

# **Hybrid Warfare and CPEC-Targeting China-Pakistan Mutual Struggle for Economic prosperity and Peace in greater Asia and regions adjoining Indian Ocean**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a promising flagship project of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). As a peace dividend, CPEC is projected to bring tremendous economic returns for Pakistan and China, particularly underdeveloped regions on both sides. Nonetheless, CPEC is facing stiff opposition from various regional and international players. This opposition stems from the fear of a rising China already slated to overtake US as the world's largest economy within the next few years. The manifestation of resistance to CPEC comes in the form of publicly stated political position of "unacceptability", widespread propaganda and covert as well as overt support of violent non-state actors. These myriad threats and challenges cumulatively form what is now commonly called hybrid warfare. This article examines primary and secondary sources of data to illustrate the nature of threats to CPEC. The research also recommends some measures to firewall these evolving threats for early realization of CPEC.*

**Keywords:** CPEC, Hybrid threats, military and non-military means, regional connectivity, Hybrid warfare

## INTRODUCTION

The Asian region has embarked upon an economic, cultural and social journey envisioned in the BRI initiative by China. The Belt & Road enterprise has two main components i.e. MSR and SREB which aims to connect different regions in China's neighborhood. This project is 'the No.1 project under heaven' by President Xi Jinping and has the potential of realizing Chinese dream. The BRI is not a regional policy but a grand global strategy with benign strategic undertones. Having a great history of brotherly relations, it is no wonder that Pakistan has been an enthusiastic consistent partner in this Chinese initiative.

Accordingly, pivotal to the realization of this BRI initiative is the execution of the flagship project i.e. CPEC. The planned route gives China access to overseas markets through the shortest possible route between Gwadar and China's western province of Xinjiang. CPEC will provide China access to the Middle East, Persian Gulf and the African region. Consequently, this game changer project is under the threat of Hybrid warfare. The use of clandestine destabilizing nonmilitary tactics against this promising project is a matter of concern for both China and Pakistan which can disrupt the vision of regional connectivity if left unaddressed. In this backdrop this research evaluates how hybrid threats can be a challenge to this flagship project.

This research further assesses the mutual mechanism required to ward off hybrid threats and to evaluate the role of Pakistan as a partner state in this Chinese endeavor. The elimination of hybrid threats will further strengthen strategic partnership between Pakistan and China and ensure increasing economic prosperity. This study is significant as it analyses the regional connectivity paradigm, hybrid threats viz-a-viz CPEC and the need to foster a mutual mechanism to extract the maximum dividends of the promising project.

### Section 1: Geostrategic significance of Gwadar for CPEC

The visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping to Pakistan in 2015 and signing of \$46 billion agreement on China-Pakistan-Economic Corridor<sup>1</sup> is perhaps the most telling demonstration of

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremy Garlick., "Deconstructing the China - Pakistan Economic Corridor : Pipe Dreams Versus Geopolitical Realities," *Journal of Contemporary China* 27 (112): 519-533, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2018.1433483>.

Pakistan's increasing geo- strategic significance. It is concomitantly a measure of the expanding strategic relations between China and Pakistan. Within this, CPEC is inextricably linked to the port of Gwadar, connecting to the Indian Ocean. The port of Gwadar is located on the Arabian Sea coast of Balochistan while Kashgar is located at the center of China's only Muslim majority Xinjiang region.

The CPEC venture involves a combination of transport and energy network projects along with development of Gwadar as a major deep-sea port. The port will offer direct access to the Indian Ocean, Arabian Sea and to the Persian Gulf, Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea leading to the Mediterranean Sea through the Suez Canal. The Gwadar port has the potential to bring continents closer. It will allow for landlocked Central Asian states and Afghanistan to benefit from access to the Arabian Sea through CPEC. It will also provide China the shortest access to the Middle East and Africa, where thousands of Chinese firms, employing tens of thousands of Chinese workers are involved in development work.

The existing sea distance between Western China and Middle East is roughly 12537 miles while it is 19132 miles for Europe.<sup>2</sup> The CPEC promises to open up China's remote, landlocked province of Xinjiang and create incentives for both states and private enterprises to expand economic activity and create jobs in this under-developed region. For Pakistan the envisaged corridor with a network of communication infrastructure, road, rail links, industrial zones and above all energy enterprises will open new vistas of economic opportunities, employment leading to cut back on the unrest in Balochistan as well as militant activities elsewhere sponsored by the adversaries.

