



# CLAWS JOURNAL

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# CLAWS Journal

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# Note from the Editor

Carl von Clausewitz had noted, “*Every age has its own kind of war, its own limiting conditions, and its own peculiar preconceptions*”. If that stands valid, then the 21st century is definitely an age cut above all the past centuries, including the one which saw the two World Wars. Violence, conflict and wars may easily be defined within measurable parameters. Globalisation and revolution due to the advent of information technology ushered in the darker side of globalisation, existentialism and the Hobbesian notion of “a man in the state of nature”. Instead of the state as an actor to wage war against an adversary which was also a state, and, hence, a unit for post behavioural analysis, the world actors, comprising nation states, are facing an adversary that incorporates a “diverse and dynamic combination of conventional, irregular, terrorist and criminal capabilities”.

The rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and the ultimate neutralisation of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi on October 26, 2019, by the personnel of the US Delta Force in which the US had to secure permission from Russia, Iraq and Turkey to fly over their air space, represents the global nature of hybrid adversaries who will continue to flourish for a considerable period of time in the present 21st century. The US further proceeded to dispose off the body of the globally acclaimed terrorist by burying it at sea, as was done in the case of Osama bin Laden in 2011, to institutionalise a violent methodology to checkmate the emergence of any iconic benchmark of leadership amongst the perpetrators of hybrid adversaries. Historically, one can see the globalisation of the phenomenon of hybrid adversaries by the two significant leaders of terror groups operating to destabilise the geographical areas of the world under their influence for years. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was not only a leader of the most brutal terrorist organisation but also the Islamic State’s leader.

He, thus saw, hybrid threat as a mechanism which can be represented as a diverse and dynamic combination of irregular forces and criminal elements all unified to achieve mutually benefiting effects. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, thus, represented a non-state entity within the state system. It is evident that the global system had learnt very little for tackling hybrid adversaries from the threat posed by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) operating in Sri Lanka before it was neutralised by the use of conventional forces in the most unconventional manner.

However, the term hybrid threat or defining hybrid warfare has led to many a debate because there is no universally acceptable definition to explain them. The term hybrid warfare, at a normative and intellectual level, appears to be too abstract and the latest thinking seriously considers referring to irregular methods to counter a conventionally superior force. A hybrid adversary is a complex, non-standard and fluid adversary which demonstrates flexibility and adapts rapidly, uses advanced weapon systems and many a disruptive technologies plus mass communication for propaganda for recruitment and to spread fake news. A hybrid war takes place in conventional battlefields, amongst the indigenous population of the war zone and the international community. Therefore, it is pertinent to counter such threats not only militarily but also through unconventional means to make it more holistic. As is evident, the ISIS-like phenomena proliferate because these are not just terrorist organisations but comprise an idea which operates as a highly decentralised entity. Thus, countering it would require a strategy that cuts its basic supply chain, that is, the ISIS needs to be refrained from monetising its acquired natural resource which is oil. If not contained at the primal stage, these entities will sprawl, as ISIS-like organisations can be equated with metastasised cancer, and can form an example for other such hybrid adversaries to be a mirror image in operations. Therefore, the world has to take note of these to contain this phenomenon.

Similarly, in South Asia, India faces a challenge from hybrid adversaries in its neighbourhood which support terrorism as a state policy. The situational success of such a policy against India has started acting as a catalyst to germinate hybrid adversaries amongst the other neighbouring states which have failed to provide good governance, economic stability and ideological preconditions through strong and ethical leadership, resulting in creating splinter groups identifying themselves as a product of the crisis of identity. It has, thus, become essential for India to pay utmost attention to neutralise the adverse effects of hybrid adversaries emanating from almost the entire region of South Asia. To undo the adverse effect and prevent India from being embroiled in protracted hybrid warfare, it is essential to understand and study the normative, cultural and civilisational preconditions that further the cause of hybrid adversaries around it.

The essays in this special edition of the *CLAWS Journal* comprise an attempt by a bevy of young but entrenched professionals focussing their attention on the issue related to the evolution of, as well as the prescriptive recommendations to tackle, hybrid warfare. It is hoped that these very perceptive articles will lead to a major debate and aid our understanding of hybrid adversaries which have become a threat to India's national security perspectives.

**Prof. Gautam Sen**  
Editor-in-Chief  
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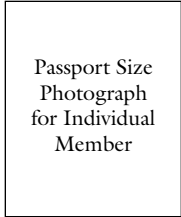
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# Contextual Evolution of Hybrid Warfare and the Complexities

Rakesh Sharma

*The French historian Marc Bloch, post German blitzkrieg in 1940, remarked that "...our leaders . . . were incapable of thinking in terms of new war. . . [Their] minds were too inelastic."*

## Prelude

On September 14, 2019, at 4.00 am, Saudi Arabia suffered a deadly attack on its Aramco owned oil facility at Abqaiq and Khurais oil field, with, as has been stated in a version, a swarm of 18 small drones and seven cruise missiles. Very highly protected and fortified facilities, in addition to armed guards, the area had six battalions of Patriot defence systems, Oerlikon GDF 35mm cannons equipped with the Skyguard radar and Surface-to-Air-Missiles (SAMs). The targets were designated with pin-point accuracy and, hence, the strikes were most effective. They destroyed nearly 50 per cent of the country's global supply of crude. The crude prices rose sharply in the international market that saw the US Secretary of State proclaiming it was an "act of war"—yet without a declaration of war. By exactitude, the perpetrators were unidentified, even the trajectory of the flights of the missiles and drones could not be ascertained; only remnants of the

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Yemeni Quds 1 missile were displayed. The conjectures are aplenty – from drone swarms, to cruise missiles, to stealth aircraft and even ground action! It is also a fallout of the usage of the modern war weaponry: plausible deniability! This is a manifestation of the 21st century’s hybrid warfare.

War is a historic constant. In strategic history, ‘war’ has had many definitions and recurring generational divides. Nations invest billions of dollars in preparing their militaries for the next war. Futurologists, bright thinkers and strategists had, in history, forecast and laid down strategies and planned conduct of wars that did not succeed eventually. Warfare is an exceedingly complex venture, where information is scanty, unclear and outdated;<sup>1</sup> as the edifice of military planning is built on assumptions, these almost often go wrong. With dwindling defence budgets, and the veritable sprint in military technologies, the armed forces are placed in a dilemmatic situation on enunciating futuristic military doctrine strategy, and creating a future force. The easiest way out for militaries is to bask in the status quo, and, hence, it is often stated that Generals have a tendency to “fight the last war”.<sup>2</sup>

Historically, the Clausewitzian relationship of politics and warfare has stood. Once a war was imminent or ensued, the political aims articulated were then translated into a military strategy for victory in war. Traditional percepts of warfare have remained inter-state, where victory implies capture of large tracts of territory (even in a desolate countryside), taking a large number of prisoners of war, or decimation of the adversary’s war-waging potential, as these are the considered finality in the capitulation of the enemy and dictating the victor’s political will.

This article aims to deal with the conceptual underpinnings of hybrid warfare, its complex character, and attempts to sift through the maze of its multi-faceted domains. It would highlight the emanating concoction in warfare, in which many forms of belligerence are usable, disaggregated or aggregated or in tandem, as per the political aims and military end state sought.

## **Transition in the Character of Warfare**

The character of war has changed, and is steadily changing. The role of non-military means of achieving political and strategic goals has grown, and, in many cases, these have exceeded the power of force of weapons and their effectiveness. This implies that wars in the future may remain unannounced, in non-kinetic format, and may even be successful in achieving political goals without transcending to force-on-force wars. Certainly, use of kinetic means in standoff forms such as precision guided munitions, missiles and rockets or space warfare, can supplement to achieve the political aims in a short timeframe. Indeed, "...the categories of warfare are blurring and no longer fit into neat, tidy boxes."<sup>3</sup>

Researchers and analysts worldwide are proclaiming that future warfare will be different. In the last 20 years, the pace of change has accelerated, due in no small part to the advent of new technologies that are transforming the way wars are fought, as well as the operating environment in which they take place. The pace of change in the information warfare domain and space, and technologies like drone swarms, directed energy weapons, artificial intelligence, high-powered microwave, autonomous systems and robotics, to name but a few, is so rapid that doctrinal and strategic changes are unable to keep pace. The ambit of information warfare and artificial intelligence is ever expanding, with digital storage, computation, and transmission of data bits combined with miniaturisation of land, air, surface, and sub-surface platforms of ever-increasing mobility and endurance.

Computers and the internet, in particular, have played a key role in shaping the transitory nature of warfare. Two emerging technologies relative to the fresh non-kinetic domains—cyber and autonomous systems—dictate contemplation. Non-kinetic means act as force multipliers to target the will of the adversary through shaping the environment, and lowering the enemy's will through coercion and hedging, leading to softening through exploitation of existing faultlines. There is movement

towards future wars with extreme lethality. Loitering munitions, also known as Lethal Miniature Aerial Munitions (LMAMs), are a form of an unmanned aircraft system that incorporates a warhead and can be thought of functionally as an unmanned *kamikaze* plane. Given their plane-like attributes, LMAMs are able to stay aloft for extended periods, thus, “loitering” over a target area.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, there would be concerns of fully autonomous systems having the authority to take a life or start a war as an agent of state policy. The possibility of life-or-death decisions some day being taken by machines not under the direct control of humans needs to be taken seriously.<sup>5</sup> The increased importance of precision guided munitions, space warfare, stealth fighters, strategic missiles and rockets are all indications of much increased lethality in warfare. China’s new microwave weapon can disable missiles and paralyse tanks by shutting down electronic systems, even those with traditional shielding against Electromagnetic Pulse (EMP) by bombarding the target with energy pulses. This amount of directed energy interferes with, and overloads, electronic circuits, causing them to shut down. China has also tested a completely new weapon, a boost glide hypersonic weapon system, capable of blistering speeds. With the sprint of military technology and cybernetics, the offensiveness of the standoff attacks in the future is in the realm of threats rather than imagination.

The writing for transition in the character of warfare has been on the wall for some time. The narrative is that “[t]he roughly three-hundred-year period in which war was associated primarily with the type of political organisation known as the state... seems to be coming to an end. If the last fifty years or so provide any guide, future wars will be overwhelmingly of the type known, however inaccurately, as ‘low intensity’”.<sup>6</sup> The intense focus on counter-insurgency or low intensity warfare also tends to relegate the likelihood of conventional operations to clichés – short, limited, localised, intense, and the like. In this transition of warfare, a significant mention is of guerrilla warfare, terrorism and insurgency. Guerrilla warfare

is not a recent innovation, though, in the 1960s, it was seen as a new form of war that could take place despite the nuclear stalemate. Later, terrorism became the new metaphor for warfare. Terrorism dealt with politics and particularly with the way politics is conducted. Illegitimate violence, akin to criminal activity, is undertaken against both political and civilian targets as a measure to manipulate political processes.

### **Evolving Hybridism and Complexities in Future Warfare**

The term hybrid warfare refers to a non-linear conflict, where state actors, in addition to kinetic or military forces, employ non-kinetic means like cyber attacks, politico-economic subversion, psychological warfare, and diplomatic pressure to bring an adversary to heel. The hybrid nature of warfare has existed historically except may be in the cyber or information warfare realm. The breadth of hybrid warfare is limited only by the imagination of the employer. The concept, when postulated, referred to a “tailored mix of conventional weapons, irregular tactics, terrorism and criminal behaviour”<sup>7</sup> and soon got redefined to include the “full range of military intelligence capabilities, non-conventional weapons, armaments, support units, and combat equipment, available for instant employment... of regular forces or irregular insurgents, terrorists, or other non-state actors...”<sup>8</sup> Sometimes, the term ‘fourth generation warfare’, initially introduced by William S. Lind, is used interchangeably with hybrid warfare due to the erratic nature of the threats and their interplay in the attainment of strategic objectives. Fourth generation warfare, however, is distinguished from hybrid warfare by the involvement of non-state actors pitted against a traditional Army. They present a decentralised, non-hierarchical, and non-traditional structure of threat. Contrarily — in hybrid warfare — wars are fought between states using non-linear tactics involving all elements of national power.

It is apparent, hence, that kinetic or non-kinetic (the latter will include cyber, social media operations, disruption of critical network

infrastructure, dissension, subversion, criminal activities, currency manipulation, environmental warfare, and the like), can be aggregated or disaggregated, as need be! In the study of warfare of the last decade, major shifts in war-fighting had been evident worldwide. Russia used only cyber attacks to compel Estonia in 2007, military force and cyber warfare in Georgia in 2008, and ‘Little Green Men’, ‘Night Wolves Motorcycle Club’ and cyber attacks in Crimea in 2014. Obviously, to achieve political aims, the protagonists utilised means other than conventional ones, and succeeded. The second Lebanon War in 2006 was a classic case of a military engagement between Israel and Hezbollah – the latter as a non-state actor used ‘hit and hide’ tactics. The Middle East imbroglio – Iraq, Syria and Yemen—comprises examples of the admixture of the conventional and unconventional. The most defining characteristics of the Syrian War are its complexities and intricacies, with multiple states and non-state actors pitted against each other – together or separated!

The 21st century warfare, hence, is metamorphosing without a distinct pattern, wherein the conventional, with increasing utilisation of Special Forces, irregular and terrorist forces, are not dissimilar, or with fundamentally different approaches. There is an increasing blurring of distinctions between war and peace, between the different domains of conflict (land, maritime, air, space, cyber) and between kinetic and non-kinetic effect. Cyber contributes to the blurring of the distinction between peace and war by creating uncertainty as to what constitutes conflict in cyber space. They are means employed in combination by the adversary and conducted by both state and non-state actors. Therefore, hybridity in warfare has evolved as a combination of more than two elements of power or components of the widely spread spectrum of conflict – both kinetic and non-kinetic. Kinetic in this consideration would imply a spectrum: space weapons, Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) defence, land, air, naval forces, as also insurgents and terrorists. Non-kinetic would encompass diplomacy, political activities,



Information Warfare (IW) including social media, cyber disruption of critical infrastructure, subversion, criminal and economic activities and similar conflictual activities. This evolved hybrid warfare can, hence, be examined as a combination of both kinetic and non-kinetic tools, used disaggregated or aggregated, as and when need be!

### **Sifting Through the Maze of ‘Hybridity’**

The term ‘hybrid warfare’ has surely caused an immense amount of confusion, as it has encompassed activities that were non-military and hitherto not classified as warfare. This has blurred the distinction between the state of war and peaceful competition – like the ‘trade war’ between China and the USA. Such generalisations and broad-brush will in future lead to pessimistic and gloomy inter-state relations, and enhance the dimensions of national security to unimaginable proportions. Many of the hybrid ‘threats’ may just be risks and, even if they germinate well, may not tantamount to ‘war’. In a manner of speaking, the instruments of belligerence by an adversary in a nation like ours will be a multitude. Organisations tailored for space wars, cyber offensives, long range precision guided missiles, could well take the initiative and even terminate wars, without as much as involving the military in the gamut of conventional warfare. Indeed, disinformation campaigns under the overall ambit of information warfare, and, hence, under hybrid warfare are bound to cause grave understanding issues on the subject. It obviously implies that contextually, the response to the myriad threats will not be the military itself. The quagmire created by the hybrid nature of threats will place any political or national security decision-making establishment in a predicament to formally enunciate strategy. Therefore, the ambit of national security will encompass the bouquet of hybrid threats.

It must, however, be acknowledged that non-kinetic measures by themselves cannot provide assurance of victory or success in achieving political objectives. There are also comprehension issues, on whether

non-kinetic attacks like cyber can be taken as declarations of war. It is well understood that non-kinetic means can be as devastating as kinetic ones and that they also have the advantage of plausible deniability by adversaries. A severe non-kinetic attack, though ‘denied’, will place the recipient nation in a quandary on what will constitute a proportionate response. Again, would a full-scale or limited conventional war be acceptable as a response to a major cyber attack?

As is apparent, the character, and, may be, even the nature, of warfare has changed, and the belligerents would use a new ‘mix and match’ of their capabilities to achieve a decisive victory. It actually implies that there would be no distinction between conventional and unconventional means to be used against the opponent, that is, in the hybrid context, attacks and responses can emanate from any military or even non-military sphere. For example, a cyber attack on civilian infrastructure like against the banking system, may be a kinetic full force response. This formulation of hybrid warfare would challenge the traditional concepts of conventional war. The standoff nature of the current day targeting by cyber means, utilising drones and cruise missiles, or even space-based assets, would blur the lines between the military and civilian domains. Such warfare is a game-changer. Any conventional superiority is of little value if the nation is woefully vulnerable to a catastrophic cyber attack. The threat of cruise missiles or drones is fine, but the fact is that a takedown of the energy grid or transportation network or health service is a far greater risk. This risk does not require any future development in cybernetics—the technology is available today, even in the open domain.

The broader ambit of hybrid warfare which includes the realms of information warfare – propaganda, psychological manipulation, media misdirection, subversion of the population—requires fresh thought. Most such typology of warfare – if it is so called – may not be practically attributable directly to an adversarial nation, or even a proxy. There would be obfuscation of state sponsorship –like the purported actions of

Cambridge Analytica in the build-up to the US elections in 2016, which included serious accusations about Russia.

## **Hybrid Warfare and Strategising for India**

A question that begs an answer here is whether or not a hybrid war can be fought with our present national security structures? What is the inter-relationship between hybrid warfare and military strategy? In such context, how does a nation like India deter hybrid threats and formulate its national and military strategies?

Conventional Indian concepts of war are incompatible and fundamentally skewed from the realities of hybrid conflict in the 21st century. Indian adversaries have either mastered irregular warfare or have sufficiently advanced technologically to embrace hybrid warfare. A linear conventional conflict will be a near sequential progression of a planned strategy, whereas a hybrid non-linear conflict will comprise simultaneous deployment of multiple, complementary military and non-military warfare tactics. In a hybrid war, the adversarial conventional military force will be supported by irregular, cyber and informational warfare tactics, aggregated together or used in disaggregated form. It must, hence, be expected that in future, the conflicts that India will have to face will necessarily be hybrid non-linear wars that will be fought with the adversary employing conventional and irregular military forces in conjunction with psychological, economic, political, and cyber assaults. Confusion and disorder may ensue when weaponised information in India would worsen the perception of insecurity in the populace as political, social, and cultural identities will be attempted to be pitted against one another.

India must then develop a framework of strategic deterrence of weaponised information, finance, and other subversive forms of aggression against the adversaries. A 'one size fits all' national security policy would not be effective. The future nature of warfare leads us to the conclusion that multi-domain warfare (one that spans two or more

military domains—land, maritime, air, cyber, space, etc) to create new and innovative ways against adversaries, is the one to be strategised for.

A joint multi-domain specialisation would indicate the right preparation for warfare – kinetic or non-kinetic. That is the responsibility on the shoulders of today’s political and military leaders. Three key postulations are preferred:

- Hybrid warfare, as per definition and ambit, describes domains that can well be termed as non-military. Hence, the prosecution of non-military domain aggressive actions, that cause damage or destruction to national infrastructure, must be taken as war – even if the adversary is unidentifiable, unprovable or resorts to plausible deniability. Cases in point would be a cyber attack on the power grid, the banking system, and the like. As stated above, the September 2019 drone attacks on the Saudi Arabian oil fields have been called ‘acts of war’ by the US Secretary of State. War, hence, in a hybrid context may be a permanence state – blurring the distinction between war and peace. This might seem unduly alarmist, and may affect rationality in behaviour. However, the hybrid character of war has its dictates, and strategising for the same is imperative.
- Since hybrid warfare is not an isolated military domain, law enforcement capabilities – in India symbolised by the National Security Guard (NSG), National Technical Research Organisation (NTRO), National Cyber Coordinator and agencies and Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs)—require parallel developments, which are skillfully fused with the military domain. The challenge is to plan development of offensive and defensive hybrid warfare technologies and expertise in an era of budgetary constraints. Hybrid warfare necessitates intensive consolidation of all resources and security assets available with various agencies, without resorting to any battle of the turf.
- It is obvious that in a scenario where non-state actors take credit, or where the initiator of an attack cannot be determined, deterring

hybrid threats may not be realistic. Military conventional deterrence remains fixated on all-out or limited high end conventional war that remains within the ambit of state versus state warfare. In the case of India, conventional military superiority, with the threat of deterrence by punishment, is insufficient to force the adversary to cease the proxy war. This credence requires a serious rethink. The likelihood of a strong conventional kinetic response to a hybrid, non-kinetic attack must not be negated. Even the converse can be construed as feasible. The *quid pro quo* response to any form of hybrid attack may emanate in a totally different realm. For example a conventional air strike at Balakot to a terrorist strike at Pulwama! This issue created by the hybridisation of threats opens new vistas in the deterrence debate and response options, and mandates further analysis. Suffice it to say that a strong conventional force will be an inadequate deterrent against hybrid threats. Hence, a proportional or disproportionate response cannot be predictable and will be contingent on the national will and political intent at that juncture. For this, India will require an effective bouquet of hybrid options, a quiver full of variable arrows that can be selectively employed as per the political decision.

- Psychological warfare, fake news campaigns, propaganda, subversion, intimidation, demoralisation and the like, are commonplace. State and non-state actors are weaponising information, to the detriment of adversaries. These will become permanent features among belligerent states. A case in point is Cambridge Analytica, and the influence peddling in the last US Presidential elections. Naturally, these are also hybrid threats, ones that seem perfectly benign, but which have immense potential to address the collective psyche of the people of a nation. It is not that psychological warfare is a new realm, however the media (including social media) for reaching out have multiplied manifold, their techniques are being made sophisticated, and the effect they are having on the populace is credible. Also, a connotation

of the hybrid threat, psychological warfare, is leading to increasing radicalisation and needs to be addressed pronto by parallel streams of well planned counter-radicalisation and information management.

- The definitional and terminological structure of hybrid warfare may have confused warfare itself. Each and every inimical act and risk is being branded as a hybrid threat or hybrid warfare. Any rational consideration of this plethora of hybrid threats, and planning for combating them is well nigh impossible. There is apparent generalisation of hybrid threats, with many of them being faceless, which will require a kind of toolbox that will be unimaginable in content. The cost-benefit analysis for catering for the hybridity will deter serious planning processes. Stepping back from this over-hyped debate that generalises hybrid warfare, and providing a deliberate and sifted out focus is essential.

## **Conclusion**

In sum, in the last 20 years, the pace of change has accelerated, due, in no small part, to the advent of new technologies that are transforming the way conventional and unconventional conflicts are fought, as well as the operating environment in which they take place. The national security strategy in the context of the myriad threats, taken as hybrid, derives itself from a political formulation of national aim, vision and interests. Contextually, military strategy, as a sub-set, envisages employment of all of a nation's military capabilities at the highest of levels, including long-term planning, development and procurement to assure victory or success.

The domain of military strategy in the future needs to be taken as a systemic approach, without anchoring future war-fighting in a single thematic concept of force-on-force as the common and the only denominator. In effect, conventional operations of the force-on-force variety become part and parcel of the larger bouquet of options that amalgamate into multi-domain warfare. Domains may

work in concert simultaneously to achieve goals, instead of only operating in, or between, two domains. Multi-domain means creating an effect in one domain that produces an effect in the other. Multi-domain-specific capabilities can be leveraged to defeat a capable foe in another domain, or the ‘force-on-force’ operations could supplement the creative ways. The armed forces are at a crossroads. Reliance on attrition, firepower and mechanised warfare had led to past successes, but this alone cannot win tomorrow’s wars. The adversaries are analysing and testing capabilities in multi-domains, and would adopt and adapt their doctrines, strategies and capabilities to benefit from our vulnerabilities. Evolution of multi-domain warfare, from the concept to functional doctrines for each of the domains, and then an overarching grand strategy, requires understanding and creativity based upon emerging technologies. To arrive at the future, prepared and ready to dominate the fight, we need a concept to guide convergence and integration of capabilities across air, land, sea, space, cyber, and electro-magnetic spectrum.

India is a nation that has unsettled borders, and is also incessantly deployed in countering infiltration and terrorism. Our adversaries are continually upgrading to acquire hybrid capabilities that will offset any conventional war disadvantages that they may visualise. Hence, for combating the hybrid nature of warfare, India will need multi-domain strategies. The ‘battlespace’ will need decluttering by designating with rigour what inimical activities are ‘war-like’, in that they are tantamount to the use of force, and which ones amount to unregulated (and possibly unlawful) competition.

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# Hybrid Warfare: Battlegrounds of the Future

VK Ahluwalia

*The most distinctive change in the character of modern war is the blurred or blended nature of combat. We do not face a widening number of distinct challenges but their convergence into hybrid wars.<sup>1</sup>*

— Frank G Hoffman

In the 34-day Israel-Hezbollah War of 2006, Israel's Army, one of the most technologically advanced militaries of the world, was pitted against the fundamentalist Shia Muslim organisation Hezbollah in southern Lebanon. Hezbollah, a non-state armed group, was armed with high-tech weaponry and other disruptive technologies, such as Precision Guided Munitions (PGMs), anti-tank missiles and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) that are traditionally used by the regular forces of a country. Hezbollah forces shot down Israeli helicopters, severely damaged a patrol boat with a cruise missile and destroyed a large number of armoured tanks by firing guided missiles from hidden bunkers. The group's guerrillas stood their ground with their hi-tech weaponry and guerrilla tactics. They operated in a decentralised manner at the tactical levels, from both their urban and mountain bases, and shocked the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) with their conventional-cum-unconventional forms of warfare. Israel accepted that it committed a mistake in not adequately preparing

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for a ‘hybrid’ conflict with Hezbollah.<sup>2</sup> US Army Chief General George W. Casey said that a new type of war that would become increasingly common in the future would be “a hybrid of irregular warfare and conventional warfare.”<sup>3</sup>

Similar to this, in the proceedings of the 2009 Hybrid Warfare Conference, Dr. Russell Glenn, Director, Plans and Policy, G-2, in the US Army Training and Doctrine Command, provided a comprehensive definition for a hybrid threat to apply to the tactical, operational, and strategic levels of war. He defined a hybrid threat as an:

...adversary that simultaneously and adaptively employs some combination of political, military, economic, social, and information means, and conventional, irregular, catastrophic, terrorism, and disruptive/ criminal conflict methods. It may include a combination of state and non-state actors.<sup>4</sup>

Although there are ample examples of Generals and rulers of the ancient times who have used both regular and irregular tools of warfare against their adversaries at strategic and tactical levels, the term ‘hybrid warfare’ appeared at least as early as 2005. It was subsequently used to describe the strategy and tactics employed by Hezbollah in the Israel-Hezbollah War of 2006. Since then, the term ‘hybrid’ has dominated much of the discussion about modern and future warfare, to the point where it has been adopted by senior military leaders and promoted as a basis for modern military strategies.<sup>5</sup> Today, in the digital age, there is a wide range of hybrid tools available which enable nations to achieve their objectives at minimal cost, albeit without even fighting an actual war. Therefore, hybrid warfare/threats are the new battlegrounds of the future, as they pose a huge challenge to security and elements of national power. The aim of this paper is to briefly discuss the genesis of hybrid warfare, the various terminologies, the salient differences between

them and their objectives. While drawing the relationship between hybrid warfare and grey zone conflicts, their application at various levels and the recommended actions to minimise their impact would be highlighted.

