

# INDIAN HYBRID WARFARE: IMPLICATIONS FOR PAKISTAN



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## ABSTRACT

In the 21st century, classical warfare between the states has evolved. War has become multi-dimensional and multi-level, instigated by clandestine agents via a blend of conventional and non-conventional means. It employs distinct instruments of power, including economic, military, political, and civil. By blurring the lines between peacetime and wartime, hybrid wars have made identifying the responsible parties and generating potential retaliatory actions extremely challenging. This paper argues that Pakistan has been the victim of hybrid warfare from its arch-rival India, which has concurrently employed elements of non-kinetic warfare to disrupt Pakistan. This study finds that India's utilisation of hybrid warfare tactics presents complex and multifaceted challenges for Pakistan, demanding a thorough comprehension of these methods and the vulnerabilities they exploit. This underscores the critical imperative for Pakistan to swiftly develop and implement integrated countermeasures spanning economic, diplomatic, legal, technological, and societal domains. Failure to address these threats effectively not only jeopardises Pakistan's security but also risks further destabilisation of the region.

**Keywords:** Hybrid Warfare, India-Pakistan Relations, Cyber Attacks, Grey Zone Operations, Psychological Operations

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

In his seminal work *On War*, Carl von Clausewitz famously asserts, "War is a remarkable trinity, comprising violence and hatred, change and probability, and political considerations - elements that unfold through the interplay of people, military forces, and government."<sup>1</sup> These fundamental aspects have shaped warfare since the earliest recorded history. However, in the 21st century, warfare has evolved into seemingly unfamiliar forms, blending both regular and irregular forces within the same battlefield. This evolution has given rise to what is commonly termed as hybrid warfare.

While a universally agreed-upon definition of hybrid warfare remains elusive, scholars generally concur that it incorporates a blend of cyber warfare, information operations, economic coercion, political subversion, and kinetic military tactics. It is a multi-dimensional war in which the enemy operates covertly and employs strategies of deception and manipulation to subject the adversary to its will.<sup>2</sup> As opposed to acquiring territorial millage from a state, hybrid warfare is primarily focused on degenerating a country's economic, cultural, and ideological foundations.

The relative novelty of hybrid warfare lies in its capacity to engage numerous sources of typical national power potential simultaneously and the deliberate utilisation of creativity, uncertainty, and cognitive aspects of warfare. Hybrid warfare, whether conducted by state or non-state entities, is typically customised to remain below the threshold of obvious detection and response triggers.

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<sup>1</sup> Williamson Murray and Peter R. Mansoor, *Hybrid Warfare: Fighting Complex Opponents from the Ancient World to the Present* (Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Humayun Hassan, 'Pakistan's Susceptibility to 5th Generation Hybrid Warfare Due to Its Prevailing Fault Lines: A Comparative Analysis with Yugoslavia,' *NUST Journal of International Peace and Stability* 2, no. 1 (January 25, 2019): 28, <https://doi.org/10.37540/njips.v2i1.21>.

For a long time, Pakistan has been the target of hybrid warfare from its primary adversary, India. New Delhi has effectively utilised a wide array of non-kinetic means to destabilise Pakistan. This paper argues that India has substantially altered its warfare strategy to incorporate hybrid warfare techniques, leveraging socio-economic, political, ethnic, and religious fault lines within Pakistan on various fronts, thereby escalating tensions in the region. As hybrid warfare significantly impacts Pakistan's national security, prospects for economic development, political stability, and social cohesion, it is imperative to comprehend the modalities and intricacies associated with this type of warfare. This will allow Pakistan to formulate corrective policies and measures against hostile external actors and their domestic collaborators.

In light of the blurred boundaries between peace and war brought about by hybrid warfare, effectively identifying and responding to threats has become increasingly challenging. Against this backdrop, this research paper undertakes a comprehensive exploration of hybrid warfare. It delves into the historical roots of hybrid warfare in India, tracing its evolution from the strategic influence of Chanakya Kautilya to the contemporary nuances embodied in the Doval Doctrine. Subsequently, it elucidates the specific objectives of Indian hybrid warfare and examines the modus operandi of these strategies and their far-reaching implications for Pakistan. The paper concludes by synthesising the findings and presenting practical insights, including policy recommendations tailored for Pakistan.

## **2. ROOTS OF HYBRID WARFARE IN INDIA**

## 2.1 Influence of Chanakya Kautilya's Arthashastra

Indian strategic culture is highly influenced by Chanakya Kautilya's Arthashastra, which extensively discusses statecraft, war, and diplomacy.<sup>3</sup> Within this ancient treatise, Kautilya categorises war into three types: open war, clandestine war and undeclared warfare.<sup>4</sup> Undeclared warfare, featuring the use of secret spies and occult practices against the enemy, is closely aligned with India's current hybrid warfare strategy. Since the inception of Raw and Analysis Wing (RAW) in 1968, India has employed covert operations to undermine Pakistan, including the formation of Mukti Bahini and subsequent support to various militant groups.<sup>5</sup> These actions seek to Pakistan's vulnerabilities across strategic, economic, political, ethnic, and geographic lines.

