

# Hybrid Warfare and its Nuances: A Case-Study from South Asia

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## Abstract

*In a hypothetical sense, hybrid war, in its all nuances, may prove extremely damaging for Pakistan due to certain evident fault lines in country's security infrastructure and body politic. India and its closest allies did try to find several avenues, which could be exploited with their location within Pakistan's political, religious, cultural, and psychological domains. Pakistan's response to India's Hybrid War, as exposed recently by the European Watchdog through the 'Indian Chronicles', has been of great significance and worth investigating. Pakistan was able to sail through the troubling times, unleashed by this Hybrid War imposed by India. It retrospectively offers a formative case study in this context. This paper aims to explore how and what kind of a Hybrid War was imposed on Pakistan, which could rather prove a*

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*recurrent security threat. In addition, an effort has been made to determine pathways and methodologies adopted by the hostile neighbour to achieve its defined objectives by undertaking diverse insidious pathways.*

**Keywords:** Hybrid War, Economic Security, India, Pakistan, Psychological Warfare, Informational Warfare

## Introduction

In the global strategic and security community, Hybrid War is meant for gaining interest along with influencing strategic thinking by engineering demoralization at several levels. The concept of Hybrid War is as old as the warfare itself, but its canvass has expanded beyond conventional techniques to other means and ways, including propaganda campaigns.<sup>1</sup> The nature and character of Hybrid War have transformed into an extremely damaging instrument due to its execution and the resultant impact on the people of the targeted country.<sup>2</sup>

Pakistan has been under the cloud of Hybrid War for the last two decades by India and its Western allies particularly, since the overt nuclearization of the Sub-continent in 1998.<sup>3</sup> The concept became even more strenuously popularized after the Russia-Ukraine conflict in 2014.<sup>4</sup> It combines multiple complex avenues simultaneously, mainly purported to achieve the desired goals and thus has become an integral part of modern warfare. Apart from employing a wide range of methods, strategies and technologies, a wide variety of terminologies are also being used by experts to explain Hybrid War phenomenon. Scholars belonging to diverse regions and specialisms, define the concept according to their regional situations and respective imperatives. Some scholars also include state's coercion, conventional and non-traditional threats, grey-zone conflict, financial sanctions, coercive diplomacy, cyber-attacks, irregular criminality, and international pressure within an ever-expansive paradigm

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<sup>1</sup> Erik Reichborn-Kjennerud & Patrick Cullen, "What is Hybrid War?" (2016), *Norwegian Institute of International Affairs*, <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/52131503.pdf>, accessed May 2, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Jack Brown, "An Alternative War: The Development, Impact, and Legality of Hybrid Warfare Conducted by the Nation State," (2018), *The Journal of Global Fault lines*, Vol. 5, Nos. 1-2. [https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.13169/jglobfaul.5.12.0058#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.13169/jglobfaul.5.12.0058#metadata_info_tab_contents), accessed 13 May 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Munir Akram, "Hybrid Warfare", *Dawn*, December 9, 2018 vide <https://www.dawn.com/news/1450346>, accessed May 18, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> James K. Whiter, Making Sense of Hybrid Warfare, 2016, *Connections*, Vol. 15, no. 2, [https://www.jstor.org/stable/26326441?seq=1#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/26326441?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents), accessed May 17, 2021.

of Hybrid War.<sup>5</sup> However, differences withstanding, distinguished academics have mostly defined hybrid conflict trajectories as a combination of conventional and unconventional tools for pursuing hostilities.<sup>6</sup>

In this paper, Hybrid War is defined as the process and employment of multiple avenues to hurt the enemy with all the available kinetic and non-kinetic means of warfare making into a parallel or even complementary pursuit of achieving the goals “by other means.”

