

Understanding the PRC's Information Operations Against India

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Abstract

This paper examines how the People's Republic of China (PRC) uses information as an instrument of strategic warfare, across military and non-military domains, in the pursuit of strategic advantage over India. Beijing's 'information operations' encompass the creation, manipulation, or selective use of information to discredit New Delhi's international profile, advance territorial claims, and show the PRC in a favourable light to domestic and international audiences. The PRC's diplomatic missions, State/Party-owned & affiliated media organizations, and social media users play an important role in amplifying this pro-PRC narrative. This paper therefore elaborates on the tactics adopted by the above actors in deploying an information operation, ranging from the use of falsely attributed material, the targeting of India's leaders, and the creation of deepfakes. While it is difficult to quantify the success of these information operations, they are of consequence to India's domestic stability and global strategic outlook, and further engender a hostile international environment. Given the PRC's capacity to disrupt India's information ecosystem and infrastructure, this paper recommends that India's deterrence strategy should focus on technological resilience, raising public awareness, and enhancing international cooperation.

Keywords: PRC information operations, China's information warfare, Chinese disinformation, Chinese fake news, India

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1. Introduction

The ongoing military standoff between India and China has necessitated a deeper understanding in New Delhi of Beijing's use of information as an instrument of warfare to secure strategic advantage. The People's Republic of China (PRC) has conventionally used information as a tool of political warfare, to target the Communist Party of China's (CCP) internal and external enemies, and to counter negative perceptions of Beijing's increasing assertiveness globally (Charon and Jeangène Vilmer 2021). While efforts at this information 'warfare' have largely been focused on Taiwan and the United States and its allies, India has been a recent target, following the military confrontation in Eastern Ladakh in 2020.

Beijing's 'information operations' against India primarily encompass the creation, manipulation, or selective use of false information by Beijing, across military and non-military domains, to discredit New Delhi's international profile, advance territorial claims, and project China as a responsible international actor. This paper draws upon three case studies - the Doklam standoff (2017), the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Galwan Valley standoff (2020), to understand how China employs information operations against India for political & strategic gains.

Section 2 delves into the history of Chinese military & strategic thought on information warfare, while *Section 3* examines various definitions of Information Operations. Beijing's motives behind deploying information operations against India are explored in *Section 4*, and *Section 5* attempts to decode the actors involved in information operations, focusing primarily on the role of Chinese diplomatic missions in India, state/Party-owned and affiliated media organizations, and social media, in amplifying Beijing's messaging in India.

Drawing primarily from English-language academic and media sources, *Section 6* elaborates on the tactics deployed, ranging from the use of falsely attributed material to the creation of deepfakes, all with the overarching goal of manipulating public perception and sowing confusion. *Section 7* attempts to decode messaging patterns which focus on asserting Chinese supremacy, and framing a negative discourse around India.

While the success of these information operations is debatable, they are of consequence to India's domestic stability and global strategic outlook. *Section 8* examines how, over the long term, such targeted campaigns have the potential to compromise public perception of India's political leadership, information about the state's ability to defend the nation from external threats, and even impact elections. In the military domain, they serve to reduce morale, heighten threat perceptions, and increase chances of altercation. From a strategic perspective, they also undermine bilateral relations by expanding the trust deficit between the two sides, and could deter political leadership on both sides from investing in confidence building measures (CBMs). Thus, disinformation campaigns engender a hostile international environment, limiting prospects of peace.

It is important to note here that what one perceives as disinformation or malign intentions could likely be disputed by another. Sophisticated information operations often blur the boundaries

between bona fide and manipulated information, posing risks to data collection and interpretation. Thus, despite the best of intentions, writing about disinformation could inadvertently perpetuate distorted narratives. Given these challenges, this paper consciously adopts a diagnostic approach towards recognizing China's capacity to disrupt India's information ecosystems, and emphasizes on the need for New Delhi to invest in strengthening its deterrence capabilities.

2. History

A review of Chinese government literature, media commentaries, and social media messages, shows that the PRC's use of information as an instrument of strategic competition extends to both military and non-military domains. For instance, in 1952, during the Korean War, Beijing had alleged that the United States had been responsible for outbreaks of bubonic plague, anthrax, cholera, and encephalitis in parts of China and North Korea – a charge vehemently denied by Washington D.C. (DiResta, et al. 2020). Over the last decade, the PRC has similarly used information as a tool to legitimize its historical claims over the South China Sea; to reinforce the narrative that Taiwan's 'reunification' with the PRC was imminent; to inflame public opinion in Hong Kong, including against the United States; and to claim its sovereignty over the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh, among others. (Charon and Jeangène Vilmer 2021; UNI 2006; Bhattacharya 2006).

In the military domain, Shen Weiguang, a soldier in a field unit of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), first wrote about the integration of information with conventional warfare in 1985 (Mulvenon and Yang 1999). In his book 'Information warfare', Shen argued that information could be used in concert with military, psychological, and electronic warfare to weaken the enemy's command and control capability (Troxler 2022). The United States' success in disrupting and destroying information systems during the Gulf War precipitated greater analytical focus by the PLA on the subject (Mulvenon and Yang 1999).

References to 'information warfare' subsequently found a mention in a paper published by Major General Wang Pufeng at the Academy of Military Science, Beijing, in 1995, where he explained how information could be used in counter-reconnaissance operations, to plant false intelligence within the opponent's side and inspire incorrect assessments (Pufeng 1995). His colleagues, Senior Colonels Wang Baocun and Li Fei, elaborated upon the concept by describing information warfare as "combat operations in a high-tech battlefield environment in which both sides use information-technology means, equipment, or systems in a rivalry over the power to obtain, control, and use information." (Baocun and Fei 1995).

Wang and Li further held that information war or warfare had both a narrow and a broad meaning. In the narrow sense, it destroyed and/or disrupted the enemy's information systems and flow whilst protecting one's own, while the broader sense pointed towards warfare dominated by information in which digitized units used information [smart] equipment (Baocun and Fei 1995). Author Dean Cheng reasoned that the broader meaning of the term translated into a "strategic information war" that made use of information and information technology in the political, economic, S&T (science &

technology), diplomatic, cultural, and military arenas to secure information advantage (Cheng 2014). Information war (xinxizhan; 信息战) therefore involved making information itself the focus of warfare (Cheng 2014).

