

FOREIGN POLICY IN HYBRID WARFARE ENVIRONMENT – WAY FORWARD FOR PAKISTAN

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Abstract

Hybrid warfare is neither a novel idea nor a new phenomenon. It has been evolving for ages, yet its manifestation in the contemporary era has intensified. Taking advantage of politico-ethnic fault lines, socio-religious vulnerabilities, and identity conflicts, hybrid warfare advocates using all means available including regular or irregular and conventional or unconventional ways of warfare to subdue the will of an adversary. An externally motivated and supported threat requires essential measures in the foreign policy domain to thwart and foil it outside the borders. Therefore, this paper deals with the conceptual aspects of hybrid warfare and highlights the contours of the hybrid threat currently confronting Pakistan. It navigates through the challenges for foreign policy formulation and implementation in a hybrid warfare environment and identifies loopholes and grey areas while recommending tangible measures.

Keywords: Hybrid Warfare, Foreign Policy, Fault Lines, Narrative, Diplomacy.

Introduction

Transformation of the world order, emerging leadership, and rapidly changing geopolitical environment have affected the drivers and determinants of a foreign policy. Developments of disruptive technologies, artificial intelligence, information technology, and advanced communication systems have also changed the foreign policy milieu. Narrative building through the virtual space of the internet and social media has shrunk the time to respond to events affecting foreign policy, thus, necessitating a coherent, matured, and efficient mechanism to deal with all intricacies and challenges of the prevailing environment. Likewise, diplomacy and warfare in the 21st century are no more subjects of the state alone. The role of non-state actors (both benign and violent) has transformed the entire landscape of statecraft.

War as a continuation of policy by other means, described by Clausewitz, has evolved to the fifth generation leading further to hybrid warfare. Manifested through a combination of ways and means including hard and soft power, variety of actors, transformed objectives, and remodelled notions of victory, the hybrid warfare environment dictates review and modification in policy options to deal with the evolving threat matrix. Although the concept of hybrid warfare is neither new nor

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novel, the manifestation spectrum is consistently broadening while encompassing a whole range of elements of national power.

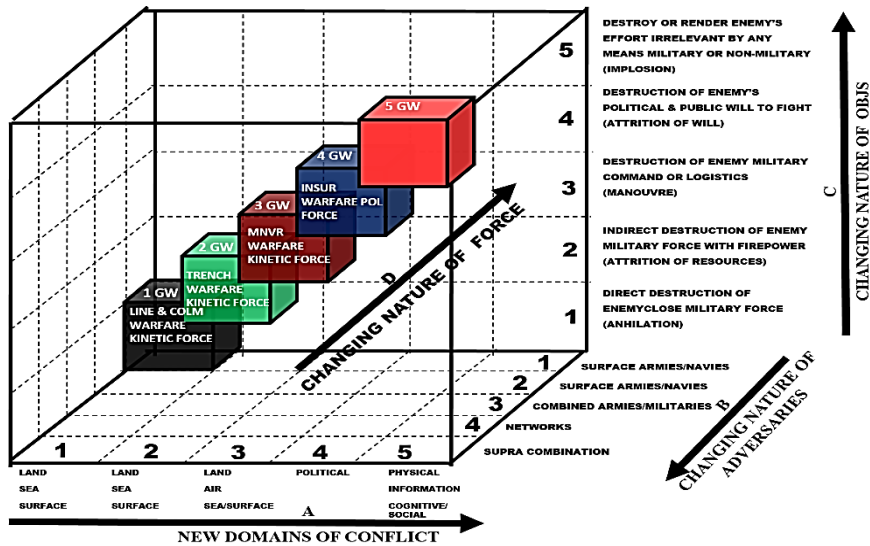
The prevailing environment is extremely volatile with changes occurring at a pace that has never been witnessed before. Oscillating challenges ranging from conventional to grey zones demand composite response at all levels. Pakistan is no exception to the latest trends as it is again at the centre stage of great powers' contestation for dominance. Therefore, the hybrid threat confronted by Pakistan requires a 'whole of a nation' approach.¹ The role of foreign policy to defuse the threat outside the borders has become crucial. This paper addresses the same question that how foreign policy act as a vanguard against externally abetted threats and cross-border terrorism in a hybrid warfare environment. Founded with an understanding of the maze of hybridity in light of the Inter-generational Warfare model, it highlights the contours of the threat matrix Pakistan is presently dealing with while proffering a way forward in the foreign policy domain.

