



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Hybrid Warfare in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Implications for Pakistan**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study with the help of different supportive theories of hybrid warfare intends to argue that it is crucial for Pakistan to redefine threat perception with the lens of hybrid warfare theory rather than traditional threats. The study highlights that due to focusing too much on traditional security threats, Pakistan is unable to identify the actual threats which are posed by Pakistan's arch rival India and its allies. The study identifies that actual threat to Pakistan from India is not by battleground weapons, rather by virtual tools which are employed against Pakistan to defeat it without fighting a physical war. Pakistan is in such type of virtual warfare, without knowing that it is in a state of war. However, through qualitative method primary and secondary data is analyzed to build a strong argument of the research. As a result, Pakistan is bleeding and becoming economically, politically and militarily weak. It is not affordable for Pakistan to opt the policy of wait and see, as rivals of Pakistan want it to bleed and hemorrhage. This is the high time for managers of Pakistan to understand the 21<sup>st</sup> Century threats and take the preemptive measures to safeguard it from hybrid warfare threats.

**KEYWORDS** 5th Generation Warfare, Grey Zone Warfare, Hybrid Warfare

**Introduction**

As French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau said that, "Man is born free, but everywhere he is in chains." Likewise, it also seems that states are free but actually they also are in chains. Applying a realist perspective, they are said to be autonomous in taking their decisions, formulating their policies, protecting their interests, and attacking and intervening to keep up their prestige. However, actually in the time when the century is echoed with the buzz word 'liberalism' they are not. They are not free to take their decisions, they are not able to make their policies, they are not able to protect the basic rights of their citizens, but they are bound to act in certain ways due to the chains these states have in the age of globalization in the world arena.

The main aim of this paper is to understand these chains in which Pakistan is caught and bound to react in a particular way leading to a more destabilized political system, and civil unrest in the country. As Gore Vidal's quotation is that a "[d]isinformation campaign has metastasized to a level where myth threatens to overthrow history" which truly applies in the case of Pakistan. Pakistan is being treated with the tools of soft power rather than hard power, as Joseph Nye gave the name of his book "Soft Power." Talking about the soft power, leads us to the tools of fifth (5th) generation warfare which has become smarter with scientific advancement, technological sophistication, as well as with the communication revolution.

As we know, actions of most of the states make them important and highlight them at the world stage. However, Pakistan's geographical location makes it important in South Asian strategies. Pakistan and India are two important countries of the South Asian region which have rivalry, enmity, and hostility at its peak. India's stabilized democratic political system, superiority in conventional weapons, and its role as a balancer for the USA against

China allowed India to be in competition for regional hegemon. On the other hand, as Feroz Hassan Khan said that Pakistan was created as a truncated, moth-eaten and weak country which couldn't last longer (Khan, 2020). From its inception it became a security state, which allowed its institutions to intervene in each other's matters rather than separation of powers. Furthermore, out of sixteen ordnance factories in the Subcontinent, it had not a single ordnance factory. Besides this, in an ambition of friendly relations with her neighbouring country China, it allowed world powers to politicize the issues of Pakistan during different developments of South Asia especially related to Afghanistan.

For the better understanding of the South Asian rival states' politics, it is crucial to know the strategic culture of both the states at regional as well as international level. For this purpose, we have to understand the military culture or military behavior of both the states in past and in present. Secondly, we have to differentiate between the military behaviors of both India and Pakistan in the past and in present. At the third point we have to identify the reasons for changing these military behaviors, especially India. Next, we will be analyzing the changing patterns of both these states towards each other. At last, the main reason for these changing military behaviors due to the change of tool known as hybrid warfare will be discussed in context of Pakistan and India.

