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Hybrid Warfare: Strategies and Counterstrategies in the India-Pakistan Rivalry

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ABSTRACT

Hybrid Warfare represents a sophisticated amalgamation of diverse warfare strategies, seamlessly blending both conventional and non-conventional techniques. This nuanced approach encompasses an array of tactics, incorporating elements from fake news to cybercrimes, civil unrest to economic warfare, and diplomacy to separatist movements. Also recognized as

asymmetrical or new-generation warfare, its primary objective is not confrontation but to meticulously identify and exploit the fault lines, vulnerabilities, and trigger points within the targeted nation. Pakistan has been subject to hybrid security threats from its historic rival India since the day of independence. The paper sheds light on Indian hybrid warfare against Pakistan which broadly encompasses political and diplomatic support to the separatist movements, targeted campaigns on social media, and hindering the timely completion of CPEC and other developmental projects. Given the intensity of hybrid security threats and their fall-flanged impact on the peace, development, and security of the state, the article has attempted to provide comprehensive policy options for Pakistan to effectively counter the hybrid threats.

Keywords: Hybrid Threats, Economic Warfare, Grey Zone Conflict, Non-kinetic Means, Pakistan

Introduction

With the advent of information and communication technology and nuclear weapon systems, the cost of conventional warfare has increased multifold.¹ This has left state and non-state actors to avoid direct military confrontation and resort to non-conventional ways of warfare. As a result, “hybrid warfare” has gained prominence as the optimal approach for a state to attain its national objectives. The use of the term in academic and military circles might be recent, however, it is agreed by the experts that the tactics of hybrid warfare are as old as the war itself.² Hybrid warfare involves strategically coordinating diverse power centers to exploit the enemy's

¹ Hassan Jalil Shah and Muhammad Ehsan, “HYBRID WARFARE: EMERGING CHALLENGES for PAKISTAN,” *Journal of Contemporary Studies* 11, no. 2 (2022): 69–85, <https://doi.org/10.54690/jcs.v11i2.234>.

² Murat Caliskan and Michel Liégeois, “The Concept of ‘Hybrid Warfare’ Undermines NATO’s Strategic Thinking: Insights from Interviews with NATO Officials,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 32, no. 2 (December 20, 2020): 1–25, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2020.1860374>.

weaknesses in diplomatic, economic, political, and societal arenas. Typically orchestrated by intelligence agencies, these operations vary in pace, intensity, and timelines.³

The primary objective of hybrid warfare is to destabilize, demoralize, and disintegrate the adversary. What distinguishes it from other modes of conflict is the fusion of diverse strategies, incorporating subversive tactics and kinetic methods. This enables the aggressor to avoid easy identification or counteraction. Information warfare, economic and cyber assaults, proxy conflicts, terrorist operations, propaganda, and diplomatic and political pressures are the essential aspects of hybrid warfare.

Decades of economic challenges, ethnic and sectarian divisions, and fragile governance have exposed Pakistan to Indian hybrid warfare.⁴ For instance, As East Pakistan witnessed growing unrest in the late 1960s, India's involvement through the Mukti Bahini and the controversial Ganga airliner hijacking in 1971 added fuel to the fire, ultimately contributing to the events leading to East Pakistan's separation and the outbreak of war.⁵ Concerns have also been raised on the subject of the activities of MQM and Baloch separatists in Pakistan's provinces of Balochistan and Sindh, and their alleged connections to India.⁶

³ Air Marshal M. Ashfaq Arain, "India's Hybrid Warfare against Pakistan: Challenges & Response Options by Air Marshal M. Ashfaq Arain," ed. Sarah Siddiq Aneel, *Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies*, July 16, 2022, <https://casstt.com/indias-hybrid-warfare-against-pakistanchallenges-response-options/>.

⁴ Hassan Jalil Shah and Muhammad Ehsan, "HYBRID WARFARE: EMERGING CHALLENGES for PAKISTAN," *Journal of Contemporary Studies* 11, no. 2 (2022): 69–85, <https://doi.org/10.54690/jcs.v11i2.234>

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ashfaq, Sarah "India's Hybrid Warfare against Pakistan"

Beyond backing separatists, India's hybrid warfare against Pakistan includes leveraging military deployments for political pressure, manipulating international organizations for influence, and waging a relentless information war through propaganda.⁷

This research examines the concept of hybrid warfare to understand the new and changing threats Pakistan faces. It explores the reasons behind the shift from traditional warfare to hybrid tactics, identifies the range of hybrid threats Pakistan might encounter in the future, and suggests possible policy approaches to combat them.

Hybrid Warfare

The term “hybrid warfare” rose to prominence in security and policy circles in the 2000s and got exponential recognition after the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014.⁸ It was first adopted in academic and military circles by Frank Hoffman while discussing the evolution of warfare strategies in the post-Cold War world.⁹ Hoffman defines hybrid threats as the simultaneous employment of “a tailored mix of conventional weapons, irregular tactics, terrorism, and criminal behavior in the same time and battle space to obtain their political objectives.”¹⁰

Hybrid warfare involves the use of a variety of means and strategies either simultaneously or in succession. It is considered a “victim-driven warfare” since the victim becomes an actor in

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Reichborn-Kjennerud, Erik, and Patrick Cullen. “What Is Hybrid Warfare?” Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), 2016. <https://www.nupi.no/en/publications/cristin-pub/what-is-hybrid-warfare>.

