

Pak-Affairs Assignment:

5th generation warfare is posing a perpetual threat to Pakistan's peace and prosperity. How can Pakistan counter 5th gen warfare impacts on Pakistan, suggest remedial measures.

From the early human history, warfare is continuously changing over time. New tactics and approaches to combat, including conventional warfare, hybrid warfare, information based campaigns, media implantations and fifth generation warfare are emerging undermining the value of conventional military methods and blurring the line between conflict and peace.

What actually 5th generation warfare is?

SGW is a concept that reshapes the nature of modern warfare, targeting the human mind and

surpassing traditional methods of combat. As the wars from 1G to 4G, relies on physical combat from muskets and trenches to tanks and guerrilla tactics to win territory. In contrast, 5th Generation warfare (SGW) is fought in digital and cognitive realm. In this 5th generation warfare, governments and international organizations manipulate individuals through technology and propaganda. SGW targets humanity, specifically the minds and behaviour of individuals. Psychological warfare, media-based perception management, and biological warfare are key components of this conflict.

Pakistan's vulnerabilities with SGW tactics:

Pakistan is highly exposed to SGW because of its geography, political rivalries, economic weaknesses, and social divisions.

Instead of tanks or missiles, its

enemies now target minds, institutions, and economy makes this warfare deeply relevant to Pakistan's peace and prosperity.

- Geostrategic position:

- Pakistan's geography makes it a transit hub for trade, energy pipelines and strategic corridors.
- Such importance invites external attention and interference.
- Such as rival states use SWI tactics to spread propaganda about debt traps, security concerns and local grievances against CPEC.
- Thus, other factors like proximity to Afghanistan, eastern border tension make it a natural target of SWI.

- Internal Fault lines:

- Adversaries exploits Pakistan's multiple ethnic groups or divisions through propaganda on social media.

Example: Fake twitter campaigns amplifying 'Free - Balochistan' trends.

- Sectarian differences give a chance to extremist groups to use digital propaganda to recruit and radicalize youth.

Example: • Sectarian clashes during Muharram processions in some areas
• Cases like Asia Bibi highlights global criticism of intolerance in Pakistan.

- Divergence of political parties:

- Rivalry attitudes between political parties weakens national unity.
- Fake news, doctored videos leads to mistrust.

Example: • May, 9, 2023 riots (army attacks after Imran Khan arrests)

- PTI versus PDM confrontation from 2022 till now.

- Economic weaknesses:

- Major factors like poverty, unemployment and unequal development creates tensions.

- SGW utilizes information, cyber attacks

and psychological operations to exploit existing societal vulnerabilities to create unrest and undermine national integration.

Example:

- Elite classes controls politics, economy and land excluding lower and middle classes. As it is a well known narrative:

"Pakistan is only for the rich"

- Spread of rumors through media platforms about "rupee collapse" or "default risk".

Example:

- During 2022-23 crises, such campaigns exaggerated default risks, weakening investor confidence.
- Pressure through FATF Grey list.

Image and International Standing:

- Use of international media, think tanks and lobby groups to project Pakistan as a hub of terrorism and unstable democracy.

→ Such as after the Pulwama 2019 incident, India launched a global diplomatic campaign branding Pakistan's as "terror sponsoring state"

Example:

- International NGOs and Indian backed campaigns highlight Balochistan insurgency as "Pakistani oppression".
- Propaganda that CPEC is a Chinese "deft trap" discourage foreign investors.

Impacts on Pakistan:

(i) Cyber and Digital manipulation:

Hackers, bots and disinformation networks push hostile narratives online creating artificial public opinion and influences policy debates.

Example: Thousands of fake accounts traced to India ran anti-Pakistan hashtags on Twitter after the Pulwama incident and during CPEC opposition.

(i) Erosion of national cohesion:

By attacking the ideological functions or foundations of the country and inflaming ethnic and sectarian tensions, 5G/WI weakens national unity.

Such as various fake accounts are made that share inflammatory content during a religious festival to provoke conflict, creating a deep seated division within society.