## 2.2 Doctrinal shift after 2008 Mumbai attacks

In the aftermath of the 2008 Mumbai attacks, India's covert operations against Pakistan gained momentum. Y.K Singh, former Indian Army chief, formulated a secret unit in the Indian Army named Technical Services Division (TSD) to secure the support of Kashmiri leadership in the Indian-occupied Kashmir (IOK) and carry out terrorist activities in Pakistan.<sup>6</sup> Under the purview of TSD, India initiated three covert operations in the post-2008 period: Operation Rehbar I-II-II was carried out in IOK, Operation Seven Sisters in the north-eastern region of India, and alleged

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<sup>3</sup> Kajari Kamal, 'Kautilya's Arthashastra: Indian Strategic Culture and Grand Strategic Preferences,' *Journal of Defence Studies*, 12, no. 3 (2018): 33, <https://idsa.in/system/files/jds/jds-12-3-2018-kautilya-arthashastra-kajari-kamal.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Muhammad N. Mirza and Summar I. Babar, 'The Indian Hybrid Warfare Strategy: Implications for Pakistan,' *Progressive Research Journal of Arts and Humanities* 2, no. 1 (2020): 42, <https://shs.hal.science/halshs-03013546/document>.

<sup>5</sup> Asma Rashid, 'Pakistan at the Crossroad: Hybrid Warfare and the Parallels between Bangla and Baloch Movements,' *NDU Journal* 36 (December 2022): 54, <https://ndujournal.ndu.edu.pk/site/article/view/129>.

<sup>6</sup> Masood U. R. Khattak, 'Indian Military's Strategic Thinking Since 2001: Implications for the Deterrence Stability of South Asia' (PhD Dissertation, International Islamic University, 2018).

Operation Deep Strike inside Pakistan.<sup>7</sup> In response, Pakistan categorically rejected India's claim of surgical strikes, dismissing them as fabricated attempts to generate media hype.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, Pakistan reaffirmed that any actual surgical strike on its soil will be met with a strong response.

## 2.3 Doval Doctrine

Upon the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) ascension to power in 2014, India's proactive stance gained momentum. Prime Minister Narendra Modi appointed Ajit Doval, known for his assertive approach toward Pakistan, as National Security Advisor. Doval advocated a three-tier strategy to address national security threats. The first level is the adoption of a defensive stance, which focuses on fortifying domestic defences and dealing with the threat on Indian soil.<sup>9</sup> The second level is the defensive-offensive strategy, which necessitates a proactive approach to eliminate and neutralise threats at their source. The third level is offensive approach, which remains infeasible in Pakistan's context due to the presence of nuclear weapons. Therefore, Ajit Doval advocated defensive-offensive strategy, emphasising the exploitation of Pakistan's key vulnerabilities across economic, political, social, ethnic, and religious spheres to push the state into isolation, defeat its policies in Afghanistan and disturb its internal political and security equilibrium.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Kokab Al-Saba, Noor Fatima, and Masood U. R. Khattak, 'India's Hybrid Warfare Strategy: Implications for Pakistan's Security,' *Journal of Xi'an Shiyong University* 19, no. 7 (July 2023): 341–71, <https://www.xisdxjxsu.asia/V19I07-19.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> "Surgical strikes": Journalists flown to LoC to debunk Indian myth,' *The Express Tribune*, October 2, 2016, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1192133/surgical-strikes-journalists-flown-loc-debunk-indian-myth>.

<sup>9</sup> Masood U. R. Khattak, Muhammad Khan, and Ghulam Qumber, 'Evolution of New Indian Military Strategy: Implications for Pakistan,' *Margalla Papers* 23, no. 1 (2019): 35, <https://margallapapers.ndu.edu.pk/site/issue/view/14/2>.

<sup>10</sup> Tassawar Aziz Malik and Sehrish Qayyum, 'Indian Political Doctrines: Understanding Internal Security Dynamics of India Impacting Pakistan,' *Margalla Papers* 26, no. 1 (June 30, 2022): 27, <https://doi.org/10.54690/margallapapers.26.i.95>.



FIGURE 1: Components of Doval Doctrine<sup>11</sup>

### 3. OBJECTIVES OF INDIAN HYBRID WARFARE

India has a variety of objectives it aims to achieve through its engagement in hybrid warfare. First, The Indian leadership, driven by Hindutva ideology, seeks revenge for perceived historical grievances; several Hindu factions in India continue to harbour resentment over being governed by Muslims.<sup>12</sup> They view Muslims as “invaders,” historically subjugating Hindus to unjust rule, causing widespread destruction, religious suppression, and economic deprivation.<sup>13</sup> Advent of democracy further intensified these sentiments because as Hindus gained power, Muslims vied

<sup>11</sup> Masood U. R. Khattak, ‘Indian Military’s Strategic Thinking Since 2001: Implications for the Deterrence Stability of South Asia’ (PhD Dissertation, International Islamic University, 2018).

<sup>12</sup> Nouman Mubarik, Junaid Jhandad, and Asma S. Khawja, ‘Indian Hybrid Warfare in Pakistan: Spin off Ramifications for Pakistan’s National Security,’ *Journal of Indian Studies* 7, no. 1 (2021): 111, [http://pu.edu.pk/images/journal/indianStudies/PDF/7\\_v7\\_1\\_21.pdf](http://pu.edu.pk/images/journal/indianStudies/PDF/7_v7_1_21.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> Edward A. Gargan, ‘The Hatreds of India; Hindu Memory Scarred by Centuries of Sometimes Despotic Islamic Rule,’ *The New York Times*, December 1992, accessed October 20, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/12/11/world/hatreds-india-hindu-memory-scarred-centuries-sometimes-despotic-islamic-rule.html>.

for independence. Therefore, the construction of Indian identity within this oppositional matrix has shaped the contours of current Indian policy vis-à-vis Pakistan.

Second, India aims to become a regional hegemon whose legitimacy is acknowledged by neighbouring countries.<sup>14</sup> As per this thinking, India believes it could potentially secure itself a permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).<sup>15</sup>

Third, India seeks to overcome strategic constraints posed by Pakistan's nuclear programme, which neutralised India's previous conventional superiority. With the initiation of the Cold Start Doctrine (CSD), India sought to overcome this strategic limitation, but CSD was based on a flawed premise. It envisaged the probability of limited war with Pakistan under the spectre of nuclear weapons,<sup>16</sup> marking a shift from a defensive stance to a defence-offence posture. As the shortcomings of CSD are now evident, New Delhi is compelled to explore alternative options, such as hybrid war.

