

Mind Wars: The New Battlefield of Information Warfare, by Maj Gen P. K. Mallick, VSM (Retd), Pentagon Press, New Delhi, 2026, pp. 290, Rs 1,250.00

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Mind Wars: The New Battlefield of Information Warfare is an ambitious, wideranging and intellectually serious work that seeks to draw attention to what Maj Gen P. K. Mallick identifies as the most consequential arena of contemporary conflict: the human mind. The book's underlying assertion that future wars will increasingly be decided by who shapes perception, narrative and cognition rather than who merely dominates terrain runs consistently through its 18 carefully structured chapters. In doing so, the author offers one of the most comprehensive Indian treatments of information and cognitive warfare to date, and that fact alone makes this book a pioneering contribution to national strategic thought.

The opening Introduction sets the conceptual tone by arguing that the information environment is no longer a subsidiary supporting arm of warfare but a permanent and contested battlespace. Mallick underlines that conflicts

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today begin long before the first kinetic exchange and continue long after the last shot is fired. Information warfare, in his framing, spans peace, crisis, and war without interruption, eroding the traditional binaries on which military planning has long relied. Early in the book, the author observes—implicitly echoing classical theory—that the aim of conflict remains unchanged: to influence behaviour and compel outcomes. What has changed is the means, speed, scale and subtlety with which minds can now be shaped.

The chapters on the ‘Foundations of Information Warfare’ and ‘Components of Information Warfare’ provide essential conceptual scaffolding. These chapters perform an important corrective function by imposing analytical order on a domain often cluttered by overlapping jargon and imprecise usage. Rather than treating information warfare as an amorphous blend of cyber activity, propaganda and social media messaging, the author separates its constituent elements while showing how they converge operationally. He stresses that information warfare is not synonymous with technology; it is an ecosystem in which narratives, psychology, platforms, institutions and culture interact. This insistence on conceptual clarity is one of the book’s strongest contributions, particularly for practitioners and scholars seeking doctrinal coherence.

Psychological warfare, addressed first as a distinct chapter and revisited later in ‘Psychological Warfare and Various Terms’, emerges as the intellectual backbone of the book. Mallick repeatedly returns to the idea that the mind—individual and collective—is both the target and the terrain. He notes that emotions, fears, beliefs, identities and grievances are not incidental effects but deliberate objectives of modern campaigns. In discussing terminology, the author draws attention to how conceptual confusion can itself become a strategic vulnerability, leading to fragmented responsibility and ineffective responses. The argument is subtle but persuasive: without a shared vocabulary and conceptual consensus, even well resourced states struggle to act coherently in the information domain.

The chapter on ‘Artificial Intelligence as a Tool for Online Radicalisation’ marks a decisive shift from classical methods to contemporary realities. Here, Mallick grapples with the uncomfortable truth that influence is no longer solely human driven. Algorithms increasingly curate attention, privilege emotional intensity, and reward extreme viewpoints, often without explicit state direction. The author characterises artificial intelligence (AI) as a force multiplier that accelerates radicalisation processes and compresses influence timelines. He cautions that while technology enhances capability, it does not replace intent; AI-enabled radicalisation remains a tool wielded by actors

pursuing political and strategic objectives. This chapter is particularly valuable in moving Indian discourse beyond reactive concerns towards structural understanding of machinemediated persuasion.

Social Media receives a full and balanced treatment, neither romanticised nor demonised. Mallick examines how social media platforms have collapsed the distinction between foreign and domestic audiences, enabling influence operations to reach citizens, soldiers, diasporas and policymakers simultaneously. The chapter underscores that social media's strategic significance lies not merely in content dissemination, but in its ability to normalise narratives through repetition, peer validation and emotional resonance. This discussion is complemented by 'Sentiment Analyses', where the author focuses on measurement and feedback—an aspect too often neglected in discussions of influence operations. He underscores that information warfare must be judged by cognitive and behavioural effects, not by volume of messaging alone.