Consequently, the lynchpin of CPEC is the strategically located port of Gwadar, on the western edge of Pakistan's coast of Makran (Balochistan). Geographically; it is close to the international maritime energy choke point, the Strait of Hormuz. Of the total world oil supply, 22 million barrels per day of oil shipments transmitted through the Strait of Hormuz in the first half of 2018, this accounts for almost 24% of the global oil market<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Research Study on Promotion of Agriculture in CPEC zones and possible role of ZTBL, conducted by Planning and Research Department, Zarai Taraqati Bank Limited, Islamabad. See <https://www.ztbl.com.pk/wp-content/uploads/Documents/Publications/Research-Studies/Promotion-ofAgriculturein-CPECZone.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> International Energy Agency. "World Energy Outlook." World Energy Outlook Report 2018, accessed March 8, 2021. <https://www.iea.org/reports/world-energy-outlook-2018> .

In a public address Pakistani Chief of Army Staff Gen. Qamar Javed Bajwa announced a geo-economic vision of Pakistan, prioritized regional integration and collective pursuits for sustainable development in an “environment of peace and stability”<sup>4</sup>. This emphasis on geo-economics is based on all the benefits that CPEC is bound to bring Pakistan and the region.

## **Section 2: Hybrid Warfare an emerging trend of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

In the wake of 21<sup>st</sup> century, hybrid threats and consequent hybrid warfare gained prominence despite the vagueness of its understanding. Generally acceptable consensus is that it is the simultaneous application of various modes of warfare military and non- military to get combined effects in the physical and psychological dimension of conflict. Facilitated by globalization and revolution in information technology, hybrid warfare is an amalgamation of synchronized techniques for the execution of all sorts of power. Employed by both state and non-state actors, they vary in their means and actions as they create linear and non- linear effects. It uses attrition based asymmetric approach across the full spectrum of societal functions to disgrace adversary’s capabilities. It relies heavily on deception, ambiguity, creativity and an element of surprise along horizontal and vertical axis to maximize synergistic effects.

The non-military means are also known as the Non Kinetic means (Table 1) that are based on or aimed at convincing, shaping and sapping the national will of the target state. This is done through exploiting the fault lines of the targeted state. They include a variety of methods and the strategy is more fluid in functioning. It is appropriately stated that, “Non-military forms and means of struggle have received unprecedented development and have acquired a dangerous, sometimes violent nature. The practical use of non-military methods and means can cause a collapse in the energy, banking, economic, information and other spheres of a state’s daily activities”<sup>5</sup>. Thus a wider array of tactics must be employed under non-military / non kinetic / hybrid threats.

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<sup>4</sup> Arif Rafiq, “Pakistan’ s Geo-economic Delusions,” *Foreign Policy* , April 5, 2021, accessed May 9 , 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/04/05/pakistans-geoeconomic-delusions/>

<sup>5</sup> Dr Harold Orenstein and Timothy Thomas, "Contemporary Warfare and Current Issues for The Defense of the Country." *Militray Review* (Army University Press, November-December, 2017 ) 22-27. Accessed March 12, 2021. <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/English-Edition-Archives/November-December-2017/Contemporary-Warfare-and-Current-Issues-for-the-Defense-of-the->

Non Kinetic Tools	Kinetic Tools
<b>Ends</b>	
Psychological Collapse / Smart /Soft Powers/ Cybernetics/ Diplomacy / Economics	Paralyzing the state through destruction / Concepts
Trade wars / Legal amputations/ 4 <sup>th</sup> and 5 <sup>th</sup> Generation warfare / Intelligence operations / Media wars , proxies / WHAM /Creative chaos theory	Doctrines / Plans / Designs
HARRP	Designs
Mind control application	Techniques
Disaster capitalism	Military application
<b>Means</b>	
Media /Movies / Culture / Information Technology / Social Media	Land Power Air Power Sea Power
Pacts / Legal Barriers	
Legal barriers / Financial Aid / Military Aid	
Espionage /Intelligence	

