

Challenges of Post-Truth Era – A Case Study of Indian Chronicles

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Abstract

This paper explains the importance of information operations which states adopt in global relationship. Due to technological development and dynamic geo-strategic environment the conduct of war has changed. The new wars are being fought in virtual domain to occupy human mind to sway public opinion for vested interests. The age in which we are surviving has been termed 'post-truth era'. The messages are created to target the emotions not reality. Development in artificial intelligence and biotechnology are biggest challenges of 21st century. The ongoing virtual wars are an extension of this perceived threat. The changing nature of threat has been termed as 'hybrid warfare'. Soft power is the key element in studying effectiveness of hybrid conflict. Soft Power can be weaponized as force of coercion and employed in lieu of, or in concert with, the application of violence. Technological advances in surveillance devices have enhanced the potential to cause desired blow to adversary through sophisticated means. Ghost political entities, NGOs, Facebook, Whatsapp, Twitter are tools of 21st century which are now effectively being employed against adversary to shape public

perception in desired direction. In Hybrid conflict outside forces act to ignite historical, religious, geographical, ethnic or socio-economic conflicts. Pakistan is target of hybrid threats because of its geo-strategic location, strong military prowess, China Pakistan Economic Corridor, influence over Afghanistan, connectivity to central Asian States and above all rich human resource. China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is prime target of Indian propaganda. Criminality is the most dominating feature of Hybrid operations.

To spread hate and fake news, India is using 500 domains. The operation was named 'Indian Chronicle'. Most of propaganda content was aimed to pollute the public opinion about Balochistan and Kashmir. As many as 11 NGOs, fake think tanks, lobbying firms and media houses would create events which were covered by fake media. A known India wire service ANI was being used for content laundering. The same content was being published not only by fake websites but major media outlets. Srivastav business entity, a hoax group was leading the entire propaganda network.

Indian false flag operations have been a part of its strategy, in pursuit of the Chanakya dictums of guile and deceit. Hybrid Conflicts are more devastating in nature compared with kinetic surge against targeted nations. Public opinion has become one of the influential factor in determining the position of a state in global structure. Will of people determines the strength of a nation. Fake news play with human mind

and compels it to deliberate in ways which are unproductive for himself as well as for society.

Key Words: Hybrid Warfare, Fake News, Indian Chronicles, Post-Truth Era, CPEC

INTRODUCTION

War has been an instrument of change and will continue to be so in future. Basic character of war will not be different from history. However, due to technological development and dynamic geo-strategic environment the conduct of war has changed. The new wars are being fought in virtual domain to occupy human mind to sway public opinion for vested interests. We always had the idea that how powerful is public opinion but never thought that manipulation of information will be so quick, devastating and so easy. Big data machines are being used to mine data and convert it into information and measuring trends to further use it for their own benefit. It has come to forefront that public opinion is most powerful tool in the domain of security, politics, trade and social development. Public opinion is most powerful tool for national security. In 1980, US Security experts introduced the concept of 4th generation warfare to represent war ravaged states threatened by insurgents. Terrorist outfits of various kinds had made sanctuaries in Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Libya to threaten regional and global

stability.¹ World after experiencing 4th generation warfare is now confronted with new kind of warfare, 5th generation or Hybrid warfare.² These may also be called mix of virtual and kinetic operations coupled with political influence by global arena. Indian National Security Advisor on 28th November, 2021 while speaking to media said “New areas of warfare have shifted from merely territorial frontiers to the civil societies. The common people’s thinking, their perception, health, sense of well-being and their perception of their government have assumed new importance”.³

The age in which we are surviving has been termed ‘post-truth era’. The messages are created to target the emotions not reality. Post-truth can be defined in simple words as “Using the appeal of emotions redundantly to influence a large group of people instead of introducing them with the

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¹ Wayne Madson, “ Fourth and Fifth generation warfare arrives on Europe and Middle Eastern battlefields,” *Centre for 5th Generation Warfare Studies*,2015, <http://www.da-ic.org/5gen/2016/07/09/fourth-and-fifth-generation-warfare-arrives-on-european-and-middle-eastern-battlefields-wayne-madsen>(accessed on May 29,2018)

² Khamis and Katherine Vaughn, “ Cyber Activism in Egyptian Revolution: How Civic Engagement and Citizen Journalism,” *Journal of Communication*, April 2012

