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The Elephant
&
the Six Blind Men:
Hybrid War/ Warfare
Lexiconic Conundrum

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The Elephant and the Six Blind Men: Hybrid War/ Warfare Lexiconic Conundrum

“Chaos is a friend of mine”

– **Bob Dylan**

Abstract

Proliferation of grey zone conflicts has led to expansion of politico-military vocabulary to encompass new terms but sans conceptual clarity and inherent dichotomies in the understood definitions. Therefore, a framework has been defined to analyze the lexica used, consequent to which legitimacy of ‘hybrid warfare’ has been established, while rejecting others. Therein the aspect of Hybrid Warfare as being ‘new’ was examined from oriental and occidental prisms to come to the conclusion that it is not a new phenomenon as a broad range of similarities exist but with variations. Thereon the contours of emerging form of contestation termed ‘Hybrid Conflict’ and associated Hybrid Threats, Forces and Operations have been delved upon, which marks a shift to use of non-military means as primary instrument of power by both State and non-State actors along with a shift in targets from politico-military (conventional) to politico-society (irregular), which is colloquially termed as Responses Short of War (RSOW).

Keywords: Hybrid War, Grey Zone Warfare, India’s Preparedness, Balance of Power, Multi-Domain Operations

Raison D’etre

The terms Hybrid War and Warfare entered in to the lexicon of security sometimes at the beginning of the 21st Century. These terms have gained traction in usage due to epochal conflicts and contestations of first two decades of this millennia such as the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah, Russo-Georgian and Russo-Ukrainian wars. But the *pièce de résistance* was the Crimean campaign executed by Russian Federation in early 2014. Hybrid warfare has become the most common term used to try and capture the complexity of 21st Century warfare, which involves a multiplicity of actors and blurs the traditional distinctions between different types of armed conflict and even between war and peace (Wither, James K, 2016).

The fact that many armed conflicts blur the lines between war and peace and involve the use of instruments that were not traditionally part of warfighting further complicates the problem. It is undoubtedly a challenge for traditional security establishments to address the wide range of threats identified by the analysts and scholars of hybrid warfare. Cast the definitional net too wide, and a term like hybrid warfare becomes too all-encompassing to be of any practical use to policymakers. Define warfare too narrowly, and policymakers may fail to appreciate the significance of many non-traditional techniques of warfare that are being employed by an adversary as a prelude or adjunct to the use of military force (Wither, James K, 2016).

Thereon the vocabulary has expanded to include terms ranging from hybrid threats, hybrid adversary, non-linear war, non-traditional war, special war, and so on so forth. Notwithstanding the lack of conceptual clarity and inherent dichotomies in the understood definitions, these tropes are being bandied about as buzzwords and are employed in a loosely interchangeable manner – all at the consideration of personages. To add more sauce to the proverbial cauldron, terms such as unrestricted warfare, compound warfare, fourth/ fifth generation warfare (4/5 GW), etc have also been brought to bear upon hapless audiences. Hence, it is necessitated that an examination of the subject is undertaken so as to clear the ‘fog’ prevailing individually in the minds of the ‘six blind men’ vis-à-vis the ‘elephant’. This monologue does not aim at answering all questions on the subject at hand but instead represents a start through an academic study.

Contextual Framework

What is factual is that every society, state or military organization has its own set of lexica correlating to its unique contextual framework which itself is derived from civilizational/ societal experiences and intellectual deliberations. Therefore, it is imperative to define the contextual framework against which an analytical examination can take place. Apropos, the genesis has to be the deconstruction of the various terminologies involved and defining them individually.

Hybrid. The word 'hybrid' has been derived from Latin word *hybrida*, which in turn is a variant of *ibrida*, of probably Greek origin, and meaning "mongrel" (Douglas Harper, 2010). In the present context, the word "hybrid" comes from genetics to denote a mixture of two different species with desirable characteristics of both.

War. The Prussian military-theorist Carl von Clausewitz defined war in somewhat simplistic terms as, "... a mere continuation of policy by other means". He theorized that war was a phenomenon or an act, enacted towards achieving a political goal, with organized violence being the 'way' to achieve it. The desired political end state was to compel the opponent to yield to the will of the aggressor state. The 'means' were the society and the military.

Most modern dictionaries define war as, "a state of usually open and declared contest between states or groups" (Lexico, 2018). It is also defined as, "a sustained campaign against an undesirable situation or activity" (Lexico, 2018). While some qualify the contest as being in the physical domain and characterized by violence, others are more broad-based and ambivalent about the domain in which the contest takes place and absence or presence of violence.