**Table 1: Kinetic and Non Kinetic Threats in 21st Century**

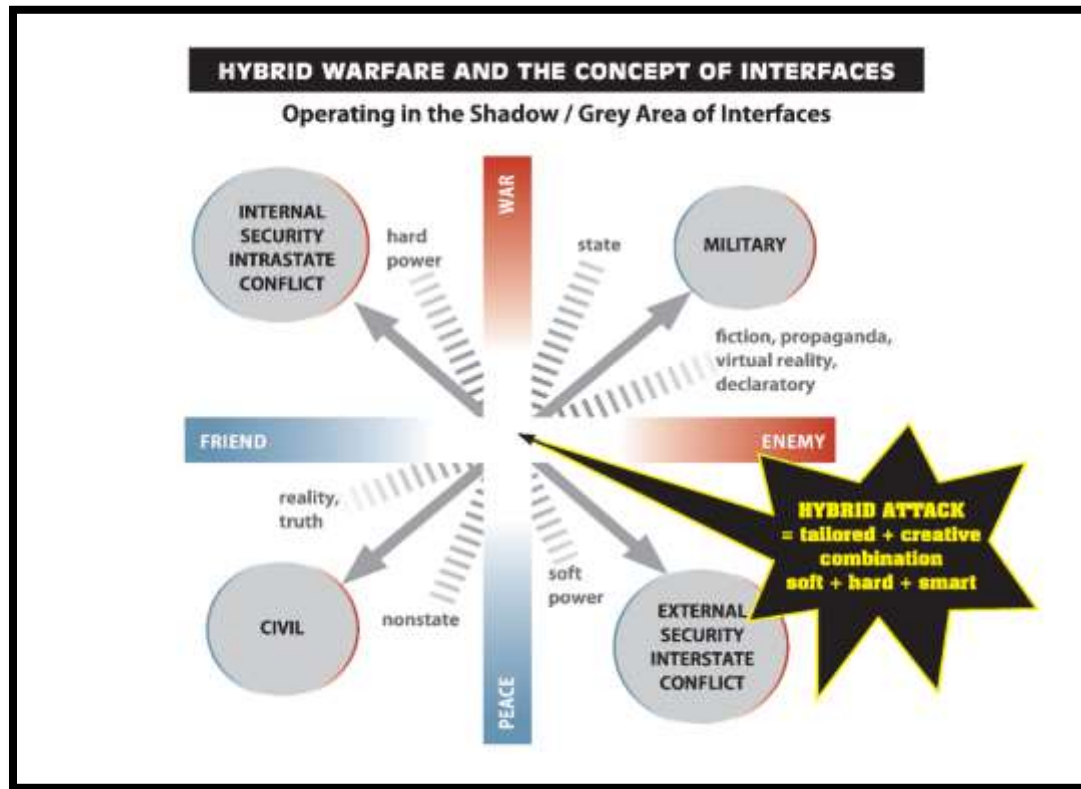
**Source:** National strategy paper titled Non-kinetic Challenges to the State of Pakistan published National Defence University by ISSRA (Institute for Strategic Studies, Research & Analysis ), February 2012

The terms hybrid warfare, hybrid threats, gray-zone hybrid threats and gray-zone conflict continue to evolve. In the first decade of 21<sup>st</sup> century, hybrid warfare and hybrid threats gained currency. Hybrid threats meanwhile are when ‘an adversary simultaneously and adaptively employs a combined mix of conventional weapons, irregular tactics, terrorism and criminal behavior in the same battle space to obtain political objectives’.<sup>6</sup> The gray-zone encompasses space between peace and war in which aggressors use hybrid threats to shape battle field and achieve strategic objectives short of all out, declared conflict. ‘By description therefore gray-

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 22-27

zone is an operational environment in which a conflict takes place'. Furthermore, gray-zone conflicts are those in which nation states and non-state actors employ hybrid threats and (or) tactics without violating international norms or crossing established thresholds leading to open war<sup>7</sup>:



**Figure 1: Hybrid Warfare and the various interfaces**

<https://www.maanpuolustus-lehti.fi/the-hybrid-face-of-warfare-in-the-21st-century/>

General James N. Mattis of United States Marine Corps, later the US Secretary of Defense, was the first to use hybrid term in 2005. Later on, the same year, both General James N. Mattis and Lieutenant Colonel Frank Hoffman, retired from Marine Corps Reserve in 2001 and currently a distinguished Research Fellow with the Institute for National Strategic Studies at NDU, argued in the US Naval Institute Proceedings, that future conflicts will be a convergence and combination of distinct challengers – traditional, irregular, catastrophic and disruptive and they together named this synthesis as Hybrid Warfare. This was a departure from US National Defense Strategy (NDS) provided in 2005 which talked about all of these challenges without

<sup>7</sup> Maritime Doctrine of Pakistan: Preserving Freedom of Seas, 2018 Naval Headquarters Islamabad, pg 113

discussing the aspect of convergence in between them<sup>8</sup>. It was the episode of Hezbollah against Israel in 2006 which provided Frank Hoffman to best explain the multi-dimensionality, operational integration and exploitation of information domain which best defines the concept of hybrid war. Frank Hoffman defines hybrid threats as “the full range of different modes of warfare including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts including indiscriminate violence and coercion and criminal disorder”<sup>9</sup>.

Similarly, the Russian Chief of the General Staff, Valery Gerasimov shared his understanding of the evolving nature of warfare in his article February 2013, titled ‘The Value of Science is Insight’. In this article he focused attention on the events of the Arab Spring (2011) and the changing world order and the use of various tools and techniques used in order to achieve certain ends. In 2013, General Gerasimov stated that “wars are no longer declared and having begun, proceed according to an unfamiliar template”<sup>10</sup>. He also described that the West was using a new aggressive strategy nicknamed “Trojan Horse”<sup>11</sup> famously referencing to the conquest of Troy by Greece. These lines effectively described the situational strategy that was unfolding in the Middle East and elsewhere at the time- a strategy that was camouflaged in plain sight.

