

MODI GOVERNMENT'S HYBRID STRATEGIC POSTURE: IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL SECURITY OF PAKISTAN

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Abstract

Over the period, the strategic approach adopted by India towards Pakistan has characteristically recalibrated and modelled around compellence, lawfare and diplomacy. The paper examines New Delhi's evolving posture under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who emphasises a more audacious framework and has shifted how it manages regional security and bilateral tensions with Pakistan. Hence, it examines how it has affected Pakistan's internationality. This study draws on regional security literature, i.e., Hybrid warfare, Compellence, Diplomacy, and Law fare, to critically assess the underlying logic of India/Modi's posture and its implications for crisis stability in the South Asian region. Moreover, this paper contextualises sequences of state actions over time, including across the Line of Control (LoC), legislative changes in Illegally Occupied Jammu & Kashmir (IIOJ&K), and coercive diplomatic engagements in multilateral forums, as part of a strategic signalling approach. Within this compellence, diplomacy, and lawfare lens, state actions empirically validate and support the literature on "hybrid warfare architecture" as an all-encompassing theoretical framework for 21st-century conflict characterised by multi-model strategic competition. Thus, the study explores whether these developments represent an enduring, strategically planned, tactically calculated and deliberately initiated transformation or merely a context-based response to security and internationality-related challenges for Pakistan. Lastly, the current integrative approach enhances conceptual clarity and promotes cross-domain analysis. The governance perspective examines the broader implications for Pakistan's diplomatic manoeuvrability, deterrence, development and the future trajectory of Pakistan/Modi-India relations in a nuclearised environment.

Keywords: Compellence, Diplomacy, Lawfare, Hybrid Warfare, Military Confrontation.

Introduction

After the British withdrawal from the subcontinent in August 1947, British India was divided into two independent states: Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority, West Pakistan and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh).

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This hastily executed partition triggered immensely devastating consequences for the region. Meanwhile, Pakistan and India have long shared highly complicated and intermittently adversarial relations shaped by historically unresolved legacies, territorial conflicts, and periodic security crises. Since independence, India has pursued a strategy shaped by aggressive diplomacy and military confrontation with Pakistan.

However, over the past decade, under the premiership of Narendra Modi, who has adopted a more assertive stance in the strategic and political environment in South Asia, the environment has changed significantly, advancing a personalised Modi agenda that reflects a confrontational approach to relations with Pakistan. Since 2014 and up to year 2025 PM Modi/India's strategic position reflects a growing emphasis on operational readiness, war signalling, and usage of varied instruments of statecraft i.e., military actions and legal or administrative tools as evident in 2016 cross border operation which systemically lead to notable developments such as in 2019 constitutional changes related to IIOJ&K marked a massive administrative re-alignment with strategic implications on the territorial sovereignty and followed by "2019 Balakot airstrike" and in 2025 "Operation Sindoor" officially presented to international community as a defensive responses to India's national security concerns this further signifies willingness to adopt a more calibrated military actions with controlled framework against Pakistan.

Compellence, Lawfare and Diplomacy as components critical to Hybrid-Warfare; Literature Review

The hybrid warfare concept has recently gained attention in security scholarship as an umbrella theory for explaining the increasingly multifaceted character of contemporary conflicts. Initially articulated by Frank G. Hoffman, hybrid warfare refers to the concurrent and sequential employment of conventional, irregular, and disruptive means to achieve underlying political objectives¹. In this way, warfare has evolved and is no longer limited to kinetic clashes; it now involves the fusion of military and non-military instruments in a highly synchronised way. Unlike traditional warfare hybrid strategies include for example, Mosqura and Bachmann described conflicts as "states or non-state actors exploit all available modes of war by using advanced conventional weapons, disinformation, economic coercion, irregular tactics, terrorism, and disruptive technologies as well as criminality to destabilise an existing order² against the target state to exploit its vulnerabilities across state and societal structures.

This argument is critical in support of the review of the study, especially in the context of Pakistan, a recipient of modern warfare. Thus, a comprehensive literature is scarce in the context of Pakistan in which author adopted hybrid warfare as the leading theory to provide a meta-framework within which Compellence, Diplomacy and Lawfare are treated as interrelated components or tools to descriptively explain the phenomenon of hybrid warfare, hence, aim to provide

exploratory analysis on events and state-actions (Indian initiatives) towards Pakistan over the specific period of time (2014 - 2025).

Hybrid Warfare

As established in early scholarship hybrid warfare encompasses multidimensional elements (e.g., informational, military, political, and economic), deliberate ambiguity and attributions for deniability, synchronicity across multiple methods, and a combination of state and non-state actors³. One of the most important discussions concerning its novelty is that some strongly argue that the hybrid mode of warfare is essentially a rebranding of older concepts⁴ (e.g., asymmetric, compound, and irregular warfare). However, others contend that it is a distinct evolutionary shift⁵. This approach has been used by states like India, and Russia whose campaign have integrated propaganda, and military and non-military tactics to achieve their objectives⁶.

On the contrary, scholarship emphasises that hybrid warfare is a complex reality that blurs the lines between peace and conflict, reality and fantasy, this confusion complicates the legal threshold, for instance, (what constitutes an armed attack or an armed conflict), consequently, it exploits existing vulnerabilities in the global legal order⁷. Similarly, hybrid threats usually operate in a “grey zone” between peace and wartime. Hence, it poses a challenge to the existing rules of attribution of armed conflict law⁸. Therefore, in the context of hybrid warfare, as an umbrella theory, this phenomenon can be viewed as a tool that can provide a comprehensive lens as it recognises that state and individuals may use instruments across a range of power not simply ‘a force’ but also information as warfare, hence, can exploit law, diplomacy, economics, as well as avenues of IT to target cultural assets⁹. From this perspective, components such as compellence, law fare, and diplomacy are not tangential but intrinsic within the hybrid actor’s toolbox.

Compellence: A Critical Constituent of Hybrid Warfare

In the realm of International Relations, compellence is a strategy refers to active ‘offensive’ form of coercion and in the context of hybrid warfare, compellence can be seen as a methodically designed, calculated, predicted and flexibly adjusted campaign by combining limited use of force, sanctions, information operations, cyber operations, and exerting diplomatic pressure aimed at altering the adversary’s behaviour to undo the actions it shall or has taken¹⁰. Whilst the academic discussion on compellence centres on military threats and coercive diplomacy¹¹, however, within the hybrid warfare framework, the approach is reconceptualised and configured to include multi-domain coercion, such as Kinetic, Informational, Legal, and Economic¹².

