quantities, while small stocks exist at almost every minor port where coasting steamers and local traders touch.

(14). RESUME.

Most of the conclusions which it seemed possible to draw from the subjects discussed have already been stated, but since a wide area has been covered, it seems desirable to finally summarise, at the risk of some repetition, the various salient points elicited, as follows:—

(a) Owing to India's continental position with a powerful and possibly hostile military neighbour, as well as to the volcanic possibilities underlying her peaceful exterior, large forces can rarely leave India, and the Indian Army exists for the defence of India.

(b) From her geographical and strategical position, however, India is able to send out combined expeditions, possessing a strategical value out of all proportion to the actual numbers despatched. Such minor armies can usually be spared, save in the gravest junctures.

(c) The security of the route from England is a necessity at all times, but especially in the event of a war with Russia, or other big campaign, and that a reasonable command of the sea is essential in waters to be crossed by an expedition.

(d) That England's policy is first to secure her trade routes by obtaining naval supremacy, after which operations against the enemy's colonies may be the best way to finish matters; also that owing to the coal question, the denial of all coal to the adversary's vessels must hasten the gaining of that supremacy. The capture of hostile coaling stations, and the protection of weak neutrals' coal-heaps, is the way to deny coal to the enemy.

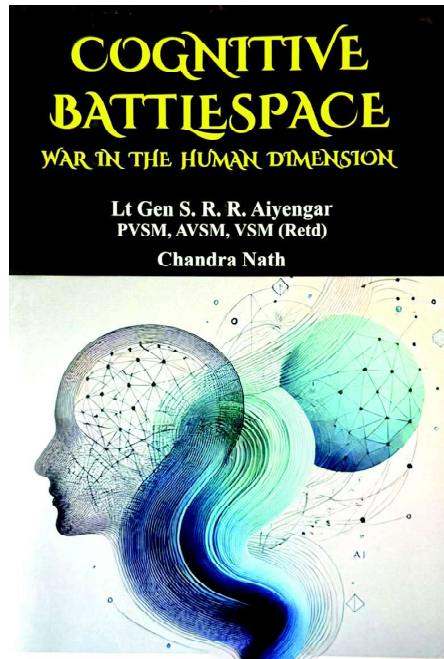
(e) That it is expeditions of this nature—to capture coaling stations, or to protect them, and to capture colonies—that are best suited to the military capacity and the strategic position of India, and in which our Sea Power in the East may best be displayed.

Review Articles

Review Article 1

Cognitive Battlespace: War in the Human Dimension

Lieutenant General SRR Aiyengar, PVSM, AVSM, VSM (Retd)
and Chandra Nath



Introduction

C*ognitive Battlespace: War in the Human Dimension* is a timely, ambitious, and conceptually rigorous examination of the cognitive domain as an emergent and decisive arena of modern conflict. During contemporary times, as warfare is increasingly shaped by Artificial Intelligence (AI), information saturation, and hybrid warfare below the threshold of armed conflict, the authors argue persuasively that the human mind has become the primary battlespace. Moving beyond traditional understandings of information warfare and perception management, the book reframes cognition—perception, belief, emotion, identity, and decision-making—as an

Cognitive Battlespace: War in the Human Dimension by Lieutenant General SRR Aiyengar, PVSM, AVSM, VSM (Retd) and Chandra Nath; Pages 339; Price INR 850/-; ISBN 978-93-93402-31-8

Journal of the United Service Institution of India, Vol. CLVI, No. 644, April-June 2026.

operational domain that demands doctrinal clarity, ethical scrutiny, and institutional preparedness.

Authored by senior military practitioners with deep experience in strategy, technology, and doctrine, the book bridges theory and practice in a rare way in contemporary strategic literature. It speaks simultaneously to military professionals, policymakers, scholars, and informed citizens, positioning cognitive warfare not merely as a military concern but as a whole-of-nation security challenge.

Conceptual Contribution and Structure

One of the book's most significant strengths lies in its systematic conceptual architecture. Rather than treating 'Cognitive Warfare' as a buzzword or an extension of information operations, the authors take define the cognitive domain with analytical precision.

Early chapters carefully distinguish between the physical, information, and cognitive domains, clarifying that while information concerns data and transmission, cognition concerns interpretation, meaning-making, and decision-making. This distinction is foundational, and the authors argue that strategic outcomes increasingly hinge not on who controls information flows, but on who shapes information, and how is it perceived and acted upon.

The book's structure is amenable to rational assimilation. Part I establishes conceptual and psychological foundations, explaining why cognition has emerged as a warfighting domain and how human decision-making operates under conditions of uncertainty, stress, and information overload. Part II moves into tools, tactics, and case studies, grounding abstract theory in operational reality. Part III provides a comparative survey of global doctrinal models, while Part IV focuses on India's specific cognitive security landscape. The final section looks ahead, exploring the future trajectory of cognitive conflict in an AI-saturated world.

Owing to its layered design, the book functions not only as a comprehensive monograph but also as a versatile reference for professional military education, policy formulation, and academic inquiry.

