



GENERATIONAL SHIFTS IN WARFARE: THE EMERGENCE OF NON-STRATEGIC FORCES IN PAKISTAN

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Abstract

The nature of warfare has transformed tremendously in the 21st century fundamentally revolving around non-kinetic ideation. The concept of war is getting back to basics by defying the adversary clandestinely. The employment of indirect war tactics without resorting to hot wars against adversaries has produced unprecedented strategic yields. Numerous reasons may be attributed to this new war paraphernalia including the cost of war; entry of technology into the battlefield, the precedence of cognitive domain over physical domain in war; the aristocratic global order and above all the internal fault lines of some states which have ushered a new strategic era in global politics. The emergence of non-strategic forces for strategic purposes has also altered the dynamics of modern warfare. This Article will discuss the generational shifts in warfare with main focus on Pakistan as its major client. The article has also explored some areas of significance for strategists to counter 5GW against Pakistan in a cognitive and non-strategic domain.

Key Words: Generations of Warfare, Media, Academia, FATF, Diplomacy, Technology, 5GW.

Introduction

Pakistan, one of the tiny state in South Asia, with a lucrative geography, its *defacto* membership of the aristocratic nuclear club, connecting the doors of strong civilizations like Chines, Ganges, Indus, Ghandhara, and Czarist civilization and being a hot-cake for superpowers for their long-lasting strategic interests in the region and surrounding, has emerged one of the significant entities on the surface of the world with its mighty overbearing in global politics as



observed by Anatole Lieven that Pakistan in the end is a big deal (Lieven, 2012). The role of Pakistan during the Cold War as an important ally of USA followed by its active role in a covert war against former Soviet Union in Afghanistan and then the American and NATO led Global War on Terror (GWOT) at the very onset of 21st century (Samrez, 2019), has made the state an important player in gearing the foreign and defence policies of great dealers in international politics. Despite a key player with its most favourite non-NATO ally of USA status, Pakistan has been at odds with Washington as well. (Ali, 2021). Similarly, Pakistan has not been at peace with its neighbours like Afghanistan in the West and India in the East due to numerous reasons (Paliwal, 2017). Apart from actual hot wars against Pakistan, a series of covert actions has been capitalized on persistently by her friends and foes alike during its entire cycle of life (Bukhari, 2021) as in the words of Alan Stephen and Nicola Baker 'condition of continuous conflict'. (Stephens & Baker, 2006). It is pertinent to highlight that why and how Pakistan has been subject to this constant syndrome of conflict.

The Advent of 5th Generation Warfare

War always changes (Lind & Thiele, 2015) and is a dynamic phenomenon (Johnson et al., 2021). The effects of war, throughout the human history, have been so intense that leaving it out is equated to ignoring one of the great forces of contemporary dispensation (MacMillan, 2020). Beginning with the simplest weapons within a small geographical area and smaller competing forces, war has gone beyond the traditional construct of a linear model and political and strategic objectives. War in the 21st century is more complex and beyond the strategic thinking of the past (Cornish & Donaldson, 2017). It seems entirely different than the history and practice of warfare in the preceding centuries (Spalding, 2019). The concepts of traditional war fighting have become so outdated that people will look back upon the 20th century's concept of armies and incredible war machines as crumbled into dust (Lind & Thiele, 2015).

The tools of modern war have also changed and today bullets and bombs have been replaced by zeros, economy and finances; monetary outlook, commerce and investments, information technology, manufacturing and communication. Controlling these frontages could lead to victory without firing a shot (Spalding, 2019). With the preceding war generations from 1st to 3rd generation warfare, the emergence of 4th and 5th generation wars are totally different as the nature of warfare and the complexion of defence forces from the historical context seem to be waning (Stephens & Baker, 2006). While the emergence of 4th generation warfare may be attributed to a non-linear and asymmetric model, the 5th generation warfare is more or less a political, diplomatic, legal, perceptions-based, ideological and above all non-strategic confrontation among the global actors (Abbott, 2010). Modern war is based on Sun Tzu's principle of war victory without any battle (Banos, 2019). It is more or less the atrophy the aggressive posture of nation-state with war no more the purview of nation state (Abbott, 2010). In the context of 21st century, the grammar of war is kinetic, connected and synthetic (Johnson et al., 2021). War in the form of 5th generation war is the ability to shape the perceptions of a target audience and it



delivers more than the kinetic energy and determines the ultimate victory in war (Abbott, 2010).

