

Hybrid warfare, effects on Pakistan and recommended strategy/way forward to deal with it in the future

Guerra híbrida, efectos en Pakistán y estrategia recomendada para afrontarla en el futuro

Abstract: This research examines the impact of Hybrid Warfare on Pakistan's peace and conflict situation. It identifies that Pakistan faces challenges primarily from its eastern neighbor, with involvement from other states and non-state entities, making the situation complex. Hybrid warfare in Pakistan utilizes social failures, economic disparities, political marginalization, and demographic inequalities. The strategies employed focus on non-kinetic methods to achieve objectives. To counter these threats, it is crucial to understand the objectives, methods, and resources behind non-kinetic strategies. Developing awareness and understanding of hybrid threats is crucial in order to develop an integrated approach to countering these challenges. The study recommends an awareness campaign on hybrid threats for state entities, the government, law enforcement, and the public to achieve a unified response. It also stresses the need for institutional capacity development to handle a diverse range of threats through centralized control and decentralized execution. Additionally, a comprehensive review of internal security policies and strategies is necessary to effectively counter the tools used in hybrid warfare.

Keywords: Conventional Warfare. Sub Conventional Warfare. Hybrid Warfare. Rogue state. Failed State. Color Revolution.

Resumen: Esta investigación examina el impacto de la guerra híbrida en la situación de paz y conflicto de Pakistán. Identifica que Pakistán se enfrenta a desafíos procedentes principalmente de su vecino oriental, con la implicación de otros Estados y entidades no estatales que hacen que la situación sea compleja. La guerra híbrida en Pakistán utiliza los fracasos sociales, las disparidades económicas, la marginación política y las desigualdades demográficas. Las estrategias empleadas se centran en métodos no cinéticos para alcanzar los objetivos. Para combatir estas amenazas, es esencial comprender los objetivos, métodos y recursos que subyacen a las estrategias no cinéticas. El desarrollo de la concienciación y la comprensión de las amenazas híbridas es clave para desarrollar un enfoque integrado para combatir estos retos. El estudio recomienda una campaña de concienciación sobre las amenazas híbridas dirigida a las entidades estatales, el gobierno, las fuerzas de seguridad y el público en general para lograr una respuesta unificada. También hace hincapié en la necesidad de desarrollar la capacidad institucional para hacer frente a una gama diversa de amenazas mediante un control centralizado y una aplicación descentralizada. Además, es necesaria una revisión exhaustiva de las políticas y estrategias de seguridad interna para contrarrestar eficazmente las herramientas utilizadas en la guerra híbrida.

Palabras clave: Guerra convencional. Guerra Subconvencional. Guerra híbrida. Estado canalla. Estado fallido. Revolución de Colores.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Peace is the innate desire of humankind; however conflict is embedded in the structure of international system, state construct, and composition of human society. War is traditionally studied as a political and social phenomenon, viewed through a military lens. While the nature of war remains unchanged, its character shifts from kinetic to non-kinetic and from conventional to sub-conventional. Scholars identify key elements shaping the evolution of war: new conflict domains, changing adversaries, evolving objectives, and shifts in use of force. Historically, these elements were unquestioned. However, the rapid transformation of war in the modern era results from political, economic, social, and technological influences driven by globalization and the information age. In the 21st century, war is no longer confined to military battles; but it encompasses all Elements of National Power, creating multifaceted ‘hybrid’ threats, which is not a new concept (Howard; Paret, 1989). Their target has always been the state or society as a whole, exploiting internal weaknesses, in which Pakistan is no exception.

Today’s world is characterized by volatility, complexity, ambiguity, and uncertainty, driven by factors like shrinking nation-state boundaries, the merging of geopolitics and geo-economics, societal divisions, and rapid technological advancements, all of which influences politics, societies, and global economies (CASS, 2021). Hybrid threats evolve strategies blending regular and irregular warfare for national advantage. Modern hybrid conflicts, rooted in history, reshape strategy with technology, communication, weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), and non-state actors (Chappell; Glennie, 2019). Hybrid warfare, coined in 2000s, blends kinetic and non-kinetic elements to counter conventional power dynamics. It involves tools like disinformation, propaganda, economic coercion, proxy militias, and cyber-attacks by states to attain strategic aims (CASS, 2021).

Hybrid warfare arises from old military concepts, cost concerns, and jurisdiction issues. New technologies encourage blending tactics to achieve political goals. This strategy is not exclusive to major powers; non-traditional actors, such as India, also engage in hybrid warfare,. Recent actions against Pakistan involve supporting separatists, economic manipulation, and diplomatic deception.

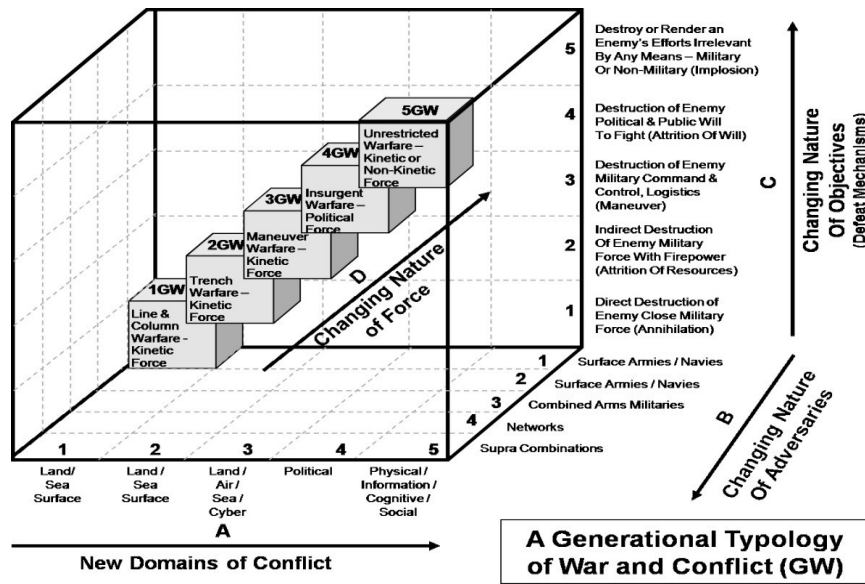
2 Generational Typology of Warfare

2.1 New Domains of Conflict

In Figure 1, the horizontal axis represents new conflict domains. Notably, the initial three warfare generations were confined to physical domains, involving military action to secure victory. The fourth generation introduced the political domain to warfare. Hybrid warfare extended this trend by encompassing social and cognitive domains, erasing the distinctions between war and peace. People asked Liang and Xiangsu⁽²⁰¹²⁾ about battlefield location, and they

replied that it is everywhere. Fifth-generation warfare surpasses fourth-generation by escalating the spheres of conflict even further to embrace the physical (including land, air, and sea), information (including cyber), cognitive, and social (including political) domains. In Hybrid warfare we can frequently observe the changing nature of Adversaries, objectives, and force.