It suggests that hybrid actors do not merely deter but also compel, e.g., through coercion, concessions, forcing policy change, and shaping decision-making. It indicates that compellence naturally situates within hybrid operations as one of the lever mechanisms for achieving political objectives through indirect and multifaceted means. Scholars explored compellence through coercive diplomacy¹³ and argue that it is used to restructure regional security governance¹⁴. Meanwhile, proxies alongside deterrence is used to put pressure on adversaries in asymmetric conflicts¹⁵.

Despite its integration, the literature on compellence related to hybrid warfare remains scarce¹⁶. In contrast, much of the classical scholarship on compellence (outside the hybrid framing) treats it as primarily a military-driven form of coercion. Thus, embedding compellence as a tool within the hybrid warfare theory invites further empirical validation, which this paper seeks to provide by contextualising the sequence of state actions e.g., India and political events in Pakistan from a governance perspective.

Coercion, Coercive Diplomacy – Component of Hybrid Warfare

Coercive diplomacy often blends soft power, financial sanctions, and multilateral negotiations in complex geopolitical environments¹⁷. This paper argues that in the age of evolving technology-based developments, the “Diplomacy” in a hybrid warfare context should not be viewed merely as a peaceful counterpart to conflict, but as a strategic instrument coherently integrated with coercion, lawfare, and military measures¹⁸ within the architecture of coercive diplomacy. In a hybrid campaign, diplomatic tools may be used to create ambiguity, shape and reshape narratives locally and globally, aim to acquire legitimacy for an action, build coalitions, and, hence, isolate adversaries, all of which work together and supplement one another within a hybrid architecture¹⁹.

As several authors question the ethical foundations of diplomatic coercion particularly regarding selective sanctions in multilateral institutions²⁰ such as IMF, UN and FATF. For instance, from a diplomatic point of view, it might be proactively anticipated or follow operations aimed at compellence or lawfare²¹, suggesting that an actor or state might use diplomatic engagements to mask aggression against an adversary and conceal its underlying intentions and objectives, e.g., economic, political, etc. Moreover, in the context of hybrid warfare, diplomacy therefore becomes a critical component of the approach, not just a reactive avenue.

Hereinafter, the literature on coercive diplomacy is also underdeveloped in the context of Pakistan. Academic work on hybrid warfare tends to emphasise military tools, whilst the diplomatic dimensions are somewhat implicit. However, the current paper views diplomacy as a subset of hybrid strategy rather than a separate domain of scholarly discussion to describe the hybrid phenomenon; hence, it can effectively contribute to coercive diplomacy context.

Lawfare: An Integral Element of Warfare Strategy

Recently, lawfare has gained attention as a constitutive component of hybrid warfare. Since this paper sequentially contextualises state action, i.e., Indian aggression before “Operation Sindoor 2025”, within the context of Pakistan, this paper loosely defines lawfare as the “use or abuse of Law” as an instrument of conflict embedded in broader coercive campaigns. There is growing consensus that lawfare is progressively becoming a central element of hybrid warfare strategies²². Integral to modern warfare conflicts. This approach involves the deployment of non-military legal tools to destabilise the governance structure of a target state. Several states such as; USA, Russia, India and China are increasingly integrating legal manipulation into their strategic coercion frameworks. This often includes weaponising of international legal system or structure to impose or influence sanctions, employing criminal prosecution as political tool and leveraging the legal asymmetries in territorial disputes²³.

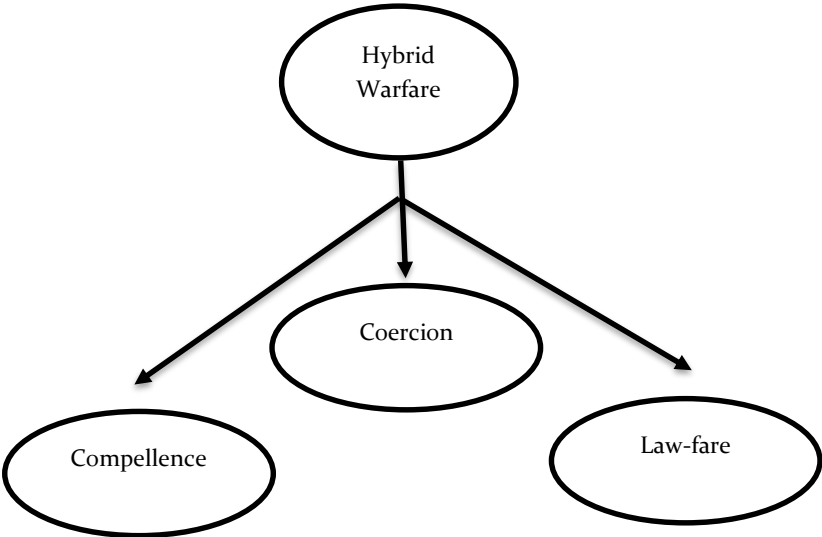
“*Offensively*” Lawfare is instrumentalised to achieve coercive ends²⁴ i.e., de-legitimise the opponent claims and seek legal justification for unilateral state actions and complicate attribution by concealing responsibility through legal frameworks²⁵, for example, blame or disgrace the opponent with reference. Moreover, “*Defensively*”, it serves to counter opponents’ lawfare by shaping public perception, reinforce state or institutional legitimacy to construct a legal narrative that justifies state’s position to exercise the authority over a conflict with target state to achieve the underlying agenda through distinctly converged strategies against an adversary. Thus, lawfare operates as strategic enabler²⁶ allow states or non-state actors to engage in forms of “legalised coercion” that exploit legal norms, judicial institutions, and manipulate discourse on rule-of-law to undermine target state and achieve geopolitical objectives through ostensibly lawful means.