⁹ Frank Hoffman, “Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars” (Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, December 2007), https://www.potomacinstitute.org/images/stories/publications/potomac_hybridwar_0108.pdf.

¹⁰ Frank Hoffman, “On Not-So-New Warfare: Political Warfare vs Hybrid Threats,” War on the Rocks, July 28, 2014, <https://warontherocks.com/2014/07/on-not-so-new-warfare-political-warfare-vs-hybrid-threats/>.

the conflict.¹¹ There are also several other words for the terms such as asymmetrical, non-conventional, grey zone conflict, ‘new generation warfare’, ‘whole of government’ approach and so on.¹² Hybrid threats encompass political, military, economic, social, and information means on one hand and conventional, irregular, terrorist and disruptive/criminal conflict methods on the other hand. The U.S. Joint Forces Command has also identified that it may include a combination of state and non-state actors.”¹³

In 1999, a study titled "Unrestricted Warfare," conducted by Chinese officers, contended that the nature of war had transformed. According to this perspective, the traditional Clausewitzian approach of employing armed forces to force an adversary into submission was no longer relevant. Instead, the revised principle advocates for employing a comprehensive range of methods, encompassing both armed and non-armed strategies, military and non-military approaches, and lethal as well as non-lethal means, to coerce the enemy into embracing one's interests.¹⁴

With modern technology's evolution, the battlefield's geographic dimensions are fading and there is more emphasis on winning wars without firing a single bullet. The British-American geo-political thinker and strategist Colin Gray mentions that categories of warfare can no longer be fitted “into neat, tidy boxes” and one can expect to see “more tools and tactics of destruction –

¹¹ Brig Ehsan Mehmood Khan, “Hybrid Warfare: A Conceptual Perspective,” Hilal Publications - ISPR, n.d., <https://www.hilal.gov.pk/eng-article/detail/MjYz.html>.

¹² Munir Akram, “Hybrid Warfare,” DAWN, December 9, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1450346>.

¹³ Definition by the U.S. Joint Forces Command

¹⁴ Stephen Blank, “The Chinese Concept of ‘Unrestricted Warfare’: Global Competitors up the Ante,” Second Line of Defense, April 11, 2014, <https://sldinfo.com/2014/04/the-chinese-concept-of-unrestricted-warfare-global-competitors-up-the-ante/>.

from the sophisticated to the simple—being employed simultaneously in hybrid and more complex forms of warfare.”¹⁵

The former Chief of Staff of the US Army, General Raymond T. Odierno also regards dealing with hybrid warfare to be a “costly lesson” and that in the future, “it will be increasingly common for the army to engage in environments having both regular military and irregular paramilitary adversaries, in the pretext of terrorism, criminality, and other complications.”¹⁶

Instruments of Hybrid Warfare

Like conventional warfare, hybrid warfare also employs a range of instruments and tactics most notably the deployment of regular military troops, use of proxies, economic coercion, diplomacy, information warfare, and cyber-attacks. By employing all the available means of coercion and engaging every citizen of the adversary, hybrid warfare allows the initiator to circumvent UN Laws and Geneva Conventions that uphold fundamental human rights and prohibit attacks on non-combatants.¹⁷ This hybrid warfare transcends traditional theater of war, employing proxies and information campaigns to destabilize nations. States may secretly employ armed groups to spread internal conflict, cripple economies, and smear reputations. Social and electronic media have become manipulation frontlines. State and non-state actors use information like

¹⁵ Robert M. Gates, “A Balanced Strategy: Reprogramming the Pentagon for a New Age,” *Foreign Affairs* 88, no. 1 (2009): 28–40, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20699432>.

¹⁶ Raymond T. Odierno, “The U.S. Army in a Time of Transition: Building a Flexible Force,” *Foreign Affairs* 91, no. 3 (2012): 7–11, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23217961>.

¹⁷ Jerrod K. Allen, “Cognitive Depth and Hybrid Warfare: Exploring the Nature of Unique Time, Space, and Logic Frames a Monograph” (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: School of Advanced Military Studies United States Army Command and General Staff College, May 25, 2017), <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/tr/pdf/AD1038857.pdf>.

weapons, firing off misinformation and propaganda to twist public opinion, influence policies, disseminate distrust in institutions, and widen societal cracks.¹⁸

Diplomacy is also an effective instrument of hybrid warfare that is used to isolate and disparage a target state among nations. The initiator employs offensive diplomatic capabilities and statecraft across national and international realms to exploit the vulnerabilities of the target state which leads to the imposition of castigating actions on it.¹⁹ Economic sanctions, lawfare, and other intentional disruptions are aimed at significantly weakening the target state's economic element of national power by impacting its international trade and domestic economy.