### **Literature Review**

Hybrid warfare is a mixture of standard military methods and unconventional approaches over several conflict domains. In hybrid warfare, strategic goals are attained through a hybrid blend of techniques and tools, with the line between war and peace blurred, as opposed to traditional warfare involving largely immediate military action (Gerasimov, 2016). This entails utilizing a mix of propaganda, cyber-attacks, economic pressure, political influence, and military might to exploit weaknesses, weaken opponents, and attain desired goals. Hybrid warfare is a historic phrase originating from wars where militants used economic, political, and military tactics to rule the opponent. Recently the word was extended more frequently with regards to asymmetrical fights and unconventional warfare tactics (Hoffman, 2007). Hybrid warfare, a mix of both conventional and non-traditional tactics, used in different historic and modern conflicts, which includes revolts, battles waged through proxies, and international power struggles. Governments and non-government organizations utilize these methods to accomplish their goals (Watts, 2018). Hybrid warfare tactics have adapted to technical developments, improved interconnectedness and the changing dynamics of present fights. Now hybrid warfare consists of contemporary communication technology, cyber skills and information sharing methods allowing a much broader cast of individuals to engage in a single battle (Kofman et al., 2016). Furthermore, the extremely interrelated nature of the present-day world makes it hard to differentiate between civilian and military forms of coercion, enabling enemies to exploit apathy and vulnerabilities in political, economic and social structures (NATO Defense College, 2017).

The Pakistan - India hybrid conflict is complex and multi-domain operation, blending conventional armed techniques with unconventional modalities and strategies. The centuries of conflict and animosity over bordering rights between the two South Asian nations have developed a vicious circle of rivalry and confrontation which has led to hybrid warfare strategies to attain their objectives and retain control over the area (Khan, 2017). The hybrid warfare between India and Pakistan might have its roots in the 1947 split of British India that led to two independent states - Pakistan and India. The division was characterized by communal violence, huge societal movements and lingering conflicts over the borders of Kashmir and Jammu that left a sour history of rivalry and territorial disputes between the two countries. Later on, wars between Pakistan and India such as 1947, 1965 and 1971 just boosted the distrust and competition further and opened the door to hybrid warfare strategies in modern times (Kapur, 2008).

India and Pakistan have adjusted their hybrid war methods to altering international relations, technology and also changing strategic goals. Such operations use from proxy warfare to information warfare, cyber warfare, unconventional ways to psychological operations. Hybrid warfare tactics usually involve non-state actors including militants and terrorist organizations which offer plausible deniability to state actors while increasing tensions without direct military intervention (Yaseen, et. al., 2016; Ahmed, 2018). Pakistan - India hybrid warfare has various strategic objectives ranging from political to territorial to ideologic. The primary goals are: - creating sovereignty over territory, 'destabilizing' the enemy, 'proving decisive in contested areas like Kashmir, the region's security in line with national interest. The hybrid warfare methods affect internal politics, affect public opinion, and get support for nationalist causes (Fair, 2018).

Pakistan and India are engaged in hybrid warfare which blends traditional armed techniques with unconventional/asymmetrical and non-traditional techniques. In this way, the two nations can attain their strategic goals with no direct conflict (Ahmed, 2018).

### **Material and Methods**

This research is based on qualitative and analytical approach to examine how India has silently and passively waged hybrid warfare against Pakistan while taking advantage of 5<sup>th</sup> Generation warfare techniques. The data collection is based upon books literature, authentic reports of highly reliable international independent non-profit organisations, newspaper articles and electronic data present at different websites. To build the conceptual framework the mainstream theories of international relations and famous strategists are used to build the argument. Besides this, the reports like EU DisinfoLab are used as evidence of the research.

### **Conceptual Framework**

It is necessary to discuss the theories which directly or indirectly address the hybrid warfare and its strategies. Some provide basis to the hybrid warfare conceptuality; however, others support this technique.

The Chinese strategist, Sun Tzu is a major proponent of this theory. He didn't use this term directly as this term was firstly used by US Marine Corps Lieutenant Colonel Frank G. Hoffman in 2006, but the methodology or techniques he supports in his 'grand theory of military strategy' directly comes into the domain of hybrid warfare. As he says, "The greatest victory is that which requires no battle" (Tzu, 2005). His advice for the deployment of strategies which are highly innovative and unpredictable in nature, exhibits his best understanding of hybrid warfare providing the basis of this theory.