³ Economic Times, “New areas of warfare have shifted from merely territorial frontiers to the civil societies “ 28 November. 2021, <https://www.timesnownews.com/india/article/warfare-areas-shifted-to-civil-society-peoples-health-sense-of-security-impact-will-of-a-nation-ajit-doval/827366> (accessed on 1 November, 2021).

facts and truth.” Fabricated information is repeatedly fed to the public mostly through digital platforms.⁴

Dynamism of world is moving at much faster pace today compared with what we witnessed in previous centuries. Since World War 2, the global order was bipolar. America was calling shots for its supremacy in EU and south Asia and pacific regions. USSR was mostly using its power to contain US moves in Europe and making counter alliances for balance of power. After disintegration of USSR, unipolar world has been much challenging for US as compared with bipolar world.⁵ Economic power has shifted from west to east. Barry Buzan has an opinion that US influence will further weaken due to its own follies, internal dynamics and increasing regionalism. Era of super powers is over, great powers and regional powers will be more influential in the absence of any super power.⁶ In its entirety the new game is being played in middle-east, south Asia and south east Asia. US has already declared Russia and China her competitors and does not see good in Pakistan and Iran, who are trusted allies of China and Russia respectively. US wants to maintain the status quo while the rising powers want to reform the global structure in order to make it more equitable and just. We are re-

⁴ Andrew Calcut, “The surprising origins of ‘ post-truth’ – and how it was spawned by the liberal left,” *The Conversation*, University of East London, <https://theconversation.com/the-surprising-origins-of-post-truth-and-how-it-was-spawned-by-the-liberal-left-68929>. (accessed on 19 December, 2021)

⁵ Henry Kissinger , *World Order*, (Newyork: Penguin Press,2014)

witnessing the cold war era which was more like world divided into two halves, one towards Russia and other towards US. The bipolar world is constrained to go into bigger conflicts, hence will rely more on proxy war and hybrid conflicts.

During last decade US undertook the “EuroMaidan” Hybrid War against Russian interests in Ukraine, which was foreseen as Eurasian Union irreplaceable bridge to the EU, or in other words, Moscow’s multipolar transnational connective infrastructure project, which overlaps with China’s Eurasian Land Bridge initiative. At the same time, the US began provoking China in the south China sea and tried assembling a lead from behind coalition to challenge its interests there, which presented a threat to the maritime portion of BRI. The US engagement through proxy war against Russian interest in Ukraine and Chinese interest in south China sea brought both China and Russia closer to establish an unprecedented Eurasian partnership, which brings us to the present day. Both Russia and China has been cooperating with each other to facilitate the transition of new global order. They have been constructing alternative governance systems and institutions such as BRICS, SCO, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, and the BRICS Bank. Pakistan stands at an important geostrategic position amid all this transition and hence is target of Indian and US hybrid techniques. After withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan, the situation seems to be attaining more

sensitivity giving provocation for more sinister attacks against Pakistan in near and far future.

Development in artificial intelligence and biotechnology are biggest challenges of 21st century. The ongoing virtual wars are an extension of this perceived threat. These virtual confrontations aim to overpower the perception of masses for trade, political and other social benefits. Humans think in stories rather than in facts, numbers or equations. What is happening in the world today, and what is the deep meaning of events are beyond human comprehension. Only big data machines can comprehend such volume of algorithms. The firms managing big data algorithms, are holding power to understand and manipulate human mind. Human mind is unable to conduct a reality check of so much of information, thus it ultimately go to wilderness. The sense of disorientation and impending doom is exacerbated by the accelerating pace of technological disruption. The liberal political system has been shaped during the industrial era to manage a world of steam engines, oil refineries and television sets. It finds it difficult to deal with the ongoing revolutions in information technology and cyber space.

Thus the question is how, this new form of threat is unfolding for Pakistan in the post truth era and response strategy.

Hybrid Techniques

The changing nature of threat has been termed as ‘hybrid warfare’. The term was coined in 2010 by US Secretary of Defence, Robert Gates. Since then it has been part and parcel of security studies. Hybrid Warfare can be defined as “the coordinated employment of political and military forms of war, through direct, indirect and virtual means, in order to achieve strategic objectives at a cost of least political risks linked with all out war”.