### **Changing Nature and Character of Conflicts**

There has been a progressive increase in internal armed conflicts (intra-state conflicts), the world over, primarily due to sectarian, ethnic and religious intolerance, socio-economic exclusion, feeling of inequality and injustice, unemployment, and non-responsive governments, unable to fulfill the aspirations of the people. The level of violence peaked in the mid-1990s. Concurrently, rapid changes have been seen in the geo-political, economic, social, technological spheres, which has impacted the emerging geo-strategic environment. It is surmised that due to the mutually destructive power of nuclear weapons and the international legal conventions, the probability of all-out wars between the global powers is very low. However, the probability of sub-conventional conflicts or limited conflicts in different regions, with an active role by hybrid adversaries, and the potential to spill over into a major conflict is high. The key feature of the security environment in recent years has predominantly been a range of asymmetric threats, which provides a greater role to the hybrid form of warfare.

The terms ‘nature of war’ and ‘character of war’ have been used interchangeably. Besides the military factors, the character of war keeps evolving due to constant changes in technology, geo-politics and geo-economics. Carl von Clausewitz, a cavalry officer, suggests in his book, *On War*, that the capabilities, circumstances and motives of a nation-state too have an effect on the changing nature of conflicts. On the other hand, traditionally, war is interactive, and is an act of violence and destruction. The most common type is the attrition form of warfare. In simple terms, it refers to ‘force on force’, with a view to annihilate the opposing force. In traditional terms, war is also political in nature, which is generally prosecuted at the national level, with political aims and

objectives. Although conflicts may have political, economic or military objectives, wars may not necessarily always be interactive and violent. Moreover, warfare has continued to evolve from clear territorial wars with a well-defined enemy, to uncertain, ambiguous and irregular wars, in which information and cyber threats have gained prominence in the prosecution of the war. Hence, the nature of war is also changing. We need to also ascertain the difference between conventional and hybrid wars. The major difference between conventional and hybrid wars is that in the latter, all the available instruments of power, from the conventional to the non-conventional, pacification to coercion and subversion, are employed by both states and/or non-state actors.

### **Hybrid Warfare Over the Years**

A peep into history suggests that in the ancient times, the rulers or their Generals in Mesopotamia, Persia, Greece, Central Asia, the Mauryan dynasty, including military leaders like ‘Alexander, the Great’ and Genghis Khan, who were masters of improvisation and manoeuvre warfare, were always ready to use unconventional war-fighting systems and tactics in their campaigns. A few tools of hybrid warfare were also employed during the Napoleonic Wars, Mao Zedong’s protracted people’s armed conflict in China, and Shivaji’s campaigns against the Mughals in India. The essence is that most of them indulged in irregular warfare, in terms of both tactics and strategic aims.<sup>6</sup>

Kautilya’s *Arthashastra* is an ancient Indian treatise on statecraft, economic policy and military strategy, written in Sanskrit, about 2,300 years ago. He has described four types of wars, which have relevance to the contemporary elements of national power. These wars were:

- one, *nantrayudha*, or ‘war by counsel’ in which diplomatic acumen plays a key role to win wars;
- two, *prakasayudhais* or open warfare, specifying the time and place – a set-piece battle;

- three, *kutayudhais*, concealed warfare, which refers primarily to *upajapa*, psychological warfare, including instigation of treachery in the enemy camp;
- four, *tusnimyudha* (*gudayudha*), in which ‘clandestine war’ uses covert methods to achieve the objective without actually waging a battle, usually by assassinating the enemy.<sup>7</sup>

The *Arthashastra* also discusses, in detail, the ‘covert activities’ of secret services, spies, secret agents, and clandestine activities. It specifically states, “Miraculous results can be achieved by practising the methods of subversion.”<sup>8</sup> In the chapter on defence and war, psychological warfare covers the methods of propaganda by way of advertising, announcing the ill effects of bad omens in the enemy camp,<sup>9</sup> to play on the cognitive domains of the enemy’s soldiers. Many such actions would facilitate easy victory, and are also similar to the modern hybrid warfare of today. Today’s tools are far more sophisticated and do not require the physical presence of the adversary at the targeted domains.

Kautilya has also prescribed the four *upayas*: *sama*, *dana*, *bheda* and *danda*—the use of all available means to achieve one’s objectives.<sup>10</sup> These were: *sama* (diplomacy, coercion or conciliation), *dana* (gifts, compensation, economic gratification), *bheda* (rupture, dissension, discontent, information or influence operations) and *danda* (use of force). It is evident from these practices that the Kautilyan concepts can be compared to terms such as hybrid, irregular, unrestricted, non-linear and grey zone warfare. These also have some relevance and similarity with terms like conventional and unconventional forms of warfare, covert operations, information operations, subversion, sabotage, deception, and propaganda.

Historically, it has been observed that nations, in order to achieve their politico-economic and strategic objectives, have continued to coin new terminologies based on the prevalent circumstances and situations, as they

affected them. They have applied various conventional or un-conventional techniques to achieve their national interests. Some of the terms like Low Intensity Conflict (LIC), low intensity operation, sub-conventional operation, asymmetric war, hybrid war, grey zone, unrestricted warfare, irregular warfare, fourth generation war, small war, non-linear, full spectrum, compound war, non-contact warfare, etc, have become part of the military vocabulary. It would be difficult to discuss all the terminologies, but they are similar to the roles, methods, and objectives for fighting in an asymmetric environment. A case in point is the term LIC, which was introduced by Frank Kitson in his book in 1971. It undoubtedly brought out that subversion and insurgency cover practically every form of disturbance, up to the threshold of conventional war.<sup>11</sup> However, a study of insurgencies the world over suggests that subversion is a sub-set of insurgency, which conforms to the tenets of hybrid warfare. Hybrid warfare itself has several terms like hybrid threats, hybrid war, hybrid influencing, hybrid adversary or fifth generation warfare, thus, making the understanding of the concept complex, and, therefore, there is no universally accepted definition of hybrid warfare so far.

### **Varied Definitions and Perceptions**

A number of strategic analysts have given certain interesting definitions of the term hybrid warfare, based on their perceptions and application in their operational environments. In 1837, Rafael Carrera had led a revolt that resulted in the dissolution of the Central American Federation. Nevertheless, “While history portrays him as a guerrilla leader, analyses of the actions of his forces during the insurrection point towards a form of hybrid warfare, a type of combat that combines classical guerrilla recruiting tactics and rural insurgency logistics with mostly conventional combat tactics and operations.”<sup>12</sup>

Frank G Hoffman, a Marine Corps officer, has written extensively on hybrid warfare. He explains hybrid warfare thus:

... Hybrid wars are much more than just conflicts between states and other armed groups. It is the application of the various forms of conflict that best distinguishes hybrid threats or conflicts. This is especially true since hybrid wars can be conducted by both states and a variety of nonstate actors. Hybrid threats incorporate a full range of modes of warfare, including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts that include indiscriminate violence and coercion, and criminal disorder.<sup>13</sup>

Russia had successfully invaded Ukraine and Crimea in 2014, following the tenets of hybrid warfare. While describing the case of Russia, Alexandru Apetroe states that the term ‘hybrid warfare’ has been used to refer to the combined usage of unconventional military tactics such as conventional warfare with irregular warfare and cyber warfare, as well as the employment of other instruments and tactics (subversive elements), to achieve a double goal: first, to avoid responsibility and retribution; and, second to weaken and destabilise the enemy without direct involvement.<sup>14</sup>

Sean Sullivan writes about the use of mass communication networks—based on the tenets of hybrid warfare—as these comprise one of the most powerful propaganda tools in the world:

Examples of hybrid warfare include dissemination of disinformation or fake news via social media, cyber-attacks on the IT systems or as the case in the conflict in Ukraine, disinformation and the use of anonymous men, dubbed ‘Little Green Men.’<sup>15</sup>

Interestingly, Patrick Cullen *et al.*, have identified the vulnerabilities that may be exploited:

Hybrid warfare is designed to exploit national vulnerabilities across the Political, Military, Economic, Social, Informational and Infrastructure

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(PMESII) spectrum. ... This process should direct comprehensive cross-government efforts to understand, detect and respond to hybrid threats.<sup>16</sup>

While discussing the definition, Matthew Symonds states, “Definitions vary, but, in essence, it is blurring of military, economic, diplomatic, intelligence and criminal means to achieve a political goal.”<sup>17</sup>

Based on its wide experience of asymmetric warfare and employment of elements of hybrid tools in Afghanistan and Iraq, the US military describes hybrid war as being:

...a combination of symmetrical and asymmetrical armed conflicts, where the intervention forces carry out traditional military operations against enemy military forces and targets, while acting simultaneously and decisively for gaining control of the indigenous population in the theatre of military operations, through stability operations.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, it may be fair to say that hybrid warfare is a strategy which employs a blend of conventional warfare, irregular warfare, disruptive technologies, cyber warfare, and communication networks with other influencing methods, such as fake news, diplomacy, and foreign electoral interventional methods, directly or indirectly, to achieve political, economic and strategic objectives. Efforts are made to synchronise the overall effort, but it becomes difficult due to the number of state and non-state actors involved. Another important feature of hybrid and grey zone warfare is to deny a country’s involvement in unconventional or clandestine activities, to prevent any further escalation. Peter Pindjack of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs at the Slovak Republic, has identified the target places where hybrid war takes place and opines that “a *hybrid war takes place on three distinct battlefields*: the conventional battlefield, the indigenous population of the conflict zone, and the international community.”<sup>19</sup>



To take preventive actions and to counter unconventional threats, the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats has been established in Helsinki. Reid Standish, a special correspondent with *Foreign Policy*, gives the rationale for the establishment of the centre, which, in essence, also describes the elements of hybrid threats:

...It was created to find new ways to defend against hybrid warfare: the blending of diplomacy, politics, media, cyberspace, and military force to destabilize and undermine an opponent's government.<sup>20</sup>

In the latest series of *Oriental Review*, an open dialogue research journal, Andrew Korybko, a specialist on hybrid warfare, has formulated the “Law of Hybrid War” which states that “[t]he grand objective behind every Hybrid War is to disrupt multi-polar transnational connective projects through externally provoked identity conflicts (ethnic, religious, regional, political, etc.) within a targeted transit state.”<sup>21</sup> Similarly, while discussing the possibility of threats to both the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and European Union (EU), Ivo Pickner argues, “It means that a hybrid threat is not exclusively a tool of asymmetric or non-state actors, but can be applied by state and non-state actors alike”<sup>22</sup> (Refer Fig 1). A few more elements can be added to the list like transnational forces abetting insurgencies, violence, organised crime and terrorism, support to political parties, religious extremism, etc.

Fig 1: Elements of Hybrid War



Source: Hybrid War as a Modern Instrument of Military Art<sup>23</sup>

### Hybrid Warfare and Grey Zone Conflicts

In the recent years, two terms—hybrid warfare and grey zone conflicts—have been added to the glossary of terms of International Relations (IR) and conflicts, which are discussed briefly. Warfare has graduated to the fifth generation in the form of hybrid warfare. It has been used in the conflicts in West Asia, Afghanistan, Ukraine, China, South Asia, the USA and many other areas of conflict. Greg Grant is emphatic when he says that, as part of situational awareness, it is easier to know about own troops, but it does not solve the problem of finding the “*low signature*” enemy.<sup>24</sup> The most potent threats emanate from the information and cyber domains: espionage, attack and manipulation. These can affect a large portion of the population in a short time. Although, the Indian subcontinent continues to face sub-conventional war in the form of proxy war and cross-border terrorism,

it has not experienced the full dimension of hybrid war in the true sense of the term so far.

Grey zone conflicts, on the other hand, are conflicts which oscillate between war and peace and are generally waged by the great powers that do not want to cross the threshold of a total war due to the nuclear threat,<sup>25</sup> and yet aim to achieve their political and territorial objectives. It may perhaps be correct to say that it is also waged by a nation against a powerful adversary, to remain ambiguous, uncertain and below the threshold of an open conflict. In the grey zone, the moves are carefully calibrated to ensure that the situation remains ambiguous and uncertain.<sup>26</sup> Mark Galeotti has described the grey zone concept as “guerrilla geopolitics”.<sup>27</sup>

While looking at the future, grey zone conflicts between the great powers will continue to be relevant for both the domination of strategic space and heightened competition for fast diminishing natural resources. While the hybrid warfare concept covers a much wider canvass, with a larger kitty of tools, the grey zone uses them selectively to oscillate between the grey zones of war and peace. Two distinctive examples of grey zone conflicts are Russia’s intervention in Ukraine in 2014, and China’s progressive, skillful increase in assertive actions in the South China Sea (SCS), by creating artificial islands to deploy Surface-to-Air Missiles (SAMs) and anti-ship missiles, and establishing security posts on the reclaimed islands.<sup>28</sup> Although, these activities are in the realm of the grey zone, they certainly point toward employment of hybrid threats. Subsequently, China has continued to conduct major naval and air exercises in the SCS, suggesting to America that any intervention would be “more risky and more costly.”<sup>29</sup> The lines among military, economic, diplomatic, intelligence and criminal means of aggression are becoming increasingly blurred.

## **Increase in Hybrid Warfare**

Hybrid threats have become predominant due to a number of reasons: one, the changing nature of the world order and the security matrix at the global and regional levels; two, the fourth industrial revolution—the fusion of technologies—in which technologies have developed at a very rapid pace and international norms and regulatory mechanisms have still not been established, e.g., for cyber, space and lethal autonomous weapon systems; three, technology has provided new tools and has empowered the state and non-state actors to achieve their objectives at much lower costs; four, information warfare, due to increased digitalisation, internet and social media influences that can change the perceptions of the target population in a much quicker timeframe; five, in counter-insurgency operations, asymmetry between the strength of a state and its enormous resources, against the will of the insurgents to fight for their cause has been facilitated by the availability of the latest technology. With the advent of new technology, digitalisation or the usage of the virtual sphere has not only provided a wide range of tools to easily and quickly propagate a fear psychosis among the masses but has also lowered the cost of achieving one's goals and objectives.

The fourth major industrial revolution has resulted in blurring the lines among the physical, digital and biological spheres.<sup>30</sup> The new technologies like: the Internet of Things (IoT), cyber security, simulation, lethal autonomous weapon systems, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and big data, augmented reality, cloud computing, additive manufacturing and 3-D printing would play a key role in organising non-contact and non-kinetic forms of warfare to achieve objectives. These technologies are already providing the architectural support for hybrid threats and challenges to security, which should be exploited, both to counter them as also to employ them to our advantage in a proactive manner.

Moreover, hybrid warfare, also known as ambiguous warfare, generally pivots around political, economic and military objectives. It is

a blend of the realms of the economy, military, information, psychology and cyber, with a view to achieve political objectives.<sup>31</sup> The range of hybrid tools continues to increase with changes in the geo-political environment, new innovations in technologies and new ideas to serve one's national interests. A few of these elements and tools put together are: conventional warfare, irregular warfare, economic leverage, cyber warfare, cyber tools (espionage, attack, manipulation), information warfare, special operations, strategic leaks, subversion, propaganda, fake news, psychological operations, public information campaign, influence operations, funding various organisations, organised protests movements, transnational abetment of violence based on sectarian, ethnic and religious intolerance, operations by proxies, and radicalisation based on religious extremism. Information and cyber warfare are central to hybrid warfare.

### **Cases of Hybrid Warfare and Impact**

Several countries have been affected by hybrid threats over the years, by both state and non-state actors, or a combination of the two. Only a few cases have been discussed. Some of the recent examples, published and spoken about at various forums, are the Russian 'little green men' in Ukraine; Russian hacks into the e-mail server of the US Democratic National Committee (DNC); the protest and counter-protest over the mosque in Houston, with both sides fake and organised by Russian trolls. Gregory Treverton *et al.* have described these as the "hybrid threats in the 21st century."<sup>32</sup> Considering the financial vulnerabilities of Ukraine, the Russian military actions were closely linked with political, economic and information campaigns.<sup>33</sup>

Similar to this, although its claims on a number of islands and territorial waters in the South China Sea (SCS) are disputed by several neighbours, China has built progressively militarised artificial islands in the SCS during the past decade. This remains part of the grey zone conflict with hybrid threats. To quote Gregory F. Treverton, "China has

concentrated on cyber tools, pursuing some combination of espionage, signalling capabilities or preparing to add cyber friction in the event of conflict.”<sup>34</sup> Even the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), Hezbollah and Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) have used the elements and mix of conventional and unconventional methods, symmetrical and asymmetrical tactics and capabilities for their violent actions and terror. Conflict in Yemen is another example of multifaceted hybrid warfare, where the Houthis, who were fighting primarily for a greater share of power, have “employed both kinetic and non-kinetic force to control the state and its socio-economic policies.”<sup>35</sup> The Houthis have withstood the campaigns by the Yemeni armed forces since 2004, and the Saudi-led coalition that carried out ground and air attacks, and naval blockades, periodically since March 2015. Recently, the Houthis claimed to have attacked the two major oil fields of Saudi Arabia by a swarm of armed drones and missiles on September 14, 2019—a new form of unmanned armed attacks though not the first of the kind in the world.

Closer home, the actions of Pakistan are examples of what is now being termed as grey zone conflict and/or hybrid threats. These have been discussed very briefly. Since its independence in August 1947, Pakistan has remained obsessed with the idea of annexation of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) with it. On October 22, 1947, as part of detailed planning, Pakistan launched 20 *lashkars* of Pathan tribal warriors from the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) into J&K, with a few retired officers from the Pakistan Army to guide the *lashkars* to achieve the ultimate aim of annexing J&K. The tribesmen were more adept at guerrilla war than infantry-style battles.<sup>36</sup> It was called Operation Gulmarg, an unconventional operation to keep it below the threshold of an open war with India, which was much stronger militarily. The Pakistan Army entered the war in 1948. Eventually, Pakistan failed.

Having not learnt a lesson, Pakistan launched Operation Gibraltar by infiltrating the Pakistan Army’s Azad Kashmir Regular Force (AKRF),

disguised as locals, into Baramulla, Uri, Gulmarg and other areas J&K, in August 1965. The aim was to foment an uprising with the support of the local people and annex J&K, with the intervention of the regular Army at an opportune moment. Pakistan had launched the AKRF, to be followed by the regular Army. While the covert multi-pronged infiltration plan and abetment of an uprising failed, it led to the Indo-Pak War of 1965. Once again, Pakistan failed in its mission.

With its experience of the role of the Mujahideen in Afghanistan since 1980, where they were supported, equipped and funded by the US, Pakistan indulged in proxy war-cum-cross-border terrorism in the Kashmir Valley in the late 1980s, which subsequently spread to the adjoining areas south of the Pir Panjal Range (PPR). Pakistan has continued to provide diplomatic, military, political, financial, propaganda and psychological support to the terrorists, including a large number of *jihadists* who came from the Middle East in the 1990s. The aim was to destabilise India by the doctrine and announcement of “bleeding India with a thousand cuts”.<sup>37</sup> In 1999, Pakistan sent its regular troops (Northern Light Infantry), dressed in local attire, to deceitfully occupy the Kargil Heights, but announced to the world that they were Mujahideen. This was yet another way of unleashing hybrid war to achieve its multiple aims. The operation was a political, diplomatic and strategic failure. However, keeping in view its larger strategic objectives, Pakistan has been successful on several counts by employing appropriate hybrid tools in a calibrated manner against India.

It is common knowledge that Pakistan sponsored terrorist groups like the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM), Hizbul Mujahideen (HM) and many others, carried out attacks in the hinterland at Mumbai, Delhi, Jammu, Varanasi, Uri, Samba, Pathankot, Nagrota, Sanjuwan and Pulwama with the aim of destroying the very idea of India. The terrorists attacked the financial hub (Mumbai) a number of times, religious places of worship to cause communal disharmony, the

Information Technology (IT) hubs, and the Parliament of the country – the symbol of democracy of the country. Being fully aware of India's growing economic and military strength as an emerging power, Pakistan resorted to the basic tenets of grey zone conflict, employing hybrid tools in terms of providing diplomatic, military, political, financial, religious, propaganda and psychological support to destabilise India.

### **Way Ahead**

As a concept, a combination of the conventional and unconventional systems of war-fighting, regular and irregular, overt and covert operations, at strategic and tactical levels, is as old as the history of warfare itself. Everyone understands that the security landscape is becoming increasingly complex, multi-layered and multi-dimensional, but it is becoming more and more difficult to understand the threats being faced by nation-states. As part of their strategy, hybrid adversaries study the critical political-economic-social-military structural vulnerabilities, and plan to target them by varied hybrid elements and tools. In fact, the nature and intensity of threats keep changing, based on innovative ideas and technological advancements. Therefore, it is important to first keep abreast with the technological tools, understand and assess the nature and intensity of the threats and vulnerabilities, and the impact on one's national security.

Given the current tempo of conflicts the world over, it would be correct to agree with Margaret Bond about the role of all elements of national power. According to Bond, "War of the next century will comprise a kind of hybrid war, projecting all elements of national power along a continuum of activities from stability, security, and reconstruction operations, to armed combat."<sup>38</sup> The capabilities of both state and the non-state actors to engage in hybrid warfare differ, but remain the most potent threat. As hybrid warfare is primarily well-equipped and designed to exploit national vulnerabilities across the political, military, economic, social, informational and infrastructural spectra, it virtually means that it



comprises war against nation-states. India continues to be vulnerable to hybrid threats, being a large, pluralistic, democratic nation, with a huge diversity in geography, demographic profile, socio-economic disparity, and other forms and manifestations. As there is no declared war, the rules of war have also changed. Thus, in the future, we will be increasingly confronted with non-kinetic and non-contact forms of threats, which will be far more potent and lethal. It is a fact that no single element of national power – certainly, not the military alone—can address the hybrid threats of the future. There is, therefore, a need to change our ‘mindset’ from conventional conflict alone to a combination of conventional-cum-non-conventional methods to combat the hybrid threats of the future. There is a need to create organisations at the apex level—the Centre—to plan and synergise the activities of various organs of the state, to respond to such situations. Also, the integration of the Centre with the states would be central to our preparation for such hybrid threats. Thus, along with logistical and military preparedness, there is a need for political and diplomatic level preparedness at all stages as well, and all these preparations need to be in sync with each other if the country has to combat hybrid threats.

With varied hybrid elements, particularly information and cyber warfare, gaining prominence to target the conventional battlefield and the indigenous population of the conflict zone, there is a need to develop a strong intelligence system, with survivability and redundancy, to identify the emanating threats and take proactive actions to mitigate them. We also have to address the international community proactively to counter the propaganda narratives of the adversaries. A case in point: cyber attacks by an adversary could paralyse the economy, governance, banking, transportation systems, and military networks. Since the indigenous population is one of the primary targets of hybrid adversaries we have to promote awareness about the adversary’s designs and threats to all sections of the society, including higher educational institutions

such as private, state and central universities. Such institutes should remain vigilant to report activities that may lead to subversion, abetment of people's movements, terrorist attacks, organised crime, radicalisation, recruitment for religious extremism/anti-national activities, and misinformation campaigns that lower the morale of the population at large. Simultaneously, the intelligence and police forces must be restructured, trained and equipped with modern tools to fight the emanating threats.

One of the most prominent players comprise the armed forces. Besides the need for synergy amongst them, they should also carry out a *de novo* study of their capabilities and effectiveness in hybrid or grey zone scenarios. It would certainly point to reviewing our doctrines, strategies, war-fighting concepts, command and control structures, intelligence at different levels, and the need to build matching capabilities. Just as Israel learnt its lessons in its war with Hezbollah in 2006, and carried out a review to fight against hybrid threats, India should also prepare for these with a sense of urgency. We, as a nation, should be prepared to fight a high intensity war along with the unconventional and hybrid threats. Therefore, a counter hybrid warfare strategy will be successful only if it can effectively synchronise the political, economic, military, social, cyber and informational warfare tools to defeat the hybrid adversaries in time.

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# Russian Capability and Usage of Hybrid Tactics During the Intervention in Ukraine and Crimea in 2014

Balraj Singh Nagal

## Introduction

The hybrid war in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine is linked to history, geography, demography, local and national power play and international level power politics between the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and Russia. Russia has strong fraternal ties with Ukraine dating back to the 9th century and the founding of Kievan Rus, the first eastern Slavic state, whose capital was Kiev/Kyiv. The country has been under partial or total Russian rule for most of those intervening centuries, which is a big part of why one in six Ukrainians is actually an ethnic Russian, one in three speaks Russian as the native language (the other two-thirds speak Ukrainian natively), and much of the country's media is in Russian. It is also why the subject of Russia is such a divisive one in Ukraine: many in the country see Moscow as the source of Ukraine's historical subjugation and something to be resisted, while others tend to look at Russia more fondly, with a sense of shared heritage and history.<sup>1</sup> Nikita Khrushchev

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and the Supreme Council of the Soviet Union transferred Crimea from under the government of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic to the government of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1954. As both republics were a part of the Soviet Union, the move was largely symbolic and of little practical consequence.<sup>2</sup> Because of its large Russian population, Crimea's links with Russia have remained very important, and Russia's military on the peninsula represented a bond with Russians on the mainland and was perceived to be an important part of the economy. The 45 million people of Ukraine have failed to resolve their internal divisions and build strong political institutions, hampering the ability to implement economic reforms. In the decade following independence, successive Presidents allowed oligarchs to gain increasing control over the economy while repression against political opponents intensified. By 2010, Ukraine's 50 richest people controlled nearly half of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), writes Andrew Wilson in the Council for Foreign Relations' book *Pathways to Freedom*.<sup>3</sup>

At a 2008 NATO meeting in Bucharest, Russian President Vladimir Putin told US President George Bush, "You don't understand, George, that Ukraine is not even a state. What is Ukraine? Part of its territories is Eastern Europe, but the greater part is a gift from us."<sup>4</sup> Former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger wrote in a *Washington Post* op-ed.<sup>5</sup> "The West must understand that, to Russia, Ukraine can never be just a foreign country."