For the purpose of this study, it is posited that 'war' is as an activity, event or phenomena, and is a contest between two states, a state and a non-state, or two non-states **involving application of violence** in a non-linear and uncertain environment towards achievement of a political objective. Further, 'war' has an enduring "**nature**" which is generally constant – violent, interactive and fundamentally political (Mewett, Christopher, 2014).

War can be categorised based on following parameters (Taylor, Timothy W, 2009):-

- **Parties to Conflict.** Could be either inter-state war between two or more nations (World War II), intra-state, that is, war within the state between groups or societies (civil war), or between a state and a non-state (insurgency or revolutionary war).
- **Political Objectives.** Hegemonic War, in which the objective is control over the entire world order (World War II), Total War, in which the objective is to defeat and occupy another state (2003 Iraq War), and Limited War, that involves less than total resources, restrain on military means and are initiated with limited aims (1971 Indo-Pakistan War).

Warfare. It can be defined as the **means of waging a war** and encompasses processes, methodologies and tactics. Therein 'warfare' has "**character or characteristic**" (conventional warfare, biological, chemical, atomic warfare, etc). It can be further classified based on:-

Methodologies

- **Conventional warfare** where conventional weapons and battlefield tactics are used. Effects are limited in space and time to legitimate targets of war with combatants being one.
- **Unconventional warfare** where conventions of war are ignored and unconventional weapons are utilised along with flouting of norms as well as targeting of non-legitimate targets.
- **Strategic Doctrine.** Attrition, manoeuvre, informational/ psychological, etc.
- **Terrain.** Land based (arctic, desert, jungle, mountain, urban warfare), and maritime (amphibious, littoral warfare, etc).
- **Equipment or Weapon Type.** Anti-surface warfare, anti-submarine warfare, armoured warfare, information warfare, nuclear warfare, etc.

Conflicts. The word “conflict” comes from the Latin word “conflictus”, which means collision or clash. International conflict is a clash of interests of two or more actors of international relations (states, groups of states, international organizations), incompatible goals. These can be classified (Bernadsky, 2012; Sheriff, 2015) by the sphere of contradictions (political, territorial, ideological, economic, ethnic, religious, etc), by the absence or presence of violence in the conflict, by equality of capabilities (symmetric/ asymmetric), by the geographical scope of the conflict (local, regional or global), by a number of participants (bilateral or multilateral), and by the duration of the conflict (short, medium or long term). The main feature of ‘conflict’ is that it has the potential for affecting change (Kurbatova, T. O.2020).

Assessment

It is interesting to note that the terms hybrid war and warfare have not been explicitly defined barring some exceptions. One definition is, “a conflict involving a combination of conventional military forces and irregulars (guerrillas, insurgents, and terrorists), which could include both state and non-state actors, aimed at achieving a common political purpose” (¹ Mansoor, Peter R. 2012). However, others have been more circumscribed like the United States Department of Defense (DOD). It claims that existing doctrines are sufficient and confabulates about hybrid warfare as, “...*blending of conventional and irregular approaches to conflicts that current and future adversaries are likely to employ to conduct war*”. Further while correlating hybrid warfare with irregular warfare, it describes it as, “*favor[ing] indirect and asymmetric approaches, though it may employ the full range of military and other capacities, in order to erode*

an adversary's power, influence and will" (Aitoro, J.R. 2010). Notice the emphasis on 'irregular/asymmetric approaches' in both articulations.

Another emerging theory is supposedly attributed to General Valery Gerasimov of Russian Federation. In his 2013 article published in *Military-Industrial Kurier*, he wrote, "*the focus of applied methods of conflict have altered in the direction of the broad use of political, economic, informational, humanitarian, and other non-military measures – applied in coordination with the protest potential of the population. All this is supplemented by military means of a concealed character*" (Coalson, R. 2018). This articulation is co-equated to hybrid warfare by many Western strategists.

Hybrid War. A closer examination of the aforesaid expressions and general literature available in public domain reveals that the focus of enquiry is on 'hybrid warfare' and thus, a cogent definition of 'hybrid war' is still missing. This absence exists simply because 'war' is a uniform continuum having an unchanging and enduring nature, generally driven by a singular political objective. Since the nature of war cannot be hybrid, the term 'hybrid war' fails in purely academic terms. The other view could be related to hybridity of 'parties to the conflict' – but it too falls short as State and a non-State actors working in unisons would at best constitute an alliance. The third counter argument could be related to the purported hybridity of the polity waging war – the Lebanese or the Palestine models. There is intense intra-polity competition, which prevents this supposedly hybrid polity to act in unison. ***It is therefore, emphatically evident that the term 'hybrid war' is fallacious and should be rejected.***

Hybrid Warfare (HW). It implies that the warfighting '**means**' are **hybrid**. That is, the methods involved are a blend of conventional and unconventional methods and all that lies in between. But history shows that the methods of warfighting were never restricted to narrow confines of conventional, unconventional or irregular. Belligerents have employed all forces and resources at their disposal covering the entire spectrum of warfare (criminal disorder to nuclear) so as to gain advantage over the other. Thus, it can be safely argued that methods inherently have a hybrid character and ***it is not a new phenomenon.***

This statement of fact holds true even when parity or asymmetry exists between two belligerents. If the combat capabilities were evenly matched more or less, the conflict would take place mostly, but not exclusively, in the conventional domain. A prime example is that of the use

of nuclear weapons by the United States against Japan in WW II despite both parties having matching conventional capability.