On the contrary, scholars have also criticised current legal framework that struggles to address hybrid forms of coercion particularly as the character of conflict increasingly becomes complex and non-traditional^{27 28}. Accordingly, this paper frames lawfare as one of the supplementary component of hybrid warfare, a component by which hybrid actors achieve strategic coherence in their campaigns against the chosen target state. It supplements compellence and diplomacy by providing a legal-institutional vector of action, contributing to the hybrid context where non-kinetic and legally framed tools proliferate.

Synthesis and Conceptual Framework

The following figure shows conceptual integration.

Figure 1: Hybrid Integration



Source: S. Mirza (2025)

The conceptual model, as depicted above, situates “Hybrid Warfare Architecture” as the all-embracing “Strategic Umbrella” under which states intend to apply the combination of Lawfare, Coercion, and Compellence, which operates interactively²⁹ to shape the target state’s behaviour whilst remaining below the threshold of full-scale conflict³⁰. Therefore, it is hereby argued that the effectiveness of these components varies and can be influenced by the moderating forces of hybrid tactics of a state over its adversary.

Based on the above conceptualisation, the following table summarises how the hybrid warfare architecture functions as a “Strategic Umbrella” integrating Lawfare, Coercion, and Compellence. The table below outlines the instruments used in a sequenced, reinforcing and supplementary manner to influence target state below the threshold of conventional war.

Table 1: Hybrid Architecture

Strategic Function	Compellence	Coercive Diplomacy	Law-Fare
Core Mechanism	Threat of Punishment to alter Behaviour	Negotiation + Threat to Influence Behaviour	Legal Norms & Institutions as Tools of Pressure
Nature of Coercion	Hard power, Direct	Soft-Hard mix	Normative and Institutional
Objective	Force Behavioural Change	Prevent, Reverse, or Stop an Action	Legitimise one's Position & de-legitimise the Adversary
Synergy in Hybrid Warfare	Creates Pressure and Fear	Provides Diplomatic Pathway & Justification	Creates Legal Legitimacy and Constraints

Source: Authors Own Compilation

Hence, it is assumed that the impact of the factors presented in the table is shaped by a set of sub-factors intended to influence the target state's governance structure and behaviour, while also recognising that the target state may adapt and trigger a feedback loop, requiring the hybrid actor to recalibrate its hybrid tactics.

Material and Research Method

The current study adopts a qualitative research design to explore how state action serves as empirical evidence for analysing hybrid Warfare as a theoretical construct and other relevant constituents. The interpretivist approach³¹ was applied to understand state behaviour, its strategic intentions, and coercive signalling, i.e., diplomatic and economic coercion embedded within policy actions, diplomatic statements, legal manoeuvres, and security decisions.

Data Sources

This phenomenon under investigation opted to utilise documentary analysis as the primary data, including Indian Government state-led actions, official Indian PM speeches, coercive signalling, international legal cases, media statements, and secondary scholarly sources as this approach is appropriate and supports the current study's examination of state-led framing, statements, diplomatic interactions, and coercive measures within a political and strategic context³².

Data Analysis – Thematic Choice

Data were thematically analysed³³ in line with the selected literature review. Themes were developed “deductively”, from theory (i.e., Hybrid Warfare, Law fare, Coercion, and Compellence), and “*inductively*”, from empirical evidence collected to ensure analytical rigour as it connected theory with observable state practices. Triangulation³⁴ was employed across multiple events, statements, and state actions in Pakistan to enhance the credibility and validity of the interpretation and mitigate researcher bias.

Hence, the chosen method is grounded in an interpretivist paradigm enabling “theory-informed qualitative analysis” of real-world “socially constructed” state actions as realities requiring contextual interpretations rather than objective measurements, thus it strengthens the conceptual understanding of *how* hybrid strategies and tactics are visible in “practice and mechanisms” through which strategic outcomes are shaped to influence the adversary.

Prologue: India’s Aggressive Assertiveness to Institutional Escalation

Contrary to traditional portrayals of India under Modi as a passive actor in South Asian security affairs, historical evidence indicates that New Delhi has repeatedly adopted assertive military, diplomatic, and symbolic responses in Pakistan related crisis. From the 1971 intervention in East Pakistan to the Kargil conflict of 1999 to more recent actions, including *Operation Sindoor* (2025), India’s security behaviour demonstrates a consistent pattern of calibrated aggression, strategic signalling and coercion.

This posture, evident since independence and reinforced through episodes such as *Operation Parakram* (2001-2002), the revocation of Article 370 in IIOJ&K, and the 2016, 2019 skirmishes, demonstrates continuity rather than rupture in India’s approach towards Pakistan. The Modi government strategy is therefore, best understood not as a departure from early policy towards Pakistan’s offers to resolve long-standing regional conflicts and territorial disputes but as an intensification of long-standing coercive practices employing force alongside controlled and strategically calibrated actions to manage escalation while advancing national objectives.

In contrast to earlier administrations, where military aggressiveness was perceived as situational or a reluctant necessity. Modi government has redefined the use of force as a sovereign and strategic necessity. This shift has altered both the perception and frequency of coercive measures, institutionalising escalation through doctrinal adjustments, official political and military discourse, and the revocation of J&K special status.

The result has been distinctly intensified and multi-layered application of coercive statecraft, calibrated not only for deterrence but also for domestic political signalling. This approach seeks to assert regional supremacy over Pakistan through calibrated pressure and symbolic dominance.

Analysis and Discussion: Shifting Doctrines in Modi/India's - Pakistan Policy

Literature on compellence suggests multi-domain influence, i.e., Kinetic, Informational, Legal, and Economic. Therefore, this study qualitatively analyses Pakistan-oriented political statements and the state's policy actions. Hence, supported by State-led actions.

"We will be monitoring every step of Pakistan," Modi added, saying that *"This is not an era of war, but this is not an era of terrorism, either. "Terror and trade cannot go together; water and blood cannot flow together."* (Sep-2016), *"Ghar Main Ghuss Ke Mary Gye,* (2019), *"We will respond in the language they understand"* (Sep-2016), and *take strict action at every place"* (2025). *"Those who used to spill the blood of Hindustan have been made to pay for each drop of blood... Earlier, we had entered their homes to attack; now we struck directly at their heart"* (2025).