The immediate genesis of the hybrid war can be traced to the Maidan Protest in November 2013. President Yanukovich (a native of eastern Ukraine's Donetsk Basins, drawing much of his support from that region's ethnic Russian population), elected in 2010, strengthened ties with Russia, extending Russia's lease on port facilities in the Crimean city of Sevastopol to 2042-47, and signed legislation that indefinitely halted Ukraine's progress toward NATO membership.<sup>6</sup> In November 2013, when Yanukovich announced that he would not proceed with the long-

anticipated association and trade agreements with the European Union (EU), mass protests erupted in Ukraine. After meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin on November 9, Yanukovich instead moved to further expand ties with Russia. Thousands of people took to the streets in response, and demonstrators established a protest camp in Kiev's/Kyiv's Maidan (Independence Square). Opposition politicians voiced their support for the protesters, while Moscow backed the Yanukovich administration with promises of low-interest loans and reductions in the price of natural gas. In the subsequent months, a series of government crackdowns was unsuccessful in suppressing dissent, and in February 2014, the Ukrainian security forces opened fire on the Maidan protesters, killing scores and wounding hundreds. With his political base disintegrating, President Yanukovich released Tymoshenko, a political opponent and ex-Prime Minister, and scheduled snap Presidential elections for May 2014.<sup>7</sup> On February 22, three months after his reversal regarding the association agreement, the protesters got their wish as Parliament voted to "remove Viktor Yanukovich from the post of President of Ukraine."<sup>8</sup>

President Viktor Yanukovich was replaced by a pro-Western interim government. The fear that a pro-Western government at Kiev/Kyiv could tilt and align with the EU and NATO, probably convinced Russia to plan the annexation as the protests intensified. In the months leading up to the decision, Russia launched a hybrid campaign which included covert operations, information warfare, and, eventually, a conventional invasion to take control of the Crimean peninsula. Simultaneously, from March 2014, it conducted a separatist campaign in the eastern Ukrainian regions of Donetsk and Luhansk with a mix of political warfare, the support of paramilitary groups, and conventional forces.<sup>9</sup>

Given its geography as a peninsula, Crimea was easy to seal from the mainland and simple to defend from a counter-attack. Russia was also easily able to sever communications between Crimea and the mainland. Crimea was a well-defined administrative entity, with its own polity and

history, including some degree of political autonomy, allowing it to be neatly separated from Ukraine as an annexed territory. Crimea was closest to Russia's Southern Military District, which had the highest state of readiness among the Russian forces, manned at 90 per cent, according to some estimates.<sup>10</sup> Circumstances conspired against Ukraine because the Southern Military District was already on high readiness, given that Russia was hosting the Olympic Games in Sochi in February and March 2014. Finally, Crimea's small size relative to Ukraine (the largest country in Europe) made the Russian annexation much more feasible.<sup>11</sup>

Russia had transit agreements with Ukraine that allowed it to deploy personnel and material to Crimea before and during the military operation. The terms of Russia's basing agreement with Ukraine offered substantial leeway for transfer of units from the mainland, if needed; there was a sizeable troop limit in the basing agreement, which gave Russia the capacity to increase its military presence while still being within the terms of its deal with Ukraine. Russia had roughly 12,000 military personnel in the Black Sea Fleet in February 2014, the only infantry unit of which was the 810th Independent Naval Infantry Brigade. The Russian Naval Infantry was staffed by contract troops, who were better trained, paid, and equipped than typical conscript units. In terms of numbers and available firepower, these forces were inferior to Ukraine's units in Crimea, lacking infantry fighting vehicles, armour, or artillery.<sup>12</sup>

Russia's 810th Naval Infantry Brigade was a leading and supporting asset for the operation, with anti-air and anti-naval capabilities. The naval base at Sevastopol allowed Russian military units to deploy early in the operation and provided the logistics for inserting Special Forces and reinforcements. This permitted Russia to insert Special Forces without initially causing alarm and introduce the necessary capabilities to conduct the operation. It also had a transit agreement through Ukraine for its forces in Transnistria (Moldova), although Kyiv/Kiev had unilaterally cancelled this deal on May 21, 2015.<sup>13</sup>



In February, Ukraine's interim Defence Minister assessed this number as closer to 15,000 troops, but considered approximately 1,500–2,000 troops as dependable and willing to obey if ordered to fight the Russian military. A contingent of 2,500 Ministry of Interior troops was also present, but had little defence value. The military force included 41 tanks, 160 infantry fighting vehicles, 47 artillery systems, and heavy mortars. The Navy's coastal defence troops included a missile artillery brigade, two independent marine battalions, and a coastal defence brigade. Of the 45 MiG-29 fighters at Belbek air base near Sevastopol in southwest Crimea, only four to six were operational. The Ukrainian air defences included the Buk-M1 and S-300 surface-to-air missile systems, which were at questionable readiness levels but could still be potent deterrents.<sup>14</sup>

Post February 22, 2014, Ukraine's political leadership made three mistakes which also helped Russia's cause. First, the Ukrainian Parliament, the Rada, on February 23, repealed the legislation that had given the Russian language official status and protection. The interim President, Oleksandr Turchynov, did not agree to sign the changed law, but great damage had been done. The Russian-speaking public judged it as an anti-Russian agenda.<sup>15</sup> Second, the next day, on February 24, Igor Mosiichuk, a leader of the Right Sector, a far-right political party and paramilitary group in Ukraine, without government support, publicly threatened to bring paramilitary fighters to Crimea. The Russian-language media used Mosiichuk's statements to convey a sense of imminent danger for those living in Crimea. Crimean Berkut riot-police officers, reinforced with Kuban Cossacks, who reside in parts of Russia near the Black Sea, set up checkpoints under the guise of responding to a potential right-wing threat. Clashes between Crimean Tatars and Russian nationalists, protests for secession from Ukraine, and counter-protests for unity ensued, leading to a general state of chaos and disorganisation and facilitating Russia's takeover. This validated the need for Russian help in Crimea and the legitimacy of Russia's intervention

to its domestic audience.<sup>16</sup> Third, on February 25, Ukraine's Minister of Interior disbanded the Crimean Berkut riot police returning to Sevastopol after suppressing protests in Kyiv/Kiev. Upon their return to Sevastopol, these units were greeted as heroes by the people and issued Russian passports by Moscow. They defected to the Russian side and provided auxiliary units in the early operations, when Russia was short on manpower. Some participated in further operations in paramilitary units, which left Crimea for the Donbas region of Eastern Ukraine to fight on behalf of the Russian government.<sup>17</sup>

Ukraine's government was in transition following the ouster of Yanukovich. Russia's task was made relatively easy by the confusion and chaos that generally follows an uprising, such as what happened in Kyiv/Kiev. It is not clear whether any action would have been successful, as Ukraine's head of intelligence services [SluzhbaBezpekyUkrayiny (SBU)] reported during a decisive meeting that the military and security forces were demoralised and not receptive to the interim government.

Ukrainian and Russian units went on alert on February 20, 2014, as the Maidan protests in Kyiv escalated into violent clashes with the government security forces and on February 22, 2014, the Ukrainian Rada removed President Yanukovich from power. Russian operations in Crimea effectively began on February 22 and 23, as battalions of the Spetsnaz (elite infantry) units and Vozdushno-Desantnye Voyska (Airborne Forces or VDV) left their bases, while others were airlifted close to the strait separating Russia from Crimea. On February 24, the city council in Sevastopol installed a Russian citizen as Mayor, and several units from the 810th Naval Infantry arrived in the city square in Armoured Personnel Carriers (APCs). This was the first tangible sign that Russia had decided to intervene militarily to change the political order on the peninsula. On February 25, the *Nikolai Filchenkov*, an Alligator-class landing ship, carrying 200 Russian Special Operations Forces [likely the Special Operations Command, Russia (KSO)], arrived in Sevastopol,

in addition to bringing Special Operations Forces units that would subsequently be used in the covert takeover of Crimea.<sup>18</sup>

On February 26, Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered a snap inspection involving 150,000 troops from parts of the Western and Central Military Districts. A drill of this scale was not unusual. The new Minister of Defence, Sergei Shoigu, had been frequently ordering large snap readiness checks and simultaneous drills since 2013. Ostensibly, the exercise was not focussed on Ukraine's borders but to move VDV and Spetsnaz troops northward in Russia. Roughly, 40 Ilyushin Il-76 military transports left the Ulyanovsk air base in Russia, with a large portion of these units moving to Anapa, a staging area just east of Crimea. On February 27, 50 Special Forces operators from the KSO unit pretending to be a local "self-defence militia" seized the Crimean Parliament and raised a Russian flag over the building.<sup>19</sup> Another large landing ship, with 300 Russian soldiers, arrived, following proper border procedures to enter Ukraine but without advance notice to the Ukrainian authorities, as stipulated in the agreements. Later that night, Russian soldiers without markings surrounded the Belbek air base. On the morning of February 28, a convoy of three Mi-8 transport helicopters and eight Mi-35M attack helicopters crossed into Ukraine without permission, giving Russia the ability to neutralise Ukrainian armour and operate at night. Ukraine scrambled fighters, deterring further helicopter units from transferring, but the Mi-35s already were operating openly over Crimea and supporting the Russian forces on the ground.

On March 1, President Putin requested Parliamentary approval to use troops in Ukraine to protect the Black Sea Fleet and ethnic Russians who faced "real threats to [their] life and health". In sum, the Russian movements of late February 2014 effectively boxed in the Ukraine forces, even though the Russian capabilities were limited to one incomplete naval infantry brigade and several hundred Special Forces operatives. On February 28, the Russian forces also seized Simferopol airport, cancelled

all flights, and began airlifting VDV units into Crimea. Still at a distinct numerical disadvantage, on March 1-2, Russia brought reinforcements by heavy landing ships. These units spread across the peninsula without much resistance, quickly encircling or taking over bases and military facilities. Armed with light utility vehicles and APCs, the Russian units had little firepower but high mobility.<sup>20</sup>

Ukraine saw its docked fleet blockaded by Russian ships; the Commander of its Navy, Denis Berzovsky, defected to Russia. The Russian forces made ad hoc arrangements with the trapped Ukrainian troops at bases across the peninsula to maintain the siege without violence. The Russian troops applied heavy psychological pressure, propaganda, and promises to the Ukrainian Commanders to get them to defect, with little success until after the annexation in March.

From March 6, Russia began a conventional troop build-up over the Kerch ferry crossing in eastern Crimea, bringing in units from motor rifle brigades, towed artillery, a variety of air defence units, and anti-ship missile batteries. The Russian military also began to mass units on Ukraine's eastern border as a threat and diversion. The Russian forces sealed Crimea off from mainland Ukraine at its northern crossing points. They severed landline communications between the Ukrainian mainland and bases on Crimea; in some areas, cell phone signals were jammed, possibly from ship-based equipment. The Russian soldiers also cut electricity to some bases to apply pressure on the besieged Ukrainian troops within. In brief, Ukraine had lost effective command and control over its units on the peninsula roughly one week into the operation. Russian intelligence also used this time to organise self-defence units consisting of local militia, Cossacks (a distinct cultural group of East Slavic people common to the region), and the former special police called the Berkut. Russian airborne troops also donned police uniforms to help keep order among the population under the pretence of being local security forces. Russia used non-military and paramilitary elements to confuse the battle

space. Russian Special Forces were critical, but other elements were also deployed to give the impression of local support. Volunteers included Army veterans, boxers, and members of the biker gang “Night Wolves.”<sup>21</sup> Russia annexed Ukraine with no direct Russian casualties. From March 19 to March 25, the Russian forces seized Ukrainian bases in Crimea, most of which offered no resistance. Moscow promised to honour the rank of, and provide better pay and benefits to, all Crimea-based Ukrainian soldiers who defected and accepted Russian citizenship. Most did so, in large part because they were stationed near their families and homes on the peninsula. Ukraine’s Defence Minister was subsequently forced to resign, announcing that out of 18,000 soldiers and families, only 6,500 chose to leave for Ukraine proper. Even among those who left, such as the 10th Naval Aviation Brigade, some soldiers later resigned and returned to Crimea. By March 26, the annexation was essentially complete, and Russia began returning seized military hardware to Ukraine.<sup>22</sup>

The Crimean Parliament initially declared a referendum on independence for May 25, and then moved it to March 30, before finally deciding on March 6 to hold the vote on March 16. The political process to hold a referendum was organised; there were two votes: one to leave Ukraine, which was necessary for Crimea to become an independent polity, and the second, a referendum to accede to the Russian Federation. The March 16 referendum would become the political instrument to annex the peninsula, a process that concluded on March 18.

While the Russian troops were conducting operations in Crimea, the Kremlin also launched an information campaign targeted at the Russian public and Crimean residents. During the seizure of Crimea, the information campaign had three objectives. The first was to discredit the new government in Ukraine, which was often referred to as a “fascist junta.” Russia also sought to highlight the danger faced by ethnic Russians in Ukraine. Finally, the Kremlin emphasised the broad support for Crimea’s return to Russia.

The Russian media had always covered events in Crimea for its own domestic public, but this intensified as the clashes between the pro-government forces and the protesters in Kyiv grew more violent. The media was also addressed, smaller players exited the scene and existing government outlets, such as RIA Novosti and Voice of Russia, were consolidated into Russia Today, now known as RT. In the period before the Crimean campaign, most of Eastern Ukraine and Crimea watched Russian television, and the overwhelming majority of the population received their news from televised media. Ukraine had largely ceded Russian-language information to Russian-based outlets, particularly in Crimea—information and entertainment from these channels were dominant among the Russian-speaking Ukrainians. The Russian forces turned off nine Ukrainian television channels on March 9, leaving access to Russian channels only. Channels from Ukraine remained accessible via satellite receivers.

On February 26, Russia began promoting its message that the regime change in Ukraine was illegal. This was one day prior to the takeover of government buildings in Crimea. This message was advanced by several Russian figures and elites contending that Russians were under threat in Crimea and required protection and that Russia needed to act to secure their safety. The message was straightforward: “[N]ationalists and fascists took power in Kyiv/Kiev, they will force Russians to abandon the Russian language, and present a general threat”.<sup>23</sup>

A movement called Stop Maidan emerged in Simferopol. Russia apparently also took advantage of a grassroots movement running in opposition to Euromaidan. Stop Maidan’s rallying cry was centered on pro-Russian statements such as “Crimea for stability”, “no to extremism”, and “no to foreign interference!” The movement used thousands of billboards and visible advertisements to amplify its message, which largely aligned with Russia’s information campaign. Though the Stop Maidan protesters denied any ties to Moscow, varying degrees of connection have been alleged. In general, Russia’s information warfare “aims at affecting the consciousness

of the masses, both at home and abroad, and conditioning them for the civilizational struggle between Russia's Eurasian culture and the West." The themes of Russia's strategic communication on Crimea pertained to the Ukrainian government and the role of the Western countries. These included the following: The Crimean land historically belonged to Russia. The transfer of Crimea to Ukraine in 1954 was a historical mistake of the Soviet period. Ethnic Russians and the Russian-speaking population in Crimea were under an imminent ultra-nationalist threat. Russia was not involved in the events in Crimea. The March 16 referendum on independence was legitimate, demonstrating the will of the people of Crimea. The Ukrainian soldiers voluntarily gave up their weapons and declared their allegiance to Russia. The Ukrainian government acts in the interests of the United States and other foreign powers. The Maidan movement was overrun by (violent) ultra-nationalists, and Ukraine's President overthrown in an illegitimate *coup d'état*, backed by the West. The pro-European population of Ukraine are the ideological descendants of Nazi supporters and fascists, and the Western countries, and especially the United States, were core orchestrators of the events in the Ukraine. The primary US motivation was the expansion of NATO and containment of Russia. The United States has been pressuring Europe to impose sanctions against Russia and is the driving force of a policy of containment against Moscow. The Russian policy is not a departure from previous Western interventions to change borders and create new political entities, such as in Kosovo.<sup>24</sup>

The Russian operations in Crimea represented, by all accounts, an efficient seizure of territory from another state, executed with speed and competence. The Ukrainian security services initially were unable to resist the attacks. With tens of thousands of Russian troops massed just across the border and the memory of the 2008 conflict between Russia and Georgia fresh in their minds, the leaders in Kiev were forced to weigh any possible military response against the likelihood of triggering an overt Russian intervention.

Hybrid operations become easier if the opposing force is perceived to be friendly and legitimate. Russia's Black Sea Fleet was historically based in Crimea; therefore, much of the population viewed its personnel as a friendly force. Crimea was distinct in that militaries belonging to two different states were based there. Both were viewed as legitimate by the population, their presence historically considered valid. Furthermore, the Crimeans had fewer economic reasons to fear, or protest against, annexation, as incomes, salaries, and pensions were substantially higher in Russia than in Ukraine. According to the World Bank, the gross domestic product per capita in Ukraine in 2014 was US\$ 3,082.50, compared with US\$ 12,735.90 in Russia. The history, identity, and economic links of Crimea to Russia were structural factors, reducing the likelihood of popular resistance and contributing to the ease of Russia's operation. Cultural proximity between the Russian and Crimea Russian troops and intelligence operatives, and the shared language, culture, and ethnicity of most Crimeans, gave the Russians advantages as an invading force. The Russian agents were able to blend readily among the Crimeans to organise or coordinate self-defence units. Paratroopers could pretend to be police or interior troops and conduct riot control against protesters. In short, the common language and culture allowed the Russian forces to rapidly insert themselves into the operating environment and take control of the peninsula. Furthermore, the Russian military could readily communicate with the sympathetic elements of the population to facilitate the takeover.

In Eastern Ukraine, Moscow initially encouraged an anti-government movement. It launched a political warfare campaign rather than sending Special Forces as a precursor to a conventional invasion. The objective was to destabilise southeastern Ukraine in order to increase control over the region, and if possible, convince the local authorities to accept a federal scheme. The Kremlin used a diverse network of political operatives, businessmen, criminal elements, and powerful oligarchs to oppose Ukraine's new government. The Ukrainian government inadvertently



escalated the conflict by arresting the protest leaders and sparking a separatist insurgency. The escalation continued as the protest movement turned to irregular warfare and Russia began conventional reinforcements with its own troops in support of the separatists.<sup>25</sup>

Protests in Eastern Ukraine against the new Ukrainian government that began almost immediately after the Maidan protests, prompted Yanukovich's flight from power. As stated earlier, the new government in Ukraine made three mistakes, which aided the separatists and Russians. The reaction to these moves, coupled with Russia's operation in Crimea, encouraged the mobilisation of both leftist and right-wing organisations in Eastern Ukraine, and their leaders, previously existing on the margins of Ukrainian political life, proclaimed themselves as "People's Mayors" and "People's Governors."<sup>26</sup> The opening events of the political turmoil in Eastern Ukraine closely followed the pattern of Crimea with the appointment of Russian citizens as Mayors/Governors in the cities of Luhansk, Donetsk, Kharkiv and Slovyansk. The protesters' actions were spontaneous and self-initiated, driven by public anxiety about the future after the victory of the Maidan movement in the capital. The public agitation and outcry appeared genuine and not disconnected from the country's political divisions. It is possible that some Russian citizens crossed the border to participate in these events of their own accord, but most protestors were local Ukrainians.<sup>27</sup> Most of the people in Eastern Ukraine had voted for Yanukovich and traditionally supported his political party, the Party of the Regions. They were upset by his removal and uncertain about Ukraine's political direction.<sup>28</sup>

The protesters seized the regional administration buildings in Kharkiv and Donetsk on March 1, took over the regional administration building in Luhansk on March 9, and demanded that a referendum be held on annexing the Luhansk Oblast (region) to Russia. The protesters' official causes included a referendum on federalisation, recognition of Russian as the second official state language, and a Customs Union with Russia.

The call for a referendum was apparently a bid to pressurise the Ukrainian government for devolution of more autonomy to the region. These individuals could be described as pro-Russian and certainly anti-Maidan oriented, but they were also obscure figures of little-to-no political significance in the country or the region, and could be characterised as local and regional political outsiders, adherents of extreme movements who exist on the margins of the political landscape.

The Ukrainian regional law enforcement cracked down on these People's Governors and, by removing them, inadvertently paved the way for a different set of leaders to take over the movement. By March 10, the local police managed to regain control of all the captured administration buildings in the three cities. Street clashes between pro- and anti-Maidan protesters continued for several days in the major cities. Meanwhile, the interim Ukrainian government appointed oligarchs as new Governors, assuming they would use their patronage networks to retain control and defend their own economic interests. The new appointees had ties with the Russian security services, military experience, and associations with business interests in Russia. Many were either local to the Donbas region or came from Crimea, likely at the behest of Russian intelligence in early March. The new leaders were more interested in mounting direct action and had the military experience to command a paramilitary force.

This change in leadership marked the true beginning of the separatist movement and the transition from political warfare to insurgency. Rather than wait to hold a referendum on the status of the regions, Commanders, such as Strelkov and his comrade Igor Bezler stormed the buildings of the local administration and proclaimed the territories under their control as republics. His actions prevented a restoration of order by the Ukrainian authorities, as occurred in Odessa and Kharkiv, where crackdowns ended the protests and the local elites chose to side with the national government. When Strelkov declared the Donetsk Republic (DNR), he

shifted the cause from federalisation to outright secession from Ukraine, which was always his personal intention.

From April 6 to 23, the separatists employed groups of armed men to capture and hold the administration buildings that were lost by the pro-Russian civilian demonstrators in early March. The separatists seized the main administrative building in Donetsk on April 6, overran an Interior Ministry rapid-response force at the Luhansk administration complex on April 11, and took the city halls in Slovyansk, Kramatorsk, and Krasny Liman on April 12. In Donetsk, the separatists seized the state security services building to gain access to 300 assault rifles and 400 handguns, enabling them to arm the fighters and further spread the insurgency. At this stage of the movement, the demands vacillated between autonomy within a federalised Ukraine and secession in order to join Russia. The proclamation by Strelkov of the DNR on April 7 marked a more concerted attempt to unify effort and command among the separatists behind a political structure. Pro-Russian separatists would declare a Luhansk People's Republic a few weeks later. Eventually, Strelkov took overall command and control of a large conglomeration of fighters called the South-East Army, becoming the leading political figure of the separatist movement. Although he was able to attract members of some pro-Russian organisations, including the East Front and Donbas People's Movement, Strelkov was unable to monopolise the use of force in the area. The local elites, who formed their own battalions, preferred to maintain their autonomy. Units such as the Vostok Battalion in Donetsk, headed by a former Commander of the Ukrainian Alfa Special Forces in the region, and Zarya in Luhansk, primarily comprising local residents, acted independently of Strelkov's South-East Army.

From April 15 to 23, Ukrainian Army and Interior Ministry forces mounted efforts to respond to the separatists. Most of the deployed units in the east were halted outside the captured cities by a handful of crude checkpoints and several pro-Russian civilian mobs. Russian citizens took

command of the separatist movement in mid-April, and they had Russian volunteers with them. The Ukrainian security forces were ineffective for two reasons. First, the Ukrainian Army existed largely on paper, with perhaps only 6,000 combat-capable troops available. Second, the Ukrainian Army Commanders spoke Russian and were disinclined to fight against fellow Russian speakers or order troops into civilian areas. The Ukrainian military was completely unprepared for the launch of combat operations. The local police in Donetsk, Luhansk, Slovyansk, and Kramatorsk were either intimidated by the separatists or defected to them. The Ukrainian soldiers and their Commanders were confused by the situation on the ground and did not know how to deal with the separatist forces that were accompanied by supportive civilian mobs. Many Ukrainian units retreated by April 23, and in one case, six Ukrainian airborne vehicles were captured by the separatists and local civilians without a fight. This handful of fighting vehicles and a self-propelled mortar were used by the separatists from April until June, when heavier conventional equipment was eventually supplied directly by Russia.

From late April to late May, the Ukrainian Army mounted a more deliberate campaign to contain the pro-Russian rebellion by securing key terrain around Donbas cities held by the separatists. The Anti-Terrorist Operation (the Ukrainian government's official name for its campaign against the separatists) was essentially a siege-warfare campaign, leveraging Ukraine's vastly superior numbers, artillery, and air power to steadily encircle and push out the separatists from fortified terrain. The objective of this strategy was to position the military for a decisive offensive against the rebel enclave, once Ukraine's national mobilisation, including the May 1 reintroduction of mass conscription for men had been completed. After taking the outlying cities, Ukraine's Army planned to isolate and besiege Donetsk and Luhansk.

Meanwhile, the separatists obtained short-range air-defence weaponry, presumably from Russia or possibly from stocks in Ukraine. In late April

and May, several Ukrainian military helicopters and fixed wing transport aircraft were shot down in the Donbas region. Russia apparently supplied the rebels with shoulder-fired and self-propelled Strela-10M short-range systems. The Russian forces massing on Ukraine's borders grew beyond 40,000, diverting Ukraine's deployments to its borders, defending cities such as Kharkiv, rather than to the conflict zone, because of the threat of a large-scale invasion. In the last week of April, the Ukrainian Army made probing attacks against the outskirts of Slovyansk. On May 2, a Ukrainian offensive made gains, seizing part of the city, with casualties on both sides and at the cost of two helicopters. In the subsequent weeks, fighting spread to other towns in Donetsk, with see-saw battles between government forces and the separatists in Kramatorsk, Slovyansk, and Mariupol.