Figure 1- A Generational Typology of Warfare



Source: <https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780203828731.ch3>

The following model explains the generational development of warfare over the years in the past:

2.2 Characteristics of Hybrid Warfare

Hybrid Warfare is a progression of fourth-generation warfare¹. Its characteristics include the following:

- The obsolescence of the traditional military and its traditional hardware (Hammes, 2012);
- In third or fourth generation warfare, one could not hack enemy's guns, bombs, or weapons. However, one can hack the enemy's information weapons in Hybrid Warfare (Haque, 2014).
- Hybrid warfare is problematic as there are no Geneva conventions to enforce norms of acceptable behavior (Wang Xiang sui, 1999).

1 Disponible at: <http://confusionism.word press.com/2010/10/17/fifth-generation-warfare-features/>.

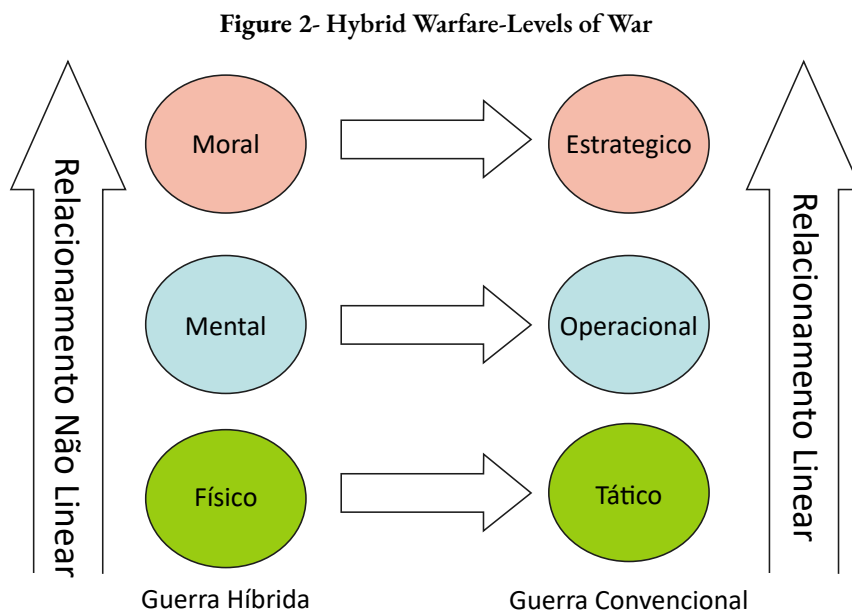
- d. The total failure of expensive military hardware and techniques to overcome not just traditional low technology weaponry but also the creative and dynamic use of the technology (available to all by the non-state actors).
- e. Traditional war centered on an enemy physical strength and fourth generation warfare centered on moral strength, while the Hybrid Warfare focus on intellectual strength.

2.3 Constituents of Hybrid Warfare

Some of the tools of Hybrid warfare are Information warfare, Propaganda, and violence including criminal acts— sub-conventional warfare including proxies, terrorism, economic warfare, cyber warfare, subversion, special operations, and conventional warfare.

Media, weak diplomacy, internal fault lines, political instability, and fragile economy are the *major enablers of Hybrid Warfare*. However, socio-economic disparity, porous borders, ethnicity/sectarianism, organized crime, corruption, injustice, weak writ of the state, and prevalence of violent non state actors are also some *other key enablers* that must be kept in mind for their relevance when discussing hybrid threat within Pakistan.

Hybrid Warfare like other forms of warfare essentially has strategic, operational, and tactical levels of war. However, they manifest non-conformingly to the previous generations, since one wrong action at the tactical level in Hybrid Warfare can cause ripples at strategic levels. There are three levels to such conflicts: moral, mental, and physical level. It is considered that the physical level, i.e. the active use of force, is the least powerful in such conflicts (Li, 2008). Hybrid Warfare actors operate in physical, mental, and moral domain to undermine the adversaries, therefore the lines between war and peace are blurring, due to the very own nature of the Hybrid Warfare.



Source: Cheng Li (2008)

2.4 Stages of Hybrid Conflict

Hybrid conflict may extend up to 25 years with various stages, which may be sequential or simultaneous, multilayered or multi-dimensional, with blurring lines. Below are various stages of hybrid conflict and its development into hybrid war:

- A. The conflict is likely to progress in four stages. In Stage 1, a strategic narrative may be built up, such as terrorism sponsorship or involvement in nuclear proliferation.
- B. Operating under this strategic narrative, hybridized conflict may transcend into Stage 2, in which insurgencies, terrorism, and cyber threats, synchronized with a hostile actor, weaken the state structure.
- C. In Stage 3 of hybrid conflict, the cohesion of the state may be broken by challenging the very *raison d'être* of the target state. Lack of public confidence in the state and its institutions (including military) and general diplomatic isolation may lead to this stage.
- D. In Stage 4 of hybrid conflict, all elements may achieve synchronization under one strategic script, mayhem would be ensured to overtly coerce the state on core issues.

Thus, the hybrid conflict may transform into Hybrid war through an engineered triggered event, which may inflame internal and external hostile elements into physical actions, such as occupation of important installations and civil disobedience. This may lead to an internal collapse, which may be exploited by external conventional means, if necessary. The aim of ensuring partial or complete collapse of the state would remain.

3 Different Perspectives in International Domain

Every age has its own kind of war, its own limiting conditions, and its own peculiar preconceptions.

Carl von Clausewitz (1989)

3.1 International Law Perspective

From an International Law perspective, Hybrid Warfare is an armed conflict involving strategic, operational, and tactical cooperation and coordination between simultaneously operating regular and irregular force elements.

3.1.1 USA Perspective

The Military Balance 2015 provides a very comprehensive definition of Hybrid Warfare: “the use of military and non-military tools in an integrated campaign, designed to achieve surprise, seize the initiative and gain psychological as well as physical advantages utilizing diplomatic means; sophisticated and rapid information, electronic and cyber operations; covert and occasionally overt military and intelligence action; and economic pressure” (Editor’s introduction, 2015).

