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**THESIS**

**HYBRID WARFARE: AN UMBRELLA FOR TERRORISM  
IN AN ERA OF GREAT POWER COMPETITION?**

by

Muhammad F. Shabbir

September 2022

Thesis Advisor:  
Second Reader:

Carolyn C. Halladay  
James A. Russell

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OF GREAT POWER COMPETITION?**

Muhammad F. Shabbir  
Lieutenant Colonel, Pakistan Army  
MMAS, National Defence University, Islamabad, 2011  
MSS, National Defence University, Islamabad, 2020

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**NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL  
September 2022**

Approved by: Carolyn C. Halladay  
Advisor

James A. Russell  
Second Reader

Afshon P. Ostovar  
Associate Chair for Research  
Department of National Security Affairs

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## **ABSTRACT**

Today's geostrategic environment is largely characterized by the phenomenon of great power competition (GPC). In this new cold war, instead of compelling an antagonist through use of force, hybrid warfare seeks to overcome an adversary by developing authenticity and persuading the populace. Against this evolving geopolitical backdrop, violent non-state actors (NSAs) and proxies gain even more significance. They become tools for great powers to achieve policy objectives. NSAs, like Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan and the Balochistan Liberation Army acting as Indian proxies against Pakistan, and Al-Qaida and ISIS in Afghanistan, provide apt examples of the enhanced role of terrorism through non-state proxies. Academic studies on the subjects of hybrid warfare, terrorism, and the GPC are found in abundance, but few draw together the distinct facets of hybrid warfare and GPC and the space for terrorism in between. This thesis is designed to tie together the dimensions of hybrid warfare, terrorism, and GPC to identify their impact on the security environment of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Based on the qualitative inquiry, this research concludes that hybrid warfare employed by great powers serves as an umbrella for terrorism, and the world needs to confront terrorism and hybrid threats together.

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

BLA	Balochistan Liberation Army
BLF	Balochistan Liberation Front
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CPEC	China Pakistan Economic Corridor
FATF	Financial Action Task Force
GPC	Great Power Competition
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
JeM	Jaish-e-Muhammad
JUA	Jamatul Ahrar
KP	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
NDS	National Directorate of Security
NSAs	Non-State Actors
PTM	Pashtun Tahafuz Movement
RAW	Research and Analysis Wing
R2P	Responsibility to Protect
SeM	Sipah-e-Muhammad
SSP	Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan
TTP	Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan
UN	United Nations
U.S.	United States
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Every age has its own kind of war, its own limiting conditions, and its own peculiar preconceptions.

—Clausewitz, *On War*

Today’s geostrategic environment is largely characterized by the phenomenon of great power competition (GPC). The creation of new regional and economic blocks like the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue or Shanghai Cooperation Organization reflects one manifestation of this global rivalry, with the great powers entering into alliances with other countries in a bid to gain dominance over various strategic spaces—including South Asia in general and Pakistan and Afghanistan in particular.

Concurrently, as warfare evolves into the so-called fifth generation, the character of war is transforming.<sup>1</sup> The nature of war—and warfare—has a persistent, unchangeable nature, but a highly changeable character.<sup>2</sup> Terms (and concepts) gaining currency in today’s military lexicon include non-kinetic warfare, which mainly consists of cyber warfare, information warfare, electronic warfare,<sup>3</sup> and sub-conventional warfare.<sup>4</sup> Important regional and global players including great powers are employing these concepts as standalone arrangements or in combination with erstwhile conventional means.<sup>5</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel H. Abbott, *The Handbook of Fifth-Generation Warfare (5GW)* (Nimble Books LLC, Michigan, 2010), 19.

<sup>2</sup> Colin S. Gray, *Another Bloody Century: Future Warfare* (Phoenix Press, May 1, 2007), 5.

<sup>3</sup> “A comprehensive operational concept that is applied in interlaced, overlapping and integrated Electromagnetic Spectrum, Information Space and Cyber Space to enable the achievement of non-kinetic environment superiority,” Martti Lehto and Gerhard Henselmann et al., “Non-Kinetic Warfare—The New Game Changer in the Battle Space,” in March 2020 International Conference on Cyber Warfare and Security (Norfolk, Virginia, Old Dominion University, 2020), 316, [https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Non-kinetic-Warfare-Spectrum\\_fig1\\_339943524](https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Non-kinetic-Warfare-Spectrum_fig1_339943524).

<sup>4</sup> “A generic term encompassing all armed conflicts that are above the level of peaceful co-existence amongst states and below the threshold of war including militancy, insurgency, proxy war and terrorism employed as a means in an insurrectionist movement or undertaken independently,” K.C. Dixit, “Sub-Conventional Warfare Requirements, Impact and Way Ahead,” *Journal of Defence Studies* 4, no. 1 (January 2010): 120, [https://idsa.in/system/files/jds\\_4\\_1\\_kcdixit.pdf](https://idsa.in/system/files/jds_4_1_kcdixit.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> Superesse Staff, “Fifth Generation Warfare—How We Have Already Entered an Ambiguous WWII,” *Superesse Straps* (blog), April 15, 2021, <https://www.superessestraps.com/blogs/news/fifth-generation-warfare-how-we-have-already-entered-an-ambiguous-wwiii>.

Russian invasion of Crimea in 2014 is an example of a campaign combining conventional and sub-conventional means. The Crimean conflict started as an undercover military operation, blending obscurity, propaganda, and the surprise aspect at the operational level. Russia's utilization of broadcasting means for psychological operations, as an element of a wider information campaign to enable the Crimean annexation, surprised both Ukraine and the West.<sup>6</sup> For instance, the Russian media portrayed Ukraine negatively with claims about hundreds of refugees fleeing Ukraine and seeking political asylum in Russia as a consequence of Ukrainian viciousness towards the Russian-speaking population. There was no immediate credible response from the western media to counter the Russian narrative, however.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, Russian intelligence and special forces participated at various periods during the subversion phase, which instigated civil unrest and caused civilian fatalities. Ultimately, the annexation was effectively completed by a conventional military incursion and physical occupation of the peninsula in 2014, using the alibi of Moscow's responsibility to protect (R2P) the Russian minority there against Ukraine.<sup>8</sup>

Against this evolving geopolitical backdrop, violent non-state actors (NSAs) and proxies gain even more significance. They become tools for great powers to achieve policy objectives.<sup>9</sup> Anti-state militant actions by Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) as proxies of India provide an example of NSAs that have been unleashed by an adversary state to create mayhem as a means for achieving regional hegemony.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Michael Kofman and Matthew Rojansky, "A Closer Look at Russia's 'Hybrid War'," *Kennan Cable*, no. 7 (April 2015): 8, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/publication/7-KENNAN%20CABLE-ROJANSKY%20KOFMAN.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> Margarita Jaitner and Dr. Peter A. Mattsson et al., "Russian Information Warfare of 2014," in 2015 7th International Conference on Cyber Conflict (Tallinn: IEEE, 2015), <https://ieeexplore.ieee.org/document/7158467>.

<sup>8</sup> Kofman and Rojansky, "A Closer Look at Russia's 'Hybrid War'."

<sup>9</sup> Frank Hoffman and Andrew Orner, "The Return of Great-Power Proxy Wars," *War on the Rocks*, September 2, 2021, <https://warontherocks.com/2021/09/the-return-of-great-power-proxy-wars/>.

<sup>10</sup> Syed Raza Hassan, "India, Afghanistan Gave Help to Pakistani Taliban, Says Group's Ex-spokesman," *Reuters*, April 26, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-pakistan-militants-idUKKBN17S1VE>.

The United States' (U.S.) withdrawal from Afghanistan is likely to encourage China and Russia to step up their activities and influence in this region with a bigger economic and security footprint in Afghanistan to the detriment of broader U.S. geostrategic interests.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, with Central Asia being in Russia's backyard and Pakistan and Afghanistan both getting closer to Russia and China, the balance of power in the region is apt to shift against the U.S. and its allies.<sup>12</sup> Thus, from the Chinese and Russian perspectives the power vacuum left by the U.S. and its allies in Afghanistan is the decline of the Western alliance in the region and conversely a strategic opportunity to gain both politically and economically.<sup>13</sup> This changing balance of power equation in the region is also reflected in Pakistan's increased high level of engagement with both China and Russia; this changing geopolitical environment is not likely to suit U.S. or Indian interests in the region, however.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, in this geostrategic setting, the phenomenon of hybrid warfare will become even more pronounced.

Pakistan has been in the eye of the storm with a full-fledged hybrid war waged against it. The apprehension of a serving Indian naval officer while planning sabotage and terrorist activities against Pakistan was one example of the ongoing hybrid war in the region as declared by the President of Pakistan in his address to the participants of the National Workshop on Balochistan in July 2021 in Islamabad.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, the recent surge in terrorist attacks in the province of Balochistan in Pakistan against Pakistan's security forces reflects the same phenomenon of terrorism being applied as a tool of hybrid

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<sup>11</sup> Sabine Fischer and Angela Stanzel et al., *Afghanistan: The West Fails – A Win for China and Russia?* (SWP, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, Berlin, September 22, 2021) 5, <https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publication/afghanistan-the-west-fails-a-win-for-china-and-russia>.

<sup>12</sup> Attendance of Pakistan PM in Winter Olympics in China and Later an Official Visit to Russia, Muhammad Ather Javed et al., "Growing Pakistan-Russia Relations: Future of Economic & Strategic Cooperation" (Valdai Discussion Club, Moscow, February 23, 2022), <https://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/growing-pakistan-russia-relations-future/>.

<sup>13</sup> Fischer and Stanzel, *Afghanistan: The West Fails – A Win for China and Russia?*

<sup>14</sup> Bilal Kuchay, "Taliban Takeover a 'Body Blow' to Indian Interests in Afghanistan," Aljazeera, August 29, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/8/29/what-does-the-talibans-takeover-of-afghanistan-mean-for-india>.

<sup>15</sup> The Express Tribune, "India Involved in Hybrid Warfare against Pakistan," July 7, 2021, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2309304/india-involved-in-hybrid-warfare-against-pakistan>.

warfare by India to achieve geopolitical ends.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, the focus of the present research remains on the trinity of evolving GPC, the prominence of hybrid warfare, and the threat of terrorism with an aim to develop a sound understanding of the manifestation of the ever-evolving conflict spectrum unfolding in Pakistan and Afghanistan in a geostrategic environment that is fluid and uncertain.

## **A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION**

How, in an era of great power rivalries, does the phenomenon of hybrid warfare provide global and regional players in South Asia an opportunity to unleash NSAs, using terrorism as one of their tools, as proxies to coerce adversaries in pursuit of achieving geopolitical objectives?

## **B. LITERATURE REVIEW**

This section will primarily focus on spelling out the three phenomena of hybrid warfare, terrorism, and the GPC to subsequently answer the whys and hows of the question posed in this thesis. Academic studies on the subjects of hybrid warfare, terrorism, and the GPC are found in abundance and are enormously valuable to the research of this subject, but few draw together the distinct facets of hybrid warfare and GPC and the space for terrorism in between. Therefore, to elaborate a consistent use of hybrid warfare by great powers using terrorism as a tool, this thesis will combine and modify several conclusions of the authors in the fields of warfare, international affairs, and foreign relations.

### **1. Hybrid Warfare and Political Ends**

For understanding the concept of hybrid warfare and how it interfaces with political ends, this thesis cites the writings of Frank G. Hoffman and Colin S Grey.<sup>17</sup> The political framework has always been the primary factor of the geopolitical landscape, and warfare

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<sup>16</sup> Shahid Afzal Khan, "Resurgence of Terrorism in Pakistan," *The Diplomat*, February 11, 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/02/resurgence-of-terrorism-in-pakistan/>.

<sup>17</sup> Frank G. Hoffman et al., *Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars* (working paper, Potomac Institute for Policy, 2007) 5, [https://www.potomac institute.org/images/stories/publications/potomac\\_hybridwar\\_0108.pdf](https://www.potomac institute.org/images/stories/publications/potomac_hybridwar_0108.pdf).

is a political behavior within the construct of politics.<sup>18</sup> This correlation of politics and war sets the stage for the subsequent thesis, as war allows the achievement of political ends and hybrid warfare is the new currency in the realm of warfare. Comprehending war and its changing character is as paradoxical as battling it. The more it is appreciated, the more it is understood with regard to its inherent capacity for tension, and uncertainty; the solitary certainty about war in the 21st century; however, is that it will shock both the policy makers and the people alike in unprecedented ways.<sup>19</sup>

This thesis will use the definition of hybrid warfare as spelled out by Frank G. Hoffman, who defines it as, “sophisticated campaigns that combine low level conventional and special operations, offensive cyber and space actions, and psychological operations that use social and traditional media to influence popular perception and international opinion.”<sup>20</sup> Multiple authors explain the concept of hybrid warfare and how it integrates various methods of warfare comprising both conventional and sub-conventional maneuvers through acts of terrorism using coercion, violence, and criminal disorder. Moreover, both states and NSAs can undertake hybrid wars, and the means by which they do so currently have altered; nevertheless, blending of traditional and unconventional practices remains an underlying principle to accomplish desired strategic aims as have been observed from primitive times of warfare.<sup>21</sup> Hoffman’s work highlights terrorism as one of the facets of hybrid war, because terrorism allows the kinetic prong of the hybrid war to come into play to strike terror into the hearts of the enemy.

As the concept of hybrid warfare evolved, different proponents of the same commented that the purpose of multi-faceted activities at both tactical and operational levels under the garb of hybrid warfare was to achieve synergy of effects in kinetic and

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<sup>18</sup> Gray, *Another Bloody Century: Future Warfare*, 6.

<sup>19</sup> *Nature and Character of War and Warfare*, U.S. Army Maneuver Center of Excellence, <https://www.benning.army.mil/mssp/Nature%20and%20Character/#:~:text=Clausewitz%20identifies%20%22danger%2C%20physical%20exertion,and%20his%20prescription%20is%20experience.>

<sup>20</sup> Hoffman, “Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars,” 38.

<sup>21</sup> Hoffman, “Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars,” 14 and Alex Deep, “Hybrid War: Old Concept, New Techniques,” *Small Wars Journal*, February 3, 2015, <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jml/art/hybrid-war-old-concept-new-techniques>.

non-kinetic domains of warfare.<sup>22</sup> In this vein, one also might argue that both conventional and nonconventional elements shape wars at strategic tiers;<sup>23</sup> for example, the conflicts in Syria, Yemen, and Afghanistan demonstrate the unfolding of the same conception. In 2006, the Israel-Hezbollah war also showed the difficulty in characterizing states as conventional actors or NSAs as fundamentally unconventional owing to the tactics adopted by both belligerents.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, the battlespace of the future will be more unpredictable and will provide the great powers more liberty of action to explore the untraditional modes of war.<sup>25</sup> Hybrid warfare thus becomes an even more preferred option and thus the response option will be difficult to configure and execute for the targeted state.<sup>26</sup>

Some authors and academic work maintain that the unipolar environment that emerged after the fall of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) paved the way for an international order in which irregular threats to the idea of conventional state-on-state conflict have become progressively widespread and suggest that great powers have traditionally backed unconventional fighters and NSAs in the execution of broader military campaigns.<sup>27</sup> The history of clandestine interference operations spearheaded by the Russians targeting the U.S. and its allies provides an example. Though the specific objectives and methods of Russian influence have differed over the years, such ideas as manipulating electoral processes have witnessed improvement and revived enthusiasm in the 21st century.<sup>28</sup> The same fact was reflected by the Israel-Hezbollah War of 2006; even though the notion of hybrid war in this style is not new, the refinement and increased

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<sup>22</sup> Hoffman, *Conflict in the 21st Century*, 14.

<sup>23</sup> Hoffman, *Conflict in the 21st Century*, 8.

<sup>24</sup> Hoffman, *Conflict in the 21st Century*, 8.

<sup>25</sup> Hoffman, *Conflict in the 21st Century*, 8.

<sup>26</sup> Arsalan Bilal, "Hybrid Warfare – New Threats, Complexity, and 'Trust' as the Antidote," *NATO Review*, November 30, 2021, <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2021/11/30/hybrid-warfare-new-threats-complexity-and-trust-as-the-antidote/index.html>.

<sup>27</sup> Deep, *Hybrid War: Old Concept, New Techniques*.

<sup>28</sup> Daniel H. McMasters, "Subversive Influence: Vulnerabilities of The United States and Its Elections to Russian Interference Campaigns" (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, December, 2020), 137, <http://hdl.handle.net/10945/66683>.

deadliness of NSAs, coupled with their capacity to endure in today's contemporary state system, is a recent development.<sup>29</sup>

This assertion that there will be more blurring of warfare categories clearly indicates that future warfare will no longer be the erstwhile conventional state-against-state affair or restricted to only kinetic domains.<sup>30</sup> Warfighters will employ all available means to outmaneuver the adversary and the phenomenon of hybrid warfare will enable manifestation of the modern warfare. On the other hand, there will be no change in the nature of warfare,<sup>31</sup> which remains violent, interactive, and fundamentally political.<sup>32</sup> Hybrid warfare with all its components—especially the kinetic domain—thrives with the sole purpose of achieving the political ends.

The thought of blurring of lines between modes of war is shared by quite a few analysts.<sup>33</sup> They suggest that the greatest conundrum in times to come will be that a state or NSA will not adopt a unilateral methodology, but rather a mix of tactics and technologies employed through novel methods to accomplish desired strategic objectives.<sup>34</sup> As Michael Evans writes, “The possibility of continuous sporadic armed conflict, its engagements blurred together in time and space, waged on several levels by a large array of national and sub-national forces, means that war is likely to transcend neat divisions into distinct categories.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Deep, Hybrid War: Old Concept, New Techniques.

<sup>30</sup> Gray, Another Bloody Century: Future Warfare, 167.

<sup>31</sup> Gray, Another Bloody Century: Future Warfare, 2.

<sup>32</sup> Christopher Mewett, “Understanding War’s Enduring Nature Alongside its Changing Character,” War on the Rocks, January 21, 2014, <https://warontherocks.com/2014/01/understanding-wars-enduring-nature-alongside-its-changing-character/>.