Separatist leaders organised a referendum on May 11, without any discernible legal basis, in which 89 per cent of participants supposedly voted in favour of self-rule. Violence continued until the May 25, Presidential election, with several attacks by the separatist forces possibly aiming to disrupt the election. Ukraine's Presidential election was held on May 25, and Petro Poroshenko defeated the former Prime Minister, Yulia Tymoshenko. The next day, the first battle for Donetsk airport began. Over two days, Ukrainian forces fought separatist militants, who suffered heavy losses. Pro-Russian rebels said that more than 50 of their soldiers were killed. The Ukrainian Army was able to push the separatists out of Donetsk's international terminal with air strikes and a paratrooper assault. The battle was also the first of the conflict involving a "large group of volunteers from Russia who arrived to reinforce the separatists."<sup>29</sup> Ramzan Kadyrov, Chechnya's President, allegedly ordered the fighters from the "*dikayadiviziya*," or "savage division" to Ukraine. The first battle for Donetsk airport was also a turning point in that more Russian soldiers arrived to reinforce the separatists, but it proved a military disaster for the separatist fighters. Scores were killed at the airport and on the way back to

the city by friendly fire from the Vostok Battalion, which confused them for Ukrainian units, due to lack of communication among the disparate separatist forces.

The May 26 battle for Donetsk airport likely marked a departure point for the greater involvement of ‘volunteers’ from Russia to bolster the separatist ranks. The battle for Donetsk airport and Ukraine’s subsequent offensive operations escalated the conflict vertically for Russia, resulting in the steady transition to conventional warfare. From June to August, the Kremlin supplied the separatists with mechanised equipment, armour, advanced munitions, and medium air defences. The strong air defence was effective; Ukraine’s Air Force suffered so many losses that it was incapable of contributing in the conflict by mid-August. On July 17, Russian-backed militia fired a surface-to-air missile at Malaysian Airlines Flight 17, killing 283 passengers and 15 crew members, drawing increased global attention to the conflict.

Ukraine’s forces were, however, still able to make some gains against the separatists. On July 5, the government recaptured several towns held by the separatists, including Slovyansk. As the fighting continued, the pro-Russian militants were pushed back into their strongholds of Donetsk and Luhansk after sustaining heavy losses. By early August, the government had recaptured about 75 per cent of territory previously held by the separatists. At this point, the rebels’ outlook was dire. The Ukrainian forces had retaken much of the separatists’ territory and were close to regaining border control and encircling them entirely. The republics of Donetsk and Luhansk were in danger of being split, as Ukrainian soldiers drove a wedge between them. Russia’s strategy was failing, forcing Moscow to up the ante by launching a conventional invasion in August of 2014. Between August 14 and 24, armoured personnel carriers and other Russian military vehicles entered Ukraine. Russia continued to deny any involvement, despite at least 1,000 Russian soldiers supporting the separatists at the time. Other figures place the number of Russian troops

moved into Ukraine at the time at 4,000. Russia continued to deny its involvement, but finally admitted to the presence of military personnel after Ukrainian troops captured 10 Russian paratroopers. The Kremlin claimed they had crossed the border accidentally. By the end of August, the separatists had resumed pressure on the Luhansk and Donetsk airports, and threatened Mariupol again. On August 24, Russia abandoned an effort to mix in conventional weaponry, such as tanks and air defence, in support of the separatist forces. Instead, it switched to conventional operations, invading with perhaps 4,000 regular troops (accurate figures are unavailable) and defeating Ukraine's military at the Battle of Ilovaisk. On September 5, in Minsk, Belarus, negotiators arranged a ceasefire between the Ukrainian and separatist forces, referred to as the Minsk I. Two days later, Russian-backed separatists seized Donetsk airport.

Although artillery skirmishes continued, both sides took a break to rearm, train, and consolidate between September 5, 2014, and January 13, 2015. In January 2015, Russia launched a second offensive, and following a second encirclement and defeat at Debaltseve, Ukraine signed the Minsk II ceasefire on February 12, 2015, on terms highly favourable for Moscow.

The Ukraine intervention displayed the range of tools at Moscow's disposal – from information and cyber war, though the use of proxies, to direct use of own forces. Proxies were a prominent feature as Russia supported an array of groups with pro-Russian agendas. In the early phases of the conflict, it sought to foment the rebels and assisted with 'volunteer' recruitment in support of the separatists. Russia relied on a range of actors with existing networks to influence Ukraine. Separatist soldiers were drawn from Russia and other post-Soviet states, tied together by nationalism. The Kremlin also employed a variety of paramilitaries. Organisations such as former members of the Chechen "Vostok Battalion," the Russian Orthodox Army, Night Wolves, Cossack paramilitaries, and Chetnik Guards operated in Ukraine and Crimea. The Wolves' Head Battalion, a

Cossack paramilitary that fought in Georgia in 2008, operated in Ukraine in lieu of Russian troops. Russia's information campaign was aimed at both the West and Ukraine, tuning the messaging for the intended audience. The Kremlin accused the West of meddling in Ukrainian and Russian affairs, while claiming Russia as a defender of democracy in Ukraine. It also claimed to act according to the people's wishes. Beyond justifying its involvement in eastern Ukraine, Russia threatened military action while insisting it wanted peace. Russia also denied its involvement in Ukraine while constantly reminding listeners about its military and even nuclear superiority as warnings. Domestic messaging focussed on NATO's threat and the West's plotting. Russia questioned the legitimacy of the government in Kiev, labelling it "fascist" and "Nazi".

In Ukraine and Russia, the concept of Novorossiia became a key aspect of the information campaign. Novorossiia, meaning "New Russia", was chanted by pro-Russian protesters and even mentioned by Putin. The term appealed to Russian nationalists seeking to return to a golden age of the Russian empire. It was also used as a historical justification for the separatists' actions. Novorossiia was used by the Donetsk and Luhansk republics when they created the confederation of Novorossiia and United Armed Forces of Novorossiia in May 2014. Beyond targeted messaging and propaganda, Russia also used cyber attacks as part of its information campaign. Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks targeted the pro-Maidan movement and Ukrainian government. The country was subjected to at least five cyber espionage attacks between 2013 and 2017. Attacks also targeted Ukraine's election system, delaying the results in October of 2014.

The new media facilitated the familiar tactics, and Russia was able to leverage the social media effectively during the conflict. Pro-Maidan pages on the two largest social-media platforms in Ukraine, VKontakte and Odnoklassniki, were blocked, as they were hosted on Russian servers. The two services were also useful in recruiting for the separatists' cause.



The messages played to a Ukrainian vulnerability, for Ukraine's security forces' lack of capability was amplified by a lack of will to fight. Defections were common. Russia's tactic of bribing and intimidating soldiers was designed to coerce them into defections. The Ukrainian soldiers were subjected to a barrage of spam messages: "Your battalion commander has retreated. Take care of yourself;" "You will not regain Donbas back. Further bloodshed is pointless"; "Ukrainian soldier, it's better to retreat alive than stay here and die".<sup>30</sup> The tactic was effective; members of Ukraine's 25th paratrooper division from Dnipropetrovsk gave up their vehicles to the pro-Russian separatists. The Ukrainian soldiers were not well equipped, paid, or fed, and were asked to fight against their "own people." Throughout the intervention, Russia put political and economic pressure on Ukraine. Russia's political campaign began before the military operations. On December 17, 2013, Putin offered Yanukovich (still the Ukrainian President at the time) a lifeline amid the instability, taking advantage of Ukraine's financial vulnerabilities. The lifeline was in the form of a US\$ 15 billion bailout and significant discounts on natural gas imports. Not only was the agreement an attempt to draw Ukraine back into Russia's orbit, it fed into the Kremlin's information operations by suggesting that closer ties to Russia would result in economic prosperity, while, in contrast, closer ties with the EU would compel Ukraine to address debt issues with austerity programmes unattractive to the Ukrainians.

Today, the separatist force continues to undergo consolidation and conversion into a conventional Army, equipped by Russia and supported by a capable contingent of Russian troops who serve as a quick reaction force. The conflict intensity is cyclical, largely quiet in the fall of 2015, with a ceasefire, then experiencing a strong uptick in artillery skirmishes and fighting in the winter and spring of 2016. Russia has achieved some of its political objectives in Ukraine and will lock in further gains if the Ukrainian leaders implement the political concessions they accepted under the Minsk II Accord.

Russia orchestrated a secession movement in the eastern regions as leverage to force Ukraine into accepting federalisation. It had ample military opportunity to invade Ukraine, defeat its forces, and conquer any eastern region if it so chose. In fact, even after having considerable time to organise, arm, and prepare, Ukraine was soundly defeated in August 2014 and February 2015 at the battles of Illovaisk and Debaltseve.

Russia's intervention in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine involved a wide range of tools and methods to achieve its aims, and the success resulted from simultaneous application these of tools and methods, aided by historical connections between Russia and the regions. The information and political warfare, coupled with language and economic links were vital to the local support. The earlier deployment of troops in Crimea made the takeover seamless and bloodless; the effortless induction of additional troops was aided by the existing agreement between Russia and Ukraine.

## **Conclusion**

Russia's intervention in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine with the use of a wide range of tools and methods to achieve its aims, attained success by the simultaneous application of the tools and methods aided by the historical connections between Russia and the regions. The Russians were helped of the confusion and chaos in the Ukrainian polity following the removal of the President by the Parliament; in addition, three decisions by the Rada became catalysts for the Russian population in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine to welcome the Russian intervention. The fears, apprehensions and expectations of the Russian population in these areas comprised the key to the success of the intervention: not only did they support it but also participated as separatists and military fighters. Information and political warfare, coupled with language and economic links were vital to the local support. The information war preyed on the anxieties of the Russian population in Ukraine and Russia about the expansion of NATO towards the Russian sphere of influence. Russia's control over TV networks and

high Russian content aided its cause. Better economic prospects with Russia compared to Ukraine convinced the local Russian population to move away and support the Russian intervention. The poor training and fighting capabilities of the Ukrainian armed forces were substantial reasons for the loss of territory; the shifting of loyalty by some troops in the Crimea based on local affiliations and base locations added to the inability to resist. The existing deployment of troops in Crimea made the takeover seamless and bloodless; the effortless induction of additional troops was aided by the existing agreement between Russia and Ukraine. Russian military assistance was a major factor in the success of the separatists, and the Russian troops' actions in the battles of Illovaïsk and Debaltseve sealed the fate of the region. The Russian actions in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine do not comprise truly classic hybrid war but are only a part of it, however, there is a need to learn lessons from the intervention. The West and NATO promised but did not deliver, and finally contributed to generating concerns and alarms in Russia. The Ukrainian polity and armed forces miscalculated and took wrong decisions and actions which contributed immensely to their defeat.

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# How Hybrid is Hybrid Warfare? India's Conundrum and Response

Rajeev Kapoor

*The assumption that in hybrid warfare, the risk of military escalation and political damage could be kept within limits may, at the same time, increase the likelihood of its offensive use. For this reason, it is more than likely that hybrid warfare in various manifestations will shape the “face of war” in the 21st century.*

— Dr. Johann Schmid

## Exordium

Given the current velocity of change, it is a certitude that the security dynamics of the world in the next two decades will be vastly different in appearance as well as character from these of today. A paradigm change in global security, as stated by General Valery Gerasimov, Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Federation, actually sums it up when he says, “... a perfectly thriving state can, in a matter of months and even days, be transformed into an area of fierce armed conflict, become a victim of foreign intervention, and sink into a web of chaos, humanitarian catastrophe, and civil war ....”<sup>21</sup>

So, it can be irrefutably reiterated that ‘war remains a chameleon’ and we need to question and define as to what actually has changed. Yes, the

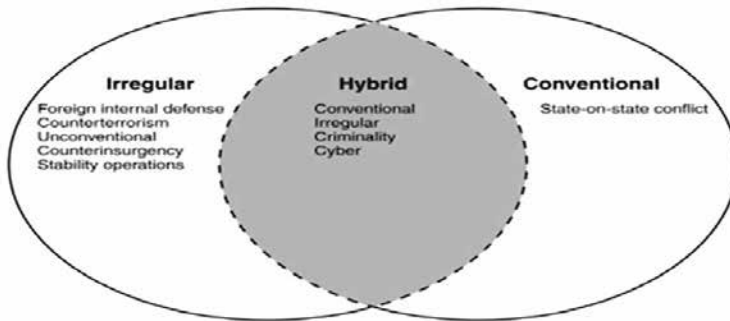
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distinctive lines between war and peace have faded to a large extent and the space for classical state vs. state, military to military confrontation is being captured by state vs. non-state actors and criminal groups. These blurring lines between war and peace, state and non-state, regular and irregular, conventional and unconventional seem to suggest that the character of warfare is changing, with more options for pursuing strategic ends just below the threshold of traditional armed conflict.

Prophesising the change, we can further add that conventional war is increasingly becoming intertwined with sub-conventional conflict, with hybrid war overlapping the irregular and conventional war dynamics (Fig 1).

**Fig 1: Hybrid War Overlaps Irregular and Conventional War**



Source: GAO Analysis of DoD Military Concept

It will not be an overstatement to say that, in today's increasingly globalised world, 'wars are becoming conflicts'. It is a truism that all wars comprise conflict but the vice-a-versa cannot be true as the ambit of 'conflict' covers a larger canvas, from verbal disagreement to the use of force.

Therefore, if we look around, no one is fighting conventionally any more. Conventional wars are becoming a big proposition. Does it constitute to saying that 'war as we knew it' is over? May be, may be not, but confrontations and conflicts undoubtedly still occur unabated

around the world and the modifications which have come to the fore are that states no longer declare the wars; and having begun, they proceed according to a template which is unfamiliar.<sup>2</sup>

In fact, the objectives of war have changed fundamentally as capture of territories is now believed to be inefficacious. The increased interconnectedness of a globalised world can be categorically taken as one of the prime reasons for making traditional wars less attractive while economic, demographic and societal factors seem to have overtaken as the underpinning for all future conflicts. Consequently, these factors, being transnational in nature, are giving rise to sub-conventional warfare and hybrid conflicts.

Therefore, the moot question which this paper raises is: has hybrid warfare engulfed India; and is India is prepared to counter this threat? Much has been discussed earlier in this issue of the journal on what hybrid warfare actually means, its evolution and postulations, as well as its components. Therefore, this article delves directly into India's preparedness for such challenges.

### **Hybrid Warfare: India's Conundrum**

Where does India stand in this muddle of hybrid warfare? Clearly, the next decade for India will not be like the last one. The challenges we face today will endure well into the future, but they will be overshadowed by emerging hybrid threats. It seems likely that these threats will grow faster, be deadlier and more ambiguous, while expanding into new physical and virtual domains.

Conceptually, India has its own share of challenges emanating from this paradox. But, what actually are these threats? And who actually are the perpetrators? This requires pondering over.

### **Identifying the Hybrid Threat**

Currently, India is facing major threats on both external and internal fronts i.e. non-state and state actors. On the internal front, we face a host



of challenges with varying objectives, ranging from Naxalism to separatist demands while China and Pakistan constitute the external threat. The external threats have the potential to synchronise with the internal players, to pose a bigger hybrid threat.

The region around India faced hybrid threats even before this term was coined by Western theorists. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) comprised the perfect case of a hybrid threat. It had state-like military capabilities with an Army, Navy, and Air Force; it simultaneously managed and sustained the insurgent movement; and even had a world-wide sophisticated propaganda network.

In continuum, the Soviet-Afghan conflict of 1979-80 was the first modern hybrid war in the true sense and it happened in India's backyard. Evaluating the immediate neighbourhood, the India-Pakistan rivalry has been engulfed in several ways by this trend. Pakistan has for long been arming and training terror groups to stage attacks on Indian soil, as part of its 'proxy war' strategy. Though, these terror groups till date do not possess any conventional warfare capabilities, the possibility of them wielding state-like destructive power, once emerging technologies make it easier, cannot be ruled out. If Russian or Iranian sponsored groups can achieve and exhibit this, there is no reason to assume that these Pakistan-backed ones cannot follow suit in the future.

Truly, the bigger and more ingenious hybrid threat to India is from China. Currently, China is smartly using Pakistan as an instrument of asymmetric war against India. There is clear evidence that the Naxal movement and northeast insurgency of India have been receiving aid from China, whose formidable capacity in hybrid warfare has been documented earlier.

Another alarming threat which can be anticipated is from the Taliban. The way the dynamics of Afghanistan is unfolding, if the Taliban gains control over Kabul, Pakistan would certainly leverage it to train and plan attacks against India in general and Kashmir in particular. The Taliban

undoubtedly would allow Pakistan based militant groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), to operate from its territory. India would be in a quandary to deal with these ‘strategic assets’ of Pakistan whose primary objective is contesting India’s control over Kashmir.

Besides the troika of Pakistan, China and the Taliban, the looming threat of ‘radicalisation’, the ‘fourth front’, is the most insidious part of hybrid war and a reality hovering over India. It is like fighting an enemy within, whose religious or ethnic persuasions can be manipulated by state and non-state actors alike for inflicting violence through newer and deadlier instruments of terror.<sup>3</sup>

Next in line stands the Maoist insurgency in India’s hinterland, which would continue to fester unless concurrent steps to make the indigenous people the stakeholders in development and good governance are seen to bear fruit. This ‘radicalisation’ and the Maoist insurgency can be manipulated by external players.

Sabotage of India’s growth through smuggling, dumping of goods, protectionism, circulation of Fake Indian Currency Notes (FICN) and similar activities by both China and Pakistan, comprises another hybrid threat which will require to be curbed through more ingenious methods. With respect to threats emanating from non-traditional sources like the use of water as a weapon through the creation of either shortages<sup>4</sup> or oversupply (resulting in floods), or even large-scale ecological damage, is another possibility.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, we need to dwell more on the so-called ‘two fronts’ of India i.e. Pakistan and China and decode what these two have done to wage or unleash their form of hybrid war on India.

## **The ‘Obsessed’ Pakistan**

In the current dispensation, Pakistan has undisputedly captured the prime position in unleashing a highly refined version of proxy war strategy against India.

A historical analysis of the major conflicts and wars fought by India since Independence reveals a common thread: hybrid war is being practised more and more. Virtually every war and conflict between India and Pakistan has seen hybrid warfare being practised by Pakistan. It continues to do so even during peace. *Fidayeen* attacks and mass casualty terror acts like in Mumbai in 1993, 2006 and 2008 are the manifestations of the hybrid war unleashed by Pakistan. In less than two years after the Kargil conflict, Pakistani-trained terrorists attacked the Indian Parliament in December 2001, after which 26/11 happened, followed by Pathankot, Uri and Pulwama. This clearly depicts that such proxy misadventures are unlikely to end.

Pakistan's obsessive 'ideological war' against India always had a congenital connect to the idea of hybrid warfare. Pakistan as a nation pursues and practises hybrid warfare as a state policy. The pursuit of a hybrid warfare model to achieve its nefarious designs is not only against India but against Afghanistan too. While the Kashmir issue, coupled with the bitter memories of the 1971 debacle, remains the key determinant in the Indian context, the pursuit of strategic depth is the principle driver in the case of Afghanistan.

Another factor that compels and makes Pakistan insecure is the conventional superiority of the Indian military and the nuclear deterrent. This explains Pakistan's hybrid strategy against India in Punjab and Kashmir through support from local militants, who are provided economic and military aid, besides diplomatic support, by China. Pakistan has also raised militant groups like the LeT, JeM and others to work as proxies and permit it plausible deniability. Pakistan follows a similar strategy in Afghanistan with the Taliban as its proxy.<sup>6</sup> Douglas A Livermore, a US Special Forces officer, writes that Pakistan's support to the Taliban is to acquire "strategic depth on its western flank, allowing (it) to focus all its attention on India".

The case of Kulbhushan Jadhav, the alleged Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) spy is another glaring example of hybrid warfare. To gain

international support against India, Pakistan picked up Jadhav from Iran and later claimed to have him arrested from Gwadar.

Finally, if we scrutinise Pakistan's *modus operandi* against India particularly in Kashmir, it emerges that it has actually espoused a three-tiered hybrid strategy in Kashmir. First, it has targeted the very structure of the state through terrorism. This has been its most visible strategy which has made it difficult for India to maintain control over its own territory. Second, it has focussed on, and targeted, the psyche of the local population by methodically manipulating their emotions and sentiments. This strategy it has exercised through the Hurriyat and Over Ground Workers (OGW), the so-called unarmed *jihadists*. Thirdly, it has consistently carried out a passive invasion through social engineering, to hit the cultural pillars of Kashmiri society. The third strategy has actually hurt the state the most as it has split Kashmiri society between its roots of *Kashmiriyat* and Sufism on one side and *Wahhabi* Islam on the other.

### **The Hidden 'Dragon'**

China remains the '*Chupa Rustam*' in this regional hegemonic game: it is playing its 'hybrid cards' clandestinely by providing traction to Pakistan's hybrid game against India. China currently sits in a 'comfort space' dominating the 'hybrid space' created by Pakistan against India. India needs to understand that it is actually China, not Pakistan, as commonly perceived, that is the mastermind and is playing the 'real' and more dangerous 'hybrid game' with India.

By following this opaque strategy, China is achieving its aim to kilter India so that it remains 'boxed in' by its problems in South Asia, leaving India with no leeway to concentrate on issues beyond its immediate neighbourhood. China sees India as a competitor and a potential threat to its strategic aspirations, and this insecurity has always underpinned its strategies against India. Hence, in this low-cost, high returns surreptitious game played by China, Pakistan remains an important cog. According to

Brahma Chellany, “By not defining the LAC, the Chinese are not only helping Pakistan by tying up large numbers of Indian troops along the Himalayas, but also retain the option to mount direct military pressure on India through border incidents if it attempted to play the Tibet card.”

The hybrid threat from China to India is a fast-growing and more potent one. However, there is lack of clarity on how it will manifest itself. Today, China, besides having an intent, also has the sophisticated wherewithal to unleash this kind of warfare on anybody in the world. Robotics and cyber attacks are likely to play a key role in shaping the future of conflict, and in both these spheres, China is among the best in the world. If these technologies subsequently get cheaper and easier to make, then we can envision a scenario of their unabated use by sponsored non-state actors.

In 2015, India faced 36 major critical cyber attacks, meaning every 15 days there were some aspects which were impacted, either in the banking system, air traffic system, rail reservation system or hacking into critical components of civil offices. Cyber attacks by China on various facets of the economy such as factories, energy supply grids, including wind and solar farms, banks, and railway and transport systems, can result in derailing governance, law and order and the economy. The effect of such disruptions could be accelerated through information warfare, use of fifth columnists and other subversive means.<sup>7</sup>

China’s military already has an in-built hybrid warfare strategy that includes expressions such as ‘informationalisation’, ‘special operations’, ‘psy, media and legal warfare’, ‘cyber war’ and ‘peace and stabilisation operations’.<sup>8</sup> Development of this capacity is further strengthened by the inexorable integration of China’s military with its political decision-making.

Another issue which leverages China to outsmart others, including India, is that no one has till date taken cyber warfare onto the diplomatic level. Thus, there is no consensus on the response to Chinese cyber

attacks. This myopic vision might lead to a dangerous threat in the future for computerised modern societies.

Regarding any chinks in China's armour, it appears that it is only China's lack of experience in the conduct of serious warfare that can be pointed out, but then, as it is always said, "The best wars are generally fought by the first timers". China, today, certainly has both the capacity and the will to wage hybrid war against India and to instigate Pakistan and India's other neighbours.<sup>9</sup>

The Sino-Indian border dispute in the Indian Arunachal Pradesh and other smaller regions, which China claims too, has the potential for hybrid warfare. This perspective is based primarily on the economic underdevelopment in India's side of the border, which contrasts vastly with the prosperity of neighbouring Chinese provinces. Therefore, in the future, there is a high possibility of Beijing covertly using such inequality to foment separatist sentiments among the local Indian population, which, regrettably, is culturally and ethnically close to the population of China.

Arming and training of pirate groups by China, to harass the ships of its smaller neighbours, including India, so as to legitimise an increased Chinese naval presence in the Indian Ocean, can be another future hybrid threat scenario. This act would not entail crossing the threshold, but it would be pursuance of attaining military advantage.

### **The 'Markhor' and 'Dragon' Collusivity**

Collusive hybrid threats from Pakistan and China are a stark reality and pose an even more dangerous scenario for India. China uses Pakistan as a millstone to fix India and pursue its stratagem of 'kill with deceit, and that too with a borrowed knife'. China flagrantly supports and defends hybrid war by Pakistan against India, and then, concomitantly speaks of ushering in peace and friendly relations with India. This 'forked tongue' policy of China reflects its disingenuous stance on hybrid war when it comes to its vested interests.<sup>10</sup>

China has certain vested interests for which it has been conniving with Pakistan against India. These interests range from the strategic to the military, political, and economic.<sup>11</sup>

**Strategic Interest:** With the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Pakistan has become indispensable for China. It has increased the prominence of Pakistan in the strategic calculus of China. With more than US\$50 billion at stake, the defence of Pakistan and its nukes has actually become a compulsion for China.

**Political and Military Interests:** These two interests naturally converge for China. China is in illegal occupation of 38,000 sq. km of Aksai China and 5,100 sq. km of Shaksgam Valley. Pakistan is the world's largest recipient of China's military largesse. As per the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), 47 per cent of China's military hardware goes to Pakistan, making it the topmost recipient of military aid from China in the last decade.<sup>12</sup>

**Economic Calculus:** Pakistan-China trade comprises slightly more than US\$ 20 billion, with more than US\$ 18 billion worth of imports from China and less than US\$ 2 billion exports from Pakistan in addition to a projected investment of US\$ 62 billion for the CPEC.<sup>13</sup>

**Diplomatic Interests:** Pakistan blatantly encashes on China's veto power at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). In return, Islamabad harps on the 'One China Policy', be it China's position on Taiwan, Tibet or feigning ignorance about the human rights violations committed against the Uighur Muslim population in Xinjiang.

