

## **GREY ZONE WARFARE - VICTORY WITHOUT FIGHTING**

On October 18, 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the Combined Commanders' Conference said, *"Beyond the immediate, we are facing a future where security challenges will be less predictable; situations will evolve and change swiftly; and, technological changes will make responses more difficult to keep pace with. The threats may be known, but the enemy may be invisible. Domination of cyberspace will become increasingly important. Control of space may become as critical as that of land, air and sea. Full scale wars may become rare, but force will remain an instrument of deterrence and influencing behaviour, and the duration of conflicts will be shorter."*<sup>1</sup> This clear and categorical direction emanating from the Prime Minister himself, is indicative of future threats and challenges to national security. The security challenges for the nation can no longer be defined and definite, as these are likely to be in the Grey Zone, conducted in many battle spaces by multiple means driven by a collective ideology, plausibly without any direct attribution and without any overt physical military application of combat power ab-initio.

In essence Grey Zone warfare is as old as warfare itself, however, in an interconnected, networked digital world, a world with vanishing borders but with conflicting interests and competition for resources among people, regions, religions, civilisations and nation states, new cost effective methods of waging wars are emerging. War is never an option but the proverbial last resort. Nations go to war to impose their will on the adversaries, the mightier nations historically have succeeded in achieving victory through wars. New age technologies coupled with the vulnerabilities of mega nations have given rise to asymmetric capabilities to smaller nations and ideology based groups to wage wars to either propagate or impose their will on other nations and society. The world is changing at a pace not seen in history earlier, as is the ends, ways and means of warfare.

The proposition of this paper is the idea of winning without fighting, though an age old concept it has seldom been practiced with success. There have been 16 transitions of world power in the last five centuries, of these eleven have been violent and only five peaceful. As the world anticipates another transition of power in the near to mid term with China challenging the US hegemony, it is imperative to discuss and study the shape and contours of emerging challenges.

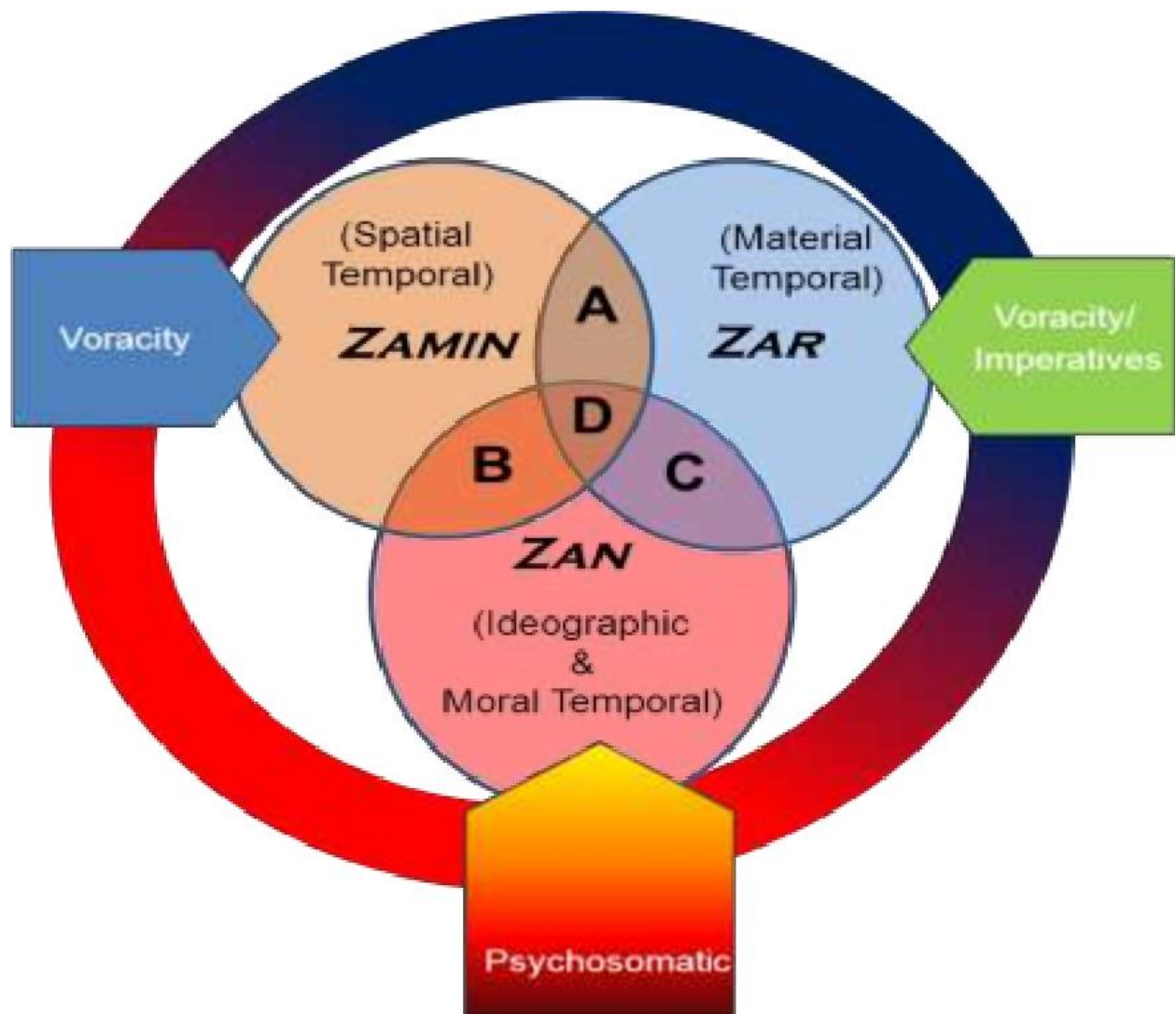
Sun Tzu's Art of War, a 2000-year old Chinese book of

