

China's 'Three Warfares' and India

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For the past decade, China is known to have actively used 'three warfares' (3Ws) strategy—media, psychological and legal warfare—to weaken its adversaries in regions constituting what it perceives to be its 'core interests'. While a wide range of tools have been deployed, the attacks have remained mostly confined to Taiwan and South-East Asian states involved in the territorial disputes in the South China Sea. But with Beijing's influence in South Asia and the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) growing, there is evidence emerging of the 3Ws strategy being put to use against India. The evolving Chinese 3Ws strategy goes beyond mere propaganda wars and misinformation campaigns. Expanding conventional war dynamics into the political domain, the 3Ws appear aimed at undermining India's organizational foundations and target military morale. More disquietingly, the strategy appears designed to subdue India without even needing to fight.

On 29 January 2013, China's state-owned Xinhua News Agency carried an interesting news report.¹ A Chinese court, the report brought out, had failed to reach a verdict on a case that would have helped Chinese authorities establish an 'Indian connection' to the over 80 self-immolations committed by rebel monks and Tibetans. If proved, it observed, China will be able to put pressure on India to hunt the alleged instigators of suicides based in India. While not giving any reason why the court could not arrive at a verdict, the report speculated that government authorities

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in China would want to unearth more evidence of an Indian connection before making it a diplomatic issue.

To the undiscerning reader, this might have been just another story on the immolations by monks in Tibet. To the astute observer, this was an example of the use of media warfare by China against its neighbour, India.

As is now well known, the Chinese regime's 3Ws strategy refers to psychological, legal and media warfares.² Over the past decade, China has exhibited a growing interest in waging an asymmetrical form of warfare in areas that are deemed to constitute its 'core interests'.³ To this end, in December 2003, it released a set of codes governing political warfare. These rules—prosaically named 'work regulations' for the People's Liberation Army (PLA)—were upgraded in 2010 to specifically address the subject of 'the three warfares': influencing public opinion; carrying out psychological operations; and preparing a strong legal defence on territorial issues.⁴

Little is known of the origins of the 3Ws, but there is a suggestion that it goes back to Sun Tzu who laid great emphasis on 'winning without engaging in war'.⁵ A more utilitarian approach to understanding 3Ws, however, is to compare it with the concept of 'unrestricted warfare' (URW)—first propounded over two decades ago by two senior Chinese PLA Air Force colonels—which as an idea that dealt with a range of operations under a single conceptual framework.⁶ The URW had components of information operations, irregular warfare, cyber warfare, terrorism, economic warfare, lawfare and espionage—all within an operational ambit that American analysts called 'offensive peacetime operations'.⁷ In the years since its development, the concept appears to have been finessed to highlight three key elements, represented by the 3Ws. It includes tools and strategies that fall short of open warfare but are meant to influence, degrade or attack the components of a nation's comprehensive national power.

TOWARDS A POLITICAL END STATE

The political context of the 3Ws is significant. As a composite idea, the 3Ws represents the Chinese commitment to expand potential areas of conflict from the purely 'military' (involving both direct and indirect force) to the 'political'.⁸ The expansion of conventional war into the political domain is sought to be accomplished by the manipulation of public opinion, legal systems and enemy leadership. However, unlike the

more traditional forms of military tactics that need a formal declaration of war between the two opposing sides, political warfare is waged during a phase of 'peace'.

The prime motive of 3Ws is to furtively create conditions suitable for a resolution of the conflict on favourable terms to China without resorting to physical war. It principally involves exploiting the enemy's weaknesses; seizing the strategic advantage; and camouflaging politically offensive moves.⁹ In extreme circumstances, however, the 3Ws can also be used to create the climate and context for the use of force.