Hybrid War has been the subject of intense debate in Pakistan over the recent past because the country found itself under the spotlight by India and a motley of its numerous supporters pursuing their own unilateral agendas and interests. As per our premise in this paper, the concept of Hybrid War is not new and dates back to the inception of the warfare itself,<sup>7</sup> India has often successfully employed all the available means at its discretion to hurt its rival Pakistan militarily, economically, psychologically, internationally, and domestically.<sup>8</sup> The Indian Hybrid Warfare strategy is/was to exploit the existing fault lines in Pakistan’s political system, which is highly polarized and vulnerable to exploitation.<sup>9</sup> From urban terrorism to sectarian killings, manipulation in stock

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<sup>5</sup> Vikrant Deshpande, *Hybrid Warfare: The Changing Character of Conflict*, 2018, *Institute for Defense Studies and Analysis*, <https://idsa.in/system/files/book/book-hybrid-warfare-vdeshpande.pdf>, accessed May 10, 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Erik Reichborn-Kjennerud & Patrick Cullen, “What is Hybrid Warfare?,” 2016, <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/52131503.pdf>, accessed May 3, 2021.

<sup>7</sup> Patrick J. Cullen, *MCDC Countering Hybrid Warfare Project: Understanding Hybrid Warfare, A multinational Capability Development Campaign Project*, 2017, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/647776/dar\\_mcdc\\_hybrid\\_warfare.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/647776/dar_mcdc_hybrid_warfare.pdf), accessed on May 11, 2021.

<sup>8</sup> Muhammad Nadeem Mirza, Summar Iqbal Babar. *The Indian Hybrid Warfare Strategy: Implications for Pakistan*. *Progressive Research Journal of Arts and Humanities (PRJAH)*, *Progressive Research Journal of Arts and Humanities (PRJAH)*, <https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-03013546/document>, accessed May 12, 2021.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

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exchanges to kidnappings for ransom, bomb blasts in shopping malls to suicidal attacks on military convoys, instigation for political uprisings to separatist movements in Balochistan, and the country has several defenseless areas. In addition, India has consistently mount everything possible to hurt Pakistan's image in the international system. However, what India could not achieve was its ultimate objective: weaken the resolve of the Pakistani nation and turn them against its armed forces.

In response to the involvement of the Indian security agencies purported to destabilize Pakistan, Pakistani armed forces successfully blunted the Indian efforts, arrested its operator Kulbushan Jadhav<sup>10</sup> near the Iranian border, and exposed him to the International Court of Justice (ICJ). Pakistan also presented a dossier of India's nefarious activities at the United Nations,<sup>11</sup> and its stance was vindicated once the European Union's DisInfoLab released its report on the Indian subversive activities against Pakistan over the last fifteen years. This study discusses the nature and character of this Hybrid War unleashed against Pakistan; highlights its target type and approaches; discusses the issues and challenges associated with the phenomenon of the Hybrid War in the country and provides some recommendations along with drawing some pertinent conclusions.

#### **The Concept of Hybrid Warfare:**

Terms including hybrid conflict, hybrid threat, hybrid approaches, hybrid efforts, manipulative cyber techniques, propaganda onslaughts and such others are applied to define Hybrid Warfare positing it as a multi-pronged trajectory.<sup>12</sup> The term encompasses all other praxis to explain the nature of

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<sup>10</sup> Kulbushan Jadhav, an Indian Navy serving officer was found guilty of spying and terrorism charges after he was caught near the Iranian border.

<sup>11</sup> Anwar Iqbal and Naveed Siddiqui, "Pakistan shares dossier on India's 'terror campaign' with UN Secretary General," *Dawn*, November 25, 2020. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1592313>, accessed May 25, 2021.

<sup>12</sup> The Conversation, June 17, 2019, Explainer: What is 'hybrid warfare' and what is meant by the 'grey zone'? <https://theconversation.com/explainer-what-is-hybrid-warfare-and-what-is-meant-by-the-grey-zone-118841>, accessed May 10, 2021.

war in this age.<sup>13</sup> It is a catchall expression to denote various characteristics of war by using all available means of power that involve both political and military strength, tactics, strategies, operational means and latest technologies. The term ‘hybrid’ was initially applied in the field of biology with a Latin etymology that means, producing different breeds, varieties and species of both animals and plants through human manipulation. However, in this context, the term hybrid is new to the lexicon of conflict and war. If we reflect on the traditional meaning of war, all wars were hybrid but with the changing nature of the world and the rise of technology and media, the characteristics of war also changed. Predominantly with the blend of various means of war, Hybrid War has emerged as an important tool for showcasing the state’s power design and strategic moves without engaging in the actual conventional war itself.