Understanding the Maze of Hybridity

Subduing the will of an opponent has been the prime objective of oppressors in the history of warfare. Defeating opposing will has witnessed several ways and means in the past.² Application of these ways and means singly, in tandem, or a supra combination predicates the selection of an objective and conceived notion of victory. The hybrid warfare stratagem helps create a battlefield of battlefields that reduces the impact of the superiority of an adversary by forcing it to deal with many battlefields simultaneously, such as conventional, irregular, virtual space, psycho-social and cognitive domains.³ Although there is no universally accepted definition of hybrid warfare, most scholars, historians, defence analysts and academia agree to its dynamic, multi-faceted and complex nature. Without a peek into the plethora of definitions, it is prudent to explain hybrid warfare through Figure 1.1. Donald J. Reed points out changes affecting the manifestation of hybrid warfare in his model of Inter-generational Warfare while explaining the fifth-generation warfare.

The Inter-generational Warfare model highlights the maze of hybridity through a prism of the evolution of warfare generations.⁴ It predicates correlation between domains, objective, force and nature of adversaries. It concludes that change in any domain reflects a change in the character of warfare (in Figure 1.1, the horizontal bar explains the phenomenon). Massive firepower and swift manoeuvring (commonly known as blitzkrieg) with state-owned trained soldiers were the hallmarks of earlier generations of warfare. Battles were fought on the land, sea and in the air; however, today, the battlefield is everywhere.⁵ Monopoly on violence (as a right of the state) is being defied by the emerging battle zones like the virtual space of the internet. Political, psycho-social and cognitive fields are also added to the physical domain of warfare. The same makes hybrid warfare a complex and intricate proposition.

Figure 1.1: Inter-Generational Warfare Model



(Source: Journal of Studies in Conflict and Terrorism⁶)

The second factor, changing nature of adversaries, supplements the results of the first factor, i.e., domains of conflict. The state versus state has seen a transformation to state versus non-state actors. In the present era, networks are up against the supra combination of actors. At times, the interests within this supra combination are not convergent. Several rival groups embracing alliances with divergent interests in Syria is a case in point. It was also witnessed in Arab Spring, where social networks, ethnic and religious interests motivated the gangs and groups to rise against the state and create chaos.⁷

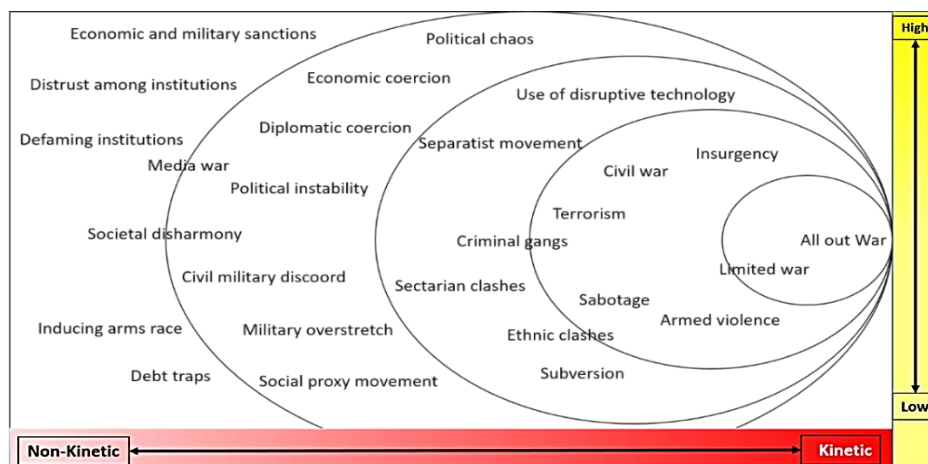
Change in desired end state is apparent from the vertical explanation of the change of objectives. Annihilation to attrition and attrition of will to affecting implosion from within is the journey of evolution of warfare. The objective set forth dictates the use of force accordingly. From regular armies to alliances and then to the use of non-state actors has been brought in by hybrid warfare. With the change in domains, the centre of gravity got shifted from the physical domain of the battlefield to other domains depending upon the nature and character of conflict. At times, centres of gravity appear to be non-existent and non-recognizable, especially in the case of supra combinations and networks. In hybrid warfare, force as a concept expands to include almost everything, kinetic or non-kinetic, military or civil, and experienced or inexperienced. The skilful use of non-violent combinations can defeat a well-equipped military adversary.