In the case where serious asymmetries exist between two belligerents, it is but de rigueur that the weaker of the two would resort to unconventional methods (guerilla warfare/ terrorism) using innovative strategy and tactics to offset the asymmetry with a superior adversary. The operative part here is “*innovative*”, and thus, an innovative strategy would encompass conducting operations in the entire spectrum of warfare to achieve parity with or better the stronger opponent.

And so, the term HW fails to establish itself as being something new, contrary to the view advocated by most security analysts and strategists regarding emergence of a “new type of modern warfare”. In fact some strategists argue that “future warfare is essentially more of the old” (Gray, C. 2005). Some, like Dr Puyvelde, articulate that “most, if not all, wars in the history of mankind have been exemplified by asymmetry between belligerents, and thus, led to evolution of hybrid strategies and tactics by the weaker party” (Puyvelde, D.V.2015).

So What is ‘New’?

To understand the ‘new’, it is important to understand the context. Firstly, most modern strategic literature on HW is driven by occidental school. It is posited that this school of thought has two distinct characteristics – a restricted civilizational experience, and a linear approach in its approaches to problem solving. Thus, the occidental strategic thought process is anchored in the works of modern theorists such as Clausewitz, Jomini and Machiavelli with the occasional fall back on pre-modern theorists Thucydides and Sun Tzu. And due to inherent linear societal approach, the narrative is generally constructed based on two opposites – in terms of black and white. Ergo this school is experiencing difficulties in defining something which is different from their traditional rule-based and ordered way of strategy formulation and warfighting.

Secondly, the occidental school has its anchorage in the international relation system that has evolved from the Peace of Westphalia (circa 1648). The Westphalian sovereignty established the notion of a nation state having sovereign control over territories, and importantly the ‘legitimate authority’ and ‘monopoly’ to wage war. Thus, over the last 300 plus years, the nation states have wielded the legitimate authority and monopoly to wage war. In that pursuit, these States established regular militaries having distinctive uniforms, legal right to bear and use arms, and a legal framework of conduct. These evolved incrementally through interaction between the polity,

the people and the military – best described by Clausewitz as *Wunderliche Driefaltigkeit* (Wonderful Trinity). The only thing that has been constant in the Occident in the last three hundred years is the ‘people’; the nature of the polity has undergone a major transformation from kings and sovereigns to elected representatives. This in turn has changed the character and structure of militaries.

The third marker is an academic one derived from the above developments. The legal definitions of terms ‘regular’ and ‘irregular’ forces are just over 150 years old. These and many more agreements on laws of war have their origins in the Lieber Code, 1863 or General Order 100 promulgated during the American Civil War. This treatise led to Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907, and onwards to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 (Witt, J.F. 2019). Specifically, the Brussels Declaration of 1874, followed up by Hague Convention of 1899 and third Geneva Convention of 1949 gave out the legal definition of a ‘privileged combatant’ (or regular forces) { Mallison, Thomas, W, and Sally, V. 1978).

However, these treaties failed to articulate what constitutes ‘unlawful combatants’. This debate was codified in the Martens Clause included in the preambles of the 1899 and 1907 Hague Conventions as a compromise on the status of *francs-tireurs* (free-shooters) which was an irregular military force deployed by France during the early stages of the Franco-Prussian War (1870 – 71) { Pustogarov, V. 1996}. Similarly, the third Geneva Convention failed to articulate a definition, though it did introduce the concept. Interestingly, it categorically identified mercenaries as not being lawful combatants (Additional to the Geneva Conventions, 1949). Thus, there exists two classes of soldiers – privileged combatants having a legal status, and the rest *who may be called* as unlawful combatant, irregulars or mercenaries.

