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## Understanding Some Prominent Types of Warfare



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### Introduction

In the twenty-first century *Davos World*, conflicts are increasingly being characterised by careful calibration to remain below the threshold of a conventional war. The perception (*What is war?*) and prosecution (*How will war be conducted?*) of war has been undergoing a change and the focus now is increasingly on targeting the adversary in such a way that both attribution and retribution become difficult. True to the proverb "A chain is only as strong as its weakest link", traditional military might is being undermined by the exploitation of a host of non-military vulnerabilities of the adversary.

India has not defined, at least in the public domain, the various types of warfare despite having experienced very many forms of the same. In some cases, she has borrowed certain terms even after its usage was continued in the West.

There is a multiplicity of jargons associated with warfare and it is pertinent to note that there is no single, universally accepted definition for most of the terms. This necessitates a clear

### Key Points

1. Traditional military might is being undermined by the exploitation of a host of non-military vulnerabilities.
2. India has not defined, at least in the public domain, the various types of warfare despite having experienced very many forms of the same.
3. India needs to come up with a public military doctrine clearly stating what her understanding of the various terminologies is.
4. No one arm/service can guarantee victory. A whole-of-government approach is required to counter the challenges in today's world.
5. India needs to be prepared to counter and exploit the unconventional/grey space to maintain its competitive edge WITHOUT compromising on its conventional abilities.

The Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS), New Delhi, is an independent think-tank dealing with national security and conceptual aspects of land warfare, including conventional and sub-conventional conflict and terrorism. CLAWS conducts research that is futuristic in outlook and policy-oriented in approach.

## Understanding Some ...

understanding of at least the most prominent ones among them.

### Irregular Warfare

Also known as Low Intensity Conflict, Irregular Warfare has been called the oldest form of warfare.<sup>1</sup> It can be seen as a type of warfare in which a significant number of those engaging in armed struggle do not belong to the armed forces or other security forces of the country.

The term can be traced at least to 1746 when an anonymous article appeared in *Gentleman's Magazine* (a British publication) titled, "Essay on Regular and Irregular Forces."<sup>2</sup> In 1986, the term was used in the English edition of a German book titled *Modern Irregular Warfare in Defense Policy and as a Military Phenomenon* by Friedrich August Freiherr von der Heydte – a German World War II veteran.<sup>3</sup> In the United States (US), the term was first used by the Department of Defense (DoD) in 1996 in a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) document and attracted much attention after 9/11 as the focus shifted to other-than-state enemies.<sup>4</sup> IW was an important theme in the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review Report,<sup>5</sup> and in the same year, an execution strategy for Irregular Warfare was drafted.<sup>6</sup>

### Definition

In 2006, the following definition for Irregular Warfare was approved by the US Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff – "a violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant population(s). IW favors indirect and asymmetric approaches, though it may employ the full range of military and other capacities, in order to erode an adversary's power, influence, and will."<sup>7</sup>

The US military doctrine recognises five core activities of irregular warfare:<sup>8</sup>

- Counter-Terrorism (CT)
- COIN
- Unconventional Warfare (UW)

- Stability Operations (SO)\*
- Foreign Internal Defence (FID)\*\*

### Salient Features

- The operational environment of Irregular Warfare is very distinct, shaped by sociology, psychology, and history. Operating in this environment necessitates an understanding of the same.
- It is a people-centric warfare where gaining influence on the relevant population is more important than control of the adversary's territory.
- It is a protracted warfare, lasting for many years.
- Insurgency and counter-insurgency (COIN) lie at the heart of Irregular Warfare.
- Subversion of the adversary's political control over the population is generally the aim of Irregular Warfare and tactics such as attrition are used for the same.
- While the full spectrum of military and non-military capabilities can be exploited for Irregular Warfare, asymmetric means are preferred.

### Note

Irregular Warfare and counter-insurgency are not synonymous. The former concept covers the wider gamut of non-traditional warfare, while COIN is a subset of Irregular Warfare. Similarly, Unconventional Warfare is a subset and a means of prosecuting Irregular Warfare and not synonymous with Irregular Warfare.

\* SO: An overarching term encompassing various military missions, tasks, and activities conducted outside the United States in coordination with other instruments of national power to maintain or re-establish a safe and secure environment, provide essential governmental services, emergency infrastructure reconstruction, and humanitarian relief. <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/Online-Exclusive/2017-Online-Exclusive-Articles/Stability-Operations-in-Syria/>

\*\* FID: Participation by civilian and military agencies of one government in any of the programmes conducted by another government to free and protect its society from subversion, lawlessness, and insurgency. <https://samm.dsca.mil/glossary/foreign-internal-defense-fid>

### Example

The first phase of the Chinese Civil War (1927-37) fought between the National Revolutionary Army and the Red Army is an example of IW. In Afghanistan, the Taliban are an irregular force fighting the regular troops. The Fedayeen Saddam was an irregular force that fought during the 2003 Invasion of Iraq.