3. Defining Information Operations

Western scholars have used diverse terminology such as ‘sharp power’ (Walker and Ludwig 2017), ‘influence operations’ (Charon and Jeangène Vilmer 2021), ‘information shaping’ (Ohlberg, et al. 2023), and ‘information manipulation’ (Ohlberg, et al. 2023), ‘to describe Beijing’s efforts at using information to seek strategic gains. This paper subscribes to RAND Corporation’s all-encompassing terminology of “Information Operations and Warfare”, which includes the collection of tactical information about an adversary, as well as the dissemination of propaganda in pursuit of a competitive advantage over an opponent (RAND Corporation n.d.). Since efforts at “information collection, management and analysis, transmission and exploitation” are also a peacetime undertaking (as explained below; Cheng 2014), this paper chooses to label them simply as ‘Information Operations.’

An information operation could use three types of information – misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation – to determine the scale and intensity of the attack. According to the United States’ Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), Misinformation is false, but not created or shared with the intention of causing harm; Disinformation is deliberately created to mislead, harm, or manipulate a person, social group, organization, or country; and Malinformation is based on fact, but used out of context to mislead, harm, or manipulate (Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) n.d.).

In Chinese government parlance, the terms “rumors” and “fake news” have often been used to refer to mis/dis/malinformation, and alleged ‘rumor mongers’ have been subject to various penalties and crackdowns (Repnikova 2018). In 2016 and 2017, the PRC enacted several laws to combat online rumors and regulate internet news services, which required social media platforms to repost government-acknowledged news, and prohibited the dissemination of independent articles (Repnikova 2018). In 2018, Beijing also introduced a regulation mandating microblogging service providers to establish an “anti-rumor mechanism,” placing responsibility on companies for filtering and regulating online information (Repnikova 2018).

From the government side, the Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) launched a special campaign in May 2023 to clean up online information, closing more than 100,000 online social media accounts that disseminated “fake news” and impersonated state-controlled media, underscoring federal concern over information distortion and manipulation (Orr and Baptista 2023).

4. Objectives

Experts at the Institute for Strategic Research (IRSEM) in Paris have reported that the PRC uses information operations (they call these 'influence operations') to target the Communist Party of China's (CCP) internal and external enemies, control groups that could defy its authority, construct a coalition around the Party to serve its interests, and project influence abroad – an approach they term as “United Front” (Charon and Jeangène Vilmer 2021). They added that Information operations (IO) are essentially a “wartime and peacetime undertaking” which encompass “public opinion, psychological and legal warfare” (Charon and Jeangène Vilmer 2021). Other scholars have similarly argued that the PRC wants to reshape the world by using mis/dis/malinformation to promote a “brand of technology-enabled authoritarianism”, and advance its irredentist aspirations, citing several instances in Taiwan, the United States, etc. (DiResta, et al. 2020; Charon and Jeangène Vilmer 2021).

The PRC's attempts at information operations against India have been insufficiently studied, primarily because IO as a concept gained prominence only after the 2016 elections in the United States, leading Western scholars to understandably study the impact of IO on their own countries and allies first. While Indian strategic experts and diplomatic correspondents are increasingly cognizant of the risks posed by Beijing's information operations against India, the topic is often subsumed under the broader category of influence peddling and operations.

That said, think tanks affiliated to the Indian military such as the Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS, affiliated to the Indian Army), and the Observer Research Foundation have focused on the PRC's information warfare strategies and cyber-attack capabilities, providing insights into the platforms used, military units likely to be involved in the process, and implications for India. (Yadav 2021; Ahuja and Diwan 2023; Bommakanti 2023). Media correspondents and historians have also provided comprehensive accounts of Chinese discourse and perceptions of India, like Shastri Ramachandran's 'Let There Be Light: Prisms of India-China Cultural Relations' which record instances from 2009-10 from the author's time in Beijing (Ramachandran 2023).

These, however, offer little evidence of the PRC's current objectives and methods to carry out information operations in India. This paper therefore seeks to address this gap by examining PRC objectives in carrying out information operations against India, tactics involved, recurring themes, and understand if/how these translate into strategic gains for Beijing.

An analysis of CCP and state documents, elite opinion, media reports, and social media content on India show that Beijing sought to deploy information operations against India in three instances – the military standoff in Doklam (2017), the Covid-19 pandemic (starting 2019), and the military confrontation in Galwan (2020). Attempts to deploy information operations are also evident in relatively peaceful periods in 2018-19, though the scale and intensity differ. This paper therefore chooses to analyze the above-cited literature between January 2017-August 2023 to understand how information operations are deployed against India for strategic gains.

Victory or dominance in information operations essentially meant securing one or more of the following objectives:

1. **Imposing reputational costs on India** by portraying New Delhi as a meddler in the sovereign affairs of another state (Doklam) and/or violating the PRC's territorial integrity (Galwan).
2. **Maintaining the military power differential** by spreading disinformation about deployment of weapons along the Line of Actual Control to assert Beijing's strong position, and to undermine India's military morale by showing dramatic footage of military casualties.
3. **Advancing territorial claims** in Ladakh, Arunachal Pradesh, and Doklam trijunction via documents and imagery that counter India's sovereign claims.
4. **Portray a positive image of China:** China has employed information operations to effectively shape its narrative and promote its interests, with the goal of showing China in a positive light to domestic and international audiences.
5. **Distract domestic audiences** from Beijing's mismanagement of the pandemic, by spreading conspiracy theories about the origin of the virus in the Indian subcontinent and framing a negative discourse on India's management of the COVID-19 pandemic (Graham-Harrison and McKie 2020).

Beijing therefore employed offensive and defensive information operations to discredit New Delhi's international profile, advance its own sovereign interests, and protect its own reputation.

5. Actors

Several agencies (State and Party-run and affiliated) are responsible for implementing Information operations. IRSEM explained that these include (but are not limited to) the Central Propaganda Department, the United Front Work Department, International Liaison Department, Communist Youth League, Ministry of State Security, and Taiwan Affairs Office; public and private companies like Beidou and Huawei, and digital platforms such as WeChat, Weibo, and TikTok, help in data collection (Charon and Jeangène Vilmer 2021).

