

UNRAVELLING THE INTRIGUING NEXUS: SOCIALLY DISRUPTIVE PROXIES AND SECURITY MILIEU OF PAKISTAN

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

Carl Von Clausewitz



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Abstract

Peace is the innate desire of humankind; however, conflict is embedded in the overall structure of international system owing to continuing struggle for power, construct of states and varying composition of society. The nature of war remains constant, however, the character of war continues to transform from kinetic to non-kinetic, conventional to sub conventional or vice versa, while at times being combination of both. With Proxy Warfare aim is to achieve a goal or set of goals across a combination of socio-economic and political domains while conducting themselves beyond visible spaces. In social domains such proxies can present divisive or disruptive tendencies. This article endeavours to present a nuanced view of how societal fissures are intertwined with concept of proxy warfare. It seeks to establish understanding of fault lines within Pakistan with a view to navigate the real threat posed by Social Proxies.

Keywords

Social Proxy, Proxy Warfare, Social Disruptive Proxies, Social Divisive Proxies, Irregular Warfare, Nature of Warfare, Future Conflicts.

Introduction

Military scholars have identified four elements that form the basis for shaping the future evolution of war. These elements are the changing nature of force, the changing nature of objectives, changing nature of adversaries and new domains of conflict, which also include Proxies. Over the period of time, war waging tactics have transformed from line and columns to asymmetrical/ Low Intensity Conflicts (LICs). Advent of 5th Generation Warfare has given birth to secret manipulation of actors, networks, institutions and states to achieve a goal or set of goals across a combination of socio-economic and political domains. 5th Generation War encompasses all previous generations and is seen as "unrestricted warfare". The main thesis is built around, "the change is exponential and not linear"¹. Where regular warfare influences Government by defeating their military power while population is kept isolated from the conflict; irregular warfare influences the Government to take decisions in an environment where military instrument stands discredited with eroded public support. Social proxies as part of irregular tactics have always remained an essential component of hybrid conflicts, where primary focus remains to exploit socio-political fault lines.

Stages of Future Conflicts²

Future warfare can have different stages which may be sequential or simultaneous, multi-layered or multi-dimensional with blurring lines. For the purpose of clarity, future conflict is likely to develop in three stages:-

- In Stage 1, a strategic narrative is built; around which different sub-themes could be developed like state sponsoring terrorism or state involved in nuclear proliferation.
- Operating under this strategic narrative, in Stage 2 conflict can transcend into use of proxies. The focus during this stage remains to manipulate public sentiments to weaken the state structure while creating insurgencies, terrorism, cyber threats, etc in synchronisation with efforts of hostile actors.
- In Stage 3, focus of effort remains on making the state dysfunctional and breaking the cohesion by challenging the writ of State. Aim remains to coerce the target state and achieve desired end state. During this stage, unrest increases due to lack of public confidence on the state.

In most of the cases, it is likely that conflict transforms into proxy war through an engineered event which may inflame and activate internal and external hostile elements. Therefore, proxy wars can be termed as indirect engagement in a conflict by third party wishing to influence its strategic outcome, while retaining non-attributability, ambiguity and deniability. Proxies may then take the form of being socially divisive or disruptive. Exploitation of inflamed sentiments of respective followers has the potential to get converted into a social proxy.



Why Proxy Warfare?

Military lexicon is already cluttered with multiple overlapping terms related to conflict continuum in the irregular warfare paradigm. Within a strategic "Ends, Ways and Means Paradigm" in the existing global geo-political and economic milieu, proxy warfare is possibly the most successful form of warfare owing to cost of conventional wars becoming increasingly unaffordable. Stability-Instability Paradox and the fact that proxy wars are easier to be waged in developing world due to societal shortfalls makes them a preferred option. Proxy wars are easier to regulate as per fluctuating sentiments due to prevalent vulnerabilities within the target society. At sub-tactical/ tactical level, a benefactor and proxy may have divergent interests but alignment of their strategic interests (outcome of a conflict) fuels the Proxy War.

What is a Social Proxy?

When opposing powers use proxies to exploit fault lines in a particular society of the targeted country, which may be socio-economic, religious, linguistic or ethnic, it can be termed as social proxies. Social proxies can be further sub divided into Divisive and Disruptive:-

- Socially Divisive Proxy is defined as "a state sponsored third party to cause disintegration in societal structure of adversary with the ultimate objective of weakening the targeted state while

remaining peaceful or unarmed".