In the emerging and ever-changing world of strategy and geopolitics, states use four triads of Hybrid Warfare: statecraft, technological, coercive, and conventional.<sup>14</sup> The states harness economic pressure, legal hairsplitting, diplomatic means, information, and technological spaces, cyber threats and attacks, actual surgical strikes, military, and intelligence operations; and, air, sea, and land as tools to weaken their enemy. They create an environment that may disable the smooth functioning of their targeted enemy just making its structures almost dysfunctional. These mentioned measures, among others, allow states to resort to the overt use of armed forces and mix other means such as coercive economic, political, and diplomatic pressures against another country to achieve their desired objectives. In an emphatic way, the flow and reception of information and its subtle manipulation turn into an important tool lodging itself at the heart of any successful operation against a targeted enemy.

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<sup>13</sup> Sean Monaghan, *Countering Hybrid Warfare So What for the Future Joint Force?*, 2018, [https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/prism/prism\\_8-2/PRISM\\_8-2\\_Monaghan.pdf](https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/prism/prism_8-2/PRISM_8-2_Monaghan.pdf), accessed on May 17, 2021.

<sup>14</sup> Ehsan Mehmood Khan, *Hybrid Warfare: A Conceptual Perspective*, <https://www.hilal.gov.pk/eng-article/hybrid-warfare:-a-conceptual-perspective/MjYz.html>, accessed May 7, 2021.

### **Nature and Character of Hybrid War**

Since the objective of every war and escalation is to win over the argument--whether on the battlefield or on the negotiating table as per the Chinese philosopher and strategist Sun Tzu who pronounced it some 2500 years ago—triumph remains the ultimate focal point. Sun Tzu insisted that the ‘acme of the skill is not to defeat the enemy on the battlefield but to win a war without fighting.’<sup>15</sup> However, history is replete with violent physical engagements over territorial and such conflicts without deterrence in place, making them into unilateral walk-overs.

The history of world’s warfare so far indicates that all the wars are inherently political because the stakeholders often aim to subdue each other by utilizing all available means to achieve their objectives.<sup>16</sup> Warfare by its very nature reflects physical destruction, deaths, devastation, and chaos in the country on the receiving end.<sup>17</sup> However, the character of modern wars is changing at a rapid pace, perhaps because the wars have become more expensive than ever before and there are more avenues and optional stratagems available to subjugate the enemy at a lesser cost. Interestingly, neither the concept of Hybrid War is new nor the objectives of the perpetrators, however, the scope of execution has expanded beyond the usual due to the technological developments, nations’ capacity to absorb shock, and resistance to foreign interventions. No matter how big the enemy is, even the small and weak states can go to any length in defending their territorial integrity and sovereignty. In the process, states may suffer beyond economic recovery, but people are willing to take on the aggressors making it into a more drawn and multidimensional pursuit.

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<sup>15</sup> Sun Tzu, “The Art of War,” (ed.) James Clavell (Lahore: Combine Printers Ltd., 1983).

<sup>16</sup> Jordan Lindell, Clausewitz: War, Peace and Politics, 2009, <https://www.e-ir.info/2009/11/26/clausewitz-war-peace-and-politics/>, accessed May 11, 2021.

<sup>17</sup> Claude Berrebi and Jordan Ostwald, “Exploiting the Chaos: Terrorist Target Choice Following Natural Disasters,” 2013, *Southern Economic Journal*, Vol. 79, No. 4, [https://www.jstor.org/stable/23809493?seq=1#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/23809493?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents), accessed May 21, 2021.