Human Cognition as Decisive Terrain

At the heart of the book is a compelling argument: war has always been fought in the human mind, but contemporary technologies have made deliberate, scalable, and persistent cognitive operations

possible in unprecedented ways. Drawing on behavioural economics, neuroscience, and military decision-making theory, the authors demonstrate how cognitive biases, emotional triggers, identity dynamics, and trust relationships create structural vulnerabilities that adversaries can exploit.

The discussion of cognition is notably sophisticated. Rather than portraying humans as irrational actors who could be manipulated, the authors emphasise on the bounded rationality of decision-makers and the cognitive load imposed by modern operational environments.

Concepts such as attention control, emotional priming, memory shaping, and trust erosion are treated not as abstract psychological phenomena but as operational variables that can be deliberately targeted or defended.

The integration of the observe, orient, decide, and act loop as a cognitive framework is particularly effective. By emphasising the 'Orientation' phase as the most vulnerable and decisive element of decision-making, the book demonstrates how cognitive warfare seeks to misalign perception and reality, inducing adversaries to make suboptimal or self-damaging choices. This framing provides a clear bridge between classic military theory and contemporary influence operations.

Technology, Artificial Intelligence, and Cognitive Amplification

Another major contribution of the manuscript is its treatment of AI as a cognitive amplifier rather than merely a technical enabler. The authors argue that AI does not simply speed up information processing; it restructures the cognitive terrain itself.

Recommendation algorithms, behavioural analytics, synthetic media, and automated influence agents shape what individuals see, feel, and believe at scale, often invisibly and continuously.

The book excels in explaining how behavioural data—digital traces left by everyday online activity—has become a strategic resource. By analysing clicks, shares, engagement patterns, and network relationships, AI systems can infer psychological profiles and predict decision tendencies with remarkable accuracy. When combined with generative AI, this enables hyper-personalised influence campaigns capable of operating at machine speed.

It must be noted that the authors do not present these developments in a deterministic or alarmist manner. They acknowledge the military and societal benefits of AI-enabled decision support, human–machine teaming, and enhanced situational awareness, while also highlighting the risks of over-reliance, algorithmic bias, opacity, and adversarial manipulation. The discussion of dual-use ethical risks is balanced and nuanced, underscoring the need for safeguards, transparency, and human oversight.

Comparative Doctrinal Analysis

The survey of global cognitive warfare models adds significant value to the book. By examining North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the United States (US), China, Russia, the United Kingdom, France, Israel, and India's approaches, the authors reveal both convergence and divergence in how major powers conceptualise cognition as a strategic asset.

The analysis of the NATO and US doctrine highlights an emphasis on resilience, decision superiority, and ethical restraint within democratic norms. In contrast, the discussion of China's 'Intelligentised Warfare' and the 'Three Warfares' framework illustrates a more instrumental approach to cognition, tightly integrated with AI, data dominance, and pre-kinetic shaping. The treatment of Russian reflexive control is particularly insightful, tracing its roots in Soviet operational theory and showing how it seeks to induce adversaries to choose actions favourable to Russian objectives while leading them to believe those choices are autonomous.

The authors critically examine how political systems, strategic cultures, and technological priorities shape doctrinal choices. This analysis strengthens the book's central argument: cognitive warfare is not monolithic, and democracies must develop indigenous, ethically grounded frameworks rather than simply imitating authoritarian models.

India's Cognitive Warfare Framework

The India-specific sections of the book root the country's cognitive-security framework in its civilisational heritage, democratic values, and contemporary challenges. The integration of classical Indian strategic thought—drawing on texts such as *Arthashastra* and

Bhagavad Gita—is treated with intellectual seriousness. Concepts such as *mantra-shakti* (power of counsel), *dharma* (righteousness) as legitimacy, and disciplined clarity of mind are linked creatively to modern concerns about cognitive resilience, ethical restraint, and decision-making under stress. This synthesis demonstrates that indigenous intellectual traditions can meaningfully inform contemporary doctrine.

At the same time, the authors are clear-eyed about India's vulnerabilities: digital fragmentation, social media-driven polarisation, cross-border influence campaigns, and the scale of India's information ecosystem. The proposed framework emphasises integration across military, civil, technological, legal, and communicative institutions, reinforcing the idea that cognitive security is a national responsibility.

Ethics, Law, and Democratic Resilience

A particularly commendable aspect of the book is its engagement with ethical and legal questions. The deliberate manipulation of cognition raises profound concerns about autonomy, accountability, freedom of thought, and democratic integrity. Rather than merely paying token attention to this facet, the authors weave ethical considerations throughout their discussion of technology, doctrine, and operations.

The book argues convincingly that democratic states face a dual challenge: defending societies against cognitive attack while avoiding the temptation to adopt coercive or manipulative practices that undermine their own values. Transparency, oversight, accountability, and human primacy in decision-making are presented not as constraints, but as sources of long-term strategic legitimacy and resilience.

