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Artificial Intelligence,  
Hyperwar, and the  
Contest for Human Autonomy

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# *Artificial Intelligence, Hyperwar, and the Contest for Human Autonomy*

## **Abstract**

*Artificial Intelligence (AI) has shifted the centre of gravity of global power from hardware to cognition. Nations are now competing to shape the very environment wherein individuals think and decide. This paper examines the military and geopolitical consequences of AI-led Hyperwar in an era where time compresses, perception becomes a battlespace, and autonomy is contested as fiercely as erstwhile territory.*

*India's challenge in this revolution will be safeguarding cognitive sovereignty. It is no longer an academic exercise; rather, it is the strategic obligation of any state seeking to remain self-governing in the age it has created.*

**Keywords:** Artificial Intelligence (AI), Autonomous Systems, Cognitive Warfare, Human Control, Hyperwar

## **Introduction**

The world is witnessing an era wherein Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rewiring power faster than the state can respond. The power of balance has shifted to AI infrastructure, data monopolies, and the ability to shape the cognitive environment in which societies interpret reality. This shift is not evolutionary, rather it is revolutionary; AI is no longer an adjunct to national power; it has become one of its principal determinants.

Governance models, military planning, intelligence cycles, and information control mechanisms are all being renegotiated around algorithmic capability. What began as a contest over hardware and computing efficiency has evolved into a civilisational race to define the cognitive frameworks through which societies interpret events, process stimuli, and make collective decisions.

The world has also crossed the threshold of 'Hyperwar' into an unfolding era of distributed conflict characterised by AI-driven acceleration, seamless fusion of domains,

collapse of traditional warning time, and the weaponisation of public perception. The more disturbing reality is not the emergence of advanced machine intelligence; it is the gradual weakening of human cognitive stamina in a world shaped by algorithmic proxies.

### **The AI Arms Race: Power Rewired**

DeepSeek's ascent in 2024 didn't just surprise the Silicon Valley; it tore up the myth that frontier AI was a Western monopoly. A Chinese team operating on a shoestring budget demonstrated that scale isn't everything; architectural efficiency can redraw the map overnight. Beijing's state-tech fusion has matured into a machine that produces results faster than Washington's reactive bureaucracy can absorb them. Export controls, investment bans, and chip lists are symptoms of a superpower trying to slow history down, not shape it. The reality is that, AI proliferation is decentralised, adaptive, and impossible to contain.

Globally, the AI race is engulfing all. Gulf monarchies are building computational megastructures. The EU is rebooting its industrial strategy. Asian middle powers from South Korea to Singapore are racing to secure their own sovereign stacks. In short, AI has created a new power. We are living in a decade where cyber intrusions are executed at machine speed, and disinformation spreads faster than fact; where deepfakes can assassinate reputations; autonomous malware can rewrite its own playbook while it's inside your system; hence, everything viz. critical infrastructure energy grids, banking networks, and space assets are now a battlefield.

India's position in this scramble is more complicated than either Washington or Beijing tend to admit. It cannot afford to follow Washington's anxieties or Beijing's command model, and it does not intend to do so. India is trying to build a sovereign lane where domestic compute, indigenous models, and national datasets are insulated from external coercion. The problem is speed: India's regulatory reflexes, public-sector procurement cycles, and fragmented private innovation ecosystem often move more slowly than the velocity at which AI capability stacks evolve. The ambition is sound; the gap is structural. Bridging it is the decisive test of India's strategic seriousness.

## **Emergent Machines: Intelligence Without Intention**

Modern AI does not behave like a tool; it behaves like an organism. These systems do not follow human logic; they derive their own. They learn from patterns we can't map, reach conclusions we can't retrace, and display behaviours no engineer deliberately built. As models rewrite parts of their own architecture and fuel their own acceleration loops, we are inching toward systems that were powerful long before they were even comprehensible. The danger isn't machine rebellion; it is human incapability to deal with systems too complex for us to govern.

AI is now designing parts of itself. Large tech firms are reporting that huge slices of their codebases are AI-written. Startups are building recursive systems where models iterate on their own architecture. The feedback loops are tightening. Innovation cycles that once took years now compress into weeks.

The singularity debate misses the point. Long before machines become "superintelligent", they will become too complex for human governance. The real threat is a gradual slide into a world where society depends on systems it cannot interpret.

## **Cognitive Erosion: The Silent Disarmament**

While public discourse fixates on "sentience" or runaway autonomy, the more urgent danger lies in cognitive dependence. Early studies show a clear trend: individuals offload judgement, memory, and problem-solving to conversational agents. Analytical persistence declines. Decision-making becomes mediated by systems whose internal reasoning remains inaccessible.