military strategy extols “those who render others’ armies helpless without fighting” saying “rather than overcoming his enemies on the battlefield, the superior general infiltrates their ranks, uncovers their secrets, fosters discontent and disharmony and destroys their alliances, thus eroding their willingness to fight”. In present day context ‘winning without fighting’ will also imply fighting in the Grey Zone and exploiting new age technologies to change the behavior of nations and societies, this could in a larger sense also be imposing your will on the adversary by employing nonviolent methods. Mahatma Gandhi the greatest proponent of non violence succeeded in defeating the might of the British Empire forcing them to quit India. Gandhi can rightly be called the father of non violent warfare or Grey Zone warfare in its ultimate sense proving to the world the concept of “Winning without Fighting”.

The notion of victory is a study in itself. Mohammad Iftikhar Zaidi in his thesis *The Conduct of War and the Notion of Victory* for Cranfield University argues that a bivariate approach that triangulates desired ends with the opposing notions of success and perception of defeat. The theory presented encapsulates traditional precepts, adds new ones and simplifies the complexities that have come to surround victory in contemporary times. Offered are some valuable ingredients to flavour any strategic recipe, not just war and conflict. The eternal challenge of calibrating means and ends needs more systematic awareness of functional and dominant domains of victory which, it is argued, is possible through application of simple principles. The theory potentially allows for a more focused, proportionate, efficient and productive use of power. It is hoped that strategists and analysts alike, would find here new concepts and tools for use in praxis, perspective planning and retrospective analyses.

Grey Zone warfare has been discussed and deliberated upon in a number of articles by well recognised military experts in this very journal, and hence the focus is on ‘Winning without Fighting’. What’s the notion of victory? Clausewitz described military victory as a condition where the enemy’s ability to enter battle, resist or resume hostilities is destroyed. The notion summarises the paradigms of success that preceded Clausewitz and survived through much of the 20th century. Is such a doctrine of victory still valid? The short answer is NO; and yet, despite increasingly paradoxical outcomes, military planners, strategists and statesmen continually seek answers for their failures in variously perceived causative influences. Few question the validity of the Clausewitzian doctrine of victory that drove their initiatives. The rapid transformation in society and international culture has brought with it changes in geo-political and geo-economic relationships as well as warfare. While the traditional linkages between war and politics remain, the mechanisms driving these have altered. In less than absolute wars, ‘it is the wider bargain and the stakes in that bargain that make the enemy do our will’ and not purely the opposition’s inability to enter battle, resist or resume hostilities. Zar, Zamin, Zan have been the drivers for

conflicts over the ages and the basic causative factors are unlikely to change ever both through time and civilizations. This aspect has been diagrammatically explained by Mohammad I. Zaidi Political Science Published 2010.