3.1.2 Russian Perspective

Russian analysts describe Hybrid Warfare by the concept of New Generation Warfare (or Non-linear War). The US and NATO consider the Georgian War (2008) and the Crimean Conflict (2014) some manifestations of the Russian approach to Hybrid Warfare. However, from the Russian perspective, these were strategic protective operations to counter US hybrid threat against its national interests and tenets (Wither, 2016).

3.1.3 Indian Perspective

The Indian perspective is significant since it has a direct bearing on Pakistan’s understanding of hybrid threats. The Indian narrative portrays to the world that Pakistan is employing Hybrid Warfare tactics against India (Monaghan, 2016). In his article for the Indian Defense Review, Brigadier Anil Gupta, from the Indian Army, defines it as “Hybrid war can best be described as a combination of conventional and sub-conventional threats and can be unleashed both by the state and non-state actors” (Gupta, 2016). The Indian concept revolves around conventional warfare, irregular warfare, economic warfare, media warfare, special operations, and information warfare aspects of Hybridity.

3.1.4 Pakistani Perspective

The Pakistani perspective on Hybrid Warfare is shaped as a response to India’s actions, by asserting that India is engaged in Hybrid Warfare tactics aimed at destabilizing and fragmenting Pakistan. This strategy involves coordinated and covert use of various instruments of power and policy, with tactical approaches including state-sponsored terrorism, media infiltration, cultural influence, and diplomatic efforts to tarnish Pakistan’s reputation and isolate it on the global stage (Mehmood, 2018).

4 INDO-PAK CONTEXT

Warfare is changing, and Hybrid War has historical roots in South Asia. The 1971 Indo-Pakistani war exemplifies diverse strategies, including psychological, subversive, and violent tactics that India has employed in East Pakistan before military intervention, resulting in Pakistan’s disintegration.

Nuclearization of South Asia resulted in a new impetus to proxy wars in that region. At the same time, the employment of Hybrid Warfare elements is increasing in the region, with some indicators of Hybrid Warfare in South Asia being:

- a. The attack on Sri Lankan Cricket team at Lahore (2009) resulted in discontinuation of international cricket matches/events in Pakistan.
- b. Terror attacks on many sensitive military installations severely affected the morale of the nation.
- c. The Mumbai attacks (2008), as well as the Pathankot and Uri attacks (January and September 2016) resulted in accusations and further strained relations between India and Pakistan. Later, during Pulwama crisis (2019), when Pakistan shot down Indian aircrafts and captured an Indian Pilot, the crisis escalated to the brink of a major war.
- d. Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) involvement in worsening the security in Karachi and Baluchistan to cause political and economic turmoil for Pakistan, as testified by the Indian Navy officer Kulbhushan Jadhav, a RAW operative captured by Pakistani Intelligence Community.
- e. The attack on the Army Public School in Peshawar in December 2014, the suicide attack on Police Lines in a Peshawar Mosque (Dec 2022), and the recent suicide attack in Bajour (July 2023) on a rally for religious political party that resulted in the killing of over 50 individuals.
- f. The recent increase in cyber-attacks, e.g. more than 700 Indian government websites were hacked since 2012 (MORE THAN..., 2015), whereas, the hacking of several Pakistani websites were also reported (WHAT IS..., 2017).

4.1 Major Events of Hybrid Nature 2001–2023

After 9/11, the South Asian region faced increased complexity, due to the US-led war on Afghanistan extending into Pakistan after the involvement of Taliban and NATO. Attacks on the Indian Lok Sabha and Mumbai were used to target Pakistan, multiple actors funded and supported sub-nationalism in Balochistan, and slogans like “militants 60 Kms from Islamabad” were spread. The era was marked by War on Terror, confusion, and poor law and order. Table 1 outlines hybrid activities against Pakistan by different actors (Haider, 2010).

Table 1 – History of Major Events of Hybrid Nature (2001–2023)

Elements	Executors	Effects
Economic	Multinational	Economic meltdown Funding to militant organizations Financial Action Task Force (FATF) grey list
Military	Multinational	Deployment of Army in Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) Escalation on eastern borders Drone attacks Operation Zarb-e-Azb Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad Cyber threats
Internal security	India	Rise of Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) Mumbai Attacks Law and order situation in Karachi Nationalist movement in Balochistan Indian belligerence; cold war doctrine Uri and Pulwama Attacks, and shooting down of Indian fighter aircrafts Attack on a Peshawar Mosque Attack on a political gathering in Bajour
Miscellaneous	USA	Raid at Abbottabad for Osama Bin Laden Attack at the Salala Check Post Drone Attacks

Source: Author.

5 Geo-Strategic Environment and Challenges

Supreme excellence consists in breaking the enemy's resistance without fighting.
Sun Tzu (1971).

After the overt nuclearization of Pakistan and conventional war being cost prohibitive, hybrid war became a preferred option against Pakistan. Given the evolving geo-strategic environment as well as internal dynamics of Pakistan, the approach is designed to destroy the Pakistani state with numerous measures
(Hussain, 2013).

You can do one Mumbai, you may lose Balochistan.
National Security Advisor (NSA) of India, Ajit Doval; Feb 2014.

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) leadership aims to weaken Pakistan, as expressed by Rajnath Singh's 2016 statement about its potential disintegration. Their objective is for Pakistan to concede to Indian supremacy in South Asia, yielding on key interests and disputes. Therefore, Hybrid Warfare led by India with backing from various actors serves as the means to achieve this goal.

As for the question, "Why Hybrid war is being preferred against Pakistan rather than conventional warfare", the following factors offer an explanation:

- a. Pakistan's possession of credible nuclear capability.
- b. The geo-strategic relevance/importance of Pakistan.
- c. Pakistan's strategic relations with China and strengthening ties with Russia.
- d. Pakistan's stature in the Muslim world, especially as a nuclear power.
- e. A befitting response in the conventional domain by the operationalization of the New Concept of War Fighting.

The cardinal aspects of Hybrid Warfare against Pakistan include:

- a. Striving for major effects without direct military action but using military power for coercion, which enables options like limited actions, surgical strikes, and cross-border firing.
- b. Involving Pakistan Armed Forces in sub-conventional warfare to weaken its conventional capability.
- c. Creating a rift between armed forces and citizens to discredit the military.
- d. Launching information operations to demoralize the nation, fostering inferiority and compliance with Indian dominance.
- e. Engaging in aggressive cyber warfare.
- f. Using economic pressure, including exploiting water resources.
- g. Undermining Pakistan's geo-strategic importance, especially its influence in Afghanistan.

