ISSUE BRIEF

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DIGITAL FOG OF WAR: USE OF GENERATIVE AI IN DISINFORMATION AGAINST PAKISTAN

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(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)

The May 2025 military standoff between India and Pakistan not only marked a paradigmatic shift in the engagement doctrines between the two countries, but it also exposed the Indian disinformation nexus to the regional and global community. While both sides were locked in a conventional skirmish, the digital landscape underwent a consequential change. Algorithmic micro-targeting, narrative manipulation, and an exaggerated disinformation campaign were all tactics employed by India to obscure facts parallel to the kinetic conflict.[1] In the digital battlefield, drones have been supplanted by deepfakes, and a strategic arsenal by doctored news headlines. The line between disinformation and misinformation was deemed impossible to discern.[2]

The fog of war may be inevitable, but in this age, it is not due to smoke and chaos alone.[3] Indian media's jingoist and fanatic tendencies manifested on the X-space (Twitter Space) and served to deliberately create confusion among the masses while using invalid and unauthentic information. This

1 Sardar Jahanzeb Ghalib, "Warfare Reimagined: Algorithmic Warfare and the Shifting India-Pakistan Strategic Landscape," Issue Brief, Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI), 2025, https://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/IB_Jahanzaib_June_4_2025.pdf.

2 Nabiya Khan, "The Information Crisis that brought India and Pakistan to the Brink," *Tech Policy Press*, June 2, 2025, https://www.techpolicy.press/the-information-crisis-that-brought-india-and-pakistan-to-the-brink/.

3 Asad Ali Shah, "AI, Deepfakes, and the Fog of War - Disinformation in the 2025 India-Pakistan Conflict / IFJ," #IFJBlog, June 25, 2025, https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/blog/detail/category/ai/article/ifjblog-ai-deepfakes-and-the-fog-of-war-disinformation-in-the-2025-india-pakistan-conflict.

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synthetic surfeit sparked resistance even in the Indian masses, leading to a paralyzed reaction to global scrutiny towards them. [4]

Artificial Intelligence (AI) in information warfare opens up the possibility of narrative monopolization.[5] Given India's history of tagging Pakistan as a sponsor of terrorism without evidence, it may also prove invaluable as an essential component in coercive diplomacy. Exaggerated battlefield superiority, coupled with false intel circulating through secure communication channels, holds a real risk of creating interoperability hurdles. The AI chatbot on X called 'Grok' sowed more misinformation in seconds than a fact checker can verify in a day.[6] For instance, old footage from Sudan was used by the chatbot to describe the Indian missile attacks on Pakistani soil.

Historically, India has abused the notion of disinformation for a long time, attempting to label Pakistan as the source of its misfortune or insecurity. A 2021 report by the EU Disinfo Lab brought India's transgressions against truth to light, along with its legitimacy into question. A fifteen-year-long operation, constituting the use of fake media and identity theft of the deceased Louis B. Sohn was exposed.[7] The movement was spearheaded by the Srivastava group and propagated further by the Asian News International (ANI).

The exacerbation of the disinformation issue can be attributed to the Indian mainstream media as well. Their irresponsible backing of a one-sided narrative did nothing but rouse warmongering in the Indian domestic audiences and discredited them in the global community. Furthermore, propelling the use of deepfakes, AI videos showing Indian attacks on Lahore, and hyper-excessive back-and-forth tussle of information introduced the idea of deliberate ambiguity. To consciously and deliberately create obstacles in the way of verifying facts during wartime is a norm for India ever since the Balakot strikes in 2019.

Open-source intelligence networks such as Bellingcat emphasized that AI content was being filtered through 'X' without any verification at an accelerated rate. A deepfake of falsified orders was shared 700,000 times on social media before fact checkers were able to debunk it, implicating the danger it

4 Anupreeta Das and Pragati K.B, "How the Indian Media Amplified Falsehoods in the Drumbeat of War," *The New York Times*, May 17, 2025, https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/17/world/asia/india-news-media-misinformation.html.

5 Noémi Bontridder and Yves Poullet, "The Role of Artificial Intelligence in Disinformation," *Data & Policy* 3 (2021), https://doi.org/10.1017/dap.2021.20.

