

HOW ASSASSINATIONS AND THE VIRTUAL NARRATIVE ARE CHANGING THE SHAPE OF WARFARE

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The continuing wars in Ukraine and Gaza, coupled with the India-Pakistan military skirmish of May 2025, have shown that not only has warfare changed but older forms of military attacks are once again back in fashion. Assassinations, once thought of as taboo, are back as a preferred tool for nations to use. Further, as countries have learnt to their cost, not being able to control the media narrative has made their efforts to prosecute a war difficult as both domestic and international public opinion turns on them. The United States, despite its huge advantage of controlling both the print and visual media, squandered its edge in Iraq when it became clear that there were no weapons of mass destruction in that country. Nations need to figure out the diplomatic, military, and technological implications of these trends.

The Shifts in Warfare: Targeted Assassinations

Throughout history, assassinations of the political leadership have been used as a means to defeat the enemy or to try and get a change in policy in the targeted state—after all, there was a reason the term regicide was coined in the lexicon of political action. The problem has been two-fold: decapitating leadership means you lose the people to talk to so as to bring about war termination or a political settlement; and there is the more obvious problem that the leadership that replaces them may be both more radical and far more dangerous to deal with.

Such concerns, however, have not stopped nations from carrying out assassinations, albeit with mixed results. In World War II, the United States successfully assassinated Japanese Admiral Yamamoto who had masterminded the attack on Pearl Harbor.¹ Yamamoto's assassination was a morale booster for the Americans because of the outrage in that country against the Japanese attack. But Yamamoto's death did not hasten the end of the American campaign in the Pacific. What did was the overwhelming industrial advantage that the United States had over Japan leading Washington to literally out produce the Japanese and German war efforts. Incidentally, Yamamoto, before the war, had been the Japanese naval attaché in Washington and had toured the country and seen its formidable industrial capacity. Thus, when asked by the Japanese military if he could carry out Pearl Harbor he famously replied, “Yes, but then what?”

¹ Maj Adonis C Arvanitakis, USAF, “Killing a Peacock: A Case Study of the Targeted Killing of Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto” Monograph, Defense Technical Information Center (DTIC), United States Army Command and General Staff College, Kansas, <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA623450.pdf>

In the Cold War era assassinations were carried out by both sides against political figures and dissidents and this approach was adopted by nations across the world who sought to assassinate their rivals, very often on foreign soil. If such assassinations were not carried out directly, they had the blessings of the intelligence agencies and political leadership of the superpowers. Thus, the assassination of President Diem of South Vietnam was carried out with the blessings of the United States² and in the 1960s the CIA sought to assassinate Fidel Castro including such bizarre plans as attempting to poison his cigars while another plan was to harpoon him while he was scuba diving.³

In recent times, Saudi Arabia (with the murder of Jamal Khashoggi)⁴ and the Iranians (killing dissidents in Europe) have carried out such actions. The United States itself, under Trump, ordered the killing of the Iranian general Qasim Sulemani and retains the right under its military doctrine to carry out targeted killings.⁵ But the wars in Ukraine and Gaza have taken targeted assassinations to a completely different and more lethal level.

Ukraine recognised early in the war that the rigid Russian command structure could be hurt by decapitating parts of the Russian General Staff, and it was able to do so with some success. After that, the Russians smartened up, stopped putting all their generals in the same room, and made themselves less easily detectable by Western intelligence and surveillance systems.

But it was Israel's wars with Hamas, Hezbollah, and Iran that brought assassinations to a new level in the pursuit of modern warfare. The Israelis have long used assassinations against non-State actors that challenge their security, particularly in the case of both the Palestinians and Hezbollah. Various Palestinian leaders have been gunned down and in the recent war against Hamas; the Israelis have killed its leadership both in the Gaza Strip and in other countries, by going after Hamas negotiators.

Against Hezbollah, the Israelis discovered where a major meeting of the leadership was taking place and reportedly hit the target with eighty-six bombs, killing the organisation's leader Hassan Nasrullah.⁶ Coupled with the earlier attack on personnel with the exploding pagers,⁷ the decapitation of Hezbollah was fatal because its numbers are small and losing the leadership meant losing the chain of command and took away its ability to successfully wage war against the Jewish state. Not surprisingly, they had to sue for a ceasefire with Israel.