This type of war is usually prolonged and aimed to achieve long term objectives. The technique involves use of proxies, terrorism and manipulation through information operations, exploiting economic shortfalls and winning over of diplomatic leverage.⁷ Soft power is the key element in studying effectiveness of hybrid conflict. Soft Power can be weaponized as force of coercion and employed in lieu of, or in concert with, the application of violence.⁸

Technological advances in surveillance devices have enhanced the potential to cause desired blow to adversary through sophisticated means. Ghost political entities, NGOs, Facebook, Whatsapp, Twitter are tools of 21st century which are now effectively being employed against adversary to shape public perception in desired direction.⁹ Pre-existing

⁷ Robert M Gates, *Quadrennial Defence Review Report* (Washington, DC; Dept of Defence,2010)

⁸ Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (Newyork, NY: Public Affairs, 2004)

⁹ ME6 Gabriel Tham et al, “ Technologies in Hybrid Warfare : Challenges and Opportunities,” <https://www.mindef.gov.sg/oms/safti/pointer/documents/pdf/V43N1a2.pdf>(accessed on 3 June, 2018)

identity conflicts exist in every state but those might not reach to a level where it could bring a political change unless supported from outside. In Hybrid conflict outside forces act to ignite those historical, religious, geographical, ethnic or socio-economic conflicts. BLA, TTP, PTM are some of the example to quote for reference. Unemployed youth is turning fast into an army of social media activists. Social media platforms are offering jobs to youth to spread content of their clients. This content is being proliferated in all directions and polluting the innocent minds.

Afghanistan which has now fallen to Taliban was facing the worst kind of political turmoil and security situation since last two decades due to foreign intervention. Adversaries had been exploiting fissures using hybrid techniques against Afghanistan through propaganda and terrorists activities to make it unstable.¹⁰ In this form of war, adversary usually target historical, ethnic, religious, socio-economic, and geographic differences.

Pakistan is target of hybrid threats because of its geo-strategic location, strong military prowess, China Pakistan Economic Corridor, influence over Afghanistan, connectivity to central Asian States and above all rich human resource. External actors seek to provoke identity conflicts in

¹⁰ Saud Ahsen, "Hybrid Wars Against Pakistan," *Global Village Space*, January 9, 2018, <https://www.globalvillagespace.com/hybrid-wars-against-pakistan/> (accessed on 30 May, 2018)

states that occupy important transit routes along the New Silk Road, and they do this through a strategic interplay of NGOs and information outlets. The most cost-effective way to wage a war is not to do so directly, but to indirectly provoke what appears to be a “civil war” in the targeted state. This is achieved by using the said NGOs and information outlets to spark identity conflict, taking advantage of historical, ethnic, religious, socio-economic, and geographic differences in bringing this about.

CPEC

China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is prime target of Indian propaganda. All possible efforts are being made by India to disrupt, control and influence the CPEC, because of its geostrategic significance for China and Pakistan both. Pakistan has time and again expressed their apprehension about Indian involvement in disruption of CPEC projects. India right at the outset of project, established special intelligence cell by spending \$500 million to sabotage CPEC.¹¹ Criminality is the most dominating feature of Hybrid operations.¹² Nine Chinese workers were

¹¹“ India Sabotaging CPEC Through Special Intelligence Cell: Pakistan’s Top Army General Zubair Mehmood Hayat,” *Financial Express*, November 14, 2017 <https://www.financialexpress.com/india-news/india-sabotaging-cpec-through-special-intelligence-cell-pakistans-top-army-general-zubair-mehmood-hayat/932956/>(accessed on 6 June,2018)

¹² William J Nemeth, “ Future War and Chechnya: a case for Hybrid warfare”, *Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey,2002*, https://calhoun.nps.edu/bitstream/handle/10945/5865/02Jun_Nemeth.pdf?sequence=1(accessed on 29 May,2018)

killed at Dasu, in northern region of Pakistan, only a day ahead of Joint Coordination Committee (JCC) meeting between two countries in 2021. JCC is the highest forum to review the progress of CPEC and also take decision for the future projects. China postponed the JCC due to impending security situation. This form of warfare infuse insecurity through psychological warfare among civil population.¹³

INDIAN CHRONICLES & FALSE FLAG OPERATIONS

India has been consistently involved in proxy and propaganda war against Pakistan. To spread hate and fake news, India was using 500 domains. The operation was named ‘Indian Chronicle’. There are dozens other domains which were being used to glorify terrorism, create confusion and chaos on counter terrorism efforts of Pakistan. These websites were also facilitating terrorist outfits to proliferate their narrative against US and Pakistan. Indian propaganda machine was seeking to provoke identity conflicts in Balochistan and KPK through a strategic interplay of NGOs and information outlets. Most of propaganda content was aimed to pollute the public opinion about Balochistan and Kashmir. As many as 11 NGOs, fake think tanks, lobbying firms and media houses would create events which were covered by fake media. However, a known India wire service ANI was being used for content laundering. The same content was being published not only by fake

