Hybrid Warfare: The Changing Character of Conflict

Editor
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INSTITUTE FOR DEFENCE
STUDIES & ANALYSES
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INSTITUTE FOR DEFENCE STUDIES & ANALYSES
NEW DELHI

PENTAGON PRESS

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Introduction

West Asia, with the Arab–Israel and Saudi–Iran rivalries as the prime drivers, at this juncture in history, is one of the most critical regions for world peace. Political, demographic and ideological stability in the region is at an ebb. Such an instability could easily expand both eastwards and westwards owing to presence of economically and politically vulnerable states. The character of conflict in this unstable zone since the 1970s has been transforming for two reasons: first, the realisation amongst the Arabs of their inability to defeat Israel in a conventional war; and second, playing out of the Iran–Saudi rivalry since the Islamic Revolution in 1979. This rivalry manifests itself through multiple means, with Yemen being the latest battleground. The Iran–Saudi conflict and the opposition to Israel in the region is not through direct force-on-force military engagements but in a hybrid form, through the use of proxies, use of military force by one against the proxies of another, propaganda, subversion, use of economic instruments, criminality, terrorism and so on, as contextualised in Chapter 2.

Over 2,000 kilometre (km) apart, Yemen and Lebanon typify the situation in West Asia. Both these coastal countries share land borders with two countries each. While Yemen, five times bigger than Lebanon, dominates one of the most active and strategic shipping lanes in the world, Lebanon, sandwiched between Syria and Israel, is located in one of the

most volatile regions. Turmoil in these two countries and a similar type of conflict involving almost all facets of force application, barring nuclear, and the power play by multiple agencies, both internal and external, has enhanced the complexity of the operational environment. Transient and localised peace is interspersed with violence and bloodshed, along with attacks on various power tools and centres. Use of regular combatants, well-trained organised groups, mercenaries and civilians, especially technology experts, covers the human aspects. Technologically, a similar spread of crude and elementary munition to sophisticated, guided weapons is noticeable. 'Force-on-force' attritional confrontation is rare, and most of the engagements are indirect, discreet and often in the form of 'hit and hide'. Expansion of conflict domains to non-traditional areas, like electromagnetic spectrum, communications, cyber, information and psychological operations, demonstrates the ability and resolve of the warring factions. Use of terrorism, criminality and illegal economic resource generation has expanded the conflict arena.

State versus state military conflicts have primarily been direct force-on-force type of confrontations, with a small percentage of effort devoted to other elements. Earlier, owing to restricted access to high-end weapons, the non-state actors could only carry out operations with small arms low calibre weapons (SALW). However, in the last three decades, non-state actor empowerment has been the root cause for the transformation of conflict from SALW usage to high-end, long-range guided weapons and aerial platforms. The basic reason for this empowerment has been the expansion of military, technology and financial support to specific non-state actors by certain states, to achieve their political/ideological/economic objectives, bypassing force-on-force direct conflict. The world over, there has been an increase in and prolongation of 'grayzone' situations, that is, neither pure peacetime nor contingencies over territory, sovereignty and maritime economic interests.[1] With states sponsoring non-states actors, the infusion of military technology and finances has led to growing power and stature of non-state actors. This, in turn, has attracted high-end human resources, including technocrats, into its folds, hitherto restricted to lower end of socio-economic and educational strata.

This phenomenon is further accentuated by the availability of commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) technology and enhanced visibility. Revolution in communication technology, in general, and social networks and media tools, in particular, has resulted in greater reach and impact on the general populace. Communication technology, with little state control, has allowed a nearly unrestricted flow of information and financial

resources. This has enabled non-state actors to have an international footprint. Coordination between various non-state actors based on their goals has become a reality, with the resultant deployment of high-end military technology to various parts of the globe. This has blurred the distinction between state and non-state, and also between conflict and peace, thus leading to hybrid wars. As Frank Hoffman has put it: 'Hybrid Wars can be waged by states or political groups, and incorporate a range of different modes of warfare including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts including indiscriminate violence and coercion, and criminal disorder.'

To understand the mechanics of hybrid warfare, two case studies are presented in this chapter: the Second Lebanon War (2006); and the ongoing conflict in Yemen. The following two sections deal with the kinetic and non-kinetic aspects of force application in Second Lebanon War and the current conflict in Yemen, respectively.

Second Lebanon War

Lebanon, after the 1982 Israeli invasion, had to grapple with a long civil war. With a mixed population of approximately 59.7 per cent Muslims and 39 per cent Christians and the presence of foreign military forces, it remained a weak state.[2] To fill the power void, Hezbollah, a non-state actor, came into prominence, with ideological, financial, organisational and military support from Iran.[3] Primarily a Shiite outfit, it had a political and social welfare role and yet used, and still uses, violence as a tool, especially against Israel.[4] Societal composition and fragmented state apparatus allowed Hezbollah to develop its interests in southern Lebanon interplaying security and social roles.[5] The Lebanese internal situation changed with withdrawal of Israel from southern Lebanon in 2000 and the Syrian forces in 2005. But the state remained weak. In 2006, Hezbollah killed three and kidnapped two Israeli soldiers. Israel responded with 'Operation Change of Direction' that led to 34-day long Second Lebanon War aimed at decimating Hezbollah.[6] This is a classic case of a military engagement between a state and an external non-state actor. Now, the United Nations (UN), with one of the largest missions—United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL)—has deployed over 12,400 peacekeepers to monitor cessation of hostilities and to support Lebanese Army in southern Lebanon.[7]