Hybrid warfare can also be explained through a 5Q inquiry. 5Q represents five basic questions: Why, How, With What, Where, and When. *Why* (Q₁) identifies the essence of hybrid warfare. With the shift from geopolitics to geoeconomic, the

international environment is increasingly becoming averse to military conflicts. Hybrid warfare facilitates avoiding attribution and retribution, whereas it is a low-cost and low-risk option compared to conventional war. An inferior belligerent can bring a superior enemy(ies) to knees. Achieving an objective in conventional war may not carry that velocity and accuracy, which is achieved through hybrid warfare, thus, becoming an attractive option around the globe. *How* (Q₂) clarifies the ways, which are employed to execute the hybrid war. There is a plethora of different ways that can contribute towards the achievement of the desired end state. Ranging from diplomatic isolation to economic coercion, social proxies to terror groups, cybernetics to sabotage, and political chaos to military stretch, several ways can be resorted to by an oppressor.

Figure 1.2 depicts the ways both in kinetic and non-kinetic domains with low to high intensity in each domain of conflict. These ways at times overlap, complement and strengthened outcomes of each other. Covering the entire landscape of regular and irregular use of force, limited or no use of force, and physical or virtual space, these ways create a complex, multi-faceted and dynamic threat matrix for the target state. Pakistan, being a prime target of hybrid warfare, will be discussed in the latter part of the paper. Figure 1.2 also helps in explaining the case of Pakistan.

Figure 1.2: The Maze of Hybridity



(Source: Author's Compilation)

With What (Q₃) suggests means that can be used by proponents of hybrid warfare, such as diplomatic clout, diaspora, international NGOs, financial institutions, non-state actors, domestic and international media, and the latest disruptive technologies. *Where* (Q₄) points to the space or battlefield where war must take place. Hybrid warfare exploits all available spaces, including open battlefields as well as virtual fields. It does not depend upon physical space only. Today, virtual space, psycho-social space, and cognitive domains are also engaged. *When* (Q₅) is important as it contributes towards the notion of victory. Hybrid warfare is more effective and

fruitful once the international environment is the permissible and domestic environment has also been shaping up. Due to globalization and digitization, conflict in one part of the world directly affects the other part. Thus, support of the international audience becomes crucial for initiating, manipulating, driving, and sustaining the hybrid war against the target state by the oppressor. India executing a hybrid war against Pakistan with the tacit approval of the west is a case in point.

Hybrid War against Pakistan

Pakistan, being relevant in geopolitical contestation, has been subjected to hybrid warfare since its inception. In recent years, the intensity of hybrid war has increased manifold. US presence in the neighbourhood with its policy of containing China and contesting for retaining pre-eminence has put Pakistan in the eye of the storm. Sino-Pak strategic cooperation and China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), with Pakistan's status as sole Muslim nuclear power, are not viewed favourably. Besides, the perennial nature of the conflict between Pakistan and India remains a repository of nuclear, conventional, and hybrid threats. However, other global and regional actors, including western neighbours, also target Pakistan through all available means to achieve their interests. A covert advisory and technical support of Israel to India further diversify the threat dimensions against Pakistan. Indicators are the recent violations of Pakistani airspace by Indian warplanes and dropping Israel-made payload inside Pakistan. Likewise, certain enablers and fault lines are being exploited by adversaries to their advantage.

In the prevailing environment of South Asia, India is a consistent conundrum for many political analysts engaged in a keen examination of India's approach towards regional security and stability. The stiff bid to seek hegemony over Pakistan and the rheostat government in Afghanistan is India's top priority and obstinate security objective. It turns out to be apparent when one witnesses India's enlarging obsession widened in numerous decades. To succeed in its strategic aims, India has done alignments and realignments with regional and extra-regional powers in the past. An examination of history reveals India's strategy. India is continuously engaged in hybrid warfare, regardless of its military strength and rivalry in the region, to seek its strategic objectives, particularly against Pakistan. India's role in driving hybrid war against rivals makes the existing security environment in South Asia precarious. Despite knowing that its hegemonic design poses direct threats to the regional security landscape, India's tempting preference for hybrid warfare is boosting against the regional sovereigns.

