

Understanding the domestic drivers of Pakistan's hybrid war

By

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The popularization of hybrid war in the national security and policy discourse can be dated from April's public statements of the COAS General Qamar Javed Bajwa which recognized accurately that Pakistan is confronted with a hybrid war.

This hybrid war, imposed on Pakistan, consists of a combination of externally assisted, wide-ranging, non-military, non-violent social, economic, informational, political, and cultural means of subversion deployed separately or in conjunction with unconventional warfare consisting largely of terrorism and localized insurgencies with the ultimate aim of the irreversible destabilization of Pakistan.

While the external drivers of this hybrid warfare have been more or less accurately located in the fluid geopolitics of the region, the intensification of great-power competition in Eurasia, India's rivalry with Pakistan, Afghanistan's hostile behavior toward Pakistan, and the anti-Pakistan utilization of Afghanistan, its domestic drivers have been identified to be the run-away national mismanagement, lack of broad-based development, and the abundance of social resentment at this lack.

These national lacunae certainly help but only function as its secondary and visible enablers. The primary domestic drivers remain hidden in plain sight in the meantime.

These drivers can be exposed with the help of the conceptual framework created by Professor Carroll Quigley (1910-1977) in his magisterial study, *The Evolution of Civilizations*. Prof. Quigley, American historian and teacher of former U.S. President Bill Clinton, explains social and civilizational change as a result of changes undergone by the organizations created for meeting six basic human needs located at six levels of culture.

According to Prof. Quigley, these are: the need for organizing power relationships at the political level; the need for material wealth generation at the economic level; the need of companionship at the social level; the need for group security at the military level; the need for understanding at the intellectual level; and the need for psychological certainty at the religious level.

As long as they continue to meet these needs effectively, organizations act as what he calls "instruments". The moment these organizations become self-serving and cease to meet these needs effectively, they become what he calls "institutions", invested with needs of their own and unconnected with the basic needs of the level at which they are located.

The transformation of “instruments” into “institutions”, called “the institutionalization of instruments” by Prof Quigley, leads to social tension, crisis and decay unless “institutions” are changed backed into “instruments” geared to serving real needs of society and promoting progress.

Counter-intuitively, then, more not less institutionalization is the cause of society’s problems. Preoccupation with power relationships, unchecked human ambitions and the failure to adapt to changes social conditions are maintained as the reasons for social crises.

This framework helps us understand the prevalent problems of Pakistan. National organizations at most of these levels have not performed competently in serving the above-mentioned basic human needs of Pakistanis. The result is the multiple crises that have become the stomping ground of hybrid warriors.

The national political need for well-organized power relationships is frustrated by acute political polarization, the ossification of democratic institutions, historically uneasy civil-military relations, provincial divide, localization of political parties, and the resulting rise of populism and staged demagoguery.

The national economic need for material wealth generation is belied by chronic macroeconomic mismanagement, the preference for debt not capital accumulation, divestiture of assets, the asymmetrical distribution of the economic pie, underdeveloped national innovation systems, and the stubborn reliance on conventional economic lore that sorts nothing out.

The national social need for companionship is perverted by social fragmentation, income inequality, precarious employment conditions, crumbling national health infrastructure, rampant consumerism amidst social want, the intensification of social competition, the mass spread of intra-class and inter-class envy, the intensification of ethnic identification, sub-optimal gender relations, and the resultant rise of the illusory connectivity of social media.

The national need for understanding is underserved by limited educational coverage, mediocre quality of education, the absence of towering unimpeachable public intellectuals, no global academic leadership, no critical mass of research excellence, the lack of original scholarship, especially, in humanities and social sciences, modest innovation capabilities in science and technology, and the resulting rise of acrimonious, divisive, and trite debates on national issues.

The national need for religious and spiritual guidance and assurance is underserved by the countless religious organizations in the country and the resulting rise of sectarian interpretations amidst widespread spiritual anomie of the masses. The 2017 promulgation of the religious ruling by all religious schools of thought banning suicide attacks, armed insurgency against the state and use of violence as forbidden was a welcome but an isolated instance of coherent leadership in the religious sphere.

The need for national security is perhaps the only need that continues to be served adequately by the armed forces of Pakistan. It has been possible because of the incessant adaptation and modernization of the armed forces to meet the changing demands of national defense and the necessity of crafting a functional mode of interaction with other national institutions. The adverse

effects of not doing so would have been immediate unlike other five spheres where the effects of delay in reform and renewal manifest over an extended duration.

The fundamental reason for crises in other spheres is the lack of adaptability and renewal of their key organizations in step with changing national, regional, and global circumstances. The agents and tactics of hybrid warfare flourish in the fissures created by the failure of national organizations to meet the basic needs or purposes of the level or sphere at which they are located. These fissures allow the replacement of constructive practices in each sphere with their destructive counterparts leading to the loss of distinction between them.

The next stage is for the negative counterparts to start mimicking and posing as the positive practices. This mimicry is then utilized for mounting demoralizing propaganda campaigns to undermine development projects, security apparatuses, and national cohesion efforts. These campaigns either precede or coincide with the physical attack on national assets.

Prof. Quigley's insight concerning the evolution of civilizations is especially relevant in the context of the ability of hybrid war to mimic constructive strategies of social development. Prof. Quigley considers that all major civilizations of the world arose on the periphery of earlier civilizations before replacing preceding civilizations.

Andrew Korybko, the Russian geopolitical thinker who wrote a seminal work on the features of contemporary hybrid wars, has discovered that hybrid war aims to destabilize the external or domestic periphery of the target state and spreads from the periphery to the core. This pattern of hybrid war is uncannily similar to the civilizational change pattern identified by Prof. Quigley.

The concentration of the activities of terrorism in the highlands of Balochistan, KP, and FATA or even the littoral metropolis of Karachi bears out this logic. In Pakistan's case, hybrid warriors have been confounded by the longer-than-broad nature of the country's geography with no clearly marked core or center. They have been further dispirited by the dogged fighting spirit and the superior strategy of the military.

Divisive political provincialism is now being purposely fomented in the guise of provincial autonomy to enable the isolation of each province with its identifiable periphery and core in order to overcome piecemeal the natural geographic egalitarianism of Pakistan.

There is an urgent need for the understanding to prevail that hybrid war is so called because of its capacity for appropriating pre-existing crises in each sphere for its own pernicious ends combined with its shape-shifting ability for simulating constructive practices in each sphere.

The attribution of major national problems to the machinations of hybrid war, as seems to be fast becoming the default policy narrative, runs the risk of playing into the hands of hybrid warriors itself. The need of the moment is to surmount the multiple challenges facing the country through unflinching reform and renewal anchored in the unconditional love of an overwhelming majority of Pakistanis for the country and the unstinting cooperation of the society and the state of Pakistan, itself buttressed by strong and harmonious civil-military cooperation.

*The article was published on June 15, 2019, in Daily Times and is available at
<https://dailytimes.com.pk/253587/understanding-the-domestic-drivers-of-pakistans-hybrid-war/>.*