Operation Gulmarg (1947), where Pakistan sent tribesmen and other irregulars along with its Army to capture Srinagar, and Operation Gibraltar (1965), where Pakistani Army personnel and irregulars infiltrated across the LoC (Line of Control) into the Kashmir Valley to incite the local population to rebellion, are examples of IW in the Indian subcontinent. In both the operations, Pakistan failed to achieve its objectives.

### Unconventional Warfare (UW)

The origin of the doctrinal concept for UW can be traced in the US to the creation of the Office of Strategic Services during World War II.<sup>9</sup> Terming it “partisan warfare,” the US Army issued an official definition in 1950 that covered aspects of unconventional warfare. In 1951, the US Army’s UW assets were consolidated under the office of the Psychological Warfare, and the US Army published the first two field manuals for the conduct of SO with an emphasis on UW.<sup>10</sup> The 1955 Field Manual 31-20, Special Forces Group, read – “UW consists of the three interrelated fields of guerrilla warfare (GW), escape and evasion, and subversion against hostile states.” The subsequent Cold War period brought about further changes to the definition; working through irregular proxies, however, remained the essence of UW.<sup>11</sup>

### Definition

As per the US Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms, the definition of Unconventional Warfare (UW) is that it consists of “activities conducted to enable a resistance movement or insurgency to coerce, disrupt, or overthrow a government or occupying power by operating through or with an underground, auxiliary, and guerrilla force in a denied area.”<sup>12</sup>

Use of a proxy force to bring down an adversary’s (legitimate) government lies at the heart of UW.

### Salient Features

The following are the salient features of UW:

- Indirect and covert approach to obtain victory (i.e., use of a proxy force like a foreign resistance movement). Participation of indigenous, irregular surrogates defines unconventional warfare.
- The aim is generally to overthrow or undermine the governmental control in that region and force the government to talk or make concessions without resorting to war.
- Use of psychological tools to win over the target population. Hence, targeting of civilian infrastructure is generally avoided.
- Significant use of guerrilla warfare/tactics.

### Note

- UW differs from guerrilla warfare in the sense that the former is an operation while the latter is a technique. Also, while all UW operations are special operations, all special operations are not UW.
- Conceptually, UW may be similar to asymmetric or unrestricted warfare/non-linear warfare as the focus is on indirect means, but it is not synonymous with them as the UW necessarily involves the use of surrogate forces that are also irregular.

### Example

While the US’ support to the Nicaraguan Contras is an example of UW, its support to Juan Guaidó’s Popular Will party in Venezuela and Operación Libertad cannot be classified as UW due to the absence of irregular surrogates.

Another example of UW is the Pakistani/Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) support to *Referendum 2020*. Patterns of operation through a proxy force (Khalistani extremists), use of psychological tools, and efforts to undermine Indian sovereignty and the government’s authority are clearly visible here. Code-named Op Express, the

ISI is providing support to Sikh separatists, especially those operating out of the US, Canada, and the UK. Apart from powerful online propaganda, Referendum posters were put up at Nankana Sahib and Panja Sahib *gurudwaras* of Pakistan and similar posters were also seen in the Indian towns of Mohali, Tarn Taran, Patiala, Gurdaspur, etc. Pakistan allowed Sikhs for Justice (SFJ), a US-based group, to open a permanent office in Lahore to coordinate the registration of Referendum votes in 2019, planned slyly to coincide with the 550th birth anniversary celebrations of Guru Nanak Dev at Kartarpur (and hence, the focus on Kartarpur Corridor). The statements issued by SFJ of it being banned by Pakistan should be taken with a pinch of salt; it is nothing but deception.

### Hybrid Warfare

This term gained popularity when it was used to describe the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah War, but it can be traced to 1998 and attributed to Robert G Walker—a retired US Naval officer. He mentioned that there was “nothing new” about hybrid operations and that the US Marine Corps had conducted both conventional and unconventional operations, making it a hybrid force.<sup>13</sup> He further defined “hybrid warfare” as “lying in the interstices between special and conventional warfare” in 1998.<sup>14</sup>

Historian Thomas Hubert who, in 1996, called the concert of regular and irregular forces “compound warfare,” saw hybrid warfare as nothing but compound warfare with new tools like terrorism.<sup>15</sup>

Lt Col Frank G. Hoffman—a retired US Armed Forces officer—states that “hybrid warfare incorporates a full range of different modes of warfare, including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts including indiscriminate violence and coercion, and criminal disorder.”<sup>16</sup> In his article titled “Hybrid vs Compound War,” he states that it is the tactics used throughout the modes of warfare to achieve gains through the use of “simultaneously and adaptively employ(ing) a fused mix of conventional

weapons, irregular tactics, terrorism and criminal behavior” in a single space and time.<sup>17</sup>

### Definition

Though there is no consensus on the definition of hybrid warfare, it can be seen as a type of warfare that involves the use of a combination of various forms of warfare, i.e., the full spectrum of warfare is available for exploitation and multiple components of the same are used for prosecuting it at the same time.