Fourth, India aims to undermine the Sino-Pakistan alliance by destabilising Pakistan. India perceives the strategic partnership between the two states as a threat to its national security. Since China holds a stronger position in the Sino-Pakistan duo, it is highly unlikely that India will take on China due to its formidable military and economic power. Resultantly, India has conveniently focused its actions on targeting Pakistan.

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<sup>14</sup> Sadia Khanum, 'Legitimacy of India's Hegemonic Claims in South Asia: A Security Perspective,' *NDU Journal* 34 (2020): 49, <https://ndujournal.ndu.edu.pk/site/article/view/68>.

<sup>15</sup> Aila Sajid Bhango, "Acceptance of Indian claim of permanent seat in United Nations Security Council in Pakistan," *Journal of Indian Studies* 2, no. 1 (2016): 85, [http://pu.edu.pk/images/journal/indianStudies/PDF/6\\_v2\\_1\\_16.pdf](http://pu.edu.pk/images/journal/indianStudies/PDF/6_v2_1_16.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> Zafar Khan, 'Cold Start Doctrine: The Conventional Challenge to South Asian Stability,' *Contemporary Security Policy* 33, no. 3 (November 2, 2012): 577–94, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2012.727685>.

## 4. MODUS OPERANDI OF INDIAN HYBRID WARFARE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR PAKISTAN

### 4.1 Instigating sub-nationalist groups to oppose mega development projects

India has historically sought to exploit vulnerabilities in Pakistan, capitalising on ethnic and sectarian divisions, stemming from deep-seated grievances within the country. For example, India actively pursues nefarious objectives in Pakistan via groups such as the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), and Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP).

In Balochistan, India has a history of providing funding, training, and support to militants, enabling them to carry out high-profile attacks against military installations in Pakistan. After his retirement, former Indian Chief of Army, General Vijay Kumar Singh, admitted India's involvement in sponsoring bomb blasts in Pakistan. In July 2019, an article in "The Hindu" confirmed the presence of BLA commanders seeking medical treatment in Indian hospitals, often with fake identities; prominent BLA leaders, including Mama Qadeer and Aslam Baloch, travelled to India in disguise.<sup>17</sup> India's objectives through BLA involve undermining Pakistan's internal security, hindering political and economic stability, carrying out attacks against Chinese workers and engineers to curtail CPEC, and establishing maritime dominance in the Arabian Sea and beyond.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Muhammad Ashfaque Arain, 'India's Hybrid Warfare against Pakistan: Challenges & Response Options' (Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies, June 2021), [https://casstt.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Issue\\_Paper\\_2-WEB-17\\_June\\_2021.pdf](https://casstt.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Issue_Paper_2-WEB-17_June_2021.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> Iman Mujahid, 'Balochistan and CPEC: Analyzing the Indian Factor,' *BTTN Journal* 1, no. 1 (July 31, 2022): 51–67, <https://doi.org/10.61732/bj.v1i1.12>.

Similarly, India's support for TTP came to the forefront when the senior commander of the group, Latif Mahsud, was detained in Afghanistan by NATO while meeting with RAW and Afghan Intelligence Khad.<sup>19</sup> He was later handed over to Pakistan; he confessed that India and Afghanistan were funding militancy in Pakistan to destabilise the tribal areas. India engaged in supporting destabilising elements in Pakistan while simultaneously investing in Afghanistan's infrastructure and providing humanitarian relief to attain popularity among the local Afghans. Pakistan while simultaneously investing in Afghanistan's infrastructure and providing humanitarian relief to attain popularity among the local Afghans.

In the aftermath of 9/11, India's involvement in Afghanistan marked the beginning of renewed hybrid warfare against Pakistan. This is because Haqqanis in the new government raised concerns for India due to their former association with groups like Lashkar--Tayyaba and Jaish-e-Mohammad.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, India provided funding, training, and nurturing to militants in Afghan soil, which allowed them to formulate safe havens as well as command and control centres. Over the last two decades, TTP militants, owing to Indian support and transnational affiliations with groups such as Al-Qaeda, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), and The East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), has posed a significant security risk to Pakistan. This has led to substantial losses in terms of human lives and economic growth.

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<sup>19</sup> Zahir Shah Sherazi, 'Key Taliban Commander, Three Others Handed over to Pakistan: Sources,' *Dawn*, December 7, 2014, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1149254>.

<sup>20</sup> Kokab Al-Saba, Noor Fatima, and Masood U. R. Khattak, "India's Hybrid Warfare Strategy: Implications for Pakistan's Security," *Journal of Xi'an Shiyou University* 19, no. 7 (July 2023): 341–71, <https://www.xisdxjsu.asia/V19I07-19.pdf>.

## 4.2 Water Coercion

India has repeatedly employed water as a potent tool in the context of Hydro Warfare, manifested in its tangible breaches of the Indus Water Treaty (IWT). India employs a three-pronged strategy as a weapon against Pakistan. First, it accumulates water by constructing dams on the rivers that flow into Pakistan. For example, India's construction of the Kishan Ganga Dam redirects water from the Neelum River in Pakistan to a power plant in the Jhelum River basin. Downstream, Pakistan has erected the Neelum-Jhelum hydropower plant, but it faces reduced power generation due to India's Kishan Ganga Project diverting 33 percent, not the claimed 10 percent, of the Neelum River.<sup>21</sup>

Second, India manipulates river courses during monsoon by releasing an excessive volume of water towards Pakistan. According to The Federal Flood Commission of Pakistan, due to India's hostile actions, Pakistan has faced 28 super riverine floods in its 75-year history.<sup>22</sup> Finally, another form of water terrorism initiated by India involves the intentional reduction or cessation of water, especially during the crop season. Pakistan, predominantly an agrarian country, heavily relies on the Indus and its tributaries, with agriculture contributing a significant percent to the GDP.