### **Impact of this Symbiotic Relationship**

In future, it would be extremely difficult for India to make any aggressive move against Pakistan without threatening Chinese interests. In fact, any Indian overture endangering thousands of Chinese citizens working on the CPEC project will certainly give China the *locus standi* to initiate hostilities against India. So, one can perceive that the operational or

strategic options for India have been substantially reduced. Anything beyond shallow skirmishes would entail the risk of drawing China into a ‘two-front’ war. As regards Kashmir, China has moved away from the position of studied neutrality to an overt pro-Pakistan stance.

Since cyber space has now become an electronic counterpart of the contemporary physical battlefield, any proliferation of China’s cyber capabilities to Pakistan and further to non-state actors could be another major concern for India. This scenario, if it occurs, can severely challenge India’s critical infrastructure security and would enlarge Pakistan’s hybrid war design.

In future, one cannot negate the China-Pakistan connivance in manipulating and influencing elections in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) or as a matter of fact, the Indian Lok Sabha elections on the lines of the Russian meddling in the US elections. This nexus can also step up efforts to consolidate and advance a simmering discord under the surface via cyber intrusions and the deliberate distribution of false information. Such threats and situations would be catastrophic.

At the low end of the conflict spectrum, Pakistan might coordinate its ‘flourishing’ proxy war against India with China’s creeping assertiveness at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and its asymmetric threats in the cyber, information and outer space areas. Simultaneity and coordination amongst the *jihadi* strikes and Border Action Team (BAT) actions by Pakistan with the People’s Liberation Army’s (PLA’s) Depsangor Chumar or Doklam type incursions could pose grave future threats for India.

China is believed to have added another attribute to hybrid warfare by constituting a private Army of retired PLA soldiers and its first company, De Wei, is setting up operations in Sudan. Such an Army is convenient, with no political liability, and is deniable being a part of private contractors. Extensive use and deployment of the same cannot be ruled out in Balochistan and Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK).



Another impact of this Pakistan-China nexus on India is that the Pakistan establishment is now less worried about its conventional defences, and is diverting ample resources, energy and time to strengthen its *jihad* architecture in India.<sup>14</sup>

### **Constituting an Effective Strategy and Response**

*Victory smiles upon those who anticipate the changes in the character of war, not upon those who wait to adapt themselves after the changes occur.*

— Giulio Douhet

India is facing sub-conventional war but is yet to experience the full dimension of hybrid war so far. Therefore, to defeat Pakistan and China in their hybrid strategy, India would need to accordingly calibrate its strategic and operational level responses. The response against both countries cannot be at the same level. For Pakistan, we need a balanced strategic, diplomatic and military response, while for China, the response needs to be skewed more towards the strategic and diplomatic vis-a-vis the military.

There is a great need to plan and implement the strategic dimensions, driven through politico-diplomatic means, complemented by Comprehensive National Power (CNP), including both hard and soft power. Besides, for achieving the desired results, it is imperative that operational actions be in sync and aligned with strategic directions.<sup>15</sup>

It goes without saying that a preemptive strategy would be best suited in the Indian context as it prevents occasions of military confrontation which have the potential to escalate into a nuclear catastrophe.<sup>16</sup> George Perkovich and Toby Dalton of the Carnegie Moscow Centre have opined that practically speaking, India does not have many counter-options because of Pakistan's nuclear capability. Devolving deeper, they say, "With a clear comparative advantage over Pakistan in economic clout and soft power, India can utilise a strategy for 'non-violent compellence' to isolate Pakistan internationally."<sup>17</sup>

More importantly, India needs a *de novo* look in its approach. So far, India has been overly moralistic against adversaries for whom morals and values are the least priority. Further, in the present geo-political realm, the economic logic and a sense of realism rather than norms and values would better serve India's purpose. The present Indian strategic culture, rather than dealing with challenges from a perspective of 'strategy', or long-term planning, tends to deal with them through a paradigm of risk management. This is probably the result of being a democracy, where the elaboration and application of strategies are difficult, as the state of domestic politics often changes quickly and, occasionally, unexpectedly.

### **Response to Pakistan**

For long, India has been bogged down by one question: what if it responds to Pakistan's proxy war with a conventional attack or a short and swift action, and in retaliation, it opts for a nuclear attack?

Now, with the two surgical strikes, India has demonstrated its political will to retaliate boldly at a time and place of its own choosing. Yet, I would say it is only a reactive response.

### **What are the Options Left in the Response Mechanism?**

Against Pakistan, is conducting further surgical strikes across the Line of Control (LoC) and air strikes on terrorist camps a solution? Is doing 'a Pak on Pak' by employing 'our hybrid on his hybrid' or the Hindi cliché *eint ka jawab patthar se*, the only effective way left to 'motivate' Pakistan to move away from its hybrid tactics against India? Or, on the contrary, is India's use of the 'economic and soft power' strategy the right response? This merits a serious discussion and pondering over.

India would need an effective assortment of covert mechanisms and hidden channels for developing, using and exploiting hybrid tactics against Pakistan so as to build and sustain the required level of pressure and compel it to shift its approach against India.

Some examples of doing ‘a Pak on Pak’ could be sabotaging the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) by exploiting the political unrest in Balochistan, thereby crippling Pakistan’s economic lifeline and infrastructure; influencing the political and social processes like elections and creating and nurturing pro-India socio-political groups, as allegedly done during the recent US election—the Gerasimov model of Russia is a successful and tested model to this affect; or employing online propaganda techniques to mould the ordinary Pakistanis’ opinion about the venality, corruption and brutality of their own military establishment; or exploiting the openness of the worldwide web to penetrate all Pakistani provinces and releasing a barrage of compromising facts and stories about the military and the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). India needs to engage the institutions and people of Pakistan to hit and defeat their Centre of Gravity (CoG) or the fulcrum i.e. the Pakistan Army. This would be a long drawn but decisive strategy.

The Indian government’s opening of a Balochi mobile phone app, website and radio bulletins in 2016 was one such proactive move. India should take a leaf out of the Russian ‘non-linear’ hybrid tactics, which have flummoxed the West in Ukraine and elsewhere, amply emphasising that we are in an era of ‘hybrid warfare’ with shadowy ‘weaponisation of the internet’ to shape public perceptions and even overthrow regimes.<sup>18</sup>

But these are high risk strategies that India may find repugnant to its core philosophy and international repute. Besides, these are great options but are more like a last resort, just a step short of a full-scale war. Such options cannot be pursued in isolation beyond a point as they ultimately tend to tread on a dangerous path of a military confrontation escalating into a nuclear war, either accidentally or deliberately.

We also need to understand that, ideologically, Pakistan is predisposed to harm India at any cost, thus, these steps are in themselves insufficient to deter it, specially when its policy-making is ‘military oriented’. Imran Khan’s recent rant can be dubbed as ‘rhetoric’ but cannot be ignored knowing how irresponsible the ‘deep state’ of Pakistan is today.

Finally, to radically restructure Pakistan into a moderate neighbour, India must bring into play a range of balanced sustained instruments. What India needs today is to shift from its mostly knee-jerk approaches and adopt a balanced proactive and defensive approach.

### **Response Beyond Military**

It must be remembered that hybrid warfare is not just about the military. The military is just a constituent of it. In essence, it goes way beyond the 'military'.

In the diplomatic domain, India has, in recent years, reached a stage where it can leverage its resources to project Pakistan's true image as a sponsor of terrorism, which should finally aim at declaring it a terrorist state. To disseminate reams of proof of Pakistan's complicity in terrorism, India can dedicatedly appoint permanent envoys to approach foreign leaders, intelligence agencies and news media. The aim should be to expose how thuggish, military-run and *jihadi*-infested Pakistan is and how a righteous, secular and democratic India is becoming a victim of cross-border terrorism. Isolating a rogue regime like Pakistan, so that no country buys its false stories, would require assiduous lobbying and convincing.

In the economic domain, we need to further leverage India's booming economy to get influential Islamic nations to invest in, and trade with, India. India must also file a suit at the International Court of Justice against Pakistan's state-sponsored terrorism. The World Court ruled against the US for fomenting terrorism in Nicaragua in 1986. A symbolic legal blow from a global body that shames Pakistan as a terrorist state will come in handy to mobilise multilateral boycotts and sanctions against it.<sup>19</sup>

India needs to increase intelligence gathering and build resilience. The intelligence gathering policies should invest heavily to detect and track hybrid warfare activities, for example, increasing coordination among countries' intelligence services. An aggressive intelligence posture

with expertise and specialists from diverse fields like technology, economy, finance, culture, arts and politics is what India really needs today.

Resilience tends to create societal structures akin to the Cold War concept of ‘total defence’. Lessons can be learnt from Sweden and Finland, that have increased investment in preparing their societies for crises or war. Ukraine’s efforts in substantially increasing the size of Home Guard style units with the intention to signal deterrence to any actor contemplating an attack, whether the conventional or hybrid war type, is worth emulating. Creating more paramilitary style units and equipping and training them, is something that the Baltic countries have also increasingly done.<sup>20</sup>

The time has come to use our supremacy in technology against Pakistan, to our advantage. There is a need for the strategy to incorporate all the elements of national power, i.e., intellectual, economic, intelligence, cyber capabilities, scientific, business, trade and diplomatic, in a new security framework through which hybrid warfare can be channelled.

To cripple Pakistan in socio-economic terms, one issue that is often discussed and readily comes to mind is the Indus Water Treaty .which has been widely debated too. Strategists believe that by simply using our own share of water, which is legally available to us under the treaty, India can deliver a debilitating blow to the socio-economic fabric of Pakistan.

Lastly, India also needs to look inwards and factor in the present Kashmiri dispensation. India needs to proactively engage with the locals of Kashmir who happen to be the fodder or the CoG of Pakistan’s nefarious hybrid actions against India. New Delhi should continue to strangulate the flow of funds and expose the threads for the same. Although India has boosted the morale and pride of national mainstream civil society with the repeal of Articles 370 and 35A, its influence in the Valley and regaining the trust of the locals is yet to be seen. India needs to tirelessly nurture this strategic asset of the local population, to play a positive role in India’s integrity and growth to

counter Pakistan in the future. We need to ensure that the idea of Kashmiri nationalism comes closer to the idea of Indian nationalism.

The final question, however, that remains is: how long will India's patience will take to cross the self-imposed red-line and use proactive and unethical hybrid means to secure its geo-political ends?

### **Dealing with the Chinese Quagmire**

Talking of the Chinese, their tactics are a bit more sophisticated, relying on cyber espionage and subversion in India, with special reference to the northeast. To deal with them, India needs to build asymmetric capabilities in terms of information, cyber, Artificial Intelligence (AI), robotics, big data and media. Pragmatically, there is a wide disparity between India and China in terms of the economy, military strength, defence industry, science, technology and innovations.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, China needs to be dealt with at a higher plane of diplomacy and economics.

For China, India should garner world support for stricter laws against cyber attacks. Diplomatically, the currency diplomacy of the Chinese needs to be countered and exposed through our growing diplomatic clout in the world. Geo-politically, India needs to make the world realise that it needs a bi-partisan, multi-pronged policy to persuade China. Besides, China being an opportunist and self-centred nation, if positively pursued by the world, can conclusively rein in Pakistan and its 'terror factory', yielding tangible results. A multi-faceted, multi-layered national strategy, with synergised political, diplomatic, economic and military measures will have to be worked out.

Since the China-Pakistan strategic embrace is not likely to change in the near future, there is a need for India to take measures which are bilateral as well as multilateral. It would be prudent for India to evolve a *modus vivendi* with China to minimise the mistrust and dilute the growing China-Pakistan nexus. If China is suitably engaged, then its acolyte, Pakistan, would follow automatically.

The biggest leverage that India has is the importance of the Indian market for China vis-à-vis the benefits it derives from its economic and strategic relationship with Pakistan. India is one of the biggest trading partners of China and total trade between India and China is over five times the trade between China and Pakistan.<sup>22</sup>

India also needs to exhort the economic benefit that Beijing accrues owing to its trade surplus with India, which astonishingly surpasses the total investment it seeks to make in the CPEC. Would it be worthwhile for China to lose the Indian market? Former diplomat Gautam Bambawale—who has the unique distinction of being India’s High Commissioner to Pakistan and Ambassador to China—feels New Delhi needs to be transactional with Beijing to get the desired results. The give and take approach has worked in the not too recent past in the proceedings of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), where China worked with India to put Pakistan on the grey list, in return for New Delhi supporting China’s candidature for chairmanship of the inter-governmental body whose purpose is the development and promotion of policies, at both national and international levels, to combat money laundering and terrorist financing.<sup>23</sup>

Offering China foreign policy concessions in India-US military relations or the Sino-Indian border dispute in return for Beijing checking Islamabad’s brazen promotion of terrorism is a trade-off worth exploring.

Pending that, as peace cannot be assured and ensured, India should be ready to support its military strategy of ensuring ‘deterrence’ against Pakistan, and ‘dissuasive deterrence’ against China, by developing its capabilities and force structuring in the future.

To conclude, our response to hybrid threats has always fallen short on understanding the psychological game which the adversary is playing with such deftness. India, therefore, needs to prepare, and prepare well, for all the hybrid eventualities to avoid getting surprised, as the threshold level and sentiments of the Indian public psyche have been enhanced post-surgical strikes. No longer can it be viewed with a myopic focus in

the classical form of conventional war or insurgency or terrorism. In sum, a thorough understanding of the nature and character of hybrid warfare is critical for all the political, bureaucratic and security forces decision-makers at all levels down to the ‘Post and Jawans’ level.<sup>24</sup> Every Indian, therefore, needs to fight the hybrid warfare waged by our adversaries.

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# Hybrid Warfare in the Sino-Indian Context

PK Chakravorty

## Hybrid Warfare

In the first quarter of the 21st century, we have used terms like civil disobedience, counter-insurgency, guerrilla warfare, insurgency, insurrection, internal security, revolutionary warfare, small wars, subversion, terrorism, Fourth Generation Warfare (4 GW), grey zone, hybrid, sub-conventional and conventional conflicts. These are more often intra-state than inter-state.<sup>1</sup> However, a Sino-Indian conflict, in all probability, would be an inter-state conflict. With China, it could be conventional, sub-conventional, grey zone or hybrid. A grey zone conflict is best understood as activity that is coercive and aggressive in nature. It is deliberately designed to remain below the threshold of conventional military conflict and open inter-state war. Grey zone challenges are ambiguous and usually incrementally aggressive. Grey zone conflicts, exist short of a formal state of war.<sup>2</sup> These conflicts fall between war and peace. The International Security Advisory Board (ISAB) of the Department of State of the United States (US) carried out an exercise to list grey zone conflicts and found that they include the following:

- Cyber, information operations, efforts to undermine public/allied/local/regional resistance, information/propaganda in support of other hybrid instruments.

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- Covert operations under state control, espionage, infiltration and subversion.
- Special Operations Forces (SOF) and other state controlled armed units and unacknowledged military personnel.
- Support logistics, political and financial, for terrorist and insurgent movements.
- Enlistment of non-governmental actors, including organised criminal groups, terrorists. Further, this includes extremist political, religious, ethnic and sectarian organisations.
- Assistance to irregular military and paramilitary forces.
- Economic pressures that go beyond economic competition.
- Manipulation and discrediting of democratic institutions, including the electoral system and judiciary.
- Calculated ambiguity, use of covert/unacknowledged operations, deception and denial.
- Explicit or implicit use or threats of use of armed force, terrorism and abuse of the civil population, and escalation.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, the most lucid definition of hybrid warfare that this article agrees with is given by Frank Hoffman. In his seminal work, Hoffman clarifies that hybrid wars are polymorphous by their nature as are its antagonists. Further, it would be increasingly difficult to characterise states as comprising only traditional forces or non-state actors who may be termed as irregular. Operational challenges will present a complex array of alternative structures and strategies. It is in all likelihood that there would be hybrid challenges capable of launching hybrid wars. These wars can be waged by states or political groups and incorporate a range of different modes of war, including conventional, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts which would include violence, coercion and criminal disorder. They would target the strategic cultural weaknesses of the conventional thought process of waging a battle effectively. The

important characteristics are convergence and combinations which occur in several modes.<sup>4</sup> Overall, Hoffman's study finds that conventional, irregular and terrorist types of warfare are not isolated challenges.

It is also important to understand what Margaret Bond says about the subject. According to her, "Hybrid war envisions employment of a comprehensive and highly nuanced variety of military activities, resources, programs and applications tailored to maximise a nonviolent, persuasive use of political and economic influence to reform hostile governments, movements or trends in politically, socially and economically unstable conditions, characteristic of failing and failed states. It also includes a full range of military intelligence capabilities, non-lethal weapons, armaments, support units available for instant employment if ever opposition elements of regular forces or irregular insurgents cross the hostility threshold and constitute a direct threat to, or threaten, these non-hostile activities".<sup>5</sup> Bond's definition, though comprehensive is essentially at the level of the government. Like the grey zone, which is a sub-set of hybrid conflicts and describes an environment between war and peace. Having dealt with these aspects, it would be essential to understand the Chinese intent.

### **Chinese Intent**

Henry Kissinger in his book, *On China*, mentions that China's strategy generally exhibits three characteristics: meticulous analysis of long-term trends, careful study of tactical options and detailed exploration of operational decisions.<sup>6</sup> The Chinese style of dealing with strategic decisions is undertaken through analysis, careful preparation, attention to psychological and political factors as also quest for surprise with a conclusion arrived at rapidly.

It is noteworthy that the People's Liberation Army (PLA) of China is closely knit to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and is politically and militarily involved in all the activities of the country. The modernisation of the PLA and its rising global status could either make

it a more responsible international power or its assertive stance would harden further, leading to clashes with existing and emerging powers. In order to understand the path which China is likely to adopt, it is important to comprehend China's defence policy which stems from the modernisation of the PLA.

There has been hardly any research in India on the modernisation of the Chinese armed forces and its impact on India's security. The People's Republic of China (PRC) was established in 1949 under the Chairmanship of Mao Ze Dong. It is one of the oldest civilisations, with a history filled with military activities for the last 4,500 years. China's traditions with regard to its military have emerged from its strategic concerns, war experience, civil-military relations and technological development. Chinese history is full of military conquests. It is pertinent to note that each imperial dynasty and modern government came to power through a military struggle. In the 20th century, the Kuomintang (Chinese Nationalist Party or KMT) came to power through revolutionary wars against the Qing dynasty which had ruled China from 1644 to 1912. Thereafter, the CCP defeated the KMT through the war for liberation in 1949. Accordingly, Chinese military history is essential for comprehending the Chinese civilisation, political institutions and foreign policy.<sup>7</sup>

The present Chinese government was formed in 1949.<sup>8</sup> The PLA, which was formed under the CCP is an organ of the Party and, thus, obeys the diktat of the Party and also has its proportionate representation in various policy committees of the CCP. The PLA participated actively in both the Great Leap Forward, Mao Ze Dong's Cultural Revolution and in the modernisation programmes of Deng Xiao Ping. Further, it fought the Korean War from 1950 to 1953, the Sino-Indian War in 1962, the Ussuri river conflict with Russia in 1969, and the Sino-Vietnamese War of 1979. However, since then, for about 39 years, China has not fought a major war, though the PLA has been involved in skirmishes in the South China Sea, intrusions in the

East China Sea and Tibet, as also in making preparations for a possible military offensive against Taiwan. China has also developed its own defence industry which enables it to indigenously produce state-of-the-art weaponry.

According to Lieutenant General JS Bajwa, “Though Chinese White Papers always state their attitude of being defensive and peaceful, its intentions appear to be deceptive”.<sup>9</sup> China’s official media continues to publicise articles intended to caution India that China retains the option of initiating military hostilities. *Wen Wei Po*, a Hong Kong based daily, owned by the People’s Republic of China, with editorial staff from the CCP and controlled by the ruling Politburo Standing Committee, published an article in June 2013, captioned “Six Wars to be Fought by China in the Next 50 Years”. It was reposted on a Hong Kong website around the middle of September 2013. The details of the author’s background are yet to be ascertained and the contents have possibly been obtained from Chinese defence analysts. The article asserts that China can wipe out past humiliations and regain its dignity only after it attains national reunification. The article visualises the six wars that would have to be fought by China in the next 50 years to achieve its goal. The wars which are visualised are as under:

- For the unification of Taiwan, which is expected to be fought between 2020 to 2025.
- For the capture of the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea, possibly in the timeline 2025 to 2030.
- For the reconquest of southern Tibet (Arunachal) which would possibly be undertaken in the years 2035 to 2040.
- For the capture of Diaoyu Island and Ryukyu Island between 2040 and 2045.
- For the unification of Outer Mongolia around 2045 to 2050.
- To militarily recapture the territory lost to Russia between 2055 and 2060.

The anticipated six wars deal with reclamation of the Chinese national territories lost since Imperial China was defeated by the British in the Opium War of 1840-42. The first option that deals with Taiwan states that Taiwan must peacefully unite by 2020, failing which the country should be unified by war which should take place by 2025.<sup>10</sup> This would be a test for the modernised PLA. The war would be difficult in case there is an intervention by the USA and Japan. The author feels that in such a case, the war would last for six months, or for three months.

It is forecast that there would be a slight pause for two years after the reunification of Taiwan. During this period, China is likely to send an ultimatum to the countries patrolling the islands in the South China Sea to withdraw, with a deadline of 2028.<sup>11</sup> The countries can preserve their investments followed by withdrawal. China anticipates that Vietnam and the Philippines will oppose the move, and both of them will fight, with possible assistance from the US. As per the author, if concrete results are not attained by negotiations, then the best option is for China to attack Vietnam. The reason is obvious as Vietnam is the most powerful country in the region. Victory over Vietnam will scare the rest. While the war with Vietnam goes on, the other claimants would adopt a wait and watch policy. China is expected to beat Vietnam, as per the author, and, thus, it would establish its suzerainty over the entire Spratly group of islands.

The third war would be for the reconquest of southern Tibet (Arunachal) in the years 2035 to 2040. The article emphatically states that Arunachal is the only point of conflict between India and China. It further notes the close relations between India, and the US, Europe and Russia. It assumes that during this period, India would militarily lag behind China. However, war with India would result in victory after sustaining losses.

Accordingly, the best strategy that China might apply would be to initiate disintegration of the region. It will probably leave no stone unturned to instigate Assam and Sikkim to fight for independence. The

other option is to provide state-of-the-art weaponry to Pakistan which would enable the country to capture the Indian part of Kashmir by 2035 and thereby enable Pakistani control of the entire region. While the fight is on for Kashmir, China could launch an attack to conquer Arunachal. As per the author, India lacks the capability to successfully fight a two-front war. However, if this plan cannot be adopted, the other option is to launch a ground offensive to capture Arunachal (southern Tibet).<sup>12</sup>

It is pertinent to note that this article may not have emanated from the higher levels in China's military establishment, but it iterates an issue often emphasised by the Chinese media that the country will ultimately have to resort to the use of the PLA to settle border issues. Articles of similar nature have been appearing in the Chinese press ever since the *Review of Asia Policy* was undertaken in 2011. A publication of the official China mouthpiece, in November 2011, recommended that China adopt new approaches in dealing with its neighbours. It further stated that goodwill may not bring harmony and, sometimes, certain altercations with neighbours are appropriate and can result in the return of peace.<sup>8</sup> It is, therefore, important to study the threat that China poses to India. In all probability, a full scale conventional war may not be fought but a hybrid threat to India does exist.

### **Hybrid Warfare in the Sino-Indian Context**

The Chinese are adept at modernising their armed forces, learning from the Gulf Wars as also the hybrid war fought by Russia in 2014 in which it annexed Crimea. The Crimean operation was marked by its simultaneous use of the civil and military sectors. It was a combination of irregular, conventional and cyber warfare. It is to be noted that, historically, China has been adept at asymmetric warfare. Of late, China has begun to adopt hybrid warfare capabilities. China is demonstrating its hybrid capabilities particularly in the maritime domain in the South China Sea



and the Indian Ocean. The People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) has developed enormously in the last 20 years, acquiring new warships, submarines, aircraft carriers and naval aircraft. With these resources, China has occupied a large portion of the Paracel and Spratly groups of islands as also developed ports to its advantage in the Indian Ocean. These include Djibouti, Gwadar, Hambantota, Kyakphu and possibly a new port, Sonadia, in Bangladesh.

Around 2014, China also heavily relied on its maritime militia, in Mandarin known as *haishangmingbing*. Like the Russians in Crimea were known as the little green men, the Chinese militia is called the little blue men.<sup>13</sup> These little blue men operate when required in conventional operations with the PLAN and often disguise themselves as Chinese fishermen and attack other ships operating in the South China Sea in an unconventional role. The concurrent use of fishermen as civilians who turn themselves into active military personnel and vice versa in accordance with the operational environment they are faced with explains how the Chinese hybrid warfare operates. Once China stabilises the ports in the Indian Ocean, it would have these maritime hybrid warriors who would start operating and disturbing maritime traffic in the periphery of India's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

The next issue which directly impacts our land border is the Chinese strategy of salami slicing.<sup>14</sup> This implies use of non-linear operations to gradually gain more pieces of land. This is applicable to building of artificial islands in the South China Sea, as also the disputed areas along the Sino-Indian border. This has been observed at Depsang, Chumar and Doklam where the Chinese creep in and try to grab territory. Wherever possible, China is also using cabbage tactics to encircle areas on land or in the sea which it claims, to block entry and exit to these areas, thereby leading to their eventual collapse. As India has hydro-carbon assets in the South China Sea, the Chinese activities have to be observed as the same could be applied in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). The Indian

armed forces have categorically mentioned salami slicing in their various discussions.

The Chinese are also using cyber warfare which is an important component of hybrid warfare. The Chinese have developed a new facet of hybrid warfare. They believe in using the civilian population to play an active role in cyber operations. The government has promoted the creation of cyber warrior units directly composed of university students and civilians.<sup>15</sup> Further, as per reports emanating, Chinese telecom companies are closely controlled by the government. But the telecom companies do not agree and have taken legal recourse to prove that they are free from Chinese government controls. This has led Chinese telecom products being seen in India and their companies are in the run for the 5G contract.