6 "How AI Chatbot Grok Sowed Misinformation during India-Pakistan Military Conflict," *Arab News*, June, 2025, https://www.arabnews.com/node/2603047/pakistan.

7 Gary Machado Alexandre Alaphilippe, Roman Adamczyk, and Antoine Grégoire, "Indian Chronicles: Deep Dive into a 15-Year Operation Targeting the EU and UN to Serve Indian Interests," EU DisinfoLab, December 9, 2021, https://www.disinfo.eu/publications/indian-chronicles-deep-dive-into-a-15-year-operation-targeting-the-eu-and-un-to-serve-indian-interests/.

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posed by appearing 'too real.'[8] Such deepfake-generated disinformation not only undermines military morale but also disrupts decision-making, giving adversaries a strategic edge.[9] This caused a realization that the success of an operation relies on how readily the people internalize that fact.

Unlike the accounts associated with the Indian military on X, the accounts associated with the Pakistani military showed caution and restraint when sharing information about the battlefield updates. With a measured approach, they were sharing only the brief outputs verified by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) and on-ground reports without exaggeration or siphoning off simulator footage to pass it on as real-time battle engagement.

Another reason for the level of disinformation being unveiled without any legal repercussions is attributed to the lack of robust mechanisms to regulate these systems. Thus, it provides a legal loophole for such dissemination. Although Pakistan advocated for caution and the setting up of regulatory frameworks regarding the digital and military use of AI, the diplomatic clout of countries such as India allows them to invest and experiment freely. However, following this conflict, India no longer wields that clout due to its jingoistic tendencies and war hysteria being condemned.[10]

The Pakistani cyber-intelligence identified Indian disinformation trolls' strategy and fired back by using real-time footage and figures compared to doctored Indian content. The ISPR strategy of exposing the damage done to Indian assets by sharing audio and videos on televised media for the international and domestic audiences allowed them to break through the fragility of their psyops and manipulation techniques.[11] The global community now realizes that in any onset of war between the two countries, India's strategy of fanatic manipulation and victimhood to create hollow narratives will not sustain.

As AI evolves, so will the danger of its proliferation and narrative manipulation until synthesized content is indistinguishable from authentic communication.[12] In a region where the nuclear dyad is vulnerable to signaling and miscalculated retaliation, the erosion of information fidelity is turning the

8 Pooja Chaudhuri, "India-Pakistan Conflict: How a Deepfake Video Made it Mainstream," *Bellingcat*, May 9, 2025, https://www.bellingcat.com/news/rest-of-world/2025/05/09/india-pakistan-conflict-how-a-deepfake-video-made-it-mainstream/.

9 "Deepfakes and the Changing Face of War," *The Express Tribune*, February 18, 2025, https://tribune.com.pk/article/97950/deepfakes-and-the-changing-face-of-war.

10 "'India's Irresponsible Jingoism Threatens One-Fifth of the World,'" *Dawn*, May 10, 2025, https://www.dawn.com/news/1909891.

11 Muskan Moazzam, "The Battle of Perceptions: India's Information Warfare Against Pakistan," Issue Brief, ISSI, June 5, 2025, https://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/IB_Muskan_Moazzam_June_5_2025.pdf.

12 "From Judgement to Algorithm: The Legal Vacuum in AI-Driven Warfare," *BJIL*, June 23, 2025, https://www.berkeleyjournalofinternationallaw.com/post/from-judgement-to-algorithm-the-legal-vacuum-in-ai-driven-warfare.

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region into a boiling pot of tensions and ambiguity. The fog, which in Clauzewitzian times used to hide tanks and infantry, now hides information and its manipulators.[13]

Pakistan must focus on the codification of AI ethics, setting up indigenous frameworks to debunk and counter generated information, and train the masses for private-public cooperation to instill wartime contingencies and responsible use of technology to make it easier for the country to navigate this new fog.[14]

13 Jonathan Kwik and Tom Van Engers, "Algorithmic Fog of War: When Lack of Transparency Violates the Law of Armed Conflict," *Journal of Future Robot Life* 2, no. 1-2 (March 12, 2021): 1–24, https://doi.org/10.3233/frl-200019.

14 Khurshid Khan, "Understanding Information Warfare and Its Relevance to Pakistan," *Strategic Studies*, June 14, 2014, https://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/1379480610_58047454.pdf.

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