



THE NEW CENTURY DYNAMICS OF HYBRID WARFARE

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**THE NEW CENTURY DYNAMICS
OF HYBRID WARFARE**

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Executive Summary

NUST Institute of Policy Studies (NIPS) organized the webinar on the contemporary dynamics of hybrid warfare on Thursday, March 25, 2021. The webinar brought together a distinguished panel of veteran statesmen, leading subject-matter experts, senior security analysts, prominent business leaders, academics, and think tank leaders from Pakistan and Russia to discuss and explore the shapeshifting nature of hybrid warfare's strategies, tactics, instruments, tools, means, and ends in the twenty-first century. The challenges posed by hybrid warfare to the peace and stability of nations, states, regions, and the world were also discussed. The report represents a critical analysis of the collective views of the experts presented during the webinar.

The webinar focused on the bewildering interpenetration of war and peace under hybrid warfare, extreme difficulty involved in the clear and objective identification of hybrid aggressors and defenders that was at the same time free of ideological labeling of the adversary, intractable entanglement of its means and ends, and near indistinguishability of its offensive and defensive strategies. The experts identified a range of key implications of hybrid warfare for domestic and regional stability in terms of its effects on political, economic, social, security, geopolitical, informational, and infrastructural domains.

Following recommendations for countering hybrid warfare emerged from the expert deliberations during the webinar:

1. Whole-of-nation and whole-of-society approaches are required for countering hybrid warfare. In this regard, a multi-layered well-coordinated full-spectrum mechanism for detecting, deterring, and responding to hybrid warfare should be developed with multi-domain integration at regional, national, and local levels. Considering that at least four-fifths of hybrid warfare activity tends to be non-kinetic, so the proportion of non-kinetic measures in combating hybrid warfare should approximate the proportion that non-military measures constitute in hybrid warfare itself. This should not mean that the military component is of lesser importance and should be put on the back burner. It is of critical importance but focusing disproportionately on military deterrence allows the non-kinetic prongs to thrive and function rampantly. This should also not mean that the military should only focus on its kinetic specialization. In fact, in order to effectively counter hybrid warfare, the military, of necessity, needs to acquire

expertise in non-military aspects of building deterrence against hybrid aggression in collaboration with other major domains.

2. Civil-military cooperation and public-private collaboration should be encouraged for hybrid warfare threat analysis and assessment as well as hybrid deterrence.
3. Dedicated and diverse transnational cooperation should be promoted for coordinating an effective response against the development and incubation of hybrid threats along the routes of BRI corridors.
4. Balanced sustainable urbanization should be promoted to prevent accumulation of stress in urban ecosystems to ensure urban metabolism stays healthy and circular so that cities do not become feral. In this regard, non-politicized, development-focused, and growth-led intercity competition should be promoted to prevent the current politicized and bureaucratized intercity competition based around the allocation of not only scarce but also shrinking resources.
5. In the political domain, a patient, participatory, horizontal, growth-led, and consensus-based negotiation of political differences should be promoted and prioritized to dissipate the accumulation of non-linear effects of hybrid warfare activity. Pakistan should aspire to becoming a strong state rather than a hard state, excelling in the art of exercising power rather than exerting force exclusively.
6. In the economic and financial domains, production and consumption of goods and services should be rationalized to avoid arbitrary distortions and should promote free, fair, and responsive markets indexed to goals of human and social development. Markets in different goods and services should be promoted through addressing market failure by an enabling government action that does not destroy markets, but rather allows them to stay functional and thrive. Moreover, fiscal and monetary policies should both be focused on impacting aggregate demand without clashing with each other. Sound economic and financial management should prevent distortions from negatively impacting economic growth.
7. Since Pakistan is fortunately experiencing a youth bulge, special attention should be given to providing ample, well-rounded, free and fair opportunities for democratic and positive political participation, inclusive development, world-class education, discretionary employment, self-actualization, and social amelioration to the youth population of Pakistan. Especially, education should promote

creativity, competence, and enterprise rather than stultification of minds.

8. Women should be encouraged through formal and informal means to participate in all major walks of national life and in all major fields of national development. An understanding should prevail at all levels of decision- and policy-making that the country will not develop comprehensively unless men and women move forward together in a spirit of unity, mutual respect, and camaraderie rather than that of agonistic competition. It should be remembered that discrimination breeds resentment which makes people malleable material in the hands of hybrid aggressors.
9. Potential conflict situations in which political leadership can be pitted against bureaucracy, and those in which one public institution can oppose another public institution should be forestalled through consensus, compromise, clear demarcation of responsibilities, and coordination through cross-functional and interdepartmental pursuit of common objectives. A service-oriented and client-oriented approach should be encouraged in state institutions while rent-seeking, wherever it exists, should be actively discouraged through positive incentives and punitive measures. It should be remembered that desirable behavior is built through positive and negative reinforcement, while undesirable behavior is eradicated through punishment.
10. State should arrange its relations with different classes, social groups, income groups, social sectors, demographic segments, economic sectors, and all citizens on a non-discriminatory basis. It should ensure that it enjoys the respect, confidence, and trust of all social strata. It should ensure the have-nots can approach it as freely and fearlessly as the haves.
11. Constitutional arrangements should be put in place for merit-based governance and a meritocratic process of elite and leadership formation through leveling privileges of birth, wealth, and social status so that competence and performance become the sole criteria of elite and leadership formation. Moreover, the situational awareness of national, local, and domain leadership should be developed to identify and move promptly against hybrid warfare threats.
12. In the informational domain, active campaigns should be launched to promote pro-people and pro-nation narratives that help defeat the informational packages and products of hybrid warfare. Media should both unfailingly uphold freedom to information and public

responsibility in this regard. Free access to information combined with sustained increase in people's capacity for material consumption should lead to a situation in which hybrid war activity will decline because of popular non-acceptance of weaponized narratives.