The last issue is the PLA's capability to instigate insurgency and rebellion in the northeastern region which has been discussed in the Chinese article on the six wars. The northeastern region has insurgent groups operating which could be supported by China.

Having observed the Chinese aspect of hybrid warfare, it would be important to examine what the drivers of a possible Sino-Indian conflict are. This would lead us to important observations as hybrid warfare encompasses conventional, sub-conventional, irregular and other forms of warfare.

### **Drivers of a Possible Sino-Indian Conflict**

The drivers of conflict could be the following:

- **Tibet Issue:** Tibet remains a core issue between India and China. India would like China to begin a process of reconciliation and healing in Tibet in its own interest and for stable Sino-Indian relations. Beijing considers Arunachal as a part of Tibet and has been claiming the entire state. Further, China has been building dams on the Brahmaputra river and tampering with the flow at the Great Bend. Moreover, the

choice of the new Dalai Lama is causing consternation in the region. All these issues could exacerbate and result in them going out of control. Being sensitive issue, these could result in hostilities.<sup>16</sup>

- **India-US Strategic Partnership:** Signalling renewed depth in ties, India and the US, on January 25, 2015, decided to further elevate the long-standing strategic partnership by enhancing cooperation in a raft of crucial areas to include defence, trade and commerce, technology transfer, counter-terrorism and climate change.<sup>17</sup> The joint declaration mentions freedom of navigation and freedom of flight which refers to the oceans and the skies. In his Republic Day message, the US President offered to raise the strategic partnership to a higher level. An article that appeared in the *Global Times* and *People's Daily* on January 25, 2015, cautioned India not to fall into the trap which was being laid to pit New Delhi against Beijing. It added that many Western media reports have pointed out that the US, regardless of historical complications, is putting greater efforts into soliciting India to act as a partner, even an ally, to support Washington's pivot to Asia strategy, which is mainly devised to counter China's rise. In a further elaboration, the *Daily* pointed to the West's ulterior motive to frame the Chinese dragon and the Indian elephant as natural rivals. The West is egging India to be fully prepared for the threat by rivals. These issues can cause provocation, which could throw things out of control. The Quad, which remains a diplomatic partnership among the US, Japan, Australia and India, could gradually transform into a military partnership, making issues more serious between China and India.
- **High Profile Posturing in the Indian Ocean Region:** Reports emanating from Beijing indicating that China is contemplating setting up military bases overseas to counter American influence, and exerting pressure on India, have been interpreted by some sections as a veiled reference to China's interest in securing a permanent military presence in Pakistan. Although it may not be politically feasible for

the Pakistan government to openly allow China to set up a military base, New Delhi fears that Islamabad may allow Beijing's use of its military facilities without any public announcement. It is possible to explain the construction of these ports and facilities by China on purely economic and commercial grounds, but regional and global powers like the US, Japan and India inevitably view the sum total of China's diplomatic and military efforts in the Indian Ocean as projecting power vis-à-vis competing rivals. Moreover, most of Chinese naval facilities in the Indian Ocean are of dual use nature and no serious strategy can discount their future military use. The notion that China aspires to dominate the Indian Ocean is a bit far-fetched. However, China wishes to play a greater role in the region, to protect and advance its interests, especially its commercial interests, as also to counter India. Countering India will be a difficult task, given the immense geographical advantages that India enjoys in the Indian Ocean. Even the task of protecting the Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC) remains challenging for the PLA Navy as of now. Currently, the steps that China is taking have caused concerns. In 2009, a sonar standoff is reported to have taken place between the Indian Navy and Chinese Navy while their ships were proceeding to the Gulf of Aden.<sup>5</sup> In the year 2014, two incidents of Chinese submarines visiting Sri Lanka were viewed with concern by India. As both the Navies get stronger, such posturing might lead to an accidental conflagration which could result in confrontation. It is reported that Chinese nuclear submarines sporadically foray into the Indian Ocean.

- **Water Issue:** The taming of the Brahmaputra by China could have major implications for India. China certainly wants to utilise the Tibetan water resources for its development. It is presumed that one day, China may divert waters from the Great Bend of the Yarlung Tsangpo (Brahmaputra river), north of the McMahon Line, building another mammoth dam, much bigger than the Three Gorges Dam

which currently is the biggest dam in the world. China has viewed Engineer Guo Kai's 'Shuotian Canal Project' as a perfect model which would save China with Tibet's waters. In addition, this will be another gigantic power plant with an astonishing generating capacity of 20,000 to 40,000 Mega Watts (MW). This, if constructed, will be three times bigger than the hydroelectric plant at the Three Gorges Dam. This one plant can provide five times the energy requirement of Bangladesh. The taming of this river will require explosives of a very high magnitude. The impact would be profound and impact the people of northeast India and Bangladesh. Further, the area being seismically unstable, the construction of the dam would cause severe earthquakes. In addition, there is a proposal to build 28 dams on the Brahmaputra, which would sequester silt that normally gets washed to the flood plains of India and Bangladesh, renewing the fertility of their agricultural lands. All this is bound to exacerbate tensions and could lead to hostilities.

- **Collapse of Pakistan:** Pakistan is an unstable state with factionalism running against the dominant Punjabis by groups from Balochistan and the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP). There are issues between the Sindhis, Punjabis and Baluchis which could cause friction, as also problems with the Shia population of Gilgit Baltistan. Further, the ethnic divide has been exacerbated by the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan which has links with numerous terrorist groups operating in Pakistan. Some of the terror groups operate against Afghanistan, some against India, and some against the Government of Pakistan itself. The economy is in the doldrums and the politicians are destabilising the country. The Pakistani armed forces have some Islamic elements who are in league with these terror groups. All this could result in the collapse of the state and the Chinese would see an Indian hand in it which could lead to China attempting to teach a lesson to India.

- **Border Dispute:** The border dispute remains unresolved and there are sporadic standoffs between troops deployed on both sides. There have been altercations and it does not take long for a small incident to get blown up. The current stalemate is dangerous and could lead to hostilities between the two sides. The Indian Prime Minister visited China in May 2015. Despite friendly talks, he stated that the border issue is like a toothache which could easily conflagrate into hostilities.<sup>18</sup> The issue was raised during the informal Wuhan Summit between President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Modi on April 27-28, 2018. Both sides directed their militaries to earnestly implement various confidence-building measures in the border areas.<sup>19</sup>

### **What Lies Ahead and India's Response**

Currently, China is straining every sinew to become a global power by 2049. It is modernising its armed forces, and despite all the hiccups, including an ongoing trade war with the United States, its economy is riding high. In all this, China is currently undertaking hybrid warfare with its maritime forces, salami slicing with its land forces, and cyber warfare with its special forces. It continues to be a friend of Pakistan that assists non-state terrorists operating in India. China is certainly interested in its claim over Arunachal and could possibly assist insurgent activity in the northeastern region. With all this, what is China likely to do militarily to disturb the prevailing situation? Visualisations of this is elucidated below. All these actions may be spread over a protracted period and could be sporadic, being suitably calibrated to suit the Chinese intentions:

- Destruction of Indian reconnaissance satellites by Anti-Satellite (ASAT) weapons.
- Transgressions at places of consequence.
- Interfering with the commercial Indian shipping in the Indian Ocean.
- Continuing to build bases in the Indian Ocean.

- Diverting the Brahmaputra at the Great Bend.
- If the need arises, capturing an area of significance with a shower of conventional ballistic missiles, overwhelming firepower of the artillery and swift attacks by the ground forces.
- Building the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and surreptitiously encouraging Pakistan to continue the proxy war in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) as also encouraging insurgency in the northeast.
- Launching sporadic cyber operations to disrupt the communications network, as well as launching social media campaigns to cause turbulence in India.

All these aspects need to be carefully analysed. Overall, India needs to take the following measures:

- Develop a national security strategy and a strategic response to China by intensification of strategic partnerships with the United States, Japan, Vietnam, Australia and Russia.
- Build up our comprehensive national power.
- Joint operations in networked conditions, with improved surveillance.
- Build infrastructure along the border with speed and military precision.
- Modernise our armed forces to cater for the hybrid threats from China and Pakistan.
- Reorganise our Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) to focus only on cutting edge technologies.
- Provide the private sector a level playing field, especially in defence production.
- Develop pockets of excellence by focussing on hybrid warfare, cyber warfare and assassin's mace weapons.
- Create a diplomatic strategy to win war as also peace.

To conclude, one must realise that China respects strength. India must enhance both its soft power and hard power to build its comprehensive national power to undertake any misadventure.

## Notes

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# Fight and Win Without Waging a War: How China Fights Hybrid Warfare

Amrita Jash

## Introduction

Sun Tzu, in his seminal book *The Art of War*, categorically states that “to fight and conquer in all your battles is not supreme excellence; supreme excellence consists in breaking the enemy’s resistance without fighting”.<sup>1</sup> Here, the focus lies on undermining the morale of the opponent. In doing so, Sun Tzu specifically mentions that “[i]n all fighting, the direct method may be used for joining battle, but indirect methods will be needed in order to secure victory” for “indirect tactics, efficiently applied, are inexhaustible [...]”.<sup>2</sup> This construct by Sun Tzu exemplifies the use of ‘deception’ in Chinese warfare. The key is: how to win without use of force?

On this view, Ren Li, in his book *Lectures on Sun Zi’s Art of War*, argues that “warfare is a way of deception” and is “the most shocking concept” given by Sun Tzu because “it favours an unchoreographed, asymmetric approach to fighting while rejecting any notion of constancy in warfare”.<sup>3</sup> This particular perspective makes it imperative to understand how China’s People’s Liberation Army (PLA) interprets the concept of deception in warfare, given that it acts as the benchmark to understand

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the PLA's rationale for operations. Sun Tzu's "ways of deception" find resonance in the Chinese perception of "how to fight a modern war" under the strategic guideline of "winning informationized local wars". On the same lines, the 2015 White Paper on "China's Military Strategy" notes that "the form of war is accelerating its evolution to informationization" which calls for China to build a national defence mobilisation system that can meet the requirements of "winning informationized wars and responding to both emergencies and wars".<sup>4</sup>

What comprises the basis of such a strategic guideline? This new Chinese way of thinking can be attributed to the significant shift in the Chinese perceptions. That is to suggest that the thought process entails a three-fold perspective:<sup>5</sup> first, an understanding that the "form of war" or conduct of warfare in a given period of time, has changed. Second, Preparation for Military Struggle (PMS) has constantly evolved with the changing "form of war" and the national security situation. Likewise, the basic point of PMS has been adjusted from being "winning local wars in conditions of modern technology, particularly high technology" in 1993 to "winning local wars under conditions of informationization" in 2004 and then to calls for "winning informationized local wars" in 2015. And third, the Chinese perception of the increasing security challenges has prompted a shift from having "fixed mindsets of mechanized warfare" to "establishing the ideological concept of information warfare".<sup>6</sup> In this framework of understanding, 'hybrid warfare' acts as a significant component of China's way of fighting a modern war, as witnessed in its growing interest in waging an asymmetrical form of warfare in areas that constitute its 'core interests'. Wherein, Sun Tzu's recommendation of deception and intelligence, use of regular and irregular methods with an emphasis on defeating the enemy's will to fight, act as key components of the current Chinese understanding of such warfare. The Chinese thinking to deal with a powerful adversary, as former Chinese Lieutenant General Li Jijun pointedly notes is:

To cope with wars at the age of information, when guiding thinking, we should try hard to prevent direct conflicts with the enemy in the high-technology field, and should create and select the most favorable timing, direction, form, and target to annihilate the enemy's effective forces by combining conventional assaults with the 'assassin's mace'.<sup>7</sup>

China's understanding of such warfare is similar to what is called 'hybrid warfare'. This assessment further exemplifies that the battlefield no longer remains limited to militaries, but has become an amalgamation of elements from society and the polity at large. With no definite rules or limits at play, hybrid warfare transcends the notion of the Clausewitzian sense of 'traditional war'.

However, what is important to note is that such warfare is not a new concept for China. Historically, China has used such tactics towards its neighbours, as witnessed in the way Imperial China dealt with its "barbarian" neighbours, based on the "four methods approach".<sup>8</sup> Such an approach entailed: first, foreigners should be kept divided by "using barbarian to fight barbarians" by means of using "barbarian" mercenaries and strategic alliances to ensure division among China's nomadic neighbours. The contemporary analogy to this would be using tactics such as diplomatic warfare; neutralising unfriendly states through public diplomacy; support for local insurgencies; and exercising pressure in international organisations such as using the veto in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). Second, if these failed, Imperial China would present bribes and tribute to foreign leaders in order to dissuade them from attacking China. The current equivalent of this would be China's aid policy as seen in the case of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), New Silk Road Bank, and others. Third, in ancient/those times, China would build fortifications in order to deter external attacks. To which, the current correlation can be drawn in terms of China's artificial island build-up in the South China Sea. And,

finally, if all else failed, military expeditions would be deployed.<sup>9</sup> To which a link can be drawn in terms of China's overseas military base in Djibouti for gaining access to the Indian Ocean Region. These are the areas which are increasingly becoming the new domains of Chinese warfare, the 'grey zone' where China conducts its hybrid warfare.

Owing to this perspective, the paper seeks to examine the Chinese understanding of hybrid warfare. In doing so, it will assess the components that define the Chinese way of fighting hybrid warfare in the 21st century.

### **The Chinese Conception of Winning by Fighting with Deception**

Stating that "[a]ll warfare is based on deception"<sup>10</sup>, Sun Tzu posited that:

[W]hen able to attack, we must seem unable; when using our forces, we must seem inactive; when we are near, we must make the enemy believe we are far away; when far away, we must make him believe we are near. [...] Attack him where he is unprepared, appear where you are not expected.<sup>11</sup>

Owing to this perspective, China's current military thinking is distinctively interpreted on the lines of deceiving the 'other'. That is to suggest, given the PLA's perception of the changing nature of warfare that cannot be fought with preconceived and predetermined strategies, Sun Tzu's policy of 'deception' equated with 'surprise' is applied dynamically and provides the means to mislead the adversaries while employing agile and flexible responses to the actual conditions encountered on the battlefield. In this regard, in the Chinese understanding, 'deception' as Sun Tzu suggests, is practised in the following ways: first, the supremacy of unconventional warfare as opposed to the conventional; second, the value of 'cheating' as a traditional underpinning of deceptive warfare; third, the recognition that change keeps warfare in a constant state of

flux; finally, the imperative to focus on benefiting from, and controlling, one's superiority in warfare.<sup>12</sup>

If that is the case, then why the need for 'deception' as a strategy? In the Chinese viewpoint, as Ren Li argues, the goal of the "way of deception" is "to as much as possible increase our advantageous conditions and reduce the adversary's advantageous conditions".<sup>13</sup> This suggests that deception not only involves manipulating an adversary's understanding of one's own capabilities and intentions, but also includes manipulating the situation with the goal of further degrading the adversary's capabilities.<sup>14</sup> In drawing a parallel, such a practice is noted in China's policy towards securing its claims in the South China Sea. Wherein, earlier, Beijing utilised conventional operations such as military clashes with Vietnam (1974) and the Philippines (2012), it now uses unconventional ways such as constructing artificial islands as well as employing paramilitary operations by fishermen to secure its claims by exerting psychological pressure on its adversaries.<sup>15</sup>

In doing so, this new form of warfare, based on deception and surprise, employs civilian technology as military weapons "without morality" and "with no limits"<sup>16</sup>—breaking the will of the adversary. China calls this new form of warfare "unrestricted warfare". Given this amalgamated understanding of "hybrid warfare", it becomes imperative to comprehend the Chinese way of fighting such warfare. Is it any different from the Western perspective?

The term 'unrestricted warfare' entered the Chinese lexicon in 1999, when two Chinese Colonels, Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, published a book titled *Unrestricted Warfare* that claimed that the battlefield had changed fundamentally and was no longer limited to the militaries for fighting. What comprises such a non-traditional form of warfare, as the book notes, are elements such as financial warfare, smuggling warfare, cultural warfare, drug warfare, media and fabrication warfare, technological warfare, resources warfare, psychological warfare, network

warfare, international law warfare, environmental warfare and economic aid warfare.<sup>17</sup>

Given this broad definition, a direct linkage can be drawn between the Chinese view of “unrestricted warfare” and the Western notion of “hybrid warfare” which, in the US perspective, is defined as the simultaneous and adaptive employment of “a fused mix of conventional weapons, irregular tactics, terrorism and criminal behaviour in the battlespace to obtain their political objectives”.<sup>18</sup> Michael Kofman and Mathew Rojansky of the Woodrow Wilson International Centre, based in Washington, have argued that the term “hybrid” denotes a combination of previously defined types of warfare, when an adversary, “employs some combination of previously defined types of warfare, whether conventional, irregular, political or information,” and that its “analytical utility is limited”.<sup>19</sup>

This suggests that the Chinese “unrestricted warfare” is synonymous to the Western idea of “hybrid warfare”. The only difference lies in the conception of terminologies, however, the perception remains the same. This very difference makes it significant to understand the elements that comprise the Chinese idea of fighting hybrid warfare.

### **Elements of China’s Hybrid Warfare: San Zhong Zhanfa Strategy to Safeguard National Interest**

Ideating on Sun Tzu’s dictum of “winning without waging a war”, in 2003,<sup>20</sup> the Communist Party’s Central Committee and Central Military Commission (CMC) put forward the concept of “Three Warfares” (*san zhongzhanfa*, 三战) as a set of codes for the PLA to conduct political warfare. Calling it the “Political Work Guidelines of the People’s Liberation Army”, Beijing’s three warfares strategy entailed : public opinion (media) warfare (*yulunzhan*, 舆论战), psychological warfare (*xinlizhan*, 心理战), and legal warfare (*faluzhan*, 法律战). Wherein, the “three warfares strategy” mainly focusses on the following functions: control of public opinion (舆论控制); blunting an adversary’s determination (意志挫伤);

transformation of emotion (情感转化); psychological guidance (心智诱导); collapse of (an adversary's) organisation (组织瓦解); psychological defence (心理防御); and, restriction through law (法律制约).<sup>21</sup>

While the three warfares are interrelated, each has a significant role to play. That is, first, public opinion or media warfare, which aims to shape public opinion, domestically as well as internationally. The means used are the materials delivered to public audiences through established news services, informal internet sites, and other social media to influence domestic and international perspectives associated with the ongoing disputes involving the People's Republic of China's (PRC's) interests.<sup>22</sup> In demanding absolute loyalty to the Party, Xi stated that the "[n]ation's media outlets are essential to political stability" and that they need to "love the Party, protect the Party, and closely align themselves with the Party leadership in thought, politics and action" as "guiding public opinion is crucial to governance of the country".<sup>23</sup> This strategy of China was well-witnessed in case of the 2017 Doklam standoff, when China's state-run media agencies were pressurising India to change its stance by emphasising on "lessons from the past" in reference to the 1962 War.

Second, usage of psychological warfare, which aims at shaping the international image of China by influencing foreign decision-makers' perceptions and their approach towards China. It is operated by means of pre-conflict posturing of military/paramilitary forces or application of other national capabilities (diplomatic, economic, and cultural) with the intention of intimidating adversaries and encouraging acquiescence to PRC-desired outcomes.<sup>24</sup> In view of this, the five tasks associated with psychological warfare are: presenting one's own side as just; emphasising on one's own advantages; undermining the opposition's will to resist; encouraging dissension in the enemy's camp; and, implementing psychological defences.<sup>25</sup>

Third, legal warfare, which aims at offering legal justification for China's assertive actions or policies. It is conducted by means of



exploitation of national and international legal systems. This is done by leveraging the existing legal regimes and processes to constrain the adversary's behaviour, contest disadvantageous circumstances, confuse legal precedents, and maximise advantage in situations related to the PRC's core interests.<sup>26</sup> China's use of such a strategy was witnessed in the case of the 2016 International Arbitral Tribunal on the South China Sea which gave its judgment against China and in favour of the Philippines.<sup>27</sup> In rejecting the verdict, China termed it as "null and void, and has no binding force. China neither accepts nor recognizes it" and that "China's territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests in the South China Sea shall under no circumstances be affected by those awards. China opposes, and will never accept, any claim or action based on those awards." Furthermore, "China does not accept any means of third party dispute settlement or any solution imposed on China".<sup>28</sup> What is noteworthy is that China has been successful in shaping the international discourse in its favour given that the 'ruling' failed to impact China's stance, and now, the Philippines under Rodrigo Duterte, is more inclined towards Beijing. Thus, it exemplifies China's 'win' without fighting a war.

With the aim to break the opponent's 'will to fight' without actual fighting, the three warfares emphasise on undertaking non-kinetic operations to influence the opponent's behaviour. The three warfares concept represents the Chinese commitment to "expand potential areas of conflict from the purely 'military' (involving both direct and indirect force) to the 'political'",<sup>29</sup> given that the doctrine is part of the PLA's regulations for the conduct of "political work".<sup>30</sup> With this strategic guideline, China seeks to depart from fighting a conventional warfare in the battlefield to launching it in the political domain by means of manipulating the societal forces such as public opinion, legal systems and leadership aspects of the adversary. This makes political warfare a crucial part of the Chinese security strategy and foreign policy and helps formulate the Chinese discourse. With this, Beijing seeks to:

... influence emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and behaviour of foreign governments, organisations, groups, and individuals in a manner favourable to one's own political-military objectives.<sup>31</sup>

In view of this, such a non-kinetic form of warfare is not just limited to war-time but can be operated in peace-time as well, unlike traditional warfare. Furthermore, with China's growing security challenges, which Xi Jinping defines as the “*Three Trends*” (三个前所未有, *san ge qian suo wei you*) and “*Three Major Dangers*” (三个危险, *sangeweixian*),<sup>32</sup> the exercise of kinetic means is increasingly becoming a limited option. Here, the “*Three Trends*” exemplify the external environment, the international situation that is constantly changing and the new opportunities and challenges that are continually emerging, while the “*Three Major Dangers*” are those of China being “invaded, toppled and separated”.<sup>33</sup> This is well-witnessed in the recent Hong Kong crisis that has got the Chinese leadership into a quandary, thus, adding to the long standing challenge from separatist forces like those of the “*East Turkistan independence*” in Xinjiang and the “*Tibet independence*” forces that have become a serious challenge to China's internal security situation. In such cases, fighting the opponent through the ‘use of force’ is not a viable option for the Chinese leadership, as the aftermath of the Tiananmen incident has significantly curtailed its choice of enforcing domestic control.

What adds significantly to this security perception is the Chinese understanding of ‘national security’. According to Article 2 of the new national security law of the PRC passed on July 1, 2015, national security is defined as:

... the relative absence of international or domestic threats to the state's power to govern, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity, the welfare of the people, sustainable economic and social development, and other major national interests, and the ability to ensure a continued state of security.<sup>34</sup>

Furthermore, Article 3 draws a link between national security and economic, cultural and social security by stating that an overall national security perspective regards the “people’s security as the tenet, political security as the fundamental, economic security as the basis and military, cultural, and social security as the safeguard”.<sup>35</sup> Given this perspective, China now defines national interest as including two major parts: national security and national development interest.<sup>36</sup> The very aspect of ‘national development interest’ further exemplifies the broadened scope of China’s national interest, wherein, anything that undermines China’s development can be perceived to be a threat.

This newly expanded understanding of national security reflects the shift in the way China perceives its threats, which unlike the past, are no longer limited to the physical border and have, instead, become more diversified, and as the very understanding of “absence of international or domestic threats” is mainly centred on safeguarding the legitimacy of the Communist Party of China (CPC). Even the PLA’s primary task lies in protecting China’s national interest, which, at the foremost, entails providing “strategic support for consolidating the leadership of the CPC and the socialist system”.<sup>37</sup> This dictum of the PLA follows from Mao Zedong’s understanding that “the Chinese Red Army is an armed body for carrying out the political tasks of the revolution”.<sup>38</sup> The PLA is the Party’s Army, tasked with maintaining the political power. Here, the objectives are two-fold: first, to ensure the continuation of the Party’s control; and, second, to prevent any form of external interference in China’s foreign and domestic affairs.

Owing to these underpinnings, China’s “three warfares” strategy, earlier handled by the General Political Department of the former General Staff Department, has become the responsibility of the Political Work Department (政治工作部), after the recent organisational reforms. The Political Work Department, which is subordinate to the CMC works in coordination with the PLA with the aim to create and safeguard the

legitimacy of the CPC's political power from any international as well as domestic threat. In addition, the Party's United Front Work Department (UFD) also monitors and maintains checks and balances over 'anti-China' narratives purported and perceived outside China that might seek to threaten the CPC's control.

With such a strategy, the objective of the CPC's political warfare has extended beyond the scope of Taiwan. Currently, under the guidance of "uniting with friends and disintegrating enemies," the CPC's political warfare strategy aims to promote the "rise of China within a new international order and defend against perceived threats to state security".<sup>39</sup> With such a 'win without fight' strategy, China is able to mould and influence the perception of others towards it, be it of friends or adversaries. Most importantly, with propaganda carried out both during peace-time and in armed conflict, China is able to maximise the outcome, given that it either "amplifies or attenuates the political effects of the military instrument of national power".<sup>40</sup> Given its non-traditional form of fighting an adversary, the Chinese strategy of the "three warfares" exemplifies the way China has mastered the art fighting 'hybrid warfare': 'win without a fight'.

## **Conclusion**

China under Xi Jinping seeks to hone its combat skills; the hybrid domain remains not an exception as is the case with other major powers given that warfare is no longer fundamentally military in nature. Similarly, China's idea of "winning informationized local wars" is also not just limited to the conventional domain but has increasingly come to characterise the unconventional areas where an adversary can be taken by 'surprise' without the 'use of force'. This is well-witnessed in China's justification of its actions to legitimise its claims with respect to Taiwan, the South China Sea, East China Sea, and others.