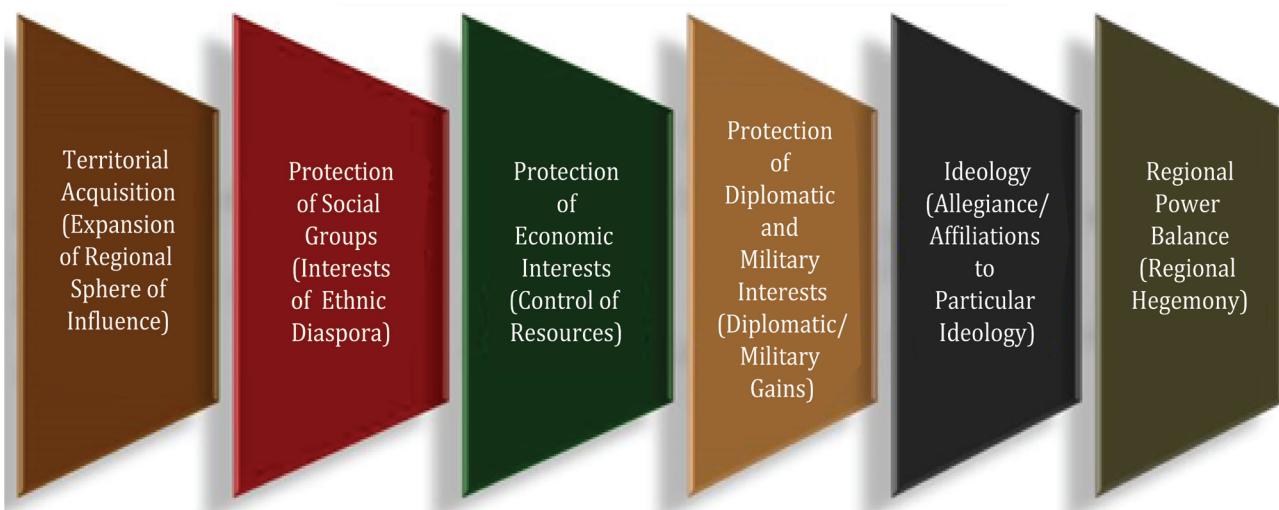
- Socially Disruptive Proxy is defined as "a state sponsored third party to cause chaos and interruption of different social activities with the ultimate objective of destabilising the targeted state through aggressive and violent means, however, remaining un-armed overtly".

Motives of Social Proxy War³

Some of the essential motives, as seen through the prism of an indirect intervention such as a proxy war, are manifested as under:-

- Territorial acquisition for expansion of a regional 'sphere of influence' in a proxy war sense. Case in point is Soviet Army's invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 to prop up the communist Government of Peoples Democratic Party against a growing insurgency and later installation of Babrak Karmal as head of state.
- Protection of social groups to safeguard issues related to identity and interests of one's ethnic diaspora.
- Protection of economic interests to garner control over resources.
- Protection of diplomatic or military interests as practiced during cold war both by US and USSR.

Figure-1: Motives of Social Proxy War



Benefactor and proxy may have diverging (at tactical and sub-tactical level) as well as converging vested interests (at strategic level) in outcome of any conflict