While the 3Ws appear to be interrelated and mutually reinforcing phenomena, each one is a domain in itself, having its own unique application and peculiar dynamics. Psychological operations or psy-ops aim to influence mass opinion by retaining support among China's own population over a contentious issue of national interest. Concurrently, it seeks to degrade an adversary's will to fight, by reducing its resolve and commitment towards the issue at stake. Media warfare is the struggle to gain dominance over the venue and mind space of the masses and the elite.¹⁰ Its central premise is that if a report in mainstream media is presented in prominent and credible fashion, it is presumed to be the truth.

Meanwhile, legal warfare is aimed at offering a legal justification for China's assertive manoeuvres in its maritime conflicts. Demonstrating the legal tenability of China's actions is a tactic to garner a modicum of legitimacy for its claims over disputed maritime territory.¹¹ But the more significant part of legal warfare is sowing the seeds of doubt in the adversary's mind about the justification of its own position.¹² Once the opponent begins to suspect the tenability of its own legal stance on a contentious issue, China gains the upper hand and starts to dictate the narrative of events.

While each is a separate domain in itself, there is one element that is common to the 3Ws. Each involves the manipulation of public opinion. This is driven by a belief that influencing the minds of the masses decisively will make it easier for the PLA to harden its posture and soften the adversary's resolve to resist China's relentless push for a resolution on its terms. In essence, therefore, 3Ws is about preparing the enemy to cede strategic ground without even needing to fight.¹³

UNDERSTANDING '3WS'

The Indian effort to decipher 3Ws is in a nascent stage with few scholars having closely researched the subject. Individual aspects of the strategy,

however, have been observed and commented on by indigenous experts. One reason for the scant Indian scholarship on the subject is the lack of information from Chinese sources. Evidently, most of the theory on 3Ws has been put out by analysts in the West and many propositions on its likely usage by China appear speculative. Yet, the evidence on offer suggests an unmistakable Chinese 'game plan', which, at least outwardly, appears to employ elements of the strategy.

From a purely military perspective, the 3Ws are another kind of information warfare.¹⁴ For over a decade now, the Chinese have been smitten by the potency, efficacy and novelty of information wars (IW). This has assumed a central role in Chinese military writings where achieving information superiority is seen as the precondition for achieving and maintaining battlefield supremacy. The 3Ws construct follows this vein of thinking as a peacetime (and, possibly, even wartime) information warfare concept. It borrows from the IW concept of gaining control over a situation by acting first,¹⁵ thus making information a potent tool with strategic applications. The 'action', however, is more 'figurative' than 'literal' and it does not—at least initially—involve physical attacks.

The 3Ws is, in fact, not a tool of kinetic warfare at all. To the contrary, it is an instrument of pre-kinetic use, whose principal application is to shape events and forge a favourable narrative in a way that achieves desirable political and military results without resorting to a kinetic phase of conflict. Indeed, studies show the 3Ws is not so much a tactic to influence military outcomes as it is a strategy to shape the political and social landscape in a manner detrimental to the adversary.¹⁶

PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE

Psychological warfare is widely acknowledged to be the most subversive element of 3Ws, designed to destroy an adversary's self-confidence and resolve.¹⁷ Peacetime applications of psychological warfare techniques involve influencing and altering an opponent's unconscious, implicit views in order to make that opponent more susceptible to coercion.¹⁸ But psy-ops also seek to disrupt an opponent's decision-making capacity by creating doubts, fomenting anti-leadership sentiments and generally sapping an opponent's will to act.

China's psychological warfare against India appears to principally target the security establishment. The tactic is highly precise in targeting critical nodes in the Indian military, and is capable of achieving non-linear effects. The most prominent example of Chinese psychological warfare

against India was the cautionary issued by a serving senior PLA officer to India immediately preceding the Indian Defence Minister A.K. Anthony's visit to China in June 2013. Major General Luo Yuan, a scholar at the Academy of Military Sciences, in a planned interaction with the media a day prior to the Minister's visit, warned India against stirring up 'new trouble' in a long-running border dispute. China, by all accounts, had marked its 'redlines' well before the Indian delegation's arrival in Beijing.¹⁹