Afghanistan is an example of people's resistance and pride in their land, culture, and Islamic values. The country may be in ruins today, but, to some persuasive extent, its people have defeated at least two superpowers in the last 40 years.<sup>18</sup> Historically speaking, Afghanistan was used both as a buffer and a battlefield between the British and the Russians during the 19<sup>th</sup> century due to its unique location.<sup>19</sup> The Russians, in their quest to secure their expanded southern borders and to obtain "access to warm waters," pursued a forward policy whereas the British incessantly strove for extending their Sub-continental outreach to the northwest.<sup>20</sup> However, soon these two contemporary global imperial powers realized that the hardships due to the mountainous terrain and the unreliability of the local support, would permit them just about to keep Afghanistan as a buffer state between them.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, through "the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907, Russia promised to consider Afghanistan as outside her sphere of influence and agreed to conduct relations with Afghanistan through the British. Britain, in return, promised not to occupy or annex any Afghan territory or to interfere in the country's internal affairs."<sup>22</sup> Now, after over a century, Afghanistan, following a type of reenactment of that experience is in the process of restarting afresh following the withdrawal of the US-led NATO troops in August 2021.

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<sup>18</sup> Mujib Mashal, "How the Taliban Outlasted a Superpower: Tenacity and Carnage," 2020, *The New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/26/world/asia/taliban-afghanistan-war.html>, accessed on May 10, 2021.

<sup>19</sup> William Byrd, *Lessons from Afghanistan's History for the Current Transition and Beyond*, 2012, United States Institute for Peace, <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR314.pdf>, accessed May 20, 2021.

<sup>20</sup> William C. Green, "The Historic Russian Drive for a Warm Water Port: Anatomy of a Geopolitical Myth," 1993, *Naval War College*, Vol. 46, No. 2. [https://www.jstor.org/stable/44642451?seq=1#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/44642451?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents), accessed May 12, 2021.

<sup>21</sup> Thomas T. Hammond, "Red Flag Over Afghanistan: The Communist Coup, the Soviet Invasion, and the Consequences," (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1984), 6.

<sup>22</sup> Louis Dupree, *Afghanistan*, (Oxford University Press, 1973), 433.



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On the other hand, traditionally, India has made use of all elements of the Hybrid War to weaken Pakistan from within to make it a pliant state so that it can resolve all its disputes including Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) on its own terms. While India applied its regular military force across the LoC aiming at the military and civilian targets, it concurrently harnessed Special Forces for a covert instigation of Baloch nationalists to raise alarms in the Western capitals. The same has been highlighted in the report of EU DisinfoLab that India spent 15 years spreading anti-Pakistan sentiments through some 750 fake media outlets all over the world.<sup>23</sup> Simultaneously, India used its diplomatic leverage effectively to hurt Pakistan's economy and stature by implicating it in money laundering and terror financing.

#### **Hybrid War and its Perceptions in Pakistan:**

Hybrid War, though not new to warfare, is far more effective than violent and direct military engagements between known adversaries.<sup>24</sup> Conventional wars are more expensive due to advanced technology weapons but remain short-lived, whereas Hybrid War acts as a slow poison on the target state and delivers a deeper impact. It aims at disrupting the daily lives of the people on the receiving end by affecting their psychology and emotions due to its inherently propagandist nature. Moreover, "Hybrid Warfare uses coordinated military, political, economic, civilian and informational (MPECI) instruments of power that extend far beyond the military realm."<sup>25</sup> That is why the challenges to deal with the Hybrid War like situations are far more complex and need a carefully crafted strategy to deny success to the enemy.

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<sup>23</sup> Alaphilippe et al. *Indian Chronicles*, 2020, <https://www.disinfo.eu/publications/indian-chronicles-deep-dive-into-a-15-year-operation-targeting-the-eu-and-un-to-serve-indian-interests/>, accessed May 13, 2021.

<sup>24</sup> James K. Wither, "Making Sense of Hybrid Warfare," 2016, *Connections*, Vol. 15, No.2, [https://www.jstor.org/stable/26326441?seq=1#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/26326441?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents), accessed May 2, 2021.

<sup>25</sup> MCDC Countering Hybrid Warfare Project: *Understanding Hybrid Warfare*, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 2017.

Hybrid War is usually launched through multiple approaches and platforms. Its effectiveness is dependent on the planning and execution of these implements. India, in the last 15 years, has deployed all tenets of the Hybrid War against Pakistan, adopting multiple approaches. Violent means were adopted against soft targets like educational institutions, religious seminaries, and business centres to tarnish the image of Pakistan both within and outside.