Moreover, the mainstream theories of international relations do not address this concept directly. For the support of realism in favour of hybrid warfare, it ought to consider the ability to deceit the enemy through unpredictable means as part of power and power politics. As power politics is all about foreseeing threat to power, strategies to gain the power, and maintaining balance of power. While bringing it into the domain of power will ease us to apply hybrid warfare through realist lens.

Besides this, the theory of liberalism which mainly talks about the fundamental rights of individuals including liberty, equality, cooperation, institutionalization, collective response to security threats, and democratization. It is clear that the hybrid warfare is the threat to all states implementing liberalist paradigm. So, it is a need of the hour to respond collectively to the threats posed by the states having aggressive designs passively. As we know that technology has altered the abilities of the states at all levels globally (Whyte, 2018).

While the theory of constructivism also relates Hoffman term of Hybrid. As Alexander Wendt's famous quote is that, "Anarchy is that states make of it" (Wendt, 1992). So, one can say that the global elites of the global world has socially constructed the global social order. Firstly, these global elites are so much sophisticated in every aspect that they seem undefeatable through their hybrid warfare techniques at one side. On the other side, the things are manipulated in such a way that despite of being majority, their rival states remain weak, backward and puppets in the hands of some global elites. Moreover, these global elites due to more technologically advancement are able to make successful use of 5<sup>th</sup> generation warfare techniques more sophisticatedly. Besides this, this technological sophistication helps them to impute the soft image of their rival states, successfully doing so resulting in economic degradation due to lack of investments and diplomatic isolation. As said by the Rosecrance that while all nations are gradually moving toward the virtual state, some will do so faster and more decisively than others. These will be the global "brains," and the rest will remain as global "bodies" (Choucri, 2012, p.10).

'Strategic interaction theory' confidents the weaker state to win the war besides being at the losing end. By using an asymmetric warfare technique, the will of the opponent to fight is targeted, rather than its capability. In Kautilya term through 'concealed war' in which guerrilla warfare techniques are used, the weak aggressor can frustrate the powerful opponent by targeting its infrastructure, civilians, soldiers, economy and its peace. This was the technique which was used by the Taliban and Al-Qaeda regime during the first Afghan war, as well as second Afghan war. However, if this technique is used by a powerful or stable state against her weak or unstable rival, the situation will be more vulnerable for the targeted state.

Furthermore, along with 'strategic interaction theory', Wardens five ring theory is also in line with the hybrid warfare, as in it five levels of targeted audiences are set to be frustrated. According to Colonel John Warden theory, the core of it is the 'leadership' encircled by, system essential, infrastructure, population and fielded military respectively. The core of the ring is leadership. If the rival state is successful in turning the population against its leadership, then there are only two ways for the victimized leadership. One is to suppress the raising voices of population through military. If it is so, then the half of the work is done because it will ultimately lead to civil war or civil unrest. The other option is that the targeted leadership is stepped down. If it steps down, even then the rival state can be successful because it can install the puppet government which can fulfil the aim. So, influencing the population will result in destruction of infrastructure ultimately paralyzing the whole COG of the state system.

Besides this, there are some more theories which strengthen our argument of hybrid warfare. These theories include 'reflexive control theory', and 'theory of lateral pressure.' These theories are complex and somehow difficult to understand. However, all these theories are more elaborately explained in my research work.

### **Arms Race between Pakistan and India**

One can say the military behavior as strategic behaviour, or strategic culture in scholarly language. While discussing the first part, the strategic behaviour of India in the past used to be offensive towards Pakistan. As early discussed, during the division of the subcontinent, efforts were made that such a type of Pakistan ought to be created which would ultimately prostrate in front of India after some time. So, from the beginning till 1998, offensiveness in India's actions could be seen. Pakistan tried her best to compete with the challenges posed by India which resulted in conventional arms race with India. However, as a newly born state, striving for the presence on the world map, Pakistan was not able to perform very well in wars with India till 1971. It's repercussions and ramifications can be highlighted in the shape of disintegration of East and West Pakistan. Post-1971, further deteriorated the situation when India successfully procured nuclear weapons after testing

in Pokhran, Rajasthan, on 18th May, 1974. This created an emergency type situation for the newly disintegrated state and urged her to take necessary measures to procure nuclear weapons. This conventional arms race converted into non-conventional arms race or we can say nuclear arms race between Pakistan and India.