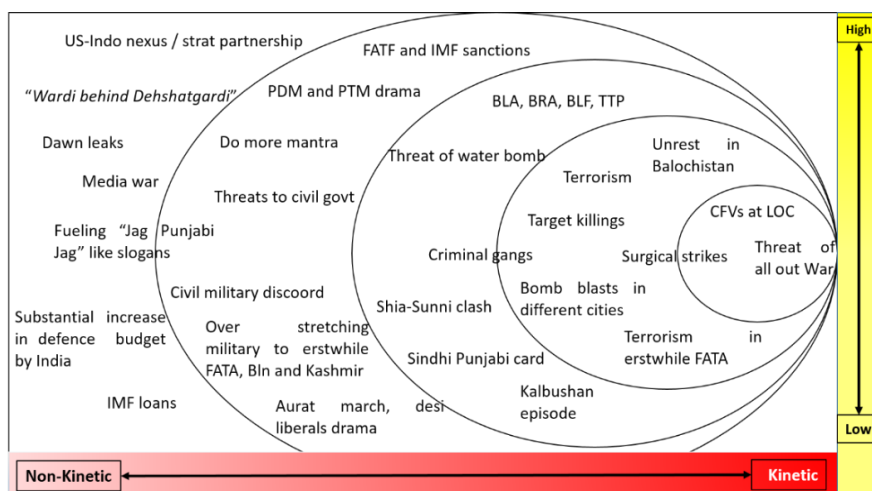
In the context of Pakistan, India's incapability to seek strategic goals by using its conventional power as its prime instrument, though the other sub-conventional elements were of subsidiary nature, appears based on wars fought between Pakistan and India since independence. It reflects that having more conventional strength and employing hybrid warfare cannot ensure success. On the other hand, a flawed assessment of a rival's strengths and weaknesses can lead towards the ultimate failure

of the designated aims, as the world has observed in 1948, 1965, 1971, and 1999. While the setback to the Indian illegal occupation of Jammu and Kashmir is to assess, India’s reversal strategy, abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A along with sub-conventional activities, is notable.⁸ India’s hegemonic designs are relevant for all regional countries, including Afghanistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Pakistan to varying degrees.

External state actors, predominantly India, synchronized with non-state actors are operating within or outside Pakistan to employ hybrid threats. These threats have various dimensions, including social, political, and financial. On the domestic front, Pakistan is confronted with multiple security challenges (both in kinetic and non-kinetic domains) posed by non-state actors, funded and supported by enemies like India. TTP and Daesh are at the forefront to sabotage the security landscape of Pakistan. Although Pakistan has been able to gain substantial success, the threat is not yet over as each passing day is bringing a new challenge. Ill-planned or hasty withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan also adds to the complexities of the issue.

India is continuously igniting the fire of sub-nationalism, religious extremism, and sectarian schism in Pakistan. In 2016, Kulbhushan Jadhav, an Indian Naval officer working for RAW in Pakistan since 2003, was captured by Pakistani security forces.⁹ The Counter-Terrorism Department of Pakistan also provided proof of RAW’s involvement in sectarian clashes in Karachi.¹⁰ Baloch Liberation Army (BLA), under the patronage of RAW, was engaged in the killings of Pakistani soldiers and officers.¹¹ In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, RAW supported and funded *Pashtun Tahafuz Movement* (PTM) against state machinery. Pakistan Army revealed the connection of foreign spy agencies and RAW (in particular) with PTM.¹² Figure 1.3 explains how Pakistan is engaged in hybrid warfare. The horizontal bar defines the level of kinetic and non-kinetic actions, while the vertical bar explains the severity of effort.

Figure 1.3: Pakistan in Hybrid Warfare



(Source: Author’s Compilation)

In hybrid warfare, a state wages war in several ways like political subversion, employing proxies, coercive deterrence, and intervention.¹³ India has tried to create political subversion in Pakistan using various instruments. On the diplomatic front, India has declared a policy to isolate Pakistan at the international level. In 2016, Indian Prime Minister, Narinder Modi, stated that India will work to isolate Pakistan internationally,¹⁴ thus, mounted a global campaign to isolate Pakistan diplomatically. In the Houston rally, Modi passed war-mongering statements against Pakistan¹⁵ in the presence of the US President that reflects US diplomatic backing to India.¹⁶ The US also established a counter-terrorism centre in India intending to train Indian forces personnel.¹⁷ Similarly, abrogation of Article 370 and subjugation of innocent Kashmiris by Indian security forces are openly defended by its allies. A senior US Congressman openly stated that “India is our important ally and we support its position on Kashmir.”¹⁸ Moreover, Israel provides unconditional support and sustenance to India in many ways.¹⁹ India, backed by right-wing Europeans, has churned out propaganda against Pakistan and China for decades.²⁰ India has been portraying Pakistan as a hotbed of terrorism and militancy and its mainstream and social media frequently report fake news against Pakistan; for example, in October 2020, footage of a blast due to gas leakage was falsely projected as a civil war in Pakistan.²¹ However, EU DisinfoLab uncovered a massive disinformation campaign launched by India against Pakistan.²²