¹³ Frank Borrelli, “5th Generation Warfare?” *Project White House*, <http://www.projectwhitehorse.com/pdfs/7a.%205th%20Generation%20Warfare.pdf> (accessed on 29 May, 2018)

websites but major media outlets. Srivastav business entity, a hoax group was leading the entire propaganda network. A famous Indian wire service stated that Srivastava Group has Little Public Presence. The group lists a host of companies as part of its business, but most of the firms conducts no real business. The group was identified hoax when international institute of non-aligned studies, an unknown think tank arranged visit of law makers from European union to Kashmir and visit was funded by Srivastav group.

In December 2020 Modi's BJP suffered defeat in in three key states, of Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh . It was biggest defeat since Modi took office in 2014 . It is predicted that Modi had a 50-50 chance in May 2019 election. What Modi needed was a little push to ignite its vote bank through provoking extremist sentiments among its voters. Thus Pulwama was orchestrated by Modi. Indian media was used to flame the public against Pakistan for revenge. Timing of Pulwama attack was deliberately selected keeping in view the Taliban-US peace talks which were maturing into final stages resulting into sidelining of Afghan Government and isolating India. Saudi Crown Prince visit was also planned to Pakistan during same period for prospectus Pak-Saudi relations. Meanwhile blast occurred in Iran, which was a handi work of NDS and RAW. Kalbushan's hearing was also planned shortly. So what else could be better time to blame Pakistan with the purpose of isolating it in the region.

Indian false flag operations have been a part of its strategy, in pursuit of the Chanakya dictums of guile and deceit. In January 1971, Indian spy agency RAW conducted a false flag operation in the form of hijacking an F-27 aircraft “Ganga”, laden with passengers from India to Lahore. In 1999, an Indian passenger aircraft was hijacked to Kabul. Chittisinghpura incident was staged on the occasion of visit of Bill Clinton to India in March 2000. Terror attack on Indian Parliament by a handful of “militants” on December 13, 2001 was again a false flag operation, launched in the wake of the 9/11 attack, to bracket Pakistan with international terrorism.

From 2001 till 2008, Pakistan was blamed for all acts of terror taking place in India which included Samjhota Express train blasts killing 59 Pakistanis, blasts in Mecca mosque Hyderabad and a mosque in Malegaon. Mumbai attack by ten terrorists on November 26, 2008 was yet another false flag operation designed to achieve several objectives. In January 2013, another drama of beheading two Indian soldiers along the Line of Control (LoC) in Kashmir was staged to reinvigorate cross border terrorism charge against Pakistan. Uri Attack and Surgical Strike Drama is well known.

WAR AGAINST TERRORISM

Use of drone is a sophisticated Hybrid technique adopted by US in recent times. Between 2008-2018, US made over 450 drone strikes in areas close to Pak-Afghan border. Inflicting maximum casualties using minimum means within Pakistan and creating ripples in socio-political environment of the country. Use of drone is combination of technology and information operation. It achieves varied effects; deterrence for terrorists inflicting maximum casualties, establishing US supremacy through technological prowess, no effect for own troops and creating fissures among target country's civil and military leadership and also undermine target country's sovereignty. Taliban, alleged to be under influence of Pakistan, are considered key player for peace in Afghanistan. In 2016, Pakistan through concerted efforts had brought all stake holders, Taliban, Afghan government, US and China on a negotiating table. When the peace talk were about to reach a consensus, Taliban leader Mullah Mansoor was killed by a US drone strike in Balochistan. It was viewed a deliberate effort by US to sabotage the peace talks and also to allege Pakistan for presence of Taliban leader on Pakistani soil.¹⁴ The leak of news about death of Mullah Omar was also a blow to the peace talk in Afghanistan. News was leaked through

¹⁴ Boone Jon, " US Drone Strike in Pakistan kills Taliban Leader Mullah Mansoor" *The Guardian*, May 22, 2016

foreign press in July 2015 when peace initiative has just started rolling down.¹⁵