Owing to this perspective, it remains indisputable that China's "three warfares" strategy has become a definite feature of what China calls

unrestricted warfare. Such a way of waging war will only evolve with time, in tactics as well as magnitude. Likewise, with its growing impact, such a warfare strategy will also further expand the scope of Beijing's strategic interests that, in all respects, seem to be expanding beyond China's borders. In addition, this strategy also influences China's policy of safeguarding its national interests not just abroad but also domestically in order to uphold the supremacy and legitimacy of the CPC.

By applying the "three warfares" strategy in peace-time, China is able to shape the environment in a way that will facilitate the operations of the PLA in times of contingency. Thereby, China's 21st century art of war comprises 'unrestricted' war that calls for 'winning without even fighting the adversary' and if fought, then to 'fight and win'.

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# Contextualising and Understanding Hybrid Warfare by Pakistan

Pradeep Semwal

*To fight and conquer in all battles is not supreme excellence; supreme excellence consists in breaking one's resistance without fighting.*

—Sun Tzu

## Introduction

The canvas of modern day conflict is diverse, with many interlinked or diverse dimensions, to include conventional conflicts (including nuclear adversaries), cyber, space, economic, use of terrorists, insurgents or religious extremism. The merging or blurring of conflicts and war forms is gradually transforming into a hybrid nature, wherein adversaries are likely to maximise the war-fighting capability at their disposal to include asymmetric or irregular tactics.<sup>1</sup>

In the Indian context, there is a distinct regional dimension to the challenges faced, with two nuclear neighbours with unresolved border disputes. Both adversaries bring different capabilities to the table: while Pakistan is specialised in breeding and exporting religious terror, China, along with its conventional capabilities, specialises in cyber and non-

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contact warfare. Active borders, conflicts and collusion between these two neighbours further enhance the complexities and challenges for India. Unconventional, guerrilla or hybrid warfare is often considered a weapon of the weaker forces against a stronger adversary.<sup>2</sup>

Post abrogation of Article 370 and deterioration in Indo-Pak relations, Pakistan is running out of options and, therefore, would again attempt to activate, exploit and consolidate its hybrid resources. This is likely to manifest in activation of sleeper cells, surge in infiltration, fresh recruitment, recycling of some apprehended/surrendered terrorists and triggering of violent agitations in the hinterland of Jammu & Kashmir (J&K). To predict and prepare for likely threats in the future, it is essential to understand and contextualise the hybrid warfare capabilities of Pakistan.<sup>3</sup>

### **Understanding the Hybrid Threat**

Frank Hoffman, from the US Marine Centre of Emerging Threats and Opportunities, defines a hybrid threat as “a form of conflict in which state and non-state actors simultaneously exploit all modes—conventional, irregular, terrorists, disruptive or criminal to destabilise an existing order”.<sup>4</sup> A hybrid threat is also defined as a “diverse and dynamic combination of regular forces, irregular forces, and/or criminal elements all unified to achieve mutually benefitting effects”.<sup>5</sup> Hybrid warfare, as defined by the hybrid doctrine of the UK, is referred to as “warfare conducted by irregular forces that have access to sophisticated weapons and systems normally fielded by regular forces. Hybrid warfare may morph and adapt throughout an individual campaign, as circumstances and recourses allow”.<sup>6</sup>

This warfare is, thus, the convergence of the physical and psychological, combatant and non-combatant, violence and nation-building, and kinetic and information approach. The most significant convergence is within the various modes of war. The key components of a hybrid threat, thus,

are the military, nation-state paramilitary force, terrorist groups, guerrilla units, criminal organisations and civil population, especially in view of J&K's agitational dynamics.<sup>7</sup>

### **Historical Perspective**

In the global context, hybrid threats are not new. There are numerous examples of a 'weaker' adversary using its relative asymmetric strength against its stronger opponent's perceived weaknesses. Lawrence of Arabia, Changez Khan and the Afghan Wars are all testimony of this type of unrestricted war. The Viet Cong and People's Army of Vietnam combined irregular and regular forces into conventional and unconventional units in fighting the French and US forces. The Russian experiences in Afghanistan bear testimony to the efficient use of irregulars in both urban and rural environments to bring to its knees the might of an erstwhile superpower. Russia, too, offensively used hybrid warfare by employing cyber warfare against Georgia. Hezbollah mixed conventional capabilities (such as anti-armour weapons, rockets, and command and control networks) with irregular tactics (including information warfare, non-uniformed combatants, and civilian shielding). The result was a tactical stalemate and strategic setback for Israel.

In the Indian context, the *Arthashastra* explains the treatise on statecraft and conduct of unrestricted warfare which is defined as "concealed war" and "silent war", involving the use of assassins, insiders, informers and prostitutes aimed at winning battles against an adversarial king. Shivaji, Guru Govind Singh and Maharaja Ranjit Singh employed hybrid resources to achieve their political and military aims. During the 1971 campaign, the Mukti Bahini, an armed organisation comprising regulars and irregulars wherein regulars were defectors from East Pakistani units, was employed by India in Bangladesh and greatly assisted it in achieving its political and military aims.

In the specific context of Pakistan, it has since its creation, post independence and partition, treated India as its primary threat and enemy. Due to its inadequacy vis-à-vis India with regards to military and financial capability, it has historically exhibited its overdependence on irregulars and hybrid warfare. It employed them in 1947-48 to seize portions of J&K, with the battle for Srinagar by regular and irregular forces being a classical example. In 1965, the Razakars were employed by Pakistan as part of a carefully crafted strategy manifesting in the form of Op Gibraltar in the hill sector. During the Kargil misadventure in 1999, Pakistan employed a mix of terrorists and regular troops to occupy critical heights along the Line of Control (LoC). The unfolding of Op TOPAC over the last three decades with the aim to *bleed India through a thousand cuts* is also a typical manifestation of the hybrid strategy adopted by Pakistan.

Pakistan trained and inducted 80,000 Afghan Mujahideen for the collapse of the Soviet forces in Afghanistan. Its hand is seen in all terrorist actions perpetrated against India which include aid and abetment to the Sikh insurgency in Punjab; aid to the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) movement in Assam; the ongoing virulent insurgency in Kashmir; cross-border infiltration; terrorist attacks in Indian cities; attack on the Indian Parliament; plane hijacking; attack across the LoC at Kargil; fake currency racket through Nepal; “Karachi project” to train Indian Mujahideen for committing acts of terror and sabotage in India; 26/11 attack in Mumbai in 2008; attack on the Indian Embassy in Afghanistan; and the Uri and Pulwama attacks. All these incidents establish the capability of the adversary to conduct intermittent acts of violence, sabotage and subversion at will against India.

### **Analysis of Hybrid Warfare by Pakistan**

Pakistan, a country born out of hate, on religious faultlines and an ever growing tilt towards extremism has always been motivated exclusively by the twin forces of fundamentalism and intrinsic hatred towards India

throughout its existence. The evils of *jihadism* and terrorism have become Pakistan's state policy, especially focussed towards India and Afghanistan. It has earned the notoriety of being the epicentre of global terrorism and has been India's traditional adversary.<sup>8</sup>

The 'Quranic Concept of War' was conceived by General Zia-ul-Haq, and propagated an aggressive, escalating and relentless *jihad* against non-believers in the faith. Terrorism was justified through religious diktats as a means to achieve ultimate dominance. It further paved the way for the current employment of irregulars by asserting that *jihad* is not an exclusive domain of the professional soldier, nor is it restricted to the application of military force alone and, therefore, the nation's entire strength must be applied to achieve the laid down objectives.<sup>9</sup> It propounds that war is to be waged against the non-believers in the name of Allah, with a spirit of religious duty and obligation. The *fidayeen* concept was further ordained by propagating that death and life after death are inevitable and those who die fighting for the cause of Allah are blessed and would be suitably rewarded in paradise.

The concept exhorts all believers to strike terror into the hearts of their enemies, stating that terror is not only a means, but an end in itself, which can be instilled only if the opponent's faith is destroyed. The thought process was formalised in a book in 1979, endorsed by, General Zia-ul-Haq, and was taught compulsorily to all Army officers.<sup>10</sup> It contributed to the radicalisation and Islamisation of the Pakistan Army and fomented extreme anti-India fervour. In future wars, the 'Quranic Concept of War' could be the singular unifying factor for *jihadists* to unite with the Pakistan armed forces against India. There is also a likelihood of propaganda regarding 'Islam in Danger' being used for indoctrination, urging all 'true' Muslims to take up arms against non-believers. This further cemented the role of sub-conventional or hybrid warfare against India.

The military strategy of Pakistan has always been anti-India and Kashmir-centric, avoiding conventional war but achieving its aims through sub-conventional means. It has fomented proxy war in Kashmir while ensuring that its activities remain below the threshold of a conventional conflict. Its strategy of using the nuclear threat is again a form of mixing conventional, sub-conventional and nuclear capabilities against India. The current situation in J&K post revocation of Article 370, with communication shut down, and concerted and coordinated actions by the security forces has been tense but stable, and Pakistan, in spite of its best efforts, has not been able to create an adverse situation. It is likely that Pakistan, will now attempt to use all its hybrid capabilities to exploit the situation for its political and military gains.<sup>11</sup>

Pakistan's hybrid warfare strategy has been conceptualised to function as an instrument of state/military policy and is designed as a force multiplier to exploit the strategic divide between India and Pakistan. It intends to enhance its force capability on the outbreak of hostilities. The hybrid warfare launched by Pakistan is likely to be multi-pronged with the likely aims to be as under:

- To mitigate its conventional shortcomings and keep the Indian armed forces engaged in sub-conventional operations, and retain the ability to calibrate relations.
- To further the divide and create mistrust between the Kashmiris and the Indian government by conducting sensational strikes on sensitive targets and instigating unrest.
- To create situations in the Valley to draw international attention and take the issue to international forums. It may also use this to draw attention away from its internal financial, cultural and social instability.
- To delay and disrupt Indian military operations to adversely impact India's war-waging machinery.

Pakistan's hybrid war against India has multiple dimensions which apart from focussing on J&K, have spread all across the country, with multiple sleeper cells, funding of radical organisations, cyber warfare, targeting through social media, paid domestic and international media and attempts to make inroads towards India from other neighbouring countries like Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh.<sup>12</sup> Pakistan has established a well oiled and coordinated system of terror funding in J&K and other parts of India, including the metros like Mumbai. The impact of these networks has been witnessed in various bomb blasts across the nation, and the situation in J&K is the result of this elaborate terror funding network.

### **Enablers for Hybrid Warfare by Pakistan**

Historical factors like partition post-independence, claim to J&K and subsequent creation of Bangladesh from East Pakistan are the biggest psychological and political reasons for Pakistan to continue the conflict with India.<sup>13</sup> The LoC, unlike a well defined International Boundary (IB), has its own peculiarities, being not clearly demarcated and the terrain providing an opportunity for infiltration by terrorists in spite of the best efforts by the security forces. The civil population i.e, the demography with its quantum and characteristics as well as its location close to the LoC, provides the opportunity for hybrid threats.

The overall force asymmetry and unfavourable force ratios in the case of an all out conventional conflict is likely to put Pakistan in an obvious disadvantage against India. This has prompted the adversary to rely heavily upon irregulars and other hybrid resources to keep the Indian forces engaged in sub-conventional conflict on multiple fronts. One of the major enablers is the centralised power centre in terms of the Pakistan Army, which controls all the intelligence and military assets, along with access to funds. Pakistan has, over time, evolved its strategy and added multiple dimensions to its hybrid threat, which include use of the social media and fake news propaganda.<sup>14</sup>

Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) plays a pivotal role as the coordinating agency in waging hybrid war against India. Its coordinated actions with the Inter-Services Public Relations Department (ISPR) of the Pakistan Army, through various wings and special cells, focus on propaganda for the domestic population, the Kashmiris and the international audience. This well oiled machinery, with adequate access to power centres and funds, acts as great enabler in conducting targeted hybrid warfare for conventional and sub-conventional operations during both war and peace.

The China-Pakistan collusion provides Pakistan access to Chinese capabilities in cyber, military, space and economic warfare. The information warfare capabilities of China provide back-end support to Pakistan and facilitate the launch of hybrid threats against India.<sup>15</sup> The human intelligence network of Pakistan, coupled with technological support from China, poses a serious hybrid threat to India and needs to be countered with a well devised and executed strategy. The availability of adequate expertise to exploit the social media and favourable print/visual media facilitates influencing the population and fomenting trouble.<sup>16</sup>

### **Hybrid Warfare During Conventional Operations**

If war is inevitable or a suitable opportunity presents itself in the form of an adverse internal situation in Kashmir, Pakistan may exploit it to fight a conventional war limited to J&K or across the entire front. The nuclear card may also be leveraged deftly during all stages of the conflict to restrict India by using international pressure.<sup>17</sup> In the past, Pakistan has employed sub-conventional warfare as an adjunct to conventional war<sup>18</sup>. The appreciated contours of using hybrid warfare could involve building up local capability, while ensuring a high degree of non-attributability and then imperceptibly increasing the intensity of sub-conventional warfare, testing India's 'threshold of tolerance' and shaping opinions in the chosen theatre of operations. However, in future hybrid wars, the

main effort could be sub-conventional, with an aim to ‘heat the iron’ while a conventional ‘hammer’ may be employed at an appropriate time to strike the ‘iron’ and conclude the short and localised campaign on a winning note.

Pakistan has a terror factory that produces terrorists for export to India, Afghanistan and across the globe.<sup>19</sup> This bench strength of approximately 1,600-1,800 terrorists will be used by Pakistan in conjunction with the regular conventional forces, along both the border and in the hinterland to degrade Indian military capabilities.<sup>20</sup> The focus could be to foster unrest, communal riots, target logistics echelons, enhance the strength of commando troops in various operations and carry out sabotage missions.<sup>21</sup>

### **Measures to Counter Pakistan’s Hybrid War**

Multi-pronged, multi-dimensional and coordinated actions at the national and multi-agency levels are required to counter Pakistan’s hybrid threat. A coordinated strategy, planned and executed by the Indian government post abrogation of Article 370 has ensured that most of the hybrid assets of Pakistan have been isolated and countered. The current situation on the ground post revocation of Article 370 has left Pakistan frustrated, due to its inability to calibrate and initiate actions along the LoC and Kashmir Valley. This was achieved by targeting the over-ground workers and denying communication links, along with financial freedom. However, Pakistan continued its cyber and social media warfare by spreading propaganda via fake media news through international and domestic media houses.<sup>22</sup>

The counter to any enemy threat needs to be planned and executed in the same domain by using better defensive and offensive capabilities. The first step in countering any threat is to understand the threat and ensure that all the agencies and individuals handling various dimensions of this versatile threat understand the dimensions and future developments in this form of warfare. Hybrid threats, thus, need to be countered



holistically, using all capabilities in the cyber, space, financial, diplomatic and military fields. The need of the hour is to create a central command and control organisation coordinating a multi-dimensional response to multiple threats to ensure a synergised and coordinated strategic response. Coordination in all these diverse fields can be achieved only by a centralised command and control organisation under the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), whose primary function could be to coordinate actions by various sister agencies. The expertise of various branches of the security forces and civil agencies needs to be synergised towards the common goal of defeating the enemy's evil designs.

## Conclusion

The casus belli between India and Pakistan is the state of J&K. The LoC provides Pakistan an ideal opportunity to launch a hybrid war with an aim to alter the status quo. Pakistan presently does, and will always, aim to create an anti-India feeling among the masses of Kashmir. The 'agitation dynamics', if handled ineptly by the civil administration and security forces, can present an opportunity for Pakistan to exploit. The proliferation of the internet and social media in the Kashmir Valley and other parts of the state adds another dimension to the already complicated issue. Most prominently, Pakistan has the *jihadi* terrorists whenever it wants to muster them. The threat from Pakistan is, therefore, real and our security architecture needs to be suitably designed to mitigate and face the nuances of the hybrid threats.

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# Hybrid Warfare Challenges to the Armed Forces: Realities and the Way Ahead

Kunendra Singh Yadav

*In all fighting, the direct method may be used for joining the battle, but indirect methods will be needed in order to secure victory.*

—Sun Tzu

## Introduction

With the recent landmark changes in the political landscape of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), a whole new era has been ushered in. A state which was unfortunately the test-bed of Pakistan's nefarious agendas for decades, has now been subjected to a bold, exigent and logical step. The dissonance in decision-making has finally given way, laying fresh ground for renewed endeavours. With "Hybrid Warfare Challenges to the Armed Forces: Realities and Way Ahead" being the subject of scrutiny, a certain degree of factual clarity needs to be brought in right away. Three fundamental queries need to be answered at the outset.

First, is the term hybrid war a relatively recent construct? The answer is a definite no. The phenomenon is actually as old as the history of warfare itself. Chanakya,<sup>1</sup> around 300 BC, propagated the use of *sama* (conciliation), *dama* (economic gratification), *danda* (use of force)

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and *bheda* (dissension) i.e., all resources at the disposal of the king (in today's context—comprehensive national power) to achieve the intended outcome. Second, are we adequately equipped to deal with the current and upcoming challenges posed by this warfare? The answer is yes. However, we certainly seem to be ill prepared at the moment and the same will be discussed later in the paper. Last, how true is the notion that hybrid warfare is a tool of the lesser opponent? At best, this can be considered partially true. Today, the greater opponents use hybrid tools with similar primacy. A case in point being the Russians in the Russo-Georgian War<sup>2</sup> of 2008. So, with these pointers as the backdrop, we move on to assess the reality of hybrid war in today's context, the challenges it poses to our armed forces and the counter strategy desired. However, before we get to know the reality and the context in which the hybrid philosophy thrives, it seems logical to understand the basic anatomy and the paradigm which drives this philosophy.

### **Understanding the Anatomy**

The Indian Army Land Warfare Doctrine 2018<sup>3</sup> puts across the hybrid warfare sentiment as:

Future conflicts will be characterized by operating in a zone of ambiguity where nations are neither at peace, nor at war, a “Grey Zone” which makes our task more complex. Wars will be hybrid in nature, a blend of conventional and unconventional, with the focus increasingly shifting to multi-domain warfare, varying from non-contact to contact warfare.

So, what is hybrid warfare? In the language of the learned, it is warfare which combines the lethality of conventional war with the fanatical fervour of irregular warfare<sup>4</sup>. Whereas, in simple military terms, it is a full spectrum warfare comprising the conventional, sub-conventional, unconventional and non-conventional means. It can, however, be stated without

exaggeration that, of late, this brutal brand has defied all sorts of definitions and is practised and professed by different names in different parts of the world. The major constituents of the definition of, and congruence with, similar contemporary strategies have been amplified below.

**Conventional:**<sup>5</sup> In short, this type of warfare involves state actors and resources also including the Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) dimensions. Most activities in such type of warfare lie in the open/overt domain.

**Sub-Conventional:**<sup>6</sup> Activities in the sub-conventional sphere can be executed in the scenarios of both No War No Peace (NWNP) and peace proper. While aspects such as proxy war, terrorism, insurgency, cyber, civil war and public disorder fall under the ambit of NWNP, peace-time issues include criminal disorder and unlawful activities.

**Unconventional:**<sup>7</sup> The majority of endeavours under this warfare lie in the covert domain to include subversion, sabotage, resistance, revolution, intelligence operations, etc.

**Non-Conventional:**<sup>8</sup> The peculiarities of this subset are the most distinct, and which are conducted overtly/covertly by the state itself as part of its political agenda. Activities under this category are separate domains within themselves for the purpose of study and execution. Major strategies under this warfare include political, diplomatic, economic and demographic wars.

Apart from the means of warfare, countries use different terminologies which have a semblance with hybrid warfare. Every nation in the world today follows a unique trend line. It has its own goals and ambitions, in both the short and long terms. Comprehensive national power is accordingly orchestrated to achieve the desired end state. A number of terms are being contemporarily used by nations which correspond to the hybrid philosophy. Thus, there is a congruence of hybrid warfare with the contemporary

strategies used by some nations. The underlying spirit guiding these terms, however, can be understood as being the same. Some of these terms are:

**Grey Zone Warfare:**<sup>9</sup> The term was originally part of the US lexicon. It denotes an environment between war and peace where hybrid tools of coercive influence, ranging from conventional forces to criminal activities, are utilised. As far as the US goes, it does not seek inclusion of conventional forces in the understanding of ‘grey zone’ conflicts, however, experts elsewhere are of the belief that such exclusion is not practicable as there is always the possibility of the use of conventional force in the grey zone.

**Unrestricted Warfare:**<sup>10</sup> This warfare comprises the Chinese comprehension of hybrid/grey zone tactics. This sort of warfare has no restrictions placed on any kind of boundaries/means/methods to achieve what the nation thinks is justified. To the extent that even culture and religion are not exempted from its ambit.

**Non-Linear Warfare:**<sup>11</sup> Such a phrase is very easily understood by a common military mind. For the uninitiated, the term was conceptualised by General Valery Gerasimov of the Russian Army in the year 2013. According to the concept, conflict does not have any clear front lines or distinct friendly/enemy areas. He even went on to mention that warfare transcends into the political, diplomatic, economic and informational domains of statecraft, making it more holistic and all inclusive.

Having glanced through these terms used interchangeably these days, the congruence is very well established. One should also not miss two significant aspects that have ubiquitously/unilaterally been endorsed by modern states in relation to hybrid war. These being the optimum exploitation of technology and use of information as frontline tools of war execution. The more meticulous and innovative the use, the better are the results.

**Means, Ways and Ends Paradigm:** In order to obtain a simplistic and in-depth understanding of the hybrid construct, it may be prudent to glance at it through the *means, ways* and *ends* phenomenon. This paradigm brings out the mechanics of manifestation of this warfare in simple terms. If the *ends* denote the desired end state/outcome of a strategy, then the *means* signify the resources available at the disposal of the executor and the *ways* are the methods (courses of action) used to attain the desired end state through existing means. In the hybrid context, this could be understood as:

**Table 1**

Means	Ways	Ends
Hard	Kinetic	Political instability Social unrest Religious disharmony Weak economy Capturing value territory and taking prisoners of war
Military	Conventional war	
Nuclear/biological/chemical	nuclear/chemical/biological strike	
Terrorists	Blasts by terrorists	
Criminals	Sabotage attacks	
Foreign mercenaries	Suicide/fidayeen	
Fifth columnists	attacks by mercenaries	
Anti-national elements		
Soft	Agitational dynamics	
Political linkages	Demonstrations	
Diplomacy (mainstream)	Short range missile strike	
Economic (trade dependency)	Non-kinetic	
Ethnic linkages	Diplomacy	
Religious linkages	Collusion with unfriendly	
Media (visual and print)	nations	
Cyber experts	Information operations	
Smart	Smuggling/fake	
Social media	currency	
Diplomacy (Track Two)	Exploiting social/religious and ethnic faultlines	
	Cyber attack	
	Electronic warfare attack	

*Source:* Prepared by the Author.



Let us understand the above table by two contrasting examples. The military is one of the hard *means* available to a nation. These *means* use the *way* of conventional war to achieve the desired *end* state of capturing maximum value territory and taking prisoners of war, thereby causing national shame to the enemy. Taking the second example, the media is a soft *means* which uses the *way* of information operations to achieve a variety of *ends* such as lowering the morale of the enemy military or nation as a whole or causing social, ethnic or religious unrest in the target country. The list tabulated above, however, is neither definite nor exhaustive. This will keep evolving as newer/innovative means and ways are adopted by states to achieve more compelling ends.

It also becomes genuinely pertinent at this juncture to clear a major misgiving. Hybrid warfare is majorly seen by some as the tool of the weak. This understanding to an extent is supported by history. During the Sino-Vietnamese War of 1979,<sup>12</sup> China was a stronger opponent and still its victory is disputed to a large extent. Vietnam was militarily weak. It could pitch just about 70,000 troops as opposed to the 600,000 Chinese troops. However, with the combination of various means such as the military, irregulars, spies and mobilising world opinion (which may be termed as hybrid in one word), the Vietnamese not only countered the Chinese conventional effort but also tilted the outcome of the war in their favour. Victory was, hence, claimed to be achieved. The thought is the same for Pakistan in our context. Since it cannot imagine outperforming India in a purely conventional war (majorly due to force and resource constraints), it resorts to hybrid warfare (proxy war in J&K;<sup>13</sup> keeping the military extremely occupied by firing, infiltration and an aggressive stance on the international border; efforts to revive the Khalistan movement<sup>14</sup> in Punjab; disruptive activities in the hinterland, and so on). Thus, an indirect approach of *bleeding India through a thousand cuts*.

The above acts of Pakistan in the current scenario, however, need to be viewed from a different perspective altogether. Today, nations indulge

in hybrid war not just because they are weak or strong, but due to the flexibility and enormous gains it offers. The smaller nations employ these means because they have nothing to lose in a conflict with larger nations; it only increases their chances of victory. Whereas the larger nations in the same conflict use them because they want to win with the least efforts/implications or, to say, *winning without fighting*, as Sun Tzu recommends. Therefore, while smaller nations like Pakistan and North Korea<sup>15</sup> use such means (against India and the United States respectively), at one end of the conflict spectrum, countries like China<sup>16</sup> and Russia<sup>17</sup> also use them with conviction at the other end. The difference only lies in the type of means wherein one (say China) relies mainly on non-kinetic means, the other (say Pakistan) banks primarily on the kinetic. Having seen the preference for hybrid wars across nations, it is now time to get a contextual comprehension of the hybrid phenomenon as it relates to India.

### **Contextual Comprehension**

As highlighted earlier, hybrid war is definitely not a tool adopted due to the size or stature of a country. Every opponent has his own design of the battle and concept of application of means (both military and non-military). Hence, it becomes extremely necessary to get the contextual comprehension right with respect to hybrid wars, as being executed by our adversaries. Such an understanding will certainly facilitate a better informed strategy based on pragmatic assumptions.