The PRC's defense white paper in 2015 had indicated that Beijing would employ integrated combat forces to "prevail in system-vs-system operations featuring information dominance, precision strikes and joint operations" (The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China 2015). Military reforms undertaken that year subsequently included the establishment of the PLA Strategic Support Force (PLASSF) as a new, separate service to focus on the conduct of information warfare. (Harold, Beauchamp-Mustafaga and Hornung 2021). On April 19, 2024, PRC President and Chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC) Xi Jinping announced (Ou and Li 2021) the end of the PLASSF, a move which resulted in the creation of a new Information

Support Force (ISF, 信息支援部队) and the alteration of the reporting relationships of two of its departments, where the SSF's Aerospace Systems and Network Systems departments were reportedly re-designated as the Aerospace Force and Cyberspace Force, respectively, and all three bodies would report directly to the PLA's CMC. (Nouwens 2024)

Central to India's case is Chinese diplomatic and media (traditional and digital) presence in India, which has attempted to create a pro-China narrative, albeit with varying degrees of success. The Chinese embassy in New Delhi, and Consulates in Mumbai and Kolkata, have been important government representatives in the information space, with official publications serving as important repositories on a range of issues from positions on the border, status of bilateral ties, to the missions' public diplomacy initiatives and views. They have also invested substantially in expanding their digital media presence in India, with former Chinese ambassador to India, Sun Weidong, ranking among the 'Top 10' most-followed Chinese diplomats on Twitter (the account currently has 96.1K followers (Sun 2017)), not too far behind his colleague in the United States with 117.8K followers (Chinese Embassy in US 2019). Observers have reported that Chinese diplomats in India have been 'wolf-warriors' by daring to take on senior Indian ministers on what they perceive as contentious issues, or have engaged Indian politicians – particularly from the Left parties in India, using Communist linkages – to convey Beijing's position (PTI 2005; Gupta, Why foreign diplomats become wolf warriors in India 2023; Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2017).

To solicit favorable elite opinion, the PRC has also extended outreach to foreign nationals who speak up on the PRC's behalf, or transmit PRC messages (Ohlberg, et al. 2023). Media reports have detailed how the PRC has attempted to build a positive narrative of Beijing by 'grooming surrogates' i.e. proxy scholars (researchers) in think-tanks, university professors, and other policy experts to write pro-PRC articles, in return for monetary compensation of up to US \$400 (nearly ₹33,000). (DiResta, et al. 2020; Mukhopadhyay 2023).

According to Freedom House, prior to the Galwan clash and the pandemic, Chinese state actors have also actively engaged in efforts to cultivate ties with Indian journalists (Ghosal Singh and Cook, Beijing's Global Media Influence 2022 2022). Ananth Krishnan, The Hindu's former correspondent in Beijing, noted that the objective was to "Tell China's story well" (Krishnan, New Messengers: The Role of Traditional and New Media in China's External Messaging During India–China Border Crises 2023). Krishnan further reported an alleged arrangement between the Chinese Embassy in New Delhi and the Indian media, which enabled reporters to live in Beijing for 10 months, along with monthly stipends and all expenses-covered tours twice every month to different Chinese provinces. The first two cohorts of the program were also reportedly awarded degrees in International Relations from Renmin University in Beijing, although this was subsequently discontinued. (Krishnan, New Messengers: The Role of Traditional and New Media in China's External Messaging During India–China Border Crises 2023).

Within China, media outlets sought to hire Indian journalists and editors to refine messaging in the English language for external audiences. Krishnan noted that CGTN (China Global Television

network) had employed at least four senior Indian editors in its headquarters in Beijing, while China Daily had at least three senior Indian editors on board (Krishnan, *New Messengers: The Role of Traditional and New Media in China's External Messaging During India–China Border Crises* 2023). However, bilateral tensions have currently impacted the stationing of journalists in both countries. (Krishnan, *Last Chinese reporter 'expelled' after India denies visa extension* 2023). Commentaries and op-eds on India, nevertheless, find frequent mentions in Chinese media outlets like the *Global Times*, *People's Daily*, *Xinhua* (all with close ties to the state or the Party), and play an important role in deciphering elite and media opinion.

In an op-ed on Chinese influence operations, Indian journalist Shishir Gupta further noted that influence peddling through the media was legitimate in Chinese power play. (Gupta, *Influence peddling through the media is legitimate in Chinese power play* 2023). When it comes to media presence, the PRC had built a sizeable information network in India, stationing as many as 14 Chinese journalists in India at one time (though the number now stands at zero) (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China 2023; Krishnan, *Last Chinese reporter 'expelled' after India denies visa extension* 2023). This was supplemented by its own extensive use of the Indian media, with Chinese diplomats publishing regular op-eds and advertorials in leading English dailies *The Hindu*, *the Times of India*, *the Free Press Journal*, and *the Economic Times*, and giving interviews to local media outlets (Ghosal Singh and Cook 2022; Krishnan, *New Messengers: The Role of Traditional and New Media in China's External Messaging During India–China Border Crises* 2023). However, there is limited direct media ownership by the Chinese public or private sector, given that Indian investment laws cap foreign direct investment in the media sector to 26% (UNCTAD 2020).

To overcome language barriers, Chinese state media outlets operate accounts on social media in Hindi, Bengali, Tamil, and Urdu, and have a vast number of followers. (Ghosal Singh and Cook, *Beijing's Global Media Influence* 2022 2022). The state broadcasting conglomerate China Media Group (CMG) Hindi's Facebook page, for instance, has 11 million followers (CMG Hindi 2013), while CMG Tamil has 10 million followers (CMG Tamil 2015). Undertaking an assessment of the PRC's IOs in several Indian languages is an ambitious, time-consuming task, limited by language constraints. Further, the author's own limited proficiency (beginner-level) in the Chinese language impedes a qualitative assessment of China's domestic content. This paper therefore restricts itself to PRC information operations only in the English language, in India and at home.