Israel Defense Forces (IDF) intent was to use superior firepower to pulverise Hezbollah and isolate their positions with tank manoeuvres. The main force application was with air power. Targets were Hezbollah

strongholds, rocket launch systems, power, oil and infrastructure. The IDF flew over 19,000 sorties, dropping 20,000 bombs and firing 2,000 missiles from air, and nearly 125,000 artillery and heavy mortar shells were also expended, against almost 7,000 targets.[8]

With the active support of Iran, the military wing of Hezbollah was well trained and equipped akin to a regular army and was also well armed with guided munitions and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). Use of radars and development of its optic fibre and cellular networks gave it a multifaceted capability. However, in the 2006 conflict, Hezbollah could not match the IDF in terms of resources or capability. Therefore, it resorted to guerrilla tactics in urban areas. 'Hit and hide' plan with ambushes and relocating to well-prepared defensive positions was the main ploy. This caused severe problems for the IDF.[9] Use of urban terrain, creation of defensive points, ability to use urban infrastructure for mobility and flexibility and well-planned and prepared weapons stocking areas allowed high-speed relocation for guerrilla warfare. Hezbollah defensive bunker systems were with electrical wiring, reinforced concrete fighting positions and enough water, food and ammunition to withstand a sustained siege.[10] Villages in southern Lebanon were also fortified to stall the IDF invasion and had over 500 arms storage sites.[11] Each village unit of Hezbollah was tasked to defend its location and delay IDF movement.[12] Training, skills, adaptability and leadership in each village cell were decisive for Hezbollah's performance. At every step, Hezbollah dictated the direction of conflict, and the IDF was only reacting in spite of overwhelming military superiority. Hezbollah's ability to manoeuvre tactically against the IDF, the autonomy given to its small units, the initiative taken by the small-unit leaders and the skill Hezbollah displayed with its weapons systems were a distinctive feature of Second Lebanon War.[13]

Hezbollah's main offensive inventory boasted of over 14,000 short- and medium-range rockets, of which 4,100 were fired. Its ability to strike deep inside Israel by rockets forced the evacuation of a number of Israelis. A good mix of offensive strategy was exhibited, with the use of rockets and armed UAVs, along with a defensive plan to slow down the progress of IDF. The effective use of the anti-tank guided missile (ATGM) systems, namely, RPG-29, AT-13 Metis and AT-14 Kornet, was key to the defensive battles. These ATGMs, with an effective range of 3–5 km against armour and battlefield targets, resulted in damaging 18 IDF tanks and killing approximately 52 personnel.[14] Induction and employment of three armed UAVs, probably Mirsad-1 or Ababil-3 (Swallow), with a range of 450km and payload of 50 kilogram (kg), by Hezbollah took the combat to another

dimension, forcing the IDF to deploy aerial surveillance systems.[15] Adoption of available technology, from guided munitions against tanks and ships to UAVs, allowed Hezbollah to sustain itself in spite of limited conventional capability. Night operation facilitation by night vision goggles (NVG) and a missile attack on an Israeli ship took the conflict higher in the technology matrix.

While Hezbollah suffered four times the losses in manpower (estimated causalities for Hezbollah were about 600 and for IDF, 131) and its military capability was substantially reduced, it won the perception battle handsomely. The tactical employment of its kinetic force was augmented with a well-crafted information dissemination strategy. With well-defined yet distinct communication strategy for four different constituencies, namely, Shiite community, Lebanon population, the Arab world and international community, Hezbollah effectively utilised the art of psychological war. Production of television (TV) programmes in Hebrew and effective use of local and Palestinian photographers to highlight their condition increased popularity and reach of its TV channel, *Al-Manar*, in spite of a ban in certain countries.[16] This perception victory catapulted Hezbollah to a position of strength not only in Lebanon but also in the region. Israel, meanwhile, tried to counter this with an aggressive information and psychological warfare. It managed to break into *Al-Manar* transmission system and resorted to air dropping of leaflets.[17] Yet, it failed to counter Hezbollah's well-crafted media strategy. In fact, today, manipulating information on news channels/portals and use of digital communication to influence public opinion has gained special significance as an element of hybrid warfare.

High success rate and low attrition in the offensive missions by Hezbollah were indicative of a well-established intelligence network.[18] The electronic war was on simultaneously, with Hezbollah using communications intelligence (COMINT) and signals intelligence (SIGINT) to monitor IDF communications. Electronic intelligence (ELINT) and SIGINT equipment and training allowed Hezbollah to stay ahead in the game. Hezbollah's protection of transmission process of its TV channel during the height of Second Lebanon War showcased its ability to collate and interpret data into useful intelligence.[19]

'An army marches on its stomach' is a well-known adage bringing to fore the logistical planning to sustain dispersed and diffused operations as part of a hybrid conflict. Hezbollah realised the significance of a comprehensive and viable logistical plan to mitigate the impact of the overwhelmingly superior military power of IDF. The central theme of its

logistical plan of dispersed storage was to deny Israeli Air Force an opportunity to achieve resource-neutralisation strike capability. Weapon supplied to Hezbollah, often through Syria or the sea route, were redistributed to various stocking points.[20] This dispersed and dynamic logistical plan was key to Hezbollah offensive and defensive operations. The plan's success was testified as Hezbollah fired over 250 rockets on the last day of the Second Lebanon War.

