

War Beyond Rules: Hybrid War and India's Preparedness

Narender Kumar

Introduction

States were known to employ military capabilities that were conventional in nature. The enormous destructive power of conventional capabilities and nuclear arsenals has made conventional wars cost-prohibitive and thus the application of non-state actors and irregular forces against states is becoming the new normal of waging wars. The beginning was made in Afghanistan when the Taliban and the Mujahids were employed, with state patronage, against the Soviet Union. Post-Cold War era, a new warfare has emerged, wherein non-state actors with state patronage, have begun to utilise military capabilities that were traditionally attributed only to states. Instead of relying solely on irregular tactics, they have surprised their adversaries with conventional arsenals including air-defence systems, missiles, rockets, and artillery.¹

Hybrid war is considered to be the next generation of warfare that will alter the manner in which future conflicts will be fought. The contours of hybrid war first emerged when the US and NATO-backed irregular forces, that led to creation of designer states out of erstwhile Yugoslavia. Irregular

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forces employed conventional capabilities to create new states in Europe, which led to the decline of Russian influence in East Europe. This new warfare prevented direct conflict between global military powers and maintained deniability of any direct involvement in a conflict. Hybrid warfare has demonstrated that non-state actors with state patronage, like the Iran-backed Hezbollah, Pakistan-backed Taliban, US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces, and Russian-backed militias in Ukraine are waging war against states by fighting within the nation and eroding the authority of the state over its territory and resources. Instead of relying solely on irregular tactics, as insurgent groups have done in the past, they have surprised their adversaries with conventional capabilities² and the employment of cyber warfare to degrade, disrupt, dislocate, and destroy the ability of a state to fight a war. One of the main facets of hybrid war that makes it more potent is that an adversary can simultaneously attack ideological and kinetic centre of gravity, thus eroding the physical and cognitive space of a state.

Pakistan has mastered the art of employment of regulars and irregulars along with non-state actors and the conflict in Jammu and Kashmir is a manifestation of this capability. Similarly the philosophy of unrestricted war followed by China is omni-directional and has the potential of confrontation in the battlefield as well as in the cyber, information, and economic spheres. India has been the target of the irregular and unrestricted warfare capabilities of Pakistan and China. The hybrid threat will be more pronounced in the future as China consolidates

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The hybrid threat will be more pronounced in the future as China consolidates its presence in Indian Ocean Region and South Asia. The Indian state should acknowledge that in a borderless battlefield, it is no longer possible to rely on military forces and weapons alone to achieve national security.

its presence in Indian Ocean Region and South Asia. The Indian state should acknowledge that in a borderless battlefield, it is no longer possible to rely on military forces and weapons alone to achieve national security in the larger strategic sense.³ Therefore, if a nation cannot understand war without understanding the broader political and social implications of the context of war in which it is executed,⁴ it will not be possible to find answer to such complex security paradigm. Hybrid wars cannot be fought by blunt military power; they require the intellectual preparation of a battle space.⁵

Hybrid war is on the cusp of conventional and sub-conventional wars and exploits regular and irregular capabilities to achieve the desired results—that of fighting a war against a strong nation without the risk of major retribution. The manifestation of hybrid threat can break the barrier of ‘no peace no war’ to a war-like situation. Figure 1 provided by Dr Frank G. Hoffman describes the spectrum of conflict and how ungoverned or grey zones lead to an irregular and hybrid threat.

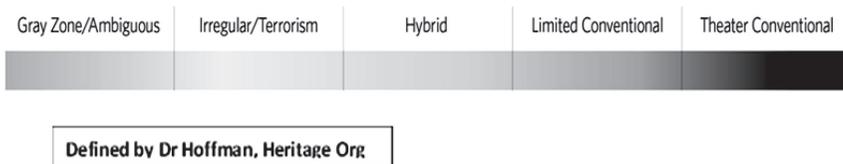


Figure 1: Spectrum of Conflict in Unconventional Warfare

Complexity of Hybrid War

Hybrid war is characterised by an undefined battle space that can be waged from within the territorial boundary of a state, from the rear and the flank.⁶ The outcome of a hybrid threat is catastrophic and states can be destabilised, not in years but in months and weeks. Syria, Libya, Yemen, and Iraq bear testimony to the fact that these states may not be geographically the same as they were prior to the beginning of the conflict. States have lost their social, secular, cultural, and constitutional

identities. Institutions that bind the various nationalities together stand fragmented and their restructuring and rehabilitation become near impossible.