Other important tools in hybrid warfare include information management, cyber-attacks, and artificial intelligence. While considered the less preferable option, a state's kinetic application of the military can still be employed to achieve the desired objective and disrupt the existing status quo.²⁰

Indian Hybrid Warfare Strategies against Pakistan

India's hybrid warfare strategies against Pakistan will be discussed here under the following three categories:

- a. Bringing Political Instability
- b. Causing Economic Slowdown

¹⁸ William C. Murray II, "Hybrid Warfare Dilemmas in the Middle Colonies during the American Revolution" (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: School of Advanced Military Studies United States Army Command and General Staff College, May 25, 2017), <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/tr/pdf/AD1039768.pdf>.

¹⁹ Sascha-Dominik Bachmann and Håkan Gunneriusson, "Http://Fhs.diva-Portal.org/Smash/Record.jsf?Pid=Diva2%3A1169376," DIVA, December 26, 2017, <https://fhs.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A1169376&dsid=-3575>; Inam Ullah Shah, "Indian Hybrid War: Challenges for Pakistan," Strafasia, June 18, 2019, <https://strafasia.com/indian-hybrid-war-challenges-for-pakistan/>.

²⁰ Gary Schaub, Martin Murphy, and Frank G Hoffman, "Hybrid Maritime Warfare," *The RUSI Journal* 162, no. 1 (January 2, 2017): 32–40, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2017.1301631>.

- c. Orchestrating International Defamation Efforts, and in turn, global isolation for Pakistan

Bringing Political Instability to Pakistan

The partition of British India in 1947 marked the beginning of a historically complex and strained relationship between Pakistan and India. In the light of the realist perspective, a strong and stable Pakistan is a challenge to the hegemonic designs and regional leadership role of India. Similarly, Pakistan has also been in a security dilemma vis-a-vis the Indian rise. The loopholes in Pakistan's institutional framework and the follies of its leadership allowed India to instigate separatist desires in East Pakistan which resulted in the creation of Bangladesh in 1971. This national setback was soon followed by another security threat in 1974 when India tested its nuclear weapons. As a result, Pakistan employed all available resources for the acquisition of nuclear weapons and ultimately succeeded in 1998. This complicated the already hostile relations between the two states. Against this backdrop, India introduced its “Cold Start Doctrine” which Pakistan countered with its “Full Spectrum Deterrence”. The fear of escalation of a nuclear conflict has made New Delhi resort to hybrid warfare tactics to destabilize Islamabad. In this regard, the persisting loopholes in the integration of Pakistan provide a golden opportunity for India and other hostile states. Pakistan has an ethnically diverse population with a lot of ethnic, religious, and sectarian strata. The chronic political instability, ethnic divide, sectarianism, weak institutional framework, poor governance mechanism and economic disparity further exacerbate the existing fault lines.²¹

The Agartala conspiracy case is a prominent manifestation of India's efforts to bring political instability to Pakistan. Orchestrated in the Indian city of Agartala between Awami League leaders, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), and the Indian Armed Forces, the explicit goal of the conspiracy was to destabilize East Pakistan and make it a separate state. Shawkat Ali, the Deputy Speaker of Bangladesh Parliament, who was among the conspirators admitted during a response to a point of order in 2010 and later on 22 February 2011, that the charges against them

²¹ Ashfaq, Sarah “India's Hybrid Warfare Against Pakistan”

were accurate.²² In his visit to Bangladesh in June 2015, India's current Prime Minister Modi also confirmed India's involvement in the Mukti Bahini movement that ultimately led to the creation of Bangladesh.²³

India's efforts to destabilize and divide Pakistan didn't come to an end with the separation of East Pakistan. India has been trying to create political instability in Balochistan by sponsoring terrorism on Afghan soil. India is supporting the Baloch dissidents living in foreign countries to advocate for Balochistan's separation from Pakistan. The chief minister of Balochistan had publicly mentioned evidence of BLA leadership having contact with Indian agencies. In July 2019, an article in *The Hindu* confirmed India's involvement with BLA. "It is confirmed that the commanders from Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) have previously sought medical treatment in hospitals in India, sometimes using disguises or fake identities"²⁴ Balochistan Separatist leaders Mama Qadeer and Aslam Baloch travelled to India in disguise. During the visit to Bangladesh Modi categorically confirmed and acknowledged his country's involvement in various activities aimed at destabilizing Pakistan.²⁵ Retired Indian army Chief Vijay Kumar also admitted that India sponsored an attack in Pakistan and provided financial support to separatist elements in Balochistan.²⁶

²² bdnews24, "'Agartala Conspiracy Case Was Not False,'" bdnews24.com, February 23, 2011, <https://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/agartala-conspiracy-case-was-not-false>. "Textbook 'incorrectly' describes Agartala Case: Shawkat," *The Daily Star*, June 12, 2010.

²³ "Indian Forces Fought along Mukti Bahini: Modi," *www.thenews.com.pk*, June 8, 2015, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/12923-indian-forces-fought-along-mukti-bahini-modi>.

²⁴ Kallol Bhattacharjee, "Explained: The Baloch Liberation Army," *The Hindu*, July 3, 2019, sec. World, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/explained-the-baloch-liberation-army/article61599528.ece>.

²⁵ Ansar Abbasi, "BLA Has Known Indian Connection," *The News International*, July 1, 2020, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/680356-bla-has-known-indian-connection>.

²⁶ Ashfaq, Sarah "India's Hybrid Warfare Against Pakistan."