Iran and Syria were the main sources of Hezbollah finances. A number of large businesses in construction and real estate sectors in Lebanon were linked to Hezbollah.[21] Criminal activities, drug money and Bekaa Valley's poppy crop were used to bolster financial support.[22] Smuggling, kidnapping and extortion to raise, transfer and launder funds to achieve its goals was exemplified in June 2002, with the arrest of Muhammad and Chawki Hamud, in Charlotte, North Carolina.[23] Currently, though the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Arab League and the European Union (EU) have declared the military wing of Hezbollah as a terrorist group, it continues to thrive economically through a combination legal and illegal activities.[24]

Conflict in the Republic of Yemen

Yemen, post-unification in 1990, could not develop economically owing to poor policies and corruption, and thus remained one of the poorest West Asian country. With two-thirds of the population being Sunni, major power resided with them. In 2004, Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi, a Zaidi Shiite, organised a movement, 'Ansar Allah', opposing President Saleh's government. As a result, there were six armed conflicts from 2004 to 2010 in Yemen's northern province of Saada.[25] In 2011, with the general populace taking to the streets against government policies, the Houthis gave it the requisite momentum, forcing Saleh to quit. In February 2012, Vice President Hadi took over from President Saleh in a compromise to end the civil unrest. However, post a small pause, the conflict resumed between the government forces and the Houthis.

Yemen, as Bernard Haykel has pointed out, is a 'highly fragmented and divided country, with no national leadership that can unite a majority of the population around a vision or program for the future'.[26] While the GCC was successful in managing the transition from Saleh to Hadi, it has not yet succeeded in addressing the deeper political and economic malaise.[27] The failure of state institutions to adjudicate, arbitrate or mediate the social conflicts that polarise the polity and bring society to the tipping

point is a core cause of civil war.[28] The Yemen crisis exemplifies this perfectly. Geographically, major parts of Yemen are under Hadi, with southern zone under Houthi control. Saleh, along with his loyalist section of Yemen Armed Forces, supported the Houthis who control the capital Sanaa. Saleh was killed in December 2017. This further complicated the power matrix. Besides these two major players, there are three other internal elements: Al Qaeda of Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), Al-Islah (Muslim Brotherhood of Yemen) and tribal leaders. Each of these five players is trying to dominate the others. The AQAP and local tribal groups are keen to exploit disarrayed security apparatus to dominate in small pockets around Lahij.[29] Fractured control and continuous conflict have forced millions of people to flee their homes and have killed or injured thousands.[30]

External forces in the fray are Saudi Arabia, Iran, Qatar and the United States (US). Operation Al-Hazm Storm, to defeat the Houthis and re-establish Hadi, was launched in 2015 by a Saudi Arabia-led coalition, including the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait, Bahrain, Jordan, Morocco, Sudan, Egypt and Pakistan. Saudi forces are coordinating with local tribal leaders and the UAE with proxy forces to enhance the effectiveness of military operations.[31] The US military has a dual role: one, attacking AQAP; and second, supporting Saudi Arabia. The US has supported Saudi-led coalition aircraft by providing aerial refuelling,[32] intelligence inputs, logistical support, along with $20 billion worth of military equipment to Saudi Arabia in 2016.[33] Iran supports the Houthis and Qatar is funding Al-Islah. Besides Syria and Iraq, the strategic rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran has intensified and become a major force behind the current fight in Yemen.[34] All forces involved in Yemen conflict are depicted in Figure 6.1.

In 2010, Yemeni Armed Forces had a strength of 66,700 and currently estimated strength of Yemen Army is about 20,000 owing to defections to support Saleh or for alternatives. Equipment destruction and attrition in the ongoing conflict has hit Yemen Navy and Yemen Air Force the hardest and these have practically ceased to exist.[35] Yemen Armed Forces are supported by the Saudi-led coalition against Houthi movement. The coalition commands over 500 fighter aircraft and requisite critical combat support elements, like ELINT, airborne early warning and control (AEW&C) system, Reconnaissance and Air to Air Refuelling. This is supported by a number of high-end surface-to-air weapon systems, like Patriot, for air defence of critical military and civil nodes. The surface forces include armour, artillery and infantry from the armed forces of the region, complemented by mercenaries hired from Latin America.[36]