Concerning CPEC, India has put all its efforts into disrupting this economic corridor by establishing a three-dimensional wing within RAW to destabilize Pakistan politically, socially, and economically.²³ India is the frontline architect of assaulting the Chinese Belt and Road initiative²⁴ by spreading fake information through media to create a trust deficit between the Pakistan government and masses. BJP-led government, since day one, has been pursuing irrational and aggressive policies against Pakistan. Leaving no stone unturned, the Indian government focuses on optimizing and exploiting every opportunity that can be made available or created in the international political system. Endeavours to disparage Pakistan’s image through FATF is a case in point. Breaching the Line of Control (LoC) is a frequent practice by India to shape up its hostile domestic environment. Fake claims of surgical strikes in Pakistan are in the same pursuit. India has been using neighbouring Afghanistan to launch terrorist attacks in Pakistan through TTP. Further, it has established closer economic ties with Iran and the Arab world, particularly the oil-rich UAE, all to undermine the image and position of Pakistan.

Pakistan and India are not only rivals but also holding the status of nuclear power. In this regard, the continuous effort of India to portray the nuclear assets of Pakistan as a threat to international peace and security is alarming.²⁵ Despite knowing that Pakistan’s nuclear program is only for strategic stability in the region, India projects that nuclear-free Pakistan would be socially peaceful, economically strong, and politically stable. For numerous times, India has launched a propaganda campaign against Pakistan for sharing nuclear technology with other countries. Anti-Pakistan elements and India are also active in cyber warfare against Pakistan. Last year, India

targeted the gadgets of Pakistan state officials, including military and civil services by injecting spy software.²⁶

India aiming at regional hegemony and global power status is pursuing multiple lines of effort, including diplomatic, information, military, economic, sub-conventional, and lawfare (DIME-SL) supported by regional and extra-regional actors against Pakistan. However, options available to India are fused in time and space to isolate Pakistan diplomatically. India attempts to coerce Pakistan to adopt compliant policies, strangle it economically, support sub-national movements, divide society on sectarian, ethnic, political, and cultural bases, discredit state institutions, create a perception of the dysfunctional state, raise questions on the *raison d'être* of its creation and carry out limited kinetic engagements at LoC. For the manifestation of such a nefarious design, India has adopted the Doval Doctrine revealed by the detention of an Indian spy, Kulbhushan Jadhav.²⁷

Foreign Policy Options for Pakistan in Hybrid Warfare

Pakistan has been following a foreign policy based on globally recognized principles with a keen eye on the challenges of the prevailing era. However, there have always been limited choices for Pakistan due to its location, neighbourhood, external vulnerabilities, political environment, and socio-economic developments.²⁸ There is no denying the fact that the image of a nation-state across the globe reflects its social, economic, political, and strategic institutions. The strength of a country is directly proportional to its image, whereas foreign policy is the external reflection of the same. History has witnessed that the fate of domestically weak and unstable countries is in chaos and catastrophe. The disintegration of the Soviet Union is considered a result of domestic weaknesses.

Therefore, the first step to having an independent, assertive, and sustainable foreign policy is to be at peace within. Putting the house in order, strengthening domestic cohesion and mutual respect improve the external reflection required to bear proactive foreign policy in a hybrid warfare environment. Domestic cohesion addresses the ethnopolitical fault lines and is also necessary for the revival of the crippling economy. Dharna politics, burning state properties, defaming institutions, blocking highways, curbing minority rights, fuelling sectarianism, and religious intolerance only pave the way for implosion from within, an objective of hybrid assault by the enemy. Thus, domestic consolidation in the social, economic, and political domains is of utmost importance before embarking upon an assertive foreign policy.

In hybrid warfare, overlapping conflict spectrum creates complex problems, which, at times, may not be resolved but can be managed. The war of narratives is a case in point. There is, therefore, a need to act within the system by identifying and understanding the core issues to counter hybrid threats, especially in the foreign policy domain. Cognitive disruption of hybrid threat logic needs to be resorted instead of focusing on physical methods to counter opponent means and capabilities. There is

also a need to arrange multi-domain targeted actions in line with national objectives. With rapid developments in different fields, the strategic direction must be aligned and avoid prescriptive measures across time and space. Dogmatism is suicidal in today's world; therefore, environmental context drives the choices in a hybrid warfare environment. A hybrid threat is not diffusible as a system at once; it is necessary to dislocate it by targeting the unity of different echelons responsible for hybrid onslaught. Pakistan must identify such pivots where focused attention is required. Diplomatic pressures, economic coercion, and terrorism besides material and financial support are the main aspects requiring such focus.

