

## **The Weaponisation of Everything: A Field Guide to the New Way of War**

Mark Galeotti, ISBN: 9780300253443: (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2022, 256 pages)

### **Reviewed by: Amber Afreen Abid**

The book provides an engaging guide to the various ways in which the wars could be waged, and how to adapt to this new reality. Mark Galeotti, an expert on all things Russian, from history to security issues, explores and formulates big ideas precisely yet powerfully with conviction and provocation. He has used numerous examples of wars and conflicts to illustrate his ideas. He started off with the history, alluding fleetingly to the renaissance of Italy to discussing modern warfare in terms of social media and the interconnectedness of societies, and how they have opened new avenues for manipulation of every aspect of everyday life and abetting in warfare.

In this book, Galeotti has discussed modern warfare and has suggested that non-military conflicts, whether in the form of structured crime, law, business, culture, technology and politics are becoming the ‘new normal’ now. He went on to discuss that it is becoming so normal that we are not realising that we are engaged in a conflict, as we have accepted a certain level of conflict happening around as routine business. Many things are weaponised today including cultural, business relationships, law, crime, and information- each of which is a subject of a chapter in this book, outlining a vast range of non-kinetic tools.

The world today is more complex and interconnected. The interdependence, which once stopped the war, is now becoming the new battlefield. Wars are being fought with non-military means like subversion and sanctions. The author describes it as ‘we live in a world of permanent low-level conflict, often unnoticed, undeclared and unending - one in which our allies may be our competitors.’(p.5) However, for understanding the present and future scenarios, the author terms the study of the history of war to be essential, but in the book he just brushes through the history and slips through the significant details that need elaboration. Galeotti has not provided a comprehensive

overview of ‘everything’ and has remained selective. Questions like weaponisation for what reason, or against whom have not been responded.

To what extent everything could be weaponised? The author states that ‘if all things are weaponisable, some are more weaponisable than others.’ (p.5) Galeotti describes the ‘more weaponisable’ instruments as the weapons that have been strategically used to wage war in history. However, defining a new way of war, one has to gauge how much one strategy or mechanism can be termed more weaponisable in terms of measurement, threshold, or definition over the other.

The author discussed that social media has become a catalyst or an accelerator for movements, causes and events, ‘hashtags, memes and selfies have become weapons of new narrative wars in their own right, and have proliferated as much as the ubiquitous AK-47 rifle’ (p.32). The conflicts today are fought through outsourcing, and exploiting journalists and scholars through print and social media; and many of them are for hire to spread disinformation and propaganda against the adversary. (p.59) The author has aptly discussed this issue, as demonstrated in the example of Indian Chronicles<sup>1</sup>, uncovered by EU DisinfoLab. India actively engaged in such kind of propaganda, used fake websites and NGOs to spread disinformation to damage Pakistan’s image.

Galeotti discusses Russia’s use of information warfare, quoting General Valery Gerasimov’s writing to the effect that ‘the role of non-military means of achieving political and strategic goals has grown, and, in many cases they have exceeded the power of force of weapons in their effectiveness’ (p. 167). While the Russia-Ukraine conflict is a military conflict encompassing all types of weapons. Thus, it is not an example of the ‘new way of war’, with a new approach to tactics and strategies of power. This is like the debate of pen verses sword, as to which is mightier,

---

<sup>1</sup> ‘Indian Chronicles: Deep dive into a 15-year operation targeting the EU and UN to serve Indian interests’, EU DisinfoLab, accessed June 17, 2023, <https://www.disinfo.eu/publications/indian-chronicles-deep-dive-into-a-15-year-operation-targeting-the-eu-and-un-to-serve-indian-interests/>

and in most of the circumstances the adversary with superior weapons, tactics, and resources succeeds.

In an earlier chapter, Galeotti wonders aloud whether conventional inter-state warfare itself may become ‘de-weaponised’. He makes the case that the high costs of actual fighting often led states to pull back from direct clashes, preferring ‘bluff and bluster’, and the ‘theatrical’ uses of demonstrative force at the inter-state level, as seen in occasional India–Pakistan clashes (p. 40). The thought of wielding anything short of military weapons in an offensive manner is not well adopted in South Asia. The author has mentioned the 2019 crisis in this case, experts believe that India failed to strike any significant target inside Pakistan, though it was a provocative and aggressive action by India, an irresponsible Indian behaviour. Had it caused casualties and damage, the repercussions could have been stringent, and the conflict could have escalated.

Galeotti mentions that ‘the Soviet leaders certainly considered ‘peace only as a breathing space’ in their geopolitical struggle with the West, but failed in their study of war to see how it was changing’ (p. 224). However, in the case of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, hard power is certainly playing its role. It is crucial to recognize that hard power remains an essential element in warfare. The ability to project military force, deter adversaries, and protect national interest is still critical. Non-kinetic strategies are additional tools that can be employed to complement hard power approaches and potentially provide a tactical advantage in certain situations. Successful modern warfare strategies often involve a combination of military and non-military means such as economic sanctions, cyber warfare, and diplomacy, to achieve the goals tailored to the specific context and objectives of the conflict.

‘The Weaponisation of Everything’ serves as a valuable guide to readers, however, the endnotes are missing, instead, Galeotti includes a section titled ‘Want to Know More?’ containing a short list of topical readings. The book, nevertheless, is recommended for understanding various tactics and strategies to be employed in warfare. It is a must-read for anyone interested in the changing nature of warfare and its implications on global security.