Overall Assessment

Cognitive Battlespace: War in the Human Dimension is a substantial and intellectually mature contribution to the emerging literature on cognitive warfare. Its strengths lie in conceptual clarity, interdisciplinary integration, and deep and incisive analysis of various themes. The authors succeed in demonstrating that cognitive warfare is neither a speculative future threat nor a rebranding of propaganda, but a present and persistent feature of geopolitical competition with strategic consequences. The inclusion of critical thinking questions,

comparative tables, and modular design enhances its utility as a teaching and reference text.

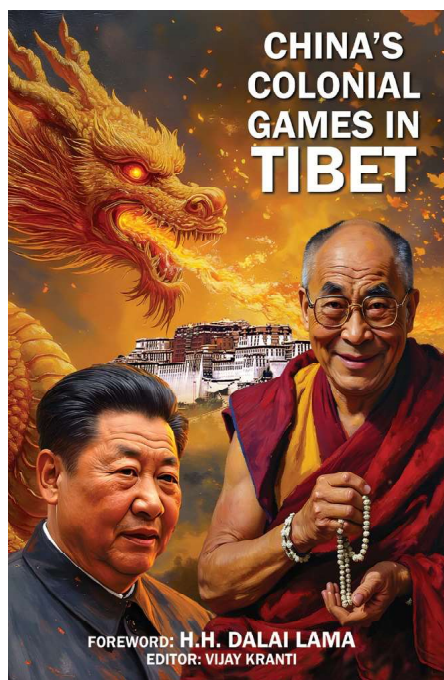
In sum, this book deserves serious attention from military professionals, policymakers, scholars, and anyone concerned with how power is exercised in the 21st Century. By clarifying the nature of the cognitive battlespace and outlining a democratic, ethically grounded path forward, the authors make a compelling case that future conflicts will be decided as much by contests over meaning and belief as by force of arms. Understanding—and defending—the human dimension of war has never been more urgent.

Lieutenant General RS Panwar, AVSM, SM, VSM, PhD (Retd)

Review Article 2

China's Colonial Games in Tibet

Vijay Kranti (Editor)



Introduction

There are books that tell a story, reminding us of what former United States President Thomas Jefferson once said, “When injustice becomes law, resistance becomes a duty”.

The book, *China's Colonial Games in Tibet*, published by V K Media Group, New Delhi, for the Centre for Himalayan Asia Studies and Engagement, is compiled and edited by Vijay Kranti, a renowned journalist, photographer, Tibetologist, and veteran expert on China. It represents the first significant attempt by any China-focused institution to bring together, on a single platform, a distinguished group of scholars and domain experts on Tibet and China. In contemporary times, it is the only work that truly captures

China's Colonial Games in Tibet; edited by Vijay Kranti, VK Media group on behalf of Centre For Himalayan Asia Studies and Engagement, New Delhi; Pages: 486; Price: INR 2,500/-; ISBN 978-81-927721-6-5

Journal of the United Service Institution of India, Vol. CLVI, No. 644, April-June 2026.

the spirit of the excerpt above. It is an exhaustive study of the contemporary situation in Tibet, which China has been assiduously hiding from the rest of the world. Hard-bound and running to approximately 486 pages, the book covers 12 sections on China's colonial practices in occupied Tibet with 60 essays by 39 well-known experts on Tibet and China across the world. The book has been compiled to provide comprehensive information to scholars, researchers, diplomats, policymakers, opinion-makers and students of defence studies, strategy, and security. The editor has successfully woven together contributions from academics, diplomats, journalists, and Tibetan activists into a coherent volume.

Given the Chinese government's absolute blockade on independent reporting, the book stands out as an exclusive work highlighting the systematic extinction of the indigenous population of Tibet by the Communist Party of China (CPC) through cultural genocide and severe environmental destruction beyond public consciousness. Unleashed by various organs of the state, particularly the United Front Work Department and the Public Security Bureau, an omnipresent secret organ of the CPC in China-Occupied Colonies (COC) like Tibet, East Turkestan (Xinjiang), Southern Mongolia (Inner Mongolia), Manchuria (Northeast China), Macau, and Hong Kong, the book is a clarion call for the world to stand up unitedly and resist the same, to say the least.

It is one of the paradoxes of contemporary international politics that Tibet, despite possessing many of the attributes traditionally associated with statehood—including its own flag, currency, passport, language, script, religion, a well-defined territory comprising the regions of U-Tsang, Amdo, and Kham, a postal system, and diplomatic relations with several countries—continues to remain a COC. During the period from 1912 to 1951, Tibet functioned in many respects as an independent state and met several of the criteria outlined in Article 1 of the Montevideo Convention on the rights and duties of states. Yet, it remains what some scholars describe as a COC. The experts featured in the opening section of this volume argue that these COCs may achieve genuine autonomy, separation, or freedom only in the event of a fundamental transformation or collapse of the CPC's rule.