<sup>33</sup> Significant literature has been published by different authors describing the idea of blurring of lines in modern warfare; including Frank G Hoffman in “Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars,” and Donald Stalker in his article “Blurred Lines: Gray-Zone Conflict and Hybrid War—Two Failures of American Strategic Thinking,” for Naval War College Review.”

<sup>34</sup> Donald Stalker and Craig Whiteside, “Blurred Lines: Gray-Zone Conflict and Hybrid War—Two Failures of American Strategic Thinking,” *Naval War College Review* 73, no. 1 (Winter 2020): 37, <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=8092&context=nwc-review>.

<sup>35</sup> Michael Evans, “From Kadesh to Kandahar,” *U.S. Naval War College Review* 56, no. 3, Article 7 (2003), <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol56/iss3/7>.

## 2. Threat of Terrorism vis-à-vis the Hybrid Threat

Academic circles acknowledge that the dogma of terrorism remains a reality even today and it still can overturn the global political order.<sup>36</sup> With the killing of Osama bin Laden in May 2011, Al-Qaida seemed to pose no more threat to the U.S. and the challenge of terrorism was fast fading, as acknowledged by the then U.S. President Barack Obama.<sup>37</sup> In hindsight, it can be safely argued that the unfolding events of the last decade indicate otherwise. Different authors agree that initially the primary threat to world peace was only Al-Qaida; despite the global campaign against the menace of terrorism, however, particularly after the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the world witnessed the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), and at present the ideology and inspiration advocated by Al-Qaida is as formidable as ever.<sup>38</sup> As a case in point, the existing number of Salafi-jihadi proscribed organizations identified by the U.S. State Department as overseas terror outfits has increased fourfold since 9/11.<sup>39</sup> That is to say that the threat of terrorism today appears to be as bad as or worse than it was twenty years ago.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, the realization that terrorism is still a threat to global order is imperative to understand the transforming character of warfare and the place terrorism holds in it.

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<sup>36</sup> Walter Laqueur and Christopher Wall, *The Future of Terrorism* (Thomas Dunne Books St. Martin's Press, New York, 2018), 2.

<sup>37</sup> Laqueur and Wall, *The Future of Terrorism*, 1.

<sup>38</sup> The idea that NSAs have gained more ground over a period of time is shared by authors like Bruce Hoffman in his work, "How Has the Terrorism Threat Changed Twenty Years After 9/11." James Phillips and Jeff Smith in their report titled Non-State Actors prepared for The Heritage Foundation shared the same fears about ISIS, dated October 20, 2021, available on <https://www.heritage.org/military-strength/assessing-threats-us-vital-interests/non-state-actors>.

<sup>39</sup> Bruce Hoffman et al., *How Has the Terrorism Threat Changed Twenty Years After 9/11?* (Council on Foreign Relations, New York, August 12, 2021), <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/how-has-terrorism-threat-changed-twenty-years-after-911>.

<sup>40</sup> Rohan Gunaratna et al., *The Full Circle of Counterterrorism* (Council of Councils, Singapore, September 01, 2021), <https://www.cfr.org/councilofcouncils/global-memos/911-effect-and-transformation-global-security>.

### 3. Return of Great Power Rivalry

Many authors have consensus that the hopes for a lasting peaceful international global order after the end of the Cold War were short-lived owing to geopolitical realities that were consequent of the efforts and attempts of other important powers, including China and Russia, to re-assert themselves on the world stage. This created an ideological wedge between the democratic political order of the West and the totalitarian China and Russia.<sup>41</sup> The re-emergence of great power rivalry by 2020 with reference to China and Russia was predicted by some in the past.<sup>42</sup> As the Cold War ended, it was thought that possibly a new era of a sole superpower or a period of no great-power rivalry had started; in retrospect; however, it appears as if this was just a period of transition.<sup>43</sup> There is a broader agreement among academic circles and experts of foreign policy that Russia wants to regain great power status; the 2014 seizure of Crimea and current broader invasion of Ukraine reflect the manifestation of the same desire.<sup>44</sup> Concurrently, China is becoming more assertive—perhaps the only rival with the overall financial, political, military, and technological might to pose a lasting challenge to the existing global order.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, in the context of Afghanistan some experts believe that most considerable risk in post-withdrawal Afghanistan is the medium- to long-term implications of Chinese rare earth element extraction being the central line of effort in China’s geostrategic plan.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Robert Kagan, *The Return of History and the End of Dreams* (Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 2008) 1–2.

<sup>42</sup> Gray, *Another Bloody Century*, ix.

<sup>43</sup> Uri Friedman, “The New Concept Everyone in Washington Is Talking About,” *The Atlantic*, August 6, 2009, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2019/08/what-genesis-great-power-competition/595405/>.

<sup>44</sup> Kyle Oliver Kendall, *Using Their Own People Against Them: Russia’s Exploitation of Ethnicity in Georgia and Ukraine* (master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, December, 2015), 115, <http://hdl.handle.net/10945/47981>.

<sup>45</sup> Ronald O’Rourke, *Renewed Great Power Competition: Implications for Defense—Issues for Congress*, CRS Report No. R43838 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, March 10, 2022), <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/natsec/R43838.pdf>.

<sup>46</sup> Major General Elton USAF Retired and Captain Fruth, U.S. Army Reserves, “Evacuation Operations, Great Power Competition, and External Operations Terror Threats in Post-Drawdown Afghanistan, Mapping out the Path Ahead,” *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs* 5, no. 1 (January–February 2022): 2–39, <https://media.defense.gov/2022/Jan/06/2002918538/-1/-1/1/JIPA%20JANUARY-FEBRUARY%202022.PDF/JIPA%20JANUARY-FEBRUARY%202022.PDF?source=GovD>.

### C. POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESES

The geopolitical developments of the region are characterized by the withdrawal of the U.S. from Afghanistan. Another aspect is the apparent U.S. loss of interest in Pakistan as reflected by the conspicuous absence of its ambassador in Islamabad from 2018 to March 2022 and even expressed by former U.S. ambassador to Pakistan, Cameron Munter (2010–2012) in a conference in December 2021 that, “the U.S. is not looking at this region in the context of Pakistan.”<sup>47</sup> Conversely, projects of the scale of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) are in the process of actualization, providing China a more deep-rooted presence in the region. Concurrently, the efforts for a Pakistan-Russia rapprochement are in place and reflected through increased high-level engagement between the two countries and Pakistan’s stance on the issue of Ukraine. Moreover, the political and security vacuum within Afghanistan does provide a breathing space to entities like ISIS and even allow a rejuvenation opportunity for Al-Qaida thereby, the threat of terrorism becoming more so real than ever before.

Against this strategic backdrop, the U.S. as a global power will have reduced presence and influence in the region in the foreseeable future. In addition to this, the geopolitical environment for India, which is a regional player and aspires to become a global power, is not very conducive. The geostrategic interests of India are tangent to those of Russia, China, and Pakistan and are instead found to be more in line with U.S. interests, being its strategic partner. Therefore, the prospects of two opposing camps in the region—with China, Russia, Pakistan, and Afghanistan on one side and the U.S. and India on the other—cannot be ruled out. This scenario in the region can up the ante of the GPC between the rival powers in the region with the aim of achieving geo-strategic dominance.

With hybrid warfare already in full swing in the region, both in kinetic and non-kinetic domains through NSAs (TTP, BLA) and information operations (revelations of the

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<sup>47</sup> Web Desk, Pakistan No Longer Under ‘Do More’ Pressure: Former U.S. Ambassador, *The News International*, December 13, 2021, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/916775-pakistan-no-longer-under-do-more-pressure-former-us-ambassador>.

EU DisinfoLab),<sup>48</sup> the likelihood of using terror outfits of the kind of TTP against Pakistan, ISIS against the Taliban in Afghanistan, and by great powers and regional powers under the umbrella of hybrid warfare is a plausible possibility.

#### **D. RESEARCH DESIGN**

This thesis is designed to tie together the dimensions of hybrid warfare, terrorism, and GPC to identify their impact on the security environment of Afghanistan and Pakistan. My analysis requires a study of the known competing interests of the great powers, the presence of terrorist entities, and the vulnerabilities of Pakistan and Afghanistan, to identify how hybrid warfare can facilitate the utilization of terrorism for achieving desired strategic ends.

After analyzing the steady buildup of hybrid war against Pakistan, and unfolding events in Afghanistan, I explore the case of powers waging hybrid warfare through terrorism as one of the tools to identify commonalities to ascertain better the relation between hybrid warfare and terrorism within an environment of GPC. The examples of Russian and Chinese support to the Taliban against the U.S. forces in Afghanistan and the harboring of TTP under the U.S. and Indian umbrella in Afghanistan against Pakistan will help to explain the relation of hybrid warfare and terrorism.

The qualitative inquiry is determined to answer the queries such as what and why to explore befitting study to offer critical analysis that will be described analytically. This research predominantly relies on data available of the acts of terrorism in Pakistan and the attacks of the Taliban against U.S. forces in Afghanistan from 2014 onward, primarily because of the developments taking place in the region, including the announcement of the launching of CPEC, terrorist attack in Peshawar in an Army Public School killing 134 children, announcement by the Obama administration of U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan by 2016, formation of a unity government in Afghanistan, and increased Russian and Chinese engagement with the Taliban that was reflected in the meeting

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<sup>48</sup> Abid Hussain and Shruti Menon, The Dead Professor and the Vast Pro-India Disinformation Campaign, BBC Urdu & BBC Reality Check, December 10, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-55232432>.

between Russian President Putin and Taliban leader Mullah Akhtar Mansour at one of the military bases in Tajikistan in September 2015.<sup>49</sup> A semblance of process tracing technique is carried out to route the occurrences that can be rectified through the published research work and also the events that can be taken into account in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Beyond those explained in the literature review, sources will consist of a wide blend of academic articles and books, as well as publications such as the “Country Report on Terrorism” and articles from the Congressional Research Service.<sup>50</sup> These sources would offer insight on the fields of hybrid warfare, terrorism, and GPC for the objective analysis of how these three phenomena shape the security paradigm in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

## **E. THESIS OVERVIEW**

Following the introduction chapter, Chapter II of this thesis explores the phenomenon of hybrid warfare to find the suitable answers to the questions including what hybrid warfare is and why is it becoming the preferred choice of warfare in the present times. This chapter lays out the relevance of the major research question. Chapter III examines the correlation between hybrid warfare and terrorism. The focus of this chapter will be to dissect the overlapping of terrorism and hybrid warfare and how these two concepts interface in the end, ways, and means paradigm. Chapter IV is an in-depth look at how the ongoing GPC is shaping the security environment in Afghanistan and Pakistan while providing a conducive environment for the employment of hybrid warfare with terrorism as one of the tools to achieve desired strategic ends. Case studies of how different powers waged hybrid wars and used terrorist organizations are incorporated in this chapter to develop the arguments in a more objective manner.

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<sup>49</sup> Hashim Wahdatyar, “4 Reasons Russia Increasingly Favors the Taliban in Afghanistan,” *The Diplomat*, February 14, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/02/4-reasons-russia-increasingly-favors-the-taliban-in-afghanistan/>.

<sup>50</sup> U.S. State Department, “Country Reports on Terrorism” (Washington, DC: Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, 2009), <https://2009-2017.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2009/index.htm#:~:text=U.S.%20law%20requires%20the%20Secretary,entitled%20Country%20Reports%20on%20Terrorism.>

## II. UNDERSTANDING HYBRID WARFARE: IS IT OLD WINE IN A NEW BOTTLE?

“Hybrid warfare” as a phenomenon of modern warfare started to emerge in the early 2000s as a buzzword in both academic and military circles to explain the changing character of warfare,<sup>51</sup> as this period was when scholars like Frank G. Hoffman coined the term.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, senior U.S. military representatives testified in 2010 before Congress that opponents are likely to employ a hybrid warfare strategy in future conflicts,<sup>53</sup> and the phenomenon further came into the limelight after the start of the 2014 Russia-Ukraine conflict.<sup>54</sup> Certain academics regard proxy and irregular warfare as constituents of hybrid warfare and even term it as unconventional warfare.<sup>55</sup> Similarly, there are those scholars who consider hybrid warfare to be non-kinetic warfare, which does not favor application of the military instrument as a preferred option. According to Frank Hoffman, “Hybrid wars blend the lethality of state conflict with the fanatical and protracted fervor of irregular warfare.”<sup>56</sup> The elements of strategic coercion, grey-zone conflict, and certain strands of unconventional threats also appear relevant to this nature of warfare.<sup>57</sup>

Hybrid warfare is intricate and all embracing. Under close analysis of the phenomenon with the lens of a generational notion of warfare, hybrid warfare appears to

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<sup>51</sup> James K. Wither, “Defining Hybrid Warfare,” *Per Concordiam*, January 2020, no. 10.01, 7, [https://www.marshallcenter.org/sites/default/files/files/2020-05/pC\\_V10N1\\_en\\_Wither.pdf](https://www.marshallcenter.org/sites/default/files/files/2020-05/pC_V10N1_en_Wither.pdf).

<sup>52</sup> Hoffman, *Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars*.

<sup>53</sup> Davi M. D’Agostino, *Hybrid Warfare*, GAO-10-1036R (Washington, DC: Government Accountability Office 2010), 1.

<sup>54</sup> Wither, *Defining Hybrid Warfare*.

<sup>55</sup> Significant literature argues that hybrid warfare is an old concept and is a combination of different facets of warfare. Scholars like Michael Kofman and Matthew Rojansky, while explaining the term hybrid warfare, argued that, “the ‘hybrid’ aspect of the term simply denotes a combination of previously defined types of warfare, whether conventional, irregular, political or information.” Kofman and Rojansky, “A Closer Look at Russia’s ‘Hybrid War,’” *Kennan Cable*, no. 7 (April 2015): 8. In addition, Alex Deep also suggests that, “the fundamental principle of utilizing a combination of conventional and irregular methods to achieve a political objective is consistent with older forms of conflict.” “Hybrid War: Old Concept, New Techniques,” *Small Wars*, <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/hybrid-war-old-concept-new-techniques>.

<sup>56</sup> Hoffman, *Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars*.

<sup>57</sup> Brigadier Ehsan Mehmood Khan, “Hybrid Warfare: A Conceptual Perspective,” *Hilal English Magazine*, February 1, 2018, <https://www.hilal.gov.pk/eng-article/detail/MjYz.html>.

be a combination of the third-, fourth-, and fifth-generation warfare in a few regions around the globe where interstate conventional war is still a reality.<sup>58</sup> Rex Brynen argues that “historically, a great many threats have been hybrid, so this isn’t necessarily new.”<sup>59</sup> The foremost distinction today is the availability of a wide range of tools in the postmodern era in the form of cyber, informational, and other domains that have established the primacy of hybrid warfare.<sup>60</sup> Hybrid warfare seeks to exploit internal fissures like economic, political, and societal unrest. The graduated strategy adopted through hybrid warfare seeks the destruction of an opposing nation by weakening it internally—and Pakistan is no exception.<sup>61</sup>

#### A. DEFINING HYBRID WARFARE

According to Brigadier Ehsan, when viewed from the vantage of “polemology—i.e., the study of human conflict and war—hybrid warfare emerges as the common expression that covers all other terms in a number of ways.”<sup>62</sup> Hybrid warfare is the manifestation of an all-encompassing character of war, which embodies application of the entire range of accessible resources, ranging from kinetic to non-kinetic, to overcome another actor.<sup>63</sup> In addition, there are instances where various actors are found engaged in an intricate hybrid war to quell each other. The complexity of conflict within the bounds of cooperation and hostility between different belligerents defines complex hybridity. This complex hybridity is reflected in the employment of several means characterized as kinetic and non-kinetic, and attributable and non-attributable by opposing actors.<sup>64</sup> To put it

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<sup>58</sup> Khan, Hybrid Warfare, *Hilal English Magazine*.

<sup>59</sup> Rex Brynen, “Countering Hybrid Threats AAR,” *Pax Sims* (blog), May 15, 2011, <https://paxsims.wordpress.com/2011/05/15/countering-hybrid-threats-aar/>.

<sup>60</sup> Frank G. Hoffman, “Hybrid Warfare and Challenges,” *Joint Force Quarterly*, no. 52 (1st Quarter 2009): 34, <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/portals/68/Documents/jfq/jfq-52.pdf>.

<sup>61</sup> Air Commodore Khalid Iqbal (Retd), “Facts and Fallacies of Hybrid Warfare: Old Wine in New Bottle?” *Criterion Quarterly* 15, no. 1 (June 2020), <https://criterion-quarterly.com/facts-and-fallacies-of-hybrid-warfare-old-wine-in-new-bottle/>.

<sup>62</sup> Khan, Hybrid Warfare, *Hilal English Magazine*.

<sup>63</sup> Khan, Hybrid Warfare, *Hilal English Magazine*.

<sup>64</sup> Khan, Hybrid Warfare, *Hilal English Magazine*.

distinctively, “hybrid warfare” is a common phenomenon that signifies a spectrum of actions, across the complete range of their interface, by the belligerents that concludes with war and incorporates ways and methodologies that have impact beyond defined battle fields.<sup>65</sup>

The U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq provide interesting examples of conflicts that witnessed the transformation of character of war from conventional to sub-conventional, as originally the wars started against rival state armies. Later, with the fall of regimes, the NSAs in the form of militant militias like the Taliban and ISIS became the belligerents, and hence the character of warfare also underwent change.<sup>66</sup> In this context, the mix of means is developing prevalence as an instrument of major powers’ strategic thinking, which brings the term hybrid into frequent usage by strategic communities around the world.<sup>67</sup> The following strands appear as the cardinal rules of hybrid war:

- Preference of indirect strategy over overt direct military conflict
- Keeping the threat of use of conventional force alive in support of unconventional methods
- Exploitation of social and religious fault lines within the society to weaken the target state from within
- Use of media to favorably project own perspective
- Involving the international community at an opportune time to achieve desired political objectives

The term “hybrid” often precedes words like “threats,” “war,” and “conflict,”<sup>68</sup> which are often used interchangeably without specific defined meanings to capture the

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<sup>65</sup> Khan, Hybrid Warfare, *Hilal English Magazine*.

<sup>66</sup> D’Agostino, *Hybrid Warfare*, 14.

<sup>67</sup> Khan, Hybrid Warfare, *Hilal English Magazine*.

