



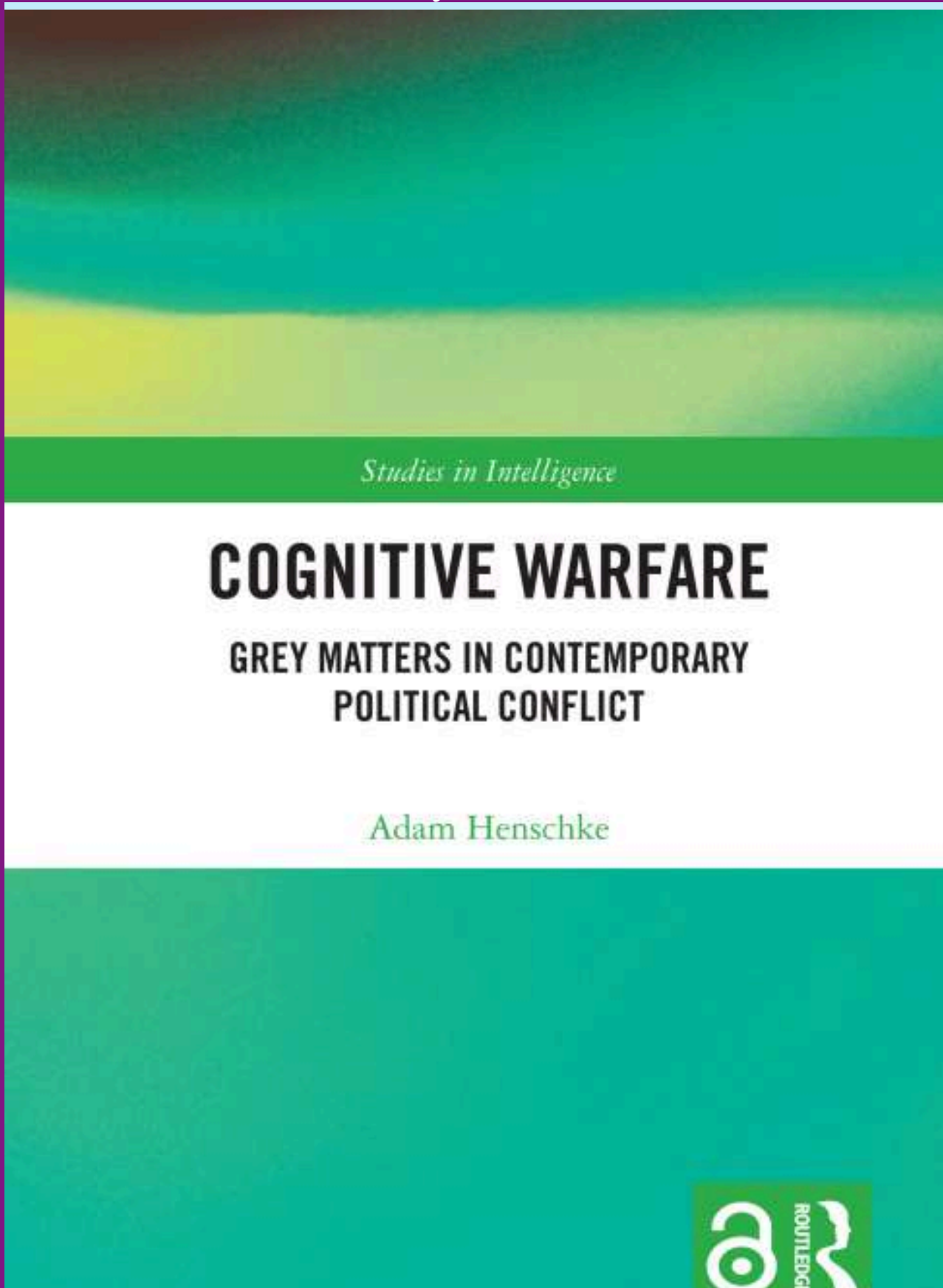
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BOOK REVIEW

**Cognitive Warfare: Grey Matters in Contemporary Political
Conflict**

Authored by Adam Henschke



Studies in Intelligence

COGNITIVE WARFARE

**GREY MATTERS IN CONTEMPORARY
POLITICAL CONFLICT**

Adam Henschke



The Battle for Truth in an Age of Disinformation

We live in an era where information itself has become weaponised. Every day, our social media feeds are battlegrounds where truth and fiction clash, where algorithms amplify outrage, and where foreign actors seek to manipulate public opinion. Against this backdrop, Adam Henschke's *Cognitive Warfare: Grey Matters in Contemporary Political Conflict* arrives not just as a timely academic contribution but as an essential guide for understanding one of the most pressing threats to democratic societies today.