Generational Shifts in Warfare and Pakistan

Pakistan has been subject to all kinds of wars from its adversaries in the form of actual wars like in 1948, 1965, 1971 (the deadliest one by dismembering it into two halves) and 1999 Kargil war (Ahmad, 2016). These wars, however, with the exception of 1971, could not challenge the national integrity of the state, despite a long-lasting instability calculus and doom days in its security history (Samrez, 2019). With an outright failure in actual wars against Pakistan, and the danger of global catastrophe with region being the hub nuclear powers, 5th generation warfare and war from within has become the last and most feasible option for adversaries against Pakistan (Lodhi, 2011). The question arises then why Pakistan has been subject to this modern kind of war? The answer to this question has been sought in the succeeding part of the paper.

Conventional Versus Virtual Warfare – A Story of Strategic Underperformance

Militarily, India and Pakistan are pitted against each other (Marshal, 2015). Pakistan has emerged out of colonial setting in South Asia with displeasing two of its adversaries, the British colonial masters and Indian National Congress leadership with the latter being sceptical for dividing the undivided *holy land* of India (Lieven, 2012). With these seed of hatred towards each other, the story has not been of ideological animosity alone but has produced actual wars between India and Pakistan. Thanks to nuclear weapons which was averted between India and Pakistan as per the notion maintained by Peter the Great, peace is made to serve war and war to serve peace (Gerard, 1994). The strategic underperformance (Johnson et al., 2021) of both the states against each other in different wars has resulted into a virtual war which has been manifested both internally as well as on global level against each other. This resort to a digital and virtual warfare has been softer in nature but harder in terms of strategic goals and objectives with destroying the moral courage of the enemies than destroying the physical courage (Stephens & Baker, 2006). It may be attributed to the danger of extinction as well as underperforming in actual hot wars against each other.

Nuclear Capability and The Cost Of War

Pakistan, desiring for nuclear equation with India for being less superior in conventional warfare, became a flashpoint for both the regional as well as global powers (Salik, 2017). Pakistan's acquirement of nuclear capability has been a point of mammoth inquisitiveness among majority international political and security analysts (Lodhi, 2011). The nuclear capability of Pakistan has become one of the reasons for launching a war against her. Pakistan, even being the ally of USA in the global war on terror, was considered one of the most dangerous states with nuclear weapons (Woodward, 2011). Moreover, despite Pakistan's stringent nuclear security regime, its nuclear weapons are associated with Islamic bomb syndrome and thereby keeping



Pakistan under constant pressure through a war of perceptions (Salik, 2017). The catastrophe of direct war could be more fatal in terms of casualties but lesser in terms of strategic objectives. Launching any conventional war against it can trigger a catastrophe of huge volume resulting in nuclear combat, thereby soft virtual war alone could keep Pakistan under check and as the last but effective resort on the part of adversaries. Pakistan's nuclear capability has averted the conventional warfare and has allowed to balance multiple security challenges (Lodhi, 2011). However, it has invited a war of constant propaganda and diplomatic pressure and isolation.

Imprisonment to Geography

Pakistan, a corridor to the warm water from the West, a bottleneck to the totalitarian world view champions from the East – Russia, bordering the so-named epicenter of the world for terrorism and drug trafficking – Afghanistan, a very close door to the rich energy resources of Central Asian Republics (CARs) (Jabbar, 2011), proximity with Iran with a conservative world view as labelled by the West yet again an important energy supplier, neighbouring the economic giant and illiberal Communist China posing a political and financial threat to the bourgeoisie world (Spalding, 2019), has become the real prisoner to its geography (Marshal, 2015) where one or the other superpower is always engaged in perusing its interests *vis-a-vis* countering the other on this part of the soil. Pakistan has been targeted by certain unfriendly nations, by launching an all-encompassing diplomatic campaign to destabilize her both from within and from without (Nawaz et al., 2023).