Figure 6.1: Pictorial Depiction of Warring Factions and External Support Elements in Yemen
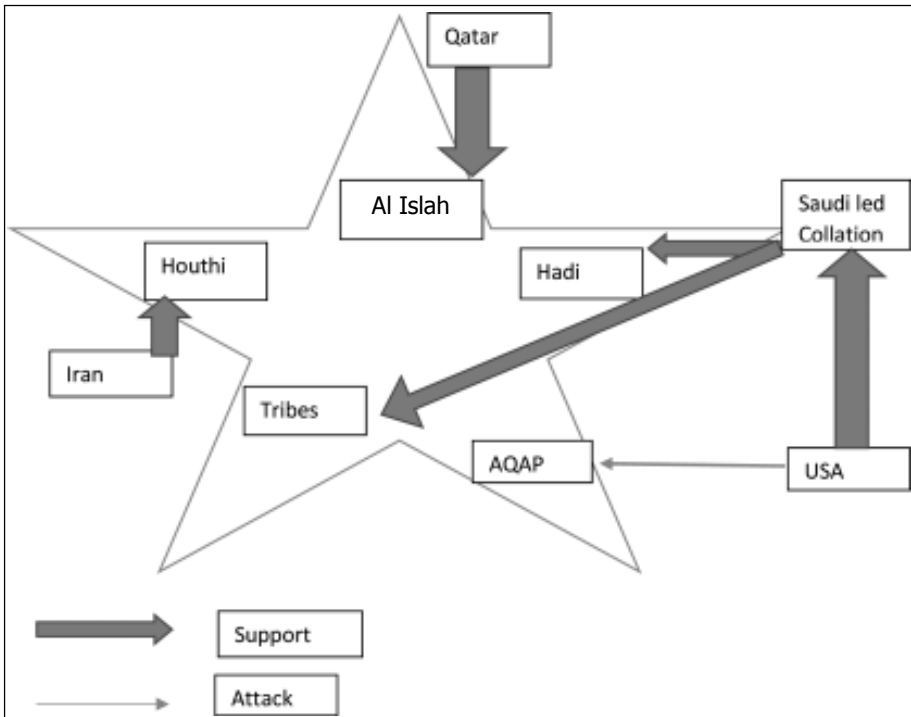
Source: Author.

On the other hand, the numerical strength of active members of Houthi movement engaged in armed conflict is estimated between 10,000–100,000.[37] However, assessing the area under active conflict and pace of operations, the actual numbers could be around 30,000–40,000 and the weapon operating elements between 10,000–15,000.[38] Currently, they have a limited stock of surface-to-air guided weapons (SAGWs), ATGMs, surface-to-surface missiles (SSMs), anti-ship missiles (ASMs) and UAVs.

Systematically and gradually, from 2012 onwards, the Houthis enlarged control of southern Yemen, including Dammaj. Houthis, in July 2014, supported by tribal leaders, in Amran, against Ahmars, gained territorial victories. In capital Sanaa, Houthis struck when demonstrations against corruption and removal of fuel subsidy, on 9 September 2014, turned violent, with police firing resulting in the death of eight protesters and an ambulance driver. A major Houthi attack on 16 September 2014 around a military camp north of Sanaa lasted four days, ending with their victory. This led to resignation by the prime minister and power balance tilting in favour of Houthis. To further consolidate, Al-Islah backer Sheik Hamid al-

Ahmar and his supporters were attacked. Capture of key military installations, the presidential palace in January 2015, resignation by Hadi and dissolution of parliament completed power shift to Houthi Governing Council. The Houthi plan was to contain AQAP and continue expansion to the oil-rich provinces of Marib and Al-Baydah.[39] Aden too came under Houthi control, albeit for a short while, as Yemen Army, reinforced by Saudi Arabia-led coalition air support, wrested it back on 15 July 2015. Immediately after this, the Houthis also lost control of Labuza army base in Lahij province north of Aden and the headquarters of the 117th Armoured Division in eastern Shabwa province. Coalition fire support, with rockets on Khor Maksar and air strikes on Anad air base, helped Yemen military regain lost ground. It is a known fact that Yemen military is continuously being equipped, trained and supported by Saudi Arabia and the UAE.[40] The UAE, the largest contributor of manpower for the coalition, deployed a brigade to defend Aden and has, till May 2017 lost 85 soldiers in this conflict.[41]

An analysis of the conflict dynamics in Yemen since 2004 indicates gradual upgradation in level, scale, tactics and technology, leading to battlespace expansion. At the beginning of the conflict, the occasional small arms fire on a Yemen Army patrol by Houthis, in contrast to use of combat aircraft to bomb the hostile locations by Yemen Air Force, indicated capability and technological gap between the two major players. With time, tactical engagements too shifted from 'hit and hide' to well-planned and coordinated ambushes using improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Organic growth of the organisation was boosted by military equipment and advice from Iran that reduced the tactical and technology gap and allowed the Houthis to gradually nibble territory and threaten military and civil targets with the use of long-range weapons. At present, the Houthis, though not as well trained and organised as Hezbollah, are resorting to same tactics as used by Hezbollah, that is, a mix of offensive and defensive, forcing Yemen Armed Forces along with the coalition to commit resources accordingly, resulting in the dispersal of forces to cover entire battlespace. Houthis, like Hezbollah, in spite of military capability inferiority, are dictating the terms of engagement through battlespace expansion—a typical hybrid attribute. The Houthis defensive positions are created in the urban centres, and the frequent offensive forays akin to guerrilla warfare have considerably slowed the progress of its opponents in spite of major capability differential. As is well known, success of hybrid tactics is based on creating small autonomous teams with offensive and defensive abilities and full-range exploitation of available equipment.