13. In the infrastructural domain, there should be a balance between supply-driven and demand-led development of multimodal infrastructure. Moreover, across-the-board resilience should be built up including resilient infrastructure.
14. CPEC development should be secured against the potential of unbalanced development to prevent the creation of situational traps that lock its benefits within particular geographies, administrative divisions, ethnic groups, social classes, economic sectors, and interest groups. Major development and growth deficits should be addressed on urgent basis before they become enablers and drivers of hybrid aggression. This should be linked to the development of broadly accessible means for the systematic fulfillment of people's aspirations for a better life.
15. Since one key prong of hybrid warfare is to create psychological dislocation, and reinforce alienation and social atomization aimed at the destruction of people's national consciousness and national identity to paralyze their will to defend themselves, so proper ideological measures, social cohesion strategies, and social solidarity campaigns should be planned to counter the more cognitive, psychological, and mental aspects of hybrid aggression.
16. Technological proficiency, self-reliance, and integration should be achieved on an urgent basis with a view to acquiring full-spectrum command and control of cross-domain technology platforms for mounting a successful response in economic, political, financial, commercial, and informational domains as part of effective, credible, and flexible hybrid deterrence.
17. Comprehensive, multidimensional, in-depth real-world knowledge and understanding of the vulnerabilities of state and non-state rivals and adversaries should be acquired for impregnable multi-domain deterrence against their hybrid aggression.

The New Century Dynamics of Hybrid Warfare

1. Introduction

The frequency of what is termed hybrid warfare has increased appreciably in the post-9/11 world. This increase can be attributed in part to the use of the term to describe different types of conflict situations that include civil wars, proxy wars, multiform domestic crises, and regional instability. Such is the growing purchase of this new conceptualization of conflict that there has been observed a tendency for retrospective characterization of conflict situations as hybrid warfare at the same time that any current conflict situation that stops short of interstate war almost invariably tends to be viewed as one of its incarnations. However, it does not mean that conventional war cannot coincide with, or be a part of, hybrid warfare, or even that the latter will not morph at some point into the former and vice versa. The protean flexibility of hybrid warfare in fact possesses the inherent dynamism of all emergent phenomena. The conceptual breadth of the term in accommodating largely different types of behaviors and situations has contributed to its popularity among experts and general public alike. It should be noted that the fact that usually these situations are not those of explicit interstate war does not mean that states are not engaged in them. On the contrary, states tend to be main enablers, beneficiaries, and victims of this form of aggression. Non-state actors usually function as vectors and agents of the major enablers and players in hybrid warfare. This form of aggression also seems to be linked to the ongoing changes taking place in the distribution of power in the contemporary interstate system. It is possible that increase in hybrid warfare activity is proportional to the growth of multipolarity in the global interstate system. Another peculiar feature related to the employment of the term in contemporary political and academic discourse is to label the actions of the adversary as hybrid warfare aggression, just as propaganda continues to be something that only the other side engages in.

A quick and easy way to make sense of the reality of hybrid warfare is to view it as perhaps the further evolution, adaptation, and application to contexts beyond the traditional battlefield of the insights of the age-old tradition of indirect approach to conflict enshrined in both the ancient and modern classics of warfare like Sun Tzu's *Art of War* and B. H. Liddell Hart's *Strategy* (1954). One key difference between the types of conflicts and behaviors stylized in these classics and those associated with hybrid warfare is that the former

focused on largely interstate war and theater operations and the latter is almost exclusively focused on defeating the adversary outside the narrowly and conventionally defined battlefield through multi-pronged violent and non-violent measures short of interstate war. The aim of hybrid warfare is to disrupt, disorient, diminish, and destroy the ability of the target state and society to put up effective resistance to the geopolitical objectives and goals of the aggressor state or non-state player culminating in the end of the target state as a credible interstate competitor. It is to be noted that hybrid warfare as a special form of aggression requires a certain quantum of power or advanced accumulation of capabilities on the part of states that may not be within the reach of most sovereign constituents of current international system. For this reason, only a handful of contemporary great powers and big regional powers are capable of waging hybrid wars. Peace and stability in the contemporary international system will, therefore, come to depend on the ability of potential and actual target states to deter hybrid warfare aggression which may include the minimization of incentives and maximization of costs for aggressor states.

2. What is Hybrid Warfare?

The webinar deliberations focused on different views of hybrid warfare, which, in retrospect, can be organized with reference to two different theoretical approaches. This report considers that these two dominant theoretical approaches to understanding hybrid warfare can be characterized as pro-Russian and pro-American or pro-Western. The pro-Russian approach can be typified by the seminal 2013 speech of then-Chief of General Staff of the Russian Army, General Valery Gerasimov, published in *The Military-Industrial Courier*, and the works of two eminent Moscow-based geopolitical analysts, Dr Leonid Savin and Andrew Korybko. On the other hand, the pro-American or pro-Western approach can be typified by the seminal oeuvre of Dr Frank G. Hoffman and the two reports prepared by the US-led Multinational Capability Development Campaign (MCDC) 2016-17 Countering Hybrid Warfare Project, based on the collaboration of NATO and other nations.

The present report's characterization of the dominant theoretical approaches to hybrid warfare as pro-Russian and pro-American or pro-Western recognizes that there has indeed been a growing body of work on hybrid warfare in addition to that referred to by these approaches and included in this report as considered representative of these approaches. However, the works discussed in this section of the report form the cutting edge of the theory of hybrid warfare in that they capture all the essential elements of hybrid warfare which

are indispensable in creating a coherent comprehension of the phenomenon. Dr Hoffman's work, in addition, is of pioneering significance in the field.