According to Congressional Research Service on 20<sup>th</sup> August 2021, General Gerasimov described Russia as continuously assessing the changed nature of war in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He defined this new form of warfare as a use of non-military tools for politically motivated conflicts. Interestingly, the concept of hybrid as described by General Gerasimov was identified and highlighted by him as a strategy that the West was already using against their adversaries, citing the events of the Arab Spring and the color revolutions<sup>12</sup>. Although nothing formally exists as

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<sup>8</sup> Murat Caliskan, "Hybrid Warfare through the lens of strategic theory," *Defense and Security Analysis* 35 (1): 40-58, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/14751798.2019.1565364>.

<sup>9</sup> Franck G. Hoffman, "Hybrid Warfare and Challenges," National Defense University Press, Joint Force Quarterly 1, no.52 (2009): 34-39.

<sup>10</sup> Andrew J. Duncan, "New 'Hybrid War' or Old 'Dirty tricks'? Teh Gerasimov debate and Russia's Reponse to the Contemporary Operating Environment," *Canadian Military Journal* 17 (3), accessed February 12, 2021, <http://www.journal.forces.gc.ca/Vol17/no3/PDF/CMJ173Ep6.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Pavel Felgenhauer, "A New Version of the 'Gerasimov Doctrine'?" *The Jamestown Foundation*, accessed March 11, 2021, <https://jamestown.org/program/a-new-version-of-the-gerasimov-doctrine/>.

<sup>12</sup> Andrew S. Bowen, *Russian Armed Forces : Military Doctrine and Strategy*. Washington: CGS, accessed February 11, 2021, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/IF11625.pdf>.

“Gerasimov Doctrine”, following the 2013 analysis by Russian General and events in Ukraine in 2014, the term became almost acceptable in the Western world. The extensive use of non-state armed actors, information and disinformation and other non-kinetic strategies by Russia were seen as a manifestation of hybrid warfare.

Given the power that modern day technology and social media tools has landed in the hands of individuals, state as well as non-state actors, creating chaos, stirring insurrections, enflaming religious sensitivities has become all the more easier than ever before.

### **Section 3: Perils of Hybrid warfare in Asia**

Asia provides the most fertile ground to study the transformation of warfare<sup>13</sup>. A home to three nuclear power states, world’s second and third largest economies, high defense spending makes the study of hybrid warfare even more interesting. The diversity in the region ranging from issues like Japanese vision of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific region, India’s Act East policy, Indo-Pakistan standoff after Pulwama attack to China’s decision of investing in Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) of which China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is the flagship project is what makes the case of studying the threats of hybrid nature more appealing viz-a-viz Asia. With this, there are perplexing issues of complex nature like the rise of extremism, increase in role of non-state actors (violent), issues of trans-nationality and role of indirect actors.

The notion of applicability of hybrid warfare in Asia is intertwined with the revival of China. With the associate closeness of China with Pakistan, several regional state actors have started exploiting the space between peace and war by means of hybrid strategies. They have been using irregular warfare to sabotage the China’s integration in Asian economy as an alternative to Western imperialism and thus resultantly adversely affect the initiatives of China like Belt and Road Initiative (its land and maritime component) and their main focus is CPEC.

For friends and allies, China's extra territorial presence is meant to draw economic advantages but for rivals, this means strategic encirclement or else 'bases' for flexibility of military (naval) operations. For instance, China's presence in Gwadar could be perceived as

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<sup>13</sup> Chiyuki Aoi, Futamura Madoka & Patalano Alessio, "Introduction 'hybrid warfare in Asia ; its meaning and shape'," *The Pacific Review* (Taylor and Francis, 2018 ) 13 (6): 693-713, accessed April 19, 2021. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2018.1513548>.



aiming to establish and enhance Beijing's competitive economic and commercial edge over the rest of the world and to increase economic activity in Pakistan. Alternatively, for rivals, especially those concerned about China's naval power, it is an attempt at seeking bases in the Indian Ocean through a 'string of pearls' (as US and West terms it) with Gwadar just being one pearl only (the rest are the Islands of Sri-Lanka, Bangladesh, Mauritius, Maldives etc.) meant to enhance reach of the Chinese navy.

Following the visit of Chinese President to Pakistan, the strategic community in India and their media in particular has made deliberate attempts to create hype of 'strategic encirclement' of their country by China. However the Indian strategic dimension depicts a different story (Table 2 and Table 3). There are a series of challenges created for the purpose to lodge hybrid warfare against Pakistan. The FATF fiasco is one of the main hurdles created to sabotage Pakistan's International standing and economic growth. Pakistan has made significant progress of 26 of the 27 action plan and therefore remains on the FATF grey list. In July 2021, the Foreign Minister stated that Pakistan provided concrete evidence of Indian terror financing in Pakistan, something that was confirmed after the Johar Town Lahore attack<sup>14</sup>. The list of such activities by India includes several avenues as highlighted in Table 3. These initiatives are designed to be used to counter China and Pakistan as India claims them as two major strategic rivals. Additionally, QUAD is also being established to serve this purpose, to function as an Asian NATO<sup>15</sup> (Table 2). The Laddakh standoff between India and China was a major eye opener for India hence the increased effort to access new weapons and information systems. The speedy advancement of technology and strategic repositioning is evidence of that.