- h. Diplomatically isolating Pakistan on the global stage.
- i. Exploiting internal divisions to fuel instability.
- j. Portraying Pakistan as a terrorism center, aiming to label it as Terrorist State and gathering international opinion against its nuclear assets (Hussain, 2013).

Pakistan confronts a multitude of challenges that significantly contribute to the dynamics of peace and conflict, particularly in the context of Hybrid Warfare. These challenges encompass:

- a. **Internal Challenges:** Pakistan currently faces a severe energy shortage, while all other social sector indicators are also not encouraging (Ahmed, 2019). Poor law and order situation, corruption, and high crime rates make any country susceptible of falling prey to external hands (Musarrat; Afzal; Azhar, 2013). Some aspects faced by common Pakistani citizen include economic hardships, injustice, unemployment, lack of basic necessities, and discrimination against poor people. Moreover, inadequate education quality and past governmental neglect have left Pakistan unprepared for 21st century challenges, making its youth susceptible to exploitation. Economic potential doesn't match the current state, with key institutions becoming burdens.
- b. **External Challenges:** external factors play a pivotal role as well, with geostrategic positioning and international defamation being key external considerations. Pakistan's geostrategic importance and absence of a fitting national strategy create vulnerability, making it susceptible to extensive exploitation (Zia, 2010). Moreover, the international community associates most of the terrorist acts worldwide with Pakistan (Laub, 2013). Haqqani Network has been tagged as "veritable arm" of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), and particularly the United States and its allies spread much propaganda on this issue, which was also exploited by India (Choudhry, 2012).

c. Security Challenges (Both Internal and External)

- **Terrorism:** the global war on terror in Afghanistan also pushed Pakistan into the war via its western border. Terrorism inside Pakistan is predominantly the base of poverty, poor education, unemployment, and inadequate infrastructure, thus exposing it to the instigators of Hybrid Warfare.
- **Military Aggression:** the Indian concept of proactive operations (PAO) can be triggered anytime. After the Osama Bin Ladin operation, the attack on Salala Check Post, and the drone attack on the Taliban Supreme Leader Mullah Mansoor, the western borders were considered unsafe until the US forces withdrawal from Afghanistan (MacAskill, 2007).

- **Sectarian/Ethnic Violence:** Pakistan is suffering from sectarian and ethnic violence, being exploited by foreign elements.

d. Resource Catastrophe

- **Energy Crisis and Economy of War:** Pakistan's energy demand has surged due to industrial expansion and population growth. If the current crisis persists, it will detrimentally impact the common people's lives. Overall, Pakistan has incurred substantial losses, amounting to billions of dollars, due to the global war on terrorism. According to Hafiz Sheikh, Pakistan's losses due to the war on terror, encompassing both direct and indirect expenses, exceed 258.1 billion dollars (Sheikh, 2019).
- **Water War:** water warfare is also a tool for Hybrid Warfare (Chappell; Glennie, 2019). India, as an upper riparian, consistently exploits Pakistan's water needs, violating the Indus Waters Treaty. It seeks water strategies to induce drought in Pakistan, given its agricultural dependence.

e. Military Aspects

- Technological Vulnerabilities of Pakistani Army and the adversary's continuous efforts to degrade Armed Forces and the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI).
- Bad governance within the country resulted in continuous and undue involvement of Pakistani Army in political issues, combined with the current exploitation by opponents to create a rift between Pakistan Army and the people.

Hybrid Warfare challenges being faced by Pakistan are highly unstructured yet well connected with internal and external elements, due to the modern means of communication. Some of the major Hybrid Warfare threats faced by Pakistan include **Non-state Actors and State Actors** like Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), and sectarian organizations. In South Asia, India uses Hybrid Warfare to politically destabilize Pakistan, as well as weaken its economy and globally isolate it. This approach involves intervention, political agitation, proxies, and coercion. Under the administration of Narendra Modi, political subversion and proxy wars have gained prominence since 2014, aligning with Ajit Doval's doctrine. Additionally, the Indo-US Hybrid Warfare against China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a topic of academic discussion worldwide. In Pakistan, political subversion occurs in various domains and people's perceptions vary based on education. NGOs and agents use Hybrid methods to incite protests and violence against the state and its institutions (Korybko, 2017).

India's prolonged efforts to isolate Pakistan from the international community, using tools like lobbying, have not yielded the intended outcomes. For example, India's attempts to blacklist Pakistan on the **Financial Action Task Force** forum have not succeeded and, despite endeavors to depict Pakistan as a sponsor of terrorism, the efforts to brand it a rogue state have proved unsuccessful. In the economic domain, the following aspects are of significant importance:

- a. India challenges CPEC's economic impact and employs Hybrid tactics to counter it, involving both kinetic and non-kinetic approaches, such as the capture of RAW agent Kulbhushan Jadhav and the support for Baloch anti-state anarchists.
- b. Karachi, an economic center, is affected by RAW's presence for its links to political factions and violent agents, causing turmoil to exploit Karachi's economic domain within Hybrid Warfare.

5.1 Military Domain

In the military domain, we observe:

- a. A nefarious strategy to fractionate government and Armed Forces is conducted by Memogate leaks and Cyril Almeida's "Dawn leaks" episode.
- b. A self-proclaimed economic expert faults military for economic challenges, portraying Pakistan's military as a burden. Notions like the military consuming 50% of the budget are deeply ingrained in the intelligentsia.
- c. For Pakistani Armed Forces to fight the external threats, have to take out the internal threats linked to those external elements.
- d. ISI, the first defense line, has been maligned with narratives such as a deep state and rouge elements.
- e. Due to on-going conflict, scarce resources had to be diverted towards security, thus affecting readiness against conventional threats.
- f. After the Uri incident, India increased military activities, like daily firing along the Line of Control (LOC), quadcopter intrusions, and submarine incursions in Pakistani waters, to test responses and potentially provoke extreme actions.

5.2 Nuclear Assets

Being the only Islamic country with nuclear capability, Pakistan's program raises global concerns. While international propaganda fuels allegations against the program and depicts Pakistan as an unsafe nation with nuclear weapons that could be potentially seized by terrorist groups, the program is essential for credible deterrence against stronger adversaries. A non-nuclear Pakistan would be better for neighbors as well as the international community.

5.3 Psychological Subversion

This is a significant facet of Hybrid warfare, involving destabilization and demoralization. Pakistan's diversity can be exploited by NGOs, advancing their hidden agendas under the pretense of welfare or development (Korybko, 2017).