² John Prados. "JFK and the Diem Coup", *National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No 101, 05 November 2003*.
<https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB101/index.htm>

³ US Government, National Archives and Records Administration.

<https://www.archives.gov/files/research/ifk/releases/2021/docid-32345891.pdf>

⁴ "Jamal Khashoggi: All You Need to Know About Saudi Journalist's Death", BBC News, 25 February 2021.
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-45812399>

⁵ US Department of Justice, Office of the Assistant Attorney General, "January 2020 Airstrike in Iraq Against Qassem Soleimani" (Memorandum for John A. Eisenberg Legal Advisor to the National Security Council), 10 March 2020,
https://www.justice.gov/d9/2023-04/2020-03-10_soleimani_airstrike_redacted_2021.pdf

⁶ David Gritten, "Who was Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah?", BBC News, 28 September 2024,
<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c1wnp0vln19o>

⁷ Maya Gebeily, James Pearson and David Gauthier-Villars, "How Israel's Bulky Pager Fooled Hezbollah" Reuters, 16 October 2024. <https://www.reuters.com/graphics/ISRAEL-PALESTINIANS/HEZBOLLAH-PAGERS/mopawkkwipa/>

Similarly, the Israeli strikes on Iran targeted both civilian and military personnel who were vital to the country's warfighting capabilities and its nuclear program. The Israelis used precision strikes to kill Iranian nuclear scientists and to take out several generals of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard.⁸ The idea was to degrade Iran's nuclear program and to disrupt the military decision-making process in Tehran.

Again, the assassinations hurt Iran's war efforts but not to the extent that is claimed in the western press. The Iranians were able to launch salvoes of missiles on Israeli targets to the extent that Israel's much vaunted Iron Dome and David's Sling anti-missile systems were degraded to a 65% level of effectiveness and politico-military targets within the country including air bases were successfully attacked.⁹ One unconfirmed report states that the headquarters of Mossad was attacked and destroyed (although the Israelis have never confirmed this). Worse, the three Iranian missile strikes on Israel, of 2024 and 2025, led the Israeli government to depend on the United States, Britain, and other nations for its security. The Americans provided an anti-missile system but also used \$500,000 Sidewinder missiles and ship based anti-missile defences to shoot down \$20,000 Iranian cruise missiles, drones, and older ballistic missiles. For the first time in its proud military history, Israel had to depend on other nations to secure itself. This, then, brings up an important issue: what are the lessons for the rest of the world militaries from this new emphasis on assassinations in warfare?

For several reasons, thinking that the Israeli and American use of targeted assassinations has opened up a new form of warfare is incorrect. Instead, both countries have used their preponderance of military power to engage in such actions. First, the Israelis were fighting non-State actors—Hamas and Hezbollah—who had no air power, no air defences, no armour or artillery. Israel had all of these, and nuclear weapons, too. In such circumstances, using eighty-six bombs to kill the Hezbollah leadership is far easier to do. Any other nation trying to do this against a State actor with air defences and air power would find it difficult to achieve such an outcome. The fact is that the Israeli strikes benefitted from western sanctions against selling weapons to Iran and that the two-armed non-state actors, Hamas and Hezbollah, were never going to be allowed to acquire air defences.

It is important to note that Hamas and Hezbollah are not State-created militaries but, instead, relatively small insurgent groups. Before the attack of 07 October 2023, Hamas was estimated to have about 20,000 fighters which is somewhat larger than a standard military division. Killing even ten per cent of such a small force, which the Israelis have successfully done, deals a significant blow to the war-making capabilities of these non-State actors.

Similarly, in the case of Hezbollah, it was estimated before the war that the organisation had a force of between 50,000 to 100,000 fighters. These numbers are generally considered to be exaggerated,

⁸ Callum Sutherland, "Iranian Generals and Scientists Targeted and Killed by Israeli Strikes—and What We Know about Them", *Time website*, 21 June 2025. <https://time.com/7293886/iranian-generals-scientists-targets-killed-by-israeli-strikes/>

⁹ "What are Israel's Iron Dome, David's Sling, Arrow and Thaad missile defences?", BBC News, 16 October 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-20385306>

since they may include those in the administrative, humanitarian, and educational wings of the organisation. Again, therefore, selected killings or the mass attack on Nasrullah's base would create disproportionate damage on the enemy.