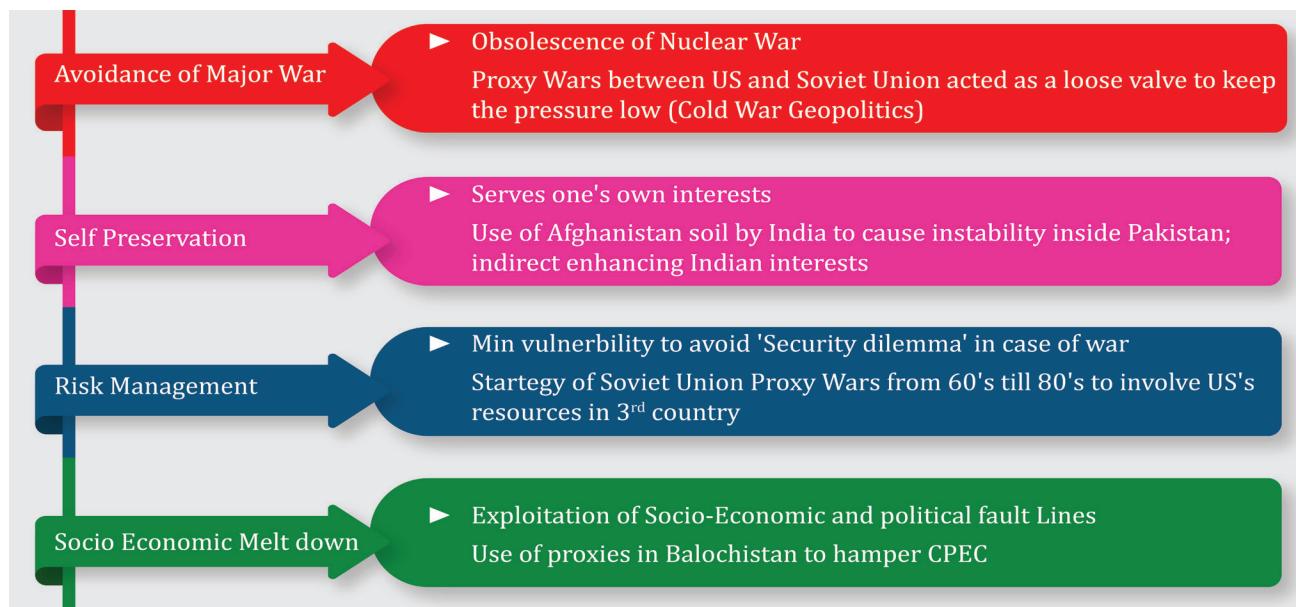


Objectives of Social Proxy War

Modern day proxy wars have become, in military parlance, arm's length 'effect based operations', whereby a specific objective is desired with the avoidance of a foreseen consequence and at an acceptable monetary cost. Few of the intended objectives out of such approach can be summarised in figure-2:-

- Economic and financial means are utilised to coerce target state through International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and Financial Action Task Force (FATF).
- Non-Kinetic means are also utilised by fanning movements; like Aurat March to spread liberalism and sit-ins.

Figure-2: Objectives of Social Proxy War



Means of Social Proxy War⁴

- Requisite or enabling environment is created through:-
 - Identification/ creation of a cause using socio-economic fault lines including governance issues and corruption.
 - Manipulation of public sentiments through exploitation of socio-economic and political landscape.
- Social issues are transformed into divisive stage where:-
 - Socio-political frustration is aggravated by using Social/ Area based groups.
 - Information/ psychological operations are employed to spread dis-information among masses through Social Media Networks (SMNs) and fake news.

- During this stage Diplomatic means may also be used to exert pressure through ethnic diaspora.

A proxy is categorised as disruptive when it starts utilising aggressive means, however un-armed overtly or using kinetic means to terrorise the society in order to create general unrest.

Historical Relevance of Proxy Warfare

External intervention in the form of proxy has always remained an important aspect of any conflict and more than 40% of all conflicts⁵ since 1945 have witnessed some influence of social proxies.

Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka

LTTE was politically mishandled which let a socially divisive proxy turn into a terror proxy and failed military efforts complicated the security situation which was later handled effectively.

• **Genesis**

Series of political discriminations by the Sinhalese considered as oppression by Tamil minority led to complete alienation of Tamils and paved the way for emergence of a social proxy in Sri Lanka.⁶

• **Evolution**

Tamils initially used the political channel for safeguarding their rights; however, the extremists believed that political struggle would not bear the desired results; therefore, LTTE was formed as a militant organisation to create Tamil Eelam State.

• **Analysis**

- RAW had been playing an active role in Sri Lanka by supplying arms to Tamil rebels and training them in Southern India. It was primarily because of this clandestine assistance and Tamil diaspora's support from Western Countries; that the insurgency managed to sustain itself for a long time.
- Series of discriminatory actions, political indecisiveness and half-hearted attempts to deal with the challenge by the Government assured Tamils that protests alone would not be productive for their movement.

1971-Proxy Warfare

In East Pakistan, sentiments of multi-lingual, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society were exploited by creating social proxies; which later transformed to disruptive proxy in the shape of Mukti Bahini.

• **Genesis**

Diverse culture in East Pakistan remained the target of hostile entities due to host of geo political/ economic reasons which was exploited.

• **Evolution**

Ethno – Nationalist leaders of East Pakistan asked due share in Government via political means, however Government's inability to tackle political deadlock led to demand of secession.⁷

• **Analysis**

- Indian Government approved influx of trained force in the form of Mukti Bahinis, whereas, Indian Army provided manpower, weapons

and training to this force and even utilised regular Indian soldiers for this purpose at later stage.

- Politics played an important role in sowing the seeds of separatism. Despite the numerical majority, East Pakistan was not given its due share in the government.
- Mishandling of social and economic issues between two parts like instituting Urdu as national language and sentiments in East Pakistan of West Pakistan's imperialism allowed India to alter the basis of Islamic nationalism to ethnic nationalism. Therefore, a systematic propaganda campaign by All India Radio was launched to build a narrative against unity of Pakistan.⁸

Arab Spring

Arab Spring was initially a divisive social proxy campaign which was mishandled and turned into disruptive proxy, later led to protracted civil war in many North African and Middle Eastern countries.

• **Genesis**

This movement was initiated in support of a Tunisian street vendor, who committed suicide due to harassment by Police. It eventually turned into disruptive proxy forcing Tunisian President into exile.⁹

• **Evolution**

Series of protests spread in region through internet/ social media for social rights of common people. These protests subsequently became violent.