Post the coerced signing of the 17-Point Agreement of 1951, China has systematically dismantled Tibet's way of life and silenced influential Tibetans, resulting in massive uprisings. These have

further triggered Chinese crackdowns. The CPC has been ruling Tibet with an iron fist under heavy surveillance and pre-emptive suppression of any form of dissent, and continues to accelerate efforts to erode Tibetan culture, language, and identity through repressive policies. An immediate consequence is the use by of the term 'Xizang' instead of Tibet by China's official media. It may be recalled that, in 1965, China reorganised and redefined the geographical boundaries of Tibet. The regions of Kham and Amdo, which together constituted nearly two-thirds of historical Tibet, were divided into several parts and merged with the neighbouring Chinese provinces of Yunnan, Sichuan, Gansu, and Qinghai. The remaining one-third of historical Tibet, comprising the region of U-Tsang, was designated as the Tibet Autonomous Region.

The focused policy of 'Sinicisation' aimed at eliminating Tibetan resistance to Chinese rule through cultural uniformity and enforced homogenisation is illustrated through the CPC's policy of weaponising education as a tool to control the Tibetan mind. It was aimed at eradicating Tibetan identity, its way of life, religion, and linguistic heritage, and promoting a unified ethnic identity, especially after the 2008 Tibetan uprising against the treatment and persecution of Tibetans.

In the above backdrop, His Holiness (HH) the Dalai Lama faces a complex matrix of challenges, the central issue being the contested question of HH's succession. As a feasible way forward, HH's promotion of democratic reform within the Tibetan polity in exile represents a transformative departure from the theocratic traditions of historical Tibet towards a participatory leadership. In his foreword to the book, HH the Dalai Lama clearly states, in the context of his 'Middle Way Approach' since 1974, that he seeks genuine autonomy for Tibet, referring to Chinese paramount leader Deng Xiaoping's assurance to his personal emissary in 1979 that "Except for the independence of Tibet, all other questions can be discussed".

While the book brings out with total clarity that a person appointed by the CPC can never be the real Dalai Lama, China's new law 'Order-5' indicates that the official position of China on the subject will continue to govern. The book, therefore, points to a potential conflict of interest among the various stakeholders. This assumes greater significance in light of the fact that the US

Congress has unanimously passed a bipartisan resolution (HR 4331), which was subsequently signed into law by the US President, prohibiting any attempt by China to interfere in or determine the selection of the next Dalai Lama.

The book also brings out the abduction of the 11th Panchen Lama, Gendhun Choekyi Nyima, by the Chinese authorities at the age of six, along with his family, three days after 14 May 1995, when he was officially recognised by HH as the true incarnation of the 10th Panchen Lama and as a future spiritual leader. He and his family continue to be kept out of public view by the Chinese Government. China staged a controlled lottery and appointed Gyaltsen Norbu, a political figure, as their 11th Panchen Lama. The disappearance of Gendhun Choekyi Nyima has prevented him from fulfilling his greatest responsibility, recognising the next Dalai Lama. Further, China has made clear its intention to use the Panchen Lama's institution to manipulate the future succession of the Dalai Lama, as the CPC perceives key leaders of Tibetan Buddhism, such as the Panchen Lama and the Dalai Lama, as threats.

Resistance to the above steps, taken by the Chinese government, highlights that despite being under tremendous suffering, interrogation, and surveillance, Tibetans have not given up their hope and struggle for freedom. It also underpins the fact that the 169 self-immolations by Tibetans, both inside and outside Chinese borders, have gone almost unnoticed and uncontested by various world governments, international bodies, and the media, while a single self-immolation by a Buddhist monk in Vietnam in 1963 contributed to events that ultimately led to the defeat and unceremonious departure of the American Army from Vietnam. The section also reinforces that the enormity of the tragedy in Tibet appears to be ignored by the world. At the same time, the self-immolation of a street vendor in Tunisia in 2010 triggered an unprecedented 'Arab Spring' across 19 Arab countries and led to the downfall of seven heads of state. The book, highlighting the cultural genocide waged by the CPC in Tibet to wipe out the entire population through slow, incremental, systematic, and unrelenting oppression, has underscored the global indifference and silence towards these Tibetan immolations.

The book also covers China's colonial policies affecting the Tibetan environment, their implications for Asia and the world, and the need to confront China on these issues. It brings out discussion on the changing climate in Tibet, which deserves urgent global attention, among other issues. The most controversial aspect of the Chinese brutalities has been the weaponisation of the CPC's 'Zero COVID' policy, the state-sponsored human organ harvesting, and deoxyribonucleic acid profiling in Tibet towards the fulfilment of its larger objective of Sinicisation.