Summarizing the above, the following is ‘new’ from the occidental prism:-

- There has been a shift in concept of security from the traditional military oriented approach to one encompassing economic, political, societal and informational. Thus, there is a distinct shift in the domains of contestations from purely physical towards virtual or non-contact.
- Democracy has emerged as the globally preferred political system in the 21st Century. Consequently, the power which was earlier concentrated in the polity/ oligarchies is slowly shifting to the society (or the people). This distribution of power has driven the change in the character of the armies from erstwhile imperialistic to nationalistic ones.
- The arrival of the Information Age, and consequent ‘informisation’ of people, groups and societies, has accentuated the power shift towards the population. This has given impetus

to the people to exercise their new found 'power' to effect a change in the polity and the military.

- 'Informed' societies in turn are challenging the existing non-democratic polities globally as witnessed during the Color Revolutions which were characterized by use of non-contact methods (generally) to effect a political change.
- However, in the event of failure of non-contact methods to effect a political change, adoption of violent means by these 'Informed' societies has taken place as is evident from the ongoing conflicts in Palestine, Syria, Libya, Lebanon, Iraq, and closer home in J&K. This is facilitated by easy availability of modern tools of violence.
- Per above, the monopoly of the State to wage war no longer exists, regardless of the 'legitimate authority' to do so. This has led to emergence of pan-national organizations leveraging the power of networking and availability of modern tools of war waging to wage wars against States and other Non-State actors. Al Qaida, Taliban, FARC, LTTE etc are the products of this phenomena. In fact, ISIS offers an interesting area of further research as this one organization started out as a traditional pan-nation Non-State actor and then transformed in to a Quasi-State having gained territory with governance structures.
- While the asymmetry between the current hegemon (United States) and its contenders (China and Russia) persists, this has not brought about a pause to inter-state competition, but instead is fueling **new and innovative methods** to challenge the status quo.
- The concept of '**Balance of Power**' is giving way to '**Balance of Interests**' due to the inter-connected nature of the global economic system. Since every state has a stake in the global economic system, use of hard power is being reduced due to second and third order effects. Thus, even States are pursuing **hybrid responses** which constitute hard, soft and smart power components in pursuit of their national interests.
- The amalgamation of all the above factors has also brought out a shift from use of military to use of non-military (including kinetic) means as the primary instrument of power. This is applicable to both state and non-state actors. The focus is on reducing the violence levels (if not eliminate totally) so as to cause less fatalities/ damage. There is also a shift in targeting – earlier the focus was on politico-military (conventional) to politico-society (irregular). This is so, as the society now wields the power to effect a behavioral change in both the polity and the military. Thus, it reflects a desire to directly target the 'source of political power' to achieve political ends, while avoiding the traditional instrument of

national power, that is, the military. This shift reflects the adoption of more efficient means of achieving political objectives/ end state.

Indian Pre-modern Perspective

Ancient Political System in India. Since an Indian perspective is proposed to drawn, it is best to establish a counter framework derived from our civilizational experiences and literature for comparative examination with the current state of things. It is posited that the ancient political system evolved from the village organization called *Panchayat* which was republican in its character and established through democratic norms. This basic political system has stood the test of at least five millennia and still exists. Over a period of time this village centric administrative unit expanded to form a tribal collective based on kinship. This led to establishment of the first social organization with political power which was led by a king. These collectives were governed by laws and societal norms. As the population base expanded, the collectives became larger thereby forming the first kingdoms and empires. Importantly their power structure was decentralized and actual power vested with the feudal lords. It was perhaps only in the last millennia that the central governance system was established but with feudalistic underpinnings.

State and Nation-State. The concept of a 'nation' is conspicuous by its absence in Indian civilizational literature. This absence can perhaps be ascribed to centrality of the cultural ideation of *Vasudaiva Kutumbakam* (the world is one family). The Indian political system thus, established the notion of a State which was different from the Westphalian concept of nation-state. This difference can be attributed to cultural dissimilarities as well as theological congruence amongst the population of the Indian sub-continent. The closest thing that could be correlated to nationalism in Indian context was of kinship or tribalism. Perhaps the arrival of the foreign invaders from the North and the West and subsequently the colonial subjugation did establish the roots of a 'nation' anchored in distinct ethnicities, culture and religion.

Inter and Intra State Relations. It is posited that there was a total absence of an organized and controlled International or Regional political system in pre-modern India. Further, due to the predominantly feudal nature of the political system, the power of the State was decentralized in spite of a unitary sovereign. Consequently, the State did not reserve exclusive legal authority and monopoly to wage war. Such a state created enduring conditions of political anarchy

characterized by frequent wars, conflicts and criminal disorder. It was only when a hegemon arose that the inter and intra state system saw some stability. Since anarchy was the order of the day, there was no distinction between the regular, irregular and the non-combatant. In such an anarchic system, individual human selfishness and greed became drivers for more conflict and led to the rise of the mercenary class which can be co-equated with irregular forces. Many of the medieval militaries employed these mercenaries who were both indigenous, like the *Prubiyas* (Kloff, Dirk H.A. 2013) or of foreign origin, ranging from the Turks to the Europeans (Dalrymple, W. 2004). A major portion of the Mughal army comprises of mercenary groups comprising of disparate Central Asian tribes (Mukerji, S. 2019). Thus, the blending of regular and irregular forces was evident. These hybrid forces employed all methods of warfare ranging from criminal (assassinations, sabotage, dissension), psychological, sub-conventional and to conventional.