**Table 2: Quad Purpose and membership**

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<sup>14</sup> Mansoor Malik, "Evidence pf India's Terror Financing Shared with FATF," *The Dawn News*, July 5, 2021, accessed July 12, 2021, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1633205>.

<sup>15</sup> Sumitha Narayanan Kutty and Rajesh Basrur, "The QUAD – What it is and What it is Not," *The Diplomat*, March 24, 2021, accessed August 3, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/03/the-quad-what-it-is-and-what-it-is-not/>

Agreements	Stated Purpose	Strategic Purpose
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Multiparty Initiatives	Stated Purpose	Strategic Significance	Member States
QUAD	Vaccine development Critical technologies and climate change	To contain China, enhance military strength Gather intelligence, Restructuring global and regional trade	United States, India, Japan, Australia  May become Quad Plus Canada, France, New Zealand and UK
*BECA (2020)		Air Force to Air Force Cooperation To provide Indian military systems with high quality GPS to navigate missiles	To get access to a number of things: American geo spatial intelligence Topographical and aeronautical data Allows sharing of highly classified information
*GSOMIA ( 2002)		It ensures security standard for safeguarding critical information shared between India and USA.	Information sharing about a rival or potential rivals
*LEMOA (2016)		It allows US and India to use bases for repair and replenishment of supplies	This opens doors to wars ships and other facilities It bridges the trust deficit

	Access spare parts and services from land bases , air bases and ports	
*COMCASA (2018)	it provides for the sale of high end technology to India by USA	It permits for ‘interoperability’ between two forces.  It will give India access to encrypted communications equipment and systems

<sup>16</sup> **Table 3: Strategic Agreements by India and USA to counter China in the IOR**

Through its operative intelligence agencies in Pakistan, India is taking keen interest in sabotaging the prospects that CPEC is expected to bring for the region as whole<sup>17</sup>. Some reports authenticate the presence of such malign factions that are hampering in the way of CPEC through the existence<sup>18</sup>. The Kulbhushan Jadhav case presents evidence of that<sup>19</sup>. Hence the investment in Chabahar port is a way to somehow balance out the shifting trends in the region. As of recently China and Iran’s rapprochement has taken place as a result \$400 billion will be invested in Iran by China panning over the next 25 years. This rapprochement had a varying impact for India who also has invested in the same project<sup>20</sup>. The Indian investment in the

<sup>16</sup> Hali, S.M, “BECA – A New Indo-US Bilateral Agreement, *The News*, November 2, 2020, accessed June 1, 2021, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/737917-beca-a-new-indo-us-bilateral-agreement>. .

<sup>17</sup> Hassan Khan, “China-Pakistan Economic Corridor – Really A Game Changer,” *Pakistan Toda*, June 13, 2015, <https://archive.pakistantoday.com.pk/2015/06/13/is-china-pakistan-economic-corridor-really-a-game-changer/>. Also see Jeremy Garlick. 2018. "Deconstructing the China - Pakistan Economic Corridor : Pipe Dreams Vaersus Geopolitical Realities," *Journal of Conemporary China*.

<sup>18</sup> Ashraf Malik, “India and CPEC,” *Daily Pakistan Today*, May 30, 2015, <https://en.dailypakistan.com.pk/cpec>.

<sup>19</sup> Ahsan Butt, “What the Kulbhushan jadhav Saga reveals about India and Pakistan's Balochistan Problem,” *The Diplomat*, January 11, 2018, accessed March 13, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/01/what-the-kulbhushan-jadhav-saga-reveals-about-india-and-pakistans-balochistan-problems/>.

<sup>20</sup> Muhammad Tayyab Safdar and Zabin Joshua, “What Does the China- Iran deal mean for teh China - Pakistan Economic Corridor ?,” *The Diplomat*, August 14, 2020, accessed April 3, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/08/what-does-the-china-iran-deal-mean-for-the-china-pakistan-economic-corridor/>.

Chabahar- Zahedan rail track did not come through even though US sanctions had exempted that project. This convergence of Iran and China is also a major incentive for Pakistan to improve relations with Iran and vis-a-versa.