<sup>68</sup> Sean Monaghan, “Countering Hybrid Warfare So What for the Future Joint Force?” *PRISM* 8, no. 2 (October, 2019): 82, [https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/prism/prism\\_8-2/PRISM\\_8-2\\_Monaghan.pdf](https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/prism/prism_8-2/PRISM_8-2_Monaghan.pdf).

essence of the intertwined nature of challenges (ranging from terrorism, ethnic conflict, and religious fault lines) involving multiple actors (i.e., regular and irregular forces) with employment of traditional and nontraditional means (i.e., kinetic, political, technological).<sup>69</sup> Considering the varying degrees of intensity of a threat and the rationale of belligerents engaged, it is possible to characterize hybrid threat, hybrid conflict, and hybrid war as different entities.<sup>70</sup> This section examines the salient distinctions.

## 1. Hybrid Threats

Hybrid threats originate from a nonaggressive, pragmatic grand strategy that pursues strategic advantages while averting retaliation by manipulating the gray zone between peace and conflict.<sup>71</sup> Frank Hoffman is mostly credited with the coining of the term hybrid threats in relation to the idea of hybrid warfare.<sup>72</sup> According to Patryk Pawlak, a hybrid threat could be viewed as the merging of different threats, enablers, and weakness into one.<sup>73</sup> For example, for any state or nation a hybrid threat would be a situation where it finds itself up against a blend of traditional and non-traditional threats posed by another state or a group of states and NSAs coupled with economic sanctions and diplomatic coercion.<sup>74</sup> According to Brigadier Ehsan, hybrid threat involves various dimensions and strands consistent with the situation in addition to the capacities and strategic objectives of the competing belligerents.<sup>75</sup> For example, terrorist organizations like Al-Qaida and ISIS operate across different regions and utilize different military, economic, and technological means to accomplish their political objectives.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Patryk Pawlak et al., *Understanding Hybrid Threats*, PE 564.355, European Parliamentary Research Service (Brussels, European Parliament, June 2015), [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2015/564355/EPRS\\_ATA\(2015\)564355\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2015/564355/EPRS_ATA(2015)564355_EN.pdf).

<sup>70</sup> Pawlak, *Understanding Hybrid Threats*.

<sup>71</sup> Monaghan, "Countering Hybrid Warfare So What for the Future Joint Force?"

<sup>72</sup> Monaghan, "Countering Hybrid Warfare So What for the Future Joint Force?"

<sup>73</sup> Pawlak, *Understanding Hybrid Threats*.

<sup>74</sup> Khan, *Hybrid Warfare*, *Hilal English Magazine*.

<sup>75</sup> Khan, *Hybrid Warfare*, *Hilal English Magazine*.

<sup>76</sup> Pawlak, *Understanding Hybrid Threats*.

## 2. Hybrid Conflict

In hybrid conflict, belligerents avoid blatant application of the military instrument against opposing actors, preferring instead a mix of military pressure, exploitation of political and economic vulnerabilities, and application of technological resources and diplomatic influence to achieve strategic ends.<sup>77</sup> While other elements of national power including economy or diplomacy may spearhead the charge for the duration of the hybrid conflict phase, the kinetic component remains in aid. Nevertheless, the option of restricted but regulated employment of armed forces may be exercised when deemed crucial.<sup>78</sup> The physical invasion of Crimea by Russian forces in 2014 reflected the practical manifestation of employing the military component when it was needed to give the final blow.<sup>79</sup> In hybrid conflict, strategic coercion of the adversary is attempted through a well-planned application of diplomatic intimidation, economic sanctions, information operations, lawfare, cyber operations, and employment of proxies.<sup>80</sup> These tools may be exercised in unison or separately depending on the strategic environment.

An ideal example of hybrid conflict is the strategic, diplomatic, and military coercion of Pakistan by India by employing different means including information operations. The same is reflected by the revelations of the EU DisinfoLab about a disinformation campaign since 2005 to discredit Pakistan.<sup>81</sup> In addition to this, India used its diplomatic influence in the domain of lawfare to keep Pakistan on a Financial Action Taskforce (FATF) grey list to squeeze Pakistan's economy, as admitted by the Indian Minister for External Affairs.<sup>82</sup> Hence, hybrid conflict allows a country to put to use all its

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<sup>77</sup> Pawlak, Understanding Hybrid Threats.

<sup>78</sup> Khan, Hybrid Warfare, *Hilal English Magazine*.

<sup>79</sup> Kofman and Rojansky, "A Closer Look at Russia's 'Hybrid War'."

<sup>80</sup> Khan, Hybrid Warfare, *Hilal English Magazine*.

<sup>81</sup> Gary Machado Alexandre Alaphilippe, Roman Adamczyk, Antoine Grégoire et al., *Indian Chronicles: Deep Dive into a 15-Year Operation Targeting the EU and UN to Serve Indian Interests*, December 9, 2020, <https://www.disinfo.eu/publications/indian-chronicles-deep-dive-into-a-15-year-operation-targeting-the-eu-and-un-to-serve-indian-interests>.

<sup>82</sup> Kunal Gaurav, Modi Govt Ensured Pakistan Is Retained on FATF Grey List, Says Jaishankar, *Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, July 18, 2021, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/modi-govt-ensured-pakistan-remained-on-fatf-grey-list-says-jaishankar-101626608739423.html>.

available means to damage its adversary state without overt employment of a military component or through minimum application of direct force in a bid to maximize its strategic gains without fearing kinetic retaliation.

In a hybrid environment, hybrid conflict and hybrid war are expected to unfold gradually.<sup>83</sup> The purpose of initiating a hybrid conflict by the aggressive actor is to pursue its own political ends in a bid to achieve strategic objectives without initiating a full-fledged military campaign to prevent retribution from the opposing actor and avoid financial and human costs of war. Nevertheless, in an eventuality where the aggressor fails to accomplish the desired ends, the hybrid conflict phase would influence the political situation to allow overt use of the armed forces in hybrid war.

## **B. VARYING PERSPECTIVES OF HYBRID WARFARE**

Conflicting ideas, perceptions, and expressions are being applied to describe the phenomenon of hybrid warfare. Following diverse perspectives of different global and regional powers based on the confronted regional and geopolitical environments as well as the strategic regional and global objectives shows how hybrid warfare is seen in different regions across the globe in terms of achieving particular strategic ends—and conversely deterring the adversaries from achieving the same.

### **1. U.S. Perspective**

The U.S. DOD uses “hybrid” to explain the increasing complexity of conflict and perceives it to be more of a threat instead of a new form of warfare.<sup>84</sup> Amid this complexity, however, the U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Special Operations Command do not share views on hybrid warfare.<sup>85</sup> For instance, the U.S. Special Operations Command and Army categorized the Russia-Georgia war as

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<sup>83</sup> Khan, Hybrid Warfare, *Hilal English Magazine*.

<sup>84</sup> Davi M. D’Agostino, *Hybrid Warfare*, GAO-10-1036R (Washington, DC: Government Accountability Office 2010), 14.

<sup>85</sup> D’Agostino, GAO-10-1036R, 14.

conventional warfare, while the Air Force characterized it as a hybrid conflict.<sup>86</sup> The U.S. armed forces; however, consider that current and future adversaries are likely to use “hybrid warfare tactics, a blending of conventional and irregular approaches across the full spectrum of conflict.”<sup>87</sup> The U.S. Joint Forces Command defines a hybrid threat as, “An adversary that simultaneously and adaptively employs some fused combination of (1) political, military, economic, social and information means and (2) conventional, irregular, terrorism and disruptive/criminal conflict methods. It may include a combination of state and NSAs.”<sup>88</sup>

The U.S. and its western allies consider that powers like Russia are conducting hybrid warfare employing varied approaches of kinetic and non-kinetic domains for strategic ends to exploit the fault lines of weak nations and deem it necessary to adapt to the changing character of warfare by putting up a resilient response to thwart all hybrid threats against its own geostrategic interests emanating from Russia and other powers.<sup>89</sup> Otherwise, strategic shocks of the nature of the Syrian war and Ukrainian crisis will keep threatening global peace.

## 2. Russian Perspective

Russian intellectuals hold the U.S. as a source of hybrid warfare. Russia perceives itself to be a victim of hybrid warfare. Russian author Andrew Korybko maintains that the West as part of its hybrid campaign against Russia uses the phrase of hybrid warfare as part of its information narrative to malign Russia.<sup>90</sup> According to Korybko, “Hybrid War can be described as manufactured or provoked identity conflict with the aim of disrupting, controlling, or influencing multipolar transnational connective infrastructure projects

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<sup>86</sup> D’Agostino, GAO-10-1036R, 14.

<sup>87</sup> D’Agostino, GAO-10-1036R, 20.

<sup>88</sup> D’Agostino, GAO-10-1036R, 18.

<sup>89</sup> Giray Sadik, “How Can NATO Effectively Counter Terrorism and Hybrid Threats?” *PERCEPTIONS: Journal of International Affairs*, 26, no. 1 (August 2021): 57, <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/perception/issue/64385/977883>.

<sup>90</sup> Andrew Korybko., “Iranian Media: Trump Is on Course to Break Us,” *Oriental Review*, 30 January, 2017, <https://orientalreview.org/2017/01/30/iranian-media-trump-is-on-course-to-break-us/>.

through the methods of regime tweaking, regime change, and/or regime reboot in geostrategic transit states.”<sup>91</sup> Similarly, in 2013 General Valery Gerasimov, then Russia’s Chief of the General Staff, noted, “The very ‘rules of war’ have changed. The role of nonmilitary means of achieving political and strategic goals has grown, and, in many cases, they have exceeded the power of force of weapons in their effectiveness. All this is supplemented by military means of a concealed character.”<sup>92</sup>

This description of the changing character of warfare by General Gerasimov was followed the very next year by the Russian invasion of Crimea and manifested the same observations as highlighted by the general.<sup>93</sup> Thus, Russia does perceive hybrid warfare as an effective tool for furthering its own strategic ideas.

### 3. Chinese Perspective

Unrestricted warfare resonates with the Chinese perspective on hybrid warfare. A book titled *Unrestricted Warfare* and published in 1999 in China highlights how Chinese academia and politicians view the changing character of warfare.<sup>94</sup> According to the authors of the book, technological advancements in an era of globalization have altered the correlation of weapons to war and have gradually blurred the face of war, which now consists of information operations, cyber, and space domains.<sup>95</sup> The Chinese considered that all erstwhile non-war acts may well be the latest elements of future warfare, which will lead warfare to transcend all boundaries and limits.<sup>96</sup> Similarly, in 2003 China issued a document, the “Political Work Guidelines of the People’s Liberation Army,” which elaborates the employment of “three warfares”—psychological, opinion, and legal.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Korybko., “Iranian Media: Trump Is on Course to Break Us.”

<sup>92</sup> Molly K. McKew, “The Gerasimov Doctrine,” *Politico Magazine*, September/October 2017, <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/09/05/gerasimov-doctrine-russia-foreign-policy-215538/>.

<sup>93</sup> Kofman and Rojansky, “A Closer Look at Russia’s ‘Hybrid War’.”

<sup>94</sup> Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare* (Beijing: PLA Literature and Arts Publishing House, February 1999), 1–9.

<sup>95</sup> Liang and Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare*.

<sup>96</sup> Liang and Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare*.

<sup>97</sup> Sergio Miracola, “Chinese Hybrid Warfare,” Italian Institute for International Political Studies, December 21, 2018, <https://www.ispionline.it/en/pubblicazione/chinese-hybrid-warfare-21853>.

Therefore, the Chinese policy is a combination of economic initiatives and “non-linear operations.” This policy paves the way for projects like China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which are propagated through information operations to increase the Chinese imprint in other countries. Simultaneously, the “salami-slicing” strategy allows progressive expansion of land territory by means of unusual practices to achieve control over disputed regions without provoking escalation.<sup>98</sup> This policy explains the Chinese method of employing hybrid warfare.

#### 4. Indian Perspective

India claims to be the victim of hybrid warfare and contemplates that it has been a victim of Pakistan’s hybrid onslaught.<sup>99</sup> Therefore, the Indian view with reference to hybrid warfare is significant owing to its direct implications for neighboring Pakistan. Indian Army officer Brigadier Anil Gupta (retired) states that, “Pakistan has been using hybrid threats against India since independence.”<sup>100</sup> This Indian thought stems from the history of the militant freedom struggle in Indian-occupied Kashmir, which India perceives to be sponsored by Pakistan.<sup>101</sup> The Brigadier notes: “Hybrid war can best be described as a combination of conventional and sub-conventional threats and can be unleashed both by the state and NSAs. This type of warfare is characterized by undefined battle space and extends to the flanks and rear as well.”<sup>102</sup>

India funds and backs sub-nationalist elements in Balochistan (BLA, Balochistan Liberation Front-BLF, etc.) and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) (Pashtun Tahafuz Movement-PTM)<sup>103</sup> to create unrest not just within the respective provinces but also in Karachi the

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<sup>98</sup> Miracola, Chinese Hybrid Warfare.

<sup>99</sup> Khan, Hybrid Warfare, *Hilal English Magazine*.

<sup>100</sup> Brigadier Anil Gupta (Retired), “Are We Prepared Against Hybrid Threats,” *Indian Defence Review* (December 2, 2016), <http://www.indiandefencereview.com/spotlights/are-we-prepared-against-hybrid-threats/>.

<sup>101</sup> Gupta, “Are We Prepared Against Hybrid Threats.”

<sup>102</sup> Gupta, “Are We Prepared Against Hybrid Threats.”

<sup>103</sup> “PTM Funding: The Role of RAW-NDS, Wealthy FATA Diaspora in the Gulf & Hostile Agencies,” *Global Village Space*, April 30, 2019, <https://www.globalvillagespace.com/ptm-funding-the-role-of-raw-nds-wealthy-fata-diaspora-in-the-gulf-hostile-agencies/>.

financial capital of Pakistan. Pakistan's Permanent Representative to the United Nations (UN), Munir Akram, cites this support in blaming India for state-sponsored terrorism within Pakistan, especially in Karachi. He further states that this is the true manifestation of the battlefield having been extended beyond the traditional borders while employing both kinetic and non-kinetic means.<sup>104</sup>

## 5. Pakistan Perspective

Pakistan takes the exact opposite perspective of the Indian view. Pakistan perceives that India has waged hybrid warfare against Pakistan since its independence in 1947.<sup>105</sup> The East Pakistan debacle of 1971 and the perennial uncertainty in Balochistan are always attributed to Indian involvement.<sup>106</sup> Pakistan considers that India has the capacity, purpose, and past record of instigating hybrid warfare against its South Asian neighbors (Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Nepal) by applying the whole range of means of statecraft across the complete spectrum of contestation and confrontation.<sup>107</sup> The description of hybrid warfare presented by Brigadier Ehsan Mehmood Khan, a serving Pakistan Army officer, reads, "Hybridity points to multiplicity, combination and complexity. Hybrid warfare denotes a kind of warfare involving a variety of means and ways applied simultaneously or in succession. Hybrid warfare is indeed a character of war that employs a range of methods and strategies. It is a victim-driven warfare wherein a victim often becomes an actor against itself."<sup>108</sup> Thus, Pakistan's place in the geostrategic milieu with limited resources makes hybrid warfare a war of compulsion for it rather than a war of choice to safeguard its own interests.

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<sup>104</sup> [https://www.un.org/en/ga/sixth/76/pdfs/statements/int\\_terrorism/02mtg\\_pakistan.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/ga/sixth/76/pdfs/statements/int_terrorism/02mtg_pakistan.pdf), Statement by Ambassador Munir Akram, the Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the United Nations, on Agenda Item 111: "Measures to Eliminate International Terrorism" (6 October 2021).

<sup>105</sup> Khan, Hybrid Warfare, *Hilal English Magazine*.

<sup>106</sup> Ashok Swain, "India Must Remember That Balochistan Is Not Bangladesh," *LSE South Asia Centre* (blog), September 5, 2016, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/southasia/2016/09/05/india-must-remember-that-balochistan-is-not-bangladesh/>.

<sup>107</sup> Khan, Hybrid Warfare, *Hilal English Magazine*.

<sup>108</sup> Khan, Hybrid Warfare, *Hilal English Magazine*.

### C. WHY HYBRID WARFARE IS BECOMING THE PREFERRED OPTION

Hybrid warfare, staying below the perceived threshold of war or direct overt application of military force, does offer strategic advantages despite being simpler, lower cost, and less risky than kinetic operations.<sup>109</sup> It appears to be a more viable option when it comes to sponsoring and fanning disinformation in partnership with NSAs in comparison to rolling tanks into enemy territory. The costs and risks are significantly less, but the gain is substantial.<sup>110</sup> For example, the Russian invasion of Crimea in 2014 enabled it to achieve its strategic ends by virtue of fusing the deniable special forces, local militias, economic influence, propaganda campaign, and manipulation of socio-political vulnerabilities in Ukraine.<sup>111</sup> According to Arsalan Bilal, the purpose of fusing kinetic means and non-kinetic methods is to cause destruction of an adversary state in an optimum way.<sup>112</sup>

There are two distinctive characteristics of hybrid warfare. First, it makes the line between war and peace time ambiguous.<sup>113</sup> Therefore, it is difficult to distinguish or determine the war threshold. The reality of war becomes obscure as its operationalization becomes difficult.<sup>114</sup>

The second significant characteristic of hybrid warfare involves obscurity and attribution. Hybrid attacks are mostly defined by a lot of abstraction.<sup>115</sup> Such anonymity is deliberately generated and inflated by the hybrid actors to confuse attribution as well as reaction.<sup>116</sup> In other words, the targeted state either remains unable to uncover a hybrid attack or fails to attribute it to a country that might be committing or supporting it.<sup>117</sup> The

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<sup>109</sup> Bilal, “Hybrid Warfare – New Threats, Complexity, and ‘Trust’ as the Antidote.”

<sup>110</sup> Bilal, “Hybrid Warfare – New Threats, Complexity, and ‘Trust’ as the Antidote.”

<sup>111</sup> Kateryna Zarembo and Sergiy Solodkyy et al., *The Evolution of Russian Hybrid Warfare: Ukraine* (Centre for European Policy Analysis, January 29, 2021), <https://cepa.org/the-evolution-of-russian-hybrid-warfare-ukraine/>.