It is also noteworthy that the two approaches have arrived at analogous insights about hybrid warfare. However, they differ in terms of their identification and attribution of who conducts, enables, benefits from, and suffers from hybrid warfare.

The pro-Russian approach for understanding hybrid warfare considers that the clear-cut distinction between war and peace does not exist any longer. In such a situation, wars are seldom declared but once they have broken out, they tend to evolve in novel patterns with the result that a normally functioning and developing state can turn into a conflict zone experiencing endemic violence, fall prey to external interventionism, and descend into the quagmire of disorder, humanitarian disaster, and civil war.¹ It is further highlighted that there has been a significant increase in the role of nonmilitary means of attaining political and strategic objectives with the concomitant increase in the power of these means relative to the force of weapons.² These non-military means consist largely of political, economic, informational, humanitarian, and a range of other non-military measures that are implemented across the entire national territory or a specifically selected sub-national conflict zone in coordination with the population's potential for protest bolstered by concealed military methods, that include, among other things, conducting informational conflict operations and special operations measures.³

The pro-Russian theoretical approach further defines hybrid warfare as a strategy of conflict aimed at:

“deploying a Color Revolution as a soft coup attempt, only to be followed up by a hard coup Unconventional War if the first plan fails. Unconventional Warfare is defined ... as any type of nonconventional (i.e. non-official military) force engaged in largely asymmetrical combat against a traditional adversary. Taken together in a two-pronged approach, Color Revolutions

¹ Valery Gerasimov, “The value of science is in the foresight,” *Military Review*, (January-February, 2016): 23-29, accessed, March 26, 2021, https://www.armyupress.army.mil/portals/7/military-review/archives/english/militaryreview_20160228_art008.pdf.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

and Unconventional Warfare represent the two components that form the theory of Hybrid War.”⁴

In the pro-Russian characterization of hybrid warfare, the overarching goal driving “every Hybrid War is to disrupt multipolar transnational connective projects through externally provoked identity conflict (ethnic, religious, regional, political, etc.) within a target transit state.”⁵ The goal of hybrid warfare disruption is to carry out “Regime Tweaking, Regime Change, and Regime Reboot.”⁶ This means that the fundamental mode of achieving this major objective is through exploiting common socio-political vulnerabilities to be found around ethnicity, religion, history, administrative boundaries, socio-economic disparity, and physical geography so that both the cluster of activities organized under the popular mobilization for “Color Revolutions” as well as the delimitation and energization of the territorial theaters of “Unconventional warfare” can take place around these socio-political vulnerabilities.⁷ The pro-Russian approach particularly emphasizes the fact that the higher the number of such weaknesses that can be exploited together in real time, the greater the explosive power of the hybrid warfare attack will be.⁸

It also accurately points out that a sustained process of societal and structural preconditioning precedes the onset of hybrid wars anywhere.⁹ Preconditioning is conceived as consisting of the efforts to generate acceptance among the targeted segment of the national population for the planned destabilization and the eventual regime change that also include provocations targeted to trip the government up in taking hasty and knee-jerk actions that lead to the exacerbation of the already existing vulnerabilities.¹⁰ This takes place by means of formal actions such as economic sanctions and lending conditions on the part of the powers promoting hybrid warfare in the target

⁴ Andrew Korybko, *Hybrid wars: The indirect adaptive approach to regime change*, 2015 (Moscow: Institute for Strategic Studies and Predictions, People’s Friendship University of Russia, 2015), 10.

⁵ Andrew Korybko, *The Law of hybrid war: Eastern hemisphere* (Moscow, 2017).

⁶ Andrew Korybko, “Applicability of hybrid warfare to Pakistan: Challenges and possible responses,” *ISSRA Journal* (December, 2017), accessed, March 27, 2021, https://www.ndu.edu.pk/issra/issra_pub/articles/ndu-journal/NDU-Journal-2017/12-Applicability-of-Hybrid-Warfare-to-Pakistan.pdf.

⁷ Korybko, *The Law of hybrid war*.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

country, that negatively affect the government's budgetary functions and constrain the government's capacity for social, welfare, and development spending, typically in a national environment, wherein the government has already been compelled to increase security spending relative to social spending to fight contrived security threats.¹¹ The expectation is that the combination of increased security and defense spending and reduced social spending will create the blast zone for the regime change activities.¹²

One key strength of the pro-Russian approach to understanding hybrid warfare consists in having discovered how concepts and practices from disciplines like business and human resource management have been transferred to hybrid wars.¹³ In this regard, it is considered that the concept and practice of coaching are being utilized by hybrid warfare actors to prepare the targeted segments of population for protests and destabilization of social order.¹⁴ These segments are cultivated to accept any and all anti-state and anti-establishment info-war narratives, dually weaponized against the target segments and the target government or state. Full-spectrum social engineering is also brought to bear on the target state and the target population.¹⁵

In the context of applying management techniques to conflict, a related but original contribution of this report's author is to consider hybrid warfare as entrepreneurial conflict in which it becomes possible and highly desirable to apply the insights and techniques of technological innovation and business incubation to social conflict and violent social change. Just as new technology-based firms and startups are nurtured and taught to be viable organizations in the process of creation of new social and economic value, so hybrid warfare enablers aim to groom targeted segments and their putative representative organizations as social destabilizers actively carrying out activities that increase social and economic entropy resulting in the dissipation of socioeconomic creative energy. Just as technological innovation and business incubation lead to the creation of new ideas, technologies, goods, products, services, processes and organizations, so endless iterations of hybrid warfare techniques and means lead to the creation of new ways of promoting,

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Leonid Savin, *Coaching & Conflicts* (Moscow, 2019).

