**Hybrid war outplays nuclear deterrence**

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The sole purpose of the theorists and strategists at the advent of nuclear deterrence was to avoid a direct military engagement between Cold War rivals: United States (US) and Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). They understood the consequences of a nuclear conflagration between the two superpowers and spent years devising strategies to avoid a direct military confrontation of any sort. While both US and USSR prepared themselves to counter each other’s nuclear initiative, efforts were made to challenge each other’s military capability through the proxies. The process continued until the Cold War ended with the breakup of USSR and then US had to look for an alternate adversary to justify Pentagon’s defense expenditures. Fortunately, US found its new battleground in the Middle East and then in Afghanistan in post 9/11 environment. The hard-fought military engagement with battle hardened Taliban is perhaps nearing an end after Doha Agreement of February 2020.

In South Asia, nuclear equation was meant to ensure that an-all out conventional war is avoided, but limited wars due to protracted conflicts may continue at the peripheries. The enduring rivalry between India and Pakistan has been changing the battlegrounds. From all-out conventional wars in the pre-nuclear era to the limited military engagements in Siachen, Kargil and Balakot under the nuclear overhang, to all spectrum hybrid war spanning over two decades, India has left no stone unturned to subjugate Pakistan with an active support of the US and its allies. However, Pakistan’s response to India’s hybrid war, as exposed recently by European Watchdog through ‘Indian Chronicles’ has been of great significance. The people of Pakistan remained steadfast behind its respective governments in general and armed forces, to ward off India’s efforts of creating chaos and disunity among the populace and the federating units. The people of Pakistan were subjected to brutal bombing attacks by suicide bombers who were trained, funded, and facilitated by India. At least 40-50 such attacks were inflicted each year on different locations: places of worship to the shopping malls, and children’s schools to in-person target killings of military, religious and sectarian leaders. The Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs) of Pakistan bore the brunt of India’s physical attacks under the ambit of hybrid war because such attacks were supported by a well-planned media campaign against the abilities of Pakistan Armed Forces to protect itself, its installations, and its people.

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India made use of all elements of hybrid war to weaken Pakistan from within to make it a pliant state so that it can resolve all its disputes including Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) on its own terms. While India used its regular military force for the cross-LoC (Line of Control) firings on the military and civilian targets, it used special forces for espionage and instigations of Baloch nationalists to raise alarms in western capitals. The same has been highlighted in the report of EU DisinfoLab that India spent 15 years spreading anti-Pakistan sentiments through some 750 fake media outlets all over the world. Concurrently, India used its diplomatic leverage effectively to hurt Pakistan’s economy and stature by implicating it in money laundering and terror financing. Information warfare and propaganda campaign were the other tools which were effectively deployed by India to create chaos internally and pressurize from outside to submit to its prescription of peace which were obviously not in Pakistan’s best interests. Unfortunately, India got enough local support for the purpose in the form of so-called Baloch separatists and nationalists who could be easily lured for petty personal gains.

Though Pakistan was able to sail through the most difficult period of its history when it faced terrorism, sectarianism, urban unrest, election engineering, and religious extremism simultaneously, its societal faultiness have been badly exposed. Therefore, there is a need to repair the damage caused by India’s hybrid war on our society through multiple counter-narratives.

One, political government and the military establishments together make a concerted effort to make people understand India’s philosophy, and modalities adopted in its execution of hybrid war on Pakistan.

Two, Pakistan must come up with a strong counter-narrative particularly for the western world that India has been instrumental in creating chaos and unrest in an effort to destabilize a nuclear weapon state, which has been a frontline state in global effort against counterterrorism (CT).

Three, Pakistan must not leave its nuclear capability to avoid an all-out conventional war against India but use it to ensure an all-spectrum national security.

Four, government must make an effort to bring all stakeholders on to one page when it comes to national security issues. Unfortunately, the same was not seen even in times of COVID crisis, or during a vote on Financial Action Task Force (FAFT). At least on these two issues entire nation should have been on the same page.

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