The complexity and characteristics of hybrid war are apparent in the definition itself. Dr Frank G. Hoffman defines hybrid war as one waged by 'any adversary that simultaneously and adaptively employs a fused mix of conventional weapons, irregular tactics, terrorism and criminal behaviour in the battle space to obtain their political objectives.'⁷ András Rácz says that in accordance with Russian military thinking, 'hybrid war is based on the integrated use of military and non-military.

Instruments covering the whole range of the state's political toolbox, including diplomatic, economic, political, social, information, and also military resources. Gerasimov's concepts of 'hybrid wars' or 'non-linear wars' include three mutually reinforcing principles. 'Permanency of conflict', blurs the boundaries between war-time and peace-time; time and space; and actors/stakeholders. According to Gerasimov, twenty-first-century conflicts in Africa and the Middle East show that prosperous and stable regimes can, within a short period of time, transform into arenas of intense conflicts.⁸ These events may not reflect an official state of war, but their social, economic, and political implications for individual countries and their societies are comparable with the consequences of real wars.⁹

The elements of hybrid warfare that makes it potent are the fusion of regular and irregular forces, simultaneity and non-linearity of application, multi-modality (military and non-military), and criminality embedded in the acts of terror or subversion. Large-scale conventional wars are rather easy to understand,¹⁰ but the unrestricted application of just and unjust means make hybrid war complex and unpredictable. One of the prime characters of the hybrid war is that it attacks through the military, social, cultural, and cyber space to paralyse the traditional and non-traditional capabilities of a state to defend and secure its vital national interests. Figure 2 describes how hybrid warfare exploits

conventional and irregular capabilities without crossing the threshold for a full spectrum war.

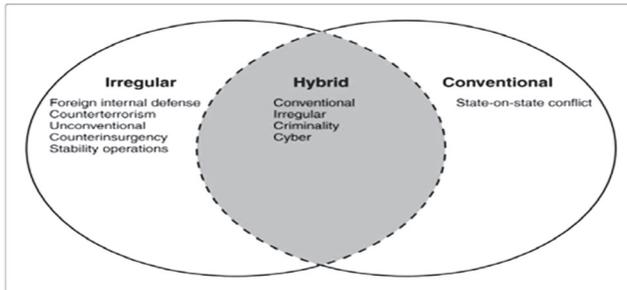


Figure 2: Hybrid War overlaps Irregular and Conventional War

Source: GAO Analysis of DOD military concept and briefing documents and academic writings.

Tools of Hybrid War

Hybrid war has a wide spectrum of conventional and sub-conventional tools for war fighting. The impact is catastrophic, if these tools are employed simultaneously in a synergised manner. Stable states can plunge into chaos and complete disarray in a matter of short time. In conventional wars, non-military targets are avoided as a matter of principle. But hybrid war has the advantage that an adversary is able to engage both military and non-military targets simultaneously. The erosion of state, polity, and society is achieved at a rapid pace. Figure 3 suggests the elements and tools of hybrid war.

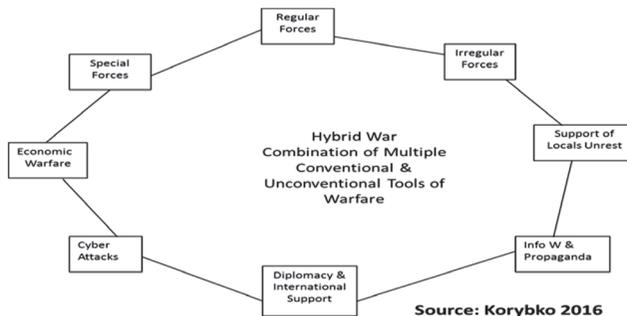


Figure 3 : Elements and Tools of Hybrid War

Source: Military Concepts And Hybrid War, Korybko 2016.