In the wake of the military standoff in Galwan in June 2020, India had banned 220 Chinese apps (over three separate announcements) including TikTok, WeChat, and Weibo, citing them as “prejudicial to sovereignty and integrity of India, defense of India, security of state and public order.” (Press Information Bureau (PIB) 2020; PIB 2020; PIB 2020). The decision, coupled with the PRC's prior restrictions/bans on Twitter and Facebook, and social media platforms' own censorship, severely limited the stream of information, particularly public opinion, from both sides. While this paper has attempted to address the issue by using archived material, secondary sources, and accessing open-source information on Twitter/Facebook accounts of Chinese institutions and individuals, the author nevertheless wishes to underscore the asymmetry of information available in government and

private domains, and acknowledges that access to public opinion from social media apps would have enabled a deeper understanding of the PRC's information operations against India.

6. Tactics of PRC Information Operations

IO can be used to sway public opinion through a variety of tactics, ranging from misleading clickbait messaging to misattributing information, or creating false narratives. This paper draws upon techniques identified by CISA and RAND that pose risks to information infrastructure and systems in the Indian context (CISA 2022; Paul, et al. 2022).

- a) **Use and amplification of falsely attributed, fabricated material:** In a study on 'The Role of Information in U.S. Concepts for Strategic Competition', RAND noted that operations in the information environment (OIE), particularly disinformation and propaganda, included planting, distributing, or promoting misleading news stories (Paul, et al. 2022). This technique was evident during the military standoff in Galwan, where Indian media have reported at least three Twitter handles that spread misleading information on New Delhi's defense capability and military preparedness.

For example, @evazhengll (whose account currently stands suspended), reported to be a Chinese national and Fudan university alumnus, misled audiences through a video on Twitter showing ten Indian soldiers being administered hyperbaric oxygen treatment by the PLA in Galwan valley, and adding that the PLA had not suffered any casualties in the clash (Zheng 2020). FirstPost noted that the video, which had received around 100,000 likes and was re-tweeted by prominent journalists in India and the UK, was actually a CGTN video from three years prior (Choudhury 2020). This author corroborates with the findings, given that the video was that of an oxygen chamber used by the Tibetan Armed Police. (CNTV Lhasa 2017).

In another instance of propagating disinformation, @CNPakWW (currently suspended) belonging to 美丽的男 何金涛 (Měilì de nán hé jīntāo or beautiful man He Jintao) a self-proclaimed harbinger of 'China-Pak Friendship' tweeted a video of US Military Apache Choppers flying over Lake Havasu in Arizona claiming these were Chinese helicopters patrolling over Pangong Tso, garnering about 5400 views (美丽的男 何金涛 2020; Dahiya 2020).

Similarly, @osint belonging to a 'Cathy Rolanova', who claimed to be an open-source intelligence expert, published misleading images about the confrontation and claimed that the PRC had 'occupied' Pangong Tso lake using satellite images of an Indo-Tibetan Border Police camp. (Dahiya, 'Cathy Rolanova' – The Many Lies of a Self-Proclaimed OSINT Expert 2020).

Within the realm of conventional media, a December 2020 article in the Global Times spotlighted a research endeavor conducted by scientists from the Chinese Academy of

Sciences, Fudan University, and the University of Texas in Houston., which postulated that the earliest inception of human-to-human transmission of the COVID-19 virus may have occurred on the Indian subcontinent. (Liu 2020). It is noteworthy that this study, having not undergone peer review, was initially disseminated via a preprint platform, only to be subsequently retracted at the request of its authors (SSRN n.d.). Nonetheless, the Global Times proceeded to characterize this withdrawal as a matter steeped in scientific intricacies, thereby absolving itself of any culpability in the dissemination of potentially misleading information. (Liu 2020).

- b) **Using prominent thought leaders and influencers:** Key personalities in the media and military have also helped in the spread of mis/dis/malinformation, though it is difficult to differentiate between actors sharing information based on personal motivations and those who do so at the state/Party's behest.

For example, Shen Shiwei, a key media personality on political and economic issues, shared a video on January 1, 2022, showing PLA soldiers raising the Chinese flag in an unspecified location in Galwan Valley (Shen 2022). The video reportedly garnered 1.7 million views on Twitter, and triggered a heated political debate in India on its military preparedness and capabilities. (Krishnan, *New Messengers: The Role of Traditional and New Media in China's External Messaging During India–China Border Crises* 2023). It also led the opposition to ask the Modi government to “break its silence” and explain how PRC troops unfurled a Chinese flag in Galwan valley (Mohan 2022).

Similarly, on May 31, 2020, 15 days before Galwan, Twitter user handle @dafengcao posted that the Indian side had first broken the consensus on the border, along with a picture of injured soldiers, presumably Indian. (Cao, *There seems to be some kind of consensus on both sides before, however, the Indian broke it first after releasing the footage* 2020). While news outlets in India have raised questions regarding the authenticity of the image, it is important to note Dafeng is a regular commentator on PLA-issues, having a sizeable following on Twitter, including prominent Indian strategic experts, underlining how key individuals play an important role in information operations (inadvertently or otherwise.) (Banerjee 2020; Cao n.d.).

- c) **Pro-PRC Opinion Through Indian Nationals:** The PRC has also used Indian nationals to amplify its anti-New Delhi messaging, though it is again difficult to distinguish between messages shared due to personal motivations and Party/state-led narratives. For instance, an Indian national Gaurav Tyagi finds multiple mentions in the People's Daily and the Global Times espousing pro-PRC opinions, including suggesting that India change its name to 'Backwardistan' considering the nation's prevailing socio-economic challenges, and by calling on Chinese companies to focus on domestic resources rather than allocating investments to

India. (Tyagi, Letter to the Editor: Indian media should focus on synergy rather than confrontation with China 2017; (Tyagi, Chinese companies should focus on domestic resources rather than investing in India 2016).

- d) **Disguising/Hiding the source:** This technique has often been deployed by the Chinese embassy in New Delhi, to mislead audiences about the original source of published material.

To illustrate, this author found eight instances between 2017-23 where the embassy had misstated that the Indian media had “published” ‘special pages’ on key historical events like the founding of the PRC, or CCP, or Tibet, concealing that these were ‘advertorials’ and had been labeled so by the media houses that published them. (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2022; Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2022; Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2022; Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2021; Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2021; Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2020; Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2020; Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2019).

Similarly, in at least three instances, the embassy chose to state that it ‘received’ interviews from media houses or reporters, when these were simply public diplomacy initiatives (like a photo exhibition), or the embassy seeking to present the official government version on the military confrontation in Doklam and Galwan (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2022; Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2017; Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2022). The embassy has also used the “Response(s) to media query” format multiple times, where in a web page follows a Q&A format on a particular issue, but offered no details on who sought these queries, when, and why (screenshot below).