Following are some of the key approaches that have negatively affected the internal and external stability of Pakistan.

- a) ***Diplomatic Maneuvers:*** India employed diplomatic maneuvers at international forums to isolate Pakistan on charges of supporting cross-border terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). India spent billions of dollars in its Hybrid War on Pakistan in the last 15 years, as revealed by the European Union's DisInfoLab through the Indian Chronicles.<sup>26</sup> The sole purpose was to project Pakistan as a perpetrator of extremism and terrorism in the region by lobbying in the Western capitals, concurrently projecting India as a peaceful democracy. India was largely successful in its efforts and was able to malign Pakistan in the Western capitals.
  
- b) ***Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and International Monetary Fund (IMF):*** By being the second most populous country in the world, India's markets are extremely attractive to the western world, and Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) have an effective clout in the power corridors of the Western capitals.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, India managed to persuade the minds of the major financial organizations to put pressure on Pakistan, and hence,

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<sup>26</sup> Ramsha Jahangir, "Indian network lobbying against Pakistan exposed," *Dawn*, December 10, 2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1594928>, accessed May 15, 2021.

<sup>27</sup> India, Inc. feels power of NRI punch, *The Economic Times*, September 11, 2006, [https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/company/corporate-trends/india-inc-feels-power-of-nri-punch/articleshow/1975918.cms?utm\\_source=contentofinterest&utm\\_medium=text&utm\\_campaign=cppst](https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/company/corporate-trends/india-inc-feels-power-of-nri-punch/articleshow/1975918.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst)

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Pakistan was placed on the grey list by the FATF in June 2018. Similarly, India had put extreme conditions for financial assistance from the IMF and forced Pakistan to seek financial help from friendly countries and avoid a default-like situation soon after Imran Khan's government came to power in August 2018.<sup>28</sup> However, the IMF accepted Pakistan's request for financial assistance in July 2019, only after it was assured of its full compliance of even tougher conditions. Hasan further mentioned that they (the IMF program) forced the government to appoint a governor and the finance minister of their choice who could pursue the recommendations put forth by the IMF and FATF. This is how they use these key internal positions within the government to pursue their larger goals. The IMF program has emerged as a new instrument of Hybrid War against Pakistan and this instrument has been ably used by the international powers to put pressure and force Pakistan to go to the IMF for the Balance of Payment support otherwise the country would be blacklisted.

- c) **Media war:** Another approach that India adopted in its Hybrid War on Pakistan was through an organized information and propaganda campaign.<sup>29</sup> India launched a multipronged strategy to malign Pakistan in cross-border terrorism in its part of IIOJ&K. India funded generously both local and international media to propagate fake news and project Pakistan as an extremist state sponsoring terrorism. India also sponsored several ethnic and separatist leaders to live abroad and fan hatred against Pakistan. It has concurrently organized anti-Pakistan demonstrations and

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<sup>28</sup> Pakistan took cash assistance from China, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates (UAE) in 2018 to avoid a default on its international commitments. Certain amount from China and Saudi Arabia is still held by State Bank of Pakistan.

<sup>29</sup> Mushahid Hussain Syed, "Joint cyber inter-services command needed to counter undeclared hybrid war," February 23, 2021, *The Express Tribune*, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2285750/joint-cyber-inter-services-command-needed-to-counter-undeclared-hybrid-war-mushahid>, accessed May 15, 2021.

rallies to catch the attention of the western media and governments. These assertions have now been confirmed by the EU's DisInfoLab report published on December 9, 2020.<sup>30</sup> The report verifies Pakistan's allegations against India of creating the insurgency-like situation in Balochistan and supporting urban terrorism in Karachi.