In a maritime context, a classic example of psy-ops was the incident in July 2011 in which a Chinese source is supposed to have issued a warning to an Indian warship, INS Airawat, operating off the coast of Vietnam.²⁰ China did not own up responsibility for the act but it was more than clear 'where' the warning had emanated from, 'who' it targeted and 'what' it was meant to convey.²¹

While the Airawat incident drew attention on account of the involvement of an Indian naval ship transiting the waters of the South China Sea, the Indian Navy has not been the central focus of Chinese attacks. That distinction, in fact, lies with the Indian Army, which has borne the brunt of China's 3Ws over the past few years. The Chinese Army's routine incursions into the Indian side along the Line of Actual control (LAC) have mostly been symbolic. But, while there have been no violent exchanges, the transgressing PLA troops have marked their presence clearly for Indian soldiers to see, before withdrawing.

Sometimes, however, things have taken a turn for the worst. The Depsang incident in Ladakh in April 2013 was a prime example of a psy-op gone dreadfully wrong. China, by a sudden show of strength, perhaps hoped for a quick capitulation by India. But it was not to be as the Indian Army adopted a tough and uncompromising posture leading to a stand-off that took Sino-Indian relations to the brink of a breakdown. The psychological dimension of the operation was significant in that despite there being no clear winner, China still managed to make a military and diplomatic point to India without a single shot being fired.

A few weeks later, another incident took place that highlighted the familiar tactic of psy-ops. Chinese soldiers entered the Indian side of the LAC in the Chumar sector in early July and removed a surveillance camera only to return it later. Coming only a few days after Anthony's seemingly successful visit to China, it did surprise many Indian analysts. The message to New Delhi from Beijing, however, was again unmistakable: China's national interests are supreme: respect our 'redlines', or else, prepare to face the consequences.

In last three years, the PLA has created capacities on the Tibetan plateau which have distinctly enhanced the quality of threat being posed by China's military posture in Tibet. With ever-increasing defence budgets, rising frequency in PLA training exercises in Tibet since 2010, and improvements in military infrastructure, including improvements in the weapons and equipment for high altitude and mountain warfare, the operational readiness of PLA to undertake agile and well-coordinated joint operations has been tremendously enhanced.²²

The militarization of Tibet has now reached a crucial stage wherein old airports in the region are being renovated, advanced aircrafts, including SU-27, located in the region, and surface-to-air anti-aircraft missiles installed.²³ There is also news of a critical railway in the region being extended towards the borders with India.²⁴ Indeed, the rapidity with which infrastructure has been constructed along the Sino-Indian borders on the Chinese side, especially in the Eastern Sector, has caused some concern in the Indian Army. But, as scholars of military psychology often point out, massing of troops and infrastructure creation along a contested border is essentially a psychological warfare tactic—meant singularly to suppress the adversary's will to enforce its claims without joining battle. Pertinently, China's psychological warfare operations have been characterized by coercion, which take the form of intimidation achieved through demonstrations and shows of force.²⁵

Notwithstanding the stand-out nature of Depsang incident—the overt transgression and its grave aftermath—most psy-ops techniques are typically inconspicuous and play out surreptitiously, mostly through writings in the media. A revealing example of this came during India's Agni V test in April 2012.²⁶ After the successful launch of the long-range nuclear-capable missile, a report in the *Global Times* (a leading Chinese newspaper with a pro-government slant) chided India for carrying out the test. The jibes against India were cloaked by an artificial appreciation of the Indian effort. 'While the test has catapulted India into a higher league', the report observed, adding that 'New Delhi always set China as a reference point for its military development.'²⁷

Next came the first big 'putdown':

Until the 1980s, India was far more advanced than China in both economy as well as technology. After that, China raced ahead, and today has outclassed India in both area... The celebrations over the missile concealed the inadequacies and slow pace of India's missile program, and hide the fact that successive Indian governments have

capitulated to pressure from NATO to restrict the range and power of their launch vehicles.²⁸

While it could be argued that the given assessment appears more 'accurate' than 'biased', the fact that the Chinese newspaper made the disparaging comments immediately after India's successful launch of a long-range ballistic missile renders the real motive clear. With stinging taunts and caustic reprimands, the *Global Times* report sought to deride the Indian achievement. But the critique of Indian defence capabilities went even further.