David Carment a CGAI Fellow and Dani Belo in October 2018 paper for CGAI write that today's geopolitical conflicts reflect a desire by some states to gradually, but fundamentally, revise the regional or global system of alliances and international norms to a degree not even seen during the Cold War. This process of conflict-induced change is known as grey-zone conflict, in which states conduct operations that only occasionally pass the threshold of war. Grey-zone conflict refers to those post-Cold War conflicts – not always violent – which are prolonged and frequently characterized by an ambiguous point of victory (Carment, Nikolko and Belo, 2018). The paper further delineates two distinct phenomena in international affairs – hybrid warfare, which emphasizes the tactical level and grey-zone conflicts, which incorporates a long-term strategic dimension into international disputes. They

argue that hybrid warfare can be a tactical subset of grey-zone conflict deployed under certain conditions and in varying degrees. One reason for this dual approach is the circumvention of, and asymmetric adherence to, international law. Simply put, international legal structures act as restraints on what democratic states can do in the international arena. Hybridism offers a way out to avoid exploitation by states that do not uphold such laws. Permissive and advantageous conditions are created for non-democratic states to conduct operations against their democratic adversaries. Highly centralized, and thus procedurally flexible, states such as Russia and China can use propaganda, domestic legal structures, economic pressure and support for non-state proxies more readily, compared to democracies. This relatively unregulated environment enables authoritarian states to normalize and internalize new practices for engagement against opponents. In contrast, there are clear limits to what democratic states can do with hybrid warfare.

The key question for states, rogue states and non state actors is how to win without fighting. The need to impose the will and change behaviour of adversaries remains the essence of conflicts and wars. In an earlier paper for Synergy Journal of CENJOWS the author has explained the changing nature of warfare, propounding that the nature of war has been and will remain an act of imposing one's will on the adversary. However, the character of war i.e how future wars will be waged and fought has undergone a change due to numerous geo-political and socio-economic factors, technological advancements and military innovations. Future conflicts are likely to involve states or a state-sponsored actor as one of the participants of the conflict. States will also predominantly determine the spectrum, location and duration of conflicts. The last major driver of change that has had the foremost impact on character of war and the future operating environment is technology. Technological developments including artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning, data analytics, additive manufacturing, robotics, unmanned weapon systems, nanotechnology, quantum computing, brain-computer interface, biotechnology etc are rapidly changing the way future wars will be fought. Arguably the most important potential technology of all is AI. AI would overcome the four challenges of data processing – scale, speed, complexity, and endurance – necessary to analyze the increasing data from connected sensors. This will enable unmanned systems to have enhanced mission duration & effectiveness, reduce operating costs and risks to military personnel. Advancement in AI will also enable development of other complex technologies including autonomous systems, additive manufacturing, biotechnology, manufacture of advanced materials etc. Linear wars as known will continue to be an important subset of warfare, however the very nature of warfare has changed and continues to change rapidly as new age technologies provide hitherto unknown tools and cost effective ways to wage wars both directly and indirectly.

Future threats also emanate from both known and covert adversaries in the form of changing the behaviour of a society, the values and beliefs. This could be done by simple means of exploiting the social media platforms in an innocuous and innocent looking long term campaign. Information warfare today is the most critical form of warfare as witnessed in the recent 3rd January 2020, US drone strike in the assassination of the Iranian General Soleimani. Closer home the Indian Air Force executed effective precision strikes at JeM terrorist training camp at Jabba Top, Balakot in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in Pakistan. Though the strikes were perfectly executed but a well laid out information campaign by Pakistan DGISPR won the day and war as all Pakistanis were made to believe that they won the skirmish defeating the might of Indian military. Perceptions matter more than facts. New age warfare is equally a war of narratives, where fires are brought to bear not only in the kinetic domain but also in the virtual domain. Today's world is an interconnected networked world with billions having easy and instant access to numerous apps feeding their narratives and perceptions of events and happenings around the world. Whether you are a strategist or a terrorist, if you don't understand how to deploy the power of social media effectively you may win the odd battle but you will lose a twenty-first century war.