Home > Embassy News

Response to media query by Spokesperson of Chinese Embassy in India Counsellor Wang Xiaojian on the raid by the Directorate of Enforcement of India on vivo India

2022-07-06 22:57

Q: On July 5 ,the Directorate of Enforcement of India conducted raided 44 production and operation sites related to vivo and its dealers across the country on suspicion of money laundering. Do you have any comments?

A: On July 5, the Directorate of Enforcement (ED) raided vivo and its dealers at 44 production and operation sites across the country for allegedly violating the provisions of The Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). We are following the issue closely.

The Chinese government always asks Chinese enterprises to abide by laws and regulations overseas and firmly supports Chinese enterprises in safeguarding their legitimate rights and interests.

The frequent investigations by the Indian side into Chinese enterprises not only disrupt the enterprises' normal business activities and damage the goodwill of the enterprises, but also impedes the improvement of business environment in India and chills the confidence and willingness of market entities from other countries, including Chinese enterprises to invest and operate in India.

The essence of China-India economic and trade cooperation is for mutual benefit and win-win results. The bilateral trade volume between China and India strikes a historical record of over 100 billion USD in 2021, which reflects the huge potential and broad prospect of economic and trade cooperation between our two countries. China wishes the Indian side to investigate and enforce the law in compliance with laws and regulations, and effectively provide an fair, just and non-discriminatory business environment for Chinese enterprises to invest and operate in India.

All these instances exemplify how disinformation can be perpetuated by distorting the origin of information, thereby undermining the public's ability to discern truth from falsehood.

- e) **Undermining India's image and Indian Leadership's Credibility:** The PRC has also attempted to manipulate public perception and sow confusion by undermining India's leadership, in print and digital media.

On July 21, 2017, *The Global Times* in an editorial claimed then-External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj had 'lied' to the parliament about India's alleged 'invasion' of 'Chinese territory' in Doklam (Global Times 2017). The paper further went on to undermine the Indian leader by stating that that New Delhi's impetuous action had stunned the international community. (Global Times 2017). In reality, however, the original statement reflected Indian concerns over the PRC's action in the tri-junction point, and its alignment in the Sikkim sector, which were unsettled as per Point 13 of the 2012 Border agreement. (MEA Sushma Swaraj's statement on military standoff with China at Doklam 2017).

Further, *The Global Times* in a July 2021 editorial also distorted a statement made by Union Minister of State for State Transport and Highways V. K. Singh, on the number of times India had defended its territory, claiming this was evidence of admission by India as being the true aggressor in the Galwan standoff (The Hindu Special Correspondent 2021; Ai 2021).

On August 16, 2017, *China Xinhua News* also released a video titled “7 Sins of India” featuring a Chinese actor in a Sikh turban, speaking in a mock Indian accent, and accused New Delhi of “trampling” international law (China Xinhua News 2017). The video was criticized as racist, and parodying the Sikh community, both in India and abroad (BBC 2017).

In May 2021, the PRC's Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission also mocked the COVID 19 pandemic in India, by juxtaposing a photograph of a Chinese rocket poised to blast into space with a cremation pyre in India, with the title “Lighting a fire in China VS lighting a fire in India” (BBC 2021). While the post was quickly taken down by the Communist Party-run news service that posted it, it lingered as a provocative example of the PRC's unsympathetic and critical attitude towards India. (Buckley 2021).

- f) **Targeting Indian Media:** In his analysis on the role of media in the Vietnam war, *Washington Post* reporter Joel Achenbach has argued that “Partisan journalists, wielding verbal flamethrowers, view their “objective” counterparts as retailers of false balance.” This has been particularly true in the PRC's context, where the Chinese embassy in New Delhi has criticized the Indian media on at least 22 instances between January 2017 and August 2023 for sensationalizing the status of the bilateral relations, particularly during military confrontations, diminishing the PRC's reputation, or for its alleged misreporting of the PRC's core interests in Taiwan, Xinjiang, and the South China Sea. The table below lists these headlines:

Date	Headline
January 15, 2023	Spokesperson of Chinese Embassy in India refuting the allegations against China made by the US State Department official during his visit to India (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2023)
June 9, 2022	Spokesperson of Chinese Embassy in India Counselor Wang Xiaojian solemnly refuting groundless allegations against China made by the US military official during his visit to India. (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2022)
April 5, 2021	Spokesperson of Chinese Embassy in India solemnly refutes wrong comments of Indian media on Taiwan-related issues (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2021)
April 2, 2021	Chinese Embassy Spokesperson's remarks on Indian media reports on joint WHO-China study report of origins of Covid-19 released by WHO (Consulate-General of the People's Republic of China in Mumbai 2021)
March 23, 2021	Spokesperson of Chinese Embassy in India solemnly refutes wrong comments of Indian media on Xinjiang-related issues (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2021)
March 2, 2021	Response to media query by Spokesperson of Chinese Embassy in India on some Indian media hyping so-called “Chinese hackers launch cyber

	attacks on Indian facilities" (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2021)
January 27, 2021	Response to media query by Spokesperson of Chinese Embassy in India Counselor Ji Rong on media reports that India will continue to ban Mobile Apps with Chinese Background (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2021)
December 30, 2020	Spokesperson of Chinese Embassy in India Counselor Ji Rong solemnly refutes wrong comments of Indian media on Tibet(Xizang)-related issues (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2020)
December 17, 2020	Response to media query by Spokesperson of Chinese Embassy in India on Indian media hyping "CPC members infiltrating some Indian agencies" (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2020)
October 27, 2020	Statement of the Chinese Embassy in India solemnly refuting China-related false allegations of US senior officials during their visit to India (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2020)
October 16, 2020	Statement of Spokesperson of Chinese Embassy in India Counselor Ji Rong on Indian media interview advocating "Taiwan independence" (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2020)
September 3, 2020	Spokesperson of Chinese Embassy in India Counselor Ji Rong refutes the China-related false remarks from US Senior Official at the U.S. -India Strategic Partnership Forum (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2020)
August 25, 2020	Spokesperson of Chinese Embassy in India Counselor Ji Rong solemnly refutes article advocating "Taiwan Independence" published in Indian media (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2020)
May 14, 2020	Statement made by Spokesperson of Chinese Embassy in India Counselor Ji Rong on Indian media interview advocating so-called "Taiwan's participation in WHO" (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2020)
May 2, 2020	Spokesperson of Chinese Embassy in India Counselor Ji Rong refuted article advocating "Taiwan's participation in WHO" published in Indian media (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2020)
April 28, 2020	Statement of Spokesperson of Chinese Embassy in India Counselor Ji Rong on Indian media interview advocating so-called "Taiwan's participation in WHO" (The Consulate General of the People's Republic of China in Kolkata 2020)
April 14, 2020	Response to media query by Spokesperson of Chinese Embassy in India Counselor Ji Rong on the timeline of COVID-19 pandemic (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2020)
April 3, 2020	Spokesperson of Chinese Embassy in India Counselor Ji Rong refuted some media blaming China for so-called concealment of Covid-19 situation (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2020)
March 30, 2020	Statement of Spokesperson of Chinese Embassy in India Counselor Ji Rong on some Indian media articles advocating so-called "Taiwan's