The significance of the entire region where Pakistan is located has been well established as asserted by Peter the Great regarding this area, “approach as close to Constantinople and India [of course the undivided one] as possible. He who rules there will be the real ruler of the world” (Gerard, 1994). Due to its geopolitical location and disposition, Pakistan has acquired an extremely promising position and role both regionally and transnationally (Maseehullah et al., 2023). This has made Pakistan a state tasteful and hateful simultaneously for big powers, thereby making it a victim of hard-core strategic onslaught throughout its chequered history. The interests of different stakeholders do not allow this part of the world to remain free of strategic trafficking all the times and virtual warfare has become a permanent feature of this part of the world. The crypto-diplomacy (Kumar, 1981) and 5th generation warfare better serve the objectives of all these forces engaged in the region for personal interests. Briefly, geography has made Pakistan a better ground for a war of unknown and constant nature.

The Emergence of Non-Strategic Forces in Pakistan

5GW, while being in its budding phase for definition, has one strong element that war is not fought in hot battlefields by opposing enemy forces in columns and drill procedures (Hammes, 2006). It has shifted to some invisible elements where the means are not strategic but the ends are purely strategic in nature, serving the long desiring goals of adversaries (Lind & Thiele, 2015). A



trend on social media, a political statement of a demagogue, a headline on mainstream media, a book, an article and a report on international forums against a state can do more harm than guns in the hot battlefields (Spalding, 2019). The emergence of factors highlighted in the ensuing paras will further clarify the status of 5GW in / against Pakistan.

The Emergence of Vibrant Media

With the advent of the Internet and information technology, data and information have got the status of a strategic weapons and as a mean to generate and augment conflicts and instability in an adversary state. Furthermore, the lines between 'hard' and 'soft' power are intermixing and muddling and military forces are no longer the singular leaders in conflicts and fighting back for the defence of a state (Klaauw, 2021). Media is considered as an integral part of the government. Today's politics, economic discourse, legal dispensation, cultural plurality or otherwise, religious orientation and even transnational happenings are mainly affected by media to a larger extent if not shaped or reshaped by it (Shrum, 2017). Media has the prowess to influence strategic decision making process as well. "Wikipedia, Google and online crowd-sourced intelligence are now considered authoritative and definitive sources through which many senior decision makers are being given their information"(Cornish & Donaldson, 2017). Every nook and corner of the globe is viewed through the naked eye of media, thereby making it exposed to the international community. This has provided the strategists a venue to influence the minds of the people for strategic purposes as well.

Modern media has become a managing and controlling tools in the hands of its handlers and managers. Those who control media are controlling the minds of the people (Molander et al., 1996). The emergence of a vibrant media, both electronic and print, has brought tremendous changes in the outlook of citizenry. There are around 150 Television channels in Pakistan while around dailies which are feeding the citizens with *round-the-clock* happening in and around the world (Maseehullah et al., 2023). In Pakistan, media has not portrayed Pakistan's image in line with its national narrative. Similarly, media has, most of the time, become biased in either too much pro or too much anti-government, thus compromising its neutrality. Again, media has not been a representative of the indigenous culture, traditions and above all nationalistic fervour which has promoted a feeling of indifference towards indigenous realities.

In 2008, Newspaper readership in Pakistan was limited to 15 million readers only while access to television was around 90 million out of total population (Jaffrelot, 2013). In 2023, every fifth Pakistani approximately 10% of the population have newspaper readership (Pakistan, 2023) while more than 144 million Pakistanis watched Pakistan Super League (PSL) matches thereby having approach to TV broadcasting (Nadeem, 2023). In 2008, there were only 85 television channels in Pakistan (Jaffrelot, 2013) while in 2023 the same quantum leveled at more than 100 TV outlets and channels (Kemp, 2023). With launching the First FM station in 1995 (Jaffrelot, 2013), in 2013, Pakistan had more than 115 on-air FM radio stations, which thrived from 18



stations alone in 2005 (Yousaf, 2013) while the same number has elevated to around 149 in 2023 (Kemp, 2023).