The list of the manifestations of Hybrid Warfare threats to Pakistan is very long, since Pakistan is exposed to a large number of instruments of Hybrid Warfare. The main maneuver is against the inner front, with sub-conventional warfare on the lead role, including terrorism sponsorship in the western border and attempts to fuel insurgencies in Balochistan and Gilgit-Baltistan (GB). The appointment of ex RAW Chief Anil Dhasmana, a Balochistan specialist, reflects this policy pursuit. Targeting of military installations/capabilities, destruction of strategic assets at Mehran and Kamra Air Base, are some examples. Misleading narratives are used to target the population of the country, as well as the security personnel. Moreover, stretching the armed forces and Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs) by their extensive employment also creates a situation of uncertainty and fear in the populace to subdue their will.

In the post-truth era, repetitive agenda-driven assertions gain more influence than facts, when shaping opinions. The information domain plays a pivotal role in influencing both domestic and foreign audiences. Pakistan's fragmented efforts have allowed enemies to exploit this domain, whereas India's focused approach reaps benefits by disseminating harmful narratives to manipulate populations. Main themes of IOs are:

- a. India is a tolerant country that holds no negative designs against any of its neighbors.
- b. Similar Pakistani and Indian cultural values cast doubt on Pakistan's ideology, rooted in 'Two-Nation Theory'. This notion is reinforced through a cultural onslaught via powerful media;
- c. Pakistan armed forces and intelligence agencies are rogue institutions and responsible for hampering Pakistan's progress.

- d. Smaller provinces are neglected, and establishment/governments have been neglecting and depriving populace of their due rights.
- e. Agitations in Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK) are Pakistani sponsored, thus hurting legitimate Kashmir Cause and connecting it with terrorism.
- f. Human Rights violations are being committed in Balochistan, GB, and other restive areas of Pakistan, thus trying to equate situation in these areas with Indian Occupied Kashmir.

5.4 Cyber Domain

India's substantial cyber capabilities result from heavy investment, for which Indian roles on global websites facilitate cyber activities. Pakistan's expanding IT sector and e-commerce and lack of safeguards increase vulnerability. Adulterated Kashmir maps on global sites and cyber-attacks on security infrastructure highlight this threat.

5.5 Use of Conventional Forces

India is keeping the Line of Control (LoC) and the Working Boundary active by indiscriminately firing cross border, resulting in innocent civilian casualties to induce social unrest and fear.

5.6 Economic Strangulation including Water Maneuver

Main thrust lines are:

- a. Efforts to undermine China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) involve spreading false information, inciting Baloch sub-nationalists, and fostering distrust between provinces. RAW's desk dedicated for CPEC and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's objections in 2015 reflect this policy. Repeated killings of Chinese engineers further weaken CPEC and Chinese-funded projects.
- b. Perpetual turmoil in Karachi, which is the economic heart of Pakistan, by facilitating various militant wings and criminal gangs.
- c. Indian funding to halt the Kalabagh Dam construction and the machinations against Bhasha Dam are economic subversion.

- d. Waging proxies via the western borders to cast huge losses in the country economic development.
- e. Fast-tracking hydropower projects worthing \$15 billion in the Indian-Occupied Kashmir in recent years, ignoring warnings from Islamabad, to disrupt water supplies to Pakistan.
- f. An unwinnable economically crippling arms race.

5.7 Diplomatic Isolation

India aims to isolate Pakistan globally, with backing from its Diaspora as a force multiplier. This pursuit involves:

- a. Tagging Pakistan worldwide with terrorism and creating doubts about the nuclear security, hence, defaming it in the international community.
- b. Diplomatic pressure and United Nations (UN) Security Council Committee's sanctions against specific Pakistani people and groups demonstrate India's influence through a persistent campaign.
- c. The unveiling of Afghanistan Strategy by ex-US President Donald Trump also had Indian footprint endorsing its view, while completely disregarding Pakistan's standpoint.
- d. Ex-Afghan President's statements against Pakistan in the Heart of Asia Conference in Dec 2016 and in the International Conference on Central and South Asia Regional Connectivity in 2021.
- e. Statement at the end of BRICS summit, which named Haqqani Network (HQN), Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) as terrorist organisations, is being claimed by India as a major diplomatic victory;
- f. Boycott of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) summit to be held in Pakistan in Nov 2016 by India, Bangladesh, and even Sri Lanka, resulting in the conference cancellation;
- g. Indian Foreign Minister's admission on Financial Action Task Force (FATF) to keep Pakistan in grey list vindicates Pakistan's stance on India's negative role in global financial watchdog.

5.8 Strategic Communication

The “surgical strike” false flag operation in IOK showcased skillful strategic communication. The world’s subdued reaction has established a precedent, granting India approval for similar actions in the future.

6 STRATEGIES ADOPTED BY PAKISTAN TO COUNTER HYBRID WARFARE

Pakistan faces Hybrid Warfare challenges due to vulnerabilities in its state structure. These challenges are acknowledged in academia, government, and military circles. Collaborating with Armed Forces and LEAs, the government implemented measures, including the National Internal Security Policy (NISP 2014–2018) and the National Action Plan (NAP), post-Army Public School incident, to address these challenges and enhance national security (Sheikh, 2019). The government, with the help of all major political parties, incorporated NAP to the constitution with the 21st amendment, and different segments of the civil society highly appreciated this initiative by the government.

The existing approach, emphasizing Dialogue, Deterrence, and Development, has yielded moderate success. However, given the evolving threat spectrum, these measures might fall short. Hybrid threats target all aspects of society, thus necessitating a comprehensive strategic response. In this context, the following actions have been taken:

- a. **Operation Zarb-e-Azb**, named after a historical sword strike of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), commenced in June 2014 in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) region as an extensive operation, encompassing nationwide information-based efforts to counter violent threats. The operation’s key objectives include striking militant groups in North Waziristan, eliminating foreign militants in FATA, safeguarding and rehabilitating locals, and restoring law and order (Javaid, 2016).
- b. In early 2015, the Government of Pakistan initiated the ***National Action Plan (NAP)*** after the attacks on the Army Public School in Peshawar. NAP aimed to counter terrorism alongside Operation Zarb-e-Azb. Endorsed by major stakeholders, it aimed to align domestic and foreign policies against terrorism and Hybrid Warfare. NAP’s 21st Amendment to the Constitution included key points like military courts, anti-militia measures, National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA), hate speech control, financial restrictions on terror groups, anti-terrorism force, minority protection, Madaris Reforms, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) rehabilitation, and online monitoring. Military courts expedited

trials, but NACTA faced challenges, while well-structured political will for NAP execution hindered desired outcomes.