Further, the book also highlights the paradox regarding systematic cultural genocide in Tibet, while the West is becoming an accomplice to it due to fears of economic retaliation from China. The contributors argue that the Chinese government's policies of systematic persecution of Tibetans began in earnest in the mid-1990s, with the forced relocation of entire populations and the establishment of re-education camps. The mass relocation of natives, displacement of Tibetan nomads by Mandarin Chinese, forcible separation of Tibetan children from their families into state-run boarding schools designed to assimilate them into Han Chinese culture, forced abortions and sterilisation of Tibetan women, forced marriages of Tibetan girls to Han Chinese men, and Xi Jinping's call for the establishment of 'Tibetan Buddhism with Chinese socialist characteristics' have not only empowered the authorities to target all publicly visible Tibetan symbols but have also unleashed a new Taliban-like face in Tibet.

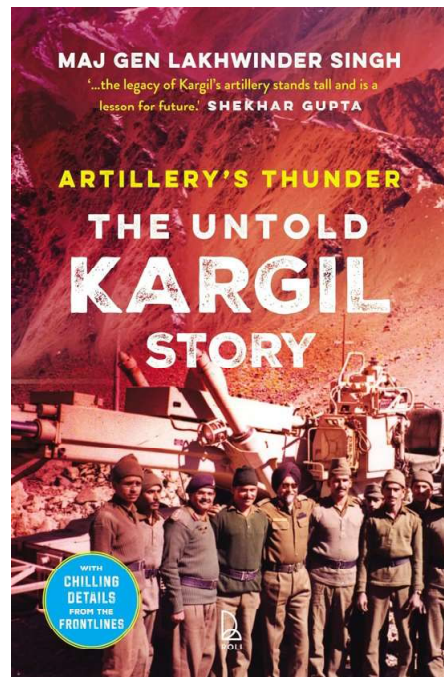
China's Colonial Games in Tibet is more than just a collection of essays on Tibet. It is a comprehensive examination of the political, cultural, religious, environmental, and strategic dimensions of the Tibetan question under Chinese rule. By bringing together a distinguished group of scholars, diplomats, journalists, and Tibetan voices, the editor has created a volume that is both informative and thought-provoking. Beyond documenting developments in Tibet, the book raises important questions about cultural preservation, human rights, environmental security, religious freedom, and the future of China's frontier regions. Whether one agrees with all its arguments or not, the volume makes a significant contribution to contemporary discourse on Tibet and merits careful consideration by scholars, policymakers, strategic analysts, and informed readers alike. A welcome addition to any personal or

institutional collection, this book deserves a place in the libraries of think tanks, educational institutions, media organisations, defence establishments, and institutions of governance, both in India and abroad.

Major General Sudhakar Jee, VSM (Retd)

Artillery's Thunder: The Untold Kargil Story

Major General Lakhwinder Singh, YSM



Introduction

Artillery's Thunder: The Untold Kargil Story is a compelling and authoritative account of the 1999 Kargil War, narrated from the vantage point of an artillery commander, who played a pivotal role in the conflict. The book commences with an insight of the Pakistan Army's psyche and their impugned compulsions to alter the ceasefire line. Pakistan operations, even though ended up in humiliating defeat for them, make for an interesting case study for a professional and a nerd.

The author takes the story beyond a conventional war narrative to present a deeply analytical and operationally rich study of modern high-altitude warfare. At its core, the book advances a

Artillery's Thunder: The Untold Kargil Story by Major General Lakhwinder Singh, YSM; Pages 240; Price INR 695/-; ISBN 9789349474192

Journal of the United Service Institution of India, Vol. CLVI, No. 644, April-June 2026.

powerful thesis: that artillery, traditionally perceived as a supporting arm, emerged in Kargil as a decisive, battle-winning combat arm that fundamentally shaped the outcome of Operation Vijay.

Blending first-hand experience with strategic reflections, the book offers insights into leadership, jointmanship, technology, and the enduring principles of warfare. It is both a tribute to the soldiers who fought under extreme conditions and a critical examination of the institutional, operational, and strategic lessons arising from the conflict.

About the Author

Major General Lakhwinder Singh, YSM (Retd) brings exceptional credibility to the narrative. A third-generation officer commissioned into the Regiment of Artillery, he has a distinguished operational background, including participation in the 1971 India–Pakistan War. During Kargil, as Commander of the 8 Mountain Artillery Brigade, he demonstrated innovation in the employment of artillery—most notably through the massing of guns and the unconventional use of Bofors in direct firing roles, enabling the gallant infantry men to close in within a hand shake distance of the enemy. His leadership earned him the nick name of ‘Enraged Bull of Dras’ and he was awarded the Yudh Seva Medal.

His operational insights, grounded in lived experience, lend authenticity and depth to the narrative. Unlike purely academic analyses, this unvarnished first-hand account reflects the realities of decision-making under fire, the constraints of terrain and logistics, and the adaptability required in combat.

Overview of the Book

The book situates the Kargil War within a broader strategic and political context. It presents the conflict as a case of strategic surprise arising from intelligence lapses, institutional complacency, and misplaced optimism driven by diplomatic initiatives such as the Lahore Bus Yatra. Pakistan’s Operation Badr, executed with deception and precision, exploited winter-vacated posts and India’s assumptions about limited conflict under a nuclear overhang.