Ongoing geopolitical power contestation is testimony to the fact that traditional power centres are shifting, political values are changing, and old enemies are becoming allies. State interests that define foreign policy approaches are also experiencing strategic transformation.²⁹ Exclusivity of relations with a few, in the present era of hybrid warfare, is not a viable option. Pakistan must focus on emerging realities while breaking away the old shackles. The inertia and status-quo be overcome by reviewing, refining, and realigning national objectives and interests. It is time that Pakistan should look beyond the traditional power centres and peep into the future through its backyard window of opportunities.³⁰ Evolving military relations with Russia and the opening of new economic vistas in Central Asia through Afghanistan is an opportunity to gain and maintain confidence with regional states. Developing blocks like Russia, China, Iran, and Turkey should be explored and exploited. The equation of religion from relations needs to be taken out while maintaining smooth relations with Iran and KSA. Pakistan has won the battle which no one else could. It needs to build on the successes of WoT.

Pakistan needs to strengthen its relations with regional countries as well as the international community. Call for collective efforts against terrorism while sharing own experience can bring rich dividends. Pakistan has concrete evidence of the Indian role in igniting violent extremism and spreading terrorism inside its territory. These issues need to be raised at all regional and global forums besides the UN highlighting India's breach of international morals and norms. The EU DisinfoLab report is an eye-opener. Pakistan must adopt a cohesive and systemic approach for its foreign policy to counter such hybrid threats. Establishing a Lawfare Department under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), or else, is necessary to deal with the international law issues emerging in a hybrid warfare environment. Unless it is well-known how does the international system works, the threat matrix will not be comprehensible, and cases like EU DisinfoLab, Reko Diq, FATF, Kulbhushan Jadhav, and Kashmir will remain haunting.³¹ Inability to understand the lawfare will not allow Pakistan to exploit opportunities provided by the reports like EU DisinfoLab.

Cyberspace is a currency for perception management, opinion building, and subduing the will of a targeted audience. Pakistan needs to focus on cyber security to develop a widespread interconnected digital infrastructure. Self-sufficiency in the cyber security domain would help achieve long-term strategic goals at national and

international levels. Moreover, it will assist the country in launching a robust cyber security campaign to counter cyber threats posed by adversaries, especially India. Although Pakistan's new cybersecurity policy includes an institutional framework for a secure cyber ecosystem with emergency response teams, the experts at MoFA should be well conversant with the latest litigations on cyber security issues emerging in a hybrid warfare environment. Pakistan should also use digital mediums to counter India's negative propaganda and fake news campaigns while creating international sound bites on all issues, including the Indian illegal occupation of Jammu and Kashmir and Saffron terrorism.

CPEC is a game-changer for Pakistan's economy. Its success is essential for the socio-economic and infrastructural development of the region. Pakistan, along with China, must engage regional and extra-regional states to join BRI's flagship project, CPEC. The economic engagement of regional states will assist in reducing security concerns attached to CPEC while building a positive image of the country. Incentivizing foreign direct investment and building stakes of countries like Russia, Afghanistan, Iran, and Central Asia through economic connectivity will help to reduce the challenges of a hybrid warfare environment and improve people-to-people contact. It will also help promote favourable public opinion and narrative building. Pakistani think tanks can play a vital role in this regard. Think tank to think tank collaboration at global and regional levels facilitated by MoFA and Pakistanis living abroad can help Pakistan to uplift its image globally. There is no denying the fact that soft power is more effective in pursuing national interests, as compared to hard power.

Conclusion

Hybrid warfare is a complex and dynamic reality demanding a comprehensive response to the threats in all domains, especially at the external level. Although the realization has felt late, it is, however, not too late. Pakistan needs to shear away the excess baggage of the past along with the old mindset. The vacuous foreign policy based on experience will not prove fruitful in a hybrid warfare environment until policymakers understand the hybrid threats, followed by necessary training on the subject. Striking balance between opportunities and problems with careful deliberation and composite planning will render a smooth sail in dealing with the challenges of today's complex environment.

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