Scales of Victory and Objectives of Hybrid War

The scales of victory in hybrid war depend on its objectives. Are these a denial of resources, regime change, or using the strategy of chaos to deny use of a geo-strategic location and cause an implosion for strategic reasons? Can the hybrid war lead to decisive victory or can it lead to protracted war? Hybrid wars are not conceptualised for a decisive victory; they are executed to set the stage for the dislocation and displacement of existing regimes, so that collapse of the system is triggered and once the state plunges into chaos, a party to the conflict can be entrusted with the responsibility of controlling the entire geographical expanse or a part of it. The Syrian war was undertaken by NATO and the US to dislodge the current Assad regime. They have propped up more than one stakeholder so that designer states can be carved out in accordance with the objectives of the architects of the conflict. On other hand, Russia wants Assad to stay, so that their strategic interests are served and their presence maintained in the Mediterranean Sea.

Hybrid war can graduate to theatre and conventional wars because it would not achieve a decisive victory in a conflict with a state. The use of irregular, non-state actors and social unrest is considered as low-cost high return option. Create a situation where it becomes untenable for a state to exercise control over its territory, people, and resources. In case of Jammu and Kashmir, the objective of Pakistan is to maintain a *no war, no peace* situation by creating a sense of indigenous struggle by the people of Kashmir for self-determination. Victory of Pakistan is to keep Kashmir in a state of turbulence and prolonged conflict and victory for India is to ensure people of Kashmir get integrated with the main stream.

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Emergence of the Hybrid Threat to India

Is Pakistan waging a hybrid war in Jammu and Kashmir? Pakistan is fixated with three factors that have driven it to remain at war with India, the notion of creating a strategic depth against India in Afghanistan; revenge for its humiliating military defeat in 1971; and the creation of Bangladesh by dismembering East Pakistan. Pakistan has focused on attaining military parity by developing nuclear weapons and hybrid warfare capabilities. Security analysts commonly use the lexicon of ‘hybrid war’ in reference to conflict in Jammu and Kashmir. Without fulfilling the pre-requisites of hybrid war it is only hypothetical whether it is simple case of terrorism or has it gone beyond and become a classic instance of hybrid war. Whether Pakistan employed hybrid warfare as per its defined elements, or as mere rhetoric, needs deliberate introspection. There is no denying that Pakistan has employed irregulars and non-state actors to destabilise Jammu and Kashmir, but is there a visible overlap of the application of all the elements of hybrid war? Is it a strategy of denial or has the conflict in Jammu and Kashmir yet to reach a stage, where it has become potent enough to be termed a hybrid war? It also throws up the question, that in case it is a hybrid war then is the strategy of India appropriate or is it a classic case of the lack of an understanding of the concept of hybrid warfare, at the political and military level. A response mechanism in the absence of a deep understanding of a hybrid threat would make it even more difficult to respond to the hybrid threat. Thus, what are the preconditions that would provide empirical evidence of a hybrid war being waged by Pakistan in Jammu and Kashmir?

Societal and structural preconditioning

General Zia unleashed Operation Topac to carry out societal and structural conditioning in Jammu and Kashmir. The focus was not on the employment of brute military force, but to make the people believe that they are an oppressed class. General Zia in one of his meetings with the military commanders and ISIS is reported to have said that, ‘Our Kashmiri brethren in the valley, though with us in their hearts and minds,

are simple-minded folk and do not easily take to the type of warfare to which, say, a Punjabi or an Afghan takes to naturally, against foreign domination.¹¹ The objective was to create societal space for hybrid war and that Pakistan has achieved.

Space for employment of non-state actors

A perception has been created through psychological conditioning that non-state actors are fighting for a just cause. Those who resisted the terror organisations and separatists were portrayed as being against the principle of self-determination in Jammu and Kashmir. Such a perception has legitimised use of terror, by otherwise peace-loving Kashmiris. Such an environment has created a space for the employment of non-state actors.

Acts of criminality

These are parts of the coercion to alter the will of the people so that they do not resist the so called people's movement. Acts of criminality are undertaken against the security forces, mainland India, and even against the Kashmiri people to create a support base by coercion if the support does not come willingly. Nation must remember that today's criminal is tomorrow's terrorist.