The other thing to keep in mind is that what the West has permitted Israel and Ukraine to do, it will not allow most nations in the world to carry out. The Iranians have killed their dissidents who now live in European countries, and their justification has been that even if these people got another citizenship, they remain Iranian nationals (you cannot renounce your Iranian citizenship even if you acquire that of another State). The reaction of Western governments has been to label these as terrorist attacks.

In contrast, when the Israelis used Australian passports to go to the UAE and assassinate various people, it led to an angry debate in the Australian parliament but no serious action was taken by the Australian government. When Benjamin Netanyahu, along with leadership of Hamas, was indicted by the International Criminal Court (ICC)¹⁰, the government of Poland asked for a waiver from the ICC ruling so that the Israeli prime minister could attend the anniversary of Auschwitz.¹¹ The implications of such actions are clear: the West will allow you to bend the rules if it suits its interests. This is what makes most nations in the world very sceptical of the "*rules-based international order*" for, as the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov argued when dismissing the validity of this order, "*The rules were never published, were never even announced by anyone to anyone, and they are being applied depending on what exactly the West needs at a particular moment of modern history.*"¹² So, what are implications of this trend for India's political and military leadership?

India has already faced a serious attempt on its political leadership, because in 2001, the Indian parliament was attacked to try and assassinate India's top politicians including the Prime Minister.¹³ Pervez Musharraf, the then military dictator of Pakistan, called it a dirty business which suggested that rogue elements within ISI had given the green light for the attack (Western intelligence agencies have long argued that the ISI has an active and enthusiastic alumni association which can be used to ensure plausible deniability for the Pakistani State).¹⁴ Of course, this begs the question of the extent to which Pakistan is in control of its intelligence assets.

The West's reaction to the crisis was telling. The United States, in particular, asked New Delhi to exercise restraint much in the same way that during Operation SINDOOR, India was asked to tone down its attack strategy and not risk a nuclear war. Neither Trump nor Biden have asked the Israelis

¹⁰ Jeremy Bowen, "What the ICC arrest warrants mean for Israel and Hamas", BBC News, 21 May 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cw4490z75v3o>

¹¹ "Polish government says it will ensure representatives of Israel can visit Auschwitz safely", Reuters, 09 January 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/polish-president-wants-icc-indictee-netanyahu-be-able-go-auschwitz-anniversary-2025-01-09/>

¹² The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's statement and answers to media questions following the 21th Doha Forum, 10 December 2023, https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/1920028/

¹³ "2001: Suicide attack on Indian parliament, BBC News", http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/december/13/newsid_3695000/3695057.stm

¹⁴ Bruce Riedel, "How 9/11 is Connected to December 13", Brookings, 11 September 2008. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/how-911-is-connected-to-december-13/>

to exercise restraint. One can, therefore, only imagine what the reaction would be if India was to engage in targeted assassinations.

Secondly, assassinations are not part of Indian military strategy or its ethos about the use of force. Operation SINDOOR was not initiated against the Pakistani military or the Pakistani people but against terrorist targets. Nor did the Indian prime minister suggest at any time that the military carry out operations against civilian targets.¹⁵ This was in stark contrast to the Israel-Hamas war where it is now estimated that over 50,000 civilians have been killed. It is highly unlikely, therefore, that Indian military would be allowed to bring about such a seismic change in its doctrine and its strategy.

In fact, since the first war against Pakistan in 1947-1948, successive Indian governments have refrained from attacking civilian targets like cities and, instead, focused on military targets like air bases, tank formations, and against military troops. On a separate level, it might even be argued that India's nuclear posture should have as its primary mission the destruction of Pakistan's military and nuclear facilities rather than to attack the civilian population of that country. However, given its existing ethos, the Indian government is unlikely to change its approach to the pursuit of war.

Thirdly, there is the more fundamental question of who loses more in a war in which such nontraditional tactics are used? India is a democracy with a growing economy. If a country was to attack India's soft underbelly—its open society, cities that are not heavily surveilled, as was the case with Mumbai in 2008, and the country's pool of scientific personnel—then the loser is New Delhi which views all these factors as crucial to the country's long-term growth.