India's water politics also raises concerns over the potential weaponisation of water resources during military conflicts. For example, in the aftermath of the Uri and Pathankot attacks, PM Modi stated, "Blood and water cannot flow together at the

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<sup>21</sup> Marina Khan, 'Environmental Impacts of Neelum Jhelum Hydropower Project,' *Graduate Journal of Pakistan Review (GJPR)* 2, no. 2 (2022): 1–32, <https://journals.pakistanreview.com/index.php/GJPR/article/view/130>.

<sup>22</sup> Federal Flood Commission, 'Annual Flood Report 2020' (Ministry of Water Resources, 2020), <https://ffc.gov.pk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/2020-Annual-Report-of-Oo-CEA-CFFC.pdf>.

same time.”<sup>23</sup> This statement served as a clear signal of a larger agenda that encompassed military actions and egregious violations of the IWT.

### 4.3 Economic Sabotage

Economic sabotage in hybrid warfare refers to the intentional and strategic manipulation of economic systems by a hostile actor to undermine the stability, growth, and resilience of an adversary's economy. This tactic often involves a combination of covert operations aimed at disrupting critical economic infrastructure, damaging investor confidence, undermining government institutions, and creating social unrest.

India's hybrid warfare against Pakistan includes economic sabotage as a key tactic to exert pressure. By leveraging various economic tools and tactics, India aims to weaken Pakistan economically, politically, and strategically in pursuit of its own interests. For example, In July 2018, India made a significant move by submitting an application for Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) status for Basmati rice to the European Commission without any prior notice to Pakistan.<sup>24</sup> Pakistan strongly condemned this move, as the EU market is vital for its \$800 million to \$1 billion Basmati exports, constituting 35 percent of the global market share.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, India's PGI acquisition could harm Pakistan's economic interests, with potential appeals to European courts leading to uncertainty for the Pakistani rice industry.

There have been several other instances where India has exploited Pakistan's weaknesses. For example, India actively lobbied to place the country on the blacklist

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<sup>23</sup> David Michel, 'Water Conflict Pathways and Peacebuilding Strategies' (United States Institute of Peace, August 19, 2020), <https://www.usip.org/publications/2020/08/water-conflict-pathways-and-peacebuilding-strategies>.

<sup>24</sup> Mahwish Hafeez, 'Basmati Rice: A New Tug-Of-War between India and Pakistan' (Institute Of Strategic Studies Islamabad, September 28, 2021), [https://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/IB\\_Mahwish\\_Sept\\_28\\_2021.pdf](https://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/IB_Mahwish_Sept_28_2021.pdf).

<sup>25</sup> 'Basmati Dispute,' *Dawn*, June 9, 2021, accessed October 20, 2023, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1628365>.

of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF). India actively works to influence and manipulate international organisations, seeking economic sanctions against Pakistan and discouraging global business transactions with the state.<sup>26</sup> Resultantly, Pakistan has been on FATF grey list several times between 2008 and 2022. According to a report by the Pakistani think-tank Tadbaddlab, Pakistan's inclusion on the 'grey list' from 2008 to 2019 might have led to an accumulated GDP loss estimated at \$38 billion.<sup>27</sup> This outcome was primarily driven by reduced consumption expenditures, export volume, and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).

The gravity of the impact indicate that Pakistan's economic fate can be influenced by external actions, highlighting state's limited autonomy shaping its economic trajectory. Therefore, it highlights the dire need to strengthen domestic economic institution and invest in economic diversification. The situation is further compounded by the absence of a robust regulatory framework to safeguard Pakistan's financial system. This deficiency not only undermines investor confidence and hampers foreign investment, vital for economic growth, but also exposes Pakistan's financial sector to multiple threats, heightening the risks of economic instability.

#### **4.4 Destabilising the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)**

India employs hybrid warfare tactics to subvert Pakistan's flagship project, the CPEC, undermining what Pakistan considers its national revival plan. Indo-US lobbies deem it as a red line and, therefore, exert pressure to sabotage it. India

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<sup>26</sup> Muhammad U. Askari and Lal K. Niazi, 'Indian Hybrid War against Pakistan: A Strategic Theory Perspective,' *Journal of Indian Studies* 8, no. 1 (June 2022): 200, [http://pu.edu.pk/images/journal/indianStudies/PDF/15\\_v8\\_1\\_22.pdf](http://pu.edu.pk/images/journal/indianStudies/PDF/15_v8_1_22.pdf).

<sup>27</sup> Naafey Sardar, 'Bearing the Cost of Global Politics: The Impact of FATF Grey Listing on Pakistan's Economy' (Tabadlab, February 23, 2020), <https://www.tabadlab.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Tabadlab-Working-Paper-07-Bearing-the-Cost-of-Global-Politics.pdf>.

perceives CPEC and Gwadar Port as potential rivals to Indian-funded Chabahar Port of Iran as it could grant Pakistan and China an upper hand in Iranian, Afghan, and Central Asian markets.<sup>28</sup>

The Modi government has assigned RAW the task of obstructing the timely completion of the CPEC; for this purpose, a dedicated unit has also been established within RAW headquarters by allocating \$500 million.<sup>29</sup> These apparatuses conduct intelligence operations, collecting sensitive information about the project and promoting anti-CEPC activities. Kulbhushan Yadav, in his disclosures, revealed that the primary objective of his clandestine operation was to revive separatist unrest in Balochistan and disrupt CPEC.