Compellence – State-Led Actions: Limited Force or Material Leverage – Significance: Resource Denial – Normalising Structural Coercion

Date	Actor / Instrument	What Happened	Why it Matters	Source
18 Aug 2014	MEA	Cancels FS-level talks after Pak HC meets with Hurriyat	Signals willingness to impose political costs unless the agenda excludes the Kashmir leadership	MEA India
29 Sep 2016	MEA/MoD & DGMO	Announces "surgical strikes" on LoC launch pads after Uri	First publicly acknowledged cross-LoC raids as punishment/denial	MEA India
27 Sep 2016	MEA	Pulls out of the Islamabad SAARC Summit	Collective isolation pressure tied to terrorism	MEA India
26 Feb 2019	MEA (FS Statement)	Airstrike on JeM camp at Balakot ("non-military preemptive")	Air power as a compelling signal beyond the LoC	MEA India
16–17 Feb 2019	Gol (FinMin/CBIC)	MFN withdrawn; 200% customs duty on all Pak imports	Economic punishment & deterrent linkage to Pulwama	The Economic Times
23 Jun 2020	MEA	Orders 50% cut in Pak HC staff; mirrors in Islamabad	Coercive cost-imposition over espionage/harassment claims	The Indian Express

25 Feb 2021	Indian & Pak DGMOs (via PIB/Army)	Reaffirm the strict 2003 ceasefire	Coercive restraint bargain after sustained firing—threat of force held in reserve	Press Information Bureau
23 Apr–29 May 2025	MEA/FS & Weekly Briefings	I W T put “in abeyance” to increase economic cost for Pakistan.	Water leverage as cross-domain compellence	MEA India

Source: Authors Own Compilation

Compellence – Indian PM (Modi) Led Actions (Threat/Use of Force or Material Leverage;

Significance: Military Signalling - Narrative Framing

Date	Venue / Context	Verbatim Key Line (PM - Modi)	Synthesis
Sep 24, 2016	BJP National Council rally, Kozhikode	“While India exports software, Pakistan exports terrorism across the world.” (The Indian Express)	Public threat-signalling & resolve after Uri; prepares audience for punitive measures.
Sept 26, 2016	IWT review meeting (post-Uri)	“Blood and water cannot flow together.” (The Indian Express)	Signals readiness to use water leverage—a material compelling tool.
Feb 15, 2019	Prime Minister’s statement after Pulwama	“Perpetrators... will have to pay a heavy price... security forces have a free hand.” (Press Information Bureau)	An explicit compelling warning preceded the Balakot strikes.
Aug 8, 2019	Address to the Nation on J&K changes	Article 370 “gave secessionism and terrorism”; change will end them. (CGI Vancouver)	Domestic strategic compellence—framed as the removal of incentives for proxy terror.
May 12, 2025	PM’s national address (post-“Operation Sindoor”)	“Terror and talks cannot coexist... Terror and trade cannot go hand in hand... Water and blood can never flow together.” (PM India)	The triad of compelling conditions (security, economy, water) is directly tied to Pakistan.
May 12, 2025	Same address	“Any talks with Pakistan will focus on terrorism and AJ&K.” (PM India)	Raises costs/limits agenda—coercive end of the compellence spectrum.

Source: Authors Own Compilation

Military Signalling and Tactical Operations

India's increasingly aggressive diplomacy against Pakistan is grounded in the strategic use of a *show of force* and *military actions* designed to demonstrate resolve, deter anticipated responses, and establish India's reputation as a principled statecraft by defaming neighbours and ethnicities, all without resorting to full-scale war.

This shift, long embedded in Modi/India's strategic behaviour, became more overt with the 2016 surgical strikes and 2019 Balakot air strike across Line-of-Control (LoC), the latter conducted in retaliation for the Pulwama suicide attack that killed 40 paramilitary forces.

These high-visibility operations marked a departure from the prior stance of strategic ambiguity, introducing a new doctrine of “Limited Kinetic Retaliation” as a normalised response mechanism. Far from being tactical these acts of symbolic aggression were intended to assert Indian authority and influence, reshape adversaries’ perceptions, and satisfy domestic political expectations.

The Modi government amplified these strikes through election campaigns; transforming battlefield tactics into political tools. This trend was significantly intensified in April 2025 after the “Pehlgam Attack” which targeted civilian pilgrims and reportedly killed two dozen people, as per Indian claims, right before the elections in Bihar - India.

India’s response, titled “Operation Sindoor, was framed under a feminist banner and allegedly involved cross-LoC strikes on infrastructure linked to actors based in Pakistan. Government representatives portrayed the strikes as both rapid and proportionate. Indian media further escalated the narrative embedding the strikes into Modi’s broader military doctrine¹⁰. This incident echoed Balakot pattern, reaffirming the government strategy of converting episodic violence into strategic capital by branding it as a “show of force¹⁵. These tactics revealed an intent to compress reaction time in high – tension scenarios, thereby increasing the risk of miscalculation between Pakistan and India. Further evidence of politicised military action became more visible during “2025 Operation Sindoor” against Pakistan. Which was used to bolster domestic national sentiment framed under the banner of Hindutva. India reinforced its strategic messaging through orchestrated media coverage military simulations, and diplomatic signalling. These moves were part of broader architecture where military responses were choreographed to align with narrative management⁴ blending national security with political dramatization. This fusion was evident in events in such as Pulwama, Balakot, Pehlgam, and Operation-Sindoor⁷ underscores growing overlap between security and domestic politics. As this blend of Bollywood – style symbolism and military strategy deepens, the risk of destabilising South Asia’s security architecture continues to grow.

Digital Influence and Information Operations

Within the realm of information management, Modi government developed a sophisticated digital propaganda ecosystem that merged public diplomacy, reengineered social media, and strategic communication. Platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube were central tools. Beyond India’s borders, the establishment of media outlets and disinformation networks across the European Union and other regions, including NGOs and impersonated UN officials transformed these platforms into arenas of influence, pressure, and geopolitical messaging. This network worked to project anti Pakistan discourse globally.