There are those in India who favour the Israeli approach but, in the opinion of this writer, do so without any understanding of the political and military blowback such actions would lead to. The West would not grant leeway to India in this matter making it difficult for the Indian government to carry out such actions. It is far better, therefore, for the country to continue its current military strategy which is grounded in international law because that gives New Delhi the moral high ground in any future war.

The Tik-Tok War

The other big change that has come with modern warfare is that the media is no longer the monopoly of governments and instead has been taken over by citizen journalists. Traditionally, the global media has been dominated by the West, which invested the resources in building up its own media outlets so they could monopolise the flow of information. It was quickly recognised that creating such a monopoly was in itself a form of power so erstwhile colonial powers such as Britain and France would beam their broadcasts globally to reach listeners in their far-flung colonies.

During the Cold War, both the Soviet Union and the United States invested in radio broadcasts that covered the world—Voice of America, Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty, and Pravda—to

¹⁵ Government of India, "Operation SINDOOR: India's Strategic Clarity and Calculated Force", Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Press Release, 14 May 2025, <https://www.pib.gov.in/Pressreleashare.aspx?PRID=2128748>

disseminate the message to global audiences that were considered receptive to such information. Thus, the fact that these countries had the technology and the resources allowed them to secure the largest broadcast bandwidths to transmit their version of current affairs around the world and attempt to create a political environment that was favourable to them.

What also added to the media strength of the West (the Soviet Union could not do this) was the fact that the Western media was willing to criticize its own governments and institutions and that added to the authenticity of its newscasts to the rest of the world, particularly the Soviet Union and the nations of Eastern Europe.

The aftermath of the Cold War left the West in a militarily, economically, technologically, and ideologically advantageous position. Western soft power was boosted by the advent of modern technology—particularly the internet and satellites—which allowed the West to dominate the global media sphere. Satellites allowed for 24/7 news channels such as CNN, BBC, Sky, and DW, to monopolise the global airwaves and drown out non-Western voices in the media sphere. The rise of the internet, by the early 2000s, led major Western papers-of-record, such as *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Wall Street Journal*, to have far more global subscribers and, therefore, increase the ability to spread their particular message.

This became particularly apparent during the second Iraq war where the American Administration of George W Bush claimed that Saddam Hussain had weapons of mass destruction and posed a clear and present danger to the United States.¹⁶ The American media was complicit as *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, helped make the case for invading Iraq on spurious grounds. This subsequently led the editors of *The New York Times* to issue a public apology for their poor coverage of the Iraq war:

“Over the last year this newspaper has shone the bright light of hindsight on decisions that led the United States into Iraq. We have examined the failings of American and allied intelligence, especially on the issue of Iraq's weapons and possible Iraqi connections to international terrorists. We have studied the allegations of official gullibility and hype. It is past time we turned the same light on ourselves... In some cases, information that was controversial then, and seems questionable now, was insufficiently qualified or allowed to stand unchallenged. Looking back, we wish we had been more aggressive in re-examining the claims as new evidence emerged -- or failed to emerge.”¹⁷

While the West's soft power was boosted by its media monopoly, challenges emerged to this packaging of news and information. Qatar funded the creation of *Al-Jazeera* with the objective of having an alternative media presence. The goal of *Al-Jazeera* was to balance the flow of information from the South to the North and to provide “*the opinion and the other opinion*”. Being well-funded by the Emir of Qatar, the new news channel quickly established a global presence and became a force

¹⁶ The US National Archives and Records Administration, “The Iraq War”.

<https://www.georgewbushlibrary.gov/research/topic-guides/the-iraq-war>

¹⁷ The Editors “The Times and Iraq”, *The New York Times*, May 26, 2004.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/26/world/from-the-editors-the-times-and-iraq.html>

in broadcasting¹⁸ and it was helped by the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Especially in the case of Iraq, *AlJazeera* presented an alternative set of facts from the carefully packaged news that came from Western news outlets, often at the behest of the Pentagon with its policy of having embedded journalists. Not surprisingly, the United States military was particularly hostile to *AlJazeera* since it repeatedly contradicted the canned narrative that the Pentagon was selling to the world through its embedded journalists.

In the post-Cold War world, the media monopoly of the West should have grown because new technologies allowed for global coverage at a significant reduction of prices. While this did happen, something quite significant happened, too. These very technologies created alternative news voices for the world. In the United States, the mainstream papers began to lose readership to websites such as the *Drudge Report* and later, online magazines such as *Slate*, *The Daily Beast*, and *Politico*, as the traditional news sources did not provide the type of news and analysis that specific audiences wanted and their credibility was increasingly being questioned by the very audience they sought to influence.