	participation in WHO" (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2020)
March 25, 2020	Refutation by Counselor Ji Rong, Spokesperson of the Embassy of China in India, on stigmatizing China for COVID-19 (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2020)
February 29, 2020	Spokesperson of Chinese Embassy in India Counselor Ji Rong Sent Representation Letter to Indian media Refuting article advocating "Taiwan Independence" (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2020)
September 17, 2019	Spokesperson of Chinese Embassy in India Counselor Ji Rong Sent a Representation Letter to the Editor of Asian Age (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2019)

While attempting to quantify Chinese media commentary on Indian media lies beyond the scope of this paper, headlines like

- "Indian media should focus on synergy rather than confrontation with China" (Tyagi, Letter to the Editor: Indian media should focus on synergy rather than confrontation with China 2017),
- "Indian media rumormongering risks sparking conflicts, damaging ties" (Li 2020),
- "Indian media's malicious distortion over China releasing information, casualties a typical face-saving exercise" (Long 2021),
- "Anti-China melodrama toxic chicken soup for India" (Global Times 2023) suggest a bellicose narrative.

Chinese media publications have also targeted Indian experts for allegedly fabricating research on Xinjiang, taking money from Taiwan, and challenging the One-China principle, among other issues. (People's Daily Online 2021; Hasija 2020; Qingqing 2020)

- g) **Facts with Chinese characteristics:** In a bid to legitimize its narrative, the PRC, on occasion, has presented its own versions of 'facts' and 'truth' as a counter to Indian government and media literature.

On July 7, Xinhua News ran an article "demystifying the truth" about the Doklam stand-off, where it claimed that India had illegally entered Chinese territory on the pretext of protecting Bhutan – the video has recorded 84,642 views on Weibo as of January 2024 (Xinhua News Agency 2017; Ranjan 2017). However, as Dr. Rajiv Ranjan (Assistant Professor, Shanghai University) noted, it failed to inform its readers that the region was in

fact disputed, as per the 1988 and 1998 agreements between the PRC and Bhutan (Ranjan 2017).

Similar 'truth seeking' documents have also been published by the Chinese embassy and consulates in India (e.g.: Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Gave a Step-by-Step Account of the Galwan Valley Incident; COVID-19, 15 Truth You Need to Know; The Facts and China's Position Concerning the Indian Border Troops' Crossing of the China-India Boundary in the Sikkim Sector into the Chinese Territory) which aim to 'set the record straight', albeit in Beijing's favor (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2020; Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2020; Consulate-General of the People's Republic of China in Mumbai 2017).

h) **Creating deepfakes:** Advances in information technology have also created new avenues for PRC information access, control, and manipulation. In late 2022, Graphika observed limited instances of so-called 'spamouflage', that included audio-visual footage of fictitious people almost certainly created using artificial intelligence techniques. This includes the video of an AI-created avatar 'Anna' promoting an India-based consulting company, and a 'Dr. Dass', an Indian-looking individual wearing a turban (Graphika 2023; Synthesia n.d.). Graphika noted that commercially available AI products like these would allow IO actors to create increasingly high-quality deceptive content at greater scale and speed. (Graphika 2023).

The collection of voice samples from military-sensitive regions of India, including Jammu & Kashmir and Punjab, by a Beijing-based AI company SpeechOcean, with close links to the PLA, has raised concerns that the PRC could use these to engage in "automated extra-territorial mass surveillance" and exponentially increase the spread of disinformation (Bhardwaj 2022). Graphika added that IO actors will continue to experiment with AI technologies, producing increasingly convincing media artifacts that are harder to detect and verify, making counter-offensive operations more difficult (Graphika 2023).

Table 1 below details various actors involved in information operations and the techniques likely to be deployed by them in an information operation based on the author's current research.

		Technique							
		Use and amplification of falsely attributed, fabricated material	Using prominent thought leaders and influencers	Pro-PRC Opinion Through Indian Nationals	Disguising/Hiding the source	Undermining India's image/ Indian Leadership's Credibility	Targeting Indian Media	Facts with Chinese characteristics	Creating Deepfakes
Actor	Chinese diplomatic missions in India								
	Chinese media organizations/ journalists								
	Chinese individuals/private organizations								

Indicates use by actor

Indicates non-usage by actor

7. Message Patterns

- a) **Government Messaging not a good reflector of status of bilateral ties:** In his essay on ‘Information Manipulation Theory’, interpersonal communication scholar Steven McCornack argued that when deceiving others, people played with or “manipulated” relevant information in myriad ways within their discourse (McCornack 2015). This deception discourse design is relevant to the PRC’s government messaging against India. In the three years since the military standoff in Galwan, India has steadfastly maintained that any normalization of bilateral ties will be contingent on the restoration of peace and tranquility on the border (Ministry of External Affairs 2022), while Beijing’s messaging reflects tonal inconsistencies. Documents published by the Chinese embassy reveal a range of standpoints, starting from “temporary difficulties” (Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in India 2020), to the two sides standing at “crossroads” (Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in India 2020), and calls for bringing China-relations back “on track” (Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in India 2020), and finally showing “new progress”, “positive momentum”, “recovery momentum” (Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in India 2022), and the situation at the border “overall stable” (Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in India 2023). This indicates that Beijing’s official messaging is not a reliable indicator of its actual intent, given that messages on “positive momentum” or “stability” in ties are in stark contrast with its massive troop deployment and ramping up of infrastructure along the border. (Krishnan, View From India | Will India’s frozen ties with China see a thaw? 2023)
- b) **Advancing sovereign claims over Indian territory:** While precise intentions of opaque, authoritarian regimes are often difficult to discern, the PRC’s information operations divulge obvious intentions at undermining India’s territorial integrity (Brands and Sullivan 2020).