In episodes such as Pulwama, Balakot, and Pehlgam, and Operation Sindoor, Indian news media and digital influencers coordinated narratives to affirm the government framing. Before Pakistan could react viral hashtags like #Modi, #IndiaStrikesBack, and #OperationSindoor rapidly circulated reinforcing New Delhi's perspective. India's tech-driven information strategy, supported by high speed digital governance, expatriate networks and aligned think tanks, amplified Modi's hybrid doctrine of SRI: Speed, Reach, and International Resonance. In contrast, Pakistan counter – digital strategy lagged behind, limited by fragmented messaging and constrained access to similarly potent media infrastructure.

Electoral Capitalisation

One of the most significant shifts under Modi's tenure has been the integration of foreign policy, military actions, and electoral strategy. Actions confined to defence circles such as retaliatory strikes became campaign tools, particularly during the 2019 national elections following Pulwama and Balakot. Ahead of the 2025 Bihar elections "Operation Sindoor" and narratives of retaliation were widely circulated to consolidate nationalist support. Official media, party campaigns, and social media influencers saturated public narratives and visuals pairing military hardware with political figures. This blurred the lines between statecraft and BJP party propaganda, embedding security operations into the heart of India's electoral theatre.

State-Led Coercion: Coercive Diplomacy (Sanctions Diplomacy) International Naming and De-legitimising Pakistan; Reputational Coercion to Isolate Islamabad in the Global Economic Order

Significance: Narrows diplomatic space and frames military pressure as conditions for Pakistan.

Date	Actor / Instrument	What Happened	Diplomatic Signal	Source
2014–2016	PM/MEA messaging	"Talks and terror cannot go together" refrain; cancellation over Hurriyat	Sets conditionality for dialogue	MEA India
16 Oct 2016	PM at BRICS Goa	"Mothership of terrorism" veiled ref to Pakistan; BRICS Goa Declaration condemns terror	Builds multilateral narrative support	MEA India
21 Sep 2018	MEA	Cancels proposed EAM-level NY meeting after new incidents/stamps	Reputation/agenda cost for perceived provocation	MEA India
2018–2019	GoI/MEA	Kartarpur corridor—talks proceed, but with tight modalities	Narrow cooperation while keeping pressure on terror issues	MEA India
31 May & 23 Jun 2020	MEA	Expels Pak officials; then orders 50% staff cut	Diplomatic penalties short of force	The Times of India
13 & 21 May 2025	MEA	Declares Pak officials <i>persona non grata</i> (PNG)	Tit-for-tat signalling & diplomatic cost	MEA India

Source: Authors Own Compilation

Coercion – Indian PM (Modi) Led Actions: Coercive Diplomacy (Threat Backed Diplomacy or Isolation)

Significance: Economically Coerce - Pakistan

“Tragically, the mothership of terrorism is a country in India’s neighbourhood” and “terror modules around the world are linked to this mothership”, Oct 2016 “We have put a lock on Pakistan. (2024), “India has launched a strong diplomatic offensive against Pakistan.”(2025), Hum Pakistan Ki Arthvywastha (Socioeconomic Development) Ko Barhany Nahi Dengye” (2016 and 2024). “Pakistan’s condition has become extremely fragile due to India’s tough measures.” (2016), “Pakistan will have to pay a heavy price for every terrorist attack, Pakistan’s army will pay it. Pakistan’s economy will pay it.” (2025). “I want to ask the people of Pakistan what you have gained? India is now the fourth-largest economy. Where are you?” (May 2025).

Date	Venue / Context	Verbatim Key Line (PM - Modi)	Synthesis
Sep 27, 2014	UNGA 69, PM statement	Urges adoption of the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism; stresses UN action against terror. (MEA India)	Multilateral agenda-setting against cross-border terror; indirect pressure on Pakistan.
Oct 16–17, 2016	BRICS Goa plenary	Pakistan is the “mothership of terrorism” (www.ndtv.com)	Name-and-shame to mobilise third-party pressure; classic coercive diplomacy.
Sep 24, 2016	Kozhikode rally	Call to “isolate Pakistan” internationally (reported line alongside “exports terrorism”). (Hindustan Times)	Threat + isolation narrative following Uri.
Aug 8, 2019	Address to the Nation	Asserts end of “secessionism and terrorism” via legal reorganisation; appeals to order & development. (CGI Vancouver)	Diplomatic messaging to international audiences for actions on Pakistan.
May 12, 2025	PM’s national address	“Terror and talks cannot coexist...” (reiterated) (PM India)	Conditional engagement—coercive diplomacy doctrine restated at the PM level.

Source: Authors Own Compilation

Multilateral Mechanism and Institutional Leverage: Containment of Pakistan and FATF Surveillance – Economic Coercion and Sanction Diplomacy

India’s engagement with the FATF (Financial Action Task Force) illustrates a strategic use of multi-lateral institutions to convert security concerns into instruments of economic pressure on Pakistan¹³ forums converted security concerns into economic pressure on Pakistan.

Despite lacking veto power, the Modi government consistently lobbied member states to amplify scrutiny over Pakistan's alleged "Compliance Gaps" related to CTF, i.e., Counterterrorism financing regulations.

During Pakistan placement on FATF grey list India positioned itself as a "norm entrepreneur" in global financial governance, advocating that development lending should be conditioned on rigorous financial oversight. This economic securitisation effectively linked Pakistan financial behaviour to broader international security frameworks, reinforcing containment through ostensibly neutral governance mechanisms.

Moreover, India's influence within FATF indirectly extended to global financial institutions such as IMF, World Bank and Asian Development Bank, where FATF regulatory benchmarks were integrated lending conditions for Pakistan. In doing so, the Modi government supported construction of a conditional regulatory architecture that constrains Pakistan's current financial space. This coordination between financial governance and coercive diplomacy marks a key evolution in India's post-2014 foreign policy. Where national interests were advanced through the erosion of boundaries between multilateral neutrality and strategic influence.

SAARC Marginalisation and Regional Repositioning

Since 2016, India has effectively side-lined *South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation* (SAARC) through a mix of diplomatic and economic pressure particularly targeting platforms where Pakistan holds equal standing. Adopting a strategy of selective multi-literalism India has redirected its regional focus towards exclusive forums such as the indo-pacific, QUAD and the BRICS where it can shape the agenda and maintain strategic dominance in forums that do not include Pakistan.