American media support, however, was crucial in the way the war was presented in the international print and broadcast media. *The Intercept*, a small independent media outlet, which is supported by the donations of its readership, made the case that, “*The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Los Angeles Times*’s coverage of Israel’s war on Gaza showed a consistent bias against Palestinians, according to an *Intercept* analysis of major media coverage.”¹⁹

The Intercept, whose data is available online,²⁰ examined over 1,000 articles from *The Washington Post*, *The Los Angeles Times*, and reached the conclusion that these newspapers had an imbalanced coverage of Israeli and pro-Israeli voices and downplayed Palestinian and pro-Palestinian coverage. But perhaps the most egregious example of biased media coverage was the story that 40 Israeli babies had been beheaded in the Palestinian attack.

By any standard, the story, if true, would have been major violation of international law and something that no normal human being could have justified. It would have led to a substantial lowering of support for the Palestinian cause among the global public. *Le Monde*, however, did a careful analysis to show that the story was actually a rumour that had gained credence and been widely circulated by the global media.²¹ So, why does the mainstream media work to project a particular image of the Gaza conflict rather than attempt to show both sides of the conflict?

Similarly, on Ukraine, the stated policy of Western governments became the narrative of the mainstream media which tended to overhype Ukrainian progress and to paint Russia as having suffered staggering losses of over a million troops. The reality on the ground has come from non-traditional media sources, which can be found on YouTube, who have debunked much of what the

¹⁸ M Zayani, “Al Jazeera’s Complex Legacy”, *International Journal of Communication* 10(2016), 3554–3569. <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/viewFile/4815/1729>

¹⁹ Adam Johnson and Othman Ali, “Coverage of Gaza War in the New York Times and Other Major Newspapers Heavily Favored Israel, Analysis Shows,” *The Intercept*, 09 January 2024. <https://theintercept.com/2024/01/09/newspapers-israel-palestine-bias-new-york-times/>

²⁰ Available at, [GitHub - theintercept/gaza-media-bias: Tracking media bias in the first six weeks of the war.](https://github.com/theintercept/gaza-media-bias)

²¹ Assmaa Maad, William Audureau, and Samuel Forey, “40 Beheaded Babies: Deconstructing the Rumor at the Heart of the Information Battle between Israel and Hamas”, *Le Monde*, 03 April 2024. https://www.lemonde.fr/en/les-decodeurs/article/2024/04/03/40-beheaded-babies-the-itinerary-of-a-rumor-at-the-heart-of-the-information-battle-between-israel-and-hamas_6667274_8.html

Western press has put forward as the actual casualty rate and pointed out how high Ukrainian casualties actually are. So, once again, the question is: why did the mainstream media work to project a particular image of the Ukraine and Gaza conflicts rather than attempt to show both sides of the conflict?

The answer to the nature of both coverages is that newspapers-of-record essentially frame their writings to support the foreign policy objectives of the American government. Yet, in doing so, they forget that modern media has bypassed them to present an alternative version that makes their print or broadcast pronouncements less authoritative. This was particularly the case with Gaza. Additionally, there was a generational difference in the view on Gaza in the United States.

By the spring of 2024, a series of pro-Palestinian and to a lesser extent pro-Israeli demonstrations broke out at campuses across America. The largest ones, as *The Wall Street Journal* documented, were along the north-east coast at prestigious schools Harvard and Columbia but there were also significant protests in Chicago, Los Angeles, and San Francisco.²²

Universities had a tough task ahead of them since they had to balance between the right of their students to freedom of speech, protecting Jewish and Muslim students from harassment, and dealing with the angry calls and public pronouncements of some wealthy donors who felt that campuses should not be permitting pro-Palestinian demonstrations. Yet the anger of the younger generation about events in Gaza was obvious.