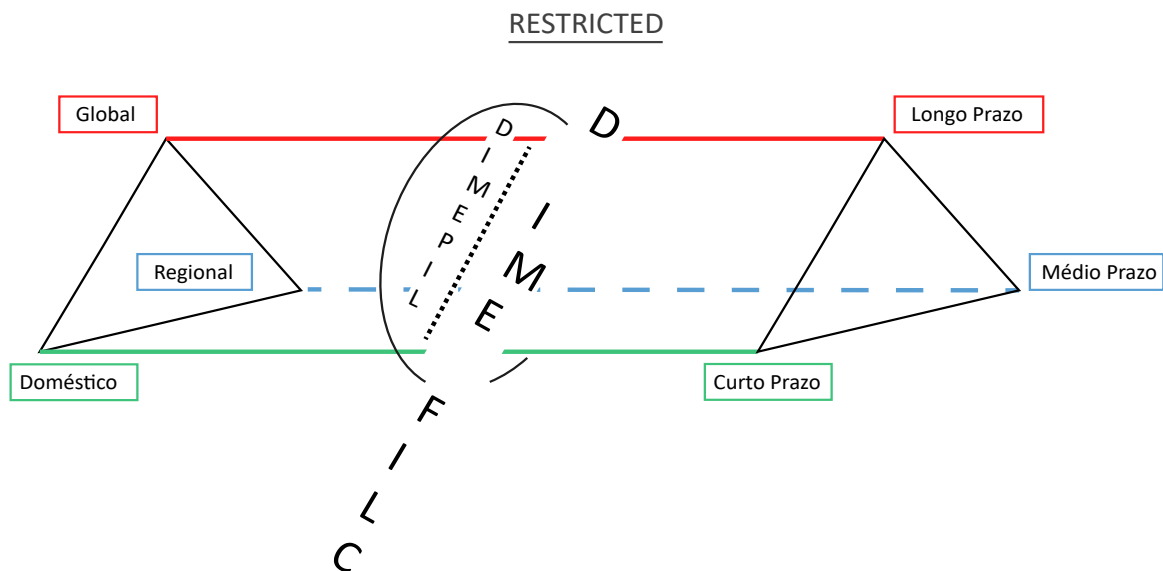
- c. Launched in early 2017, Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad aimed to counter terrorism and hybrid strategies of adversaries. Its core goal was to eradicate remaining terrorist groups, strengthen previous successes, and guard against internal and external threats of Hybrid Warfare. Notably, the operation strength lay in coordinated planning among armed forces, intelligence agencies, and law enforcement. It aligned with the National Action Plan, underscoring its importance.

The information warfare and the manipulation of facts were employed in the propaganda against Saddam Hussein accusing him of possessing weapons of mass destruction, which turned out to be nonexistent, to justify the illegal intervention in Iraq (Rampton; Stauber, 2003). In the meantime, the “baby killers” slogan used against Bashar al-Assad regime and against Saddam Hussein (Marano, 2002) has remained the same. Developed nations employ information and asymmetric warfare against weaker countries for their political and monetary benefit (Qureshi, 2019). Therefore, Pakistan’s understanding of these fourth and fifth-generation/Hybrid Warfare tactics is crucial to better defend its territories from unlawful intervention, propaganda, misinformation, and from exploitation by the media, as well as from the attacks of non-state actors (Nofi, 2006).

To counter hybrid threats effectively, understanding non-state actors’ motives and enemy’s political interests is key. Developing an integrated National Security Apparatus, guided by synchronized policy and strategy, is crucial. A politically led approach with societal and institutional measures is imperative. A National Hybrid Response Regime and Counter Hybrid Warfare (CHW) Strategy is proposed, offering a comprehensive response for grey zone situations and high-end Hybrid Warfare.

The complex nature of threats calls for a “*Whole Nation Approach*” with DIMEFILCH, employing Diplomatic, Information, Military, Economic, Financial, Intelligence, Legal, Cultural, and Humanitarian involvement and capabilities. Therefore all Elements of National Power (EoNP) and the societal segments would be gelled together in addressing critical vulnerabilities in Pakistani society and in creating a resilient domestic environment, which eventually leads to the first strand of preventing the very ideology of Pakistan from being compromised (Marano, 2002). DIMEFILCH is basically a term to describe the “war effort” while employing the full spectrum of all resources (Nofi, 2007). Victory in this type of warfare would be marked by the restoration of the country stability, the resolution to an internal conflict, the end of a civil war, or a peace agreement. Ideally this approach must include the policy of Identifying, Preventing, Detering, Defending, and Developing with a context of short-term, mid-term, and long-term measure in global, regional, and domestic domains. The proposed framework is explained in Figure 3:

Figure 3- Proposed Framework against Hybrid Threats



Source: Nofi (2007)

Concept — given the multifaceted nature of hybrid warfare against Pakistan, a **synchronized and multidimensional response** is necessary. A comprehensive National Response Framework is crucial **to ensure security, stability, and prosperity**. This involves safeguarding society, bolstering confidence, maintaining robust military capabilities, and fostering political will and national unity for effective implementation.

Strategic Framework — a framework of **Deter, Protect, and Prevent (DP²)** has been selected to address the threat. It can be viewed in terms of three concentric circles; each circle has two domains (kinetic and non-kinetic) to thwart the posed threat. Information campaign lies at the heart of response to hybrid conflict and remains a constant.

Response Strategy — at the national level, the strategy going forward would be based on “Comprehensible National Security,” which would entail adopting measures in all domains, including Defense, Internal Security, Economic, Diplomacy, Social well-being, Governance, Energy, Information, Environmental etc.

6.1 Countering Hybrid Warfare: Way Forward for Pakistan

Pakistan needs to improve the existing mechanisms and develop innovative strategies in light of the following recommendations to counter the challenges of Hybrid Warfare.

