

Proxy wars or wars through proxies are exploiting the natural security situation of Pakistan. Thus, rendering an unsurmountable loss by maligning its peace, prosperity and development. How Pakistan can cope up with these proxy elements in Pakistan?

Answer

Introduction:

Proxy war is a "strategic tool" employed ~~one~~ state or organization against another, without directly being involved with the opponent. Alister Hoene has defined the proxy wars as:

"Proxy wars are a game of smoke and mirrors that obscures the real motivation behind them"

Pakistan has been grappling with the issues of proxy wars for several decades. The non-state actors are using the Pakistani

territory to pursue their interests. These wars have not only resulted in significant human and material losses but also have undermined the country's internal security, prosperity and development.

"The use of proxies in Pakistan is a symptom of a broader regional and global power struggle, with competing interests and agendas driving the conflict."

Michael Kugelmann
The Diplomat, 2016

Proxy Wars in Pakistan:

Proxy wars in Pakistan have been persistent feature of country's history, often as a result of its strategic location and "geopolitical" interests. Some noticeable examples are:

- **SOVIET AFGHAN WAR**
(1979 - 1989)
- **Post Cold War Era.**
(1991 - Present)
- **Kashmir Conflict**
(1947 - Present)
- **War On Terror**
(2001 - 2014)
- **BALUCHISTAN CONFLICT**
(2001 - Present)
- **AFGHANISTAN CONFLICT**
(2001 - Present)

I-

The Soviet-Afghan War:

The Soviet-Afghan war had a significant impact on Pakistan. Pakistan's support for the Afghan Mujahideen, who were fighting against the Soviet Union created a proxy war in the region. As a result Pakistan became a hub for extremist groups. One of the prominent examples of proxy groups is Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) which later became one of the most notorious militant

group, resulting in numerous terrorist activities in the region.

Post Cold War Era:

The post cold war era has resulted in the proliferation of proxies in various regions including Pakistan. After the collapse of USSR, the US reduced its support to Pakistan and created a vacuum that was quickly filled by various non-state actors such as Iran & India to expand their influence in the region.

Kashmir Conflict:

The Kashmir conflict has played significant role in the emergence of proxies in Pakistan. Since its inception the Kashmir conflict has continued to fuel the use of proxies in Pakistan by India. One of the prominent example is "Mukti-Bahini" a Bengali nationalist movement backed-up by India which resulted in the separation of Bengal.

War On Terror:

After the 9/11 terrorist attacks US launched the **War on terror** and invaded Afghanistan. Pakistan became a key ally in the fight against the Taliban & Al Qaeda too and its network; as **Ayaz Amir** said, “

“The roads to the Taliban in American eyes, goes through Pakistan””

However the consequences of GWOT on Pakistan were radical. The state became once again a battle ground for the proxy wars. Pakistan faced brutal terrorist attacks, targeted killings, firing, and bomb blasts in all the regions from KPK to Balochistan.

Balochistan Conflict:

Balochistan's separatist movements is a longlasting conflict in Pakistan's southern province of Balochistan. These separatist group namely **BLA**, **BRA**,

and. **BSO-Azad** has waged proxies in Pakistan to advance its cause, including terrorism, & violence against citizens. These major separatist groups with some others receive support from India in terms of finance to create instability in region. The conflict is also linked to CPEC and the major infrastructure projects, thus, one of the major reason of India backing up these groups is to contain Pakistan's influence in the region.

AFGHAN CONFLICT:

The US withdrawal from Afghanistan and the new Taliban regime had created hopes in Pakistan that situation will finally shift towards stability and cooperation between the two countries. However, the relations between the two countries remained strained and the rise of terrorist activities of the militant groups linked with Afghanistan specially TTP is observed, carrying out several attacks on the security forces

and the civilians, although Pakistan has called Taliban to crack down the militant group, but their ability to control their actions seems uncertain.

PROXY AGAINST PAKISTAN BY THE RISING US-INDIA RELATIONS:

The constant collaboration between India and US enhances the doubts about the US support of Indian hegemonic designs in the South Asian region.

"India is an invisible partner, not just in the region but as it relates to a lot of the United States' shared priorities across the world."

For instance,

"the case of Kulboshan Yadav"

"an Indian spy apprehended from Balochistan province, bear witness to the fact."

So the Pakistan has remained a victim of various proxies, one of which is being waged by India on Pakistani

coil. Also the US has always asked Pakistan to "do more" but to her surprise the "absolutely not" response from the former prime minister **Imran Khan**, further it has created mistrust between the two countries. Thus the issue of US-India strategic relations has created mistrust between USA and Pakistan.