Kautilya's *Arthashastra*. In order to further substantiate facts, a cursory examination of the pre-modern treatise on statecraft has also been undertaken and some relevant facets have been brought.

- ***War as an Extension of Politics.*** Arthashastra focuses on preserving and expanding the power of the State. Therein it brings out that Inter-State competitions existed, and to preserve the State it was necessary to play 'power politics' with focuses on foreign policy expansionism but with the caveat that military conquest was not the prime option. Instead, a linear approach was advocated to achieving political objectives through four *upayas* or linear approaches to achieve political objectives by a State (Liebig, Michael and Mishra, S. 2017). These were sama (conciliation), dana (gifting), bheda (dissension) and lastly, danda (force) {Gautam, P. 2017}.
- ***Use of 'Other Means' to Achieve Political Objectives.*** The Kautilyan foreign policy theory (*Sadgunya*) proposes six methods of achieving political objectives. Out of these, war is only one option and the *ultima ratio* (Gautam, P. 2017). In that context Kautilya lists out four forms of warfare – *Prakasa Yuddha* (open warfare governed by set of rules), *Kut Yuddha* or 'concealed warfare' (deception, irregular tactics and the general abrogation of norms and laws of war), *Guda or Tushnim Yuddha* or clandestine operations/ silent warfare (that included disinformation, dissension, targeted killings, political assassinations), and lastly *Mantra Yuddha* or 'war by counsel' (or coercive diplomacy) which blended *Kut and Guda Yuddha* with diplomatic parleys. The economic futility of war was the principle driver for articulation of 'other means' of achieving political objectives in inter-state

contestations. Kautilya states, “when the advantages to be derived from peace and war are equal, one should prefer peace, for disadvantages such as loss of power and wealth are ever attendant upon war” (Gautam, P. 2017).

- **War Without Spilling Blood.** Chapter 6 Book X, ‘Concerning Wars’, summarizes the Kautilyan concept of a ‘bloodless war’. Patrik Olivelle translates it as, “an arrow unleashed by an archer may kill a single man or not kill anyone; but a strategy unleashed by a wise man kills even those still in the womb” (Gautam, P. 2017).

Appraisal

Having established two distinct frameworks (occidental and oriental) which are rooted in two different timelines, it is easy to compare and come to conclusions. It is quite evident that there are broad range of similarities between the two frameworks. Thus, it somewhat proves that ‘new’ is somewhat more of the ‘old’. There is clear evidence to support that the means and authority to wage war were not restricted to States, there was blending of forces as well as methodologies of warfighting, focus on achieving political objectives through ‘other means’ which were short of open war, centrality of economy in inter-state conflicts and war avoidance, and emphasis on containing violence and bloodshed. Thus, with emergence of the ‘new’ Westphalian concept of nation-state itself is under siege with a shift towards a more federated political structures mirroring the pre-modern era.

Therefore, it leads to the conclusion that the emerging challenges to the existing international system, and the combination of limited civilizational experience and linear cultural outlook has led to the articulation of the term hybrid warfare as a new or modern form of warfare. This condition is best summed up by Clausewitz who stated that, “*Every age has its own kind of war, its own limiting conditions, and its own peculiar preconceptions*”.