Expansion of spectrum of conflict is indicated by the Houthis firing the long-range Qaher-2 ballistic missile towards Jizan and Nazran in Saudi Arabia; attack on the US Navy destroyer, *USS Mason,* in the Red Sea in October 2016; and sniper attacks on a military base in Saudi Arabia and in Midi district. The attacks by the Houthis on the armoured vehicles of Saudi-led coalition forces—in Hawzan with an IED; in al-Mukha with ATGMs; in Harib al-Qaramish with artillery; and with rockets at Manfaz al-Khadra—indicates the span of munitions in use. Conflict in an open market in Marib and use of human shields by Houthi are signs of a shift of battlespace close to civil population and resultant civilian casualties. On 30 January 2017, a Saudi frigate was attacked near the Houthi-controlled port of Hodeidah by an unmanned remote-controlled boat laden with explosives. The attack killed one, and the frigate returned to port with minor damage.[42] In February 2017, a Yemen Coast Guard boat was destroyed near Al-Mokha by mines laid by the Houthis. Thus, technology infusion in the operational scenario is with UAVs, anti-tank and anti-ship missiles, as well as land and sea mines.[43] Technology will continue to help in greater diffusion of battlespace and enhance the hybridity of conflict.

The operational matrix indicates a robust command, control and intelligence network working for the Houthis wherein critical information about static and mobile systems in near-real time is available. To bolster its offensive capability, the Houthis plan to use Ababil series UAVs, fitted with high explosive warheads, to target radar of Patriot missile batteries to enhance the success rate their SSM attacks. Intelligence gathering and disseminating to the field operators has worked well in both Lebanon and Yemen. This is a key attribute for success of hybrid tactics using multiple means for single objective.

Logistics continue to play a pivotal role in Yemen. Logistical network for Houthi movement is inclusive of sea routes. However, the supply chain has severe blockages, resulting in a slow pace of operations and adequate time lapse between successive offensives. Throttling of supply routes, ban on oil exports and air attacks by Saudi-led coalition have forced the Houthis to remain defensive. However, Yemen Army, with better equipment and support from the coalition, has not yet been able to exploit available air superiority to regain lost ground owing to tough urban battles and logistical challenges.[44] Like other tenets of hybrid war, logistical plan needs to have multiple tentacles, with multiple routes, storages and sources, albeit all in small quantities.

When Houthi movement commenced in 2004, it was with fighters high on morale but low on military training. Protracted engagement for over

13 years has battle-hardened the group and the morale is still high owing to pull of greater power, including financial power with the capture of key areas and institutions like Central Bank of Yemen. In the initial phases, the weapon systems, mainly SALW, IEDs and mines, were procured from the black market or from the stocks of Yemen Army through corruption. However, the ongoing military engagement has seen the operation of specialist weapons and equipment from the Houthis. Operating SAGWs, ATGMs, SSMs and UAVs needs training and high skill levels. The Houthi movement is expected to have a limited number of specialist weapon operators, and these probably are trained by military professionals who were part of Yemen Armed Forces or with external help, probably from Iran and Hezbollah. Effective use of man-portable air defence systems (MANPADS) to shoot down aircraft of Yemen Air Force in 2014, and Saudi helicopter in 2017,[45] and the use of Yemen Air Force fighter aircraft to undertake air strikes on the presidential palace in Sanaa in March 2015 indicate defections from Yemen Air Force.[46] Use of sectarian card has allowed a flow of financial help and resultant induction of weapons for Houthis, followed by Houthis control of certain territories. Economic deprivation has nudged a large number of fence sitters to cross over to the Houthi movement against corrupt administration, leading to an exponential rise in its cadre and financial state. Houthis have remained focused on achieving a greater share in national power matrix, and therefore they have continued to build their combat capability. Seizure of military equipment and defections from Yemen Armed Forces have bolstered the already increasing military capability of the Houthis, which peaked in 2015–2016 with their ability to use fighter aircraft, UAVs, SSMs, SAGWs, tanks, infantry combat vehicles (ICVs) and unmanned explosive-laden boats. Presently, the Houthis have T-72, T-55, armoured infantry fighting vehicle (AIFV) and armoured personnel carrier (APC) to undertake surface operations, and a limited number of anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) batteries.[47]

Hybridity of conflict in Yemen gets complicated by simultaneous operations by different elements in the same geographical space, with distinct enemies and objectives. The US–AQAP battle adds another dimension. Commencing with a cadre strength of 200–300 in 2009, AQAP was estimated to have 1,500 personnel by 2015.[48] The AQAP, with two attempts to blow up aeroplanes with plastic explosives and detonator to be triggered by an alarm clock and a mobile phone, showed technological proficiency.[49] Houthi–Hadi conflict and the resultant chaos allowed AQAP to reorganise itself post multiple attacks by the US.[50] The AQAP, with suicide attacks on security forces in Mukalla and Aden, has retained relevance in

conflict dynamics.[51] The US, to target AQAP, has carried out more than 80 strikes since 28 February 2017 in Yemen, as compared to about 30 strikes in 2016.[52] The US also carried out strikes on three coastal radars in Houthi-controlled coastal area in 2016.[53]