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

sustaining, and spreading conflict in an endless trial-and-error feedback cycle of product refinement.

The pro-American or pro-Western theoretical approach – chronologically older than its Russian counterpart – is likewise deeply cognizant of the melding of conventional and unconventional means, the blurring of belligerents, the simultaneous deployment of multiple technologies, “transcendence of a blend of regular and irregular tactics,” and the generation of multi-level and multi-domain effects so that hybrid wars include a “range of different modes of warfare, including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorists acts including indiscriminate violence and coercion, and criminal disorder.”¹⁶

It accurately “describes hybrid warfare as the synchronized use of multiple instruments of power tailored to specific vulnerabilities across the full spectrum of societal functions to achieve synergistic effects.”¹⁷ These instruments of power tend to be military, political, economic, civilian, informational (MPECI)” means at the disposal of the hybrid warfare actor.¹⁸ The aim is to carry out “horizontal escalation defined as the applied combination of MPECI means of power”¹⁹ with a view to creating both linear and non-linear effects to undermine the target state’s critical functions defined,

“as the activities or operations distributed across the political, military, economic, social, information, infrastructure (PMESII) spectrum the discontinuance of which would lead to the disruption of services that a working system (for example a state, its society or a subsection thereof) depends on. Critical functions can be broken down into a combination of actors (for example, individuals or organizations), infrastructures (for example, ‘critical’ national power grids) and processes (for example, legal/jurisdictional, technical, political).”²⁰

¹⁶ Frank G. Hoffman, *Conflict in the 21st century: The rise of hybrid wars* (Arlington, VA: Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, 2007), 14; Frank G. Hoffman, “Examining complex forms of conflict: Gray zone and hybrid challenges,” *PRISM: The Journal of Complex Operations*, 7, no. 4 (November, 2018): 30-47, accessed March 28, 2021, https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/prism/prism_7-4/prism_7-4.pdf.

¹⁷ Patrick J. Cullen & Erik Reichborn-Kjennerud, *Understanding hybrid warfare* (Multinational Capability Development Campaign (MCDC) 2016-2017, 2017), 8.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 31.

¹⁹ *Ibid*.

²⁰ *Ibid*.

The pro-American or pro-Western approach views horizontal escalation as a special feature of hybrid warfare which allows synchronization defined as,

“the ability of a hybrid warfare actor to effectively coordinate instruments of power (MPECI) in time, space and purpose to create the desired effects. The ability to synchronize both military and non-military means simultaneously within the same battlespace is considered a key characteristic of a hybrid warfare actor.”²¹

It sees simultaneous horizontal escalation and de-escalation as one of the biggest advantages of synchronization that,

“allows for de-escalation of one or more instruments of power and/or switching between means which keep the overall escalation at a certain level. Also, one instrument can be used for compensatory measures, as a carrot while other are used as coercive, as a stick.”²²

Apart from simultaneous de-escalation and escalation, synchronization is further believed in the pro-American or pro-Western approach to enable the hybrid warfare actor “to tailor means and vulnerabilities to effects,” “to use coercion while staying below the target’s detection thresholds,” and “to use coercion while staying below the target’s response thresholds.”²³

Thus, synchronization offers a virtually limitless menu of options for confounding the adversary through a potentially endless series of permutations in which means of power, vulnerabilities, and effects can be continually combined. What usually wrong-foots the defender against an hybrid warfare attack is that it fails to see that hybrid warfare is a concealed form of total warfare so the former normally fails by aiming to mount a tactical or partial response to a systemic strategic threat and a vertical response to synchronized attack.

3. Implications of Hybrid Warfare for Domestic and Regional Stability

The webinar deliberations dealt in detail with the implications of hybrid warfare for domestic and regional stability. These implications stem directly from the very nature of hybrid warfare. Since both states and non-state actors are involved in hybrid warfare, the potential for spillover in hybrid wars from

²¹ Ibid, 12

²² Ibid, 13.

²³ Ibid.

one part of the national territory to another and from one state to another remains high. Conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Ukraine, and Yemen, testify to the risks inherent in the spillover of hybrid threats. This can be termed the lateralization of conflict and is a property inherent in the horizontal escalation of hybrid warfare. Lateral extension of conflict is both a geographical phenomenon and a structural phenomenon. As a structural phenomenon, it means that hybrid warfare attack in one domain will necessarily lead to both linear and non-linear effects not only within the same domain but all other domains or any given combination of domains. Thus in this situation, a hybrid war that was launched initially precisely because an interstate war was perceived to be too costly, could become a means for diffusion of conflict culminating in interstate war. So hybrid war, rather than containing interstate conflict can actually promote it under certain situations.

It has been postulated above that the growth of hybrid warfare is proportional to the growth of multipolarity in the contemporary interstate system. This means that the competition among great powers, between great powers and major regional powers, and among major regional powers will further encourage the proliferation of hybrid threats and the frequency of hybrid wars. It has been suggested that the intensification of U.S.-China competition will increase the likelihood of proxy wars in different regions between the U.S. and China.²⁴ This should be especially of concern for national policymakers in Central Asia, South Asia, West Asia, Southeast Asia, Africa, and Latin America. In the context of hybrid warfare, especially relevant is the concept of “wormhole escalation” defined as the tendency for “alternative and less predictable escalatory pathways” that heighten the potential for “Holes” to “suddenly open up in the fabric of deterrence through which competing states could inadvertently enter and suddenly traverse between sub-conventional and strategic levels of conflict in accelerated and decidedly non-linear ways.”²⁵ This risk of asymmetric escalation will face not only the U.S. and China but other powers in the system as well and will be related to increased hybrid aggression.