For instance, Chinese domestic press reportage supporting Beijing's decision to standardize names of 11 Indian cities in Arunachal Pradesh with Chinese names, and its depiction of Arunachal Pradesh and Aksai Chin as PRC territory in the 2023 edition of Chinese maps contradict its calls for improving bilateral relations (Dayal, et al. 2023; Xijin 2023; Global Times 2023; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China 2023). In government statements too, claims of the PRC's 'effective jurisdiction' over Doklam, and its portrayal of India as the aggressor in the Galwan valley standoff, and Beijing's subsequent but 'justifiable' use of force suggest that the PRC will continue to challenge India's sovereign claims over territory it deems as its own (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2017; Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2020).

As scholars at the International Republican Institute noted, *"the simple knowledge that the PRC can and does retaliate against "enemies" is itself a form of information shaping, as punishment of one country for crossing the PRC's rhetorical red lines must be factored into other countries' calculations"* (Ohlberg, et al. 2023). Such efforts therefore reflect a strategic approach to influence India's behavior, while simultaneously reaffirming the PRC's resolve to protect its territorial integrity and sovereignty.

- c) **Protecting the PRC's 'core' interests:** The PRC's information operations against India reflect its uncompromising stance on the protection of what Beijing perceives to be its 'core' interests particularly in Taiwan, Xinjiang, Hong Kong, Tibet, and the South China Sea. Embassy documents, in particular, show the PRC's unwillingness to make any concessions on its sovereign and territorial claims in the above areas, going in so far as to justify the use of force to defend them (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2022).

While India has avoided references to the 'One China' policy since 2010, it has nevertheless maintained a 'studied silence' on issues pertaining to the PRC's core interests, not only to avoid directly antagonizing Beijing, but because of its own policy of non-interference (Haidar and Krishnan 2022). However, this author found that the Chinese embassy in New Delhi issued **14 press releases** upholding its claim on Taiwan (*Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2022; Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2022; Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2022; Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2022; Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2021; Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2021; Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2020; Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2020; Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2020; The Consulate General of the People's Republic of China in Kolkata 2020; The Consulate General of the People's Republic of China in Kolkata 2020; Embassy of the People's Republic of China*

in India 2020; Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2020; Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2019) **7 clarifications on Xinjiang** (including propaganda videos) (*Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2021; Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2021; Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2019; Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2019; Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2019; Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2019; Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2018*), and **6 statements & interviews on Hong Kong** (*Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2020; Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2020; Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2020; Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2019; Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2019; Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2020*), **5 mentions of Tibet** (*Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2020; Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2019; Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2018; Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2018; Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2018*), and **1 on the South China Sea** (*Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2020*), between 2017-August 2023. A simple search on any Chinese media outlet further reflects the same undeviating, non-negotiable stance, indicating the sustained prioritization and protection of China's core interests.

- d) **Poor perception of India:** Chinese disinformation campaigns in the media often exhibit a perception bias against India, premised upon allegations of alleged lack of infrastructure, poor safety standards, and domestic disturbances.

In August 2023, Logically published a report explaining how the PRC's disinformation narratives around infrastructure failures in the Odisha train crash, and the Bihar bridge collapse, coupled with domestic unrest in Manipur riots, had contributed to a negative public opinion about India (Dayal, et al. 2023). This poor perception exacerbates India's 'underdeveloped' image in Chinese discourse, deepening public impressions about the limitations of its political system, the inability of a section of its bureaucracy to match up to the pace its polity, and Beijing's incomparability regionally (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2017).

As Beijing-based journalist Mu Chunshan explained, Chinese public discourse on India's "outrageous rape statistics" and use of alternative medicine such as "cow urine to treat COVID-19" only served to magnify its backward image, and fuel existing beliefs that India fell short of China in nearly all aspects, except its larger population (Mu 2023). In essence, a prevailing sentiment among most Chinese people is one of superiority and self-confidence in relation to India (Mu 2023).

Observers have further argued that the PRC is also increasingly assessing India through the prism of its fraught and worsening relations with the United States. (Saran 2022). From

Beijing's perspective, India's evolving relationship with the U.S. is a significant factor in assessing India's global and regional role, and its strengthening ties with the U.S. present a potential challenge to Beijing's regional influence (Ghosal Singh, *Analysing the current Chinese discourse on India* 2023). Chinese discourse on the India-U.S. partnership subsequently focuses on joint efforts by the two sides to 'contain' China, Washington's unreliability as a partner, the limited durability of ties, and even India's reluctance in siding with the U.S over Ukraine. (China Daily 2022; Qian 2023; Naderi 2020; Global Times 2022.)

- e) **Asserting the PRC's supremacy:** The Chinese Embassy in India has strategically utilized media channels and diplomatic outreach to showcase China's achievements and establish its influence in the Indian media landscape. Through cultural events, media partnerships, and active engagement on social platforms, the embassy has aimed to present a positive image of the PRC, which includes highlighting PRC's economic growth, technological advancements, and military prowess. (Ma 2023; Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2017; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China 2022). However, Beijing has also employed various coercive measures, including media editorials, to exert pressure on India and caution against misjudging China's restraint as a sign of weakness (Hu 2020). These editorials, often found in state-controlled media, serve as a platform for articulating China's concerns and issuing veiled warnings. They typically highlight the need for India to avoid arrogance in its foreign policy decisions, especially in areas of mutual interest and/or contention, such as border disputes. By adopting a coercive message framework, Beijing essentially seeks to dissuade India from taking aggressive stances that might escalate tensions.
- f) **Persuasion:** All states exert power through a mixture of coercion and inducement, and the PRC's information operations against India, particularly in persuading it to join the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), reflect attempts at gaining influence through attraction rather than by coercion alone. (Ohlberg, et al. 2023; Nye Jr. 2022). PRC government documents between 2017-19 have routinely highlighted potential benefits of participation in Beijing's ambitious infrastructure initiative, highlighting its convergences with New Delhi's 'Act East Policy', focusing on development and multi-polarity, and to integrate India further into global industrial and value chain. (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2017; Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2017).