Zakat (almsgiving) was the main source of Houthi funding, along with donations from Iran and Hezbollah, prior to gaining control of Sanaa and the Central Bank of Yemen. To offset 53.7 per cent decline in revenue owing to the suspension of oil exports since 2015 and shrinking economic activity, the Houthis imposed a $20 war tax on civil servants and cut spending on budgetary items, like scholarships, that are unrelated to the war. Blackmarketing of fuel, the formation of a cartel of oil importers and control of non-banking systems have accelerated the rate of wealth transfer to the Houthis.[54] This has resulted in the sustenance of financial support for the conflict and high morale for the Houthi movement. Financial sourcing though legal, illegal and criminal means is evident in protracted hybrid war by non-state actors. For example, an investigation into Al Qaeda sleeper cells in Europe in the wake of the attack on World Trade Center in the US, on 11 September 2001, revealed the widespread use of legitimate businesses and employment by Al Qaeda operatives to derive income for supporting themselves and their activities.[55]

The next section covers the emerging contours, in which I delineate major common attributes of hybrid wars and geopolitical implications from these two case studies, as well as lessons for India.

Emerging Contours

Conflict dynamics in Lebanon and Yemen show many similarities. Although there are no clear winners, the power equation continuously oscillates in various geographical and notional aspects, owing to failure of all players to define objective goals.[56] Ideological battle fought by both Hezbollah and Houthis has all the key elements of a hybrid war—kinetic and non-kinetic—but with different goals. The rise of Hezbollah was primarily against an external power, Israel, with strong religious flavour and little internal conflict with the state, whereas Houthi moment was initiated against the state for a greater share of power. Conceptual dissimilarities between the Houthis and Hezbollah end here. Hezbollah with a Shiite base and Houthi with a Zaidi base have Iran's support, albeit to different degrees based on ideology. Both these groups are focused on garnering state power. Operational philosophy and the scale of operations by the Houthis in Yemen are akin to what Hezbollah did in southern

Lebanon in its formative years. The prime motive of Hezbollah military wing is to protect Lebanon from Israeli attacks and therefore, it resorted to rocket attacks on the IDF and ambush of its patrols/posts while operating from southern Lebanon. While Hezbollah bore the brunt of IDF attacks in 2006, Houthis are facing a similar situation against Saudi-led coalition since March 2015, while engaged in operations to retain control of the territory from slipping back into the hands of Hadi-led government. Hezbollah, probably the strongest non-state actor in the region, has developed its military capabilities to oppose a strong IDF. The weak Yemen Armed Forces, supported by a Saudi-led coalition, have substantially lower military prowess as compared to the IDF and therefore, the nominal Houthi military capability has been able to retain its control over substantial territories. Over the years, Hezbollah has expanded its international footprint through ideological expansion, whereas the Houthis, with a socio-economic agenda, are restricted to Yemen. This represents the span of future hybrid threats: from being local to global, with varying capacities and capabilities, but invariably supported by state/states.

Doctrinal Precepts: Compulsions of Hybrid Conflict

Rules of engagement make the most distinct difference between the conflicting sides in this study. Hybrid tactics blur the boundaries between war and peace. The roles of aggressor and conflict party are deliberately obscured.[57] The conflicting sides in Lebanon and Yemen represent states and non-state actors. While Israel, Yemen and Saudi-led coalition represent the state and are bound by United Nations (UN) Charter on warfare, Hezbollah and the Houthis experience no such restrictions. Second distinction between the sides is capability exploitation: the non-state actors fully employ all their capabilities but state actors are forced to exercise restraint to contain collateral damage owing to diffused battlespace.

The air power was the most well-marked capability differential between the warring factions in Lebanon in 2006, and this is also true for the current Yemen situation. While Hezbollah was aware of its limitations in this aspect well before the commencement of the conflict, the Houthis realised it only after active participation by Saudi-led coalition. Hezbollah, therefore, developed a concept of command, control, communications and logistical support through dispersed and delegated subsets so as to deny Israel Air Force a centre of gravity for targeting. This also influenced Hezbollah's equipment profile and therefore, no manoeuvre capability with induction of tanks, was developed. The offensive element was dovetailed with defensive infrastructure and the plan was to exploit Israel's thin strategic

depth by use of short- and medium-range rockets. To stall the movement of Israeli armoured formations, multiple small independent teams with ATGMs were developed and deployed. Hezbollah used medium-range rockets to expand the battlespace in 2006 and ATGMs to increase the depth of tactical engagements. Dispersal of Hezbollah cells in almost every village in southern Lebanon expanded the target area for IDF, and thus the reduction in force density.