<sup>112</sup> Bilal, “Hybrid Warfare – New Threats, Complexity, and ‘Trust’ as the Antidote.”

<sup>113</sup> Bilal, “Hybrid Warfare – New Threats, Complexity, and ‘Trust’ as the Antidote.”

<sup>114</sup> Bilal, “Hybrid Warfare – New Threats, Complexity, and ‘Trust’ as the Antidote.”

<sup>115</sup> Bilal, “Hybrid Warfare – New Threats, Complexity, and ‘Trust’ as the Antidote.”

<sup>116</sup> Bilal, “Hybrid Warfare – New Threats, Complexity, and ‘Trust’ as the Antidote.”

<sup>117</sup> Bilal, “Hybrid Warfare – New Threats, Complexity, and ‘Trust’ as the Antidote.”

Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. Presidential elections,<sup>118</sup> which at the time of the elections remained largely unnoticed and later became a national issue, and the Indian disinformation campaign against Pakistan for a period of over fifteen years starting from 2005,<sup>119</sup> provide suitable examples of how hybrid actors operate against hostile nations. By exploiting the thresholds of identification and attribution, the hybrid actor makes it complex for the targeted state to formulate appropriate policy and strategic responses. In this regard, the period leading up to the U.S. presidential elections of 2016 reflects the same response dilemma, that as early as June 2016, the news of Russian involvement started surfacing but not much could be done to put an end to the continued Russian involvement to influence the outcome of the elections as it revealed subsequently.<sup>120</sup>

Due to rapid technological innovations and the upswing of asymmetric warfare, all-out wars can be ineffectual even vis-à-vis powers that have comparatively limited means and influence. Victory might thus become an exceedingly challenging idea to achieve.<sup>121</sup> With the cost of war increasing and innovative tools being at the disposal of opposing states, the will to fight all-out wars may possibly be shrinking; it does not indicate the diminishing of conflicts, however, but alters the dynamics of warfare. In a nutshell, the global security paradigm is fundamentally transforming even though the nature of war remains the same.<sup>122</sup>

#### **D. HYBRID WARFARE IN THE INDO-PAK CONTEXT**

India and Pakistan share a turbulent history. Both belligerents have employed elements of hybrid warfare in the past to achieve their political-military objectives.

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<sup>118</sup> Robert S. Mueller, *Report on the Investigation into Russian Interference in the 2016 Presidential Election* (Washington, D.C., Independent Counsel Investigations, 2019), <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/5955118-The-Mueller-Report>.

<sup>119</sup> Hussain and Menon, *The Dead Professor and the Vast Pro-India Disinformation Campaign*.

<sup>120</sup> Mueller, *Report on the Investigation into Russian Interference in the 2016 Presidential Election*.

<sup>121</sup> Bilal, "Hybrid Warfare – New Threats, Complexity, and Trust as the Antidote."

<sup>122</sup> Bilal, "Hybrid Warfare – New Threats, Complexity, and Trust," *NATO Review*, November 30, 2021.

## 1. Operation Gibraltar, 1965

The existing strategic environment in the 1960s provided Pakistan with a prospect to favorably resolve the Kashmir dispute. The opportunity was offered after the Sino-Indian War in 1962, when India was completely overwhelmed by the Chinese and in the process lost the Aksai Chin region of Ladakh in a matter of days.<sup>123</sup> During this period, even though being numerically inferior to the Indian Armed Forces, Pakistan's armed forces, being a U.S. ally as members of CENTO (Initially Baghdad Pact found in 1955, renamed Central Treaty Organization, 1959) and SEATO (South East Asia Treaty Organization, founded in 1954), enjoyed a qualitative edge over India,<sup>124</sup> which Pakistan wanted to exploit with reference to the annexation of Jammu and Kashmir through military application.<sup>125</sup> The Rann of Kutch (seasonal marsh located in the bordering area of Thar Desert in Pakistan's Sindh province and Kutch district of Gujarat, India) conflict in the April of 1965 resulted in some military gains for Pakistan over the disputed territory.<sup>126</sup>

Prior to these military and geopolitical developments, in December 1963, a holy relic (believed to be the hair of the Holy Prophet Muhammad PBUH) from the Hazratbal shrine in Srinagar disappeared.<sup>127</sup> This one event triggered unrest and deep religious passion among Muslims in the disputed territory, which was seen by Pakistan as a perfect opportunity for an uprising against the Indian state.<sup>128</sup> These considerations convinced Pakistani policy makers that the use of a covert approach followed by the threat of an all-

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<sup>123</sup> Bruce Ridell, "As India and China Clash, JFK's 'Forgotten Crisis' Is Back," Brookings Institute, June 17, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/06/17/as-india-and-china-clash-jfks-forgotten-crisis-is-back/>.

<sup>124</sup> Muhammad Ayub Khan, "The Pakistan-American Alliance Stresses and Strains," *Foreign Affairs*, January 1964, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/1964-01-01/pakistan-american-alliance>.

<sup>125</sup> Lieutenant General Tejinder Singh Shergill (Retired), "An Overview of 1965 Indo-Pak Conflict Strategic and Operational Insights," *SP's Land Forces*, no. 4, 2015, <https://www.spslandforces.com/story/?id=366>.

<sup>126</sup> Maninder Dabas, "When Indo-Pak Armies Met at Rann of Kutch, Leading to Operation Gibraltar and 1965 War," *India Times*, October 19, 2016, <https://www.indiatimes.com/news/india/when-indo-pak-armies-met-at-rann-of-kutch-leading-to-operation-gibraltar-and-1965-war-263845.html>.

<sup>127</sup> Victoria Schofield, *Kashmir in Conflict: India, Pakistan and the Unending War* (I.B. Tauris, 2003), 4.

<sup>128</sup> Schofield. *Kashmir in Conflict: India, Pakistan and the Unending War*, 108.

out war would influence an advantageous solution in Kashmir, thus favoring a hybrid option over classic conventional means.<sup>129</sup> Gibraltar was the codename given to the operation wherein Pakistan would covertly infiltrate regular forces that would join up with the local Kashmiris and start a widespread revolt against Indian rule.<sup>130</sup> If successful, Pakistan hoped to gain control over Kashmir. The operation failed, but it did expose the military and political circles within India and Pakistan to the idea of hybrid warfare in its own way as a means of pursuing strategic objectives while fusing conventional and non-conventional means in both kinetic and non-kinetic domains.

## 2. 1971 War

The conflict in erstwhile East Pakistan (present-day Bangladesh) in 1971 marked the transition of a crisis of socio-economic nature into a politico-military conflict.<sup>131</sup> The main tools utilized for the policy ends included strategic communication, diplomacy, cultural invasion, international media, civil rights organizations, print and electronic media, East Pakistani intellectuals, Hindu teachers in East Pakistan, and whispering campaigns.<sup>132</sup> Hybrid warfare strands applicable to 1971 Indo-Pak war included the following:

### a. *Shaping of the External Environment*

According to former Indian Foreign Secretary, JN Dixit, “The Government of India decided on a two-track approach to resolve East Pakistan crisis. Firstly, to support the liberation struggle to exert pressure on the Pakistan Government to respect electoral verdict of 1970. Secondly, mobilize international public opinion through bilateral contacts and the UN.”<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Sultan M. Hali, “Operation Gibraltar—An Unmitigated Disaster?” *Criterion Quarterly* 7, no. 1 (March 21, 2012), <https://criterion-quarterly.com/operation-gibraltar-an-unmitigated-disaster/>.

<sup>130</sup> Aditya Narayan Sharma, “An Unholy Alliance of Guns, God, and Government Operation Gibraltar, 1965,” *Economic & Political Weekly*, 53, no. 16 (April 2018), <https://www.epw.in/journal/2018/16/commentary/operation-gibraltar-1965.html>.

<sup>131</sup> Major General Sukhwant Singh, “East Pakistan: The Problem,” *Indian Defence Review* (November 2016), <http://www.indiandefencereview.com/spotlights/east-pakistan-the-problem/>.

<sup>132</sup> J.N. Dixit, *Across Borders: Fifty Years of India's Foreign Policy* (New Delhi: Sangam Books Ltd, 1998), 105.

<sup>133</sup> Dixit, *Across Borders: Fifty Years of India's Foreign Policy*.

*b. Affecting the Internal Situation*

India had very shrewdly adopted a policy of resentment against West Pakistan and appeasement to attract East Pakistan by manipulating the existing fissures that had emerged due to political and economic misgivings of East Pakistan.<sup>134</sup> India enjoyed a strong influence over East Bengali intelligentsia and elites, many of whom were Hindus, as Calcutta was regarded by many Bengalis as their cultural capital due to relative cultural affinity.<sup>135</sup> Additionally:

- (1) In a response to the hijack of an Indian airliner in January 1970 by hijackers from Indian-occupied Kashmir, India played a strategic masterstroke by banning use of its airspace to Pakistan, thereby virtually isolating the two parts of Pakistan.<sup>136</sup>
- (2) India supported centrifugal forces in East Pakistan that were critical of West Pakistan by subversion, propaganda, material support, training, and direction<sup>137</sup> and convinced the Bengali public servants serving in the

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<sup>134</sup> Jagmohan Meher, “Dynamics of Pakistan’s Disintegration: The Case of East Pakistan 1947–1971,” *Sage Journals* 71, no. 4 (2015), <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0974928415600849>.

<sup>135</sup> Meher, “Dynamics of Pakistan’s Disintegration: The Case of East Pakistan 1947–1971.”

<sup>136</sup> Kapil Kak, “India’s Grand Strategy for the 1971 War,” *CLAWS Journal* (Summer 2012), 88–101, [https://archive.claws.in/images/journals\\_doc/1394790936Kapil%20Kak%20%20CJ%20Sumer%202012.pdf](https://archive.claws.in/images/journals_doc/1394790936Kapil%20Kak%20%20CJ%20Sumer%202012.pdf).

<sup>137</sup> Major General Khadim Hussain Raja (Retired), *A Stranger in My Own Country East Pakistan 1969–1971* (Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2012), 80.

western wing of the country and in diplomatic missions abroad to assist the separatists with required official intelligence.<sup>138</sup>

- (3) India physically supported Mukti Bahini to launch insurgency operations to embroil the Pak Army in internal operations.<sup>139</sup>

***c. Dominating the Information Domain***

India formulated information operations with the aim of influencing and targeting foreign governments and policy makers, domestic and foreign audiences, the East Pakistani populace, and the Pakistan Army. Research and Analysis Wing's (RAW) psychological warfare division did make sure to bring the unrest in East Pakistan under the international spotlight. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi herself reached out to the world to project the crisis of East Pakistan and stance of India.<sup>140</sup> The extensive propaganda campaign created an environment where India either received support for its actions from the international community or at least non-opposition for its policies and actions.<sup>141</sup> Major policy objectives included the following:

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<sup>138</sup> Pragnya Patnaik, "How R&AW Shaped India's Victory in the 1971 War," *Times of India*, December 19, 2021, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/pragnya-speaks/how-raw-shaped-indias-victory-in-the-1971-war/>.

<sup>139</sup> Kak, India's Grand Strategy, CLAWS Journal.

<sup>140</sup> Patnaik, How R&AW Shaped India's Victory, *Times of India*.

<sup>141</sup> Patnaik, How R&AW Shaped India's Victory, *Times of India*.

- (1) Delegitimize the Pakistan State in East Pakistan and label it as a barbarian “occupation force,” to exploit the socio-political fault lines<sup>142</sup>
- (2) Project India as flag bearer of the international community’s support to the oppressed people of East Pakistan.<sup>143</sup> The Indian Prime Minister of the time traveled herself to important world capitals to spread the Indian message.
- (3) Enhance Bengali nationalism in the East Pakistani populace to a point of no return based on anti-West Pakistani sentiments while guarding against development of any secessionist trends or pan-Bengali nationalism in West Bengal<sup>144</sup>

**d. *Employing Sub-conventional Warfare***

India planned Operation Jackpot as the irregular component of the campaign under General B.N. Sarkar, Director of Military Operations for the Eastern Command and “General” Osmani, Commander Mukti Bahini with the following contours:<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Mir Sherbaz Khetran, “Indian Interference in Balochistan,” *Strategic Studies* 37, no. 3 (Autumn 2017): 112–125, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/48537560.pdf>.

<sup>143</sup> Patnaik, How R&AW Shaped India’s Victory, *Times of India*.

<sup>144</sup> What has Been the Impact of the Creation of Bangladesh? *History Today* 71, no. 3 (March 2021), <https://www.historytoday.com/archive/head-head/what-has-been-impact-creation-bangladesh>.

<sup>145</sup> Mandeep Singh Bajwa, “Operation Jackpot: What Went into Launching the Mukti Bahini,” *The Indian Express*, November 1, 2021, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/military-digest-operation-jackpot-and-what-went-into-launching-the-mukti-bahini-7601258/>.

- (1) Established training and support bases for insurgents close to the border<sup>146</sup>
- (2) Organized insurgents into a coherent infrastructure with eleven sectors for command and control of Mukti Bahini while denying rise of any alternative setups<sup>147</sup>
- (3) Focused attacks on communication infrastructure, military organizations, and —government apparatus to deny freedom of movement to the Pakistan Army while instigating massive reprisals against the civilian population<sup>148</sup>
- (4) Established no-go areas and safe zones in population centers and gradually enlarged areas under insurgents' control<sup>149</sup>
- (5) Occupied conventional-style lodgment areas and then requested international diplomatic recognition and intervention

*e. Launch of Conventional Campaign*

After creating the ripe environment for a coup de grâce by utilizing all elements of national power, the Indian army worked with the Mukti Bahini to gain international credence under R2P and then launched the military prong that finally led to the dismemberment of Pakistan on 16 December 1971.<sup>150</sup>

**E. CONCLUSION**

Hybrid warfare cannot be termed as a fresh commodity in the domain of warfare. In recent years it has attracted a lot of scholarly attention. The concept of hybrid warfare is perceived by nations as per the dictates of their respective strategic needs. The concept is gaining more currency in geo-politics for achieving desired political objectives owing to

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<sup>146</sup> Bajwa, "Operation Jackpot: What Went into Launching the Mukti Bahini."

<sup>147</sup> Bajwa, "Operation Jackpot: What Went into Launching the Mukti Bahini."

<sup>148</sup> Jack F. R. Jacob, *Surrender at Dacca: Birth of a Nation* (Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 1997), 90.

<sup>149</sup> Jacob, *Surrender at Dacca: Birth of a Nation*, 91.

<sup>150</sup> Patnaik, How R&AW Shaped India's Victory, *Times of India*.

the existing global order, which is not conducive to erstwhile conventional wars for the reasons highlighted earlier in this chapter. We are living through an age of war of narratives. Perceptions have become realities and hybrid warfare is all about managing perceptions.

In the context of the India-Pakistan equation in South Asia, hybrid warfare is not an alien phenomenon for either country. The study of conflict between two nations reflects manifestation of the concept of hybrid warfare in its true terms. Both nations employed non-conventional means including both kinetic (sub-conventional) and non-kinetic (information operations) to undermine each other before overtly resorting to military means in respective wars of 1965 and 1971. As Pakistan in 1965 attempted to take advantage of anti-Indian sentiment in Jammu and Kashmir coupled with a guerrilla operation before an all-out war, India in 1971 very successfully exploited the existing fault lines in East Pakistan through a well-orchestrated propaganda campaign alongside sub-conventional operations of Mukti Bahini prior to the start of an overt conventional military campaign. Hence, hybrid warfare had been in play historically, and South Asia is no exception.

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### III. HYBRID WARFARE: A NEW LEASE ON LIFE FOR TERRORISM

Terrorism is not an end in itself, but a means to the end for great powers under the overarching phenomenon of hybrid warfare.<sup>151</sup> Terrorism can largely be non-attributable especially in hybrid warfare and hence is applied in strategic environments where more overt actions are not deemed feasible.<sup>152</sup> Russian support for local terrorist outfits in Syria (Anna Borshchevskaya claimed that the Russian Federal Security Service deliberately pushed North Caucasians out of Russia to join ISIS and other terrorist organizations in Syria) is the manifestation of the same idea of employing terrorism as a tool of hybrid warfare.<sup>153</sup> Therefore, the concept of terrorism is characterized by inherent inconsistencies, conspiracies, mixed ideologies, and the ability to generate immense fear.<sup>154</sup> The role of terrorism in hybrid warfare has been spelled out by Peter Braun: “The main objective of terrorist activity in a hybrid environment is to spread fear and terror, to intimidate populations and degrade the will of an adversary. When multiple terrorist activities follow a central strategy, they can destabilize a state or a society to a considerable degree, even if an individual acting alone may cause relatively little harm.”<sup>155</sup> This chapter addresses the fundamental issue that the world needs to confront terrorism and hybrid threats together.

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<sup>151</sup> Scott Jasper and Scott Moreland, “The Islamic State Is a Hybrid Threat: Why Does That Matter?” *Small Wars*, December 2, 2014. <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/the-islamic-state-is-a-hybrid-threat-why-does-that-matter>.

<sup>152</sup> Peter Braun, “Fighting ‘Men in Jeans’ in the grey zone between peace and war,” NDC Policy Brief, no. 18 (August 2019), NATO Defense College, <https://www.ndc.nato.int/news/news.php?icode=1344>.

<sup>153</sup> Anna Borshchevskaya et al., *The Russian Way of War: Threat Perception and Approaches to Counterterrorism*, Foreign Policy Research Institute (September 2020), <https://www.fpri.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/russias-war-in-syria.pdf>.

<sup>154</sup> Laqueur and Wall, *The Future of Terrorism*, 2.

<sup>155</sup> Braun, “Fighting ‘Men in Jeans’.”