National Level — to counter Hybrid Warfare, Pakistan should strengthen internal cohesion by improving governance and societal unity. Simultaneously, it should diplomatically expose India’s actions while employing innovative information strategies. To address Hybrid Warfare effectively, the following national-level steps are crucial:

- a. **Formulation of National Strategy:** developing a comprehensive political strategy is essential to address Hybrid Warfare. The absence of such a policy has led to a lack of defined strategies against the various facets of this type of war. While National Internal Security Policy NISP–2014 and NISP 2018–23 have emphasized counter-terrorism and counter-extremism, they overlook several other aspects of Hybrid Warfare.
- b. **Good Governance:** the government must demonstrate performance management to the masses by:
- Delivering governance down to the grassroots level by coming up with federal and provincial structures with constitutional backing to deal with critical internal fault lines.
 - Strong anti-corruption policies.
 - Balance between the institutions and harmony between political and military leadership.
 - Good relations between the central and federal units.
 - Provision of a legal basis for judicial, political, and administrative reforms.
 - Equal distribution of resources.
 - Curtailment of unnecessary government expenditure.
 - Provision of standard education and basic health facilities.
- c. **Economic Development:** enhance the current positive economic trend with structural reforms, prioritize growth-oriented strategies for public welfare. Secure the success of CPEC for regional prominence. Develop realistic economic roadmaps to position Pakistan as a key regional player with special focus on:
- Short term factors to restore economy to the position of its natural potential.
 - Energy and food security as essential elements of the economic development plan.
- d. **Defensive-Offensive Posture:** adopt a defensive-offensive posture against India's Hybrid Warfare and make the country's immune system (the social contract between the state and its citizens) strong and resilient.
- e. **Foster Opinion:** reveal the true nature of India's policies using creative diplomacy and information methods. Cultivate resilient opinion networks that counter outside influence and false narratives.

- f. **Public and Political Support:** unification of all stakeholders by the government, including religious-political parties, to achieve consensus on pressing national issues. Currently, no such forum exists for this purpose.
- g. **Legal Issues:** Hybrid Warfare challenges the state-judiciary relation on civil/human rights. A national mechanism is essential to address legal issues arising in this contemporary environment.
- h. **Understanding of Hybrid Warfare at all Levels:** given the complexity of Hybrid Warfare threats, it is crucial for future leaders to grasp the implications and trade-offs involved in preparing for and executing counterinsurgency and stability operations.
- i. **Trade, Not Aid:** prioritize trade over aid, echoing the sentiment of former Prime Minister Imran Khan, to generate foreign exchange and foster job growth.
- k. **Countering False Information:** educate the youth to be patient and critical online, avoiding impulsive reactions to information. Consider a government-backed counterintelligence effort to gain insights from reports like EU DisinfoLab.

l. Security Challenges (Both Internal and External)

- **Capacity Building for Civic Response against Terrorism** — for enhancing civic response, a comprehensive civil defense strategy with the following main constituents needs to be evolved:
 - » Citizen participation.
 - » Safeguard of critical infrastructure.
 - » Short term rescue and relief by building crisis response capacity.
 - » Management strategy for catering for long term physical and psychological effects of the terrorist attacks.
- **Funding of Anti-State Elements:**
 - » Suspension of terrorist organizations funding, which are often sourced from legitimate businesses, charities, criminal activities, and contributions, for significantly hindering their ability to carry out attacks.

- » Implementation of National Action Plan without restraint or respite, bringing Madaris in mainstream and implementing single national curriculum.
- » De-politicization and capacity building of Law Enforcement Agencies.
- » Repatriation of Afghan refugees and illegal immigrants.
- » Consolidations FATA gains and gradual transition to civil authorities.
- » Stringent border control mechanism.

m. Contemporary Warfare: effective media handling in Hybrid Warfare is of paramount importance. To use media in an optimistic way by:

- Allocating substantial resources and efforts to enhance the capacity of Pakistani media and raise awareness about India's negative propaganda in response to emerging challenges.
- Implementing a comprehensive media policy and strengthen lobbying endeavors to bridge the gap between Pakistan's actual situation and the misrepresented image of the country.
- Identifying rogue elements and adopt a strict approach towards media contents.

n. Improving Technology: steps recommended for progress in the fields of space/satellites technologies, as well as bio and nanotechnology are:

- Organizations working under Strategy Plans Division (SPD) Force are best suited for the tasks. SPD must open up to development in the field of such technology.
- Higher Education Commission to introduce subject related to nanotechnology in its existing establishments/syllabus.
- Agriculture universities to undertake projects related to bio-security and next-generation preparation for such eventualities.
- Space/satellites technologies, robotics or robotic engineering being taught at related institutes working under the National University of Science and Technology (NUST).

o. Resource Catastrophe:

- **Food and Water Security:** Pakistan's growing population and food prices need a food and water conservation strategy, therefore the Ministry of food and agriculture must analyze and come up with long term goals in this regard.
- **Migration of Skilled Individuals:** the establishment of favorable political, social, and economic conditions Pakistani government, as incentives to curb the brain drain.
- **Energy Sufficiency:** to overcome energy crisis:
 - » Adoption of proper energy efficiency measures in the industrial sector.
 - » More focus on hydropower and alternative energy.
 - » Effective use of Thar coal and other natural resources.
 - » Above all, management and fair distribution of all available energy resources.

p. Exterior Maneuver/Diplomacy: focus must remain on proactive diplomatic drive to maintain "positive relevance" in the international arena by:

- Continuing to support the Kashmir cause politically, morally, and diplomatically. Plan and complement the strategy based on legality, human rights, and international humanitarian law.
- Diplomatic maneuver based on comprehensive partnership with China, mutually beneficial partnership with Russia, maintaining and enduring strategic relations with US, and enhance EU-Pakistan strategic partnership in socio economic sector.
- While striving for friendly relations with neighbors, engagement with India should be based on the principle of equality and dialogue without any precondition.
- Remaining engaged at strategic level and seeking peaceful and friendly relations; de-hyphenate Pakistan's security paradigm from Afghan security milieu.

- Foster balanced engagement with Middle East, proactive comprehensive engagement with both Saudi Arabia and Iran, and all efforts in energy connectivity with central Asian republics.
- Effective lobbying in global powerhouses, especially the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the US, EU, and financial institutions.
- Capacity of key embassies must be optimized.
- Harness of enormous potential of Pakistani Diaspora to promote own interest as well as reinforce lobbying efforts
- Indian threats to abrogate or exploit loopholes in Indus Waters Treaty must be taken seriously, and effective engagement with World Bank must be pursued to maintain the treaty sanctity.

q. Military Level:

- **Strategic Forces:** assured strategic capability must be maintained at all costs. The strategic forces need to maintain “Full Spectrum Deterrence” under the umbrella of “Credible Minimum Deterrence.”
- **Conventional Forces:** maintenance of capable, well equipped, and threat focused conventional forces, whose capacity building must be further enhanced in line with force development goals around pillars of **quality** and **indigenization**.
- **Specialized Training:** prioritize training to comprehend terrorist tactics, relief operations, and Hybrid Warfare. Introduce and discuss the subject at Army Schools of Instructions.
- **Intelligence System:** strong intelligence system is vital for Hybrid Warfare, by enhancing integrated, coordinated networks, data sharing, and alerts for swift responses. Key Hybrid Warfare intelligence aspects include:
 - » A bottom-up approach needs to be implemented in the entire area of operation.
 - » The intelligence loop needs to be faster than that of the enemy.
 - » Accuracy must take primacy over quantity.