#### **Section 4: Hybrid Warfare at play against CPEC**

Hybrid warfare has taken many forms as far as CPEC is concerned. Pakistan provided a detailed dossier of “irrefutable evidence” of Indian sponsorship of terrorism on Pakistani soil. On the 14<sup>th</sup> November 2020, the evidence for this was presented in a joint press conference with the Inter-Service Public Relations (ISPR) Director General Major Gen Babar Iftikhar in Islamabad and Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi. Jointly they condemned the ceasefire violations by India across the LoC, and the Foreign Minister stated that there is a clear correlation between the terrorist activities in Balochistan and the CPEC. The Minister also highlighted that this was a clear violation of international law, in particular Articles 2(4) United Nations Charter, Article 41(3) of the Vienna Convention, and the paras 2 and 5 of the UN Security Council Resolution 1373 of 2001<sup>21</sup>. This dossier was a huge development in elaborating the ‘grand design’ of outside forces that are constantly at work to slowdown, sabotage, undermine and compromise the integrity of the CPEC project.

Evidently as the first phase of CPEC has been successfully completed amidst multifarious threats we can identify a series of attempts made at sabotaging the projects related to CPEC. Some significant attempts (2018 onwards) have been highlighted below:

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<sup>21</sup> Naveed Siddiqui, “Irrefutable Evidence : Dossier on India's sponsorship of state terrorism in Pakistan”, *DAWN NEWS*, November 14, 2020, accessed May 11, 2021, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1590333> Also see Tribune, The Express. 2020. *Pakistan presents 'irrefutable evidence' of India's sponsorship of terror to sabotage CPEC*. November 14, 2020, accessed February 11, 2021, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2272201/pakistan-presents-irrefutable-evidence-of-indias-sponsorship-of-terror-to-sabotage-cpec>. Also see Ahmad, Riaz, Hong Mi, and Lloyd W. Fernald, "Revisiting the potential security threats linked with the China- Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)", *Journal of the International Council for Small Business* 64-80, accessed May 13, 2021. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/26437015.2020.1724735>.

- Attempt to attack Chinese consulate on 23 November 2018 was to create rift in China and Pakistan relations.
- Airing ethnic conflicts is one of the tools used to defeat state's interests. BLA and BLF are easy targets to be brainwashed and thus misused accordingly, fueling the Balochistan separatists.
- Several extremist groups have been trying to sabotage the project. East Turkestan Islamic movement (ETIM), Tehreek-i- taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Lashkar – e – Tayyiba, Lashkar-e- Jhangvi and Balochstan Liberation Front. Several other right wing groups are also trying to sabotage the CPEC.
- Blaming Pakistan for instigating Pulwama attack resulting in a standoff was another attempt in the same direction.
- Aggravating sectarian divide along Sunni-Shia attacks on one against the other is also one of the subversive techniques of creating unrest.
- Forcing Pakistan to international isolation and smearing Pakistan to be sponsoring terrorism.
- Boycott of SAARC conference in 2016 is true manifestation of it, as no such attempts have been made to revive that regional platform.
- Refusal to host Asia Cup 2018 due to participation of Pakistan.
- Denial to attend China led OBOR summit in May 2017 due to involvement of Pakistan.

In order to further disrupt and undermine the security situation in Pakistan specially in Balochistan. Few key incidents can be highlighted in this regard:

- A 5-star hotel was attacked in Southwest Pakistan, as three terrorists killed by security forces. The BLA (a Baloch separatist group) claimed responsibility for the attack. The Pearl Continental (PC) Hotel located near the Gwadar's seaport was the target and security forces were engaged in firing. Luckily no casualties were reported<sup>22</sup>.
- Recently in July 2021, an attack on Chinese workers in KP, when twelve people including nine Chinese workers died in a bus attack. They were workers at the Dasu

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<sup>22</sup> Aamir Latif, "2 Militants storm 5 -Star hotel in southwest Pakista", World, Asia-Pacific, May 11, 2019, accessed May 1, 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/militants-storm-5-star-hotel-in-southwest-pakistan/1475910>.

Power project (KP). The Dasu power project comes under the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)<sup>23</sup>.

- A powerful explosion rocked the provincial capital when a hotel in Pakistan was targeted that killed 4 people and wounded 12 others. The blast luckily missed the Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan that day. Ambassador of China. Mr Nong Rong was in Quetta, Serena Hotel at the time when the blast took place. This attack was later claimed by TTP, who did not state whether the Ambassador was the target of this attack<sup>24</sup>.
- A European Union NGO by the name of EU DisinfoLab that works to combat disinformation against the European Union has uncovered a 15 years' disinformation campaign by India against Pakistan. In the report published by the NGO, it states that India has used one of the "largest networks" to "discredit Pakistan internationally"<sup>25</sup>.
- The Pegasus Spyware (2021) is one of the latest examples of Indian hybrid warfare. A list of 50,000 phone numbers hacked by the Indian government through the Pegasus software (developed by Israel) has surfaced. The list included the names of Pakistani and Chinese officials. The Foreign Office of Pakistan has requested the UN and relevant bodies to investigate the matter of phone hacking of Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan and other officials<sup>26</sup>.
- Under Prime Minister Modi, Indian government has created a special CPEC cell in its premier Intel agency, RAW. An exclusive amount has been set aside for the purpose of destabilizing Pakistan, Balochistan and for covert and overt propaganda against CPEC/Pakistan. All this is part of strategy of hybrid war aimed at weakening CPEC.