In 2011, the US Army defined a hybrid threat as “the diverse and dynamic combination of regular forces, irregular forces, criminal elements, or a combination of these forces and elements all unified to achieve mutually benefiting effects.”<sup>18</sup>

The former United States Joint Forces Command defines a hybrid threat as “any adversary that simultaneously and adaptively employs a tailored mix of conventional, irregular, terrorism and criminal means or activities in the operational battle-space. Rather than a single entity, a hybrid threat or challenger may be a combination of state and non-state actors.”<sup>19</sup>

According to the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats, Helsinki, a hybrid threat refers to an action conducted by the state or non-state actors, whose goal is to undermine or harm the target by influencing its decision-making at the local, regional, state or institutional level ... Activities can take place, for example, in the political, economic, military, civil, or information domains. They are conducted using a wide range of means and designed to remain below the threshold of detection and attribution.”<sup>20</sup>

There can be two types of hybrid threats: grey-zone hybrid threats and open-warfare hybrid threats, distinguishable on the basis of visible use conventional weapons and tactics, and presence/absence of ambiguity.

### Salient Features

In hybrid warfare, multiple vulnerabilities across the domains of Diplomacy, Information, Military, Economy, Finance, Law Enforcement, Intelligence, and

Population (DIMEFLIP) are targeted simultaneously. Hybrid threats can use one or more of a nation's instruments of power (diplomatic, information, military, and economic) to influence an adversary and achieve strategic objectives.

- Tools used are military and non-military, including militias, cyber, economic, political, and psychological dimensions.

### Note

- Many definitions of hybrid warfare underscore the need for the use of a combination of conventional and non-conventional means to qualify as hybrid, disregarding the simultaneous use of multiple means of just non-conventional warfare like cyberattacks, circulation of Fake Indian Currency Note (FICN), Psy Ops, etc.
- Russia's concept of "non-linear warfare," China's concept of what came to be known as "unrestricted warfare" are essentially hybrid as they seek to employ the full spectrum of military and non-military capabilities to undermine the adversary. It may be topical to state that a few days before the Crimean Crisis, Vladislav Surkov, a Russian politician, used the term "non-linear warfare" in a story published under his alleged pseudonym – Nathan Dubovitsky.<sup>21</sup>
- According to Gen George Casey, former Chief of the US Army, decentralisation was vital to hybridity; the resulting doctrine, hence, saw a hybrid threat as combinations of conventional, irregular, terrorist, and criminal elements which seeks to counter the Western conventional superiority. The British doctrine, on the other hand, sees hybrid warfare as a facet of irregular warfare, in line with Huber's definition.<sup>22</sup>

### Example

During the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah War, Hezbollah, a non-state actor, exploited various dimensions of warfare including psychological warfare (Hezbollah's TV channel al-Manar, for example, played videos of

the Hezbollah hitting the Israeli naval destroyer Hanit and Hassan Nasrallah taking credit for the same), electronic warfare (Hezbollah prevented the IDF from jamming its networks south of Litani river), use of guerrilla as well as conventional tactics, etc.

While the full dimension of hybrid warfare has been experienced in Iraq and Afghanistan, India has experienced a limited dimension of it in the form of simultaneous episodes of Pakistan-trained terrorists engaging in cross-border terrorism, propaganda by Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) – Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), circulation of FICN, etc.

## Grey-Zone Operations

### Introduction

Grey zone can be defined as the condition between complete peace (white) and an all-out conventional war (black), i.e., a condition of no (all-out) war no peace. Grey zone operations is hence a broad term covering wide range of actions including economic warfare, creeping military expansion, information warfare, psychological warfare, cyberwarfare, etc. Also termed "guerrilla geopolitics," basically anything short of conventional war (but above complete peace) falls in the grey zone.

### Definition

Grey-zone conflicts again have no single, universally accepted definition. In the January 2016 issue of *Joint Forces Quarterly*, a grey-zone conflict was defined as a segment of the conflict continuum "characterized by intense political, economic, information, and military competition more fervent in nature than normal steady-state diplomacy, yet short of conventional war."<sup>23</sup>

### Salient features

- Multiple vulnerabilities across the domains of DIMEFLIP are targeted simultaneously and all tools of foreign policy, whether governmental or non-governmental, can be exploited for doing the same.
- It is as much a tool of the weaker state against the stronger one, as it of the stronger state against the weaker one.