Kalbhushan Jadhav, an active service Indian Navy officer, arrested on March 3, 2016, in Balochistan²⁷, accused of carrying out espionage activities against Pakistan admitted that he has been “directing various activities in Balochistan and Karachi at the behest of RAW and the deteriorating law and order situation in Karachi.” He confirmed the involvement of RAW in activities related to the Baloch separatist movement within Pakistan and the region around it.”²⁸

The leadership of MQM, a dominant political party in Pakistan's largest city Karachi, has deep off-the-record ties with the Indian establishment. In officially recorded interviews with senior MQM leaders, British authorities discovered that the party used to receive funds from India.²⁹ Muhammad Anwar, a member of the Coordination Committee of MQM, revealed the party's directives to procure funding from Indian contacts in an interview with a private channel.³⁰ Kulbhushan Yadav admitted to travelling to Karachi multiple times for meetings related to terrorist activities. The arrest of certain MQM members and the subsequent restoration of peace in Karachi substantiate this assertion.³¹

Pakistan’s Foreign Office and senior military leadership have repeatedly confirmed that India is running dozens of training camps in Afghanistan for multiple globally outlawed militant

²⁷ Business Standard, “WHO IS KULBHUSHAN JADHAV,” *Business Standard India*, n.d., <https://www.business-standard.com/about/who-is-kulbhushan-jadhav>.

²⁸ Dawn, “Transcript of RAW Agent Kulbhushan’s Confessional Statement,” DAWN.COM, March 30, 2016, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1248786>.

²⁹ BBC, “Pakistan’s MQM ‘Received Indian Funding,’” *BBC News*, June 24, 2015, sec. Asia, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-33148880>.

³⁰ The Nation, “MQM Collected Funds from India: Anwar,” *The Nation*, June 22, 2020, <https://www.nation.com.pk/22-Jun-2020/mqm-collected-funds-from-india-anwar>.

³¹ Express Tribune, “Rangers Arrest Eight Suspects behind Recent Terrorist Attacks,” *The Express Tribune*, February 25, 2019, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1918270/rangers-arrest-eight-suspects-behind-recent-terrorist-attacks>.

groups to plot terrorism on Pakistani soil to destabilize the country.³² TTP, an alliance of militant networks, formed in 2007, has known links with the Indian establishment. Ehsanullah Ehsan, a senior commander of TTP, who surrendered in 2017, confirmed in a video released by Pakistan's military that India's intelligence agency Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) and Afghanistan's NDS are providing extensive help to the Pakistani Taliban or TTP to fight Islamabad.³³ US Defence Secretary nominee Senator Chuck Hagel has also confirmed Indian subversive activities in Pakistan through Afghanistan stating that India has over the years “financed problems for Pakistan on that side of the border.”³⁴ Rajnath Singh, Indian Defense Minister, has openly warned: “Pakistan has been divided into two countries. If it does not stop cross-border terrorism, it will soon be divided into 10 pieces,”³⁵

Economic Slowdown

Undermining Pakistan's economic foundation is central to India's hybrid warfare against Pakistan. A crippled economy impacts the political, social, and defense paradigm, making a state vulnerable to both traditional and non-traditional security threats. India has implemented various measures that have impacted the economic dynamics with Pakistan.

³² Ayaz Gul, “Pakistan Claims ‘Irrefutable Evidence’ of Indian Links to Terrorism on Pakistani Soil,” VOA, November 14, 2020, https://www.voanews.com/a/south-central-asia_pakistan-claims-irrefutable-evidence-indian-links-terrorism-pakistani-soil/6198372.html.

³³ Syed Raza Hassan, “India, Afghanistan Gave Help to Pakistani Taliban, Says Group’s Ex-Spokesman,” Reuters, April 27, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKBN17T0EA/>.

³⁴ Express Tribune, “‘India Financed Problems for Pakistan’ from Afghanistan: Chuck Hagel,” The Express Tribune, February 26, 2013, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/512867/india-financed-problems-for-pakistan-from-afghanistan-chuck-hagel>.

³⁵ Express Tribune, “India Threatens to ‘Break Pakistan into 10 Pieces,’” The Express Tribune, December 11, 2016, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1260808/india-threatens-break-pakistan-10-pieces>.

India considers CPEC and Gwadar Port to be unnecessary competition and obstacles to the Indian Chabahar port. Indian Prime Minister Modi has criticized the project, describing it as "unacceptable" to India³⁶. Soon after the launch of the CPEC project, Indian PM Modi travelled to Iran in May 2016 and announced a deal to develop Chabahar port in Southeastern Iran. India announced an investment of \$500 million for the development of the Chabahar project to boost trade with Afghanistan, Iran, and Central Asian Republics (CARs).³⁷ India is concerned that the development of Gwadar Port and China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) could outshine the Chabahar Project as the two ports are just 75km apart from each other.³⁸ India is actively engaged in creating a significant perception crisis regarding CPEC through online media platforms, including YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and Weblinks.³⁹

During the discussions on Pakistan's status at FATF on 21-23 October 2020, the Indian campaign demonstrated trends that involved targeting CPEC, linking Pakistan with terrorism, civil turmoil, and instability.⁴⁰ As a response, the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) reported to twitter authorities about the anti-state tweets. In addition, cloned think tanks, primarily located in Brussels and New York, attempted to propagate CPEC as a potential debt trap for Pakistan associating it a modern version of the East India

³⁶ Naveed Ahmad, "Modi Spoke India's Mind over CPEC," The Express Tribune, August 20, 2016, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1166455/modi-spoke-indias-mind-cpec>.