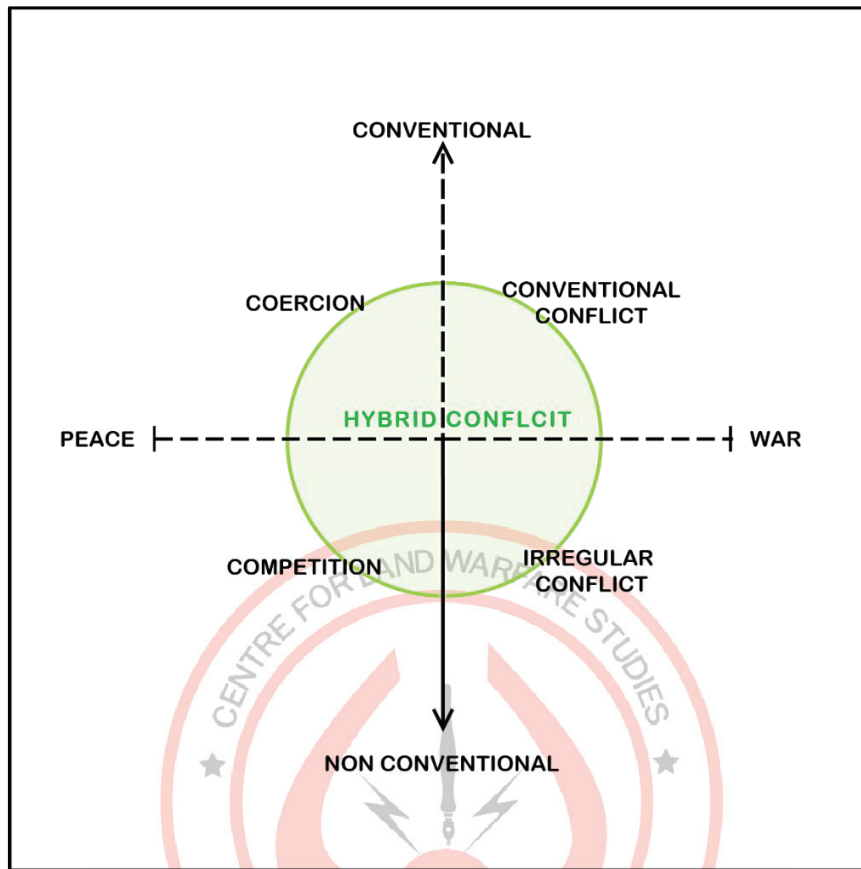
Notwithstanding above, there are changes which can be seen. Key changes are:-

- What we are witnessing is decline in use of conventional military capability in Inter-State contestations and a corresponding rise in non-military and irregular methods. This is true even for States having comparatively large conventional capabilities (Russia, China, Pakistan, etc.), who are resorting to increasing use of non-military means even against weaker States. This is driven by the desire of all to find more effective and efficient means to achieve the desired political end state.

- The emergence of domains such as cyber and electromagnetic has provided new means for Inter-State and non-Inter-State contests. The networking and ‘informisation’ of the population has caused a power shift in societies from the polity to the people. Consequently ‘people’ have emerged as the new center of gravity.
- The military response of the information age has been ‘weaponisation of information’ which is being directed against networked societies and groups with the aim of creating dissension, chaos and dislocation through disinformation and psychological domination. And thus, ‘*influencing*’ is the new buzzword.

Hybrid Conflicts

The traditional spectrum of conflict between the dyad of ‘war and peace’ is linear in nature and therefore, falls short of elucidating both the character and nature of war. Apropos, when a second dimension, that is, the methods or means (warfare) is added, it addresses this shortcoming. Given below is the **Full Spectrum of Conflict Design** articulated by Robert S. Burrell which has been suitably modified (**Figure 1**) {Burrell, Robert, S. 2023}. The X-axis delineates the continuum between war and peace and the Y-axis delineates the methods and means (warfare). These means can be employed directly (and overtly), indirectly (including covertly and clandestinely), or somewhere in between. Together, four clear quadrants emerge viz. competition, coercion, conventional conflict and irregular conflict. This two-dimensional framework elucidates the relationship between methods and means and the environment spectrum in which conflicts take place. Considering that methods can be hybrid (hybrid warfare), it is posited that the same can be applied across the entire spectrum of conflict to achieve the desired political objectives. This can be termed as ‘hybrid conflicts’ which encompasses all four quadrants of the Conflict Design. An example would be the use of nuclear weapons which can be used for both coercion and in conventional conflict.