Balochistan plays a central role in the geography of CPEC, being situated adjacent to Afghanistan. Therefore, unrest and insurgency in Balochistan pose a significant threat to the entire project. To this end, India is providing diplomatic support, financial aid, and arms and ammunition to the ethno-nationalist separatist elements in the province; these insurgents are responsible for targeting Chinese labourers, government officials, development projects, and critical infrastructure.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, India utilises Afghan territory as a sanctuary for training and supporting Baloch insurgent groups, recognising Afghanistan's significance as a crucial link connecting Gwadar to the historic Silk Road via the Central Asia.

Moreover, India also disseminates information regarding CPEC routes and sector-wise spending in different regions of Pakistan to foster a lack of trust among

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<sup>28</sup> Kashif Hasan Khan and Ali Omid, 'China-India Counterbalancing Measures through International Corridors and Ports: The Focus on Chabahar and Gwadar Ports,' *Journal of Liberty and International Affairs* 9, no. 2 (January 1, 2023): 171–90, <https://doi.org/10.47305/jlia2392171k>.

<sup>29</sup> Ahmad Khawar Shahzad, 'CPEC: A Critique of Lucid Implications,' *Social Science Research Network*, September 15, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3527395>.

<sup>30</sup> Usman Shahid, 'Balochistan: The Troubled Heart of the CPEC,' *The Diplomat*, August 23, 2016, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/08/balochistan-the-troubled-heart-of-the-cpec/>.

its provinces. To generate an enormous narrative on CPEC, India utilises media outlets on a massive scale to proliferate pseudo-perception via anti-state content on Facebook, Twitter, and websites.<sup>31</sup>

## 4.5 Grey Zone Operations

The term grey zone broadly refers to multi-dimensional activities aimed at altering the behaviour of adversaries while remaining below the threshold of conventional military engagement.<sup>32</sup> On a spectrum between peaceful diplomacy on the one end and total war on the other, grey zone operations occupy a space in between; it encompasses interaction between both state and non-state actors that falls outside the traditional binary of war and peace because of the uncertainty regarding the nature of the conflict, the parties involved, and the relevant policy and legal frameworks.

Amongst the most widely recognised instruments of grey zone warfare is the idea of “little green men.” According to Bensahel, little green men in the Russian invasion of Crimea in 2014 were “soldiers and other agents without any uniforms, insignia, or other identifiable markings that enabled Russia to deny any involvement.”<sup>33</sup> The fundamental reasoning behind the use of such agents is to prevent a strong counteraction from a defender. A traditional military force is very likely to provoke a similar retaliation from the defender, whereas ambiguity surrounding the controlling party leads the defender to exercise caution while considering a response against identified intermediaries.

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<sup>31</sup> 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 (2022): 39, <https://ndujournal.ndu.edu.pk/site/article/view/128>.

<sup>32</sup> Tahir Mahmood Azad, Muhammad Waqas Haider, and Muhammad Sadiq, ‘Understanding Gray Zone Warfare from Multiple Perspectives,’ *World Affairs* 186, no. 1 (December 2022): 84, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00438200221141101>.

<sup>33</sup> Hal Brands, ‘Paradoxes of the Gray Zone,’ *Social Science Research Network*, January 1, 2016, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2737593>.

India also employs grey zone warfare as a means to assert its dominance in the region; this includes utilising proxies and fait accompli tactics against Pakistan. India's use of pellet guns in Kashmir is another controversial aspect of India's strategy, which can be viewed as a part of its grey zone operations. Indian security forces have extensively resorted to the use of pellet guns to subdue protestors; amid the mass uprising in 2016, more than 1100 people were partially or fully blinded- an event referred to by many as the "world's first mass blinding."<sup>34</sup> The equivalence of "pellet gun" with "shotgun" is erratic. The former is akin to airguns used for popping balloons at village fairs, whereas firearms employed by India use standard 12 gauge pump-action shotguns, each of which has the capacity to be loaded with four shells.

India argues that Kashmir should not be regarded as a typical civilian region but a warzone where India is confronted with externally fuelled Islamist insurgency; therefore, Indian actions need to be judged using the laws of war, not the laws of peace. Gray zone operations have blurred lines between law enforcement and military engagement, making it extremely challenging to define the nature of conflict and the appropriate response.

In this realm, Pakistan can compete equitably with India through careful resource allocation and strategic planning. Our nation boasts significant legal expertise, deployed in service to the state. Yet, to uphold its proactive stance, Pakistan must guard against the possibility of oscillating between inaction and delayed responses. Therefore, Pakistan must invest in a dedicated cadre of international law specialists and strategically leverage international laws pertaining to war crimes and genocide,

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<sup>34</sup> Mehmood Hussain, 'From Abrogation to Dominion: Navigating India's Neo-Colonial Settler Agenda in Kashmir and Elimination of Kashmiri Identity,' *Muslim World Journal of Human Rights*, November 13, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1515/mwjhr-2023-0006>.

to counter India's strategic manipulation of legal mechanisms in IIOJK and to effectively advocate for justice on the global stage.

## 4.6 Information Warfare

Media is considered the fourth pillar of the state, and India has effectively leveraged this platform to carry out a deceptive campaign against Pakistan. Academics and think tanks, backed by media, present a bleak perspective of Pakistan's governance, law and order, and economy to misinform the general public and generate unnecessary debates on matters of national significance.

