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

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

— Dr. Johann Schmid

Exordium

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

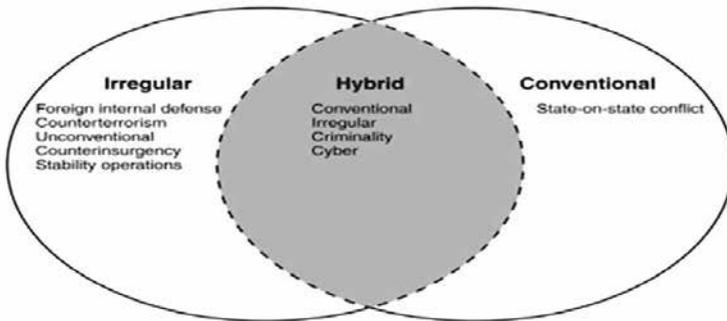
So, it can be irrefutably reiterated that ‘war remains a chameleon’ and we need to question and define as to what actually has changed. Yes, the

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

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

Fig 1: Hybrid War Overlaps Irregular and Conventional War



Source: GAO Analysis of DoD Military Concept

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

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

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

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

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

Hybrid Warfare: India's Conundrum

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

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

Identifying the Hybrid Threat

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sabotage of India’s growth through smuggling, dumping of goods, protectionism, circulation of Fake Indian Currency Notes (FICN) and similar activities by both China and Pakistan, comprises another hybrid threat which will require to be curbed through more ingenious methods. With respect to threats emanating from non-traditional sources like the use of water as a weapon through the creation of either shortages⁴ or oversupply (resulting in floods), or even large-scale ecological damage, is another possibility.⁵

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

The ‘Obsessed’ Pakistan

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Hidden 'Dragon'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The 'Markhor' and 'Dragon' Collusivity

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

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

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

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

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

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

Impact of this Symbiotic Relationship

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Constituting an Effective Strategy and Response

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

— Giulio Douhet

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

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

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

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

Response to Pakistan

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

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

What are the Options Left in the Response Mechanism?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Response Beyond Military

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Dealing with the Chinese Quagmire

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Notes

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