The Emergence of Social Media and Digital Platforms

Social media dynamics have profound effects in determining the audience, attracted to crisis and their perceptions of time, space and involvement (Johnson et al., 2021). The emergence of social media in contemporary era has ushered a new epoch and domain of warfare and conflicts (Nawaz et al., 2023). The booming nature of engagement in media especially the digital media platforms and internet can be assessed from the fact that around 20 million Pakistanis had access to internet in 2008 (Jaffrelot, 2013) while in 2023 the same number raised to around 87.9 million (Kemp, 2023). Similarly, the new era of information age has ushered in Pakistan and a number of social media platforms are actively accessed and relied upon by Pakistanis for information, entertainment and even expressing their views. These platforms have become the source of getting into really the age of information. Similarly, around 80 million Pakistanis had the privilege to use mobile phones till 2008 (Jaffrelot, 2013) while in 2023, the same figure has raised to almost 191 million (Kemp, 2023). The idea of *post-truth* got popularity when referring to the voluminous scale of disinformation at global level (Knight, 2018) and it could be gauged from these facts that a sizeable number of Pakistanis capitalize on social media platforms. Social media apps and platforms like Facebook with around 37.30 million users, Facebook Messenger with 11.65 million surfers, YouTube with 71.70 million users, WhatsApp with approximately 11.4 million users as the most favorite app, Instangram (12.95), TitTok (16.51 million), SnapChat (25.70 million), Twitter with 4.65 million netizens (Kemp, 2023) have a deep-rooted and extensive following in Pakistan.

“Strategic narrative building and so-named ‘Virtual War’ with relying more on the use of virtual sources and internet and capitalizing social media a lot have now turned into a noticeable significant war fronts” (Johnson et al., 2021). The spread of social media and digital platforms across the globe for better connectivity has fetched remarkable variations to the complexion and outlook of society, particularly in the Third World. The concepts like “Rose Revolutions”, “Arab Spring” etc., are the direct corollary of vibrant social media platforms. This boom has brought new challenges for certain states. These platforms are used aggressively as propaganda tool, narrative building instrument and image [mis] management tactics against the adversaries. The disclosure of “*disinfo-lab* has surfaced this, employed by Indians against Pakistan (Machado et al., 2020). The role of media has become so prominent that in today’s world it seems as if we are not the customers rather the product of this entity (Harari, 2018).

The aggressive use of social media platforms allegedly being managed from overseas has targeted national narrative, ideology, the centre of gravity, historical roots and above all the bottom line of decency in any activity which has shaken the roots of Pakistani society. The forceful social media posture has been surfaced in highlighting the non-complacent role of Pakistan in War on



Terror (WoT), the involvement of establishment in all negatives of the state, an anti-armed forces propaganda, polluting the political environment of the country far below the level of decency, dragging issues of strategic level to the corridors of social debate and making issues out of non-issues all have surprised the rein holders of Pakistan. Posing challenges to national integration, Pakistan has really entered into a real *post-truth era* (Knight, 2018).

Academia and Narrative Building

The world surrounded and saturated by extraneous information, clarity alone has become power (Harari, 2018). Academia plays a significant role in building and re-building a nation as per its goals and specific realities. The polarization of education system in Pakistan with multiple curriculum components, disposed in different institutions through a faculty trained from divergent educational background has led to further division in the society instead of developing cohesiveness and pluralism. The history, culture, ideology, religion, and social fabric all have been under question in debate and discussion in academia which has nurtured a breed of youth naïve to nationalistic feelings, sceptical to state role both nationally and transnationally thus damaging a unified national narrative on issue of national importance related to strategic significance, political dispensation and social harmony. The academia has played the opposite of its role in Pakistan (Rahman, 2015), leading to its strategic hazards. The wide claims of very hollow and shallow knowledge has developed the illusion of profound understanding and maturity (Cornish & Donaldson, 2017).