## A. HYBRID THREATS AND TERRORISM

Acts of violent terror on a geostrategic canvas constitute segments of hybrid threats, a concept that was also asserted by President Obama in 2014.<sup>156</sup> According to Giray Sadik, “terrorism has the potential to become a key part of hybrid strategy in the grey zone where lines between state and non-state, domestic and international, civilian and military, physical and cyber domains are deliberately blurred.”<sup>157</sup> On occasion, terrorist attacks have been employed to obscure the correlation among these domains, to achieve superior asymmetric effects countering an antagonist possessing greater conventional strength.<sup>158</sup> Thus, in the hybrid environment, separating terrorism from hybrid threats is not deemed viable.<sup>159</sup>

In this context, the threat posed by terrorism under the ambit of hybrid warfare in the emerging security environment is real for both Pakistan and Afghanistan as NSAs like Al-Qaida, ISIS, and TTP remain operative in the region. Moreover, the relevance of terrorism in today’s regional environment, especially after the Taliban take over in Afghanistan, gains even more significance. Considering the past alliance of the Taliban and Al-Qaida, the revival of the latter seems inevitable.<sup>160</sup> Terrorist organizations in the past have put to use ideological themes through novel methods of execution, 9/11 being the most glaring example, and the same can be expected in the future as well. In Pakistan and Afghanistan, the extremist religious ideologies are the easiest to be exploited by militant groups. The social fabric of the region—reflected through laws, educational curricula, and politics—provides fodder for such ideologies.<sup>161</sup> Militant groups can always find recruits on the basis of religious ideologies from the general populace.

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<sup>156</sup> Jasper and Moreland, *The Islamic State is a Hybrid Threat: Why Does That Matter?*

<sup>157</sup> Sadik, “How Can NATO Effectively Counter Terrorism and Hybrid Threats?” 60

<sup>158</sup> Sadik, “How Can NATO Effectively Counter Terrorism and Hybrid Threats?” 60.

<sup>159</sup> Sadik, “How Can NATO Effectively Counter Terrorism and Hybrid Threats?” 60.

<sup>160</sup> Gunaratna et al., *The Full Circle of Counterterrorism*.

<sup>161</sup> Madiha Afzal, “Terrorism in Pakistan Has Declined, but the Underlying Roots of Extremism Remain,” *Brookings Institute*, January 15, 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2021/01/15/terrorism-in-pakistan-has-declined-but-the-underlying-roots-of-extremism-remain/>.

According to Dr. Andrew Mumford, unless terrorism is not viewed through the prism of hybrid warfare the counterterrorist realization will remain blind-sided by the uncertain attributes of modern hybrid threats.<sup>162</sup> Mumford cites the instances of ISIS operations in Syria and Russian-sponsored local militias in Crimea to explain the significance of viewing terrorism as an extension of hybrid warfare. Mumford further adds that, “tactical acts of terrorism seen today in hybrid war has the collective capacity to have a strategic effect given the way it is being used in conjunction with other conventional modes of conflict.”<sup>163</sup>

## **B. HYBRIDIZATION OF TERRORISM**

Beyond terrorism’s deep-rooted linkage to hybrid threats there exists another increasing phenomenon identified as “hybridization of terrorism,” which refers to the growing danger from those terrorist groups who possess hybrid abilities.<sup>164</sup> Current conflicts across the conflict spectrum—especially in Syria, Afghanistan, and Yemen—reveal the manifestation of hybrid strategies, making inadvertent outcomes a reality. For instance, in Syria all fighting groups are gaining from substantial material assistance from foreign sponsors, in addition to the pillaging of Syrian military depots.<sup>165</sup> Owing to the uncertainty of relations among various groups, arms and ammunition often end up in the hands of other belligerents than they were meant to support.<sup>166</sup> The increasing hybrid capability of outfits like Al-Qaida, ISIS, and their regional surrogates are the reflection of this growing phenomenon.<sup>167</sup> Likewise, great powers may strengthen terrorist groups by

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<sup>162</sup> Dr. Andrew Mumford et al., *The Role of Counter Terrorism in Hybrid Warfare*, Contract No. 03–16-C-011 (The University of Nottingham, August 2016), 2, <https://www.tmmm.tsk.tr/publication/researches/04-TheRoleofCounterTerrorisminHybridWarfare.pdf>.

<sup>163</sup> Mumford, 2.

<sup>164</sup> Sadik, How Can NATO Effectively Counter Terrorism and Hybrid Threats? 60.

<sup>165</sup> Sadik, How Can NATO Effectively Counter Terrorism and Hybrid Threats? 60.

<sup>166</sup> Lawrence Marzouk, Maria Chereseva, Jelena Cosic, and Ivan Angelovski, “The Coyote’s Trail—A Machine Gun’s Path from Serbia to Syria,” *Balkan Insight*, May 9, 2017, <https://balkaninsight.com/2017/05/09/the-coyote-s-trail-a-machine-gun-s-path-from-serbia-to-syria-05-08-2017/>.

<sup>167</sup> Sadik, How Can NATO Effectively Counter Terrorism and Hybrid Threats? 60.

producing and providing access to destructive weapons (drones or anti-tank weapons).<sup>168</sup> The intertwining of these trends lessens the technological advantage conventional actors usually enjoy against NSAs (terror outfits) and therefore reduce the danger terrorists encounter when confronting conventional armed forces.<sup>169</sup> This makes the terrorists even stronger and the result includes prolonged conflicts (e.g., Libya, Syria, Afghanistan, etc.), increasing civilian fatalities and causing massive refugee outflows.

### C. THE ROLE OF NON-STATE ACTORS AND PROXIES

NSAs represent the intricate franchise of violence that exists next to the non-kinetic dimensions of hybrid warfare.<sup>170</sup> But in certain circumstances, “NSA” cannot be termed as a comprehensive tag to explain numerous entities as succeeding lines will explain.<sup>171</sup> The presence of Russian operatives in disguise of local militias in the erstwhile Soviet republics highlights the same phenomenon where categorization of entities is not just limited to NSAs.<sup>172</sup> NSAs have gained significance, in some regions outshining fragile states in authority.<sup>173</sup> A few are merely obscure arms of the state, even when they are intended to function as if they represented independent factions, for example, the Iraqi paramilitary outfit named Fedayeen Saddam, in the times of Saddam Hussein’s rule or the different Syrian pro-Assad regime militias, with few of the groups operating under the umbrella of National Defence Forces.<sup>174</sup> Others like the Jihadi groups in Pakistan and Afghanistan during the 1980s against the Soviets are classic proxies created by a benefactor

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<sup>168</sup> Braun, “Fighting ‘Men in Jeans’,” 3.

<sup>169</sup> Sadik, “How Can NATO Effectively Counter Terrorism and Hybrid Threats?” 60.

<sup>170</sup> Vladimir Rauta, “Towards a Typology of Non-State Actors in ‘Hybrid Warfare’: Proxy, Auxiliary, Surrogate and Affiliated Forces,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 33, no. 6 (2020): 1, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09557571.2019.1656600?scroll=top&needAccess=true>.

<sup>171</sup> Thanassis Cambanis, Dina Esfandiary, Sima Ghaddar, Michael Wahid Hanna, Aron Lund, and Renad Mansour, *Hybrid Actors—Armed Groups and State Fragmentation in the Middle East* (The Century Foundation Press New York, 2019), 7.

<sup>172</sup> Cambanis, Esfandiary, Ghaddar, Hanna, Lund, and Mansour, 7.

<sup>173</sup> Cambanis, Esfandiary, Ghaddar, Hanna, Lund, and Mansour, 7.

<sup>174</sup> Cambanis, Esfandiary, Ghaddar, Hanna, Lund, and Mansour, 7.

state, which function with a semblance of autonomy but in reality are entirely managed by their sponsor and serve their sponsor's policy objectives.<sup>175</sup>

### 1. Emergence of Non-State Actors

There is an increasing trend of globally acknowledged de jure states having proper territorial boundaries and state structures but who fail to exercise state authority and lack governance capacities to enforce writ of the state.<sup>176</sup> Political scientist Robert Jackson terms this phenomenon of creating a new form of actor as quasi-state.<sup>177</sup> Quasi-states present inherent weaknesses within state structures and often, in such circumstances, NSAs come in to fill that vacuum triggered as a consequence of the weakening of quasi-states. NSAs undertake governance affairs and experience the process of managing the affairs of statehood but do not enjoy authentic international recognition.<sup>178</sup> In countries like Afghanistan, political rivals, local groups, and jihadi groups perform fundamental public services that states fail to perform. The official and unofficial differences are vague because there exists an ambiguity between prevailing ground realities and recognized legal procedures.<sup>179</sup> Today's geostrategic makeup does not support the process of non-state entities transiting into proper states and this trend is likely to remain a lasting feature for the foreseeable future. Some of the actors within the existing geopolitical construct do undertake state-like roles but are denied recognition and acceptance under international law; instead, they develop into hybrid actors.<sup>180</sup>

The literature normally divides these actors into three distinct categories: criminal syndicates, terrorists or insurgents, and militias or warlords.<sup>181</sup> All three categories of NSAs use real or threat of violence to accomplish their goals. The variations are found in

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<sup>175</sup> Cambanis, Esfandiary, Ghaddar, Hanna, Lund, and Mansour, 7.

<sup>176</sup> Cambanis, Esfandiary, Ghaddar, Hanna, Lund, and Mansour, 7.

<sup>177</sup> Robert H. Jackson, *Quasi-States: Sovereignty, International Relations and the Third World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 237.

<sup>178</sup> Jackson, *Quasi-States*, 27–29.

<sup>179</sup> Jackson, *Quasi-States*, 27–29.

<sup>180</sup> Cambanis, Esfandiary, Ghaddar, Hanna, Lund, and Mansour, 10.

<sup>181</sup> Cambanis, Esfandiary, Ghaddar, Hanna, Lund, and Mansour, 12.

their terminal aims. Criminal syndicates break the law or challenge the state for purely financial gains.<sup>182</sup> Terrorist groups employ violent behavior for achieving political objectives, by questioning the writ of the state in quest of a new constitutional framework.<sup>183</sup> In contrast, militias do not intimidate or intend to take over the state, nor do they desire to only manipulate the failure of legitimate power for financial benefits. Rather, the militias prefer introducing their own form of power structure.<sup>184</sup> Historically, warlords from ancient times to the present era have been generally enigmatic leaders who control regions where the state's capacity to enforce its own legitimacy does not exist.<sup>185</sup>

The journey of several hybrid actors begins initially as warlords who act as services providers of basic amenities including security for their people down to the community level. Accessibility to weapons and capacity to muster combatants permit them to cement their status.<sup>186</sup> Osama Bin Laden is the prime example of the transformation of a war lord into a hybrid actor. Their combatants sign up for both ideological and financial motives.<sup>187</sup> Ideological reasons are often an outcome of ethnic or sectarian beliefs and correspond to a struggle against an outside threat.<sup>188</sup> The creation of the Mujahideen in Afghanistan against the USSR invasion and later uprising against U.S. presence demonstrate that largely ideology does stem from sectarian and ethnic beliefs. Financial motivations involve more avenues to generate funds such as establishing check posts, which warlords utilize to outsource labor costs and create support.<sup>189</sup> In most cases, warlords fail to transition into formal state actors. They enjoy neither the wherewithal to take over the government nor the flexibility to openly join it. Consequently, various warlords develop into hybrid

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<sup>182</sup> Cambanis, Esfandiary, Ghaddar, Hanna, Lund, and Mansour, 12.

<sup>183</sup> Cambanis, Esfandiary, Ghaddar, Hanna, Lund, and Mansour, 12.

<sup>184</sup> Cambanis, Esfandiary, Ghaddar, Hanna, Lund, and Mansour, 12.

<sup>185</sup> Ariel I. Ahram and Charles King, "The Warlord as Arbitrageur," *Theory and Society*, 41, no. 2 (2012): 169–86, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41349129>.

<sup>186</sup> Cambanis, Esfandiary, Ghaddar, Hanna, Lund, and Mansour, 13.

<sup>187</sup> Cambanis, Esfandiary, Ghaddar, Hanna, Lund, and Mansour, 13.

<sup>188</sup> Cambanis, Esfandiary, Ghaddar, Hanna, Lund, and Mansour, 13.

<sup>189</sup> Cambanis, Esfandiary, Ghaddar, Hanna, Lund, and Mansour, 13.

actors.<sup>190</sup> The hybrid actor thus symbolizes a vacuum between a localized warlord and the proper state actor.

In case of a failure to take over the state, a hybrid actor starts to create various mechanisms to sustain its potential, authenticity, and influence, even with less integration. This process involves maintaining presence both inside and outside the framework of the state.<sup>191</sup> On occasion, the hybrid actor collaborates with the state and at times, it goes head on against the state for capacity building, achieving legitimacy, and eventually acquiring power.<sup>192</sup> Hybrid actors pursue establishment of parallel regionalized governance structures with the purpose to gain a footing in the power corridors of the state.<sup>193</sup> Thus, the presence of ISIS and Al-Qaida in Afghanistan presents the same challenge for an NSA of its nature, thus making it a security challenge for the region.

## 2. Proxy War

Conventional perceptions of proxy warfare suggest that states use proxies to further their political aims in a cost-effective way, while reducing the risk of getting entangled in a major military conflict. According to Assaf Moghadam and Michel Wyss, states employ proxies to accomplish geo strategic ends, but the states envisage the proxies as an indirect, mainly military instrument to attain set objectives.<sup>194</sup> Proxy wars are characterized by a type of confrontation that is indirect and involves a different belligerent than the two principal actors, a belligerent that is employed by either of the main actors to impact strategic results of the conflict.<sup>195</sup> Proxies can be distinguished from direct involvement or

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<sup>190</sup> Erwin Van Veen and Feike Fliervoet, “Dealing with Tools of Political (Dis)Order” (working paper, Clingendael Netherlands Institute of International Relations, December 2018), 17, <https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2018-12/dealing-with-tools-of-political-disorder.pdf>.

<sup>191</sup> Cambanis, Esfandiary, Ghaddar, Hanna, Lund, and Mansour, 15.

<sup>192</sup> Cambanis, Esfandiary, Ghaddar, Hanna, Lund, and Mansour, 14.

<sup>193</sup> Veen and Fliervoet, “Dealing with Tools of Political (Dis)Order,” 17.

<sup>194</sup> Assaf Moghadam and Michel Wyss, “The Political Power of Proxies: Why Nonstate Actors Use Local Surrogates,” *International Security* 44, no. 4 (Spring 2020): 119–157, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/754067/pdf>.

<sup>195</sup> Andrew Mumford, *Proxy Warfare* (Polity Press, 2013), 1.

covert action.<sup>196</sup> For one thing, proxy war has been a lasting component of modern warfare and is likely to continue, because the accomplishment of a favored strategic conclusion in a certain conflict is overshadowed by the cost of direct engagement based on an assessment of gains, philosophy, and risk.<sup>197</sup> This trend has been especially widespread in the post-World War II environment, owing to the fear of employing nuclear weapons, thus warranting a cautious approach towards conflict engagement to avoid the colossal scale of destruction in a possible nuclear showdown.<sup>198</sup> Proxies employed by states are means of furthering strategic interests to weaken opposing states through sub-state entities with the aim of ensuring certain strategic consequences from a conflict.<sup>199</sup>

Proxy wars are fundamental to a bond between a sponsor, which could be a state or NSA external to the equation of an ongoing conflict, and they are the conduit for arms, training, and financing from the sponsor.<sup>200</sup> Such activities are undertaken presumably for purposes of expanding political cum strategic interests, while concurrently curtailing risk.<sup>201</sup> In sum, proxy wars have become the rational alternative for states, instead of engaging in all-out conventional wars with heavy costs to pursue strategic ends.<sup>202</sup> Even though proxies have been employed throughout history as a means of achieving the aims of third parties, it was only in the previous century that war by proxy was altered into a prolific type of conflict.<sup>203</sup> In fact, proxy wars became deeply rooted in the geopolitics of the Cold War.

The relationship between sponsors and their proxies are environment specific and are mired in a host of questions concerning consent, stages of engagement, and the

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<sup>196</sup> Mumford, *Proxy Warfare*, 1.

<sup>197</sup> Mumford, *Proxy Warfare*, 2.

<sup>198</sup> Mumford, *Proxy Warfare*, 2.

<sup>199</sup> Mumford, *Proxy Warfare*, 2.

<sup>200</sup> Mumford, *Proxy Warfare*, 2.

<sup>201</sup> Mumford, *Proxy Warfare*, 11.

<sup>202</sup> Chris Loveman, "Assessing the Phenomenon of Proxy Intervention," *Conflict, Security and Development*, 2, no. 3 (2002): 30, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/14678800200590618?needAccess=true>.

<sup>203</sup> Mumford, *Proxy Warfare*, 12.

assessment of subsequent gain.<sup>204</sup> In this context, hybrid actors more often than not are closely associated with an external benefactor.<sup>205</sup> In most instances, the benefactor provided help to assist the hybrid actor from its initial days, supplying resources along with training.<sup>206</sup> Iran's support for Hezbollah provides an adequate example of an external sponsor's investment in a hybrid actor. Yet, there are times when leverage of the proxy increases and a power shift takes place in the equation with the sponsor state. Such a change can cause the rise of a far more equitable partnership between the two entities, with the proxy in a position to define more of its own political goals and military strategy autonomously. For instance, the same phenomenon unfolded in terms of the relationship between Syria and Hezbollah in the post-2005 environment.<sup>207</sup>

Great powers in the past have applied the strategy of employing proxies (by the USSR in Vietnam or by the U.S. in Afghanistan) against each other. Moreover, Russian interference in Syria has to be seen in the context of GPC, as this interference was fundamentally designed to erode the U.S.-led global order because Russia considers that the U.S.-led global order had been disadvantageous to its own strategic interests. This explains Russian partnership with groups like Hezbollah.<sup>208</sup>

#### **D. HYBRID THREATS AND TERRORISM IN PAKISTAN AND AFGHANISTAN**

The prevailing geopolitical setting of the region hosting these two countries provides a conducive platform for great powers to unleash the weapon of terrorism as part of the kinetic domain of hybrid warfare by employing NSAs to further political ends. Pakistan and Afghanistan have largely been unsuccessful in effectively dealing with, or even recognizing, the different uncertainties and complexities of life faced by their

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<sup>204</sup> Loveman, "Assessing the Phenomenon of Proxy Intervention," 31.

<sup>205</sup> Cambanis, Esfandiary, Ghaddar, Hanna, Lund, and Mansour, x.

<sup>206</sup> Cambanis, Esfandiary, Ghaddar, Hanna, Lund, and Mansour, 16.