Over 32000 Pakistani citizens including security forces personnel have lost their lives due to IED attacks and suicide bombing and more that 40000 are seriously wounded. To tarnish image of the country and create regional division among Pakistani nation, terrorists have been targeting minorities which include Shia Hazaras and Ahmadais in the cities of Quetta, Peshawar and Karachi.¹⁶ Security forces personnel including police were particularly targeted to shatter confidence of a common citizen over security forces. During the last decade (2008-2018), terrorism has been the biggest issue of Pakistan, which has not only affected the political and social fabric of the society but also badly harmed its economy. Yet the biggest security threat could not be securitized in a desired manner. The major hindrance in securitization process was the political elite and media of the country. After 9/11, the decision to join war against terrorism did not enjoy the popular support of major political parties because they had been sidelined by the military ruler General Pervez Musharraf. The marginalized political powers were more inclined to settle their score instead of eradicating terrorism in the country. The fissures among political elite and media routines were

¹⁵ Rhode David, "Why Mullah Omar's death could be nightmare for Afghanistan," *The Atlantic*, July 30, 2015 <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/07/mullah-omar-death-afghanistan/400013/> (accessed on 6 June, 2018)

¹⁶ Madiha Afzal, "The Terror Forgotten Victim in Pakistan," *Op-Ed Brookings*, July 8, 2013

effectively exploited by enemy. It has been the major reason for emergence of fissures in the society. Civil-military relations in Pakistan has been an enigma at least during last four decade. In an era of digital technology this division has propped up distinctly and easier for outside forces to exploit it for their own benefit.

Looming human crisis in Afghanistan is another type of hybrid technique to dent the peace in region. Over 2 million Afghan refugees are facing worst type of food and security problems. US has not only freezed over \$9billion Afghan government assets in US Banks but has not taken any pledge to support the Afghan crisis. The Chaotic withdrawal is another testimony to the hybrid technique for vested interest. Abrupt withdrawal has put Afghanistan extremely vulnerable thus compromising the security of whole region.

USE OF MEDIA AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Pakistan provides an ideal ground for propoganda to enemy due to its societal layout and polarized political system and sectarian issues. Study shows that Pakistan media accord priority to political news, and terrorism news was second priority. Number of episodic frames in both newspapers also indicate that they only reported terrorist incidents as an event, there was no effort for follow up stories or investigation that who were these terrorist groups. Media only covered the incident to highlight

casualties and number of injured. Stereotype coverage only criticized security lapses on the part of security forces and law enforcing agencies. No in-depth reporting on the scene or off the scene was carried out to find out the reasons of attack, selection of target, financiers, abettors and facilitators and other details which could raise awareness about the threat and help in securitization of terrorism. Framing of news stories regarding terrorism in media were not supportive of securitization. It raised suspicion on the discourse through illusionary reporting and linking terrorists with support from security forces. Media included those voices more which were against the security forces and excluded voices of those who were securitizing the threat.

Perspective of a news story is very important for any discourse. Pakistani media presented the US perspective of raising suspicion on Pakistani security forces. It also raised suspicion on military leading the war on terror without political support. Some part of media did not use the lexis to describe word 'terrorist' rather it used words 'fighter' and 'attackers', which created hurdle in mobilizing public opinion against terrorism. Ills of terrorist groups were not highlighted, but errors of security forces remained prominent agenda in Pakistani media. The suspicion on security forces was product of the inter-media effect. Pakistani press mostly rely for their content on foreign news agencies. International Financial Institutions like IMF, World Bank, Asian

Development Bank, UN, WHO, USAID are influential to carry out the agenda of big powers as part of hybrid conflict.

Pakistan since last three years have repeatedly drawn attention of world powers towards targeted campaign of deceit and lies of India. A dossier was also presented to UN secretary general about an organized network being operated by India to propagate against countries which do not support the Indian foreign policy objectives and hardline policies.

Pakistan has adopted a proactive policy to project the Indian propaganda. But still a lot is required to be done. The internet has made the access easy and it is being exploited by India and other western nations against Pakistan. A dissident group sitting in European countries have joined hand with the Indian propaganda machine to defame Pakistan and its efforts for global peace

CONCLUSION

Hybrid Conflicts are more devastating in nature compared with kinetic surge against targeted nations. Public opinion has become one of the influential factor in determining the position of a state in global structure. Will of people determines the strength of a nation. Fake news play with human mind and compels it to deliberate in ways which are unproductive for himself as well as for society. Human resource is one of the biggest asset of a nation and the way human resource thinks is

biggest power of a nation. It is more bigger power that all other power sources. Imagine if 220 million people thinking about progress of the country, of thinking otherwise, how bigger the result will be. Hybrid conflict are designed to target the will of the people of an adversary. Will of people is paramount for progress.

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