²⁴ Dominic Tierney, “The future of Sino-U.S. proxy war,” *Texas National Security Review*, 4, Iss. 2, (Spring 2021), accessed, March 29, 2021, <https://tnsr.org/2021/03/the-future-of-sino-u-s-proxy-war/>.

²⁵ Rebecca Hersman, “Wormhole escalation in the new nuclear age,” *Texas National Security Review*, 3, no. 3 (Autumn 2020): 91-109, <https://tnsr.org/2020/07/wormhole-escalation-in-the-new-nuclear-age/>.

One major consequence and goal of the proliferation and increased frequency of hybrid wars will be the massive physical and psychological dislocation produced on both national and regional scales. A key aspect of this dislocation is the reduced tendency for cooperation in personal, social, and international spheres and, at times, irreversible loss of confidence among citizens in the legitimacy of state's sovereignty. Dislocation is directly related to the destruction and impairment of assets and resources across the political, military, economic, social, informational, infrastructural, and cultural domains. While it is virtually impossible to enumerate all the possible permutations of means of power, vulnerabilities, and effects, a few effects of hybrid warfare in each of the above-mentioned domains can be enumerated below.

In the political domain, hybrid warfare produces political polarization and facilitates the seizure of institutions designed to channel the exercise, transfer, and sharing of political power, hardens and effects the cessation of traditions, conventions, and norms for the negotiation of political differences, and enables the transition of legitimate non-violent struggle for power into violent struggle for seizing power through coercive and non-legitimate means. Where this transition does not succeed, an alternative situation comes into being in which there is an endless postponement of political consensus by permanently pitting the ruling political parties against all opposition parties and by pitting the ruling factions within political parties against other factions within those parties. Thus, the Hobbesian "war of all against all" is perpetuated by means of the emasculation of very those political and constitutional institutions that exist to mitigate sociopolitical conflict.

In the economic and financial domains, hybrid warfare can monopolize and thus weaponize the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services on the basis of ethnic and geographic differentiation. It can also exploit a routinely present social and income inequality and distributive asymmetry in any functional society. In the financial domain, hybrid aggression can create the dissonance and disjuncture between a country's fiscal and monetary policies so that fiscal policies seems to get out of the control of the government policymaking and the monetary policy increasingly comes under the sway of the political process which may itself be far from transparent and efficient.

In the domain of policymaking, a generational incompetence evidenced in bad policies resulting in low levels of economic growth and development can create ideal conditions for the success of hybrid warfare attacks. Incompetent

policymaking inadvertently facilitates hybrid warfare activity which in turn reinforces bad policymaking in a vicious cycle.

In the social domain, the effects of income and social inequality can be intensified through prolonged neglect of remediation on the part of the sociopolitical leadership. The intersection of political differences, economic crises, and physical dislocation can fuel protest movements that are perceived to be more representative of popular forces and more reflective of popular grievances than the constitutionally mandated institutions. These protest movements can be engineered to do the damage while staying within the constitutionally prescribed limits. As a result, in a multiethnic and multid denominational society, this intersection can be directed against the state and the government in the service of regime change designs. If a given society has experienced traditionally low levels of political participation, is based on unstable mechanisms of power sharing, has been governed by means of a restrictive process of the formation of elites marked by the dominance of ascribed or inherited status rather competitively acquired status, and has suffered from historically low levels of circulation of elites across lines of class, creed, and ethnicity, then hybrid warfare attacks can easily widen fissures between leaders and the governed.

In the military domain, hybrid warfare can have a demoralizing effect tailored to create disorientation based on the inability to identify adversaries properly. It also creates the risk of disproportionate use of power in a situation of non-conventional war. It can prioritize the coercive use of force in situations in which the crisis could be resolved in peaceful and non-coercive means. It can also create a situation in which dialogue is prioritized in situations where only the use of force would defeat the adversary. It can make the proverbial fog of war even denser, resulting in the violation of Liddell Hart's positive and negative principles of strategy so that means cannot be adjusted to ends, the object cannot be kept in sight, the line of least expectation is not chosen, the line of least resistance is not exploited, the line of operations offering alternative objectives is not taken, the plan and dispositions are neither flexible nor adapted to circumstances, the attack is launched before the enemy is dislocated and paralyzed, and the attack is renewed along the same line or in the same form after it has once failed.²⁶

In the informational domain, a constant barrage of conflicting information robs the target population to distinguish between true and false narratives. The

²⁶ B. H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy* (London: Faber & Faber Ltd., 1954), 335-336.

relativity of truth is heightened to perfectly align with the confirmation bias of the target segments of population. There is not only a reversal of the chain of causation, especially historical causation, but its effective disruption by means of weaponized narratives which correspond to the non-linearity of the effects of hybrid warfare attacks. This is especially carried out to de-value the narrative of national and social cohesion through increasing the psychological and moral purchase of the preferred narratives of hybrid warfare actors, which usually intensify an already existing historical basis of unresolved exclusion and marginalization to beget increasingly hardline and radical intellectual and political positions among the target segments. While kinetic operations tend to be time-bound with definite objectives in view to be achieved in finite terms, forms of hybrid aggression, especially, in the informational domain, tend to be potentially endless, and, beyond a certain point, become self-perpetuating and self-generating as soon as they have taken root in people's consciousness and become enmeshed into the continuous character of thought.

