

ACICE Issue 10/23 (October)

ACICE Monthly Digest

A monthly roundup of significant news around the world

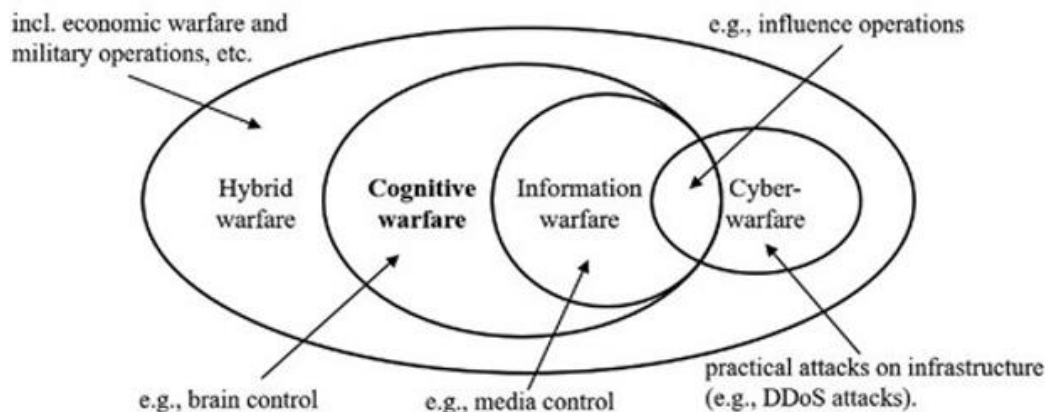


ADMM Cybersecurity and
Information Centre of Excellence

Cognitive Operations

Minds as Battlefields: Understanding Cognitive Warfare

- A Norwegian-based Strategem research article in November 2021 reported that NATO currently recognises five warfighting domains: land, sea, air, space and cyberspace. More literature is now suggesting adding a sixth domain on cognitive warfare. This is a battle of the minds. According to NATO's Strategic Warfare Command's post on "Cognitive Warfare: Strengthening and Defending the Mind" published in April 2023, cognitive warfare is defined as "activities conducted in synchronisation with other instruments to affect attitudes and behaviours by influencing, protecting and/or disrupting individual and group cognitions to gain an advantage".
- While research studies have proposed various versions of co-relations between cognitive warfare and other forms of warfare, cognitive warfare is often observed to be part of hybrid warfare as it is integrated with information warfare and cyber warfare. In 2020, the Journal of Global Security Studies published by Oxford University Press provided one illustration of the conceptual relationships among the different types of warfare:

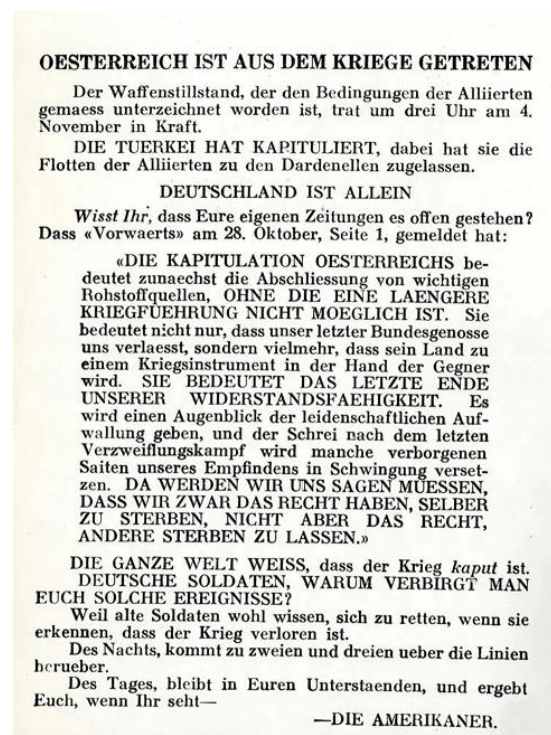


Conceptual relationship between cognitive warfare and other kinds of warfare

- Cognitive warfare can be seen in using misinformation and disinformation to alter perceptions among the populace, which could erode trust towards the government. Cognitive warfare can also be integrated with cyber-warfare

such as through launching deceptive emails to mislead the target audiences to provide confidential data or download malicious attachments. The fast-evolving digital landscape has given rise to amplified effects of information and cyber warfare in the cognitive domain.

