



# Security Challenges of India: Perspectives and Prospects

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**Abstract:** As most of the armies of the world adopt, the paper bases the quantum of threat posed by a security threat through its capability and interest and not by purported intention. We will explicitly list all security threats as well as economic, social, political and technological factors that can give rise to an increased security threat level. We will first analyze external and then internal security threats before evaluating which of the two, if at all, be more threatening to India in the coming decades.

**Keywords:** Security Threat, Challenges, Prospects, Issues, Perspectives, Measures.

**Introduction:** “If you know your enemies and know yourself, you will not be imperiled in a hundred battles; if you do not know your enemies but do know yourself, you will win one and lose one; if you do not know your enemies nor yourself, you will be imperiled in every single battle” The Art of War, Sun Tzu (6<sup>th</sup> Century BC), Chinese general and military strategist India is widely believed to have arrived on the global stage. In fact, if one goes by the popular press both domestic and foreign, it is very difficult to not get swayed by the euphony being generated about India and her inevitable ascendance to rightful place in the comity of nations. Nonetheless this paper attempts to desist from merely joining the self-congratulatory chorus and instead objectively analyses the security threats – external, internal, covert and overt, state

and non-state – posed to our country. Therefore at the outset, it must be emphasized though I am a strong believer in the idea of India, her resilience and ability to resurrect from every conceivable threat she has faced in the last two millennia; the paper tries to adopt a pragmatic strategist’s approach in the analysis of country’s security environment.

## **External Security Threats to India:**

India has the disadvantage of being situated in close proximity to what is being described as “the epicenter of global terrorism” [1]. Tribal region near the Afghanistan-Pakistan border is constantly drawing attention of America’s Global War on Terror (GWOT) since 2001. India’s increasing relevance to the US strategic canvas, troubled relationship with Pakistan since the independence of the country, deteriorating and unpredictable



relationship with China, unstable political climate in Nepal along with Maoist insurgency, mistrustful relationship with Bangladesh, civil-war ravaged and still-healing Sri Lanka, authoritarian Myanmar have rendered any fair estimation of Indian preparedness to deal with these security challenges an onerous task. We will now analyze capabilities and interests of each of these players and then assess their influence on India's strategic calculations.

**The United States of America:** India's relationship with the sole military and economic superpower of the world has been on the rise during the previous decade. A new shift in Indo-US relations was witnessed during President Clinton's visit in 2000, fortified by Presidents Bush and Obama's visit to the country. That said, although India remains ideologically non-committal to signing the CTBT and NPT regime; there has been tremendous improvement in the nuclear energy field through signing the Indo-US Nuclear Treaty in 2006. The US has always been a practitioner of hard real-politick, its policies have always been defined by its own interests in the region. The US support to Pakistan's military through CEATO arrangements in 1960s, later President Nixon's visit to China in Feb 1972 which was secretly facilitated by Pakistan and resulted in melting the ice between the two nations, support to

Pakistan's defense apparatus and Taliban through 1980s and now military offensive in the Af-Pak tribal region have all been calibrated on the US self-interests. All these steps have had a profound impact on India's external security environment. The continued US presence in our North-West border is cited to be one of the main reasons behind Pakistan's belligerent attitude in the aftermath of the Parliament attacked in 2001 and 26/11 mayhem & 2008. The Pakistani Army knows Indian options are severely limited to strike across Pakistani territory owing to military assistance she is providing to GWOT. Apart from limiting India's punitive capability against Pakistan for its sponsoring terrorist attacks and their infrastructure in India, the US has also provided substantial financial and military to Pakistan which have adverse consequences to our strategic calculations.

Nonetheless the US is likely to dominate world affairs for at least another two decades. India has to work towards minimizing adverse impact of the US-Pak assistance on our external security. On a lighter note, India should emphasize to the US that for fighting tribal insurgents in its North-Western region; Pakistan does not need F-16s and nuclear submarines!



**People's Republic of China:** Indo-China relations have been marked with distrust and fear on both sides after 1962 border clash which resulted in China usurping Aksai Chin area in J&K giving it easy road access from the Tibetan plateau to remote Xinxiang region in the West. Additionally China's rise in the past three decades has given it tremendous weight in international political and security circles. China has patiently been working towards building military-political and security circles. China has patiently been working towards building military-economic and political alliances around India's periphery – termed as “strings of pearl strategy”. China remains India's number one security threat. It has provided consistent military assistance to Pakistan for use against India, funded armed rebels in the North-East and has continued to up the ante in diplomatic circles through stapled visas, visa denials and spying on Tibetan Diaspora in India.

Although India needs to be sensitive towards Chinese sensitivities towards Tibet, India has failed to play an assertive role in communicating its interests to the Chinese side. On the other hand, China has built up superior civilian and military infrastructure along Indo-Tibet border. Our defense preparedness vis-à-vis China leaves much to be desired. As has rightly been enunciated by one of our Army Chiefs[2], the possibility of

Two-Front War scenario with both Pakistan and China should be factored in while preparing our doctrine of war and operational readiness.

**Pakistan:** The perennial challenge before India defense apparatus to manage external covert and overt threat from Pakistan does not need any emphasis. Since the birth of that country, we have fought them four times in war – 1948, 1965, 1971 and 1998. Besides the country is facing low intensity conflict in J&K abetted and sponsored by Pakistani military, in the North-East and through support to various fringe extremist group within the country. The country also faces huge challenge before its economy in the form of fake rackets being operated from Karachi and Dubai and widely believed to have blessings of Pakistan's infamous Inter-Services Intelligence – its external spy agency.