³⁷ Fahad Shah, "Does the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor Worry India?," Al Jazeera, February 23, 2017, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2017/2/23/does-the-china-pakistan-economic-corridor-worry-india>.

³⁸ Ashfaq, Sarah "India's Hybrid Warfare Against Pakistan"

³⁹ Maryam Azam, "Pakistan -India Security Paradox: Between Deterrence and Coercive Diplomacy," *Journal of Security & Strategic Analyses* 7, no. 1 (2021): 160–80, <https://thesvi.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/dr-marayam-azam.pdf>.

⁴⁰ Azam, "Pakistan – India Security Paradox."

Company and China's neocolonialism in Pakistan.⁴¹ Following the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan, there has been an Indian effort to disseminate the narrative that Pakistan supports the Taliban, creating a negative global perception and lobbying for economic sanctions against Pakistan. India's policy asserts that without stringent economic and diplomatic measures from the US and the EU, Pakistan would continue harboring terrorism in the region.⁴² However, an analysis of the English press indicates that, during the first six years following the US invasion of Afghanistan, the Taliban were viewed as a security concern in Pakistan, receiving predominantly negative or neutral portrayals.⁴³ Additionally, Pakistan has borne the brunt of the terrorism wave, suffering a substantial loss of 80,000 casualties and significant economic damage.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Francesca Marino, "Beijing's CPEC Is the New East India Company in Balochistan," ThePrint, November 14, 2020, <https://theprint.in/pageturner/excerpt/beijings-cpec-is-the-new-east-india-company-in-balochistan/543391/>.

⁴² Siegfried O. Wolf, "Pakistan and State-Sponsored Terrorism in South Asia," in *Terrorism Revisited*, 2017, 109–55.

⁴³ Saima Kausar, Dr. Mudassar Hussain Shah, and Maryam Waqas, "THE PORTRAYAL of TALIBAN in the EDITORIALS of ENGLISH PRESS of PAKISTAN: AN EVALUATION from 11 SEPTEMBER 2001 to 30 SEPTEMBER 2007," *Pakistan Journal of International Affairs* 4, no. 3 (September 27, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.52337/pjia.v4i3.235>.

⁴⁴ Mudassar Hussain Shah, Saima Kausar, and Danish Sarwar, "CRISIS PERCEPTION on CPEC: HOW INDIA IS USING REGIONAL and PAKISTAN'S DOMESTIC ISSUES in MANUFACTURING GLOBAL PSEUDO DISCOURSE," *NDU Journal* 36 (December 31, 2022): 38–49.

India has actively advocated at the FATF to push for sanctions against Pakistan, seeking its inclusion in the FATF's "Black List." This move is based on India's allegations that Islamabad supports specific small groups, including Jaish-e-Mohammed, which pose threats to New Delhi.⁴⁵

India has also engaged in cyber warfare against Pakistan in various forms. Following the Pulwama attacks in 2019, state-sponsored Indian agencies executed a clandestine cyber assault targeting the military, commercial, and government assets of Pakistan specifically targeting the website of Pakistan's Foreign Office and Pakistan Army.⁴⁶

International Defamation Efforts

Media has become an important tool of digital warfare as it directly targets people's minds, perceptions, thoughts, and emotions. News, advertisements, productions, talk shows, and other programs are capable of influencing or manipulating public opinion.⁴⁷ New Delhi is extensively employing this useful tool to portray a negative and bleak perception of Pakistan's governance, economy and law and order situation. The film industry in India particularly adopts narratives that contribute to fostering animosity against Pakistan.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Jan Achakzai, "FATF: International Lobbying by India Might Retain Pakistan in Greylist," Global Village Space, October 14, 2019, <https://www.globalvillagespace.com/fatf-international-lobbying-by-india-might-retain-pakistan-in-greylist/>.

⁴⁶ The October Sky, "Worst Ever Cyber Attack on Pakistan - Indian Hackers in Response to Pulwama Terror Attack," The October Sky, February 17, 2019, <https://www.theoctobersky.com/featured-stories/worst-ever-cyber-attack-on-pakistan-indian-hackers-in-response-to-pulwama-terror-attack>.

⁴⁷ Faiza Bajwa, Muhammad Haseeb Sarwar, and Adiba Akhtar, "Analysis of Indian Films Propaganda against Muslims and Pakistan," *Pakistan Social Sciences Review* 2, no. 1 (June 30, 2018): 369–80, [https://doi.org/10.35484/pssr.2018\(2-1\)30](https://doi.org/10.35484/pssr.2018(2-1)30).