<sup>207</sup> Mumford, *Proxy Warfare*, 20.

<sup>208</sup> Borshchevskaya et al., *The Russian Way of War: Threat Perception and Approaches to Counterterrorism*.

people.<sup>209</sup> The vacuum left by the inability of the states to perform is largely attributed to the rise of phenomenon like the Taliban in Afghanistan and TTP and BLA in Pakistan; moreover, this vulnerability of the state is also exploited by transnational NSAs who find refuge in such countries to undertake the role of proxies and surrogate warriors.<sup>210</sup> Furthermore, with reference to Afghanistan, international policymakers' persistence on maintaining support to quasi-states and refusal to recognize erstwhile NSAs like the Taliban regime is impeding Afghanistan's transformation.<sup>211</sup> This section examines the reasons that make Pakistan and Afghanistan ideal battle grounds of great power proxies under the looming threat of terrorism.

### 1. Pakistan: Land of the Pure or Contradictions?

Pakistan was conceived as the land of the pure that promised hope, prosperity, and security to the people who shared a common value system and derived inspiration from an ideological belief. Pakistan is an extremely diverse society in relation to its ethnic, linguistic, and sectarian arrangement. This diversity has proven increasingly difficult to manage—or govern. Extremist attitudes in matters related to religion and ethnicity have taken front seat and the element of tolerance is fast becoming a rare commodity in societal behaviors.<sup>212</sup> Moreover, the political landscape of the country further complicates Pakistan's situation. Weak political institutions mainly due to dynastic politics and repeated military interventions coupled with incompetent governments have not allowed the common people to become part of the political process.<sup>213</sup> Furthermore, it is the socio-economic disparity that puts additional strain on the societal makeup. The increasing gap

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<sup>209</sup> Noor Akbar, "Problems Caused by Economic Disparity in Pakistan," *Content Generate*, July 2, 2020, <https://contentgenerate.com/problems-caused-by-economic-disparity/>.

<sup>210</sup> Meirav Mishali-Ram, "State Failure Reassessed," *World Affairs: The Journal of International Issues* 17, no. 1 (Spring Jan–Mar 2013): 80–107, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/48535493.pdf>.

<sup>211</sup> Isabelle Khurshudyan, Reis Thebault, and Gerry Shih, "U.S. Allies and Adversaries Are Holding Off for Now on Recognizing, Aiding the Taliban," *The Washington Post*, August 20, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/08/20/afghanistan-taliban-international-recognition-aid/>.

<sup>212</sup> Irm Haleem, "Ethnic and Sectarian Violence and the Propensity towards Praetorianism in Pakistan," *Third World Quarterly*, 24, no. 3 (August 2010): 463–477, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/0143659032000084410?needAccess=true>.

<sup>213</sup> Jayshree Bajoria, "Pakistan's Fragile Foundations," *Council on Foreign Relations*, March 11, 2009, <https://www.cfr.org/background/pakistans-fragile-foundations>.

between the privileged and deprived is further dividing an already polarized society.<sup>214</sup> The following issues define the threat spectrum of Pakistan and eventually serve as the breeding grounds for terrorism and allow other powers to launch hybrid warfare through their sponsored proxies:

**a. Ethnic Diversity**

Stephen P. Cohen remarks that “Pakistan is one of the world’s most ethnically and linguistically complex states.”<sup>215</sup> Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Balochistan, and Kashmir make Pakistan complete, but Pakistan has long struggled with the questions of ethnicity and nationalism. The federation attempts to hold Pakistan together against the pull of ethnic centrifugal forces.<sup>216</sup> Ethnic divide has been a persistent phenomenon haunting the Pakistani political landscape.<sup>217</sup> The emergence of NSAs like the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA), Baloch National Army (BNA), and Sindh Liberation Army (SLA) is the result of the reservations of marginalized ethnic entities.

**b. Sectarian Issues**

Sectarian dissonance between the Sunnis and Shias continues to blemish the social fabric of Pakistani society. The external regional environment has much to do with the increasing sectarian divide in Pakistan; however, as both Iran and Saudi Arabia invested in their proxies within Pakistan to undermine each other. Unfortunately, Pakistan’s society became the collateral damage of these regional proxies.<sup>218</sup> In this context two prominent events of the later part of the 20th century have much to do with the present state of affairs

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<sup>214</sup> Syed Mohammad Ali, “The Tale of Two Pakistans,” *The Express Tribune*, June 3, 2022, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2359706/the-tale-of-two-pakistans>.

<sup>215</sup> Stephen P. Cohen, *The Idea of Pakistan* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 367.

<sup>216</sup> Christopher O. Hurst, “Pakistan’s Ethnic Divide,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 19, no. 2 (1996): 179–198, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10576109608436002>.

<sup>217</sup> Veena Kukreja, “Ethnic Diversity, Political Aspirations and State Response: A Case Study of Pakistan,” *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, March 6, 2020, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0019556120906585>.

<sup>218</sup> Zahid Shahab Ahmed and Shahram Akbarzedah, “Pakistan Caught between Iran and Saudi Arabia,” *Contemporary South Asia*, Vol. 28, no. 3 (June 2020): 336–350, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09584935.2020.1779181>.

when it comes to sectarian polarization. One was the Iranian revolution, and the other was the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. After the revolution of 1979, Iran became a theocracy and, as the biggest Shia country, decided to export its ideology in the region, especially to countries with Shia populations. In this context, Pakistan as home to the second-largest Shia population after Iran became an important country for Iranian leadership.<sup>219</sup> The Afghan jihad provided impetus to the growth of Deoband (Sunni) Islamist fighters within the country like Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), which prompted the Shias to form militant groups like Sipah-e-Muhammad (SeM). These militant groups were also a consequence of a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which continues to date.<sup>220</sup>

### *c. Governance and Security*

A substantial section of Pakistani society finds itself socially and politically excluded. Landless laborers, tenants, and certain ethnic and sectarian groups feel neglected and hold the state and the elite responsible for their plight.<sup>221</sup> Civil service (bureaucracy) in Pakistan is a pure manifestation of elite capture. The bureaucracy is structured in a way that it inevitably promotes an elite culture within the country's upper class, which raises questions in the minds of the masses about the state's intent and ability to deliver for the common people.<sup>222</sup> The gap between the haves and have nots is fast increasing in Pakistani society. According to the National Human Development Report for Pakistan endorsed by the UN, the financial disparities in income have increased alarmingly. "The poorest 1 per cent of the Pakistani population is estimated to possess around 0.15 per cent of the country's national income. On the other hand, the richest 1 per cent control 9 per cent of national income."<sup>223</sup> This country with the fifth-largest population in the world—220

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<sup>219</sup> Ahmed and Akbarzedah, "Pakistan Caught between Iran and Saudi Arabia."

<sup>220</sup> Col Harsh Vardhan Singh, "Sectarian Divide in Islam and Fall out in Pakistan," Vivekananda International Foundation, October 21, 2019, <https://www.vifindia.org/article/2019/october/21/sectarian-divide-in-islam-and-fall-out-in-pakistan>.

<sup>221</sup> Marco Mezzera and Safiya Aftab, "Pakistan State-Society Analysis, Initiative for Peace Building" (working paper, Clingendael Netherlands Institute of International Relations, January 2009), 18, [https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/20090300\\_cru\\_pakistan\\_mezzera.pdf](https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/20090300_cru_pakistan_mezzera.pdf).

<sup>222</sup> Hassan Baig, "Elite Capture," *The News International*, January 22, 2022, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/927107-elite-capture>.

<sup>223</sup> Mohammad, "The Tale of Two Pakistans."

million people—ranks 149th on the Human Development Index.<sup>224</sup> This bitter reality is the reflection of how the society and the state structure have largely contributed to the creation of islands of prosperity in the sea of poverty. Turmoil in Balochistan and the emergence of PTM in KP for seeking economic prosperity reflect the increasing distrust of a segment of the population in the state of Pakistan. This lack of faith in the state system is causing social and political unrest, which provides an opportunity to hostile nations to lure in the disgruntled youth and employ them against Pakistan through hybrid warfare.

These fault lines have allowed a mushrooming growth of different ethnic, sectarian, and social movements including numerous violent NSAs including SSP, TTP, Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (LeT), and BLA. The rise of PTM in the province of KP reflects the reaction of discontentment brewing within the population of underdeveloped regions in the country. Manzoor Pashteen the leader of PTM declared that “Nationalism is a reaction against the racist policies of the state.”<sup>225</sup> He further desired to resolve the imbalance in the distribution of state resources to Pashtoons, along with other marginalized communities like Baloch. These assertions of the PTM leader explain that ethnic identity and politico-economic deprivation are used to attract the masses to stand up against the state.

## **2. The Afghan Conundrum**

On the eve of the coup against King Zahir Shah in 1973, *The New York Times* reported that Afghanistan had just “leaped into the sixteenth century.” Nearly four decades later in 2010, British Defense Minister, Liam Fox, described Afghanistan as a “broken 13th-century country.”<sup>226</sup> The question is, why does Afghanistan continue to be perceived as such and why is it such a conducive turf for the use of other players including both state actors and NSAs?

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<sup>224</sup> Human Development Index, 2022, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/hdi-by-country>.

<sup>225</sup> Lynne O’Donnell, “Pakistani Pashtun Leader,” *Foreign Policy*, March 2, 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/03/02/pakistan-politics-manzoor-pashteen-pashtun-nationalism/>.

<sup>226</sup> Thomas Barfield, “Is Afghanistan ‘Medieval’?” *Foreign Policy*, June 2, 2010, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2010/06/02/is-afghanistan-medieval-2/>.

Like Pakistan, Afghanistan also has a diverse ethnic society with strong religious influence. Moreover, lack of political stability within a predominantly tribal culture further compounds the Afghan quagmire. The following factors contribute to Afghanistan's ongoing vulnerability to terrorism and make it a likely battlefield of great power proxies under the umbrella of hybrid warfare:

*a. Ethnic Diversity*

Afghanistan, like many other developing nations, experiences the dilemma of developing harmony and solidarity at the national level in a diverse society.<sup>227</sup> What makes the Afghan issue even more complex is the fact that distinct ethnicities have been made to co-exist not because of any shared motivation or cause but due to the unfolding of political events in the country that resulted in an unintentional co-existence.<sup>228</sup> Ethnically and linguistically, Afghans have a mix of population: Pashtuns constitute largest ethnic entity with 42 percent of the population, followed by Tajiks (27 percent), Uzbeks (9 percent), Hazaras (9 percent), Aimaq (4 percent), Turkmen (3 percent), Baloch (2 percent), and 4 percent other small groups.<sup>229</sup> Dari (Persian) and Pashto are official languages. The Tajik and Hazara communities mostly speak Dari while Pashto is mostly spoken in the eastern and southern parts of the country. Turkmen and Uzbek are spoken in the northern regions of the country, which demonstrates that the country is divided into different regions fundamentally on ethnic grounds.<sup>230</sup> The rise of the Taliban can also be attributed to the phenomenon of ethnic polarization, as the Taliban were a pre-dominantly Pashtun militia and were able to garner support from Pashtun warlords.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> Ghulam Mustafa and Adil Khan, "Afghanistan: A Study in Internal Conflict and National Cohesion," *International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding* 2, no. 4 (August 2015): 31, <https://ijmmu.com/index.php/ijmmu/article/view/18/18>.

<sup>228</sup> Mustafa and Khan, "Afghanistan: A Study in Internal Conflict and National Cohesion."

<sup>229</sup> Afghanistan Demographics, accessed May 10, 2021, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/afghanistan-population>.

<sup>230</sup> Mustafa and Khan, "Afghanistan: A Study in Internal Conflict and National Cohesion."

<sup>231</sup> Mustafa and Khan, "Afghanistan: A Study in Internal Conflict and National Cohesion."

**b. Sectarian Issues**

Religion still penetrates all facets of everyday social interactions in Afghan rural society; nothing is devoid of it.<sup>232</sup> Its impact is visible in all spheres of Afghan society, ranging from business to matters of conflict resolution. In Afghan society it is difficult to separate religion from politics.<sup>233</sup> The idea of separating religion from governance is almost alien to most Afghan minds, the two are so inherently intertwined.<sup>234</sup>

**c. Governance and Security**

Even though the USSR withdrew from Afghanistan, the country remained marred by civil war among the different factions of Mujahedeen groups. The ensuing political vacuum and insecurity led to the emergence of the Taliban, a new phenomenon in the mid-1990s.<sup>235</sup> The Taliban's strategy of propagating religious nationalism to achieve their political objectives paid off and, despite facing stiff resistance from the Northern Alliance (non-Pashtuns), the Taliban took control of almost 90 percent of the territory by 1998.<sup>236</sup> Countries like Russia, Iran, India, and Tajikistan extended their assistance to the Northern Alliance.<sup>237</sup> These external players overshadowed the internal politics of Afghanistan, which caused further chaos and anarchy. Moreover, NSAs like Osama Bin Laden relocated to Afghanistan as it became a safe sanctuary for terrorists to plan and execute their attacks around the world targeting western nations, especially the U.S..<sup>238</sup>

The socio-political landscape of Afghanistan is a representation of a divided society where historically the role of the state has been marginalized. The perennial state of conflict that can be attributed to a lack of national unity on both internal (civil wars) and external

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<sup>232</sup> Barfield, "Is Afghanistan 'Medieval'?"

<sup>233</sup> Barfield, "Is Afghanistan 'Medieval'?"

<sup>234</sup> Barfield, "Is Afghanistan 'Medieval'?"

<sup>235</sup> Quil Lawrence, "Chaos After Soviet Withdrawal Gave Rise to Taliban," December 7, 2010, <https://www.npr.org/2010/12/07/131884473/Afghanistan-After-The-Soviet-Withdrawal>.

<sup>236</sup> Mustafa and Khan, "Afghanistan: A Study in Internal Conflict and National Cohesion."

<sup>237</sup> Mustafa and Khan, "Afghanistan: A Study in Internal Conflict and National Cohesion."

<sup>238</sup> Mustafa and Khan, "Afghanistan: A Study in Internal Conflict and National Cohesion."

fronts (foreign invasions) created a political and security vacuum in Afghanistan. This vacuum was filled by NSAs such as Al-Qaida and ISIS and turned Afghanistan into a safe haven for terrorists. Moreover, great powers have exploited Afghanistan's instability for their own proxies to outsmart strategic rivals. Thus, Afghanistan has been a playing field for proxies of both great powers and NSAs and with present uncertainty after the return of the Taliban is likely to be the same in the foreseeable future.

## **E. CONCLUSION**

Hybrid warfare has provided a new lease on life to NSAs and proxies who thrive on terrorism. Threats in the hybrid environment are meant to achieve an asymmetrical strategic end and terrorism is one principal threat.<sup>239</sup> True to its character, hybrid warfare does not allow an easy comprehension with regard to the roots or implications of any subversive act due to the masked intent and non-attributable involvement—particularly with the support of external terrorist strikes.<sup>240</sup> Concurrently, NSAs like Al-Qaida, ISIS, TTP, and others over a period have built their capacities to strike against targeted countries across the globe and hybrid warfare is allowing these NSAs to keep their relevance alive as proxies of great powers. The enabling environment available to NSAs as proxies is likely to make the strategic landscape even more hybrid, where tactical acts of terrorism like the ones we witness in Pakistan and Afghanistan will have a global signature with strategic implications.<sup>241</sup>

Therefore, it can be summed up that hybrid warfare will continue to be employed by different powers using terrorism through NSAs to serve the broader strategic objectives.<sup>242</sup> Furthermore, Pakistan and Afghanistan will be the likely hub of these strategic power politics.

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<sup>239</sup> Sadik, *How Can NATO Effectively Counter Terrorism and Hybrid Threats?* 66.

<sup>240</sup> Mumford et al., *The Role of Counter Terrorism in Hybrid Warfare*, 4.

<sup>241</sup> Sadik, *How Can NATO Effectively Counter Terrorism and Hybrid Threats?* 66.

<sup>242</sup> Mumford et al., *The Role of Counter Terrorism in Hybrid Warfare*, 38.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION: GREAT POWER COMPETITION ENABLING MANIFESTATION OF TERRORISM AS A TOOL OF HYBRID WARFARE**

In this new cold war dubbed the GPC, instead of compelling an antagonist through use of force, hybrid warfare seeks to overcome an adversary by developing authenticity and persuading the populace. Hybrid wars are not fought for tactical triumphs in the Suwalki gap, but for influence in countries like Pakistan and Afghanistan.<sup>243</sup> The GPC has already changed strategies and postures among the main actors. For example, U.S. President Joe Biden declared in 2021 that it was no longer feasible for the U.S. to remain involved in costly forever wars, as in Afghanistan and Iraq.<sup>244</sup> Instead, it must reorient its resources to prove that “democracy works” as the U.S. confronts increasing strategic rivalry from autocratic states.<sup>245</sup> President Biden thus implied that this new footing would mean abandoning counterterrorism efforts that had strategic implications in the greater competition against China and Russia.<sup>246</sup>

Though the world seems to have gone past the era of the GWOT, the subject of counter terrorism probably has lost its traction for the policymakers in the power centers of the world. The foreign policies of great powers like the U.S. are transitioning from one age to another. Recent U.S. policy documents, in particular the National Security Strategy and the National Defense Strategy, indicate in certain terms that counterterrorism no more enjoys the primacy that overshadowed U.S. policy making for almost two decades post 9/

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<sup>243</sup> An area southwest of the border between Lithuania and Poland. Named for the Polish town of Suwałki, this choke point holds a lot of strategic and military significance after Poland and the Baltic states became members of NATO.

<sup>244</sup> Nicole Gaouette, “Biden Says U.S. Faces Battle to ‘Prove Democracy Works’,” CNN, March 25, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2021/03/25/politics/biden-autocracies-versus-democracies/index.html>.

<sup>245</sup> Gaouette, “Biden Says U.S. Faces Battle to ‘Prove Democracy Works’.”

<sup>246</sup> Michael J. Boyle, “Counterterrorism in an Era of Great Power Politics,” *Orbis* 66, no. 2 (2022), 184–200, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0030438722000072>.

11.<sup>247</sup> This policy shift does not constitute the end of terrorism as a threat to stability and order on a global scale; however.