India faces a huge vulnerability. More than 80 percent of its critical weapons systems are imported from France, the US, Russia and Israel. If these countries cut off supplies or ammunition during a conflict, India would be helpless... India's recent military output, including a strategic growth in nuclear forces and arms purchasing, is designed to catch the eye. But for how long can borrowed weaponry lead to genuine security? Sadly, it is easy to please the Indian government. All that is needed is flattery.²⁹

Again, a 'dispassionate' assessment will probably claim more 'truth' in the remarks than 'exaggeration', but clearly, the Chinese media wasn't acting out of altruism when making the remarks. The observations were squarely meant to demoralize India to take the 'euphoria' out of what the Indian strategic community saw as a landmark achievement.

Interestingly, 3Ws construct goes beyond political jibes and polemical putdowns. The tactic involves a degree of subtleness and sophistication, and usually alternates between aggravation and assuagement. For instance, the same report that criticized India for its ballistic missile test also contained some old-fashioned reassurance, meant to persuade New Delhi of Beijing's benign intentions and its professed peaceful growth model.

Although there is an international effort to paint India and China as enemies and to make the two countries go to war with each other, such an effort will fail. The Chinese and Indian people share a long history and culture, and what is needed is more discussion between the two about their economics, education, tourism and culture... By playing up the 'China threat' and postulating that India can 'counter and contain China,' vested interests are hoping to ensure that more and more money is spent on foreign weapons systems rather than domestic manufacture.³⁰

Evidently, a key part of 3Ws is soft intimidation of an adversary. The

bitter pill of offensive putdowns invariably comes swaddled in a layer of sweet assurances. China's recent reliance on soft power—diplomacy, trade incentives, cultural and educational exchange opportunities and other techniques—to project a benign national image, positioning itself as a model of social and economic success and developing stronger international alliances, is a significant adjunct to 3Ws.³¹ Stories abound of Chinese officials carrying out sophisticated socializing operations on their foreign guests by deftly embedding in their minds a positive picture of China and its policies. The first objective for the Chinese government, they persuade their guests, is the removal of poverty from the rural hinterland—a task that would, by their own conservative accounts, take at least two decades to accomplish. Treated with a strong dose of hospitality and softened by propaganda,³² the guests are convinced of the sincerity and honourable intentions of the Chinese. Upon returning home, they zealously (though unconsciously) promote the idea of a benign China—one that is too busy improving the lot of its people to be thinking of any external conflict.³³

Cyber Attacks

Cyber attacks are another key element of psy-ops.³⁴ In July 2012, several high-level Indian officials reported their emails had been hacked into. This included officials from the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), the paramilitary unit deployed along much of the country's 3,500 km border with China. The hackers even breached the main National Informatics Centre's email server, which serves all government departments.³⁵

Unsurprisingly, Government of India offices dealing with domestic affairs such as women and child development and statistics were not touched. The miscreants focused on the reports with secrets and stole critical information like deployment locations of troops and communication between ITBP (commanders) and officials of the MHA.

Investigations showed that the cyber attacks were carried out by groups based in China and targeted Indian plans and programmes in much the same way as Lockheed Martin's futuristic F-35 stealth fighter programme was hacked into in 2011. It is widely believed that the hackers stole design features which ultimately helped China with its J-20 and J-31 stealth fighter programmes.³⁶

Cyber warfare is meant to target adversary motivation and willingness to wage war. But more broadly, and seen in combination with the other

elements of 3Ws, it aids significantly in reducing the effectiveness of the opposing political leadership and undermining collective national capability. Of all the forms of deceptive warfare, this is the severest of them all, and unless India gets proactive and has robust systems in place, this might prove to be the Achilles heel of India's national security.