The politically destabilized, economically weak, newly disintegrated and fragile state tried her best to survive by changing her behaviour for procuring nuclear weapons as a strategy. Pakistan burnt the midnight oil to acquire the status of nuclear weaponry state. As it is said that Zulfikar Ali Bhutto once said in his interview with the Manchester Guardian that "We (Pakistan) will eat grass, even go hungry, but we will get one of our own (Atom bomb).... We have no other choice!" (Khan, 2020). As one of the famous author Mr. Feroz Hassan Khan also gave the name of his book with the title, "Eating Grass The Making of the Pakistani Bomb" (Khan, 2020). Despite all odds, Pakistan was able to successfully procure nuclear weapons however the US tried her best to stop Pakistan attaining Nuclear Processing Plant from France (Rizvi, 2004). The successful detonation of nuclear weapons in response to India's overt nuclear tests created a balance of power in the South Asian region. This transformation not only created a balance of power but also balanced the weak status of Pakistan in the field of conventional weapons as well. This was the basic reason why Pakistan didn't give 'no first use policy' against India, rather we insisted and created deterrence by monopolizing, asserting and favoring any situation of 'first use policy' to create deterrence (Irish Examiner). In the post-1998 period there was no full-scale war, just like cold war it seems that there will be no war between Pakistan and India due to the stability-instability paradox. However, scholars of international relations argue that the Kargil incident questioned the notion which says, 'nuclear weapon states do not fight wars' (Ghazanfar et al., 2022), but some scholars do not consider the Kargil crisis as a war because it didn't turn into a full-fledged war.

### **Stability-Instability Paradox and Hybrid Warfare from Active Mode to Passive Mode**

Historically, there are many incidents in which both the nuclear rival states witnessed proxy wars against each other but the stability-instability paradox didn't allow both the states to fight at full scale. The traditional thinking 'violence solves the problem' which is also referred by Eva Gerharz, further referring to Michelutti and Martin (Gerharz et al., 2017) is the main reason for relying upon compulsive means of settling their issues, rather than through amicable means. This thinking seems to have come to an end with the non-traditional means of warfare. It is also difficult for India to be in competition with China on the one hand and face the challenges posed by Pakistan. In the wake of 'Twin Peaks Crisis', despite the nuclear balance of power, India assumed that there is still a space of conventional surprise for Pakistan. India's 'Operation Parakram' under their 'Sunderji Doctrine' or Cold Start military doctrine, which is considered as an ill-conceived, flawed and costly campaign failed to get successful results (Clary et al., 2018), strengthened Pakistan's policy of maintaining balance of power through 'Credible Minimum Deterrence'. It is obvious to both India and Pakistan that the military standoffs at different times or any other traditional warfare technique after any proxy incident could not work.

However, the situation is more dangerous because the USSR didn't disintegrate due to any direct confrontation with the US, rather it disintegrated due to internal political and economic instability, turmoil and chaos. Pakistan from its creation used to focus on its traditional issues of security, which in modern times have become too irrelevant or can be said to be too narrow focused issues. On the other hand, it remained unable to foresee or anticipate non-traditional challenges posed to its security. Unarmed security challenges are the most crucial issues in the 21st Century. Pakistan is facing multifaceted challenges which are not directly related to India but indirectly can be related to India, because in hybrid warfare it is not important that a single country is behind conspiracies, rather the hands of more than one country can also be found. The allied states of one's enemy can well perform the duty. The reason is that international favoritism allows third party countries to play

their role beneficial for India. The challenges include threats posed by internal turmoil or civil unrest, decades old harvesting of religious extremism, diplomatic isolation at regional as well as global level, unable to create popular view or soft image of the state, bitter relationship with its neighbouring countries, especially with Iran, institutional tug of war for more and more power, and economic degradation. It is easy to say that the chaotic situation in Pakistan is due to its own wrongdoings. However, it can also be other way round, that due to the passive intervention of India and its allies against Pakistan has led Pakistan which in words of Dr. Bilal Ghanzafar “tunnel vision trap” (Ghazanfar, 2022) in which it is unable to timely detect the modern threats. Too much focusing upon traditional threats resulted in the loss of peripheral threats and illusionary vision towards sophisticated threats to its security. Psychologically, Pakistan accepts India’s prime importance regionally but as a ‘never say die’ policy, strategic defeat is acceptable rather than India’s hegemony or subservience is not an option (Khan, 2005).