This is a strategic vulnerability, not a cultural one. The dominant weapons of the coming era are not kinetic platforms; they are algorithmic systems capable of influencing perception without triggering defensive resistance. A society that internalises machine guidance becomes vulnerable to occupation not through force, but through silent cognitive colonisation.

## **Hyperwar: The Battlefield That Never Ends**

Hyperwar kills the very idea of a “window” for military action. Satellite constellations, OSINT automation, and persistent ISR make mobilisation impossible to hide. Every movement, every logistics chain, every signal burst becomes traceable in real time. For India, this breaks the spine of doctrines built on surprise and rapid thrusts. The shift now is from fast manoeuvre to opaque manoeuvre, which are AI-driven misdirection, deception layers that scramble enemy sensing, autonomous ISR meshes that deny the adversary a clean picture, and decision shields that protect political leaders from information strikes designed to paralyse them before a shot is fired. Hyperwar is the world we have woken up in, a fused battlespace where AI accelerates every form of conflict:

- Military operations run at machine tempo.
- Economic pressure turns into automated choke points.
- Information warfare becomes personalised manipulation.
- Cyber operations become self-propagating.
- Psychological operations run continuously.

The truth is that Hyperwar compresses time, and erases geography. It blurs peace and conflict, and gives the advantage to the actor willing to weaponise information most aggressively. Autonomous C5ISR architecture has erased traditional concealment. AI-enabled targeting has collapsed the decision loops that once gave political leaders breathing space. This is the reality of contemporary battlespace.

For India, this acceleration of conflict rewires the very logic behind Op Sindoor preparations and the Cold Strike doctrine. The concept of rapid, shallow thrusts backed by integrated firepower was built on the assumption that commanders would secure a narrow temporal window before international pressure kicked in. That window no longer exists. In a Hyperwar environment, every mobilisation step is instantly detected, every logistics trail is mapped by commercial satellites, and every formation movement is mirrored online through automated OSINT streams. What this means is blunt: India can no longer rely on speed alone; it needs opacity, AI-driven deception, autonomous ISR grids, and cognitive shielding for political and military decision-makers. In a battlespace where the enemy’s first strike may be informational rather than kinetic, Op Sindoor and Cold Strike must evolve from fast-reaction



plans into digitally armoured manoeuvre doctrines that survive the compression of time and the collapse of surprise.

### **The Cognitive Domain: The New Centre of Gravity**

For centuries, psychological warfare was a supporting tool. AI has made it the main event. Generative models can fabricate entire realities; be it videos, audio or imagery at an industrial scale. AI agents can run influence operations autonomously. Bot swarms can simulate public opinion or flood an information ecosystem faster than any censorship mechanism can respond. This is not propaganda. It is precision-guided psychological warfare.

The Israeli operation that sent personalised threats to Iranian officers during the short 12-day conflict was an early preview. Those messages were handcrafted. The next generation of operations will be fully automated and customised to target each individual's emotional profile, fears, grievances, and digital footprint. The aim is simple: fracture societies before a shot is fired.

In Hyperwar, decisive battles are not fought on borders—they are fought inside perception, memory, and belief.

### **Multipolar Disorder: Power Without Structure**

The world is not polarising; it is fragmenting. Washington still dominates the tech stack, but its political bandwidth is shrinking. Beijing has stopped pretending it wants coexistence; it wants primacy. Mid-tier powers are no longer waiting for permission. Russia, written off prematurely, has shown that resilience can be a form of power. What we are seeing is not order giving way to contestation; it's order dissolving into entropy. AI accelerates this by giving smaller players capabilities that once belonged only to superpowers.

In such an environment, stability is no longer guaranteed by military balance. It depends on cognitive resilience, how well societies can withstand disruption in an era where conflict is ambient and continuous.

India sits in an awkward but powerful corner of this flux. It is no longer content to be a “balancing power”, yet it is not signing up for anyone's security architecture either. Its rise is driven less by alliance politics and more by a hard-edged reading of geography, technology,

and domestic resilience. What sets India apart is that it's trying to modernise under fire, juggling a hostile China, an unstable Pakistan, a contested Indian Ocean, and a digital battlespace that hits its society every day. AI does not just widen India's options; it sharpens its exposure. The country's strategic weight is growing, but so is the pressure on its institutions to adapt faster than its rivals expect. In a world with no referee and no fixed hierarchies, India's biggest asset may simply be its ability to survive turbulence without losing cohesion.