Erosion and subversion of established institutions of governance

Hybrid war can only become effective if the institutions of governance collapse and there is an erosion of its functioning. This allows hybrid threats to create a space for the effective usage of all elements of hybrid war. This has been achieved to a great extent and the political and public space stands encroached. Educational institutions are becoming the hubs of Intifada and secessionist ideology. Members of the state police are under tremendous pressure to switch sides and not act against stone pelters and terrorists.

Synergised application of regulars, irregulars, and non-state actors in same battle space

Irregulars and non-state actors can operate both as terror organisations

and regular forces. The Hezbollah and Syrian Democratic Forces have acquired the capabilities to operate as regulars and non-state actors. The targets of regulars, criminals, and irregulars in hybrid war could be different. Irregulars could target regulars, terrorists could dominate the cognitive domain, and criminals could target those whom they consider as obstructing their larger goal. Pakistan has been using regulars to train equip, control the irregulars, and terrorists to operate in Jammu and Kashmir and even other parts of India. The targets are carefully selected by the Pak Army and ISI, and resources and logistics are made available to them to execute the task. But the irregulars and regulars have restricted their activities along the line of control (LOC). Interestingly the division of boundaries for employment is clearly defined. Non-state actors operate within the Indian Territory while regulars and irregulars operate along the LOC.

Simultaneity and multi-modality of application of hybrid capabilities

Hybrid warfare is effective if all components are employed simultaneously in same battle space. Engagement of security forces, institutions, coercion of those who oppose the violent means of the terrorists and society at large is being undertaken to create an impression that entire population has revolted against the government and system has collapsed.

Internal subversion is triggered to control and deny space to the state institutions. Effectiveness of hybrid war is in internal subversion and this is a major reason for the destabilisation of a nation. Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan have literally imploded, purely because of internal subversion and fragmentation of society. Pakistan has achieved internal subversion in Kashmir Valley and that is one of the major factors of effectiveness of hybrid war being waged by Pakistan.

Information war

Hybrid war becomes even more potent and volatile with an information war. It creates the perception of success, decides the scales of victory, and acts as potent tool for a misinformation campaign against the established

governments. In the digital era, media becomes one of the most potent tools of the information war. Pakistan has been exploiting this to the hilt.

Cultural and structural violence

Cultural and structural violence justifies the wrongs as right. It reduces the space for reconciliation and depicts the entire hybrid war as a war for a just cause. A state can handle direct violence but it is very difficult to handle cultural and structural violence.

Resource control

Denial of access to resources is one strategy used in hybrid war. It weakens the war waging capability of the target nation. Denial of resources is achieved by disrupting communications and the destruction of resources. The other aspect of resource control is the exploitation of resources for enhancing capabilities. ISIS has denied resources to Syrian and Iraqi governments and used the same resources to enhance its own capabilities. Pakistan may like to do the same but has been unable to achieve success.

Non-state and irregulars acquiring conventional capabilities

Hezbollah and Syrian Democratic Forces and ISIS have acquired conventional and sub-conventional capabilities. It is not possible to acquire such capabilities without state patronage. Thus, such groups pose a serious threat of hybrid war when combined with other tools of war. Terrorists are getting support from irregulars and regulars from across the LOC but a defined conventional capability is yet not employed by Pak-sponsored proxies in Jammu and Kashmir.

Grey zones or ungoverned territory

Grey zones and ungoverned territories allow criminals and non-state actors to gain a foothold in a target nation to enable other elements of hybrid war to destabilise the state. Though a classical grey zone does not exist in Jammu and Kashmir but hybrid war in Jammu and Kashmir has ensured that there is neither complete peace nor complete war.

North-East India

The north-eastern states of India have seen the longest on-going insurgency in the country. The scale of violence fluctuates but it continues to simmer and except for Mizoram all other states have active insurgent groups. What is equally worrying is the nexus between criminals, drug traffickers, insurgents, and the state patronage of our adversaries who provide ideological and material support from across the border. Insurgents enjoy safe havens or grey zones across international borders. There is some degree of subversion among the population in some areas. The components of modern instability (corruption, poor governance, unemployment, uneven distribution of wealth, poor development, and ethnic fragmentation) do exist and these create the space for hybrid elements to spread the network.