• **Analysis**

- Social injustice and economic marginalisation united people from different segments of society; demanding regime change in most of the Middle East and North African countries.
- Global financial crises vis-à-vis lack of structural reforms; led to rising unemployment and social frustration among locals which created environment of hatred against the rulers. External support to the protestors was provided by international media houses.





Social Vulnerabilities of Pakistan

Multiple social vulnerabilities provide ample ground for Socially Divisive/ Disruptive Proxies to gain foothold inside Pakistan.

- Cultural plurality, ethnic heterogeneity and lingual/ territorial affinities as part of our national makeup coupled with existing social/ cultural undercurrents are exploitable by inimical forces.
- Allegiance to particular traditions and customs is considered very dear and non-adherence/ changes create resentments.
- Local, regional and sectarian associations are source of harnessing social sentiments; however, religious extremism allows sectarianism to simmer.
- Lack of transparency, accountability and dispensation of justice are aggravating governance issues and increasing political strife.
- Un-equal distribution of resources, development of infrastructure and internal displacements due to conflicts/ natural disasters act as additional strain on resources leading to despondency among masses. It leaves the people vulnerable to hostile propaganda.
- Environmental stressors linked to climate change lead to internal migration putting pressure on urban areas vis-à-vis psychological implications lead to hopelessness and depressive demeanor.

Climate induced resource scarcity in terms of water or arable land can contribute towards conflicts and security concerns.

- Dependence on International Financial Institutions (IFIs) due to inconsistent economic policies has increased the trust deficit among the people and the state.

Manifestation of Social Proxies in Pakistan

Indian efforts towards instability inside Pakistan and spill over of volatile security situation in Afghanistan have presented multi-faceted security challenges in Social Domain. Threat spectrum in this regard includes:-

- Sectarian Proxies encouraging sectarian tendencies in the country.¹⁰
- Ethnic Proxies to exploit ethnic and regional card.¹¹
- Religious Proxies providing fuel to religious intolerance.
- Political Proxies are utilising political space to their advantage simultaneously challenging authority of state.
- Diplomatic Proxies being utilised to coerce the state through diplomatic means.
- Bloggers/ Tweeps/ Media Houses with vested interests, trying to influence public opinion.



Prime motive of these proxies is to achieve individualistic interests while also dis-crediting state authority, thus furthering the vested agenda.

Challenges

- Safeguarding ideology of Pakistan in the wake of extremism which is religious as well as liberal; thereby, reducing sectarian divide.
- Keeping national cohesion intact despite continuous divisive/ disruptive efforts by dissident elements.
- Improving governance, reducing corruption and transfer of power at grassroot level to minimise discontent in the society.
- Addressing genuine grievances of the populace through socio-economic development particularly in newly merged districts and Balochistan.
- Development through economic integration and aiming for self-reliance to mitigate economic coercion.
- Countering regional proxies through assertive foreign policy while promoting Pakistan's soft image.
- Intelligence-based kinetic prong to identify friend and foe to target facilitators, abettors and hostile elements.
- Mitigation of Sub-Nationalist tendencies which are

exploited by Hostile Intelligence Agencies (HIAs) due to illiteracy and diverse ethnic landscape.

Way Forward

- Whole of a Nation approach for cohesive national response utilising all Elements of National Power (EoNP) is necessary to mitigate threats related to social proxies.
- Encouraging dissident elements to shun differences on issues of national interest.
- Initiatives by federal/ provincial Governments to ensure socio-economic development of newly merged Districts, Balochistan, South Punjab, Interior Sindh and Gilgit Baltistan.
- Diplomatic means be utilised to stop foreign support to proxies by developing regional consensus.
- Project own narrative to negate negative propaganda through enforcement of media regulations and having own media servers to control the flow of un-warranted media traffic/ mis-information/ dis-information.
- Strict enforcement of necessary regulations to safeguard security vis-à-vis privacy.
- Capacity enhancement and modernisation of



Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs) to mitigate negative social trends focusing on divisive/disruptive proxies.

- Intelligence fusion to achieve cohesive effort to counter negative social tendencies.
- Establish of a National Dialogue Forum (NDF) to serve as a platform for political, religious, local elders, Non-Profit organisations, scholars, policymakers and LEAs to bring all the challenges on discussion table. NDF will not only help connect diverse social and political segments of the society, but also create an environment to discuss critical issues.

Conclusion

Pakistan is facing various strands of proxy warfare both internally and externally, which impede the states' progress in a number of ways. Comprehensive national response, involving all EoNP, is important to fight back this threat, to mitigate its existential manifestation/magnitude. Today's Pakistan is ever stronger to combat such threats both as a state and society. A well-orchestrated and institutionalised response will defeat this threat and take Pakistan forward towards progress and prosperity.

NOTES

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