Nationalistic Forces and Their Non-Participatory Role in Politics

Threats don't come from the borders. They can also come from within (Marshall, 2019). In Pakistan there are several nations within one state (Marshall, 2015). The emergence of Pakistan led to another problem of unity from within. The rise of Bengali nationalism on the issue of Urdu as national language, the resurgence of Pakthoon nationalism in the backdrop of Pak-Afghan border division and the surfacing of Baloch and Sindhi sub-nationalistic feelings have been bleeding Pakistan more than her external adversaries. The creation of Bangladesh in 1971 was the first ever dent inflicted by her enemies which questioned the integrity and sovereignty of Pakistan (Ahmad, 2016). Strategically handling this issue has got a regional character as India is content to see Pakistan divided within itself and will work to maintain that (Marshall, 2015).

One of the strategic challenges to Pakistan has been the emergence of sub-nationalistic elements devoid of any flexibility in terms of dialogue and plurality while also keeping themselves aloof from political process which make them, more or less, the non-strategic forces with strategic objectives. Despite persistent efforts, Pakistani government has been unable to bring all the sub-nationalistic elements like *Pakthoon Tahufuz Movement* (PTM), Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) (Nawaz et al., 2023) and Sindhi nationalists within the framework of political dispensation. This has led to a war from within which is an effective tool in the hands of Pakistan's opponents. The



alleged support to these elements has also led to a tense regional environment. With India, it always comes back to Pakistan, and with Pakistan, to India (Marshal, 2015).

International Fora and Pakistan's Image Management

Pakistan opened her eyes in an era of Cold War where two superpowers were at dragon drawn with each other to encircle the world for extending their sphere of influence and spread of their respective ideologies. Pakistan has been the victim of what is better known as coercive diplomacy (Johnson et al., 2021). The rise and fall game of empires, nevertheless, proved to be meaningless for Pakistan as her isolation on international forum has been one of the major challenges from strategic stand point. Friendship with USA has proved to be more challenging than favourable, geographical proximity with former USSR and later Russia has been futile, animosity with India has been more life-threatening, bordering Iran has been less awarding and affinity with China has been more annoying than pleasing for Pakistan at the international forum.

Political instability and swinging between democratic and dictatorial dispensation, her nuclear capability being termed as unsafe (Salik, 2017), human rights record, Financial Action Task Force (FATF) allegations of sponsoring terrorism, bordering Afghanistan with the failure of NATO forces and blame being placed on the shoulders of Pakistan and vigorous and aggressive diplomatic posture against Pakistan, all have led to an active political confrontationist approach on the part of her adversaries on international forum. The outrage of a stubborn international forums have done more damage than any other strategic move as it has led to international isolation and precarious diplomatic failure of the state.

Conclusion

The emergence of fifth-generation warfare (5GW) is not a flat idea of war like the traditional war fighting. This war may be considered as a competition of misinformation, disinformation and propaganda through fake news mainly relying on virtual sources and with technologies (Nawaz et al., 2023). The social and cultural make-up of Pakistan, her nuclear capability leading to her strategic weight, geo-political orientation in contemporary capitalist world, engagement in and association of all major powers with this part of the globe, strategic and ideological confrontation with India and Delhi's strategic underperformance (Johnson et al., 2021) vis-à-vis Pakistan, the process and culture of globalization and above all her challenging ideological orientation, make Pakistan one of the strong battleground for 5GW. Furthermore, the vivacious social and booming digital media platforms, friable politico-economic environment with negligible consideration towards the hazards of these factors, internal fragility, journeying through the *post-truth* era, global image [mis] managing and unfruitful narrative building paraphernalia and its less cost effective nature all have nurtured the field contrary to the interests of Pakistan. Pakistan considerably meet the requirements of all the components on the catalogue of a war of unconventional nature in the form of 5GW.



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