Cyberspace is likely to continue to remain a decisive element in China's strategy to establish and maintain regional dominance. This is likely to include deterrence through infiltration of critical infrastructure; and military technological and industrial espionage to gain critical knowledge.

MEDIA WARFARE

Mediafare's potent form is on account of its relative imperceptibility and slow poisoning effect. It is a constant and ongoing activity aimed at influencing perceptions and attitudes over the long term and is rarely used to precipitate an armed confrontation.

Low-level media war is China's favoured instrument of choice in acting against its adversaries. Its main tool is the news media—both domestic and foreign—and it includes the whole range of instruments that shape public opinion (news, movies, television debates, books, etc.). China is aware that its increasing involvement in the Indian Ocean is likely to face resistance from India. But China's political elite also realize that it may be too risky to let Chinese state media agencies indulge in rhetoric openly critical of India. In order for the media reports to sound credible, the alarmism about India's supposed plans for the militarization of the Indian Ocean, therefore, oft than not emanates from other seemingly 'neutral' sources, mostly financed by Chinese agencies.

In 2010, for instance, *The Daily Star*—a news portal with alleged links to entities in China³⁷—published a report titled “‘Militarisation of the Indian Ocean’ by India”.³⁸ An excerpt from the report on the role of the Indian Navy is instructive:

The Indian Navy, already one of the largest in the world, is reportedly expanding from 155 ships to well over 300, including three aircraft-carrier battle groups and a flotilla of nuclear-powered submarines. Indian policy makers worry about the Chinese-built Gwador port of Pakistan.

The Chinese, for their part, worry over the Straits of Malacca, through which 80% of its oil supplies are presently shipped. On this Robert Kaplan quotes Zhang Ming, a Chinese naval analyst, who

warns that 244 islands of India's Andaman and Nicobar archipelago could serve to block the western entrance to the Strait of Malacca. This is one of the reasons that led China to have close bilateral ties with Myanmar. Myanmar has a strategically located Island (Coco Islands) north of India's Andaman Islands.³⁹

The same news portal published a report in January 2011 when an Indian naval research facility was inaugurated. That report, titled 'India Seeks Naval Supremacy with Warship Research', carried no negative references and only highlighted India's vigorous efforts towards increasing its naval capability. Its title, though, did hint tantalizingly of the possibility of the Indian Navy's 'hegemony' in the Indian Ocean.⁴⁰ A year later (in December 2012), the news portal published another report after an annual press conference by the Indian Navy's Chief of Naval Staff: 'Indian Navy Ready to Deploy in South China Sea as Tensions Climb'.⁴¹ Again, the report merely suggested that the Indian Navy was planning deployments in the South China Sea to protect national interests. The title, however, did create the impression of a developing crisis in the South China Sea involving the Indian Navy. So, even without resorting to much conjecture, the report sought to play on the readers' worst apprehensions.

It is pertinent that appearing to 'understate' seemingly serious threats in a news report is an integral part of the tactics to garner greater credibility. The driving logic is that if a news report appears factual and balanced, even grave insinuations can be made to appear plausible. With a little anxiety planted in the minds of impressionable readers, an alarming picture is conjured up in organic and spontaneous fashion.

LEGAL WARFARE

China's legal warfare in the Western Pacific is widely acknowledged. Western analysts believe that China has, since 2009, engaged in a resourceful 'lawfare' strategy to deny access to its coastal seas to warships and aircraft of the United States (US), Japan and other countries in the South China Sea. This strategy was first set forth in a Chinese defence white paper in 2006, proposed the 'gradual extension of strategic depth for offshore defensive operations', and for 'enhancing Chinese capabilities in integrated maritime operations and nuclear counterattacks'.⁴²

A 2007 US Department of Defense report to Congress on China's military power explained that Chinese strategists had been taking an increasing interest in international law as an instrument to deter adversaries

prior to combat.⁴³ The report brought out that through an orchestrated programme of scholarly articles and symposia, China had begun the work of shaping international opinion in favour of a distorted interpretation of the Law of the Sea by shifting scholarly views and national perspectives away from long-accepted norms of freedom of navigation and towards interpretations of increased coastal state sovereign authority.⁴⁴ By doing so, China may be promoting a Chinese interpretation of the Law of the Sea that restrictively interprets the 'freedom of navigation'.