The “Pew Research Center” conducted surveys to gauge generational attitudes towards Gaza and the Palestine issue and what it found was that the attitudinal divisions on the Palestine issue were, indeed, generational. Thus, a third of the adults under 30 said that their sympathies were entirely or mostly with the Palestinians while 14% said their sympathies were with entirely or mostly with the Israelis. In contrast, in the age group 65 and over, 47% were entirely or mostly with Israel while only 9% were sympathetic to the Palestinian cause. Six in ten adults under 30 had a positive view of the Palestinian people and 46% of that age group felt the Israeli response was unacceptable. 34% of those under the age of 30 felt Hamas had legitimate reasons to fight, and in the same age group around 47% felt that discrimination against both Muslims and Jews had increased since the start of the war.²³

While the Israelis succeeded in getting the mainstream media to buy and propagate their narrative, there was also the failure of the mainstream media, both print and broadcast, to adequately cover the war and to present a balanced and objective analysis. Most young people were getting their information from their chosen social media platforms be it Tik-Tok, Telegram, WhatsApp, Instagram, or YouTube. These sites had certain advantages against which mainstream media could not compete. They provided tailored content that suited the preferences of their younger users.

²² Steven Rusolillo, “College Protests Sweeping Across America: See Where they are Happening,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 26 April 2024. <https://www.wsj.com/us-news/education/college-protests-sweeping-across-the-u-s-see-where-they-are-happening-e55c5544>

²³ Laura Silver, “Younger Americans Stand Out in their Views of the Israel-Hamas War,” *Pew Research Center*, 02 April 2024. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/04/02/youngers-stand-out-in-their-views-of-the-israel-hamas-war/>

They were not beholden to corporate and political interests and, most importantly, the content was cheap to produce and easy to upload to a platform where they could reach millions.

All this has serious implications for any nation's decision to go to war and on how to pursue the conflict. Since the first Gulf War of the 1990s governments have sought to embed journalists in their military units so as to accurately portray their version of events. We are past the era of embedded journalism, since Tik Tok and associated social media make it impossible to control the narrative anymore. Independently uploaded video is both authentic and powerful and negates the canned attempts of governments to shape the narrative.

Further, as Operation SINDOOR showed, a country's public will be turned off by the excessive jingoism of the domestic media because truth becomes a casualty in the process. By the third day of the confrontation with Pakistan, Indians were complaining about how their domestic media had moved away from a balanced coverage to sensationalism. Sections of the Indian media ignored the careful statements being made by the Indian government and military and, instead, spread stories like Karachi had been attacked by the Indian Navy and that the Baluch Liberation Army had captured Quetta. Retired Indian Navy officers had to go on talk-shows to point out that if the Navy went into action it would be in a declared war and not in the type of skirmish that Op SINDOOR was being limited to.

One should add, however, that the much-vaunted CNN and *AlJazeera* hurt their own reputations by spreading the fake news that an Indian woman fighter pilot had been shot down and captured by the Pakistanis thus leading India to sue for a ceasefire. Neither news organisation issued an apology for the inaccuracy of their story.

The other thing that became clear in the aftermath of Op SINDOOR was that initially, Pakistan was able to better wage the information war against India due to its more skilful use of the international media, as it was able to make the unverified claim that three Indian Rafale fighter jets had been shot down. The story of the success of Chinese weaponry over western systems also quickly gained credence. It was only after the Indian defence forces were permitted to present their own evidence that an information balance was restored in respect of the conflict.

What must be understood, therefore, is that in a future war, one should expect a lot of video clips and commentaries on social media that will go against the narrative that a country proffers. The best way to do that is to be truthful and measured in one's comments. Once Chief of Defence Staff, General Anil Chauhan, accepted that India had lost aircraft but that it was a normal course of war, the domestic and international media became less obsessed with the issue. Also, the Pakistanis had nothing else left in their quiver in terms of propaganda to shoot at the Indians.

The lessons to be learned from the new information wars are simple. Expect a very high level of disinformation or even information that nevertheless does not fit into the country's stated narrative. What is needed, therefore, is the ability for the country's defence forces to react effectively and quickly to provide alternative evidence and quash rumours. To do that, India has to move away from its idea of letting its creaky, secretive, and inefficient Victorian bureaucracy try and shape a narrative. The government would do well to bring in journalists and advertising executives so as to learn how to successfully wage an information war.

A serious attempt should also be made to cultivate the traditional foreign press, since it still has influence in the corridors of power of the western world. This means giving access and being willing to take difficult questions that go against Indian policy. Such openness and frankness are appreciated and it raises the country's standing as one with an open society.

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