Operational Concepts: Execution of Hybrid Conflict

A professional force like Israeli Air Force, with total air superiority and backed by robust intelligence, targeted over 7,000 sites in Lebanon and yet failed to comprehensively defeat a small Hezbollah force sans air support. Yemen conflict is also indicative of a similar outcome wherein all elements of Yemeni Armed Forces, including air strikes, were used to counter Houthi movement since 2004. In fact, the Saudi Arabia-led coalition has been undertaking air strikes against Houthi-held areas since 26 March 2015. The coalition started operations with an air campaign, that was later augmented with naval blockade and deployment of troops on the ground. The only deterrence that the Houthis could display against coalition air might was a limited number of MANPADS and AAA batteries. Post a pause for five months, the air strikes recommenced in August 2016, with focus on Saada, Sanaa, and Ta'az.[58] As a result of these air strikes, collaterals have formed a large number of 10,000 casualties since March 2015, in terms of women, children and medical staff of non-governmental organisations (NGOs).[59] Also, an air strike on the funeral procession of the father of the Yemeni interior minister on 8 October 2016 resulted in the killing of the local mayor and a number of tribal leaders.[60]

This reiterates that in a conflict against a dispersed and diffused opponent, the concepts of use of air power developed to tackle a conventional threat are of little use. In an urban/guerrilla warfare, air power utilisation needs to be transformed from an overtly offensive arm to a supporting, precise, intelligent and restrained component, so as to avoid collaterals and yet assist in achieving the laid-out objectives. Such an approach consumes an extraordinarily large amount of time and resources, backed by clearly thought-out strategy.

Transforming Character of the Conflict

States and non-state actors are resorting to methods of hybrid warfare involving the use of military means below the threshold of a conventional war to undermine a state in a covert manner. Weak states with non-

homogenous societies are particularly vulnerable. This approach combines various civilian and military means and instruments in a way that does not reveal their actual aggressive and offensive intentions until all pieces of the puzzle have been brought together.[61] While various explanations have been offered for hybrid warfare, in the white paper, 'Defence of Japan 2016', the term is used to mean 'aggression conducted by methods that are difficult to identify definitively as "armed attack" based on their outward appearance, involving a combination of non-military means, such as sabotage and information manipulation, and military means which are utilized covertly.'[62]

Looking at the components of Second Lebanon War and its after-effects and the ongoing Yemen conflict, it is evident that conflicts in future will have an application of all facets of power and the battlespace and battle timelines will be poorly defined. The conflicts will have political, ideological, social, economic and military sides and the battle of supremacy will be not only with military hardware but also with information and economy. Military employment will include urban conflict, irregular war, proxy war and guerrilla war simultaneously, and in the same space as direct 'force-on-force' engagement. Warfare is transforming from military-to-military direct engagement to a system-to-system engagement. Both in Lebanon and Yemen, ideological congregations have developed into politico-military entities with the use of kinetic and non-kinetic force to control the state and its socio-economic policies. Over a period of three decades, Hezbollah has matured and developed into a multifaceted organisation with an international footprint, in spite of ban by many nations. The Houthis are gradually stabilising as a force to control a part of Yemen independently and transforming from being a non-state actor to a state. Thus, it can be seen that 'ends justify the means' seems to be the underlying principle.

Geopolitical Impact

Hezbollah, post-2006, has expanded its political, social, economic and military might in Lebanon and now practically controls the country. Passive role of the Lebanese Armed Forces during attacks by IDF in 2006 allowed Hezbollah to expand its influence in spite of heavy men and material loss and to garner a major share of perception battle as the main force defending Lebanon. Hezbollah has not only maintained its military wing against United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1701 (2006) but also has expanded its strength and role.[63] Even with a small representation of 12 in 128-member Majlis an-Nuwwab (Lebanese Parliament), Hezbollah's

power to veto allows it to control the nation without getting embroiled in the administrative process.[64] Its involvement in Syria and associated costs have diminished its stature. Based on how its leadership and supporters view its future role, it will have to strategise accordingly, but its military wing will continue to be the lynchpin which has converted a non-state actor to being a state actor sans state responsibilities. The situation experienced by Hezbollah in Lebanon and the lessons learned apparently are finding their way into Yemen. The ability of the Houthis to withstand military might of the coalition supported by the US, and containing AQAP and the local militia, is reminiscent of Hezbollah operational philosophy. The situation in Yemen is a typical multifaceted hybrid war, therefore a decisive termination of the military conflict is not foreseeable. It is likely to be a slow and long marathon race to peace using Houthi power and Hezbollah tactics, with support by Iran, against Saudi-led coalition supporting Hadi and Yemen Armed Forces. Fracture in GCC in June 2017, with a severance of ties with Qatar, has had an impact on the strength of the Saudi-led coalition force in Yemen. With over two years of conflict and a large number of collaterals, the US Special Operation Command is expected to increase its presence alongside Saudi Arabia and UAE troops in Yemen against the Houthis. As per UN Special Envoy to Yemen, Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, 'A peace agreement, including a well-articulated security plan and the formation of an inclusive government, is the only way to end the war that has fuelled the development of terrorism in Yemen and the region.'[65]