For India, the US' experience with Chinese lawfare is instructive. As America spends millions developing and deploying the high-tech littoral combat ships and in implementing 'seabasing' amphibious warfare tactics to effectively operate in the coastal zone, its well-laid plans appear to be in danger of being negated by China's advances on the battlefield of international law.⁴⁵

By the same token, if India were to develop greater amphibious capability for deployment across the Indian Ocean littorals, in areas with greater Chinese military presence (Sitwe, Hambantota, Gwadar, etc.), lawfare could be used to counter Indian force projection. The Indian Navy does see itself as a provider of net security in the IOR and would conceivably be wary of Chinese attempts to circumscribe its influence in the region.⁴⁶ And yet, such a contingency has a low probability because China's use of legal warfare appears confined to areas it sees as core interests where coercive tactics are regularly employed to maintain strategic primacy. Since China claims no territory in the IOR, the chances of lawfare in the region are quite remote.

This then raises a significant question: could the Chinese Navy use international and domestic laws to carve out some 'space' for itself in the Indian Ocean—not to lay claim on 'territory', but only justify a military maritime presence? While China's legal strategy in the IOR is unclear, there is a growing possibility that Beijing might try to legitimize the PLA Navy's presence in the Indian Ocean through greater international support. China's recent 'blue book' for the Indian Ocean is vaguely suggestive of a future Chinese approach in the region. The document dwells on the possibility of no single power dominating the Indian Ocean in the future, leading to a situation where China would be an 'equal force' in the regional security architecture.⁴⁷

If indeed China does firm up a legal strategy for the Indian Ocean, it would need both regional and international support to manage the repercussions of its maritime claims. China would, conceivably, like

to project its foray into the Indian Ocean as a legitimate need. In these circumstances, Beijing may have no option left but to play up India's growing military presence in the Bay of Bengal as a 'threat' to Chinese energy flows through the sea lines of communication (SLOCs). Consequently, Beijing could use an inadvertent misunderstanding in the Indian Ocean involving the PLA Navy and Indian Navy to claim that its own maritime rights have been violated.

While manipulation of the international legal system is always a possibility with China, lawfare may be used by China primarily to establish China as an aggrieved party. It could question the Indian interpretation of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and of the notion of 'freedom of navigation'. Aggrieved parties in maritime conflicts sometimes need only to show the legitimacy of their grievances and to earn the right to redressal. If China could somehow show its rights in the Indian Ocean were being violated, then it could create the legal space needed to justify a military presence.

INDIAN PERCEPTIONS OF 3Ws IN EAST ASIA

Over the past three years, Indian maritime strategists have observed China's assertive moves in the Western Pacific over territorial claims with a sense of trepidation. Skirmishes with Japan over the Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea and conflicts with the Philippines and Vietnam in the South China Sea indicate Beijing's willingness to aggressively defend its perceived rights. But with 'Taiwan' continuing to be a major issue, and the US pivot to the Asia-Pacific region in full swing, the Chinese leadership too is beginning to feel the pressure.

Seen through the 3Ws prism, China's pre-kinetic strategies in East Asia seem to have run their course and the stage seems set for a more violent phase. With all disputants having adopted inflexible positions, there is an increasing possibility of force being used to resolve differences. If China does manage to consolidate its position in the western Pacific, it could then ready itself to play the 'long game' in other the other strategic theatre of interest—the Indian Ocean.