- d) Internal instability:* The barbarous attack on Army Public School on December 16, 2014, was the watershed event in Pakistan's history of its struggle against extremism and terrorism.<sup>31</sup> In an armed attack, later accepted by the Taliban, more than 150 people embraced martyrdom, 132 of them being students. India has been funding and fueling sabotage and subversive activities through its proxies across the length and breadth of Pakistan. One of its operators, Kulbushan Jadhav was apprehended near the Iran-Pakistan border.<sup>32</sup> He was a serving Indian Navy officer with a task to engage local mercenaries for creating chaos in Balochistan by killing the ethnic population of the Hazara community. Concurrently, he was also active in organizing ethno-sectarian violence in Karachi. India took the case of Jadhav to the International Court of Justice (ICJ), where Pakistan's stance was vindicated, and Jadhav's punishment was not revoked. Indian media was fully on board and undertook an organized campaign to project India as a peaceful neighbour who was under attack by Pakistan-sponsored cross-border terrorism. India targeted the less-informed Pakistani population through fake news and propaganda campaigns from its own media. However, Indian media got badly

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<sup>30</sup> Indian Chronicles: Deep Dive into a 15-Year-Old Operation Targeting the EU and the UN to Serve Indian Interests. <https://www.disinfo.eu/publications/indian-chronicles-deep-dive-into-a-15-year-operation-targeting-the-eu-and-un-to-serve-indian-interests/> accessed April 8, 2021.

<sup>31</sup> BBC, Pakistan Taliban: Peshawar school attack leaves 141 dead, December 16, 2014, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-30491435>, accessed May 1, 2021.

<sup>32</sup> Dawn, "Timeline: How the Kulbushan Jadhav saga unfolded," July 18, 2019, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1493236>, accessed May 20, 2021.

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exposed when one of its outspoken anchors Arnab Goswami's WhatsApp leaks<sup>33</sup> came to the fore about the Pulwama and Balakot incidents. Two years after the Pulwama incident, it is learnt that Balakot strikes were pre-planned to take revenge for the Pulwama incident without considering the consequences of conflict escalation between the two nuclear neighbours.<sup>34</sup> India's Prime Minister Modi placed the entire region at risk of conflict escalation only to gain sympathy from his vote bank for the lives of 40 soldiers and then declare victory in Balakot strikes, without accepting the loss of two fighter jets of IAF including a captured pilot.

- e) ***Electoral Engineering in the Hybrid:*** Electoral engineering or sheer manipulation is the simplest way to create chaos in the target state because if the results of the general elections are not accepted by the stakeholders, the result may be political instability best suited for Hybrid War. Electoral engineering is the most conducive platform to create instability at the grassroots level particularly due to its intensity and longevity since it starts during the pre-election period and continues during and post-election into the new government's tenure. Election engineering affords an ideal opportunity for the perpetrators of the Hybrid War. Without going too far back in history, if one looks at the 2013 general elections in Pakistan, we find that it was followed by the longest sit-in at the 'D-Chowk' in front of the Parliament House. The sit-in by PTI continued for 126 days and terminated only due to an unfortunate enemy strike at the APS on December 16, 2014, killing 150 students and teachers. The enemy's purpose of launching a Hybrid War was achieved because the nation and the law enforcing agencies were glued on to the management of

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<sup>33</sup> Chats of Arnab Goswami expose the Government even more than the anchor and businessman, National Herald, <https://www.nationalheraldindia.com/india/chats-of-arnab-goswami-expose-the-government-even-more-than-the-anchor-and-businessman>, accessed March 14, 2021.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

Dharna (sit-in) and the enemy struck. Opposition parties have lately been vocal in their criticism of the army for allegedly bringing Prime Minister Imran Khan into power by manipulating the 2018 general elections, and later influencing the governance through a façade of civilian rule.<sup>35</sup> The PPP leader Asif Zardari in the past and PML (N) leader Nawaz Sharif more recently have been extremely critical of the army. Its' role in the election engineering to bring PTI into power is an allegation repeatedly rejected by the Pakistan Army. Likewise, some of the religious party leaders who were supporters of the Army are also seen criticizing them since recent years.

**Issues and challenges:**

- 1) In the current financial situation, it is hard for Pakistan to come out of the IMF program. This was one of the biggest challenges for the former Prime Minister Imran Khan and his successor, Mian Shehbaz Sharif since the food and utility prices remain high and are going up. Given the global and local factors, poverty graph within the country is also getting accented which makes the country more vulnerable to misinformation by denying a strong element of consensus and confidence. Unemployment, both due to the financial position and the pandemic is getting worse. Youth unemployment is becoming a serious challenge for the government to meet. Coming out of the FATF pressure is another alarming situation for the government of Pakistan.
- 2) Dealing with the media and propaganda war is becoming critical with each passing day. It has become a serious weapon where youngsters are becoming an easy target and mobilized towards achieving ideological grounds of the enemy.