In the cultural domain, perceived and actual cultural differences will be used to promote physical and psychological distance through the exploitation of multiple differences between social groups based on identity, values, and beliefs. In sociopolitical situations where there is prior ossification of social and political identities and the allocation of resources, assets, and benefits is organized around this ossification, hybrid warfare aggression will be preceded by a sustained informational and political campaign designed to promote violent responses to the given social stratification. Endemic dissatisfaction produced by differential and restrictive access to tangible and intangible resources will explode into violence if it became concentrated on any given event of social injustice made worse by official ineptitude in dealing with it. This opens up the path to violent expression of public anger which can spiral out of control in unpredictable directions.

In the infrastructural domain, hybrid warfare attacks will aim to choke and paralyze the normal functioning of different social and physical infrastructures, a goal made easier in national and regional situations of deficient and degraded infrastructure. In this regard, Asia's unmet infrastructure needs can tempt hybrid aggression in different national contexts.

There is an inherent link between hybrid warfare and cities. This link needs to be understood thoroughly because cities are not only sanctuaries of human civilization but also hubs of governance and policymaking, nodes of the global system of wealth creation, nurseries of talent, incubators of technology, and

archives of human memory. In order to acquire a multi-faceted understanding of the hybrid warfare, the 21st century dynamics of the growth and development of cities need to be understood comprehensively. Hybrid warfare will find conducive conditions in badly governed cities, simply because cities as “the places where people live are getting increasingly crowded, urban, coastal and networked, the wars people fight will take on the same characteristics.”²⁷

It has been proposed that the contours of contemporary conflict are being shaped and defined by four major drivers or megatrends, namely,

“*population growth* [original italics] (the continuing rise in the planet’s total population), *urbanization* [original italics] (the tendency for people to live in larger and larger cities), *littoralization* [original italics] (the propensity for these cities to cluster on coastlines), and *connectedness* [original italics] (the increasing connectivity among people, wherever they live). None of these trends is new, but their pace is accelerating, they’re mutually reinforcing, and their intersection will influence not just conflict but every aspect of future life.”²⁸

The confluence of these trends with the weaknesses in political, social, economic, cultural, and infrastructural domains will create a boiling urban cauldron of unfulfilled aspirations, rampant corruption, predatory consumption, and human squalor.

“Taking these four megatrends together, we can see a clear pattern. Rapid urban growth in coastal, underdeveloped areas is overloading economic, social, and governance systems, straining city infrastructure, and overburdening the carrying capacity of cities designed for much smaller populations. This is likely to make the most vulnerable cities less and less able to meet the challenges of population growth, coastal urbanization, and connectedness. The implications for future conflict are profound, with more people competing for scarcer resources in crowded, underserved, and undergoverned urban areas.”²⁹

An ecological perspective on the anatomy of cities and the dynamics of urban ecosystem that incubate conflict has developed the model of “the *microecology*

²⁷ David Kilcullen, *Out of the mountains: The coming age of the urban guerrilla* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 28.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 28.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 35-36.

of urban violence [original italics]" defined as "the ways in which broader patterns of conflict play out in the dozens of microhabitats that make up a city under stress."³⁰ Deserving to be quoted at length for its hard-nosed realism and exceptional ingenuity, it highlights the urban ecosystem that,

"lies at the center of a larger pattern of flows, with rural factors in the city's local or international hinterland – things such as environmental degradation, poor rural infrastructure, and rural conflict – prompting population flows into the urban area, which in turn contribute to rapid urbanization. Along with material flows (food, air, water, electrical power, and fuel), economic flows (construction materials and other commodities both licit and illicit; ground, sea, and air traffic; and money), and informational flows, these flows of population contribute to the creation of informal periurban settlements.

An accretion of slums, squatter settlements, and shantytowns grows in a transitional zone around the old city core, displacing land that was once used to provide food and other goods and services to the city, and covering the rainfall catchment area for the city's water supply. The city's growth puts its infrastructure under stress, so systems of governance, both within the old urban core and in newer outlying areas, now lack the carrying capacity to support the scale of the population and other inflows they are experiencing. The city's systems lack the carrying capacity to metabolize these inputs and become overwhelmed, and this leads to a buildup of toxic effects such as urban poverty and exclusion, disease, unemployment, social injustice, and ethnic dislocation. These in turn give rise to violent crime, social and political unrest, and – in severe cases – organized conflict. Shortages of food, fuel, electricity, and water exacerbate these problems, and urban violence in turn makes it harder to deal with these shortages. The city's connectedness (via information and money flows, and through transportation hubs such as seaports and airports) allows its population to participate in licit and illicit activities off shore, to influence (and be influenced by) conditions in the rural hinterland, and to connect with global networks, including diaspora populations. This set of interactions affects both local and international conflict dynamics."³¹

³⁰ Ibid, 43.

³¹ Ibid, 44-45.

This model can be linked to the concept of “feral city” defined as,

“a metropolis with a population of more than a million in a state the government of which has lost the ability to maintain the rule of law within the city’s boundaries yet remains a functioning actor in the greater international system.

In a feral city social services are all but nonexistent, and the vast majority of the city’s occupants have no access to even the most basic health or security assistance. There is no social safety net. Human security is for the most part a matter of individual initiative. Yet a feral city does not descend into complete, random chaos. Some elements, be they criminals, armed resistance groups, clans, tribes, or neighborhood associations, exert various degrees of control over portions of the city. Intercity, city-state, and even international commercial transactions occur, but corruption, avarice, and violence are their hallmarks. A feral city experiences massive levels of disease and creates enough pollution to qualify as an international environmental disaster zone. Most feral cities would suffer from massive urban hypertrophy, covering vast expanses of land. The city’s structures range from once-great buildings symbolic of state power to the meanest shantytowns and slums. Yet even under these conditions, these cities continue to grow, and the majority of occupants do not voluntarily leave.”³²

It would seem that a “feral city” would be the end goal and a perfect haven for nesting hybrid warfare actors, activities, and aggression. The challenge before national and city governments is to ensure that their cities do not become feral as such cities would be a magnet for “both nontraditional and transnational threats” including the potential for pandemics and massive environmental degradation, and the near certainty that feral cities will serve as major transshipment point for all manner of illicit commodities.”³³ In addition, such cities will also serve as critical nodes in the regional and global circuits of black economies of scale and dark incubators for criminal entrepreneurship.