**Western Adversary:** The desire for operational parity, irrespective of the established capability mismatch, defines as well as justifies the use of sub-conventional means by Pakistan.<sup>18</sup> All the wars fought with India, from the 1947 War till the Kargil conflict stand as testimony to the use of irregulars<sup>19</sup> towards achieving war aims. In 1948, a force led by tribesmen and duly supported by serving and retired Army officers formed the tool of Pakistan's conventional designs in Kashmir. This, of course, was coupled with the subversion of the troops of the state forces

of the Maharaja (an aspect of hybrid warfare). Similar was the story in 1965 when internal disturbance in Kashmir over the missing hair of the Prophet emboldened Pakistan to induct a large number of irregular forces in conjunction with the regular Army to gain control over territory from multiple ingress points. The story in 1999 was the reverse. This time around, Pakistan wanted to prove that the act of intruders occupying high altitude heights overseeing the national highway to Leh was totally a Mujahideen endeavour, however, it was again proved wrong. Therefore, the presence of the hybrid content in all these instances is well established.

Use of hybrid warfare as a war execution strategy not only suits Pakistan, but comprises its domestic and strategic compulsion. Domestically, it needs to keep the Kashmir issue alive (either by internal disruption in Kashmir or seeking international intervention) for various reasons for which hybrid warfare is the best option as per cost benefit analysis. This would prove the worth of its military as well as polity to the anti-Indian elements in the country. It would also divert the Pakistani common man's attention from core domestic issues such as slow growth, widespread corruption, and so on.

Strategically, the geographic location of Pakistan affords it certain advantages. The country is located at the crossroads of South Asia, the Middle East and Central Asia. Time and again, its location has been a source of leverage, both for itself and the United States, towards meeting their Western agendas. Afghanistan is a case in point<sup>20</sup>. Pakistan has been practising hybrid war in Afghanistan since 1980s, initially through the Mujahideen and now the Taliban. In both cases, this has benefited Pakistan strategically as well as economically. The strategic benefit has three aspects attached to it. First, it provides Pakistan a place of relevance in the Global War on Terror against the Taliban in Afghanistan, courtesy the United States. Second, it also gives a spot of prominence in various international conflict resolution forums for Afghanistan, enhancing its brand value in a way. Thirdly, its internal leverages over the Taliban help

Pakistan to retain a sort of latent control over Afghanistan. This, in turn, placates its notion of strategic depth against India and also helps extend its influence towards Central Asia. The economic benefits<sup>21</sup> accruing by helping the United States against the Taliban are known worldwide. All this, in a way, can be attributed to Pakistan's knack for executing hybrid warfare by using non-state actors.

**Northern Adversary:** The context is entirely different when we speak of China. The country is treading the road to superpower status. Armed with top-notch technology and world class weaponry, it is way ahead of India in terms of capability, both military and otherwise. Since any overt use of purely conventional means towards conflict resolution is likely to discredit its reputation in the comity of nations, it is more inclined towards the use of non-kinetic/non-contact grey zone tactics.<sup>22</sup> This has been amply demonstrated through its endeavours in the maritime domain (South and East China Seas and the Indian Ocean Region) and also the recent Doklam crisis.<sup>23</sup> The point here being that India must expect an equal share of hybrid warfare application against it by China in both standalone and collusive modes.

Therefore, as evident from the above, every nation has its own justified reasons to indulge in the so-called hybridism. The greater danger being that hybrid means will see an ever greater adoption by nations in the times to come. Some reasons which naturally make this the warfare of choice<sup>24</sup> are:

- No formal declaration of war is required. The majority of tools can be used during such war.
- Peace/no war-no peace.
- Low cost option, with high payoffs.
- Attributability is always doubtful.
- Deniability factor.
- Avoids abrupt international attention as in the case of conventional war.

- Survivability ratio of means applied is comparatively higher.

### Challenges Posed to Indian Defence Forces

*A concerted effort is being made by our adversaries to shrink the space for conventional war through the prosecution of unconventional operations at the lower end of the spectrum and threats of early and irrational use of conventional weapons at the other.*

—The Indian Army Land Warfare Doctrine 2018<sup>25</sup>

The armed forces of any nation are a lucrative target for an adversary indulging in hybrid warfare activities. Despite their reach, precision and lethality, the forces are extremely vulnerable due to their large logistic and administrative entities. Cumulatively, they pose a viable signature, sometimes greater than the mass of combat forces themselves. Any dent or discredit caused is likely to catch headlines and impact the overall morale of the Army and the state. At the same time, such activities keep the forces engaged below the conventional threshold, hampering their overall conventional preparedness. The challenges, thus, posed by hybrid warfare to the armed forces are myriad; however, for the sake of comprehension and analysis, these have primarily been divided into the physical and virtual domains, as elucidated below.

**Physical Domain Challenges:** In order to facilitate assimilation, predicaments in the physical domain can further be sliced into Pakistan- and China-centric.

- **Pakistan-Centric:**<sup>26</sup> If one was to characterise the nature of activities originating from the western borders, these can be stated as crude, unscientific and uncoordinated to a large extent. Conventionally, involvement of regular forces in support of hybrid war is majorly limited to a full scale war under a nuclear umbrella, a short swift limited war, Border Action Team (BAT) action, Ceasefire Violations (CFVs) and logistics support to infiltrating columns. The majority of the

efforts are being diverted towards sub-conventional, unconventional and non-conventional endeavours by way of infiltration by militants across the Line of Control/International Border (LoC/IB) and also through the maritime medium, agitational dynamics, sleeper cells, sabotage activities, smuggling, piracy, and malignant endeavours on the religious, social and ethnic fronts.

- ***China-Centric:***<sup>27</sup> Our northern neighbour follows a totally different class of physical activities in the hybrid domain. These being the likes of standoffs on the IB, transgressions, intrusions, increasing assertiveness on the political and military fronts, forays into the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), economic colonisation, debt trap, active pursuance of the equity for debt model, posing threats to island territories, collusion with like-minded adversaries and an overall attitude of the so-called coercive gradualism.<sup>28</sup> It can be stated with conviction that these activities, ranging from the tactical to the strategic level, are well articulated, with control at the highest levels.

**Virtual Domain Challenges:** As far as the virtual domain is concerned, the Chinese have an upper hand, however, of late, Pakistan has also shown promising competitiveness, especially in the information domain. Its special liking for subverting the Indian armed forces personnel through a well designed network of intelligence operatives and, of late, through a deft use of social media, has been an ongoing concern for the Indian forces.<sup>29</sup> The propaganda war launched by Pakistan in the international media in response to the Indian abrogation of Article 370 from J&K is worth noting.<sup>30</sup> While the physical activities are seemingly overt in nature, those in the virtual sphere are mostly covert in design, with very few open signatures. This is where the characteristics of attributability/deniability come into play more often. The activities in this domain are generally of a strategic nature, with severe and sometimes

crippling consequences for nation-states. China specifically has made great strides in the use of non-contact warfare to achieve its national aims. These include cyber warfare, Electronic Warfare (EW), Integrated Network Electronic Warfare (INEW), information operations (“Three Warfare Strategy”<sup>31</sup> including psychological warfare, media warfare, and legal warfare), political and diplomatic parlaying, economic warfare and irredentism/demographic warfare.<sup>32</sup>

### **Counter-Strategy**

Hence, given the nuances, any strategy aimed at countering the manifestations of hybrid war in any form/name has to factor in the emerging security environment, technological advancements and multi-spectrum conflict challenges facing the nation today. It is evident that the current and future wars will be more hybrid in content and equally collusive or collaborative in context. The counter means, thus, employed or intended to be employed, must remain present-relevant and future, ready. It is also prudent to believe that hybrid wars are ever on, and different approaches/strategies are required to tackle them during peace/No War-No Peace (NWNP) and during active hostilities. The common sense motto of ‘Be Prepared’ will, however, apply equally across all approaches. Two scenarios to be taken into consideration with regard to counter-strategies are discussed briefly below.

#### **Peace/NWNP Scenario: Whole of the Government Approach:**<sup>33</sup>

This aspect has to be understood with all the coherence it merits. All elements of national power should come into play in tackling such a threat. The military is just one of them but the military as the first responder always should not be the norm.<sup>34</sup> A state which always and every time looks upon its military to either counter an existing issue or as a tool of retribution, will be typecast and seen as one having limited options. The government has shown a definite resolve towards countering various aspects of hybrid warfare, the major steps being the intent to

dislodge terrorist infrastructure across the LoC through surgical strikes and the recently conducted Balakot strikes; a big jolt to the economic terrorism propagated by Pakistan by demonetisation in the year 2016; and the recent move to abrogate Article 370 and downgrade the status of J&K to a Union Territory (UT) status. These measures, falling under the military, economic and political domains, form part of the government's approach towards countering various facets of hybrid warfare to different extents. Such measures, demonstrating the will of the government, are needed every time the adversary attempts any misadventure in the hybrid domain, to unhinge and push him onto the back foot, irrespective of the political set-up of the time.

**Military Capability Enhancement:** The military, which primarily forms the conventional component of hybrid warfare, has to be further empowered, building the requisite capabilities in both the physical and virtual domains, with strong linkages to national level abilities. A long-term integrated perspective plan for capability development of the forces is already in place and needs to be pursued with priority, with assured budgetary support.<sup>35</sup> Talking of specifics, any counter-strategy, whether military or otherwise, will fundamentally rest on our capability to acquire actionable intelligence. Though considerable progress has been made with respect to Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities<sup>36</sup> through the space and aerial dimensions (remote sensing satellite series, electronic intelligence satellites, unmanned aerial vehicles, long range maritime patrol aircraft), a lot is still desired. These capabilities need to be built to the requisite numbers, with their products percolating seamlessly down to the tactical level. The role of precise image intelligence acquired through cartosat satellites for successfully executing the surgical strikes in 2015 is no secret.

**Focus on Non-Contact Warfare Capability:**<sup>37</sup> Battles will now have a prolonged non-contact phase and a serious blend of the hybrid dimension. This cannot be neglected or downplayed any more. Our



capabilities in this domain have to emerge as the best and top-notch. We have no choice in this whatsoever. Our endeavours such as renewed importance to information warfare (including psychological operations, electronic warfare and cyber warfare) at all levels in the armed forces, establishment of the Defence Cyber and Space Agency (to be upgraded to the force level of command)<sup>38</sup> and the recently conducted Anti-Satellite (ASAT) tests need to be built on further in all earnest.

**Embrace Technology:** Technology has redefined the way wars are, and will be, fought in future. It has become a major enabler of both kinetic and non-kinetic dimensions of war-fighting. Our slow pace of technology adoption can be attributed to heavy import reliance. A country relying majorly on trade for meeting its security needs will always be in the process of catching up. There is, hence, a dire need to promote Make In India and indigenous products rather than look abroad at all times. The Technology Perspective and Capability Roadmap 2018 (TPCR)<sup>39</sup> provides the industry an overview of the equipment that is envisaged to be inducted into the forces up to the late 2020s. It aims at driving the technology development process in right earnest. The point to be understood here being that only laying down what is desired by the forces may not be adequate at this stage: it has to be backed up by proper government support and eager willingness by the military to accept indigenous products.<sup>40</sup> The Akash surface-to-air missile system, Arjun tank, Dhruv utility helicopter, Tejas multi-role fighter aircraft, Pinaka multi-barrel rocket launcher and Nag anti-tank missile are some of the indigenous weapon systems doing exceedingly well for the Services. The only need is to keep pushing this forward. Nations much smaller in size like Singapore and Israel should be looked upon as role models with regard to optimising technology. There is no choice but to endorse technology in every affair of the nation and military. It is a simple pursue or perish situation.

## Active Hostilities

**Coherence of Action:** All the abilities/capabilities that we as a nation have built upon need to be harnessed in entirety during hostilities. The linear, standalone methodology of war-fighting, with cooperation and coordination dependent on personalities, will have to give way to jointness, not only at the level of the Services but at the national level. The recent announcement with regards to the creation of the post of Chief of Defence Staff (CDS)<sup>41</sup> as a single point military adviser to the government is a long pending and welcome step. Its implementation has to be deliberate and meticulous.

**Citizens' Role:** The onus of fighting a hybrid enemy cannot rest solely on the defence, paramilitary or police forces—it has to be a national effort with every citizen playing his role by being security conscious during peace/no war-no peace/active hostilities. Some proposed measures in this regard are listed below.

- **Rejuvenation of Home Guards:**<sup>42</sup> The Home Guards is a voluntary citizens' force to act as an auxiliary element to the police for assistance during exigent/emergent situations. Border states have a Border Wing version of the Home Guards which serves as an auxiliary element to the Border Security Force (BSF), with clear-cut roles during hostilities such as counter-infiltration, protection of vulnerable areas and points and security of lines of communication. Presently, there is sub-optional utilisation of the Home Guards and especially the Border Wing. It is proposed that the Border Wing of the Home Guards be shifted under Ministry of Defence from the Ministry of Home Affairs. Thereafter, this force may be rejuvenated by enhanced training and, further, orbatted under static formations to strengthen the rear area security/counter hybrid war posture. This force, comprising locals of the area, will function on the lines of scouts and act as the eyes and ears of field formations in both forward and rear areas.

- ***Village Defence Committee:***<sup>43</sup> This was instituted in the state of J&K to make border areas self-sufficient in terms of security. It is an organisation of the villagers, by the villagers and for the villagers. The effective utilisation of these entities is dying down due to weak management. There is talk to even disband them. This may not be the correct approach. The role of village defence committees in the 1965 War is well known. They acted as force multipliers to the Army by reporting and countering the moves of the irregular forces who operated by merging with the population. It is proposed that these committees be further strengthened by proper training and equipping. A retired Serviceman in the village should be made responsible for their training. The instructor and members (8-10, depending on the size of the village) may even be given an honorarium to incentivise the matter.
- ***Role of National Cadet Corps:***<sup>44</sup> The role and charter of the National Cadet Corps (NCC) is well known to all. However, it is felt that the NCC can play a larger role towards building a strong and secure society. To this end, it may be prudent to make one year of NCC enrolment compulsory in colleges. During this year, the enrolled undergraduates may be exposed to one outdoor camp, including basic firing and field craft. By doing this, over a period of time, we can at least move towards a security conscious society which can, to an extent, look after its self-security aspects. During a war, such people will be better placed to look after themselves and may even serve as volunteers in the communication zone.

**Disruptive Response:** The armed forces are well aware that the time for set-piece conventional battles is long over. Today, the war may well be over before the military battle begins, or it may be half won/lost before the troops set foot on the ground as happened in Georgia and East Ukraine. Our armed forces have to be prepared to operate under such

eventualities, tailoring our doctrines, strategies, tactics, techniques and procedures accordingly. In other words, our response has to be disruptive in nature which poses a paradigm not planned for by the enemy. This can only be achieved by creating core competencies in new dimensions of warfare through the use of emerging means such as drones, artificial intelligence, robotics and social media.<sup>45</sup> Towards this end, flexibility and mental mobility will need to be the hallmarks of the military and political leadership at all levels.

## Conclusion

The low liability and high payoff paradigm of hybrid warfare will ensure that this remains the preferred choice of war-waging for many nations, irrespective of their size and stature. As a peace-loving nation, we may not subscribe to this ideology, but will definitely have to be prepared to confront it and, at times, to preempt it suitably. Our capabilities, hence, have to match our intent. Towards this, ‘A Whole of the Nation Approach’ both towards coherent capability building and a coordinated response mechanism at the national level is a *sine-qua-non*.

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## Tata Power SED Bags a Prestigious Order to supply High Night vision Device from the Indian Navy



The Tata Power Company Limited, through its Strategic Engineering Division (SED) has bagged a contract from the Indian Navy for the supply of **180 Nos. of Helmet Mounted Night Sights (HMNS)** after competing in an open/ global tender and successfully clearing exhaustive Field Trials held at one of the Naval Bases in Mumbai, which also included sea-water immersion of the equipment upto

15m. Tata Advanced Systems Ltd has agreed to acquire the Strategic Engineering Division of Tata Power Company.

The complete HMNS comprising of a **light weight Twin-Tube Night Vision Binocular** fitted on an **Advanced Combat Helmet (ACH, Bullet-proof)** comes with optimal controls and user friendly adjustments incorporating many advance features like automatic high-light cut-off, inter-changeability from Bino to Mono configuration, and head protection from 9mm x 19mm FMJ RN ammunition with 8.0g/ 124 grain mass fired from Sub Machine Carbine/ MP-5 (tested as per NIJ standard 0106.01 (field condition) with muzzle velocity of 436 + 9.0m/s), etc. **Both the NVD as well as the BP Helmet are of Tata make.**

The Night Vision Equipment so desired by the user is the best & latest in class with **Generation-3**, minimum **1700+** Figure of Merit (**FOM**) Image Intensifier Tubes (**II-tubes**) having inbuilt **Auto-gating** technology that automatically adjusts the light intake thereby substantially enhancing the life & performance of the Tube. The equipment being light weight is best suited for the operational needs of the troops during night ambience as it not only boosts troop's night vision capability several folds but also **drastically improves the depth perception due to its twin-tube configuration**, giving better maneuverability and the much required edge over the enemy.



As per the company's official spokesperson, this is the best Night Vision system to be supplied to any of the Indian Defence Forces till date. With the introduction of this system the company believes that more requirements of Higher FOM Night Vision Systems will be generated in India by users such as Special Forces and Army, which Tata Group is fully confident of meeting and delivering indigenously. Tata Power SED



will be manufacturing such high-end Night Vision Devices in India, which are also in service with world leading forces such as German Army, Swiss Army & US Marine Forces and this is for the first time when such a high-end Night Vision equipment's will be inducted with an Indian Armed Force supplied by an Indian company.

Tata Power SED has been in the process of developing state-of-the-art Night Vision Devices (NVDs) (both in Image Intensifier (II) & Thermal Imaging (TI) domains), and has invested substantially to establish world-class Optronics Manufacturing & Testing facility in its Bangalore Factory for the Night Vision operational requirements of the Indian Forces. This facility also caters to the requirements of maintenance



& after sales support. With maximum indigenization, SED has designed, developed and produced various II & TI devices in the recent past and the same are currently in use with forces such as Border Security Force (BSF), National Security Guard (NSG). Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), Indian Army and Various State Police. The end user's feedback on the performance of these devices during night ambience has been quite encouraging. Today, Tata Power SED is one of the very few private companies in India, which has also exported high end Multi-sensor Electro Optic Systems.



Tata Power SED has been serving Indian Defence Forces for the past 4 decades and is a leading Indian private-sector company in the Design, Development, Production, Integration, Supply and Life-cycle Support of mission-critical Defence & Home Land Security Systems of National importance. Tata Power SED has partnered with the Indian MoD & MHA, Defence & Paramilitary Forces, CAPFs,

DPSUs and DRDO in the development & supply of state-of-the-art Systems and emerged as prime-contractor for important projects of the Indian Govt. in the field of Missile & Rocket Launchers, Computing Platforms, Modernizing Airfields, Border Management, Night Vision etc.

The supply of these 180 high-end Night Vision Devices, which is to be completed in a year from now, is expected to change the dynamics of the Night Vision Indian market which will allow the end-users to raise their qualitative requirement bar to a level where very few forces operate in the global scenario currently.

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# Hybrid Tactics Come of Age: Implications of the Aramco Attack

Manjari Singh

On September 14, 2019, Saudi Arabia's state-owned Aramco's oil facilities were hit by a swarm of 18 drones and seven cruise missiles.<sup>1</sup> Located in the eastern province in the capital city of Dammam, the Abqaiq oil facility and Khurais oil field are protected by a massive air defence system installed jointly by Saudi Arabia and the US. With a market value worth of US\$2 trillion and reserves 10 times bigger than Exxon Mobil, Aramco is crucial not only to Saudi Arabia and the region, but to the entire world!<sup>2</sup> Therefore, naturally, the attack on the sites at once shut down 5 per cent of the world's oil supply, and oil prices rose up by 20 per cent.<sup>3</sup> Even though the functioning of the sites and oil production was reportedly resumed in two weeks' time, the attack had serious implications in terms of the security apparatus as well as vulnerability.

Given the strategic significance of the Saudi facilities, for long, the sites have been identified as a top security risk globally. The risk factor in Khurais oil field was analysed and kept at top priority after a failed attempt by Al-Qaeda way back in 2006 when the terrorist organisation tried to ram two Vehicleborne Improvised Explosive Devices (VBIEDs). Similarly, the Abqaiq facility is heavily guarded and is the most protected place in the world. It has been estimated that a single point of failure in

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the facility could lead to the removal of millions of barrels of oil per day from the global market.<sup>4</sup>

As stated, both the Aramco facility and the oil field are heavily guarded wherein the kingdom has installed armed guards to protect the perimeter. The US, on the other hand, has the super critical high-tech firm Raytheon-produced six battalions of Patriot Defence Systems installed at the sites. Along with this, the US maintains a large Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) station and military personnel stationed in the eastern province to protect against any external threats. Both the US and Saudi Arabia had deployed massive American hardware—satellites, Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS), Patriot missiles, surveillance drones, battleships and jet fighters—yet the jamming of the destructive drones could not be done. More so, it was not even detected! Thus, the September 14, attack on the sites despite such heavy protective measures, has exposed the vulnerability of even protected sites all over the world. More so, it brought to light how non-state actors could destroy such defensive systems by their innovative skills.<sup>5</sup>

The Houthi run *Al Masirah* news agency claimed on September 15, that it was the Zaidi Shia group Ansar Allah that had perpetrated the attack; however, there is a widespread disbelief that the Houthis could have engineered such a pin-pointed attack, with accurate precision and coordination.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the initial reaction by the Saudis and the Americans, after following the trajectories of the attacking drones and cruise missiles from the northwest, was obviously to blame Iran for the attacks. However, no solid claims could be made except that some of the drones were similar in design to Iranian drones used in earlier operations. The two countries claimed to have evidence but no conclusive proof surfaced. Moreover, Iran vehemently denied its involvement.<sup>7</sup> The Persian state further retorted that the Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards shot down the US' RQ-4A Global Hawk BAMS-D, a surveillance drone, in June, but was able to publish the pathway, which in Aramco's case, has not

been shown so far.<sup>8</sup> Hence, a standoff occurred even though President Trump's initial reaction was that his country was "locked and loaded" to punish the perpetrators depending on the verification.<sup>9</sup> Since then, there have been many international attempts back and forth for the peace talks to be initiated and some negotiations to be reached. However, there have been no major developments at that front.

Surprisingly, on November 25, Reuters released a special report titled *Time to Take Out Our Swords – Inside Iran's Plot to Attack Saudi Arabia*. The report claimed that four months before the swarm of drones and missiles crippled the Saudi Aramco facility, "Iranian security officials gathered at a heavily fortified compound in Tehran" in May. The members included "top echelons of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, an elite branch of the Iranian military whose portfolio includes missile development and covert operations".<sup>10</sup> The report further claimed that to "teach a lesson" to the US without getting into direct confrontation with it, a plan was formulated to make Saudi Arabia's oil installations a strategic target. This was the first report to claim Iran's direct involvement in the affair, though the Persian state-run the *Tehran Times* had earlier bashed Reuters for diluting the issue and mingling the facts. The news agency published an article which blamed and accused Reuters of being upset due to the US not attacking Iran.<sup>11</sup>

It is to be noted that the attacks took place at the time when the US Administration under President Trump had given clear indications on disengagement with the Middle East and orienting its focus towards another strategic location – the Indo-Pacific. However, after the September 14 attack, the Trump Administration could not do so and this further irritated the Americans. In that context, re-engagement in the region became imperative because the attacks on the "world's most strategically significant oil facility" reflected poorly on the United States: a country under its protection had been targeted.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the attack further exposed the vulnerability quotient and posed a

question mark on the efficacy of the world's best defence systems installed jointly by the US.

The interesting point is that it is still unclear as to who actually attacked the oil installations! Such manoeuvring and precision based attacks reveal that the hybrid content in future warfare is going to be such that it will be difficult to find out the perpetrators. Moreover, it exposes the vulnerability of strategic installations, even those which are well guarded. A case in point is the ongoing discussion on the risks of water supply disruptions in Saudi Arabia.<sup>13</sup> Water is a key vulnerable component in the kingdom and any disruption to the supplies will be devastating not only for the Saudis but for the entire region.

Similar considerations have engulfed the entire world about the security of key strategic establishments. Even India needs to be watchful and upgrade its defensive systems especially as, recently, in February-March 2019, there was news about the Indian Air Force (IAF) shooting down Pakistani drones in Kutch district of Gujarat. Similarly, the IAF-led Sukhoi-30 shot down drones which had flown in from Pakistan in the Bikaner sector of Rajasthan at the Indo-Pak border.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, it is important not only to keep a check on such attacks but even the probability of such incidents needs to be reduced.

Notably, with the revolution in technology, the sprawling black market and easy availability of Do-It-Yourself (DIY) kits, non-state actors are already armed with insurmountable access to innovations. The Aramco incident, in that context, has reiterated the vulnerability aspect of strategic assets such as nuclear power plants, energy installations and water supply systems globally. These installations need to be protected the most. While the ground systems are well guarded, there is a need to install geo-synchronous satellites for monitoring of such sites. Activation and upgradation of digital and firewall systems to counter any form of cyber threats need to be taken into consideration. Thus, in the larger interest of security of the state,

security of the society and stability in the region, nation-states will do well to install innovative measures to provide effective surveillance and security protection to their strategic assets.

## Notes

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# Notes for Contributors

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- (e) Articles in Newsmagazines: Gurmeet Kanwal, “Pakistan: On the Brink,” *The Week*, November 4, 2007, p. 45.
- (f) Articles from Newspapers: M. K. Bhadrakumar, “New Regionalism in Central Asia,” *The Hindu*, July 14, 2004.
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(h) Reports and Documents:

- United Nations, UNCED, *The Global Partnership for Environment and Development* (New York: United Nations, 1992).
- Canberra Commission, *Report on the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 1996). Available on the Internet at <<http://www.dfat.gov.au/cc/cchome.html>>

(i) Conference Papers:

Michael Williams, "The Discursive Power of Community: Consideration on the European 'Security Community'", Draft Paper presented at the conference on Power, Security and Community: IR Theory and the Politics of EU Enlargement, Copenhagen October 9-12, 1997.

(j) Unpublished Theses and Dissertations:

Christopher Strawn, "Falling of the Mountain: A Political History and Analysis of Bhutan, the Bhutanese Refugees and the Movement in Exile", Dissertation submitted to the University of Wisconsin, USA, 1993, Chap. 4.

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