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<sup>35</sup> Baqir Sajjad Syed, "Army rejects allegation of meddling in political affairs," January 12, 2021, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1601016>, accessed January 17, 2021.

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- 3) India attempted several times to diplomatically isolate Pakistan. The recent 2021 trade relaxation agreement between India-Pakistan highlighted the nefarious attitude of the Prime Minister Modi when the Indian government on the one hand, agreed to open trade with Pakistan while on the other, approved in their national assembly to hoist Indian flags on the government institutions across Indian Occupied Kashmir. That highlights the Indian government's strategic design to malign Pakistan while they were certain of Pakistan's stance on the issue of Kashmir.
- 4) The biggest challenge that Pakistan faced in India's Hybrid War and its continuous fall-out has been the impossible nature of distinguishing or even identifying the perpetrator, because India mainly operates through its proxies. India's support of urban terrorism in Karachi and separatist groups in Balochistan and nudging terrorist activities from across the western borders often created enormous challenges to Pakistan's LEAs in discovering, controlling, and eliminating them without creating panic among the local populace. Pakistan's LEAs led by the Armed Forces took some time to understand and track the hidden enemy but, in the end, it was accomplished with precision and without much resistance.
- 5) India's Hybrid War on Pakistan was particularly challenging because it was jointly conducted by the state and the Non-State Actors (NSAs). While India's state organs were targeting Pakistani posts and civilians on the Line of Control (LoC), it is funded and supported by NSAs who were engaged in subversive activities across Pakistan.

### **Recommendations**

As seen above, one may say that the Hybrid War affirms its efficacy in strategic warfare, primarily because it is less expensive and more damaging for the state and society which are put on the receiving end.

India adopted this route against Pakistan once it achieved nuclear parity and following the Kargil escalations, it began to pursue it more vehemently with 9/11 and Afghan imbroglio, appearing as conducive opportunities. Pakistan took time to understand India's slow but steady strategy anchored on multiple attritions but the former managed to eliminate its proxies yet not without stupendous costs in human lives and material. However, it is a continuous war because none of the disputes with India including Jammu & Kashmir, have been resolved and therefore the war is not over, and varying from social media to diaspora and global fora it remains persistent. Therefore, it is recommended that Pakistan develops multi-pronged strategies to counter India's multiple threats. They may include:

- A. Pakistan needs to work on improving its internal policies anchored on consensus and peaceful coexistence that otherwise leave open loopholes that are misused by external factors. To overcome the internal challenges Pakistan needs to put her house in order. Work on improving the fault lines varying from ethnic to sectarian and intra-institutional, so that they offer a cohesive defense against external instigations and props. In this regard, Pakistan needs to improve its governance structure, bring political stability, and improve the culture of fighting against corruption amongst its all the sectors while prioritizing its community development. Inducting transparent accountability in all its civil and khaki sectors, irrespective of their stature, must become a national urgency along with improving the judicial system from the grassroots to the top echelon. While inducting reforms at the higher level in the larger interest of the country, local expertise should be equally utilized to overcome the internal issues and for improving fault lines at the subaltern levels.
  
- B. Karachi being the economic growth center of the country needs to be stabilized on all fronts leaving no area vulnerable to chasms and conflict.