The examination of events in West Asia indicates an intertwined power play between two major regional powers, Saudi Arabia and Iran. Yemeni affairs are further complicated by being the latest battleground for these two powers. While Saudi Arabia is backing Hadi, Iran is said to be supporting the Houthi rebellion. At the same time, Qatar is believed to be funding the Al-Islah party, which combines tribal leadership.[66] With the entry of Hezbollah on the side of the Assad regime in Syria and Hamas aligning itself with the Sunni axis, the sectarian divide in West Asia seems complete. The Hezbollah was till now a heroic Arab entity, an ally of Hamas, and supported by the Gulf sheikhdoms. By entering the Syrian conflict on a sectarian basis, it appears to have violated its own history. The influential Qatar-based cleric, Yusuf Qaradawi, who had earlier applauded it fulsomely when it had stood up to Israel in 2006, has now termed it the 'party of Satan'. He has also called on all Sunni Muslims with military training to march against Assad. Qaradawi was responding to the Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrullah's pledge to support Assad till his final

victory. This Saudi–Iranian confrontation has now also acquired a sharp sectarian character, with efforts across West Asia to mobilise a 'Sunni axis' to confront the 'Shiite crescent' led by the Islamic Republic of Iran.[67] The conflict is political, economic and tribal rather than a sectarian clash between Shiite and Sunnis.[68] Saudi Arabia had backed multiple individuals and factions in Yemen, including Al-Islah, till the uprisings of 2011. However, now Saudi Arabia has categorised and banned the Houthis and the Qatar-backed Muslim Brotherhood as terrorist organisations.[69] Persistent status quo on the definition of insurgency, freedom struggles and terrorism among various states restrains the process to bring peace. Viewing all events as a zero-sum game limits the perceptions of this issue.[70]

An acute sense of vulnerability is reflected in the nature of conflicts in West Asia, and vertical cleavages are deepening on sectarian basis with the main cause of socio-economic disparity taking a secondary role. As per Timo Kivimaki, protection wars have become the main course of violence in the world, occasionally contributing over 50 per cent of total fatalities.[71] In the propensity to garner strategic significance, Saudi Arabia and Iran have taken the conflict in Yemen to a high level on the technological matrix and expanded the civil disturbance to a hybrid war. With multiple entities aiming for a favourable end state, the conflict, though of low to moderate intensity, will continue for a long time owing to overlapping objectives. This prognosis is supported by a dynamic simulation approach for evaluating the scope and intensity of the conflict trap[72] and is reaffirmed by poor record of West Asia socio-political engineering through the use of coercive force.[73] The deepening of the sectarian divide in Lebanon, Hezbollah's focus on the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and sustenance of AQAP are ominous signs of a conflict trap that West Asia will find hard to come out from. Qatar crisis in GCC has added another dimension to this vulnerable region. And maybe at the end of it all, proxy wars and hybrid wars are facilitated whenever the states, without a visionary leader, are a kaleidoscope of religions, regions and traditions and just ready to be exploited. This makes it difficult to identify agencies to be engaged for a lasting solution.

Lessons for India

Open, pluralistic and democratic societies offer a number of potential targets and are therefore particularly vulnerable to hybrid activities.[74] Hybrid war, with multiple tentacles and poorly defined beginning and end, is a reality, with its perpetrators including states and non-state actors acting from within or outside the state. Preparations as a nation need to be

made to thwart a combination of cyberattacks, propaganda, economic pressure, political destabilisation with irregular and covert elements, subversion and regular armed forces. Therefore, the armed forces must be ready to face a spatially focused threat posed by military forces below or above the threshold of open warfare, at short notice, as part of a hybrid strategy characterised by the orchestrated use of military and non-military means across the full range of the threat spectrum.

For kinetic aspects, development of quick processes, accurate offensive tools and robust defensive capabilities are necessary. Ability to undertake high-intensity operations in urban areas and yet restrict the collateral damage is essential. Battlespace in such a scenario is often fluid and multifaceted and capability for real-time surveillance of entire expanse is a prerequisite for operational success. In non-kinetic arenas, multiple identities of Indians based on region, religion, language and caste, and divide based on socio-economic and political paradigm, become a significant factor. This coupled with a rapid expansion of communication tools leaves low reaction time for state apparatus to contain the aggression. While the threat needs to be tackled in multiple dimensions, the best methodology to tackle it is at the beginning, owing to its low initial intensity, and to firewall areas and sectors for lateral propagation. Entire capability needs to be applied to thwart its spread. Education and governance transparency are two most significant tools for the purpose on the domestic front. Internationally, with Indian diaspora spread in various regions of the world, the situation needs to be assessed critically and requisite advisory issued to avoid endangering them prior to and during panic evacuations.

Conclusion

The Second Lebanon War in 2006 and the ongoing conflict in Yemen indicate the hybrid nature of warfare, in which a political/socio-economic narrative supported by armed elements utilising flexible organisational structure and technology can withstand a militarily more powerful adversary. Hezbollah, with a small core group of 1,000+, adapted and prepared the battlespace to their strengths. A delegation of powers to each cell and their ability to augment the cells with local villagers and basic weaponry skills eliminated the need for a long command, control and logistical chain. This, in turn, made it difficult for IDF to identify critical targets and hit them. A similar model is being followed by Houthis in Yemen, albeit against a less determined and capable enemy. While Hezbollah has practically garnered control of Lebanon and is deeply embroiled in Syria, Houthis are yet to

reach a state of equilibrium in Yemen. Both conflicts, separated by a decade, indicate the transformation of nature, scope and basis of warfare.

Threats to the state and society are not always easy to predict. The opportunities offered by globalisation, new technologies and the digital age are redefining the conduct of conflict. This holds an important lesson about the type of forthcoming threats for states and societies and to be prepared accordingly.

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