For India SAARC marginalisation serves two objectives: it deprives Pakistan of its most accessible multilateral forums and consolidates India's regional leadership through alternative architectures based on maritime security, economic interconnectivity, and democratic values. Since the newer platforms do not offer membership to Pakistan thus, affirms Modi's vision of an "Asia – Pacific Order". This realignment is not merely exclusionary for Pakistan but also constructive. As India presents itself as a regional provider of public goods, encompassing disaster relief, digital infrastructure, and development financing. And for Pakistan this shift results in diplomatic, and economic isolation by design undermining its ability to shape regional narratives within intergovernmental platforms.

Thus, India's repositioning of itself in the region illustrates that access to multilateral forums is increasingly dependent on agreement with Indian security frameworks and political narratives particularly under Modi regime.

Arab World Diplomacy and Gulf Realignment

India's engagement with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member states under Modi reflect a deliberate geo-economic realignment of its diplomacy in the Muslim world. Historically reactive and bound to remittance diplomacy, India's approach has become institutionalised through energy agreements, defence cooperation, investment corridors, and cultural exchanges.

These developments diluted traditional rhetorical support for Pakistan on the Kashmir and reduced GCC investments in Pakistan economic development. Increasingly GCC states prioritised economic pragmatism over pan-Islamic solidarity shifting trade, labour, and diplomatic ties towards India. India employed a multi-faceted diplomatic strategy through counterterrorism collaboration and engaged in defence and maritime surveillance, offered low cost skilled labour force and IT capacity to build strategic depth in the Gulf. And for Pakistan, it gradually diminished Pakistan's historical credibility and emotional significance in the Arab World.

Consequently, shortly after the revocation of Article 370, PM Modi was awarded the "Order of Zayed" by the UAE in 2019. This recognition marked a symbolic rupture – a separation of past loyalties from the Gulf's evolving foreign policy outlook and signalled prioritisation of India's economic stature over Pakistan's traditional role. Financial-capitalist states like, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Qatar, are increasingly adopting multipolar and pragmatic foreign policies aligning with the rising powers based on their strategic interests.

Strategic Narrative, Symbolic Diplomacy and Civilizational Framing

To frame India as a progressive, civilised and democratic nation facing existential threats while portraying Pakistan as a primary perpetrator behind the region's instability, the Modi government deployed strategic narratives as essential instruments of influence. These narratives intertwine Indian identity, civilisation pride, and national security objectives forming a coherent ideological framework that promoted across diplomatic channels.

Arguably, India's foreign policy" has synthesised strategic narratives as the core of its influence, redefined the state of India and its national security strategies, and focused on establishing Indian hegemony in South Asia as PM Modi weaved sovereignty, terrorism, and development into a seamless ideological framework and became a performative discourse. During the Pakistan-India crisis, i.e. "Operation-Sindoor, 2025" or "Balakot Airstrike, 2019", these events were presented as pre-emptive measures against Pakistan and transformed into diplomatic capital. The PM Modi government moved quickly to shape international opinion through narrative deployment via press conferences, coordinated media briefings, and high-level diplomatic engagements, this approach provided India with temporary dominance over the crisis chronicle by framing escalation as a legal act of self-defence aimed at elevating India's dominance in South Asia.

Modi government foreign policy was more than a domestic identity project. i.e., Hindutva ideology, recasting foreign policy particularly in relation to Pakistan through civilizational lens. Such as;

- It actively informs India's external posture,
- Framing conflicts in civilizational terms,
- Modernity vs medievalism,
- Tolerance vs radicalism,
- Order vs chaos,

Narrative based on these aforementioned aimed to highlight India's ancient heritage, spiritual depth, historical victimhood are therefore, harnessed to legitimise escalation as both lawful and culturally necessary against Pakistan where national security and cultural nationalism converge in a symbolic choreography of diplomatic power.

Law fare: State-Led Legal / Institutional Instruments to Advance Underlying Objectives

Significance: Reinforcing Indian claim, de-legitimise Pakistan, conditionally frame Pakistan with suspensions.

Date	Forum / Law	Step	Relevance to Leverage against Pakistan	Source
8 May 2017 → 17 Jul 2019	ICJ, Jadhav (India v. Pakistan)	India seizes ICJ; 2019 Judgment finds a breach of the VCCR; orders an effective review & consular access.	Uses binding adjudication to pressure Pakistan's process/ outcome	International Court of Justice
1 May 2019	UNSC 1267 Committee	Masood Azhar is listed (asset freeze, travel ban, arms embargo)	Multilateral legal constraints on a Pak-based actor	United Nations Press Releases
5 Aug–9 Nov 2019	J&K Reorganisation Act, 2019 & new UT maps	Constitutional & statutory reorganisation; Surveyor General/PIB publishes new maps	Domestic legal move with cross-border implications; hardens India's territorial position	India Code
25 Jan 2023	Indus Waters Treaty (IWT)	Notice to modify IWT under Art. XII	Shifts dispute to treaty-law terrain; signals readiness to revise regimes	MEA India
23 Apr–29 May 2025	MEA/FS & weekly briefings	IWT held "in abeyance" (temporary suspension) linked to the terror conditionality	Legal-institutional pressure coupling water & security	MEA India
11 Dec 2023	Supreme Court of India	Upholds abrogation of Article 370	Consolidates the domestic legal basis for the Aug 2019 reorganisation in the face of external critique	MEA India

Source: Authors Own Compilation

Law fare: Indian PM (Modi) led actions: Legal Framing and Institutional Instrumentation;

Significance: Narrative advocacy, agenda building, social influence, and legal pressure on Pakistan

Date	Venue / Context	Verbatim Key Line (PM)	Synthesis
Aug 8, 2019	Address to the Nation on J&K Reorganisation	Article 370 “gave secessionism, terrorism, nepotism and widespread corruption... We are moving forward with re-organisation of J&K.” (CGI Vancouver)	PM frames constitutional re-engineering as a security-law measure that constrains Pakistan’s effects
Sept 26, 2016	IWT review (post-Uri)	“Blood and water cannot flow together.” (used by PM to frame future treaty posture) (The Indian Express)	Normative legal/treaty framing to justify a more rigid IWT stance as part of the pressure toolkit
May 12, 2025	PM’s national address (Sindoor)	“Any talks with Pakistan will focus on terrorism and PoK.” (PM India)	Law-cum-diplomatic agenda-setting (jurisdictional/issue framing) that narrows the negotiation space

Source: Authors Own Compilation

Political Re-Engineering of Law: J&K

Arguably, one of the most consequential illustration of how domestic legal reforms were leveraged as instruments of international diplomacy under the Modi government is the revocation of Article 370 and dissolution of J&K special status. This move represented a calculated geo-political manoeuvre to integrate the region into India’s centralised federal structure. It transformed the legal framing of Kashmir from a bilateral conflict to an internal re-alignment. This reframing curtailed Pakistan’s diplomatic leverage by removing the dispute from the realm of international mediation. New Delhi reasserted narrative of constitutional supremacy and consequently India refused to entertain any bilateral negotiations or global arbitration concerning Kashmir.