- An example of the use of cognitive warfare in history was during World War I, during which American-produced anti-war leaflets – dropped by planes or released from artillery shells – targeted German troops in order to sap their morale. These leaflets indicated that the efforts of the German troops were futile, and they were promised rations if they surrendered. During World War II, both Germany and Japan used English-speaking radio broadcasts to flood messages that the war was going according to their plan, which also aimed to reduce the enemy’s morale.



*An American-produced leaflet intended to convince German troops to surrender late in World War I
(Source: National Museum of the US Air Force, Dayton)*

- Cognitive warfare can also leverage individuals’ pre-existing fears. At the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, rumours and fake news spread virally through hearsay and online spaces and drove panic purchases, usually after announcements of the latest statistics of COVID-19 fatalities and speculations of lockdowns. The trigger of anxiety can undermine social

environment; (c) enhancing strategic communications to gain ground support; and (d) increasing cybersecurity measures to minimise the avenues for cyberattacks in cognitive warfare.

- Much remains enigmatic about the cognitive mechanisms involved in cognitive warfare. It is important to unravel cognitive threat processing, including perception, attention, memory, learning, and social cognition. Social cues, such as social identity, hierarchy, and group dynamics, are critical yet poorly understood aspects of how we respond in cognitively threatening situations. Consequently, states need to recognise the importance of advancing our understanding of these cognitive processes to make informed decisions and develop effective countermeasures against cognitive warfare.

Terrorism

Pro-ISIS Activity

- Amid the Israel-Hamas war that broke on 7 October 2023, a regional pro-ISIS social media user disseminated images of ISIS fighters travelling to Gaza to join the fight, using the Palestinian flag to “camouflage” their identities. The user also expressed hope for victory for ISIS fighters worldwide, including in the Philippines and southern Thailand. Other ISIS supporters remained critical of Hamas as Hamas practised democracy, which ISIS supporters considered heresy.
- Several regional pro-ISIS social media users have disseminated messages denouncing democracy and elections as heresy, and urged attacks on polling stations in Indonesia. There has also been an increase in the number of messages from regional extremists calling for attacks on the upcoming Indonesian General Elections in February 2024.



Social media images of (a) ISIS fighters travelling to Gaza to join the Israel-Hamas war; and (b) denouncing democracy and elections, urging attacks at polling stations in Indonesia

Annex

Cognitive Operations

1. Modern Cognitive Operations and Hybrid Warfare
<https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2032&context=jss>
2. Cognitive Warfare: Strengthening and Defending the Mind
<https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2023/april/cognitive-warfare-maneuvering-human-dimension>
3. Cyber Influence and Cognitive Threats
<https://research.aston.ac.uk/en/publications/cyber-influence-and-cognitive-threats>
4. Recognising and Mitigating Cognitive Biases: A Threat to Objectivity
<https://www.theiia.org/en/products/bookstore/recognizing-and-mitigating-cognitive-biases-a-threat-to-objectivity/>
5. Cognitive Warfare and the Use of Force
<https://www.stratagem.no/cognitive-warfare-and-the-use-of-force/>
6. Towards an Understanding of the Cognitive Mechanisms Involved in Threat Processing and Perception
<https://www.frontiersin.org/research-topics/54567/towards-an-understanding-of-the-cognitive-mechanisms-involved-in-threat-processing-and-perception>
7. The Coronavirus Infodemic in Southeast Asia: Panic Buying and Mis-/Dis-information
<https://www.iseas.edu.sg/media/commentaries/the-coronavirus-infodemic-in-southeast-asia-panic-buying-and-mis-dis-information/>
8. 12 Psychological Warfare Strategies Used Throughout History
<https://www.thecollector.com/psychological-warfare-strategies/#:~:text=The%20Mongols%20used%20effective%20psychological,for ces%20that%20much%20more%20painful.>
9. Cognitive Warfare: An Ethical Analysis
<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10676-023-09717-7>

Terrorism

1. What It Would Mean to Treat Hamas Like ISIS

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/10/12/opinion/israel-hamas-isis-gaza.html>

2. Israeli Bid to Cast Hamas as ISIS Hurt by Gaza Deaths

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-10-16/israeli-bid-to-cast-hamas-as-isis-is-undercut-by-gaza-death-toll>

3. Israel's New Hamas-Gaza Concept Is Doomed to Fail Just Like the Last One

<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2023-10-13/ty-article/.premium/israels-new-concept-of-hamas-and-gaza-is-doomed-to-fail-just-like-the-last-one/0000018b-27bb-d1bc-a58b-6fbf9edf0000>

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