³² Richard J. Norton, “Feral cities,” *Naval War College Review*, 56, no. 4 (Autumn 2003): 97-106, accessed, April 2, 2021, <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol56/iss4/8/>.

³³ *Ibid*, 100.

Preventing cities from becoming feral and serving as both the launch pads and targets of hybrid warfare attacks requires “tailored interventions that can both keep a city safe and allow it to flow and breathe” through,

“supply-side interventions [original italics] (which help ameliorate some of the causes of rapid, unplanned urbanization and thus relieve some of the pressure on a city and its infrastructure), *demand-side interventions* [original italics] (which help improve the city’s resiliency and thus its ability to cope with the pressures on its systems), and *framing system interventions* [original italics] (which seek to alter the context within which the city develops, by changing its interaction with larger national and transnational systems).”³⁴

Since the overarching objective of hybrid warfare has been identified in at least the pro-Russian theoretical approach to be the disruption of multipolar transnational connectivity projects through externally provoked identity conflicts within the targeted transit state, one is but forced to consider the risks posed by hybrid warfare aggression to CPEC, and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). In this case, ethnic differences, sub-national administrative divisions and boundaries, and physical geography will be utilized to disrupt specific bilateral and multilateral projects in those regions of Eurasia where participating countries of BRI are located. As these projects are designed to promote development and common prosperity within and between countries, the role of national governments will be critical in ensuring the distribution of benefits from these projects is as horizontal as possible.

Also related to this aspect is how perceptions of BRI investments in one country will be manipulated in another participating country. In this regard, Pakistanis will have to be especially careful against all attempts to depict the recent Sino-Iranian 25-year comprehensive strategic partnership as designed against Pakistan’s national interests because such attempts will be inevitably designed to create a wedge between China and Pakistan on the one hand, and Iran and Pakistan on the other.

In different states under different conditions, varying combinations of the means of power will be deployed as hybrid warfare attacks. For instance, in the case of Pakistan, the issue of the creation of new provinces can be manipulated by hybrid warfare actors so that the resistance against new administrative entities will become both visceral and divorced from the facts

³⁴ Kilcullen, *Out of the mountains*, 51.

on ground. Similarly, the question of different types of legislation and its beneficiaries can also be used to plan hybrid warfare attacks to undermine public confidence in the legislative process. Ethnic movements can be manipulated for serving anti-state and antisocial ends. In this case, legitimate local movements have to guard specifically against such manipulation. Also, the nexus between organized crime, terrorism and corruption can be designed to force concessions from the state. Therefore, state should exercise anticipatory prudence and move preemptively to remedy the causes that could generate protest movements. Inefficient public service delivery and rent-seeking practices in state institutions act as possible vectors of hybrid warfare attacks. Problems of coordination between political leadership and bureaucracy can also be manipulated by hybrid aggressors if they paralyze the business of state and disrupt public service delivery. In this regard, the tendency for institutional turf wars inherent in any system of governance will provide the opportunities for hybrid war attacks to widen the differences between different state institutions, organizations, and departments.

The foreign policy choices involved in partnering with different poles of power can also become a hybrid threat if it leads to failure to distinguish between long-term interests and short-term benefits. In this regard, Pakistan needs to be mindful of true friends like China and Turkey, and should be able to recognize countries that can become friends, countries that are not enemies, and countries that will not become friends. As a rule of thumb, it needs to be understood that India has been and will be the prime but not the only patron of hybrid warfare aggression in Pakistan. This fact itself will enable the state to identify events as hybrid warfare attacks across different domains. Coercive diplomacy of certain major, middle, and small powers intended to perpetuate a perception about Pakistan as a regional spoiler especially with regard to Afghanistan in complete denial of the facts on ground seems to be a hybrid tactic aimed at creating bad faith and bad conscience in Pakistanis about the intentions of Pakistan's state and government.

Since hybrid warfare in pro-American theoretical approach typically consists of synchronized horizontal escalation of various means of power, any crisis that metastasizes quickly to more than two domains can be identified as a possible hybrid warfare attack, but it does not mean that escalation of only one instrument of power cannot be a hybrid warfare attack. Some possible synchronized hybrid warfare combinations of instruments of power against which Pakistan needs to guard are *military-political-economic*, *economic-political-informational*, *economic-political-social-informational*, *economic-political-social-*

infrastructural, military-political-civilian-informational, and ethnic-religious-regional-military-informational-infrastructural. While these combinations cannot be presented here in an exhaustive manner, listing some of them should draw the attention of defenders against hybrid warfare aggression's prolific destructive creativity.

Achievement of comprehensive self-reliance through self-generated and self-promoted growth and development in political, military, economic, social, cultural, informational and infrastructural domains can act as the robust guarantee of countering hybrid warfare aggression at any given time or place.