Initial Indian responses were fragmented and costly, marked by inadequate preparedness and coordination. However, the narrative charts a remarkable transition from confusion to operational coherence. Once the scale of intrusion was recognised,

India mounted a coordinated response integrating infantry, artillery, and air power.

The Politics of War

One of the book's key strengths lies in its candid examination of the politico-military interface. The author highlights how diplomatic optimism masked adversarial intent, leading to strategic surprise. The Lahore Bus Yatra is presented as a case where political goodwill inadvertently contributed to complacency.

The decision-making process at the highest levels is critically analysed. Delays in employing air power, restrictions such as not crossing the Line of Control (LoC), and lack of domain expertise within decision-making bodies influenced the conduct of operations. While these constraints ensured escalation control, they also imposed significant operational limitations.

The author raises a fundamental question: whether India's tactical success was matched by strategic exploitation? He argues that while the military achieved its objectives, political caution limited the broader gains. This chapter underscores the need for alignment between political objectives and military capability, and for balancing restraint with strategic advantage.

Higher Leadership in the Army

The book offers a nuanced critique of higher military leadership during the conflict. Pakistan's success in achieving surprise is attributed to Indian complacency, routine practices such as vacating winter posts, and failure to interpret warning indicators.

The initial Indian response suffered from lack of clarity, delayed decision-making, and coordination challenges. However, the narrative also highlights the adaptability of field commanders who recalibrated operations, improved situational awareness, and restored momentum.

An important insight is the impact of leadership gaps and the absence of seamless jointness. The delayed integration of air power and the lack of unified command initially hindered operations. Nevertheless, once clarity of intent was established, leadership at various levels ensured coherence and effectiveness.

The chapter reinforces the importance of decisive leadership, institutional preparedness, and the ability to transition rapidly from a reactive to a proactive posture.

Air Operations in the Kargil Battlefield

The role of the Indian Air Force (IAF) is examined with candour and balance. Air power was initially constrained by concerns over escalation, lack of preparedness for high-altitude operations, and the directive not to cross the LoC.

When air operations commenced under Operation Safed Sagar, the IAF faced immediate challenges—losses due to Man-Portable Air-Defense Systems (MANPADS), reduced weapon effectiveness in rarefied air, and coordination issues with ground forces. Close air support proved difficult due to terrain and altitude.

The eventual induction of Mirage 2000 aircraft with precision-guided munitions improved targeting accuracy, though the overall impact remained limited compared to artillery. However, the IAF's logistical role—airlift, casualty evacuation, and sustainment—proved indispensable.

The chapter highlights a critical lesson: air power must be equipped, integrated, prepared, and doctrinally aligned for specific operational environments. High-altitude warfare demands specialised capability, joint planning, and realistic expectations. Drawing a parallel with the Combined Forces Operations under the United States (US) in Afghanistan in 2002 to clear Taliban from the Tora Bora Heights, akin to Kargil heights, he underscores how the technologically superior US Air Force, suffered the same malaise as the IAF in Kargil. He then goes on to questions the viability of close air support operations in the face of the air denial means like the Surface-to-Air Missiles (SAMs) with the adversary.

The Bravehearts of Kargil

This section stands out as a tribute to the courage, resilience, and leadership of Indian soldiers. The narrative vividly captures the extreme conditions of high-altitude warfare—thin air, steep gradients, and exposure to enemy fire from dominating heights. Initial assaults, particularly at Tololing, were marked by heavy casualties and setbacks. However, as operations evolved, improved planning, acclimatisation, and artillery fire power enabled success. Infantry and Artillery fused well as the body and soul, leaving little choice with the Pakistanis to flee or get perished. As the young officers led infantry assaults, the commanders used artillery like scalpel and sledgehammer in equal measure—a new doctrine of mountain warfare was born.

The battles of Tololing and Pt 5140 are described as turning points, showcasing coordinated operations and exceptional bravery. The narrative revolves around how a feint attack at Tiger Hill turned out to be one of the most fascinating victories, through Infantry's grit and Artillery's prowess, left General Pervez Musharraf red faced and beaten. With the capture of Pt 4875, the last vestige of Pakistan's hold in Dras was decimated. It was to become the culminating moment of enemy's rout. Individual acts of heroism of the three Param Vir Chakra holders—Grenadier Yogendra Yadav, Captain Vikram Batra and Rifleman Sanjay Kumar—and many unsung heroes underscore the human dimension of war. The chapter emphasises that while technology and firepower are critical, the ultimate determinant of success remains the soldier's courage and resolve.

Early setbacks highlighted the inadequacy of conventional tactics in high-altitude terrain. Learning from these reverses, Indian forces dramatically increased artillery deployment, massing over 100 guns to deliver sustained and concentrated firepower. This overwhelming barrage neutralised enemy defences and enabled infantry advances.

A key innovation was the use of Bofors guns in direct firing roles at close ranges, achieving unprecedented accuracy against fortified positions. The integration of direct and indirect fire, night firing, and flexible deployment enhanced operational effectiveness.