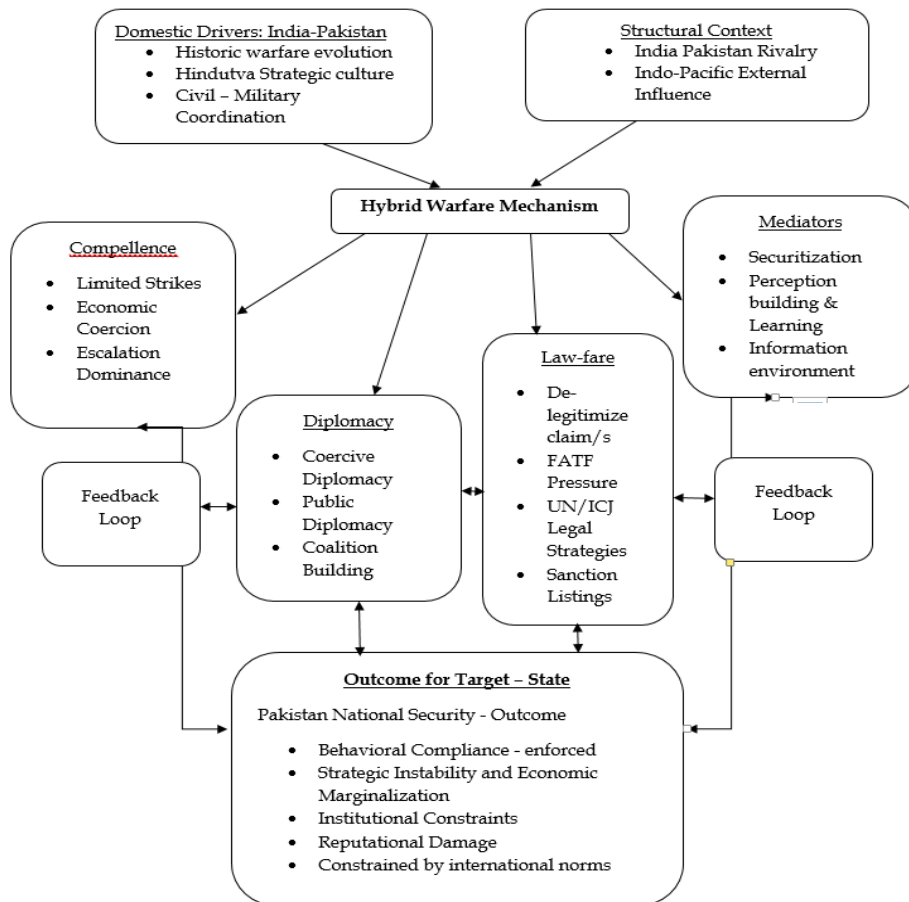
Moreover, the strategic use of legal and normative instruments has become central to India’s lawfare doctrine key element for its “legal coercion” towards Pakistan. Through global legal forums, India sought to re-affirm its sovereign claims and challenge Pakistan’s international standing. In *Kulbhushan Jadhav case* (ICJ 2017-2019) India portrayed Pakistan as violator of Vienna convention framing Islamabad as a habitual violator of international norms by invoking UNSC resolution 1267, India persistently sought to pressure Pakistan through counter terrorism law.

The Modi government extended legal coercion through the suspension of the Indus Water Treaty (IWT) further illustrating how India weaponised treaty law by invoking legal entitlement and asserting that alleged interference invalidated established cooperative frameworks.

Taken together these actions exemplifies a broader shift in Indian strategy where legal justification, narrative construction, and selective treaty interpretations are combined to consolidate India's claims while restricting Pakistan's diplomatic space in international governance system.

Revised Conceptual Framework

From the perspective of this current study and in the context of Pakistan's environment, particularly in relation to recent conflicts with India, this study proposes a revised hybrid framework. It emphasises that hybrid warfare today demands a more adaptive analytical framework. Hence, the revised framework accounts for domain convergence, in which influence campaigns are synchronised to create overload effects on target state systems.



Source: Authors Own Compilation

Conclusion

Situated within the literature on hybrid warfare, coercion, and lawfare and adopting an interpretivist perspective, current study highlights the role of narrative reframing in underpinning India's hybrid warfare approach in the context of Pakistan. Focusing on the period from 2014-2025 under the Modi government, the analysis demonstrates how Hybrid warfare, Lawfare, and Coercive diplomacy have been combined to reshape regional security narratives, framing Pakistan as *regional destabiliser*. India's strategy was to justify both kinetic and non-kinetic measures, from "Surgical Strikes" and "Operation Sindoor" to diplomatic isolation campaigns at the United Nations and the Financial Action Task Force, alongside economic coercion of Pakistan. Collectively, these measures became almost sustained hybrid strategy.

Hence, each of these measures was designed not only to reinforce India's sovereign claims but also aimed to delegitimise Pakistan's counter-narrative by framing it as non-compliant with international norms. Therefore, India's integration of lawfare into its hybrid warfare matrix transformed international law into a controlling tool of strategic resource, serving both to justify its assertive posture and to diplomatically, coerce Pakistan. Thereby, contributing to economic coercion and the marginalisation of the target state within a hybrid warfare context.

Strategic Forecast for Pakistan: Navigating a Hostile Strategic Environment

Recalibrating Deterrence: Modi/India's shift towards "coercive diplomacy" and "surgical countermeasures" attacks inside Pakistan seen in 2016, 2019, and 2025 turned a new Deterrence equation in South Asia, and Pakistan still relies on its past dependence and observed realities as Modi/India brings a Real-time threat to Pakistan.