The North-East has seen three cycles of insurgency related instability. The first cycle was marked by an ideologically-backed ethnic conflict for self-determination that started in the late 1950s and continued till the 1980s. The second cycle that started in the 1990s highlighted the fact that ideology was withering away and had become an industry, and this is still continuing. The third cycle, if not checked in time, is likely to unfold a dangerous mix of Jihadi and LWE insurgency. This is perilous because it can pave the way for the beginning of a hybrid threat in the north-eastern states.

The potential of initiation of hybrid war in the North-East does exist but the subversion of population has not taken place to a great extent, except in some pockets in Assam, Bengal, and Manipur. An encouraging sign is that the masses are looking for peace and development rather than conflict and instability. The youth still feel that their future lies with India and in spite of the instability on the ground, insurgency is unlikely to get converted into hybrid war. This belief should not make the government complacent and the situation should be continuously monitored and effective steps both military and non-military need to be taken to restore peace and stability.

Is the Indian State prepared to deal with Hybrid War?

Hybrid war is amorphous in nature; the trajectory it takes is difficult to

define. Even those who orchestrate this warfare can lose control over the outcome. It has the potential to transform into conventional war and multiple sub-conventional wars. On one side of the spectrum it uses Intifada as a tool to paralyse state institutions and occupy the public space; and on the other side, it has the potential to unleash brutal violence that can be directed against potential targets. Another facet of hybrid war is that there is persistent risk of strategic miscalculation and escalation of conflict. Thus, hybrid war is not purely military matter; it is a war against a nation, a society, a culture, and its people. To deal with this emerging threat a whole of nation approach is required. Figure 3 defines the tools of war that cover almost the entire spectrum of military and non-military threats.

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The biggest flaw in the Indian response, especially in Jammu and Kashmir, is that India is seeing this conflict through the prism of a conventional military response. This is a tired ideology which is likely to confront the fatigue factor sooner or later. A synergised response under a single command authority covering both military and non-military measures is imperative. Intelligence agencies are operating independently of the security forces and are not responsible for the troops on the ground. The MHA controls Central Armed Police Force whereas the Army operates under the MOD. The state police and the India Reserve Battalions (IRB) operate under state authority. Cyber and information war is conspicuous by its absence and even if it is being initiated, it is independent of the other

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agencies. A fragmented approach, in the absence of a common operational plan, is unlikely to achieve the desired results. Operations are being executed under different ministries and there is no single central authority that is responsible and accountable for the execution of a comprehensive and integrated response. Therefore, a military response only will be inadequate and a bad idea to pursue. The response requires a strategy and synergy between military and non-military partners and other law enforcement agencies.

Hybrid War needs Hybrid Response

Prevent collapse of state within. When NATO was reviewing its strategy to deal with Russian hybrid war they realised that, when a country is attacked by conventional land, sea or air forces, it is usually clear how best to respond. But what happens when it is attacked by a mixture of Special Forces, information campaigns, and backdoor proxies? What's the best response?¹² Hybrid war thrives on internal fault lines. The characteristics of a hybrid threat are such that it is difficult to identify its footprints and signatures during the early stages. Identifying the next target likely to be engaged by the adversary is a clever strategy provided the capabilities

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are developed enough to do so. The problem in India is that because of political convenience the signatures are either suppressed or overlooked. Another major problem is the lack of an intellectual appreciation of threats and challenges posed by hybrid war. The intelligence agencies should have experts who can demystify the contours of hybrid war. The best response is to subdue and eliminate the threat before it manifests. The problem arises when there is political patronage for criminals and fringe elements that are vulnerable to subversion. Thus, defensive and offensive measures as part of national strategy need to be instituted in a synergised manner. The denial

of space and the securing of the exposed flank is the first step a nation must take to counter hybrid threat. The whole effort should be to prevent the collapse of the state strengthening of institutions.

Hybrid War in Indian context is here to stay

India must acknowledge that hybrid war is here to stay and it will require greater understanding and a comprehensive national power to respond to it. Military as the sole responder of the hybrid threat is a bad strategy, because lines of conflict/engagements are blurring. Simultaneous engagement on multiple fronts should be the norm and not an exception.