Figure 1: Full Spectrum Conflict Design

Source: Adapted from the Original by Robert S Burrell

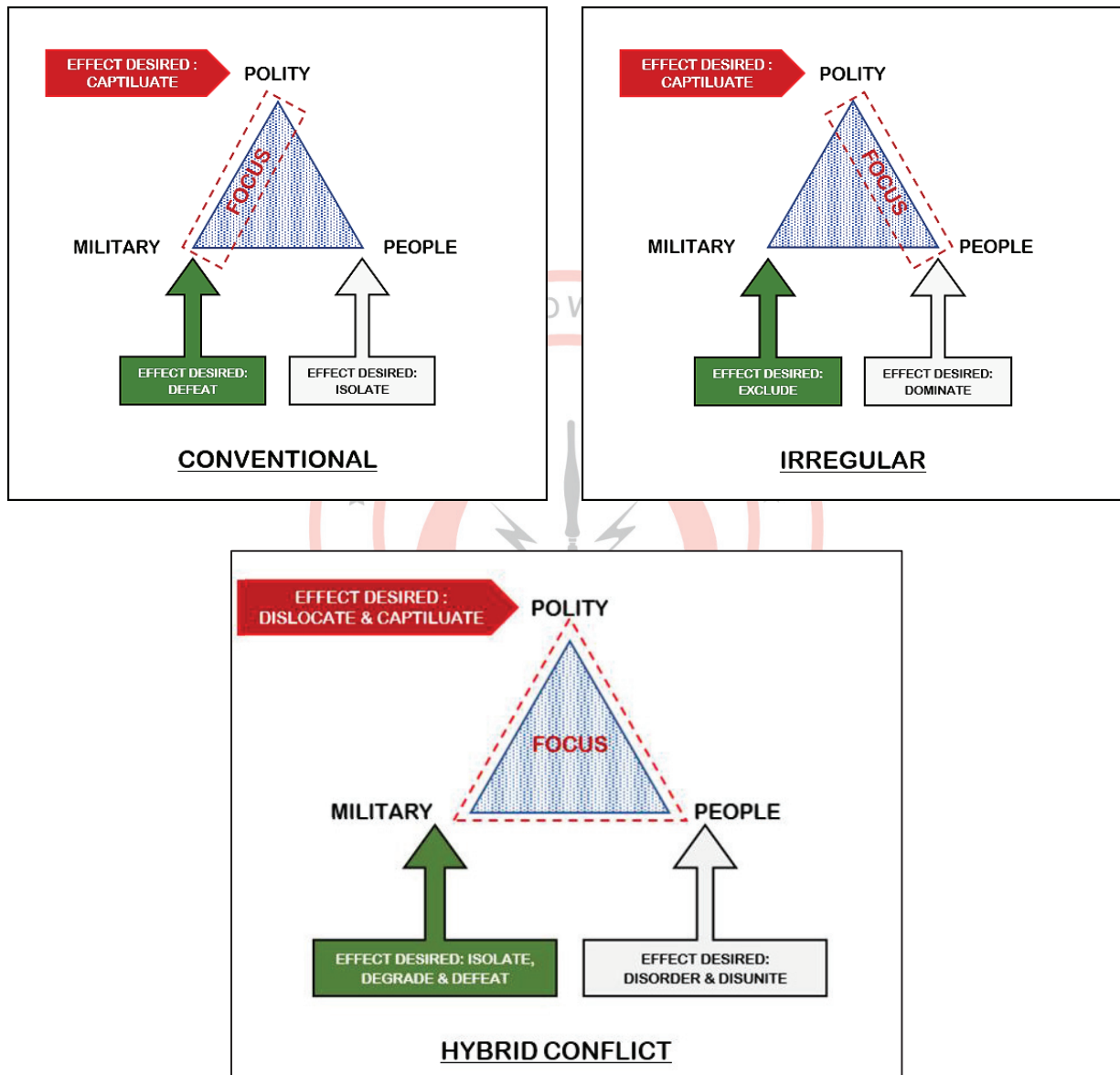
So, what are the key ingredients of Hybrid Conflicts? As we have concluded previously, there is marked drawdown in use of conventional military (but not a complete absence), there is an upswing in use of modern technological means and irregular methods, the domains of conflict have expanded, there is an aspect of adopting a covert approach to contests, effort is no keeping the conflicts below thresholds of war, there is a diffusion of power between the polity and people, and finally, there is an underlying emphasis on efficient achievement of political objectives anchored in the desire of economic preservation.

In that context, Julian Lindley-French's postulation of 'Strategic *Maskirova*' merits attention. It is described as, "*a war that is short of war; a purposeful strategy of deception that combines use of force with disinformation and destabilization to create ambiguity in the minds of leaders about how best to respond*" (Lindley-French, J. 2015).

Hybrid Conflicts can be defined as, "a contestation which aims to influence the polity, the people and the military to achieve desired political objectives through application of traditional

military and political (diplomatic) means suitably blended (and strategically directed) with irregular (including covert) and non-military means (to include emerging and traditional). The non-military and irregular means being the principal arms of action so as to keep the conflict below the threshold of war”.

Figures 2 – 4: Conventional, Irregular and Hybrid Conflict Constructs



The cognitive domain therein is the principle domain of warfighting in context of Hybrid Conflicts which are characterized by predominance of influence operations with kinetic operations being its sub-set with the aim of affecting a cognitive domination of the adversary. The physical dimension focuses on physical conflict on land, sea, air and space domains, and complements the

actions in the cognitive and virtual domains. Hybrid Conflicts can also be undertaken against the larger international community to safeguard own national interests in an inter-connected global order.

