**Changing Nature of Conflict**

[Atique Ur Rehman](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/atique-ur-rehman/%22%20%5Co%20%22More%20Articles%20by%20Atique%20Ur%20Rehman)

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War has always been an instrument of change. Believe it or not, it will continue to be so in times to come. The basic character of war can not be different from what it has been in the past. However, due to technological advances in artificial intelligence and biotech, the shift of economic power from west to east and challenges faced by nation-states due to social media, the conduct of the war has changed manifoldly. The Cold War gave rise to clandestine operations. This new war is being fought in the virtual domain to occupy the human mind to influence public opinion for vested interests. Since information is the new currency, it is a war of information and big data. Public opinion is the most powerful tool of politics, trade, social development and policy formulation.

In 1980, US Security experts introduced the concept of 4th generation warfare to represent failed states, threatened by insurgents. In the last two decades, the world has witnessed a war against terrorism. After experiencing 4th generation warfare, the world is now confronted with a new kind of warfare: 5th generation or Hybrid warfare.

The dynamism of the world is moving at a much faster pace than we had witnessed in previous centuries. The unipolar world is into making another shift; changing into bipolar or multipolar. In its entirety, the new game is being played in the Eurasian landmass. The US has already declared Russia and China their competitors. It does not see good in Pakistan and Iran either. The US wants to maintain the status quo while the rising powers want to reform the global structure to make it more equitable and just.

Through a proxy war, the American engagement against Russian interest in Ukraine and Chinese interest in the South China Sea brought both global powers closer to establish an unprecedented Eurasian partnership, which brings us to the present day. Both Russia and China have been cooperating to facilitate the transition of a new global order. Pakistan stands at an important geostrategic position amid all this transition. Hence, it remains a target of the entire Indian and the US efforts in hybrid conflicts. After the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan, the situation seems to be attaining more sensitivity, provoking far more sinister attacks against Pakistan in the near and far future.

Indian false flag operations have been a part of its strategy, in pursuit of the Chanakya dictums of guile and deceit.

Developing artificial intelligence and biotechnology are the biggest challenges of the 21st century. Advances in both fields facilitate humanity the power to reshape and re-engineer life. Ongoing virtual wars are part of the same challenge. These virtual confrontations aim to overcome the perception of masses for trade, political and other social benefits. Humans think in stories rather than in facts, numbers or equations. What is happening in the world today, and what is the deep meaning of events are beyond human comprehension. Only big data machines can comprehend such a volume of algorithms. Firms managing big data algorithms are holding power to understand and manipulate masses perception. The human mind is unable to conduct a reality check of so much of information, which ultimately goes to wilderness. The sense of disorientation and impending doom is exacerbated by the accelerating pace of technological disruption. The liberal political system has been shaped during the industrial era to manage a world of steam engines, oil refineries and television sets. It finds it difficult to deal with the ongoing revolutions in information technology and biotechnology.

Thus, the question remains how is Pakistan facing this new form of war, more lethal than kinetic operation?

This type of war is usually prolonged and aimed to achieve long-term objectives. The technique involves the use of proxies, terrorism and manipulation through information operations, exploiting economic shortfalls and winning over diplomatic leverage. Soft power is the key element in studying the effectiveness of hybrid conflict. Soft power can be weaponised as a force of coercion and employed instead of, or in concert with, the application of violence.

Technological advances in surveillance devices have enhanced the potential to cause a desired blow to the adversary through sophisticated means. Ghost political entities, NGOs, Facebook, Whatsapp and Twitter are tools of the 21st century, which are now effectively being employed to shape public perception in the desired direction. Pre-existing identity conflicts exist in every state but those might not reach a level where it could bring a political change unless supported from outside. In Hybrid conflicts, outside forces act to ignite those historical, religious, geographical, ethnic or socio-economic conflicts. The creation of BLA, TTP and PTM are some examples to quote for reference.

The most cost-effective way to presently wage a war is not to do so directly, but to indirectly provoke what appears to be a “civil war” in the targeted state. This is achieved by using the specific NGOs and information technology to spark identity conflict, taking advantage of historical, ethnic, religious, socio-economic, and geographic differences in bringing this about.

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is the prime target of the US and Indian propaganda. All possible efforts are being made by opposing forces to disrupt, control, influence the CPEC, because of its geostrategic significance for China and Pakistan both. India has established special intelligence cell in 2015 by spending $500 million to sabotage CPEC. Recent disclosure of Indian chronicles by EUDisInfoLab establishes the fact that India is big time busy to sabotage CPEC.

Criminality is the most dominating feature of Hybrid operations. Nine Chinese workers were killed at Dasu, in northern region of Pakistan, only a day ahead of Joint Coordination Committee (JCC) meeting between two countries. JCC is the highest forum to review the progress of CPEC and also take decision for the future projects. China postponed the JCC due to impending security situation. This form of warfare infuse insecurity through psychological warfare among civil population.

India has been consistently involved in proxy and propaganda war against Pakistan. Thus Pulwama was orchestrated by Modi to win extremist vote in the state elections. Timing of Pulwama attack was carefully selected to align it Taliban-US peace talks which were maturing into final stages, visit of Saudi Crown Prince to Pakistan and Kulbushan’s hearing which was also planned shortly. So what else could be better time to blame Pakistan with the purpose of isolating it in the region.

Indian false flag operations have been a part of its strategy, in pursuit of the Chanakya dictums of guile and deceit. Chittisinghpura incident, in which 35 villagers of Sikh faith were killed by own Indian agencies in Anantnag district, was staged on the occasion of visit of Bill Clinton to India in March 2000. Terror attack on Indian Parliament by a handful of “militants” on December 13, 2001 was again a false flag operation, launched in the wake of the 9/11 attack, to bracket Pakistan with international terrorism.

Recent disclosure of Indian Chronicles by EUDisInfoLab is a testimony to Indian nefarious designs to propagate against Pakistan. Indian Chronicle is 15-year influence operation which was being led by the Srivastava Group. The propaganda operation began in 2005 and is still ongoing. Indian Chronicle is a testimony to the Dosier, Pakistan had given to UN in 2020 about hybrid war, India has unleashed against Pakistan. Since last fifteen years India is spreading fake news through a multi layered network of 750 fake websites and Media houses in 116 countries.

International Financial Institutions like IMF, World Bank, Asian Development Bank, UN, WHO, USAID are influential to carry out the agenda of big powers as part of hybrid conflict. Cultural attack through films, webseries are also very poisonous to hit the basic norms and ideology of a nation.

Pakistan need to prepare itself well in the intellectual and technical domains for future conflicts which will be fought in the cyber domain.

*The writer is a Phd in International Relations from QAU and can be reached at atiquesheikh2000@gmail.com.*