(ii) Economic confidence crises:

Continuous propaganda about corruption, debt-trap, currency collapse discourages investors.

e.g: Anti-CPEC propaganda claiming Pakistan is "mortgaging sovereignty to China" reduced confidence of investors in Gwadar projects.

(iii) Social Unrest:

Disinformation leads to chaos on the streets.

Such as viral WhatsApp and Twitter

rumors in 2023 mobilized violent protests within hours, showing how quickly digital propaganda translates into physical disruption.

This way, Pakistan experiences the consequences of SGW every day. The greatest impact like unity and trust gets eroded then what is left behind. So, some strategies should be adopted to encounter challenges faced by Pakistan due to SGW.

Remedial Measures:

(a) Public awareness campaigns:

Educating the public especially the youth, on how to recognize and counter disinformation and propaganda via social media.

e.g: Recently in 2023-24, fact checking units on social media debunked rumors about Pakistan's default, calming markets.

Measure: FIA could launch a multimedia campaign on TV, radio and various platforms guiding people how to detect fake news.

"A lie can travel halfway around the world while the truth is still putting on its shoes"

Mark Twain

(e) Cyber and Media Regulation:

Develop robust cybersecurity and counter hostile online propaganda.

e.g: Just like in 2024, FIA Cybercrime wing traced Indian fake accounts spreading anti-Pakistan's hashtags and shut them down.

Measure: Implementing strict laws to counter fake news and regulating social media platforms to ensure they remove content that harms national security and creates internal chaos.

"In the digital age, controlling the narrative is as critical as controlling territory"

❖ Strengthen Economy and Transparency:

Reform economic systems, ensure transparency in mega projects like CPEC.

e.g: State Bank's digital monitoring of subsidies in 2025 reduced corruption rumors.

Measure: Efforts to attract investment and create a stable economy can lead to more opportunities for citizens, making them less susceptible to foreign influence that might exploit economic hardship.

A famous economic principle says:

"An economy built on trust is harder to attack than one built on secrecy".

❖ Engaging Youth:

Providing jobs, digital skills, and platforms for innovation. As ~~Quaid~~ Quaid said;

"The future of any nation lies in the hands of its youth".

(o) Academic and Research Think tanks:

Strengthen policy think tank and universities to research hybrid threats.

e.g: NUST "centre for International Peace and Stability" produces policy papers on hybrid warfare.

As Francis Bacon said right:

"Knowledge itself is power".

Measure: In response to misinformation spread by about CPEC, a research institute like SDPI or ISSI might release a comprehensive data driven report.

(o) Regional cooperation:

Work with allies (China, Turkey, Muslim countries, SCO states) for cybersecurity, media cooperation and intelligence sharing.

Measure:

Pakistan as a member of SCO, could participate in a regional cybersecurity task force. This task force on a cyber attack can share information with China and Russia about attack's origin,

malware used, tactics and TTPs of attackers.

Case studies:

1. 2019 Pulwama-Balakot crises:

Indians launched massive disinformation campaigns, fake news claiming "100 of terrorists were killed".

Impact on Pak: International pressure, economic instability through narrative warfare.

Relevance to SGW: Shows how media and propaganda were used as weapons not just military strikes.

2. PTI Dharna and Protest politics:

Prolonged protests in Islamabad flooded social media with fake news, videos and campaigns.

Impact on Pak: Political polarization deepened, governance suffered.

Relevance to SGW: Illustrates how internal fault lines are exploited digitally to weaken state stability.

3. Cyberattacks on Pakistani Banks (2018-19):

Hackers stole over 20,000 debit and credit cards of multiple banks.

Impact on Pak: Public lost trust in banking security, economy faced negative propaganda about "unsafe investment".

Relevance to SGW: Demonstrates economic warfare via cyberspace.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, SGW is not a temporary phase but a perpetual threat to Pakistan's peace, stability and progress.

Unlike conventional wars, SGW controls and attacks the mindset, economy, institutions and social fabric of state.

In this case, Pakistan must build resilience through unity, technology, education, transparency to turn the challenge of SGW into an opportunity for strengthening peace and prosperity. As Quaid reminded us:

"With faith, discipline and selfless devotion to duty, there is nothing worthwhile that you cannot achieve".