Terrorism cannot be ignored in this era of renewed GPC; however, since these two phenomena are inter-connected. Terrorism associated with great powers is generally an element of larger undermining campaigns and proxy wars. Moreover, state-sponsored terrorism is nothing novel. In the Cold War, the former USSR sponsored different terrorist groups across different regions to destabilize pro-U.S. countries.<sup>248</sup> In addition, great powers under the prevailing geopolitical setting continue to provide support for terrorism in tandem with other policy instruments, such as cyber and information operations or conventional kinetic operations, as part of a bigger strategic campaign.<sup>249</sup>

#### **A. GREAT POWER COMPETITION CHARACTERIZED BY HYBRID WARFARE**

The National Directorate of Security (NDS) gives extensive attention to the hybrid facets of the ongoing global competition.<sup>250</sup> In its analysis of the geostrategic environment, the NDS asserts that China is leveraging influence strategies and economic tools to intimidate neighboring states, and that Russia is coercing and intimidating eastern European nations with intensive information operations and threat of use of military means to discredit and subvert democratic practices.<sup>251</sup> It also underscores that great power rivals have intensified endeavors short of conventional wars by furthering intimidation to modern frontiers, breaching fundamentals of freedom, and manipulating obscurity with the purpose to intentionally obscure the boundaries between political and military objectives. Therefore, the means of warfare with great powers have diversified beyond pure military

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<sup>247</sup> Hal Brands and Tim Nichols, “Special Operations Forces and Great-Power Competition in the 21st Century,” *American Enterprise Institute*, August 4, 2020, <https://www.aei.org/research-products/report/special-operations-forces-and-great-power-competition-in-the-21st-century/>.

<sup>248</sup> Daniel Byman, “The Role of Terrorism in Great Power Competition,” *The National Interest*, April 23, 2022, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/role-terrorism-great-power-competition-201921>.

<sup>249</sup> Byman, “The Role of Terrorism in Great Power Competition.”

<sup>250</sup> Eric Robinson, “The Missing, Irregular Half of Great Power Competition.” Modern War Institute at West Point, September 8, 2020, <https://mwi.usma.edu/the-missing-irregular-half-of-great-power-competition/>.

<sup>251</sup> Robinson, “The Missing, Irregular Half of Great Power Competition.”

dimensions and have engulfed domains across financial, information, and other civilian spheres—the likelihood of war being waged in our cities, streets, and living rooms is as high as in a far-away battleground.<sup>252</sup> An analysis of GPC and the evolving character of warfare brings to the fore a clear parallel between GPC and hybrid warfare.<sup>253</sup> Great powers apply hybrid warfare to net expanded influence in regions of interest for strategic gains and to also force the adversary to over stretch in responding in different domains to make it bleed economically.

Present times are not likely to see great wars between great powers. It can be safely assumed that hybrid warfare will dominate a substantial duration of the existing phase of geopolitics characterized by GPC, because of three basic factors that put caution on blatant use of the military instrument: nuclear restraints on escalation, the latest competing stratagems, and the increased emergence of belligerents including NSAs across the conflict spectrum.<sup>254</sup> First, the nuclear age restricts the limits of violent escalation, thus affecting the manner in which great powers would compete for increased influence. Great powers will seek to control the scale of violence to avoid unmanageable escalation.<sup>255</sup> Second, the disparity of strength in the conventional military domain between the U.S. and its adversaries as displayed in the Gulf war of 1990 and later in 2003 the U.S. invasion of Iraq has compelled its adversaries to come up with competitive strategies largely dependent on indirect strategy through proxies, as was demonstrated in Afghanistan.<sup>256</sup> Third, the landscape of geo-politics is more star studded than the Cold War when there were only two superpowers. Now the U.S. is competing with Russia and China on the global front and other regional players in respective regions including the NSAs like Al-Qaida and ISIS.

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<sup>252</sup> Erica Gaston, “Superpowers, Super-Spoilers, and Hybrid Warfare,” *United Nations University* (blog), March 2022, <https://www.wider.unu.edu/publication/superpowers-super-spoilers-and-hybrid-warfare>.

<sup>253</sup> James G. Hall and William T. Pitt, “The Utility of Irregular Warfare in Great Power Competition” (master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2020), 109, <http://hdl.handle.net/10945/66647>.

<sup>254</sup> Hall and Pitt, “The Utility of Irregular Warfare in Great Power Competition.”

<sup>255</sup> Jeremy Suri, “Nuclear Weapons and the Escalation of Global Conflict since 1945,” *International Journal: Canada’s Journal of Global Policy Analysis* 63, no. 4 (December 2008): 1016, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002070200806300412>.

<sup>256</sup> David Kilcullen, *The Dragons and The Snakes: How the Rest Learned to Fight the West* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2020), 18.

Therefore, with the increased complexities of global geopolitics and the presence of multiple stake holders presently applying indirect strategies, there are strong indications that hybrid warfare will characterize GPC.

## **B. SIGNIFICANCE OF SOUTH ASIA IN GREAT POWER COMPETITION**

As Asia develops into the focal point of the emerging multipolar international order, the growing significance of South Asia has much to do with the increasing warmth of relations between U.S. and India with the aim to create a strategic alliance in the region.<sup>257</sup> The improving Indo-U.S. relations will probably be at the cost of the historical U.S. ties with Pakistan, being India's archrival.<sup>258</sup> Pakistan has felt more and more threatened by the increasing U.S. inclination towards India as a strategic partner, a partnership viewed by Pakistan as a serious threat to its national security interests.<sup>259</sup> This reduced U.S. interest in Pakistan provides a window of opportunity for other countries to establish a foothold within Pakistan, creating doubts about how Pakistan would configure itself in the emerging global order overshadowed by GPC.<sup>260</sup>

Likewise, China and Russia are viewed to gain the maximum from the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in terms of asserting their power potential and enhancing political impact.<sup>261</sup> Beijing and Moscow are endeavoring to fill the relative power vacuum after the U.S. departure from Afghanistan to strengthen their respective power statures in the regional equation.<sup>262</sup> Following the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, China and

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<sup>257</sup> U.S. Department of State, *The United States and India: Deepening our Strategic Partnership*, Fact Sheet (Washington, DC, July 27, 2021), <https://www.state.gov/the-united-states-and-india-deepening-our-strategic-partnership/>.

<sup>258</sup> Stephen P. Cohen, "India-US Relations: Pakistan," Brookings Institute, June 4, 2016, <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/india-us-relations-pakistan/>.

<sup>259</sup> Shahid Latif Bajwa, "U.S. Security Cooperation with India and Pakistan: a Comparative Study" (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2013), 135, <https://calhoun.nps.edu/handle/10945/34621>.

<sup>260</sup> Syed Mohammad Ali, "The U.S.-China Strategic Rivalry and Its Implications for Pakistan," Stimson Institute, December 1, 2020, <https://www.stimson.org/2020/the-u-s-china-strategic-rivalry-and-its-implications-for-pakistan/>.

<sup>261</sup> Sabine Fischer and Angela Stanzel, "Afghanistan: The West Fails—A Win for China and Russia?" *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik*, September 22, 2021, <https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2021C50/>.

<sup>262</sup> Fischer and Stanzel, "Afghanistan: The West Fails—A Win for China and Russia?"

Russia at the UN overtly challenged perceived U.S. diplomatic pressure tactics against the Taliban regime (i.e., the threat of sanctions and denying diplomatic recognition).<sup>263</sup> A Chinese diplomat at the UN even demanded that the Taliban should be brought into the international fold and the U.S. and its allies must be held accountable for crimes in Afghanistan.<sup>264</sup> Therefore, South Asia in general and Pakistan and Afghanistan in particular remain significant to great powers for achieving respective strategic objectives—often well beyond the region.

### 1. U.S. Strategic Goals in South Asia

The U.S. views South Asia as a vital component of its security strategy, as South Asia houses a fifth of the world's total population, boasts a few of the world's fastest-growing economies, and at the same time remains a challenge to world peace and stability, being a flashpoint of continuous tensions between different nuclear powers.<sup>265</sup> In the midst of these basic realities, the U.S. remains wary of the growing Chinese presence, particularly in Pakistan. Therefore, the U.S. continues economic and military engagement with Pakistan to avoid a deadlock in bilateral relations.<sup>266</sup> The growing Chinese footprint in Pakistan remains a concern for Washington; however, and in this context, the U.S. has shown serious concerns about CPEC, which were reflected in the November 2019 critique by U.S. Ambassador Alice Wells.<sup>267</sup> U.S. reservations about CPEC are largely the strategic competition with China and India's open opposition to the actualization of CPEC. In the event, this project has the potential to provide much needed economic stability to Pakistan;<sup>268</sup> moreover, China would gain effective control of the strategic port of Gwadar.

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<sup>263</sup> Colum Lynch and Robble Gramer, "China, Russia Look to Outflank U.S. in Afghanistan," *Foreign Policy*, September 2, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/09/02/afghanistan-withdrawal-china-russia-outflank-geopolitics-united-nations/>.

<sup>264</sup> Lynch and Gramer, "China, Russia Look to Outflank U.S. in Afghanistan."

<sup>265</sup> White House, *National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: White House, 2017), <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>.

<sup>266</sup> Ali, "The U.S.-China Strategic Rivalry and Its Implications for Pakistan."

<sup>267</sup> Daniel Markey, "How the United States Should Deal with China in Pakistan," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, April 8, 2020, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/04/08/how-united-states-should-deal-with-china-in-pakistan-pub-81456>.

<sup>268</sup> Markey, "How the United States Should Deal with China in Pakistan."

Concurrently, the threat of terrorism and the presence of NSAs in Afghanistan remain a serious concern, and the U.S. considers this region as a safe haven for terrorist entities like Al-Qaida and ISIS.<sup>269</sup> Indeed, approximately a fifth of all terrorist organizations listed by the U.S. are based in South Asia.<sup>270</sup> The U.S. response aims at strengthening its strategic partnership with India to promote it as a chief opponent to China, curtail Chinese influence in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and not allow any threat of terrorism to actualize against its mainland and its allies.<sup>271</sup> The formation of a quadrilateral forum comprising the U.S., Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Uzbekistan and continuous high-level engagement with Pakistan (including interactions between services and intelligence chiefs) reflect U.S. intentions to thwart any terrorist threat emanating from South Asia.<sup>272</sup>

## **2. Russia's Strategic Objectives in South Asia**

Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov in March 2019 stated that, “there was a shift in the center of global economic power to East from West where a liberal order marked by globalization was losing its attractiveness and is no more viewed as a perfect model for all.”<sup>273</sup> Lavrov’s point was that Asia will be the next frontier of GPC. Russian policy makers view this evolving geostrategic environment as an opportunity to reclaim regional and global preeminence.<sup>274</sup> Thus, Russia endeavors to challenge the U.S. sway globally by encouraging its traditional idea of protectionism, thereby undermining the opposing perspective offered by the U.S. and its allies in the form of the liberal world order.<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> Paul R. Pillar, “Afghanistan Isn’t Good Terrorist Real Estate,” *Foreign Policy*, October 3, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/10/03/afghanistan-isnt-good-terrorist-real-estate/>.

<sup>270</sup> White House, *National Security Strategy*, 50.

<sup>271</sup> Madiha Afzal, “An Uneasy Limbo for US-Pakistan Relations amidst the Withdrawal from Afghanistan,” *Brookings Institute*, August 6, 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2021/08/06/an-uneasy-limbo-for-us-pakistan-relations-amidst-the-withdrawal-from-afghanistan/>.

<sup>272</sup> Afzal, “An Uneasy Limbo for US-Pakistan Relations amidst the Withdrawal from Afghanistan.”

<sup>273</sup> Tom O’Connor, “Russia: World No Longer Trusts U.S. to Lead, It’s Time Others Step in to Stop ‘Blackmail and Pressure’,” *Newsweek*, April 12, 201, <https://www.newsweek.com/russia-world-no-longer-trusts-us-1394848>.

<sup>274</sup> O’Connor, “Russia: World No Longer Trusts U.S.”

<sup>275</sup> Malik X. Harris, “Pakistan in the Era of Great Power Competition” (master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2020), 129, <https://calhoun.nps.edu/handle/10945/65539>.

In the Cold War era, Russia's interest in South Asia was mainly a function of its global competition with the U.S., and India was its strategic partner in the region.<sup>276</sup> Surprisingly, the existing global realities defining the U.S.-India strategic partnership has not done much damage to Russian influence in India, as the latter did not condemn the former's invasion into Ukraine.<sup>277</sup> Historically, Russia's outlook toward South Asia has been structured around varying interests like access to warm waters and most importantly neutralizing U.S. interests in this region.<sup>278</sup> Now; however, Russia has enhanced its emphasis on South Asia and desires to re-assert its impact in South Asia to provide itself a chance to become an important actor in the emerging multipolar world order by intensifying its efforts for increased relevance in the region.<sup>279</sup>

### 3. China's Strategic Objectives in South Asia

Similar to Russia, China's rise as a great power is centered on its strategy of defying American dominance.<sup>280</sup> During the GWOT, while U.S. resources and energies were consumed in combatting terrorism, China increased its economic and military imprint globally and regionally.<sup>281</sup> China also utilized the U.S. presence in Afghanistan to enhance its trade opportunities through Afghanistan.<sup>282</sup> China remained cautious with the option of use of force in the GWOT in Afghanistan and did not employ boots on the ground. Rather, it utilized its geographical contiguity through the Wakhan Corridor to connect Afghanistan

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<sup>276</sup> Graeme P. Herd, ed., *Russia's Global Reach: A Security and Statecraft Assessment* (Garmisch-Partenkirchen: George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies, 2021).

<sup>277</sup> Michael Kugelman, "Russia Still Looms Over U.S.-India Relationship," *Foreign Policy*, April 14, 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/04/14/us-india-relationship-russia-ukraine-war/>.

<sup>278</sup> Muhammad Imran, Ghulam Mustafa, and Gulam Muhammad Nagra, "Regional Dynamics and Russian Security Strategy in South Asia: A Comparative Analysis of Pakistan and India," *Global Regional Review* IV, no. II (Spring 2019): 1–11, <https://www.grrjournal.com/jadmin/Author/31rvIolA2LALJouq9hkR/vjbZh1lVdB.pdf>.

<sup>279</sup> Harris, "Pakistan in the Era of Great Power Competition."

<sup>280</sup> Rasti Delizo, "The Rising Defiance of China and Russia against the US," *Rappler*, March 31, 2021, <https://www.rappler.com/voices/thought-leaders/analysis-rising-defiance-china-russia-united-states/>.

<sup>281</sup> Khalid Rahman, "The Challenge of Terrorism and War on Terror: Chinese Response," *Policy Perspectives* 9, no. 2 (Winter 2012): 12, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42922702?seq=1>.

<sup>282</sup> Rahman, "The Challenge of Terrorism and War on Terror: Chinese Response."

with Chinese BRI projects.<sup>283</sup> By 2019, China emerged as the fifth-largest export market for Afghan products and was also the fourth-largest supplier of imported products for Afghanistan.<sup>284</sup>

South Asia remains crucial for Chinese strategic objectives, which it plans to pursue through the BRI. CPEC must be viewed in the same backdrop. CPEC is considered the flagship project of the \$900 billion-plus BRI,<sup>285</sup> which would entail several north-south economic corridors across Asia alongside linking the Eurasian region for trade and commerce. By investing enormously in the BRI, China desires to achieve the status of an economic superpower.<sup>286</sup> Moreover, the confluence of BRI and South Asia makes this strategic region even more significant to China's ambitious future policies aimed at furthering its international status as an economic power and influence across the globe.<sup>287</sup> India and the U.S remain wary of China's enhanced maritime signature in the Indian Ocean region, however, which puts added stress on the Chinese equation with India and brings the U.S. and India closer to each other with the strategic objective to counter China.<sup>288</sup>

### **C. SPONSORED TERROR BY NON-STATE ACTORS IN PAKISTAN AND AFGHANISTAN**

These great powers have identified their point men in South Asia to bring down their respective nemeses while using the tool of terrorism under the umbrella of hybrid warfare.<sup>289</sup> The presence of NSAs like Al-Qaida, ISIS, TTP, BLA, and others in both Pakistan and Afghanistan provides an enabling environment for the threat of terrorism and

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<sup>283</sup> Rahman, "The Challenge of Terrorism and War on Terror: Chinese Response."

<sup>284</sup> "China and Afghanistan: Bilateral Trade Relationship and Future Outlook," August 4, 2021, <https://www.china-briefing.com/news/china-and-afghanistan-bilateral-trade-relationship-and-future-outlook/>.

<sup>285</sup> Dr. Raza Khan, "Washington's Reservations over CPEC," *The Express Tribune*, November 08, 2017, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1552420/washingtons-reservations-cpec>.

<sup>286</sup> Khan, "Washington's Reservations over CPEC."

<sup>287</sup> Harris, "Pakistan in the Era of Great Power Competition."

<sup>288</sup> Harris, "Pakistan in the Era of Great Power Competition."

<sup>289</sup> A. Nawaz Khan, "South Asia and the New Great Powers Competition," *Strategic Foresight for Asia*, April 7, 2019, <https://strafasia.com/south-asia-and-the-new-great-powers-competition/>.

allows the great powers to employ these NSAs as their proxies to undermine the strategic interests of rival powers. Following sub-sections will endeavor to identify the factors that make Pakistan and Afghanistan the ideal proxy fields of great powers.