⁴⁸ Ashfaq, Sarah "India's Hybrid Warfare Against Pakistan"

After the 9/11 incident, Indian cinema has done extensive work to project Muslims as supporters and promoters of terrorism and insurgencies in India, Kashmir or elsewhere.⁴⁹ Indian blockbuster films like *Tere Bin Laden*, *Ek Tha Tiger*, *Raees*, and *Mission Majnu* are just a few examples that show India's planned digital war against Pakistan.⁵⁰ In the past three years alone, India has sponsored content promoting negative themes about Pakistan such as civil-military discord, federal-provincial tensions, the rise of nationalism, the treatment of minorities, Kashmir policy, the CPEC project, the escalating radicalization, and the state of women and child rights.⁵¹ The Express Tribune has compiled this data and revealed that the spread of such disinformation always coincided with key events such as Financial Action Task Force meetings.⁵² Twitter accounts originating from India are widely used to disseminate much of this agenda by strategically incorporating phrases like terrorists, forced conversions, security terrorism, terror attacks, and threats to peace in messages and posts concerning Pakistan. In 2019 and 2020, the European Union-based Non-Governmental Organization "DisInfo Lab" exposed an intricate web of Indian disinformation campaigns.⁵³ These campaigns heavily relied on fake news platforms operating in the mainstream as well as social media, actively engaging international and civil society to garner support against Pakistan. ANI and the Shrivastava group, played a significant

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Faiza, Muhammad, Adiba "Analysis of Indian Films Propaganda"

⁵¹ Hammad Sarfraz, "How India Unleashed Targeted Social Media Campaigns against Pakistan," *The Express Tribune*, December 26, 2021, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2335695/how-india-unleashed-targeted-social-media-campaigns-against-pakistan>.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Gary Machado Alexandre Alaphilippe, Roman Adamczyk, and Antoine Grégoire, "Indian Chronicles: Deep Dive into a 15-Year Operation Targeting the EU and UN to Serve Indian Interests," EU DisinfoLab, December 9, 2020, <https://www.disinfo.eu/publications/indian-chronicles-deep-dive-into-a-15-year-operation-targeting-the-eu-and-un-to-serve-indian-interests/>.

role in the circulation of information that was later deemed inaccurate or misleading.⁵⁴ The investigation highlighted connections between ANI and a network of more than 250 websites accused of spreading misinformation about Pakistan across more than 60 countries since 2005.⁵⁵ Apart from this, social organizations and humanitarian groups linked with the UN and the EU were also key components of this collective.⁵⁶ Pakistan's placement on the FATF grey list in 2020 raised concerns about potential involvement in financing extremism. The report identified a number of NGOs linked to the UN Human Rights Council as potentially engaging in activities against Pakistan over a decade, which may have contributed to these concerns.^{57 58}

The campaign still continues. Instead, New Delhi noticeably intensified and expanded these operations. A notable example occurred during the protests by Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan in Lahore in April 2021, where propaganda hashtags such as #CivilWarInPak and other provocative Twitter trends gained prominence. These trends persisted for days, dominating the regional discourse and portraying a misleading image of political unrest within Pakistan. Upon closer scrutiny, after the situation had settled, it was revealed that a significant portion, precisely 61%, of the total hashtags originated from India. Numerous Indian-based fraudulent Twitter accounts engaged in Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior (CIB), generating a staggering 84,000 tweets, retweets, and replies using the specific hashtag. Furthermore, seven out of the top ten cities

⁵⁴ Mahnoor Saleem, "Indian Disinformation Operations against Pakistan and Its Implications," Centre for Strategic and Contemporary Research, December 29, 2021, <https://cscr.pk/explore/themes/defense-security/indian-disinformation-operations-against-pakistan-and-its-implications/>.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ EU Disinfo Lab Report, December 9, 2020

⁵⁸ Financial Action Task Force, "Jurisdictions under Increased Monitoring - October 2021," Fatf Gafi, October 2021, <https://www.fatf-gafi.org/en/publications/High-risk-and-other-monitored-jurisdictions/Increased-monitoring-october-2021.html>.

where this hashtag trended were Indian cities, including New Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Lucknow, Pune, and Jaipur.⁵⁹

Again in October 2020, Indian Twitter accounts and news websites spread claims of a civil war in Karachi, Pakistan.⁶⁰ In 2018, Amit Shah, then BJP president, reportedly told a rally that India was capable of delivering any message she wanted to the public, whether sweet or sour, true or fake.⁶¹ During the Fall of Panjshir on September 6, 2021, Indian Twitter once again employed its ugly disinformation campaign against Pakistan. India's widely viewed prime-time news network, Republic TV, broadcasted a segment from the video game "Arma-3," dubiously presenting it as exclusive evidence of the Pakistan Air Force's involvement in the Panjshir offensive.⁶² Taking this misinformation a step further, a retired Indian army officer shared an image of Pakistani celebrities donned in military attire for a movie sequence, misleadingly presenting it as the "truth about Pakistan army's presence in Panjshir."⁶³

⁵⁹ Asad Baig, "Misinformation Warfare - #CivilWarinPakistan Trends with 61% Tweets Coming from India; New Delhi Contributes the Highest Number," Digital Rights Monitor, April 18, 2021, <https://digitalrightsmonitor.pk/misinformation-warfare-civilwarinpakistan-trends-with-61-tweets-coming-from-india-new-delhi-contributes-the-highest-number/>.

⁶⁰ Abid Hussain, "India Buzzes with Fake News of 'Civil War' in Pakistan," *BBC News*, October 22, 2020, sec. Asia, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-54649302>.