India needs New Doctrine for Integrated Action

Strategies for war are conceptualised during peace time. Hybrid war is complex and the military needs to define its strategy, doctrine, concept of operations, force restructuring, special equipment, and special training. It would require combatants and non-combatants as part of the force, to deal with every element of hybrid war.

Intelligence Agencies First Firewall

Hybrid war is initiated first in the minds of the masses and then it manifests in the physical world. Therefore, an understanding of the stresses and strains created by religion, society, culture, radicals, and criminals is vital. Intelligence agencies are required to carry out the mapping of the human terrain and the social, economic, and cultural fault lines. The 'mapping of human terrain' requires intellectuals, social scientists, cyber experts, information warriors, and professionals to understand and unravel any uneven behaviour by individuals and groups of people. Thus, the first responders should be the intelligence agencies, law enforcing agencies, and state administration. The terrorists/insurgents live among the people, terrorist attacks occur before the eyes of the people, and terrorism threatens the lives of the people. So the people have an unparalleled advantage compared with uniformed, specialised security forces.¹³ Therefore, engagement with the people to fight hybrid war is vital since they are the centre of gravity.

Relevance of Conventional Capabilities in Hybrid War

The Indian Armed Forces are equipped, trained, and structured to fight conventional wars. Often the question, that is raised, is that if India is unlikely to fight a conventional war then why so much focus on conventional capabilities. The simple answer is that if India does not maintain its conventional capabilities it will be engaged in sub-conventional and hybrid war at multiple levels. Conventional deterrence will, therefore have to be maintained. However, one should not also assume that all state-based warfare will be entirely conventional.¹⁴

Hybrid War is Multi-Dimensional Unified Conflict and Need Unified Efforts

Hybrid warfare compels the opponent's military and civil population to support the attacker, to the detriment of their own government and country.¹⁵ Thus, hybrid war requires the whole of the government approach to deal with it. The response should be based on the principle of unity of efforts, simultaneity, integrated approach, synergised and synchronised efforts. Execution of plan should be coordinated at the highest level to achieve cooperation for effect-based response. Tools are diplomatic, cyber, informational, economic, political, asymmetric, and military. Operational commanders cannot achieve strategic objectives solely through military action but must depend on the full government response to achieve appropriate goals. The defining principle of dealing with hybrid war is 'unified effort'—simultaneous application of tools of war, 'mixed tactics' conducted across the enemy's territory, and more importantly, within its 'spheres of influence'.¹⁶ Military operations are, therefore, part of a larger comprehensive, whole of government approach.¹⁷

When to Fight and Where to Fight

It is a smart strategy to determine when and where to fight. There is a need to identify the tools that are to be applied at a particular stage and against what specific threat. The cyber threat can be handled by the cyber as well as the law enforcement authorities. Military response ideally should not

be applied against Intifada and the law enforcing agencies should be tasked to deal with it. While military operations are on-going, dialogue, discussion, analysis, and post-operation actions are important at every stage. The tools should be determined by strategy and not as an emergency response.

The debate of ethics and rules does not apply to hybrid war; what is important is the impact of own response to a borderless war.

Conclusion

India should not become a victim of hybrid war or casualty, because of its own neglect. There is a need to introspect, analyse and formulate the doctrine and strategies to have an effective mechanism to deal with it. Hybrid warfare will be a defining feature of the future security environment¹⁸ and thus a fragmented approach will be detrimental to the national interests. The debate of ethics and rules does not apply to hybrid war; what is important is the impact of own response to a borderless war. As Frank Hoffman states, 'Tomorrow's conflicts will not be easily categorised into conventional or irregular, the emerging character of conflict is more complicated than what it appears. A binary choice of big and conventional versus small or irregular is too simplistic.'¹⁹ India needs to develop an understanding of hybrid war and the contours of conflict suggest that the future wars will not be completely conventional, nor should it be assumed that state-based conflict has passed into the dustbin of history. Many have made that mistake before. State-based conflict is less likely, but it is not extinct.²⁰ Hybrid warfare has emerged from the theory to the reality and it is here to stay.

Notes

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