As the following chart shows, though in absolute terms terrorism related deaths in India have shown a decline; the potential for disturbing communal harmony within the country through such machinations cannot be underestimated. The fatalities here include all three kinds of death – civilians, security forces personnel and the terrorists[5]. We will during the later part of the article explore how external agencies with covert or overt support from nefarious elements within the



country can potentially destabilize the security situation.

**Immediate Neighborhood:** Unfortunately our other neighbors with the exception of Bhutan also don't provide any succor to military planners and political leaders and are equally as challenging as China and Pakistan. While Nepal is in the grip of political turmoil since the ouster of unpopular King Gyanendra, India has to play its cards carefully lest it be seen with a big brother agenda. India and Nepal share an open boundary with free exchange of people and currency across the borders. Although few contentious points remain in the Indo-Nepalese relations; they should not be allowed to obstruct our efforts in ensuring political stability in this strategically important neighbor of hours. Perhaps Indian leftist parties can be utilized by the Central government to persuade Maoist leadership in Nepal to desist from molycoddling too much with the Chinese to our and Nepal's detriment.

Bangladesh on the other hand is showing signs of delivering on the stated policy of the Government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina of not letting her country's soil for anti-India activities. Bangladesh has recently handed over many high profile terrorist leaders hiding in their country. India has also reciprocated with huge USD 1 billion

economic assistance in the form of line of credit to Bangladesh[7]. But India should actively continue to manage her somewhat uneasy relationship with the Opposition leader in Bangladesh former PM Mrs. Begum Khalida Zia. Seeking active Bangladeshi cooperation in destroying the terrorist infrastructure of Harkat-ul-Jihad-al Islami (HuJI) remains a challenge for Indian security agencies.

Although India at first neglected their relationship with Burmese military rulers, there have been improvements in the past few years in our bilateral relations. China has been investing in Kyaukryu and Sittwe as commercial ports on the west coast close to our NE states. Both of these ports can be used as a naval base and should be a cause of concern. India also needs to co-opt Myanmar for curbing the North Eastern rebel groups e.g. NSCN, ULFA and Manipur rebels which find shelter in dense forests along the international border. For that increased economic and military cooperation without inviting international limelight is a challenge as recently the US has started objecting to our strengthening relationship with the junta.

### **Internal Security Threats to India:**

India's internal security challenges can be categorized under two heads – insurgency and extremism. We will explore the

internal security threats to India in these lines.

**Insurgency:** India faces huge challenges in dousing the insurgency fires in many parts of the country – from the dense forests of Central India covering Chattisgarh, Jharkhand, few districts in Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, few parts of Andhra Pradesh (so called Red Corridor) to North-East India. We all know the Pakistani sponsored and mooted terrorist activities in the state of J&K since 1989. Besides there are dozens of militant groups in ethnically diverse North Eastern part of the country. Indian strategy so far has been to first let a state handle its law and order situation and intervene only in cases of extreme urgency. This strategy needs a rethink because of signs of consolidation among many of the freedom- seekers e.g. there are indications that Maoists have tried to forge ties with Kashmiri separatists and ULFA to synergize their activities. Furthermore as Left-Wing Extremism (LWE) in India stretches has their proximity to important cities and both north-south and east west lines of communication – termed as “potentially dangerous” by the Indian Army[9]. Therefore for successfully tackling the menace of LWE, two pronged strategy needs to be adopted – focus on socio-economic uplift of the affected areas as it is unfulfilled promise of the Indian state to

her citizens (aka Directive Principles of the State) and secondly this is one of the root-causes of the rise of Naxal movement in the Indian hinterland. Sincere efforts must be taken to implement inclusive growth as an objective of public policy. On fighting the insurgency, inter-state cooperation is a must and jurisdictional issues should not be allowed to tackle a nation-wide insurgency. Failing which, it must be emphasized India will face severe governance crisis internally and might even descend into chaos.

### **Which is greater threat – Internal or External?**

It is indeed a complex task to determine which of the two threats will be greater for India. In fact, in highly dynamic external security situation and rapidly evolving internal socio-economic developments, the relative strengths of these challenges cannot be determined with certainty. But one can say that an internally weak nation cannot fight an external adversary successfully. So tackling internal insurgency successfully is a greater and immediate challenge than fighting wars abroad. Continued insurgency can provide a fillip to external aggression from our adversaries sensing internal weakness. For example, left wing ultras can cripple rail and road infrastructure in the event of war and our enemies can very well factor this into their



calculations. Similarly, insurgencies in India are abetted and supported by our adversaries and the impact of the two challenges cannot be isolated per se.

**Conclusion:** As has been argued throughout this paper, in area as humongous as national security it is difficult to ascertain which of the two threats – external or internal – will pose greater security threat to the country going forward. But if we take nation as an organism, to fight an external adversary internal strength is prerequisite. Internal cohesion and external defense preparedness is what gives a nation lethal power to deter a potential aggressor and preserve freedom. Indian history has shown throughout millennia, we have lost out freedom and riches by neglecting our frontiers or through internal factionalism. Any nation which is getting rich without paying adequate focus on defense invites aggression. Are our policymakers ready for the challenge to steward safely an ascendant India of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?

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