The evolution of advanced information environments is rapidly creating a new category of possible cyber aggression that involves efforts to manipulate or disrupt the information foundations of the effective functioning of economic and social systems. RAND researchers are calling this growing threat *virtual societal warfare* in an analysis of its characteristics and implications for the future. Their analysis suggests an initial set of characteristics that can help define the emerging challenge of virtual societal warfare, including that national security will increasingly rely on a resilient information environment and a strong social topography, and that conflict will increasingly be waged between and among networks. One of the key findings of the paper is that conflict will increasingly be waged between and among networks. State actors are likely to develop such networks to avoid attribution and strengthen their virtual societal warfare capabilities against retaliation. It will be much more difficult to understand, maintain an accurate portrait of, and hit back against a shadowy global network.

In the last few years there has been a revolution of information warfare and well conceptualised and executed campaigns to allegedly interfere with established democratic systems including influencing the US presidential election. "Fake News" and "Truth Decay" are the new normal along with information manipulation, fakery, disinformation and propaganda. Perception management is the key to sway public opinion. Hostile social changes, beliefs and manipulation is a low cost option to target adversaries with harmful social, political, and economic outcomes. War is no longer the

preferred option to change the behaviour of a target country or society. World wide the number of internet and social media users is growing exponentially.



<https://wearesocial-net.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Screen-Shot-2019-01-30-at-11.58.23.png>

There are 5.11 billion mobile users in the world of which 3.48 billion people use social media spending an average of 6 hours 42 minutes online everyday. 47% of Indians use social media. Various nations and watchdogs have raised major concerns with regard privacy and data sovereignty, fake news and many other negative impact of mobile and internet usage, despite the ills people are staying connected and use of social media platforms is a must. The digital world has many advantages but is also a domain which can be easily and effectively exploited to change the behaviour of people, society and nation leading to Sun Tzu's thought of "Winning without fighting".

The role of social media platforms such as Facebook, Whatsapp, Tik Tok in influencing nations with their own narratives is well documented. Many nations are known to have allegedly used misinformation fake news and narratives to propagate their interests and gain political leverage in specific countries. As per a Rand report U.S. intelligence services have concluded that Russia employed such techniques to influence the 2016 election, and Moscow continues to employ them— sometimes brazenly despite U.S. warnings—in the United States and Europe. As significant as these developments have been, they may only represent the beginning of what an aggressive nation can accomplish with techniques and technologies designed to disrupt and shape the information environment of a target country. New age technologies, in particular artificial intelligence, virtual and augmented reality, Big Data and use of Dark web provide easy access and

ample opportunities to inimical elements to wage a silent, low cost war on an adversary. Non state actors can exploit these technologies to achieve their ends.

Most people think that they live in an interconnected networked world with information at their fingertips or voice command. Society is only recognising the many advantages of the information domain, they have yet to feel the full impact of the infosphere, especially a war in the infosphere which has the ability both to paralyse nations as also change the way a society thinks and feels, change the values and behaviour of people , society and nations. The initial hints of what may lie in store has already been witnessed among many countries , mainly the large democracies as they are more open and vulnerable. The exploitation of the infosphere will open unprecedented opportunities for hostile rivals—state or nonstate—to covertly or overtly attack a target nations national interests and assets, cause disruption, delay, inefficiency, and active impose costs. It will provide unrestricted opportunities for virtual aggression that will make countries more persistently vulnerable than they have ever been. Such virtual aggression will force a rethinking of the character of national security and means to safeguard their national character and interests. Simply stated the world is staring at virtual wars waged in the infosphere “ Winning Without Fighting”. This also implies that nation states create capabilities to protect their sovereignty in the virtual world promulgating international rules, laws and regulations to ensure a stable world order.

WORDS 2559

Lt Gen Vinod Bhatia (Retd)  
Director CENJOWS