This entire aspect of “influencing” can also be termed as Strategic Communication Campaign and can also be classified as **Responses Short of War (RSOW)**. Thus, a campaign can be conducted to influence the behaviour of nations/ entities, their polity, population and military through non-kinetic and kinetic means offering the prospect of plausible deniability and restricting the conflict to threshold below war. Therefore, it offers the opportunity of being an **efficient warfighting method and effective tool of statecraft**.

Hybrid Threats, Forces and Operations

In the context of Hybrid Conflict, terms such as hybrid threats, forces and operations also come in to play. These too therefore, need to be examined to ascertain their veracity.

Hybrid Threats. The term ‘threat’ can be defined as communicated intent to inflict harm or loss on another individual, organization or society. There are two variables herein – communication of intent and harm/ loss. Communication of intent can be through kinetic, non-kinetic or both mediums (hybrid). Similarly, the ‘harm/ loss’ can be in the physical, non-physical (cyber or electromagnetic) and cognitive domains (economic, psychological, etc), as also in all three combined. Thus, it is evident that ‘threats’ when blended together and applied simultaneously can attain more potency through manifestation in multiple domains. Apropos, ‘hybrid threats’ establishes itself as being a valid term.

Hybrid Forces and Operations. A hybrid force, in-keeping with the definition of hybrid, would be one comprising regular and irregular forces operating as a team under a **single commander** (unity of command) in the **same and/ or different domains** (physical and/ or cognitive). Such a force would generate a combat potential much higher than that of its individual components due to the complementary effect. And operations conducted by a mix of conventional (or regular), irregular and hybrid forces, operating in same or different domains but with a singular operational objective, can be defined as Hybrid Operations.

There are ample examples of use of hybrid forces and conduct of hybrid operations both from pre-modern and modern eras. The campaigns waged in ancient Hispania by the Iberian leader Virathus or the renegade General Sertorius against the forces of the Roman Republic in the 2nd and 3rd Centuries BCE respectively can also be defined as hybrid operations. Similarly, the concept of *la petite guerre* (small wars) executed by European armies during the 17th and 18th Centuries has parallels with the HW operations (Mackubin Thomas Owens, 2018). Therein a guerrilla force comprising both military and para military forces undertook irregular operations in hostile territory to support the conventional operations. Another notable example was the concept of *L'Ordre Mixte* or *Order Mixte* (Mixed Order) which was a tactical formation of the French Revolutionary Army passed on to Napoleon's Grande Armée (Pavkovic, M., Rice, R.S., Schnied, F.S., and Scott, C. 2008). Therein the tactical units were composed of regular troops and militias due to operational necessity.

A similar model has been adopted by the Chinese Navy (PLAN) which utilizes its fishing militia, a supposedly civilian force, along with its Coast Guard, operating in conjunction with PLAN to form a classic hybrid force colloquially called as "**little blue men**". Similarly, the Russian invasion of Crimea in 2014 was also characterized by the employment of "**little green men**", a hybrid force comprising local Crimean volunteers/ militia and Spetsnaz (special forces), operating together in Crimea. This hybrid force created the conditions for a nearly bloodless annexation of Crimea through conduct of influence operations.

Today hybrid forces can effectively incorporate technologically advanced systems into their force structure and strategy, and use these systems in ways that are beyond the intended employment parameters. Operationally, hybrid military forces are superior to Western forces within their limited operational spectrum (Hoffman, F.G. 2009). Terrain, especially the urban variety, is used as a force multiplier, and the population as a resource provider – providing logistics and intelligence. The kinetic operations of hybrid forces coupled with influence operations help in gaining control over the masses. This cognitive domination translates into higher combat effectiveness, as the morale of opposing forces and supporting population significantly degrades. Thus, psychological or influence operations become the dominant line of operation complemented by kinetic operations.

Conclusion

This monologue establishes that term like ‘hybrid warfare’ is academically valid while debunking others including ‘hybrid war’. It also delved upon the contours of emerging form of contestation which has been coined as ‘hybrid conflict’. It also establishes that this form of contestation is no longer limited to conflicts between asymmetric belligerents, but has also become the preferred tool of statecraft for powerful States having adequate conventional and nuclear capability. Thus, hybrid conflicts also fall within the ambit of RSOW when perceived for the prism of ‘war’.

Future challenges will definitely be different from the conflicts that our nation has faced over the last century. Hence, India needs to articulate its national security strategy, war fighting concepts and force structures considering the changing character of warfare and shift from achieving national objectives through ‘conflicts’ rather than ‘war’. It mandates establishment of **agile, multi-domain** and **multi-agency** organisations with capacity to undertake hybrid conflicts in all domains and using all national means. Concurrently, a collaborative approach needs to be adopted both within the nation and at the international level to develop dynamic statecraft strategies and responses to counter such threats through development of capabilities and capacities in pursuance of our national interests.

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