- Grey-zone operations debilitate the target's decision-making apparatus. The target is faced with the conundrum of whether to respond at all, and if so, with which instrument(s) of retaliation.
- It is often characterised by disinformation, ambiguity, and/or incremental aggression.
- Operations in the grey-zone seek to avoid attribution and retribution.

#### Note

- Grey-zone is not a type of warfare, but an operational environment.
- Hybrid tactics and grey-zone conflicts are not independent of each other. Hybrid tactics are used across the full spectrum of conflict, including the grey zone.

#### Example

Grey-zone operations have become increasingly prominent in today's world due to globalisation and economic interdependence. Revisionist powers Russia and China have mastered the art of grey-zone operations. Be it creation of artificial islands, stopping exports of rare earth elements to Japan in 2010, boycott of South Korea's tourism industry and companies linked to the deployment of the US Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) system in South Korea, China has effectively used tactics of coercion in the grey zone.

Russia has also operated successfully in the grey zone be it the cyberattacks targeting Latvia's foreign and defence bodies in 2018 as also in the aftermath of the Bronze Night riots in Estonia in 2007, deployment of "little green men" during the Crimean Crisis, cutting natural gas supply to Ukraine, alleged interference in the US elections, etc.

ISI's funding of stone-pelters in the Kashmir Valley,<sup>24</sup> uploading of morphed images which created panic in the people from North East India and triggered their migration from South India (a bulk of the websites in which these photos were uploaded were traced to

Pakistan), China building ports in India's strategic neighbourhood, China's cartographic aggression including objecting to Indian leaders' visits to sovereign Indian territory of Arunachal Pradesh, building of dams on river Brahmaputra (Tsangpo in Tibetan) potentially threatening India's riparian rights, etc., are ways in which grey-zones operation have been prosecuted against India.

#### Response Mechanism

While certain elements, such as the human element, the financial element, etc., may be the pivot of certain conflicts/wars, the act of countering and/or preventing the same needs a whole-of-government approach. Sticking just to one element, whether military or non-military, is not likely to produce/sustain the desired results.

#### The Way Ahead for India

- India needs to come up with a public military doctrine clearly stating what her understanding of the various terminologies is.
- Increasing operations in the grey zone have rendered treaties such as the Kellogg-Briand Pact, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, etc., anachronistic and meaningless. India, regardless of whether or not she is a signatory to the pacts, needs to define what she considers an act of aggression which would invite a reaction, i.e., she needs to redefine what she considers "war."
- As unconventional threats, and challenges in new dimensions of warfare become increasingly common, India should put in place a whole-of-government structure to counter the same, as also act proactively in all realms – military and non-military. India needs to be able to better exploit DIME and its PMESII (Political, Military, Economic, Social, Information, and Infrastructure) effects.
- India should incorporate into its concept of deterrence, a robust system of hybrid elements

including weaponised information, and have a mechanism to keep on upgrading it, keeping in mind the dynamic nature of especially the information space and the security space in general.

- The effect of grey-zone operations should be factored in during war-gaming exercises conducted by the Armed Forces.
- A quantification methodology should be developed for the Military Civic Action undertaken by the Armed Forces, and a strategy should be formulated to follow it year after year. Such actions should not be personality-oriented.

### Conclusion

As is evident from the definitions above, there is a degree of overlap and fluidity in the definitions of various jargons and no watertight compartmentalisation, which is perhaps true of warfare in today's time too.

Rather than come up with catchy phrases and then try to fit a complex situation into it, a thorough analysis of the situation should be carried out and a term coined then to define similar situations, i.e., the emphasis

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should be on defining the situation and then naming it rather than fitting a situation into a term.

While the tactics and nomenclature may be new, the concept of targeting the adversary's Achilles heel, be it cognitive, economic, political, etc., has existed since time immemorial. Indian mythology is replete with examples of "devas" (divine beings) using deception and unconventional means to defeat "asuras" (non-divine beings), the Mahabharata talks about how Shikhandi was used as a shield by Arjun. Arthashastra – the ancient Indian treatise on statecraft, economic policy and military strategy – talks about open, concealed, and silent wars. Shivaji Bhonsle – the seventeenth-century Maratha king – successfully employed guerrilla tactics to frustrate and defeat the numerically superior Mughals.

Hybrid operations in the grey zone will continue to characterise warfare and as conventional wars become increasingly unlikely, India needs to be prepared to counter and exploit the unconventional/grey space to maintain its competitive edge WITHOUT compromising on its conventional abilities.

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