CHINA'S 3Ws AND THE INDIAN OCEAN

Critical for India then is the following question: *when, and under what conditions, does China establish a military presence in the Indian Ocean?*

In the past few years, China has focussed on the defence of unexploited

maritime resources within what many Chinese see as territorial waters, but which are internationally regarded as the high seas surrounding China. Beijing's current tensions on this issue with Japan, Vietnam and the Philippines have led to both the public and elite demanding a buildup of naval strength.⁴⁸

While there is little strategic rationale for Beijing to be associated in security affairs in the Indian Ocean, it has made clear its intention to be a stakeholder in the region's affairs. In 2009, it made a request to join the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), but was refused participation as the forum was strictly restricted to littoral states of the Indian Ocean.

China is, by all accounts, prepared to wait for an opportune moment to enter the Indian Ocean. It will conceivably use all the elements of 3Ws to create favourable conditions to make its eventual thrust. Beijing recently unveiled the 'March West' programme—a key element of its larger grand strategy for the Indian Ocean Region aimed at filling the gaps left by the American retreat from West Asia and the Middle East.⁴⁹ However, notwithstanding the opportunity that retreating American troops and the anti-piracy patrols in the West Arabian Sea have presented the PLA Navy with, establishing a permanent naval presence in the IOR is likely to be a gradual affair. As regional IOR states warm themselves to the idea of greater Chinese presence in their vicinity, the PLA Navy will likely bide its time until it is welcomed in the region.

VULNERABLE AREAS

Over the next decade, China can be expected to target three regions on India's periphery: Arunachal Pradesh; the Andaman and Nicobar Islands; and the smaller South Asian states. While China's interest in Arunachal is well known, its 3Ws may be played around India's geographical periphery too. In recent times, writings in the Chinese media have raised questions about the Indian Navy's efforts to militarize the regions close to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. It can reasonably be surmised that China will continue to give importance to maintaining a presence in the Indian Ocean and will increasingly resort to 3Ws when establishing its outposts in the region.

Whilst Beijing's central focus will be on enhancing its influence in South Asia, a key element of the strategy will be projecting India's strategic presence in the region in alarming terms. Indeed, a beginning already seems to have been made. An article published in the Chinese government

mouthpiece, *Global Times*, on 21 February 2013, written purportedly to allay Indian concerns over transfer of Gwadar port to a Chinese company insinuated that New Delhi was upset over the port's handover because it 'nullified the India–US strategy of encircling China'.⁵⁰ Though India criticized Pakistan for the handover, the piece observed, it was silent on its own strategic ambition in the region—a grand plan marked by the investment of 'huge chunks of money' in the port of Chabahar in Iran. India's real concern, the article claimed, was that China may expand its influence in the Indian Ocean thereby adversely affecting Indian interests.⁵¹ Indeed, of all the spaces in the IOR vulnerable to China's 3Ws, the most susceptible are India's smaller South Asian neighbours.

COUNTERING 3Ws

In order to develop an effective combat strategy against 3Ws, broadly, India must focus attention on four aspects: developing institutional frameworks and responses; creating awareness about 3Ws techniques and outlining standard operating procedures (SOPs) for impact mitigation; focusing on flexible and durable responses; and pre-empting attacks taking into account shifts in the political and military situation.⁵²

In countering the 3Ws, information collection and exploitation has a central significance and must go beyond 'wartime' or 'peacetime' measures. Information dominance rests on two primary factors: modern information technology, which is integral to information collection and transmission; and the ability to degrade the quality of information, whether by slowing down transmission or by introducing false or inaccurate data.⁵³ India's security forces need to act from the baseline assumption that the China's psychological and media warfares will target both high-level decision makers and lower-level policy implementers (individual soldiers, clerks, etc.). China's efforts to secure information dominance, therefore, will target not only the physical information infrastructure and the data that pass through it, but also the human agents that interact with those data, especially those who are making decisions. Indian networks and operators will thus need to be hardened.

Whilst there is need for top-down guidance on the issue, individual Indian institutions must develop the capacity to counter the 3Ws. A counter public opinion warfare campaign could be an effective strategy, but it must support not just military but also political and diplomatic objectives. Ultimately, the key to countering 3Ws lies in developing

flexible and supple responses in changing geopolitical conditions. All available civilian assets and resources will need to be leveraged to develop the tools and techniques to counter the 3Ws.