### **1. Pakistan: Caught in the Cross Fire**

Competing interests of great powers make Pakistan vulnerable to threats of all nature, terrorism being the most prominent one. Pakistan has claimed to have irrefutable evidence of a RAW-TTP nexus.<sup>290</sup> Pakistan has repeatedly accused India and the former Afghan regime under the U.S. presence of sponsoring terrorism in Pakistan.<sup>291</sup> A Pakistani Foreign Office spokesperson claimed in November 2017 that the Indian intelligence agency, RAW, has developed a strong network with terrorist outfits like TTP, Jamatul Ahrar (JUA), and others in Afghanistan who “are being used for subversive activities in Pakistan.”<sup>292</sup> The spokesperson further stated that, “Afghanistan should not allow its territory to be used by India against Pakistan.”<sup>293</sup> Pakistan had repeatedly highlighted that the TTP, the JUA, and other terrorist organizations have found sanctuaries in Afghanistan and were responsible for acts of terrorism against Pakistan.<sup>294</sup> These claims were further strengthened when the former Afghan Chief Executive Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, acknowledged that the TTP had a strong presence in Afghanistan.<sup>295</sup>

Later in November 2020, Pakistan again officially accused India of state-sponsored terrorism in a joint press conference by the then Foreign Minister and the spokesperson of

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<sup>290</sup> Ayaz Gul, “Pakistan Claims ‘Irrefutable Evidence’ of Indian Links to Terrorism on Pakistani Soil,” Voice of America, November 14, 2020, [https://www.voanews.com/a/south-central-asia\\_pakistan-claims-irrefutable-evidence-indian-links-terrorism-pakistani-soil/6198372.html](https://www.voanews.com/a/south-central-asia_pakistan-claims-irrefutable-evidence-indian-links-terrorism-pakistani-soil/6198372.html).

<sup>291</sup> Gul, “Pakistan Claims ‘Irrefutable Evidence’ of Indian Links to Terrorism on Pakistani Soil.

<sup>292</sup> “Credible Evidence’ about RAW-TTP Nexus: FO,” *The Express Tribune*, November 23, 2017, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1566348/ttp-daish-jamatul-ahrar-using-afghan-soil-terror-activities-pakistan-fo>.

<sup>293</sup> “Credible Evidence’ about RAW-TTP Nexus: FO,” *The Express Tribune*

<sup>294</sup> “Credible Evidence’ about RAW-TTP Nexus.

<sup>295</sup> “Credible Evidence’ about RAW-TTP Nexus.

the Pakistan Armed Forces.<sup>296</sup> Specifically, India was accused of operating several terrorist training camps in Afghanistan for various globally banned terrorist organizations to plan attacks against Pakistan.<sup>297</sup> In the same press conference, Pakistan for the first time displayed documentary evidence including details of banking transactions amounting to huge figures in dollars, audio recordings, and specifics of links between Indian intelligence operators and diplomatic officials with different Pakistani militant fugitives operating from Afghanistan.<sup>298</sup> According to Pakistan, the evidence provides tangible proof of Indian monetary and material patronage to several terrorist groups, including U.N.-declared terrorist groups JUA, BLA, and TTP. Pakistan shared with the UN the same set of alleged evidence of direct Indian sponsorship of terrorism in Pakistan in the form of a dossier.<sup>299</sup>

The prevailing security environment in Pakistan with regard to hybrid threats and terrorism has much to do with CPEC. In December 2021, Pakistan's Counter Terrorism Department claimed that 90 percent of the terrorist outfits running operations from Afghanistan target CPEC projects.<sup>300</sup> When it comes to CPEC, U.S. policy makers have been very public in voicing their concerns. One of the primary reasons for U.S. opposition to this project stems from the renewed competition with China over regional and global dominance.<sup>301</sup> Similarly, Indian aversion to CPEC is evident with measures such as setting up a CPEC Cell in the headquarters of the Indian intelligence agency RAW, as alleged by Pakistan's Defence Secretary Lieutenant General Alam Khattak (retd) in July 2018 in a

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<sup>296</sup> Tariq Ullah Wardak, Joint Press Conference of DG ISPR and Foreign Minister, Daily Times, November 14, 2020, <https://dailytimes.com.pk/689240/joint-press-conference-of-dg-ispr-and-foreign-minister/>.

<sup>297</sup> Wardak, Joint Press Conference of DG ISPR and Foreign Minister, Daily Times.

<sup>298</sup> Gul, "Pakistan Claims 'Irrefutable Evidence' of Indian Links to Terrorism on Pakistani Soil."

<sup>299</sup> Gul, "Pakistan Claims 'Irrefutable Evidence' of Indian Links to Terrorism on Pakistani Soil."

<sup>300</sup> Times of India, December 30, 2021, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/pakistan/90-terrorist-groups-operating-from-afghanistan-target-cpec-projects-pak-counter-terrorism-dept/articleshow/88590872.cms>.

<sup>301</sup> Markey, "How the United States Should Deal with China in Pakistan."

briefing to the Senate Standing Committee on Defence.<sup>302</sup> Ever since the launch of CPEC it has been observed that terrorist attacks especially in Balochistan (southwestern province of Pakistan) have witnessed an upward trend as the centerpiece of CPEC, Gwadar Port, happens to be in Balochistan. Suspicions have grown over a period in Pakistan that the U.S. is targeting its plans to incorporate Afghanistan into CPEC.<sup>303</sup>

There have been events in the past where certain actions of the U.S. were construed as if the U.S. was putting in efforts to dismantle CPEC, creating discord in Balochistan.<sup>304</sup> For instance, Sarmad Ishfaq argues that in July 2016 the U.S. added JUA to its terror list.<sup>305</sup> Ishfaq further adds that, “this was worrying for both China and Pakistan as historically whenever the White House has targeted terrorist organizations along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, there has been an increase in terror outbreaks in Pakistan.”<sup>306</sup> Once the U.S. declared the JUA to be a terrorist organization, the outfit’s attacks in Balochistan proliferated.<sup>307</sup> The terror group was responsible for the killings of 135 innocent civilians largely in Quetta (capital of Balochistan) in two successive months of August and September in 2016 alone.<sup>308</sup> Ian Price observes that it is undetermined whether the declaration of JUA as a terror group was to sabotage CPEC intentionally, but the consequence was predictable.<sup>309</sup>

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<sup>302</sup> The Economic Times, “Pakistan Claims RAW Running ‘Special Cell’ to Sabotage China-Pakistan Economic Corridor,” July, 12, 2018, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/pakistan-claims-raw-running-special-cell-to-sabotage-china-pakistan-economic-corridor/articleshow/51825235.cms>.

<sup>303</sup> Tom Hussain, “Pakistan Fears U.S. Is Targeting Its China Links as it Seeks to Settle Scores from Afghanistan,” *This Week in Asia*, October 2, 2021, [https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3150790/pakistan-fears-us-targeting-its-china-links-it-seeks-settle?module=perpetual\\_scroll\\_0&pgtype=article&campaign=3150790](https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3150790/pakistan-fears-us-targeting-its-china-links-it-seeks-settle?module=perpetual_scroll_0&pgtype=article&campaign=3150790).

<sup>304</sup> Sarmad Ishfaq, “India and America Collude to Disrupt the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor,” *Open Democracy*, June 3, 2019, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/india-and-america-colludes-disrupt-china-pakistan-economic-corridor/>.

<sup>305</sup> Ishfaq, “India and America Collude to Disrupt the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.”

<sup>306</sup> Ishfaq, “India and America Collude to Disrupt the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.”

<sup>307</sup> Ishfaq, “India and America Collude to Disrupt the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.”

<sup>308</sup> Ishfaq, “India and America Collude to Disrupt the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.”

<sup>309</sup> Ian Price, “Is the U.S. Trying to Sabotage the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor?” *The Diplomat*, September 29, 2016, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/09/is-the-us-trying-to-sabotage-the-china-pakistan-economic-corridor/>.

In contrast, India has been blatant to say the least in its efforts to derail CPEC.<sup>310</sup> Major Gaurav Arya, a retired Indian Army officer, acknowledges India's sponsorship of Baloch militants and endeavors to destabilize Pakistan.<sup>311</sup> The retired officer, renowned for his apparent connections with Indian intelligence RAW, often boasts his links in media with Baloch militants and claims that India will continue to support these secessionists in gaining separation from Pakistan.<sup>312</sup> Astonishingly, several of his claims have been followed by attacks on Pakistani troops in Balochistan.<sup>313</sup>

A spike in terrorist attacks has been observed in the recent past, BLA has been very active in its attacks targeting Pakistani security forces who were providing security for CPEC projects.<sup>314</sup> The suicide bomb attack of April 2022 by a female BLA terrorist that killed three Chinese nationals was the latest in a series of ongoing terrorist attacks against Chinese nationals working in Pakistan.<sup>315</sup> According to Michael Kugelman, "The attacks have been rising for quite some time, a reflection of increasingly emboldened separatist militants angry about Chinese investments, and a growing capacity to carry out these types of operations."<sup>316</sup>

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<sup>310</sup> Waqar Ahmed, "Indian-Funded Terrorism in Balochistan," *The News International*, January 7, 2021, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/770531-indian-funded-terrorism-in-balochistan>.

<sup>311</sup> Ahmed, "Indian-Funded Terrorism in Balochistan."

<sup>312</sup> Ahmed, "Indian-Funded Terrorism in Balochistan."

<sup>313</sup> Ahmed, "Indian-Funded Terrorism in Balochistan." Major Gauran Arya (Retd) made claims of terrorist attacks by Baloch insurgents in April 2020 and thereafter there were several attacks against Pakistan's security forces personnel in Balochistan. For example, in May 2020, seven soldiers lost their lives in two separate attacks in Balochistan.

<sup>314</sup> Pakistan: Are Attacks on Chinese workers Jeopardizing Beijing's CPEC Projects? <https://www.dw.com/en/pakistan-are-attacks-on-chinese-workers-jeopardizing-beijings-pec-projects/a-61618631>.

<sup>315</sup> Pakistan: Are Attacks on Chinese Workers Jeopardizing Beijing's CPEC Projects?

<sup>316</sup> Pakistan: Are Attacks on Chinese Workers Jeopardizing Beijing's CPEC Projects?

## 2. Afghanistan: A Proxy Playground

The great powers remain interested in Afghanistan mainly owing to its peculiar geostrategic location as a gateway to resource-rich Central Asia, proximity to China and Russia, and neighboring both Pakistan and Iran.<sup>317</sup>

In March 2018, General John Nicholson, commander of U.S. forces in Afghanistan, accused Russia of “smuggling weapons from the border neighboring Tajikistan to Taliban.”<sup>318</sup> He further alleged that Russia was inflating the figures of ISIS militants in Afghanistan “to legitimize the actions of the Taliban and provide some degree of support to the Taliban.”<sup>319</sup> The U.S. viewed Russia’s purported concern over ISIS as an excuse to rationalize its interference in Afghanistan and to expand its military influence in the region.<sup>320</sup> By forming connections with the Taliban, Russia wanted to coerce and even challenge the U.S. and its allies.<sup>321</sup> Russia’s reemergence in Afghan issues was largely aimed at irritating Washington and its allies.<sup>322</sup> Therefore, the moment of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan was celebrated by Russian policy makers who saw a great power making an unceremonious exit. Konstantin Kosachev, a Russian senator in charge of the International Affairs Committee, stated that, “In Afghanistan, the myth of the omnipotence of U.S. military power has been destroyed. Abandoned bases and the inability to ensure security and operation of a mere airport are powerful symbols [of that]. From

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<sup>317</sup> Samra Naz and Zafar Nawaz Jaspal, “Afghanistan in the Snare of External Power Struggle,” *Strategic Studies* 38, no. 3 (Autumn 2018), pp. 22–39, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/48539382?seq=1&cid=pdf>.

<sup>318</sup> Dawood Azami, “Is Russia Arming the Afghan Taliban?” BBC World Service, April 2, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-41842285>.

<sup>319</sup> Azami, “Is Russia Arming the Afghan Taliban?”

<sup>320</sup> Azami, “Is Russia Arming the Afghan Taliban?”

<sup>321</sup> Mary Ilyushina, “Russia Has Been Engaging with the Taliban for Years. The U.S. Withdrawal Might Give It an Opportunity to Expand Its Role,” CBS News, August 21, 2021, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/russia-taliban-afghanistan-american-withdrawal-opportunity/>.

<sup>322</sup> Ilyushina, “Russia Has Been Engaging with the Taliban for Years. The U.S. Withdrawal Might Give It an Opportunity to Expand Its Role.”

now on, it's not bombs that are being dropped from American planes, it's living people. And they leave 'their own people' without the slightest embarrassment.”<sup>323</sup>

Revived Russian interest in Afghanistan has raised suspicions of a “new Great Game,” with Afghanistan once again a battlefield for great powers. Shortly after the Taliban takeover in Kabul, both China and Russia pledged to work closely with the new regime.<sup>324</sup> Therefore, leaving a vacuum in Afghanistan for China and Russia will not serve U.S. interests. Thus, the U.S. is not going anywhere; rather, it is repositioning itself for yet another phase of wars.<sup>325</sup>

According to former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, the West must work out a strategy to exert maximum pressure on the Taliban.<sup>326</sup> Western leaders like Blair argue that the Taliban is a strategic concern and acknowledged that direct intervention in Afghanistan is not a feasible option; Blair notes; however, that “non-intervention is also policy with consequence.”<sup>327</sup> Blair further adds that “intervention can be in different forms and advocates the option of intervention to achieve long-term strategic objectives.”<sup>328</sup> World leaders are willing to intervene differently from the past (indirect strategy),<sup>329</sup> and the divergent interests of the great powers are compelling enough to employ the services of NSAs under the umbrella of hybrid war to seek own objectives and undermine those of the adversarial power.<sup>330</sup> Therefore, it appears that the threat of terrorism is not leaving Afghanistan any time soon.

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<sup>323</sup> Ilyushina, “Russia Has Been Engaging with the Taliban for Years. The U.S. Withdrawal Might Give It an Opportunity to Expand Its Role.”

<sup>324</sup> Irfan Raja, “Is Afghanistan a Playground for New Proxy Wars?” *Daily Sabah*, September 29, 2021, <https://www.dailysabah.com/opinion/op-ed/is-afghanistan-a-playground-for-new-proxy-wars>.

<sup>325</sup> Raja, “Is Afghanistan a Playground for New Proxy Wars?”

<sup>326</sup> Tony Blair, Tony Blair: Why We Must Not Abandon the People of Afghanistan—For Their Sakes and Ours, Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, August 21, 2021, <https://institute.global/tony-blair/tony-blair-why-we-must-not-abandon-people-afghanistan-their-sakes-and-ours>.

<sup>327</sup> Blair, Blair: Why We Must Not Abandon the People of Afghanistan—For Their Sakes and Ours.

<sup>328</sup> Blair, Blair: Why We Must Not Abandon the People of Afghanistan—For Their Sakes and Ours.

<sup>329</sup> Blair, Blair: Why We Must Not Abandon the People of Afghanistan—For Their Sakes and Ours.

<sup>330</sup> Pawlak, Understanding Hybrid Threats.

#### **D. OVERALL ASSESSMENT**

It can be safely concluded that today's warfare does not limit belligerents to only state actors. Empirical evidence of the manifestation of hybrid warfare using terrorism as a tool in Pakistan and Afghanistan as mentioned in earlier parts of this thesis suggests that NSAs have become an added and permanent feature of battlefields. The present-day battlefield is not restricted to dedicated combat zones but rather has engulfed all spheres of life and has even incorporated the space domain. Instances of using forums like FATF for economic coercion and information campaigns as revealed by the EU DisinfoLab are the reflection of the enhanced spectrum of battlefields of which Pakistan has been a constant victim.<sup>331</sup> It is no longer a war of combat weapons; instead, it has become war of narratives. The purpose of wars and conflicts is no longer solely territorial victories—winning minds has fast become the more cherished war trophy. The world now lives in the age of hybrid warfare. “Friend or foe” identification is more uncertain than ever before. The cost is low, and the dividends are huge. All elements of national power—which include political, economic, military, diplomacy, technology, and information—have become the tools of warfighting and keyboard warriors represent the new generation of soldiers.

War's nature remains violent, interactive, and fundamentally political, however.<sup>332</sup> This consistent nature of warfare, coupled with hesitant great powers avoiding direct confrontation, amplifies the role of indirect strategy through NSAs while using the tool of terrorism to knock down the adversary when and where needed. South Asia is no exception. NSAs have been employed in Pakistan and Afghanistan by great powers to instill terror within these countries, as the primary goal of terrorism in a hybrid environment is to instill fear and terror, cause intimidation among the people, and weaken the will of an adversary to fight back. A terror-hit region loses the confidence of international investors, which slows down the economic activity. The loss of more than \$100 billion to Pakistan's

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<sup>331</sup> Alaphilippe, Adamczyk, Grégoire et al., *Indian Chronicles: Deep Dive into a 15-Year Operation Targeting the EU and UN to Serve Indian Interests*.

<sup>332</sup> Mewett, “Understanding War's Enduring Nature Alongside Its Changing Character.”

economy due to terrorism in the period 2005–2016 reflects the same phenomenon.<sup>333</sup> When multiprong terrorist actions go along a fundamental strategy, they can create instability in a society to a substantial degree, which is visible in both Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Hybrid warfare allows plausible deniability and helps shields state actors from the responsibility of any action taken against the enemy state. The sponsored proxies, through NSAs and under the garb of legitimate ideological struggle, strike terror and the relation of state and NSAs continues to flourish in this new age of warfare living through the era of GPC. Moreover, it is imperative to understand that the upswing of hybrid warfare cannot be construed as the culmination of conventional warfare; hybrid warfare represents a complex aspect for military and security planning in the present age, however.<sup>334</sup> In the future, conflict will not be restricted to any one domain of kinetic or non-kinetic dimensions of warfare. It will be a blend of conventional and sub-conventional means not limited to uniformed soldiers and battlefields, with the aim of targeting the minds of people to influence their decision making. Hybrid warfare is more directed to target the will to fight of the adversary, rather than his complete annihilation.

Furthermore, the prevailing geopolitical and geoeconomic considerations appear to be more conducive for hybrid warfare as the most preferred option for great powers around the globe in pursuance of strategic objectives, especially in reference to countries like Pakistan and Afghanistan. Direct confrontation and traditional wars in a globalized world with much interdependence do not seem to be a viable option. Hence, hybrid warfare allows a discreet path for seeking desired strategic dividends and the pattern adopted by great powers in Pakistan and Afghanistan using hybrid warfare as an umbrella for terrorism is likely to be replicated in different regions across the globe in the future.

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<sup>333</sup> Abheet Singh Sethi, Business Standard, July 6, 2015, [https://www.business-standard.com/article/specials/terrorism-has-cost-pakistan-100-billion-in-past-11-years-115070600193\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/article/specials/terrorism-has-cost-pakistan-100-billion-in-past-11-years-115070600193_1.html).

<sup>334</sup> Hoffman, “Hybrid Warfare and Challenges.”

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