For example, Srivastava Group initiated an operation to discredit Pakistan on a global scale. The primary objective was to strengthen pro-Indian sentiments and foster anti-Pakistan rhetoric. India also sought to consolidate its power, and ultimately attain greater support from international bodies, such as the European Union (EU) and the United Nations (UN).<sup>35</sup> In 2019, the EU Disinfo Lab exposed a vast Indian network comprising over 265 synchronised pseudo-local media platforms spanning 65 countries, all aligning with Indian objectives.<sup>36</sup> This network comprised questionable think tanks and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) involved in producing content designed to undermine Pakistan. It used fabricated identities of dead human rights activists and journalists and attempted to imitate established media outlets and news agencies, such as the EU Observer and the Voice of America.

This represents just a small proportion of India's information warfare. For example, in the aftermath of the Balakot Strike carried out by the Indian Air Force

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<sup>35</sup> Bilal Kuchay, 'EU NGO Report Uncovers Indian Disinformation Campaign,' *Al Jazeera*, December 12, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/12/11/eu-ngo-report-uncovers-a-15-year-disinformation-campaign>.

<sup>36</sup> 'Indian Chronicles' (EU Disinfo Lab, 2019), [https://www.disinfo.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Indian-chronicles\\_FULLREPORT.pdf](https://www.disinfo.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Indian-chronicles_FULLREPORT.pdf).

(IAF), Indian media falsely claimed that the IAF killed more than 200 people in an alleged Madrassah administered by Jaish-E-Muhammad.<sup>37</sup> However, the reality was different, and no damage was reported. Pakistan carried out successful air operation across the LOC, destroying two Indian aircraft and capturing a fighter pilot, Abhinandan Varthaman. Despite this, Indian media continued to disseminate a false narrative that Abhinandan had shot down a PAF aircraft.<sup>38</sup> Based on these claims, the Modi government was able to secure a second term, attaining a decisive political victory by raising the political slogan of “Chokidar.”

Another example of India’s information warfare is the placement of the “Free Balochistan” advertisement on billboards and buses in the US and Europe in 2017. According to political expert Agha Haroon, the government of India earmarked a budget of 7 billion Indian rupees for orchestrating anti-Pakistan campaigns.<sup>39</sup> This involved partnerships with self-exiled dissident organisations, such as the World Baloch Organisation. The primary objective was to divert attention away from atrocities in the IOK and to tarnish Pakistan’s image as a means to advance India’s geopolitical ambitions. Moreover, almost all English newspapers in India routinely dedicate at least one page to news and opinion articles featuring anti-Pakistan rhetoric. This pattern indicates magnitude of India’s information warfare against Pakistan; through these methods, the former has constantly exposed the latter to relentless internal and external propaganda.

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<sup>37</sup> Kurita Masahiro, ‘The 2019 Pulwama Crisis and India-Pakistan Deterrence Stability in the New Era,’ *Security and Strategy* 3 (January 2023): 113, <https://www.nids.mod.go.jp/english/publication/security/pdf/2023/01/10.pdf>.

<sup>38</sup> Kurita Masahiro, ‘The 2019 Pulwama Crisis and India-Pakistan Deterrence Stability in the New Era,’ *Security and Strategy* 3 (January 2023): 114, <https://www.nids.mod.go.jp/english/publication/security/pdf/2023/01/10.pdf>.

<sup>39</sup> Muhammad Ashfaq Arain, ‘India’s Hybrid Warfare against Pakistan: Challenges & Response Options’ (Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies, June 2021), [https://casstt.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Issue\\_Paper\\_2-WEB-17\\_June\\_2021.pdf](https://casstt.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Issue_Paper_2-WEB-17_June_2021.pdf)

Pakistan relies on conventional methods such as manual reporting and analysis rather than advanced technologies to monitor and analyse social media for hybrid threat detection. It currently lacks sophisticated algorithms powered by machine learning and artificial intelligence to sift through vast amount of data in real time. Furthermore, the lack of crises management plans and outreach efforts hinder state's ability to detect and respond promptly to misinformation campaigns and propaganda, leaving Pakistan vulnerable to the stealthy tactics of hybrid warfare.

#### **4.7 Psychological Manoeuvring**

Among the most concerning aspects of hybrid warfare is the focus on targeting the national will of the people. Due to the psychological harm it inflicts, the task of effectively deterring becomes complicated. Indian psychological operation in 1971 exploited well-identified fault lines between East and West Pakistan. As a means to condition the masses, India capitalised on the rhetoric of asymmetric development, inadequate representation in power corridors, lack of political freedom, and cultural and ethnic propensities.<sup>40</sup> India's SWOT analysis was followed by a psychological warfare campaign against Pakistan, involving spreading rumours about the massacres of the Bengalis and the exodus of the refugees.

Furthermore, India has been employing psychological operations in Kashmir since the early years of the liberation movement. According to the Kashmiris who grew up in the 1990s, during the times when armed resistance was at its peak, there were recurrent incidents where Indian soldiers would break into the homes of people, vandalise their properties, and create disturbances. The underlying purpose was to

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<sup>40</sup> Javed Iqbal, "The Separation of East-Pakistan: Analyzing the Causes and Fixing the Responsibility," *Pakistan Journal of History and Culture* 29, no. 2 (2008): 53–74, [https://www.academia.edu/29939444/The\\_Separation\\_of\\_East\\_Pakistan\\_Analyzing\\_the\\_Causes\\_and\\_Fixing\\_the\\_Responsibility](https://www.academia.edu/29939444/The_Separation_of_East_Pakistan_Analyzing_the_Causes_and_Fixing_the_Responsibility).

instil a sense of fear and insecurity among the people to demoralise them and dissuade them from leaving their homes, even for a political gathering. The widespread cultivation of fear also weakens the connection of Kashmiris with their land and territory.