SECURITY THREATS ON ACCOUNT OF PROXY WARS:

Pakistan has been a victim of internal security issues resulting from the use of proxies by various countries. The involvement of proxies has led to the rise of extremism, sectarianism, and violence, and above all to terrorism, causing significant internal challenges for Pakistan. Some of the major threats are:

I- TERRORISM & MILITANCY:

Proxies by the foreign countries has

led to the rise of extremists groups and terrorists activities in Pakistan. For example, during the Soviet-Afghan War, Pakistan supported Mujahideen, which led to the rise of the militant groups such as the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. Similarly, the involvement of proxies in Kashmir conflict resulted in spread of militancy and terrorism.

II. SECTARIAN VIOLENCE:

Proxies has also fueled sectarian violence within the state, with different religious groups receiving support from different foreign countries such as, the Shia-Sunni conflict in Pakistan has aggravated by the involvement of proxies, with KSA & Iran supporting different groups.

III. POLITICAL INSTABILITY:

The use of proxies by foreign countries in Pakistan has also led to the political instability. For example, the involvement of proxies in

Balochistan Conflict has led to the separatist movements which have created unrest and instability in the province.

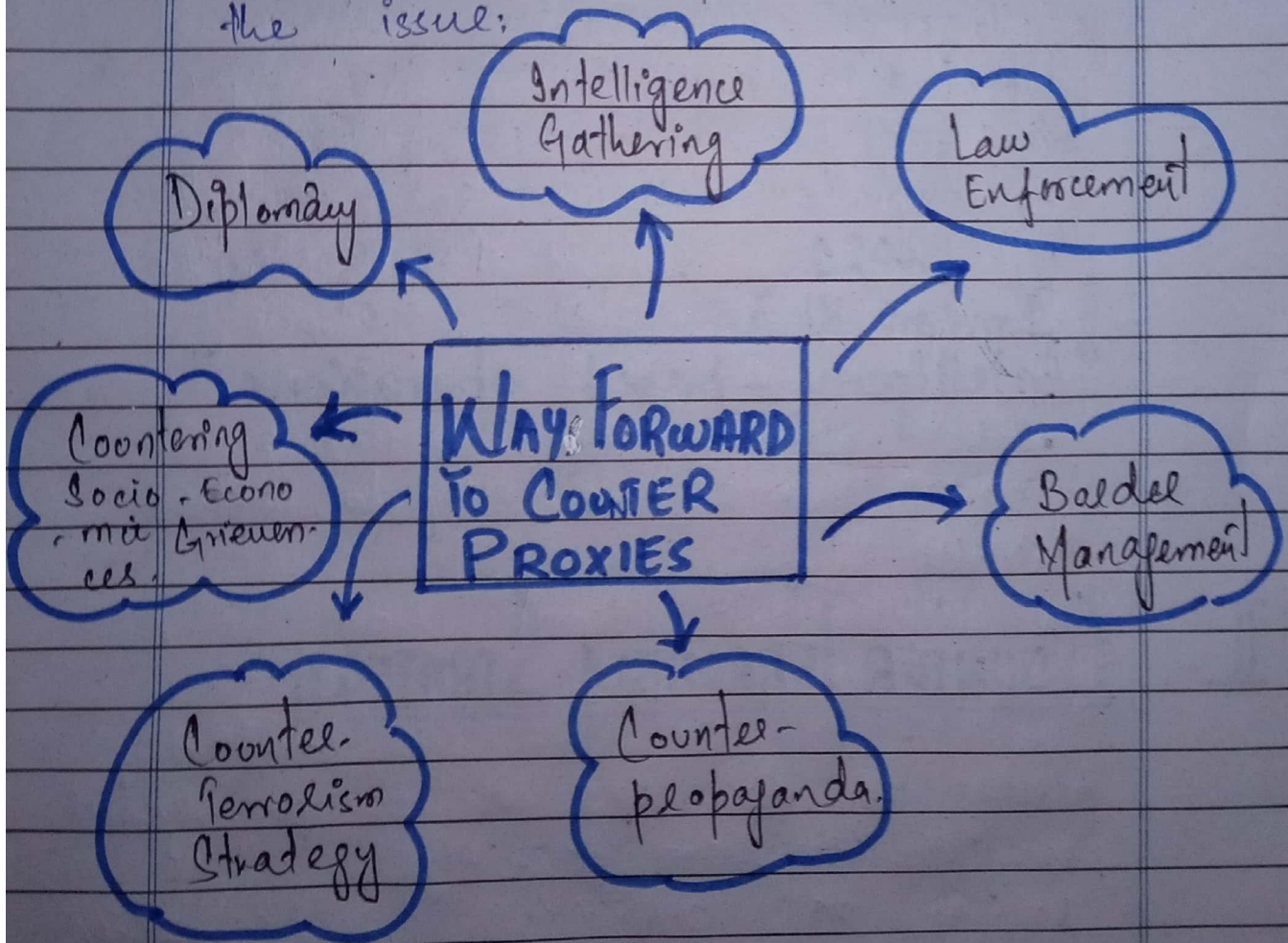
IV - ESPIONAGE:

Peonies has also led to the espionage activities in Pakistan, undermining the security and sovereignty. For instance, Indian peonies have been known to recruit Pakistani nationals or their own as spies. The arrest of former Indian Navy officer Kulbhushan Tadhav, on charges of espionage and terrorism is one prominent example of India's involvement in subversive activities in Pakistan.

The use of peonies has created several security issues that has significant impact on the country's internal security.

WAY FORWARD TO COPE UP WITH PROXY ELEMENT IN PAKISTAN:

Pakistan can cope up with proxy elements in the state through a combination of military, political and socio-economic measures. Here are some strategies that Pakistan can adopt to address the issue:



I- INTELLIGENCE GATHERING:

Intelligence gathering in Pakistan has a critical role to counter the proxies. Pakistan needs to improve its intelligence gathering capabilities in order to identify and neutralize proxy elements operating within the state. Successful operations like **Zarb-e-Azb** has proved the importance of "real time intelligence". Government officials have also emphasized the importance of intelligence gathering to counter proxies. For example, in **2021**, former Prime Minister **Imran Khan** stated that, "**intelligence-based operations**" were critical in countering terrorism and militancy in the country.

II- COUNTER TERRORISM STRATEGY:

Pakistan needs to develop a comprehensive counter-terrorism strategy that focuses on preventing radicalization, disrupting terrorist networks, and promoting deradicalization effects. Several military operations

like **Rah-e-Nijat** in 2009 and **Zub-e-Azb** in 2014 have been carried out in past to counter proxies, aiming at the disruption of activities led by militant groups. Hence the military can play a crucial role by launching such operations, also a strong legal framework is essential to counter terrorism through proxies.

III. Diplomacy:

Diplomacy can play a crucial part in helping Pakistan to combat proxies. Diplomatic efforts can help to isolate proxy groups and their supporters, build international consensus against them and promote peace in the region. Pakistan can work with countries to diplomatically isolate the countries that support proxy groups. After the **2014 Peshawar Attack** in school, the ex-PM **Nawaz Sharif**, called for a united front against terrorism. In a statement he said,

"We must work together to defeat this menace. We must show a united front against terrorism."

IV- COUNTERING SOCIO-ECONOMIC GRIEVANCES:

Countering socio-economic grievances can play a significant role to counter proxy by addressing the underlying social and economic issues that led to the emergence of proxies. Reducing inequality in society, uplifting people that belong to lower class (poor), raising awareness through education to improve critical thinking and preventing vulnerable populations from being swayed by extremist ideology can help Pakistan to get rid of this menace.

"We need to promote education and awareness to counter extremist groups and prevent the emergence of proxy groups."

Imran Khan

V- Law Enforcement:

Pakistan needs to strengthen its law enforcement agencies to combat terrorism effectively. This would involve improving their training, equipment, and operational capacity. Considering the present scenario of increasing terrorist activities by TTP, effective law enforcement measures can disrupt TTP operations as well as that of other militant groups through preventive measures, conducting investigations and cooperating with international partners.

VI- Border Management:

Border management can play an important role in countering terrorism. Effective border management can help to prevent the movement of militant groups and weapons across the border. It includes effective border surveillance, border fencing and about all cooperation with the neighboring countries can help to prevent cross-border infiltration. On account of

2014, Peshawar School attack,
 the then Pakistan's Intelligence
 Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali
Khan said,

"We need to strengthen border surveillance to prevent the movement of militants and weapons across the country's borders."

II - COUNTER PROPAGANDA:

Propaganda is one of the primary tool used by proxy groups to recruit members, spread ideology, and gain support leading to extremism and also sectarianism within the state. Countering the false narratives can help to weaken the appeal of the proxy groups. Engaging local communities and disseminating accurate information, fulfilling the needs and demands of the groups on national level that can create the threats of proxy wars can help to counter the scenario.

"We need to counter sectarianism and promote inter-sectarian harmony."

(Shah Mehmood Qureshi)

CONCLUSION:

It can be concluded that, coping proxy elements in Pakistan requires a sustained and coordinated efforts across various domains, including security, diplomacy and development. By employing a comprehensive approach, Pakistan can mitigate the impact of proxy wars and promote peace and stability in the region.