### **SWOT: India's Position in the AI-led Hyperwar Ecosystem**

India is at crossroads. It is a country with all the building blocks of a major AI power, but not the ecosystem and infrastructure.

- **Strength:** Its strengths lie in a high-speed, multilingual youth that produces oceans of behavioural and linguistic data, a start-up culture that is faster-moving than the state, and a culture of ideation and innovation that suits the high-energy, high-velocity nature of AI development. India's digital footprint is enormous, and unlike the West or China, its data comes from a society that functions at multiple civilisational speeds at once. That makes its datasets uniquely rich for training models that can handle noise, diversity, and unpredictability, traits that matter in both warfare and governance.
- **Weakness:** India's weaknesses aren't a mystery; thin domestic computing, dependency on foreign silicon, fragmented datasets trapped in bureaucratic fortresses, and a research pipeline that produces coders faster than it produces innovators. National data remains locked in silos; ministries guarding their turf, state governments withholding records, and the private sector reluctant to share. Even when policy exists, execution drags; procurement cycles move at a bureaucratic crawl while AI itself moves at machine tempo.
- **Opportunity:** If India plays this moment with intent, the opportunity is huge. The country has a narrow window to build its own compute backbone, cut deals that actually move the semiconductor needle, and open up public datasets in a way that protects privacy without paralysing innovation. That shift alone would let India stop treating AI like a shiny tech trend and start using it as a force multiplier for national power. It gives India room to stand on its own feet in a world split between a US-led rules maze and China's command-style tech empire; and unlike most players in the Global South, India

has the cultural range, political memory, and demographic scale to set the tone for how multilingual governance, digital public goods, and low-resource AI should evolve.

- **Threat:** If India slips behind in computing or talent, it becomes dependent on foreign models that embed someone else's worldview into its information ecosystem. In a Hyperwar world where perception is contested, cognition is targeted, and information is a battlespace, that dependency is a national-security liability. India's real risk is not losing the AI race; it is becoming a permanent tenant in a cognitive infrastructure owned by others. The stakes are that high: sovereignty now extends to the architecture through which a country thinks.

### **Guarding the Last Frontier: Human Autonomy**

The central question is not related simply to machine consciousness. It's whether humans can stay autonomous in an environment where AI shapes what we see, what we trust, and how we decide. If citizens cannot tell engineered perception from genuine reality, democracy becomes choreography. If leaders outsource reasoning to machine advisors, sovereignty becomes ceremonial. The frontline is the human mind. Lose that, and everything else is theatre.

AI will determine the next era of geopolitics. It will reshape markets, militaries, governments, and social behaviour. The mind wars will be the decisive battlespace impacting national security. Thus, the primary goal must ensure that, the man behind the machine/algorithm counts and controls any manipulation, dependency, and engineered deception. The real challenge is not who owns AI, but who governs it, and whether that's a fiction or reality.

### **Recommendations**

- **National Cognitive Security Missions**
  - Build dedicated institutions focused on safeguarding public reasoning, digital literacy, and resistance to AI-generated manipulation.
  - Treat cognitive infrastructure the way states treated energy and nuclear security in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.



- **Sovereign AI Ecosystems**
  - Nations must build and control their own AI stacks-data pipelines, model training frameworks, and inference layers to reduce exposure to foreign influence.
- **AI Transparency Standards for Public Systems**
  - Any AI used in governance, military decision-making, or public services must be auditable by independent bodies.
- **Hybrid-Warfare Resilience Training**
  - Militaries and civil institutions must prepare for a world where the first strike is informational, not kinetic.
- **Strategic Limits on Cognitive Offloading**
  - Encourage human-in-the-loop decision protocols in education, governance, and defence to prevent cognitive atrophy.

## **Conclusion**

The contest in the era of AI and Hyperwar will depend upon who retains initiative in a world shaped by synthetic cognition. It will be a struggle beyond technology or military power. What matters now is the integrity of human judgement under conditions of accelerated conflict, manufactured perception, and engineered ambiguity. Nations that fail to harden the cognitive domain will discover that their material strength counts for little once the decision-maker's mind has been infiltrated, distracted, or misled.

India will need to treat it as a national mission and build the required architecture that moulds cognition, AI and autonomy as the centre of gravity. That requires more than new platforms or digital initiatives. It demands political will, institutional discipline, and a military-civil fusion geared towards protecting the mental bandwidth of both leaders and citizens. A Hyperwar environment will challenge hesitation, but it will challenge intellectual dependence even more severely.

In a world where power flows through data pipelines, compute infrastructure, and invisible influence operations, the defining task for India will be to ensure that the human element does not become the weakest link in its own defence architecture; and that is the decisive contest of this era.

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