Similar tactics were employed by the US military during the Vietnam War; they utilised unsettling sounds to deter the National Liberation Front's soldiers. The amalgamation of sounds aimed to exploit the Vietnamese cultural belief that individuals not buried in their homeland would endure suffering in their afterlife. This was a psychological tactic employed to convince Vietnamese soldiers to leave their positions and go back to their home country. Likewise, Due to the continuous use of psychological operations in Kashmir, it is reported that nearly 60 percent of the population in IOK suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and anxiety.<sup>41</sup>

#### **4.8 Coercive diplomacy to isolate Pakistan**

For a long time, policymakers have viewed coercive diplomacy as a viable alternative to armed conflict. Refraining to engage in a constructive dialogue with Pakistan, India has also adopted a range of counter-productive measures. For example, in November 2016, The Foreign Office of Pakistan revealed that eight Indian diplomats, purportedly linked with RAW and the Indian Intelligence Bureau (IB), were found to be engaged in acts of terrorism in Pakistan under the cover of diplomatic assignments.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Omer Aijazi, 'Psychological Warfare: How the Military Creates Fear in Everyday Life in Kashmir,' Centre for Strategic and Contemporary Research, April 28, 2021, <https://cscr.pk/explore/themes/defense-security/psychological-warfare-how-the-military-creates-fear-in-everyday-life-in-kashmir/>.

<sup>42</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan, 'Record of the Press Briefing by Spokesperson,' November 3, 2016, <https://mofa.gov.pk/record-of-the-press-briefing-by-spokesperson-on-03-november-2016>.

Lobbying is another tactic employed by India to weaken the diplomatic position of Pakistan. For example, due to Indian lobbying in the US in 2010-11, Pakistan's request to acquire six Olive Hazard Perry-class frigates for its Navy was denied. Furthermore, the Indian government has repeatedly emphasised its aim to diplomatically isolate Pakistan at regional and global levels. For example, in the aftermath of diplomatic tension that arose due to the Uri attack in 2016, India declared its boycott of the SAARC summit, citing Pakistan's alleged role in the attack.<sup>43</sup> Prime Minister Modi also issued a warning of potential diplomatic isolation to Pakistan.

"We will isolate you. I will work for that.....Terrorist attacks in Bangladesh and Afghanistan were also being instigated by Pakistan. This is the only country that is exporting terrorism in all corners. Wherever there is news of terror, there is news that either the terrorist first went to this country or later, after the incident, like Osama Bin Laden.....India would continue to push to make Pakistan a pariah state in the eyes of the international community.....We will intensify our efforts and force you to be alone all over the world."<sup>44</sup>

India's unsubstantiated accusation and malicious campaign could result in significant ramifications for the entire South Asian region. Pakistan holds a pivotal geostrategic position in the world and isolating it regionally would pose challenges for inter-regional connectivity between South Asia and Central Asia.

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<sup>43</sup> Areeba Arif, "Energising SAARC: Options for Pakistan," *Strategic Studies* 38, no. 2 (August 9, 2018): 80, [https://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/5-SS\\_Areeba\\_Arif\\_No-2\\_2018.pdf](https://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/5-SS_Areeba_Arif_No-2_2018.pdf).

<sup>44</sup> Kokab Al-Saba, Noor Fatima, and Masood U. R. Khattak, 'India's Hybrid Warfare Strategy: Implications for Pakistan's Security,' *Journal of Xi'an Shiyou University* 19, no. 7 (July 2023): 341–71, <https://www.xisdjxsu.asia/V19I07-19.pdf>.

## 4.9 Cyber Attacks

The increase in cyber-attacks has amplified the asymmetric threat to the databases and decision-making processes of all countries.<sup>45</sup> The Indian government has officially sanctioned some state-level system firms to carry out continuous cyber assaults on the civil and military facilities in Pakistan. Since 2020, a group known as SideWinder has carried out an astonishing number of over 1,000 attacks on cyber assets related to government, military, and business sectors in Pakistan.<sup>46</sup> The group compromised, stole, and altered content within the targeted computer networks and government websites, such as the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (NEPRA), where they hosted a malicious payload for the purpose of distribution.

This is not the first instance where Pakistan's strategic assets have been subjected to cyber-attacks attributed to India. In 2021, Pakistan's Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) endured a significant cyber-attack, resulting in prolonged disruptions and the theft, alteration, and deletion of taxpayer data.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, there have been various attempts to vandalise institutional websites in Pakistan, including those of the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), the District Courts of Gujranwala, the Faisalabad Police Department, and the Lahore High Court.<sup>48</sup> India also reportedly uses Israeli software tools, such as "Pegasus" and "Chat Line," to hack into both Android and IOS mobile phones to get unauthorised access to

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<sup>45</sup> Tughral Yamin, 'Hybrid Warfare- Challenges for Pakistan,' *Strategic Thought*, no. 1 (2019): 134, <https://strategicthought.ndu.edu.pk/site/article/download/54/44/54>.

<sup>46</sup> Pierluigi Paganini, 'Snake Carried out over 1,000 Attacks since April 2020,' *Security Affairs*, May 31, 2022, <https://securityaffairs.com/131831/apt/sidewinder-aggressive-apt.html>.

<sup>47</sup> Irta Fatima, "Pakistan's Cyber Threat Landscape and Prospects of Regional Cooperation on Cyber Security," *Spotlight on Regional Affairs* 40, no. 11 (November 2022), <http://www.irs.org.pk/Spotlight/SP11022022.pdf>.

<sup>48</sup> Irta Fatima, "Pakistan's Cyber Threat Landscape and Prospects of Regional Cooperation on Cyber Security," *Spotlight on Regional Affairs* 40, no. 11 (November 2022), <http://www.irs.org.pk/Spotlight/SP11022022.pdf>.