Others Perils to CPEC include:

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<sup>23</sup>AlJazeera, "Pakistan bus 'blast' kills at least 12, including nine Chinese", *New York Times*, July 14, 2021, accessed July 19, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/21/world/asia/pakistan-hotel-bombing-china-ambassador.html>.

<sup>24</sup>Ihsanullah Tipu Mehsud, "Deadly blast hits Pakistan hotel, Missing China's Envoy by perhaps just minutes", April 21, 2021, accessed May 14, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/21/world/asia/pakistan-hotel-bombing-china-ambassador.html>

<sup>25</sup> Bilal Kuchay, "EU- NGO Uncovers a 15 year Disinformation Campaign", December 11, 2020, accessed January 12, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/12/11/eu-ngo-report-uncovers-a-15-year-disinformation-campaign>.

<sup>26</sup> GeoNews, "Pegasus Spyware : Pakistan asks UN to probe phone hacking of PM Imran Khan By India", *Geo News*, accessed June 12, 2021, <https://www.geo.tv/latest/361282-pegasus-spyware-pakistan-asks-un-to-probe-phone-hacking-of-pm-imran-khan-by-india> ; and see also <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/8/11/women-pegasus-spyware-scandal-india-middle-east-phone>.

- Fueling insurgency and instability in Balochistan through covert and overt means.
- Spreading rumors to misguide:
  - China intends making Pakistan a colony and is extracting maximum benefits out of it.
  - China intends making CPEC a military project under economic guise.
  - China will subjugate Pakistan economically through repayment of loans under CPEC
- Trying to malign CPEC by declaring it as an illegal project, affecting disputed territories.
- Facilitating terrorist attacks and abetting terrorist outfits to sabotage the progress of CPEC. Meanwhile, it also aims to deter potential investors.
- Persistently indoctrinating that CPEC is contributing to environmental degradation.
- Signing of LEMOA between US and India providing naval operational flexibility to both sides.
- India establishing bases in Seychelles, Mauritius and Djibouti.
- India establishing naval base at Duqm Oman.
- Nuclearization of Indian Ocean-India operationalizing SSBN and test firing new missile systems.
- Large scale joint exercises between USN-IN.

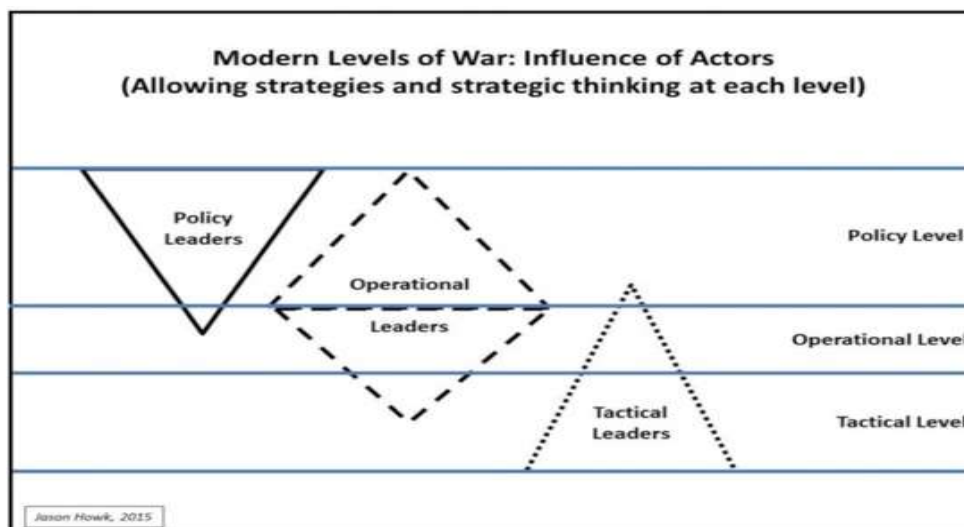


Figure 2: Modern Levels of Warfare<sup>27</sup>

## Section 5: Firewalling Hybrid Warfare at the Strategic and Policy level

The section above describes the multifarious nature of Hybrid warfare thwarting the CPEC. It is evident that the nature of this kind of warfare requires a multi-dimensional response to tackle the variety and severity of the threats.

- First and foremost China should continue trusting Pakistan's efforts in truly materializing the project in full spirit. The China - Pakistan partnership is basically on target and this should be guarded and protected with trusts and transparency at both ends.