The role of Forward Observation Officers, real-time adjustments, and forward command hubs ensured precision and responsiveness. Despite logistical challenges, artillery units maintained sustained fire under extreme conditions.

The psychological impact of artillery was as significant as its physical effect. It eroded enemy morale while boosting the confidence of Indian troops. The chapter establishes artillery as the decisive factor in Kargil, reshaping the conduct of operations.

Artillery as a Combat Arm

Building on operational evidence, the book argues for a doctrinal shift in recognising artillery as a combat arm rather than merely a support element. Historically influenced by colonial structures, artillery's role has evolved with technological advancements.

The Kargil experience demonstrated that firepower, rather than manoeuvre alone, can determine outcomes—especially in terrain where manoeuvre is constrained. The author reinforces this argument by referencing contemporary conflicts such as Ukraine and Azerbaijan–Armenia, where long-range precision fires and drones dominate the battlefield.

The chapter calls for organisational and doctrinal reforms to accord artillery equal status with other combat arms. It also highlights emerging technologies—artificial intelligence-enabled munitions, extended-range systems—that will further enhance artillery’s centrality in future warfare.

Technology and High Altitude

The book provides a balanced assessment of technology’s role in high-altitude warfare. While technology is often viewed as a force multiplier, Kargil demonstrated its limitations.

Surveillance radars struggled to detect slow-moving infantry. Precision munitions had limited applicability due to terrain constraints. Air power faced challenges from MANPADS and environmental conditions.

At the same time, adversaries relied on technologies such as weapon-locating radars. The chapter highlights that technology must be context-sensitive and adaptable.

Emerging trends—drones, advanced SAMs, and networked systems—are reshaping warfare. However, their effectiveness in extreme environments remains uncertain. The fundamental principles of firepower and manoeuvre continue to dominate.

Looking Back: Afterthoughts on the War

The concluding chapter is reflective and critical. It acknowledges the victory but emphasises the systemic failures that led to the conflict—intelligence lapses, complacency, lack of surveillance, and absence of a clear national security policy.

Political hesitation and constraints such as not crossing the LoC prolonged operations and increased costs. The author warns against recurring strategic passivity and highlights the need for accountability and institutional reform.

The chapter also addresses future challenges, particularly the China–Pakistan nexus and the likelihood of a two-front scenario. It underscores the importance of viable and visible strategic deterrence, and the need to move away from the defensive mind set. The role of diplomacy is examined in conjunction with military power, highlighting that effective diplomacy is often underpinned by credible force.

Critical Evaluation

The book's greatest strength lies in its operational clarity and firsthand authenticity. Complex concepts such as fire planning, coordination, and target acquisition are explained with precision and accessibility.

The balanced approach—acknowledging failures alongside successes—enhances credibility. The narrative is neither triumphalist nor overly critical; instead, it presents a nuanced understanding of war. However, the book occasionally reflects a strong advocacy for artillery, which, while justified, may appear to underplay the contributions of other arms. Nonetheless, this focus is consistent with the author's central thesis and the title of the book itself.

Conclusion

Artillery's Thunder: The Untold Kargil Story is an insightful and authoritative contribution to military literature. It not only documents the Kargil War but also provides enduring lessons for future conflicts.

The book reinforces a fundamental truth: while technology evolves, the core principles of warfare—mass, coordination, leadership, and decisive application of force—remain constant. By restoring due recognition to artillery, the author contributes to shaping contemporary military thought.

For military professionals, it offers practical lessons in firepower employment, joint operations, and adaptability. For scholars and general readers, it provides a deeper understanding of modern warfare's complexities.

Ultimately, the work stands as both a tribute to the soldiers of Kargil and a call for strategic clarity, institutional reform, and sustained preparedness in an increasingly complex security environment.

Major General Sanjeev Chowdhry (Retd)

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- Class I Gazetted Officers of Group 'A' Central Services.
- Any category mentioned above will be eligible even though retired or released from the Service.
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For further particulars, please write to Director General, USI of India, Rao Tula Ram Marg, (Opposite Signals Enclave) Post Bag No. 8, Vasant Vihar PO, New Delhi – 110057.

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CS3/R-120/2025	Book	ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, MILITARY TACTICS, BRIDGES AND ASPIRATIONS: ACTION PLAN INSIDE by Brig Pawan Bhardwaj, YSM M/s Pentagon Press	1,295	2025
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Adm/SYB 2024	Year Book	STRATEGIC YEAR BOOK 2024; Editor-in-Chief: Maj Gen BK Sharma, AVSM, SM** (Retd); edited by Maj Gen Sanjeev Chowdhry (Retd), Ms Komal Chaudhary, Mr Vinayak Sharma, and Mr Mihir S M/s Vij Books of India Pvt Ltd	2,750	2024
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Adm-Mil Ops/2024	Book	MILITARY OPERATIONS-LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR MULTI-DOMAIN WARFARE by Wg Cdr UC Jha, PhD (Retd) and Gp Cp KK Khara, VM (Retd) M/s Vij Books of India	1,750	2024
CMHCS-8	Book	VALOUR AND HONOUR-INDIAN ARMY THROUGH THE AGES; edited by Maj Gen Ian Cardozo, AVSM, SM (Retd) and Maj Gen Jagatbir Singh, VSM (Retd) M/s Pentagon Press	1,495	2024

USI

(Estd. 1870)

OUR ACTIVITIES

Centre for Strategic Studies and Simulation (CS3)

The erstwhile Centre for Research was re-christened as CS3 on 01 Jan 2005. The Centre focuses on detailed and comprehensive enquiry, research and analyses of national and international security related issues, and undertakes gaming and simulation of strategic scenarios, to evolve options for wider discussion and consideration.