- » The principle of exercising restraint could be adhered for a moral ascendancy, when in doubt.
- r. **Integration rather than Segregation:** enhance mutual security ties with the community to counter hostile combatants' advantage.
- s. **Mental Conditioning of Troops:** implement measures to mentally fortify troops against negative influences from open media and society. Senior officers' interactions can play a pivotal role.
- t. **Media Campaign:** Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) should strategize a potent media campaign, possibly purchasing airtime on key channels, emphasizing themes such:
 - Recount of the armed forces achievements.
 - Exposure of internal anti-Pakistan elements.
 - The role played by the Army in nation-building tasks.
 - Army's sacrifices in operations.
 - Clarification of public misperceptions about the war on terror.
- u. **Technological Vulnerabilities of Pakistan Army:** the technological vulnerabilities of the Army need to be addressed immediately by:
 - Apart from using US-based GPS, Pakistan Army can also endeavor shifting to a Chinese-based or indigenous GPS system.
 - Collaborating with defense research labs and engineering universities for enhancing drone technology, focusing on weapon-carrying drones.
 - Establishing a centralized and proactive cyber warfare command at Joint Staff Headquarters, incorporating civilian sector resources.
- v. **Intelligence Sharing and Integration:** Pakistan needs to immediately propose that all of Afghanistan's neighbors (Iran, the Central Asian Republics, and China), Russia, and the Afghan government (Taliban) share their anti-terrorist intelligence.

7 CONCLUSION

War is a moral contest; they are won in temples long before they are ever fought.

Sun Tzu (1971).

Hybrid conflict cannot be categorized as a new form of warfare. However, in the 21st century's specific security environments and more so due to the globalization's unprecedented progress that increased nation-states inter-dependencies and susceptibilities, it does provide answers to persistent problems of overcoming adversaries with more economy of effort and plausible deniability. In a way, Hybrid Warfare is an expression that offers multiple players the likelihood of attaining political objectives in face of mighty adversaries. This is not limited to the military domain, since economically crippling the enemy is the most prudent way of subduing their will and imposing personal will upon them.

In short, the hybrid war in the 21st century exploits the internal weaknesses and fault lines of the target states by employing non-military means, including diplomatic, political, economic, informational. Additionally, it focuses on intimidating, manipulating, and coercing infrastructures of target states while also keeping the conventional military forces at the ready, as a final blow to crumble the adversary. As per the experts, the fundamental theme behind the application of hybrid tools is the subversion of masses in the target state, who become unwitting pawns in the hands of hostile forces against their state. By the time the pattern is discerned, it is generally too late to apply any corrective measures or inflict a change of course.

Hybrid threats will only grow and complicate with time and would be pursued by more and more belligerents, both statal and non-statal, along with equally innovative and unorthodox approaches for achieving the political ends or for political purposes. Hybrid Warfare is still in the nascent stage of conceptualizing. Therefore, countering the hybrid onslaught, both in physical and in the information environment, with preventive or defensive approaches contemplated by the nation-states or structures/leaders, can, at best, act as a temporary remedy to the menace, by limiting the effects. Nevertheless, the practitioners of hybrid means would later also learn other innovative and novel techniques to circumvent and bypass the defensive mechanism, thereby giving rise to a vicious circle of cause and effect.

A very complicated aspect of hybrid warfare is that it can be waged at any time and stage of a crisis in the target state. Thus, the victim may not realize that it is being subjected to hybrid war until it is too late. During the peacetime, hybrid tactics can be employed garbed as benign and benevolent activities in the target state, such as support for human rights, gender equality, freedom of expression, and right to information etc. At this stage, the purpose of such activities would be to test and recruit potential pawns to deepen the cleavages and fault lines in the state structure, before taking its control (as per the required intensity) under an overall plan of action, – all done in a calibrated and methodical manner. Few examples can be NGOs and INGOs and the support extended to their activities on the pretext of humanitarian sentiments. By that, specific themes would be prepared and propagated in print, electronic, and social media to condition and influence

the target audience, thus reshaping their opinion in favor of or against a particular issue, as well as influencing syllabus and curricula of public and private schools, instigating various groups for a specific agenda and legitimizing their activities by overt and covert actions and pronouncements. Recent examples are unprecedented and unwarranted coverage and support of Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (known as PTM in Pakistan) activities by media organizations like VOA and BBC, sympathizing with the agenda of renegade political factions and supporting specific political parties/personalities with a vested interest.

With the progress of a long term plan, and as the crisis situation in the target country reaches higher intensity, inimical forces will step up the hybrid onslaught causing internal fissures, uncertainty, chaos, and greater instability in the target state without coming to fore. Thereby efforts to recognize the perpetrator, as well as following countermeasures would be extremely difficult. At this stage, the energies and focus of the target would be on minimizing the damage and figuring out the matching response to counter and defeat the onslaught. Gradually the stage will be set for the initiator of hybrid attack to peak the momentum and deliver the final blow, either still covertly if feasible, such as in the event of Crimea, or to apply military force overtly, as happened in East Pakistan. However, this analogy presumes that hybrid war is a mean of merely shaping the environment before the final blow is unrestrictedly delivered. By that, the aim of hybrid war would be for the armed forces of the target country to have no chance to defeat the aggression. By the time it realizes the enormity and scale of hybrid means employed against it, it would, at best, point out the individuals and organizations directly involved in hybrid war and penalize them with a fleeting possibility of resorting to international laws and conventions to pinpoint the real instigators. Such are the perils of operating in a post-truth environment and a complex world, in which weaker states have to continuously remain on guard against hybrid threats.

8 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research on ongoing hybrid warfare in Pakistan should focus on understanding the evolving strategies employed by non-state actors and state-sponsored entities. Investigating the role of social media platforms and information warfare in shaping public opinion and political narratives is crucial. Analyzing the impact of economic factors, such as foreign aid and trade policies, on the country's vulnerabilities to external influence can provide valuable insights.

Additionally, studying the effectiveness of counter-hybrid warfare measures, both at the governmental and societal levels, is essential. Exploring international collaborations and diplomatic efforts aimed at countering hybrid threats can offer a broader perspective. Furthermore, research should delve into the psychological aspects of hybrid warfare, examining how it affects the mental health and social cohesion of the affected populations. Lastly, analyzing case studies from other nations facing similar challenges can provide comparative insights and inform robust policy recommendations for Pakistan.

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