The CPEC Authority Act<sup>28</sup> (2020) entails several functions some of which include:

- Generating political consensus on the project's direction.
- Carve out a joint mechanism with China to present alternate narrative / perspective to the existing mindset amongst general populace still confused as if CPEC is some imperialist design of an emerging economy.
- This can be done by making more open discussions on the project, awareness campaigns, seminars workshop with the participation of Chinese and Pakistani politicians, economists, academia and student body should be involved.

Moreover, the following can be done

- An aggressive electronic and print media campaign in Pakistan to counter US-India narrative on CPEC should be encouraged and supported.
- Bringing in more transparency in CPEC projects is the key to fully extract the dividends of CPEC so that uncertainties can be cleared.
- The prospects for the skill development and job creation in CPEC should be explored further and transparent mechanisms should be instituted.

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<sup>27</sup> Jason Criss Howk, "3 Clearer Levels of War: Policy, Operational, Tactical", *Dispatches Pine Hurst*, August 22, 2017, <https://dispatchesfrompinehurst.com/2017/08/22/3-clearer-levels-of-war-policy-operational-tactical/>.

<sup>28</sup> Government of Pakistan, 2020. *The China Pakistan Economic Corridor Authority Act*. Islamabad: gov.pk. accessed June 12, 2021, [http://www.na.gov.pk/uploads/documents/1612267873\\_350.pdf](http://www.na.gov.pk/uploads/documents/1612267873_350.pdf).



- Communication channels should be streamlined horizontally and vertically i.e. from government to the people and between the two countries in order to avoid any misunderstanding.
- Balochistan should be politically stabilized, with horizontal development activities throughout the province should be undertaken.
- Baluchistan should treat this is a star primary project because then the province will be able to reap maximum projects.
- Full- fledged policy framework should be drafted viz-a-viz CPEC and thus consequently strategists should be given the chance by fair means to execute policy measures. Fresh mandate specifically dealing with CPEC shall accelerate the progress and will discourage the groups who intend maligning it.
- Creation of synergistic response, sharing the valuable information with other services. Joint intelligence operations by all services of Pakistan Armed Forces and other law enforcement agencies can prove vital in safeguarding interests of CPEC.
- Dedicated force structure is considered essential in order to safeguard the sensitivities related to CPEC in both land and maritime domain. Raising of dedicated task force CTF-88 by Pakistan navy is the step in right direction.
- Effective border management along Pak Afghan border is the need of the hour to stop frequent incursions of terrorists

### **Conclusion:**

The CPEC is a visionary project that will define the future of the entire region. The new 'Silk Road', as called, is a network of land and sea based economic corridor intended to connect China to Europe and the Middle East through Pakistan, Central Asia and Russia. The corridor is intended to shorten the route for China's energy imports from the Middle East by bypassing the Straits of Malacca which could be blocked in war. The planned corridor has not only its origins in Gwadar but starts at the port to end at Kashgar, some 2040 kilometers Northeast in China. It is destined to bring prosperity and development throughout the regional landscape. This corridor has the potential of connecting Africa, Middle East, Mediterranean region and the extended IOR region.

The hybrid warfare in the form of multifarious threats has been directed at CPEC since its initiation. We can see that these threats are multidimensional and have been used at tactical and operational levels as well. The aim of these threats is to sabotage the CPEC, its related projects and also to undermine the security apparatus of the same. The challenge faced by both China and Pakistan in unison is to keep the CPEC functional and operational so that the dividends that it is bound to reap are not undercut. The peace and security of the region is constantly under threat due to these attempts by the non-state and some states actors, this leads to an unstable and imbalanced political and economic regional environment.

Both China and Pakistan are determined to carry forward CPEC as originally conceived. The establishment of CPEC Authority has provided a fresh vitality to the mega enterprise in Pakistan. But external opposition to damage CPEC remains equally formidable. It is imperative that both sides in Beijing and Islamabad forge an all-embracing joint strategy. It should provide for unhindered political backing, dispel any domestic misapprehensions and has full potential to quell propaganda or any other nefarious designs against CPEC.

### **Recommendations:**

Keeping in view the dynamics surrounding the project, the following policy recommendations are made:

- Debates in the national and provincial legislatures should be held. All provinces should be treated for equitable gains, in best manner possible.
- All stakeholders should be kept on board for any decision taken regarding CPEC i.e. Chamber of Commerce, economists, environmentalists, business community, trade associations and efforts should be made to address their concerns.
- The Pakistani media should play a positive role in creating a positive image of Pakistan. It should also ensure the access of information relating to investment and developmental opportunities in all provinces to the international community.
- Overseas Pakistan's should also be encouraged to invest in various CPEC related projects and SEZ's to ensure a wide scale investment in the CPEC.

- Strengthening of dedicated special security division by Pakistan army will surely provide the necessary protection to CPEC infrastructure.
- Negative press, propaganda and blaming game should stop in the case of CPEC, Gwadar, Baluchistan and the stakeholders involved.
- All the displacements, if made, should be compensated well by the concerned authorities.