Centre for Military History and Conflict Studies (CMHCS)

The CMHCS was established in Dec 2000 at the behest of the three-service HQs to encourage an objective study of all facets of Indian military history with a special emphasis on the history of the Indian Armed Forces. It focuses on diverse aspects of the history of Indian military evolution, policies, and practices – strategic, tactical, logistical, organisational, socio-economic, as well as the field of contemporary conflict studies in the broader sense.

Centre for Emerging Technology for Atma Nirbhar Bharat (CETANB)

The centre started as the Atmanirbhar Bharat Initiative in 2022 and later rechristened as the CETANB on 01 Jan 2024 and included Cyber Centre of Excellence (CCoE) as part of it, in conjunction with Cyber Peace Foundation. The centre's objective is to forge emerging technologies with geostrategic and geopolitical situations with a view to make the services self-reliant by making possible the indigenous production of defence equipment and spares. The CCoE trains military personnel in artificial intelligence, cyber, and machine learning, in addition to cyber forensic analysis in its well-equipped lab. Furthermore, it helps MSMEs to break into the defence industrial ecosystem.

Centre for United Nations and Humanitarian Studies (CUNHS)

The centre was established under the United Nations Peace Keeping Centre (CUNPK) in 2000. It organises workshops, seminars, and training courses for peacekeepers, observers and staff officers, both Indian and foreign. It also oversees the practical training of the Indian contingents. In Aug 2014, CUNPK moved to Integrated Headquarters (Army) of Ministry of Defence. The USI has now established CUNHS, which is focusing on operational, strategic, and policy issues related to United Nations Peace-keeping. It also organises seminars and conferences on such issues.

Centre for Professional Military Education (CPME)

The Institution conducts regular correspondence – interactive courses and mock test practices and assists and helps officers prepare in online and offline modes to help them prepare for promotion examinations and competitive examinations for entrance to Defence Services Staff College, and the Technical Staff College. Over the years, the activity has been a significant and well-received activity.

Centre for Publications and Library (CP&L)

This section manages the USI's key publications including the Strategic Year Book, USI Journal, books, monographs, occasional papers, and joint

publications. These works contribute to an informed discourse on defence, strategy, and national security. The Strategic Year Book offers an annual review of critical developments, while other publications provide deeper analysis and collaborative perspectives. The USI Journal, Asia's oldest defence journal (est 1871), serves as a platform for military and strategic thought, welcoming contributions regardless of rank. The Journal remains a vital space for responsible and quality-driven engagement.

USI Gold Medal Essay Competition

Every year, the institution organises a Gold Medal Essay Competition, open to commissioned officers of the Defence Services and officers of the Territorial Army, Assam Rifles, and the Senior Division of the National Cadet Corps, and Gazetted Officers of the Civil Administration in India, including retired officers. These essays, the first one of which was introduced in 1871, constitutes a barometer of opinion on matters that affect national security, in general, and the defence forces, in particular.

Lt Gen S L Menezes Memorial Essay Competition

This has been instituted from 2015 on a subject related to armed forces historical research. The essay competition is open to everyone across the globe.

USI War Wounded Foundation Joint Essay Competition

This essay competition was instituted in 2021 through a Memorandum of Understanding between the USI and the War Wounded Foundation. The competition is open to all across the globe and must be about issues relating to the experiences and/or rehabilitation of war-wounded and disabled personnel of the Indian Armed Forces.

USI-Lt Gen PS Bhagat Memorial Essay Competition

The USI-Lt Gen PS Bhagat Memorial Essay Competition fosters intellectual inquiry, original research, and professional discourse on military leadership and strategic issues. It honours Lt Gen PS Bhagat's legacy while promoting strategic writing and advancing knowledge in defence and security studies.

MacGregor Medal

This medal is awarded to armed forces personnel for valuable reconnaissance and adventurous activity they may have undertaken.

Lectures, Discussions and Seminars

A series of lectures, discussions, and seminars on service matters, international affairs, and topics of general interest to the services are organised for the benefit of local members in Delhi.

Library and Reading Room

The library includes over 72,000 books, including rare works from the 17th–19th Centuries, with a primary focus on strategy and defence alongside diverse subjects on Indian life. It offers extensive research resources, an air-conditioned reading room with current material, and has been fully automated since 2002.