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- C. The lack of inclusive governance in the province of Sindh in general, and Karachi and likewise instability in Balochistan, provide fertile ground for external forces to manipulate the internal dynamics of a plural society like Pakistan. Hence, maintaining peace and stability in Karachi and Balochistan is essential for Pakistan's overall economic development and prosperity. This will enable Pakistan to maintain its revenue growth and financial sustenance besides closing all those voids that otherwise remain attractive to external manipulation. Improved infrastructure in Karachi is an important area that needs an immediate response on the part of the government to improve the overall financial business. Along with Gwadar, that will enable both domestic and foreign investors to take interest in sustaining and creating businesses in Pakistan.
- D. To improve the economic situation at large, Pakistan needs to cut down on its imports and work on improving its exports by undertaking all kinds of systemic and corrective measures. IMF program needs not to be made the first and prime agenda to avoid financial pressure and involvement of external forces in the mainstream politics of Pakistan anymore. It will bring along short-term economic consequences but will be better for the long-term development and prosperity of Pakistan.
- E. In terms of the Balochistan issue, the government needs to bring Baloch people into mainstream politics, and human capital development, should be the official priority. Institutions of higher learning such as the universities, provincial departments, and local governance structures will substantiate Pakistan's political sinews and cohesion. This will help bring forth highly skilled people into various key development projects such as the CPEC across the Indus lands and especially in an underdeveloped Balochistan. Within this perspective, NUST has opened its Campus in Quetta to help support the Baloch population and improve their human capital through such more efforts towards the institution building are needed.

- F. Over the issue of western borders, Pakistan has already started fencing across the demarcation line to prevent unchecked movement of undesirable elements. Pakistan also assisted the Afghan authorities and other parties regarding the peaceful and orderly exit of the foreign forces in 2021, mainly to bring/maintain stability within Afghanistan and the neighboring region, and more formative work is needed on similar lines to help build a cross-ethnic consensus in Afghanistan with less inimical fall-out for Pakistan.
- G. Islamabad needs to improve the overall image of Pakistan that India otherwise has been exploiting to malign it globally and it must develop strong counter-narratives to blunt the Indian media's onslaught. Also, it needs to respond to India's hybrid strategic designs and trajectories on time.
- H. Like India, Pakistan also needs to establish its media and research units across the world to promote a positive image and narrative and that is where public diplomacy deserves significant attention. To achieve that, Pakistan should first establish its national/central narrative and implement it throughout government departments, and by aiming for universal education within the country. The state needs to watch closely the messages and signaling over social media platforms in such a manner that neither rights of the masses are affected, nor the state security is threatened by foreign instigators.
- I. Pakistan's LEAs should remain vigilant against Indian proxies and must not allow them to flourish again. Pakistan must not lower its guard against the activities of the Indian Consulates in Afghanistan or elsewhere, even if its role has been marginalized in the recent past.
- J. Last but not least, Pakistan's financial bodies must keep a watch on foreign funding of NSAs, including NGOs, and *Madrassahs*.

## **Conclusion**

The enduring rivalry between India and Pakistan has been changing the battlegrounds. From all-out conventional wars in the pre-nuclear era to the limited military engagements in Siachen, Kargil and Balakot under the nuclear overhang, to all spectrum Hybrid War has been spanning over two decades, India has left no stone unturned to subjugate Pakistan with an active support of the US and its allies.<sup>36</sup> The people of Pakistan were subjected to brutal attacks by suicide bombers who were trained, funded, and facilitated by India. At least 40-50 such attacks were inflicted each year on different locations: places of worship to the shopping malls, and children's schools to in-person target killings of military, religious and sectarian leaders. The LEAs of Pakistan bore the brunt of India-sponsored physical attacks under the ambit of Hybrid War because such attacks were supported by a well-planned media campaign against the Pakistani Armed Forces, their installations, and its populace across the Indus lands. Information-led warfare and propaganda campaigns were the other tools effectively deployed by India to create internal chaos and to exert pressure from the outside, aimed at humbling the country at former's prerogatives. Unfortunately, India got enough local support for the same in the form of so-called Baloch separatism and some other clusters from amongst the ethnic nationalists who could be easily lured for petty personal gains. Hybrid war in its all nuances and manifestation was aimed at damaging Pakistan from within, due to certain evident fault lines. Its current politico-military leadership continues to fight with all its resources at hand. ■

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<sup>36</sup> Zia Ul Haque Shamsi, "Hybrid War Outplays Nuclear Deterrence," *Daily Times*, (Islamabad), March 16, 2021. <https://dailytimes.com.pk/734757/hybrid-war-outplays-nuclear-deterrence/> accessed May 25, 2021.