In the post-Mumbai attacks of 2008, the strategic posture of India totally changed from the defensive mode to defense through offensive mode which is also explained by India’s National Security Advisor Ajit Kumar Doval. At the cost of arms parity with India, Pakistan is trapped in ‘tunnel vision trap’ which in lieu ignores other aspects of its security especially grey zone warfare.

### **Phases of Hybrid Warfare and Pakistan**

According to the scholars there are four main phases for the application of hybrid warfare. First phase is known as ‘Subversion’ in which operations of smaller intensity are conducted in the shape of mass movements for occupying key governmental defensive and administrative infrastructure. During this phase acts of terrorism and assassinations are done. Side by side propaganda machinery is made active with the subversive tactics including preplanned crimes with political radicals. Second phase includes the proxy operations with increased actions, disintegrating the unity through ethnic conflicts, usage of militias, weakening the control of local and central government, establishing new power structures within the state as well as direct training for proxies. Third stage is more intense with assumed direct actions with the threat of possible invasion, isolating governmental forces, providing support to the proxy warriors, dissemination of false information along with cyber-attacks, and limited scope military operations. At the last stage, after creating all the chaos in the state international attention is attained by talking about the usage of nuclear weapons, border military exercises, and escalating the conflict through different means (Ionita, 2018).

### **Result of Hybrid Warfare in South Asian Context**

The purpose of this research is to direct an attention towards the hybrid warfare is being fought against Pakistan unknowingly. There are oodles of domains in which warfare has been started against Pakistan. However, some of them are highlighted in this research and others are explained in my research thesis.

### **Deteriorating Image of Pakistan**

Pakistan due to lack of resources and disturbance of balance of power at regional level is too much focused on traditional security threats. Due to it, Pakistan paid too much loss to its reputation. Pakistan remained unable to pay attention towards its soft image which can also be a part of warfare techniques. Especially after the Mumbai attacks in 2008, India successfully portrayed Pakistan as a terrorist state at the global stage. Through its gray and white propaganda, India’s successful projection as a terrorist state kept Pakistan on the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) degraded list for approximately four years. Despite being a front-line state in ‘war against terrorism’, the international community treated

Pakistan as a terrorist state notably after the killing of Osama Bin Laden from Abbottabad. India's silent target resulted in Pakistan's diplomatic isolation at international level.

### **Information Warfare**

The changing nature of warfare includes the fast flow of information with intentionally dissemination of wrong and false information to deviate the people from the reality. In this target are picked in such a way that provides mental distress to the enemy. In every case of hybrid warfare, one similarity can be seen throughout the world. Media's influential role and flow of disinformation or misinformation plays a crucial role in this warfare. Through fraudulent media such a narrative is built which makes the public against her own well-wishers, or it is trapped to make decisions against her interest. By creating confusion in the society, a hot debate is generated in such a way which finally charges the extremist elements while desperate the residents. In the case of Pakistan, signs of warfare through disinformation can clearly be seen in past and present time. In the past, our Bengali brothers and sisters were used as a tool to ignite the weaknesses posed by the leaders of West Pakistan. As explained by the historians, the Hindu teachers also played an important role in the mental preparation of Bengali freedom fighters creating a nursery for future. At present, target is not different, but the tools employed for this purpose are different. Those things are being questioned in such ways which are not questioned in any of the state. The level of humiliation against our protectionist institutions couldn't be seen in the past. India projects Pakistan as a failed state while blaming army as harbinger of all the menaces which Pakistan faces today (Shah et al., 2022). The incident which occurred on 9<sup>th</sup> May, 2023, due to political unrest created a confused situation in Pakistan, dividing public opinion in two ways. Both of which opinions are not beneficial for a security state. One perception is built that one of the leading political parties of Pakistan is culprit of all the wrongdoings of 9<sup>th</sup> May, perceiving them as a traitor of Pakistan. The other perception which seems is being engineered that Pakistan's establishment's unseen hands are the reason of 9<sup>th</sup> May incident. Through perception management anti-establishment narrative is being built as traitors of Pakistan.