⁶¹ Derek O'Brien, "The Disinformation Playbook: A Government That Wants to Fact Check the Fact-Checkers," *The Indian Express*, April 13, 2023, <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/disinformation-playbook-government-that-wants-to-fact-check-fact-checkers-8554978/>.

⁶² Express Tribune, "'French Media Report Exposes Indian Fake News against Pakistan,'" *The Express Tribune*, October 2, 2021, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2322979/french-media-report-exposes-indian-fake-news-against-pakistan-fawad>.

⁶³ Dawn, "Ex-Indian Army Officer Shares Picture from Movie Set as 'Truth' about Pakistan Army's Presence in Panjshir," *DAWN.COM*, September 12, 2021, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1645991#:~:text=A%20retired%20Indian%20army%20officer>.

An additional instance of India's information operations involves the dissemination of "Free Balochistan" and "Save the Baloch people" advertisements, which were prominently featured on billboards and buses in the United States and Europe back in 2017.⁶⁴

Ever since the 9/11 incident, Indian officials have time and again highlighted Pakistan as the "epicenter of terrorism" on different regional and international forums. They blame Pakistan for hosting and glorifying people such as Dawood Ibrahim, Osama bin Laden, Lakhvi, Sajid Mir, Hafiz Saeed, and Masood Azhar.⁶⁵

India attributed almost all acts of violence on its territory to Pakistan, conveniently timed with important visits of Pakistani leadership abroad or major powers' leaders visiting the subcontinent. Notably, these incidents, such as the Chittisinghpura massacre in 2000, the 2001 attack on the Indian Parliament, the Nadimarg slaughter in 2003, the Uri attack in 2016, and the Pulwama attack in 2019, coincided with diplomatic events, consistently placing Pakistan in awkward positions while projecting India as a victim, negatively impacting Pakistan's image.⁶⁶

In addition to disinformation campaigns, India also securitizes sports specifically cricket to exert pressure on Pakistan. The decision to abstain from cricket matches with Pakistan was strategically aimed at undermining a formidable rival team. A report by CID has confirmed the involvement of RAW in the 2009 terrorist attack on a Sri Lankan team in Lahore.⁶⁷ Later, India

⁶⁴ Daily Times, "Pakistan Summons UK Envoy to Lodge Protest," Daily Times, November 3, 2017, <https://dailytimes.com.pk/134135/pakistan-summons-uk-envoy-lodge-protest/>.

⁶⁵ The Wire, "India Accuses Pakistan of Frustration for Inability to Use Terror Proxies after Remarks on PM Modi," The Wire, December 16, 2022, <https://thewire.in/south-asia/india-pakistan-terrorism-unsc-pm-modi>.

⁶⁶ Ashfaq, Sarah "India's Hybrid Warfare Against Pakistan"

⁶⁷ Ansar Abbasi, "2009 Terrorist Attack on Sri Lankan Team Was RAW Sponsored," The News International, September 20, 2021, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/893892-2009-terrorist-attack-on-sri-lankan-team-was-raw-sponsored>.

exploited this attack as a pretext to hinder international cricket events in Pakistan. India unilaterally banned Pakistani cricketers from participating in the Indian Premier League (IPL) and cricket's governing body.⁶⁸ In September 2021, the New Zealand Cricket Board unexpectedly called off a tour to Pakistan, mere minutes before the commencement of the first one-day match between Pakistan and New Zealand, citing security concerns. Threatening emails were sent to the New Zealand cricket team players and their families from fake accounts, warning that they might face a terrorist attack in Pakistan. The threatening email originated from a connected device located in India, employing a VPN to display an IP address associated with Singapore.⁶⁹ Another illustrative instance is the recent 2021 T20 World Cup, where a concerted campaign targeted Pakistani cricketer Hasan Ali. Verified Twitter accounts, owned by Ravi Ranjan and Anand Ranganathan, associated with OpIndia.com, disseminated negative content with the explicit intention of fueling sectarian unrest within Pakistan.⁷⁰ Expressing concern, Ranganathan, a columnist and consulting editor at Swarajya, an Indian right-wing monthly print magazine, remarked, "Shocking to see how Hassan Ali is being viciously abused by his fellow Pakistanis because he is Shia and his wife is Indian."⁷¹

Policy Options for Pakistan

Hybrid warfare is a serious threat to the national security, social cohesion, economic advancement, and political stability of Pakistan, however, it is not getting the desired attention

⁶⁸Abdul Qadeer, "POWER POLITICS of SPORTS in INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS and ITS EFFECTS on CRICKET," *Margalla Papers* 25, no. 2 (December 31, 2021): 84–90, <https://doi.org/10.54690/margallapapers.25.2.75>.

⁶⁹ Express Tribune, "Emails from India Led to NZ Tour Cancellation: Fawad," The Express Tribune, September 22, 2021, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2321381/emails-from-india-led-to-nz-tour-cancellation-fawad>.

⁷⁰ Hammad Sarfraz, "How India Unleashed Targeted Social Media Campaigns against Pakistan," *The Express Tribune*, December 26, 2021, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2335695/how-india-unleashed-targeted-social-media-campaigns-against-pakistan>.