The intellectual centre of the book is formed by the chapters on 'Narrative and Cognitive Warfare', 'China and Cognitive Warfare', and 'Perception Management'. Narrative warfare, Mallick argues, is about framing reality—deciding what is seen as legitimate, inevitable, or morally acceptable. Cognitive warfare goes a step further by targeting how societies think, reason, and respond, exploiting biases and heuristics embedded in human cognition. The chapter on China offers a particularly instructive case study, highlighting how longterm narrative shaping, information control, and psychological influence are integrated into state policy and military doctrine. China is portrayed not merely as an adversary, but as a benchmark in the systematic pursuit of cognitive advantage.

The discussion on perception management synthesises these ideas into a practical framework, emphasising how domestic morale, international legitimacy, and adversary expectations must be managed as part of a single continuum. This theme is reinforced in *Surprise, Deception and Psy Ops*, where Mallick revisits classical principles through a modern lens. He stresses that surprise today is often cognitive rather than physical, achieved by shaping expectations and narrowing perceived options rather than by sudden manoeuvre alone. Throughout these chapters, the author repeatedly returns to the insight that wars are frequently decided before they are openly fought.

The book's analytical depth is further enriched by the country studies on Pakistan, China and Russia, which stand out as some of its most practically relevant sections. Pakistan is examined as a case of sustained and institutionalised narrative warfare, particularly effective in internationalising

issues and reframing military or terrorist incidents into political disputes. The analysis suggests that Pakistan's approach relies less on technological sophistication and more on consistency, coordination and narrative discipline. China's information warfare model is presented as systemic and statedriven, integrating political control, technological infrastructure and longterm cognitive conditioning. Russia's strategy, in contrast, is characterised by reflexive control—shaping adversary decision making by manipulating information, ambiguity and perception. These chapters are valuable not because they catalogue adversaries, but because they illustrate how different political systems generate distinct styles of mind warfare.

Following the country studies, 'Cautionary Thoughts' introduces a reflective pause. Mallick warns that mind warfare is inherently volatile and ethically fraught. Influence operations can backfire, corrode domestic trust, and blur moral boundaries if pursued without restraint. This introspective turn adds credibility to the overall argument, demonstrating that the author is attentive not only to capability, but also to consequence.

The Hypothetical Information Warfare Plan against Greenland by India functions as an extended thought experiment. It is deliberately provocative, designed to force the reader to think through objectives, audiences, escalation dynamics, instruments of influence and exit conditions. More importantly, it illustrates how information warfare planning differs from kinetic planning requiring anticipation of narrative reactions, international opinion, and cognitive thresholds rather than measurable territorial gains.

The 'Recommendations' section is among the book's most significant contributions and deserves particular emphasis. Mallick does not argue for dramatic new structures or fashionable doctrines. Instead, he calls for conceptual clarity, institutional cohesion, and a whole of nation approach. He argues that information and cognitive warfare cannot be the sole responsibility of the military; they require coordination across government, engagement with civil society, and resilience at the societal level. Implicitly, the recommendations suggest that India's greatest vulnerability lies not in lack of technology, but in fragmented ownership and intellectual under preparedness.

The 'Conclusion' ties these strands together by reiterating that mind wars are neither temporary nor peripheral. They are persistent, adaptive and increasingly central to state competition. The author leaves the reader with a clear message: ignoring this domain does not preserve neutrality; it cedes initiative.

If the book has a limitation, it is one of breadth rather than judgement. The sheer scope of the subject inevitably constrains the depth of some empirical sections, particularly for India specific case studies. Yet this does little to detract from the book's essential achievement.

In sum, *Mind Wars: The New Battlefield of Information Warfare* stands as a landmark Indian contribution to understanding contemporary conflict. It is analytically rigorous, conceptually disciplined, and refreshingly sober in tone. Above all, it deserves recognition as a pioneering effort by an Indian military thinker to grapple seriously and comprehensively with a subject that many have acknowledged in passing, but few have attempted to chart in full. In an age where influence often outweighs firepower, Maj Gen P. K. Mallick has provided not just a book, but a strategic wakeup call.