### **Exploiting the Fault Lines of Pakistan**

In this mean of warfare, the policy is implemented gradually to get the better results. For this purpose, the incorporation of different ideological and ethnic groups at regional level is also a part of nowadays warfare techniques. The purpose of doing so is to undermine the targeted state from within it. The uprising of ethnic groups in Balochistan and India's increasing involvement in Afghanistan during the war against terrorism period are no more hidden from the world. To secure the 2,640 km long Durand Line at mountainous terrain is also a challenge for Pakistan from its inception. As we know, no government in Afghanistan, even friendly governments of Pakistan in Afghanistan didn't recognize the Durand Line. This clash of interest between the two neighbouring and Muslim brother countries creates a fault line which always remained vulnerable for Pakistan. This situation not only created distress relationship between both the countries, but provide the third-party targeting Pakistan, India to exploit the situation. To undermine the Pakistan's integrity India as part of her hybrid warfare strategies used to exploit the situation in Balochistan by supporting Baloch separatists through arms, funding, as well as training of the terrorists to showcase the case at global stage in regards of suppression of dissent groups and human rights violation of freedom fighters (Muzaffar, et. al., 2018).. As part of India's hybrid warfare technique, it not only challenging the sovereignty of Pakistan, but also provides India an opportunity to curb the increasing role of Chinese investment in Gwadar Port which is linked with China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) (Yaseen, et. al., 2017). One of the latest examples is the attack upon Chinese workers and engineers working at Dasu hydroelectric dam site (CNN, 2024).

### **Recommendations: Policy Options for Pakistan**

Due to the severity of the threats posed by hybrid warfare can be understood that NATO allies has also devised a mechanism for strengthening their national resilience as part of their collective defence against People's Republic of China and Russian Federation (NATO, 2024).

Firstly, all the stakeholders of Pakistan should have to understand that hybrid threats are the most crucial threat to its security. Secondly, it has to opt the PDD Policy, which includes prepare, deter, and defend. For this purpose, Pakistan should also similar to NATO, establish counter-hybrid support teams to detect and respond hybrid activities. Moreover, as part of their strategy, Pakistan should preemptively establish response options in case of hybrid threats. Furthermore, Pakistan's security institutions along with intelligence departments should work in coordination on this issue as part of their strategic planning. Proper response team ought to be established which in case of fake or disinformation highlight the reality by uncovering the culprits at international forums to reverse the deteriorated image of Pakistan. Besides this, finding the source of disinformation can be a good way forward, which can help us to know the possible foreign funding of militant groups and abroad run media groups.

### **Conclusion**

The rise in anti-Pakistan sentiment shows that the state is at the verge of war though virtually. Hybrid warfare didn't happen suddenly over a night, rather it is a result of decades old planning of its opponents. In modern times, the set goals are not achieved through direct targets rather through indirect means of warfare which includes the usage of modern tools such as gadgets and highly sophisticated technologies to surrender the base of the state which especially includes the damaging of its core ideology and questioning the protectionist institutions. There is a dire need that the 'managers' of Pakistan ought to rethink and reconsider their strategic policies through cost-benefit analysis. A slight shift from traditional threats to non-traditional threats could be seen from the National Security Policy 2022 of Pakistan, but this policy still undermines the strategies related to non-conventional threats (Shah et al., 2022). Rather than focusing too much on traditional threats, threats posed by 5th generation warfare ought to be considered. More focus should be made on building public opinion, soft image of establishment, and rebuilding confidence upon democratic values.



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