⁷¹ Ibid.

from the policymakers. It requires a comprehensive and effective strategy capable of countering both the adversary and collaborators within the internal structure. The formulated policies should be directed towards safeguarding national interests while maintaining global relevance in the ever-changing geopolitical landscape.

The economy is the most important instrument to effectively cater to the hybrid security threats given its linkage with diplomatic clout, national cohesion, and other aspects of national security.⁷² A state economically dependent on other states and financial institutions can not pursue independent foreign and domestic policies. The government of Pakistan need to strengthen the economic base of the state by formulating policies for long-term sustained development. This may include enhancing the export quality by manufacturing goods and services that experience high demand in international markets, particularly in Asia. Leveraging the strategic location of the country by establishing itself as a hub for regional trade and transit and prioritizing the expeditious completion of CPEC projects, especially pipelines, motorways, and railways connecting Gwadar to Kashgar would be the steps in the right direction. Pakistan has a huge potential for **soft power** in the form of its vibrant culture, tourism potential, Islamic identity, financial assistance packages, educational scholarships and rich media and entertainment industry. The internationalization of education, cultural festivals, exchange programs, and collaborations with international artists can showcase the richness of Pakistani culture and present a significant opportunity for Pakistan to wield soft power.

Pakistan's administration must also address the internal social, economic and political issues that have been leading to polarization within the society with the unresolved grievances. Temporary policies may help in dealing with the immediate threat but to ensure a sustainable way forward, it is necessary to include structural reforms too, not just as the broader goal but also as something that would deal with the root cause of the problem.

⁷² Ashfaq, Sarah "India's Hybrid Warfare Against Pakistan"

To ensure that people's social, economic and political rights and demands must be ensured because if one persists, the threat will still remain which can then be exploited by external forces and they make the country susceptible to threat, endangering the national security concerns.

To address these issues, the governments need to take concrete efforts to tackle non-traditional challenges like food insecurity, climate change, educational disparity and healthcare challenge. These are the fundamental human rights and when a particular group or groups are deprived of these rights, they become vulnerable to exploitation of grievances by non-state actors.

Religion and ethnic divide plays a significant role in Pakistan's social fabric and due to the existence of multiple ethnicities and religious sects coinciding in the country, there is always a higher chance of polarization. One of the sustaining issues that cannot be neglected in the role of the religious schools and the training of minds from a young age. The Madrassah system of Pakistan is known for its significance in shaping the perception of other religious sects from a young age. There is a high need to make sure that these institutes remain non-political and focus on education that is more constructive and progressive and done on the principle of uniting the nation rather than further dividing it on sectarianism. A transparency of the funding of the institutes is also necessary to ensure their linkages are non-political. Even outside the religious institutions, the education should include educating the children to coexist peacefully with the people of different ethnicities and religious with the national identity uniting them as one equal unit. This can be done by bringing reforms in the curriculum and introducing effective teaching methods.

Moreover, an accountable media environment is indispensable, and PEMRA should enhance its endeavors to promote honesty or precision by providing fair opportunities for various voices. It must take proactive steps to address any non-compliance with rules regarding journalism practices so that we can avert the eventual misuse or abuse of social platforms. These are all crucial factors that reinforce stability in our nation's future.

Recognizing the evolving landscape of hybrid warfare with rising cyber-attacks, Pakistan must prioritize its security preparedness. This requires enhanced collaboration with trusted partners, putting national security above partisan interests, and building a strong digital shield. Recruiting top IT talent, securing critical infrastructure, and mandatory cybersecurity testing of imported tech are essential steps in safeguarding systems and financial structures.

Conclusion

Hybrid warfare refers to the utilization of strategies, including propaganda, deception, sabotage, and other non-military tactics, with the longstanding objective of destabilizing adversaries. To understand how this is done, this discussion was based on the case study of India and Pakistan. India's use of hybrid warfare methods against Pakistan involves tactics like support for separatist factions, sponsoring of terrorist activities and taking measures to weaken the economic state of the adversary. Substantial evidence reveals that India has been using these measures to weaken its adversary Pakistan. This has been done through its involvements in separatist movements within Pakistan, be in the separation of East Pakistan as Bangladesh or the ongoing separatist movement in Balochistan. India uses these divisions within Pakistan to its own advantage against its rival. Apart from this, the study pointed out investigations that have proved India's monetary linkages with the anti-state movements as well as propaganda carried out by Indian media to defame Pakistan through their cinema productions or social platforms to affect global opinions about Pakistan. India has also tried to weaken Pakistan's economy by trying to sabotage the progress of CPEC, which is meant to improve the infrastructure and economy of Pakistan.

As Pakistan is going through a political and economic crisis currently and as the unrest is exacerbated by these crises, it becomes imperative for the state to take some necessary policy measures to ensure that the underlying factors of these problems are dealt with. For this, it is proposed to prioritize long-term economic development as well as working on the nontraditional security concerns affecting the people of Pakistan that fuel their grievances. Efforts must be made in education, healthcare and employment throughout regions struggling through inequalities; diplomatic solutions should therefore complement comprehensive measures addressing provincial conflicts.

In addition, a proactive monitoring of media content regulation guided by appropriate legislation mandatory will not only help fighting propaganda but also ensure public safety awareness remains dominant at all times.