WhatsApp chats. This targeting was discovered when the phones of 1,400 individuals subjected to hacking attempts over a two-week period were analysed.<sup>49</sup>

Therefore, India has strategically conducted extensive cyber warfare operations against Pakistan, officially authorizing state-level entities to carry out continuous cyber assaults on civil and military infrastructure. This aggressive stance has markedly intensified the asymmetric threat landscape, posing significant risks to the databases and decision-making processes of both nations. These cyber operations involve compromising, stealing, and altering content within crucial computer networks and government websites, often deploying malicious payloads for distribution. The frequency and severity of these cyber incidents highlight a persistent pattern of aggression targeting Pakistan's strategic assets.

In response, Pakistan has significantly bolstered its cybersecurity infrastructure, as demonstrated by the establishment of crucial institutions such as the National Centre for Cyber Security (NCCS) and the Pakistan Computer Emergency Response Team (PakCERT). Additionally, initiatives focused on digital literacy and awareness campaigns have been pivotal in cultivating a cyber-conscious public. However, given the ever-evolving landscape of cyber threats, there is a critical imperative to shift focus towards more advanced domains. This includes the development of indigenous cybersecurity technologies, the augmentation of cyber intelligence capabilities, and the cultivation of a robust cybersecurity industry.

## 5. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Pakistan must devise policy strategies to respond to the full range of hybrid war operations in the following areas.

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<sup>49</sup> 'Pakistan Army Identifies Major Cyber Attack by India Targeting Mobile Phones of Govt, Military Officials,' *The News International*, August 12, 2020, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/699597-pakistan-army-identifies-major-cyber-attack-by-india-targeting-mobile-phones-of-govt-military-officials>.

## **5.1 Leveraging Advanced Data Analytics and Intelligence Sharing for Hybrid Threat Detection**

The government should invest in cutting-edge technologies such as machine learning and artificial intelligence to analyse diverse data sources like social media, satellite imagery, and financial transactions for early detection of hybrid warfare tactics. Furthermore, promoting international collaboration and intelligence sharing among allied nations will strengthen collective defence against hybrid threats and enhance Pakistan's situational awareness in the region.

## **5.2 Prioritising Indigenous Technology Development for Pakistan's Digital Security**

By prioritising the development of indigenous hardware and software capabilities, Pakistan can reduce the risk of external manipulation and maintain greater control over its digital systems. Integrating the NASTP Kamra Techno Park, particularly the Aerospace Design and Innovation Centre (ADIC), into Pakistan's initiatives for developing indigenous hardware and software capabilities could be highly advantageous. The ADIC within NASTP encompasses various wings, including the NASTP Cyber and IT Division focusing on software development, computing, data centres, fintech, and cybersecurity.

## **5.3 Adopting a Counter-Lawfare Strategy**

Pakistan must adopt a counter-lawfare approach to thwart India's strategic manipulation of legal mechanisms. The Attorney General's office can play a key role by providing legal analysis, proposing initiatives, coordinating with agencies, prosecuting offenders, fostering international legal cooperation, and engaging in

judicial reviews. However, the office must be granted greater autonomy, allowing it to initiate actions without mandatory approval from the Law Ministry.

## **5.4 Safeguarding Pakistan's Financial System and Promoting Diversification**

Pakistan must put a regulatory framework to safeguard its financial system, such as strengthening anti-money laundering (AML) and counter-terrorism financing (CTF) measures, enhancing regulatory oversight, and promoting transparency in financial transactions. For this purpose, the government should establish a specialised Economic Intelligence Unit (EIU) to collect, monitor, process, and analyse economic trends, market dynamics, and potential threats to economic security.

## **5.5 Countering Misinformation and Disinformation**

Pakistan must implement diverse comprehensive communication strategies, encompassing proactive messaging, crisis communication plans, and targeted outreach efforts to engage diverse audiences across various communication channels. Proper channels must be established for timely reporting and response to false narratives and malicious content. Pakistan should learn from countries like Singapore and Finland in countering disinformation. For example, Singapore's Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA) allows quick correction or removal of false content, while Finland emphasises early media literacy education through initiatives like FactBar.

## 6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, in the rapidly transforming security landscape, the concept of warfare has undergone significant transformation, transcending traditional military paradigms. This has unleashed an era dominated by the complexities of hybrid warfare, a phenomenon encapsulating a diverse array of strategies, including cyber-attacks, psychological operations, coercive diplomacy, propaganda, proxy warfare, and grey zone operations, etc. The novelty of hybrid warfare lies in its ability to harness multiple sources of power simultaneously, strategically employing creativity, uncertainty, and cognitive aspects to operate below the threshold of immediate detection and response triggers.

In the context of South Asia, Pakistan has evidently been the target of hybrid tactics from its primary adversary, India. India's engagement in hybrid warfare is a complex interplay of historical animosities, regional power dynamics, and strategic recalibrations amid the changing geopolitical dynamics. Not only has India altered its land warfare strategy, but it has exploited socio-economic, political, ethnic, and religious fault lines within Pakistan to attain its national goals. New Delhi's adept employment of non-kinetic measures on multiple fronts has significantly disrupted the security situation of Pakistan.

Pakistan needs to comprehend the modalities and intricacies of Indian hybrid tactics in order to discern and counter hostile external actors and their domestic collaborators. From building a resilient economy and formulating a balanced foreign policy to fostering legal resilience, countering information warfare, navigating the cyber frontier, intelligence cooperation, comprehensive strategies are essential for addressing multifaceted challenges. Pakistan must adopt a whole-of-society approach, involving not only government but also civil society, private sector, and

general population. Robust implementation of these measures is important to safeguard Pakistan's national interests and foster regional stability.

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