4. Recommendations

The following recommendations for countering hybrid warfare emerged from the webinar deliberations:

- i. Whole-of-nation and whole-of-society approaches are required for countering hybrid warfare. In this regard, a multi-layered well-coordinated full-spectrum mechanism for detecting, deterring, and responding to hybrid warfare should be developed with multi-domain integration at regional, national, and local levels. Considering that at least four-fifths of hybrid warfare activity tends to be non-kinetic, so the proportion of non-kinetic measures in combating hybrid warfare should approximate the proportion that non-military measures constitute in hybrid warfare itself. This should not mean that the military component is of lesser importance and should be put on the back burner. It is of critical importance but focusing disproportionately on military deterrence allows the non-kinetic prongs to thrive and function rampantly. This should also not mean that the military should only focus on its kinetic specialization. In fact, in order to effectively counter hybrid warfare, the military, of necessity, needs to acquire expertise in non-military aspects of building deterrence against hybrid aggression in collaboration with other major domains.
- ii. Civil-military cooperation and public-private collaboration should be encouraged for hybrid warfare threat analysis and assessment as well as hybrid deterrence.
- iii. Dedicated and diverse transnational cooperation should be promoted for coordinating an effective response against the development and incubation of hybrid threats along the routes of BRI corridors.
- iv. Balanced sustainable urbanization should be promoted to prevent accumulation of stress in urban ecosystems to ensure urban metabolism

stays healthy and circular so that cities do not become feral. In this regard, non-politicized, development-focused, and growth-led intercity competition should be promoted to prevent the current politicized and bureaucratized intercity competition based around the allocation of not only scarce but also shrinking resources.

- v. In the political domain, a patient, participatory, horizontal, growth-led, and consensus-based negotiation of political differences should be promoted and prioritized to dissipate the accumulation of non-linear effects of hybrid warfare activity. Pakistan should aspire to becoming a strong state rather than a hard state, excelling in the art of exercising power rather than exerting force exclusively.
- vi. In the economic and financial domains, production and consumption of goods and services should be rationalized to avoid arbitrary distortions and should promote free, fair, and responsive markets indexed to goals of human and social development. Markets in different goods and services should be promoted through addressing market failure by an enabling government action that does not destroy markets, but rather allows them to stay functional and thrive. Moreover, fiscal and monetary policies should both be focused on impacting aggregate demand without clashing with each other. Sound economic and financial management should prevent distortions from negatively impacting economic growth.
- vii. Since Pakistan is fortunately experiencing a youth bulge, special attention should be given to providing ample, well-rounded, free and fair opportunities for democratic and positive political participation, inclusive development, world-class education, discretionary employment, self-actualization, and social amelioration to the youth population of Pakistan. Especially, education should promote creativity, competence, and enterprise rather than stultification of minds.
- viii. Women should be encouraged through formal and informal means to participate in all major walks of national life and in all major fields of national development. An understanding should prevail at all levels of decision- and policy-making that the country will not develop comprehensively unless men and women move forward together in a spirit of unity, mutual respect, and camaraderie rather than that of agonistic competition. It should be remembered that discrimination breeds resentment which makes people malleable material in the hands of hybrid aggressors.

- ix. Potential conflict situations in which political leadership can be pitted against bureaucracy, and those in which one public institution can oppose another public institution should be forestalled through consensus, compromise, clear demarcation of responsibilities, and coordination through cross-functional and interdepartmental pursuit of common objectives. A service-oriented and client-oriented approach should be encouraged in state institutions while rent-seeking, wherever it exists, should be actively discouraged through positive incentives and punitive measures. It should be remembered that desirable behavior is built through positive and negative reinforcement, while undesirable behavior is eradicated through punishment.
- x. State should arrange its relations with different classes, social groups, income groups, social sectors, demographic segments, economic sectors, and all citizens on a non-discriminatory basis. It should ensure that it enjoys the respect, confidence, and trust of all social strata. It should ensure the have-nots can approach it as freely and fearlessly as the haves.
- xi. Constitutional arrangements should be put in place for merit-based governance and a meritocratic process of elite and leadership formation through leveling privileges of birth, wealth, and social status so that competence and performance become the sole criteria of elite and leadership formation. Moreover, the situational awareness of national, local, and domain leadership should be developed to identify and move promptly against hybrid warfare threats.
- xii. In the informational domain, active campaigns should be launched to promote pro-people and pro-nation narratives that help defeat the informational packages and products of hybrid warfare. Media should both unfailingly uphold freedom to information and public responsibility in this regard. Free access to information combined with sustained increase in people's capacity for material consumption should lead to a situation in which hybrid war activity will decline because of popular non-acceptance of weaponized narratives.
- xiii. In the infrastructural domain, there should be a balance between supply-driven and demand-led development of multimodal infrastructure. Moreover, across-the-board resilience should be built up including resilient infrastructure.
- xiv. CPEC development should be secured against the potential of unbalanced development to prevent the creation of situational traps that lock its benefits within particular geographies, administrative

divisions, ethnic groups, social classes, economic sectors, and interest groups. Major development and growth deficits should be addressed on urgent basis before they become enablers and drivers of hybrid aggression. This should be linked to the development of broadly accessible means for the systematic fulfillment of people's aspirations for a better life.

- xv. Since one key prong of hybrid warfare is to create psychological dislocation, and reinforce alienation and social atomization aimed at the destruction of people's national consciousness and national identity to paralyze their will to defend themselves, so proper ideological measures, social cohesion strategies, and social solidarity campaigns should be planned to counter the more cognitive, psychological, and mental aspects of hybrid aggression.
- xvi. Technological proficiency, self-reliance, and integration should be achieved on an urgent basis with a view to acquiring full-spectrum command and control of cross-domain technology platforms for mounting a successful response in economic, political, financial, commercial, and informational domains as part of effective, credible, and flexible hybrid deterrence.
- xvii. Comprehensive, multidimensional, in-depth real-world knowledge and understanding of the vulnerabilities of state and non-state rivals and adversaries should be acquired for impregnable multi-domain deterrence against their hybrid aggression.



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