CONCLUSION

The development of the Chinese 3Ws is a defining feature in the emerging strategic landscape of Asia. As China's interest in the Indian Ocean increases, use of 3Ws against India is only likely to grow. Much of this is likely to be in the nature of low-level psychological attacks meant to 'reveal and exploit' divisions in India's political and military system. Media warfare, meanwhile, will be used to reduce support for India as a benevolent Indian Ocean power. China will likely continue to use its lobbyists for foreign propaganda, even as it continues to play on Indian anxieties and insecurities. Legal warfare, for the time being, may not be used against India. It may only come up in China's objection to India's securing of sea lanes and the militarization of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

The use of 3Ws in the maritime domain is likely to be more complex. While Taiwan still remains a primary mission for China, as part of its 'far-seas defence strategy', Beijing is laying the foundation of a force meant to accomplish broader regional and global objectives. In the next few years, it will be able to project and sustain a modest-sized force to protect China's expanding maritime economic interests in the IOR.⁵⁴ As China's intervention capability improves, India will be wary of confronting PLA Navy ships in the Indian Ocean. Over the long term, improvements in China's C4ISR (Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance), including space-based and over-the-horizon sensors, could enable Beijing to identify, track and target military activities deep into the Indian Ocean, even though India's main challenge will likely come from China's military forces based in the region.

NOTES

1. See 'China Court Fails to Link India to Self-immolations', *The Times of India*, 29 January 2013, available at http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-01-29/china/36615542_1_lorang-konchok-immolations-china-court, accessed on 11 September 2013.
2. Walton, Timothy A., 'Brief on China's Three Warfares', Delex Special Report

- 3, 18 January 2012, available at <http://delex.com/pub/dsr/Three%20Warfares.pdf>, accessed on 15 June 2013.
3. Most analyses of 3Ws have been carried out by analysts from the United States and Taiwan. Though not laid down as official strategy anywhere in Chinese official literature, Western analysts surmise that the People's Liberation Army (PLA) has a low-level asymmetric plan overlaying its official military strategy.
4. Cheng, Dean, 'Winning without Fighting: Chinese Public Opinion Warfare and the Need for a Robust American Response', The Heritage Foundation, 26 November 2012, available at <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2012/11>, accessed on 15 June 2013.
5. Tzu, Sun, 'The Supreme Art of War is to Subdue the Enemy without Fighting', *The Art of War*, translated by John Minford, London: Penguin Books, 2008.
6. Liang, Qiao and Wang Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare*, Panama City: Pan American Publishing Company, 2002. The authors apparently wrote the book in reaction to the 1991 US-led coalition victory in the Gulf War against Iraq. This is what they had to say about new-age war fighting: 'A new concept of weapons is emerging. New-age weapons transcend the domain of traditional weapons. They can be controlled and manipulated at a technical level; and can afflict material of psychological casualties on the enemy. These are weapons that include all means that transcend the military realm, but which can still be used in military operations' (p. 16).
7. Checketts, Carlson Thomas, 'Harmony & Chaos: The Principles of China's Unrestricted Warfare', *IO Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 2009, pp. 3–11.
8. The PLA's operational guidance document, 'Regulation on the Political Work', stipulates 3Ws is 'a reinforcement of political work in terms of media warfare, psychological warfare, and legal warfare'. A corroborating supplement to the document, the '100 Case Studies for Each Type of the Triple Warfare', deals primarily with managing political outcomes and attenuating enemy resolve. Walton, 'Brief on China's Three Warfares', n. 2.
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16. Anand, 'Chinese Concepts and Capabilities of Information Warfare', n. 14. The author brings out that at the national and strategic levels, China's IW transcends the military aspects and becomes an important tool for shaping perceptions and belief systems of adversaries and competitors on a higher plane.
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