The thing that struck the most about this book is its courage to ask uncomfortable questions. Can democracies fight information warfare without becoming what they oppose? Where's the line between legitimate persuasion and malicious manipulation? Henschke, an Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the University of Twente, doesn't offer easy answers. Instead, he provides something more valuable: a framework for thinking clearly about cognitive warfare when clarity feels increasingly rare.

A Framework Grounded in Values

The book's central argument revolves around two foundational principles: human dignity and political autonomy. These aren't just abstract concepts; they're practical ethical touchstones that help distinguish between acceptable information operations and those that fundamentally undermine democratic institutions. What is appreciable is how Henschke systematically builds this framework through conceptual, historical, and ethical lenses, making it accessible without sacrificing rigour.

The structure moves logically from examining cognitive warfare in international relations to its domestic manifestations and emerging technological dimensions. The historical grounding is particularly illuminating, tracing information conflict from military deception and propaganda to today's algorithmic manipulation and micro-targeted disinformation campaigns. Henschke demonstrates convincingly that while information warfare isn't new, its modern incarnation represents a qualitative shift in scale and sophistication.

The Dual Perspective

One of the book's greatest strengths lies in its balanced examination of cognitive warfare as both a threat to liberal democracy and a tool potentially employed by democratic states themselves. Henschke doesn't shy away from uncomfortable truths: democracies face serious vulnerabilities to information manipulation, yet they may also feel compelled to engage in similar tactics. This dual perspective examining democracies as both victims and potential practitioners, adds intellectual depth that transcends simplistic narratives.

The chapters on technology and contemporary manifestations effectively connect historical practices to current challenges, from coordinated disinformation campaigns to domestic insurrections fuelled by manipulated information ecosystems. Reading about how cognitive warfare corrodes the foundations of democracy by making truth expendable felt both sobering and urgent.

Where the Analysis Could Go Deeper

Despite its considerable strengths, the book has limitations worth noting. The ethical framework centred around human dignity and political autonomy, while compelling, sometimes feels insufficient for addressing the messy realities of information operations. In practice, cognitive warfare often intersects with legitimate political speech, journalism, and activism. The boundaries between persuasion, propaganda and warfare can be frustratingly porous.

Henschke acknowledges this complexity, but I found myself wishing for more detailed guidance on navigating these grey areas. When does aggressive political messaging cross into cognitive warfare? How do we distinguish between counter-narratives and manipulation? These practical questions matter enormously to policymakers and practitioners.

Additionally, the focus on liberal democracies, while understandable given their particular vulnerabilities and ethical commitments, means that perspectives from non-democratic contexts receive less attention. A more robust comparative analysis might have enriched our understanding of how different political systems both deploy and defend against cognitive warfare.

An Essential Contribution

Henschke's writing strikes an effective balance between academic rigour and accessibility. The prose remains engaging without sacrificing analytical depth, making the book valuable for scholars, students, policymakers, and informed general readers alike. His methodical approach builds arguments systematically while grounding abstract ethical principles in concrete examples.

As trust in political and social institutions continues to erode, partly due to the very manipulation tactics Henschke analyses, this book provides essential conceptual tools for understanding what's at stake. The argument that cognitive warfare threatens democracy by undermining citizens capacity for autonomous political judgment should serve as a wake-up call.

A thoughtful 276-page book that offers a thorough, well-researched look at its subject. Paperback copies in India retail for roughly ₹4,500–₹5,500, while digital editions and e-books are more affordable and widely accessible.

I would highly recommend this book to anyone concerned with preserving democratic institutions in an age of information saturation. It's particularly valuable for those working in security studies, ethics, international relations, or policy development. While it won't resolve all the dilemmas it raises, it will equip readers to think more clearly about cognitive warfare and its implications for democratic societies.

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