Extended Strategic Response

- Multi-Domain Deterrence: Pakistan must build deterrence capabilities across all warfare domains (Hybrid, Law fare, Coercion; economic & diplomatic) to rise to the challenges of Modi's narrative advantage.
- Pakistan needs to have asymmetric and unconventional strategies, e.g., area denial, decentralised readiness and must be accompanied by autonomous command and distributed retaliation capacity to assure response.

Diplomatic Diversification and Regional Pivot

In response to Modi/India's narrative framing in international institutions, particularly counter terrorism, India has contributed to Pakistan's diplomatic isolation in forums like SAARC, FATF, in the GCC, and in some parts of the UN system.

To counter this, Pakistan requires network-based diplomacy, issue-centred and responsive to adversaries. Therefore, Pakistan must shift its focus to West and Central Asia, regions that are culturally connected and rich, possesses significant infrastructural potential, and ideologically cohesive to integrate with.

- **Bypass SAARC** and enhance Pakistan's regional reach by countering Indian influence through ECO and SCO; revitalise ECO, with Iran, Turkey, and Central Asian, Arab or Gulf States, regions that are resource- rich with advanced infrastructure, socially developed and share common cultural identities;
- **Engage SCO and the UN** for sustained security dialogues and embedding Pakistan's security concerns within the larger International and regional Security frameworks.
- **Engage the US, Europe, Africa, ASEAN,** and Latin America on Climate change Justice, sustainable development and trade connectivity to diversify Pakistan's diplomatic and economic partnerships.
- **Rebrand Pakistan's** diplomatic outreach with GCC, Arab states beyond narrow strategic accommodation, by deepening engagement with them through energy cooperation, civic engagement and youth diplomacy based on shared Islamic heritage and establish open youth council or other structured forums for exchanges.

Such initiatives can rebrand Pakistan as a diplomatically agile state, capable of engaging across multiple strategic theatres and policy arenas, expanding Pakistan's role from a primary security-centric actor to a regionally (West Asia; GCC states) integrated stakeholder with multi-dimensional influence.

Reconstituting Pakistan's Soft Power

Pakistan lacks a sustained, resource-rich, and diversified public diplomacy apparatus due to humanitarian and geopolitical constraints.

Narrative Reforms

- Craft Pakistan identity not around grievances, but resilience, diversity, and peace-oriented Islamic values, shift from reactive diplomacy to proactive thematic advocacy on peace, development, and human security dimensions.
- Establish "Pakistan Public Diplomacy Council" (PPDC) in major cities inside and outside Pakistan, bringing together diplomats, media experts, researchers, scholars, and creatives with digital outreach to validate Pakistan's contribution to international governance.
- Pakistan should focus on overseas Pakistani (Diaspora) professionals, academics, and GCC states, West Asia, Europe, the US, etc., to normalise Pakistan's voice in global forums to nullify anti-Pakistan rhetoric.

Economic Resilience and Strategic Flexibility

Pakistan's long-term strategic capability is linked to its economic foundations. Fiscal constraints, external debt servicing pressures, and reliance on multilateral financial institutions have at times limited the country's ability to project its "Trueness of Pakistan" globally. Moreover, to effectively combat economic coercion and prevent further economic marginalisation of Pakistan, it is imperative to enhance national resilience. A forward-looking approach must focus on economic diversification and social integration within West/Central Asia and the GCC, which can offer strategic integration into their economies.

- Geo economic realignment: Pakistan needs to increase and prioritise trade connectivity, digital economy development, and sustainable energy partnerships. This shift can be complemented by a Pakistani professional diaspora where economic influence complements geopolitical weight.
- Monetary cooperation with key partners in West Asia can reduce vulnerabilities. These regions, though challenging due to Afghanistan, still offer innovation-driven industrial development. Central Asia and the GCC, however, offer industrial collaboration with a focus on dual-use technologies, crisis management systems, and cooperation in manufacturing, which can provide flexible support for both economic growth and technological capital. Such a flexible economic policy can strategically add value to national stability and enhance the credibility of Pakistan's diplomatic and security engagements.
- Pakistan should reframe its approach not by mirroring but by adopting a proactive multilateral global counter-terrorism strategy resonating human as well as planetary security dimensions.

Therefore, Pakistan should diversify diplomatic outreach beyond historical alignments to include underrepresented regions and build geo-economic integration. Leveraging thematic partnerships on environment, migration, and development can accelerate its development.

Contribution to Knowledge

- The paper advances the understanding of hybrid warfare not merely as an accustomed form of battle but as a comprehensive strategic framework within which traditional conceptual tools, i.e., compellence, law fare, and diplomacy, function as interconnected modus operandi rather than being treated in isolation in the context of Pakistan.
- By bridging concepts, the review establishes a cross-disciplinary bridge and initiates cooperative debate and collaboration between legal scholars, military theorists, and the diplomatic community in the context of Pakistan.

- This current study identified several areas where more empirical research is required, as conceptual validation is scarce and contextual to Pakistan. Hence, it provides a research agenda for theory/model testing presented in this study, as well as a call for re-conceptualisation of current policy.
- Current study surfaces legal ambiguities and ethical dilemmas posed by hybrid tools, highlighting the need for updated legal doctrine and initiating normative debates in the context of grey zones related to Pakistan.

Future Research Direction

- In this current study, Hybrid warfare conceptualised compellence, diplomacy, and lawfare as the critical constituents; therefore, the conceptual model presented in this study is contextual to Pakistan. However, it remains under-validated and warrants future empirical validation across settings.
- Develop and test the current model presented in this study using comparative case studies in the context of conflict-ridden regions, i.e., Ukraine, etc.
- Future studies can test and focus on hybrid strategies consistently shifting to predict political outcomes, coercive success or legal legitimacy over a target-state.
- Another research direction is to investigate institutional responses to hybrid threats, particularly lawfare and diplomacy.

Funding Disclosure Statement

It is submitted that no external funding has been received by the author(s) for the research or publication of this article.

Conflict of Interest Statement

It is declared that there are no competing interests of the author(s) involved in the publication of this article.

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