Furthermore, the PRC has also attempted to assuage India's concerns over the BRI's infringement of Indian territory, by underlining its openness to cooperation and collaboration with India, including joint projects and initiatives that align with India's connectivity needs (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2017). (Albeit, this runs counter to their claims of Pakistan's sovereignty over Kashmir as stipulated in Article 6 of the China-Pakistan agreement. (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India 2017))

8. Impact and Success

The efficacy of an information operation hinges upon its ability to effect perceptual shifts amongst its target audience. While recent opinion polls underscore a decline in public sentiment towards the PRC in India (67% as per the 2023 Pew Survey (Silver, Huang and Clancy 2023)) and India in China (50.6% totally, i.e. 25.4% very unfavorable views towards India and 25.2% somewhat unfavorable views, as per the 2023 Tsinghua University survey (Center for International Security and Strategy, Tsinghua University 2023)), attributing these adverse sentiments solely to a specific information operation presents a formidable challenge, given that these sentiments are deeply embedded within the broader framework of bilateral relations and lack granularity pertaining to any singular occurrence.

Conversely, it would be an oversimplification to dismiss these information operations as unsuccessful, given that they generated vigorous public discourse within India concerning its military readiness and political credibility. Therefore, while they may not qualify as unqualified triumphs, one cannot wholly discount their influence in the orchestration and propagation of deceptive narratives.

Acknowledging these methodological constraints in tracing the precise causal links between information operations and shifting perceptions, this paper has therefore intentionally adopted a diagnostic approach by attempting to provide a comprehensive overview of the constituent elements comprising information operations directed against India.

However, the potential impact of information operations still warrant a further examination.

- a) **Social Impact:** Sophisticated information operations often make it difficult to differentiate between actual propaganda and factual information, leading to confusion amongst its intended audience. In India's case, its existing socio-economic and political fault-lines leave New Delhi susceptible to information exploitation and further religious & regional divide. This was evidenced in Meta's 2023 Adversarial Threat report (Q3) which stated that that the company had removed 13 accounts and 7 groups on Facebook and Instagram, that originated in China, for inauthentic behavior targeted at India (Nimmo, et al. 2023). Some of these accounts/groups had accused the Indian government of corruption and supporting ethnic violence in the Indian state of Manipur, while others accused the Dalai Lama of corruption and pedophilia (Nimmo, et al. 2023).
- b) **Political Impact:** Information operations also have a political impact. The absence of accurate, reliable information has the potential to exacerbate societal polarization on issues such as expenditure on defense & security versus public welfare, deepen ideological rifts between the Right and the Left, raise questions over the government's credibility and even the election process. For instance, in their examination of Chinese proliferation in India's digital

and political spaces, authors Arun Mohan Sukumar and Akhil Deo have argued that while there is little evidence of China's interference in Indian elections, there are nevertheless pre-conditions to suggest how Chinese state-based actors appear emboldened to facilitate disinformation campaigns that could compromise public discourse and potentially the integrity of future elections (Mohan Sukumar and Deo 2021).

- c) **Strategic Impact:** From a foreign policy perspective as well, Chinese information operations directed at India carry the potential to significantly undermine the existing bilateral relations between the two nations. The dissemination of distorted narratives by these operations has the capacity to erode trust and deter political leaders from addressing fault-lines in the relationship. Beijing's rhetoric has also compelled India to recalibrate its diplomatic strategies, and pursue a closer relationship with the United States and its allies over shared concerns over the PRC's increasing assertiveness, weaving a complex web of alliances and impacting power dynamics.

- d) **Military Impact:** Disinformation campaigns also serve to heighten the PRC's threat perception militarily, increasing chances of altercation. In his essay on 'China's Three Warfares and India', defense expert Abhijit Singh noted that Beijing's strategy went "beyond mere propaganda wars and misinformation campaigns," to target military morale, and "plant anxiety" by playing on the readers' worst apprehensions, in this case a full-scale military confrontation (Singh 2013). As noted above, information operations have the ability to impact the psyche and morale of the military community by eliciting an emotional response, primarily fear and anxiety (Krull 2018). This could potentially distract personnel from military missions, undermine morale, impact readiness, and cause concerns over personnel safety and family, without imposing heavy costs on the Chinese side (Krull 2018). As Singh noted, they could "subdue India without even needing to fight" (Singh 2013).

9. Conclusion

The PRC possesses extensive financial and technological resources and human capital to target India's information ecosystem & infrastructure. Advances in technology, coupled with the rapid pace of information sharing & dissemination and the sheer volume of information, often make it challenging for Indian authorities to promptly identify and counteract disinformation. This leaves substantial room for false narratives to take root and influence public opinion before corrective action can be taken. Further, the lack of effective regulatory frameworks and technological countermeasures have also left India susceptible to external influence. Addressing these vulnerabilities is crucial for safeguarding the democratic foundations of the nation against the insidious impact of foreign disinformation campaigns.

To build its deterrence capacity against Chinese disinformation campaigns, India should prioritize a multifaceted approach. Firstly, investing in robust cybersecurity measures is essential to safeguard critical information infrastructure and counter the spread of false narratives. Strengthening intelligence capabilities to identify and counter disinformation campaigns swiftly is crucial.

Additionally, enhancing media literacy among the public can empower individuals to discern between accurate and misleading information, reducing the effectiveness of disinformation. Collaboration with international partners to share intelligence and best practices is also vital, as disinformation is a global challenge that requires a coordinated response. For instance, in January 2021, the Center for Strategic & International Studies in Washington D.C. had detailed how Taiwan had responded to Chinese disinformation campaigns by deploying a range of tools like 'meme engineering' teams in government departments, strengthening legal prohibitions, and coordinating with civil society organizations to empower citizens – models that can be adapted in the Indian context as well. (Blanchette, et al. 2021).

By developing a comprehensive strategy that combines technological resilience, intelligence capabilities, public awareness, and international cooperation, India can build a more effective deterrence against Chinese disinformation campaigns, safeguarding its domestic stability and strengthening its position in the international arena.

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