



---

## India's National Security: Balancing External and Internal Challenges

**Dr. Shivendra Shahi**

Assistant Professor, Dept. of Defence and Strategic Studies, Shri Varshney College, Aligarh

---

**DOI : <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17112629>**

---

### ARTICLE DETAILS

**Research Paper**

**Accepted:** 17-08-2025

**Published:** 10-09-2025

**Keywords:**

---

---

### ABSTRACT

India's national security architecture is a complex, multi-dimensional construct shaped by a combination of enduring external threats and dynamic internal challenges. This article explores the nuanced spectrum of India's security concerns, including its geopolitical vulnerabilities with nuclear-armed neighbours, maritime and cyber threats, and emerging hybrid warfare tactics. Internally, India confronts insurgencies, radicalization, organized crime, and the growing influence of misinformation and climate-induced instability. The analysis delves into the key challenges confronting policymakers, from border management and cybersecurity to institutional coordination and the delicate balance between civil liberties and state security. It highlights recent government initiatives, such as defence modernization, smart border projects, and enhanced surveillance systems. Furthermore, the article emphasizes the crucial role of citizens and civil society in sustaining a secure and resilient nation. Through a forward-looking lens, it proposes a holistic strategy that integrates hard security measures with inclusive development, environmental safeguards, and democratic accountability. India's security future depends not only on statecraft and strategy but also on the collective vigilance and responsibility of its people.

---



## Introduction

National security in India is not a static concept defined solely by armies and arsenals. It is a constantly evolving mosaic that encompasses territorial integrity, internal harmony, economic resilience, technological preparedness, and the will of its people. In a country as geographically vast and socially diverse as India, safeguarding national security demands a nuanced, multi-pronged approach.

## Understanding the External Security Landscape

India's external security environment is marked by persistent volatility and complex geopolitics. With a land border stretching over approx. 15,000 kilo meters and maritime interests covering nearly 7,500 kilo meters of coastline, India's security is shaped not just by land disputes, but by the broader dynamics of regional power projection and maritime dominance. Bordered by two nuclear-armed neighbours-China and Pakistan-India remains in a complex geopolitical setting. The 2020 Galwan Valley clash with Chinese forces underscored the fragile nature of the Line of Actual Control (LAC). With Pakistan, the challenges are deeper and more historical-wars, border skirmishes, proxy terrorism, and the unresolved Kashmir issue continue to test bilateral ties.

India has faced over 1,100 ceasefire violations along the Line of Control (LoC) with Pakistan in 2022 alone. Meanwhile, China continues to expand military infrastructure along the LAC, with reports of dual-use villages and rapid troop mobilization capabilities.

Beyond immediate borders, India's external security posture also extends to maritime security in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), where increased Chinese naval activity and the development of strategic ports under the Belt and Road Initiative (such as Gwadar in Pakistan and Hambantota in Sri Lanka) have raised alarms. India's growing focus on securing sea lanes of communication (SLOCs), enhancing blue-water navy capabilities, and conducting joint maritime exercises like Malabar are part of a broader Indo-Pacific strategy aimed at countering strategic encirclement and ensuring a free, open, and inclusive region.

Moreover, cyber threats from hostile state and non-state actors, espionage campaigns, satellite and space warfare capabilities, and hybrid threats-including misinformation campaigns-have become integral to India's broader external security concerns. Strategic partnerships-such as those through the QUAD with the U.S., Japan, and Australia-offer a buffer and an opportunity. However, India must tread carefully, balancing these with its legacy ties with Russia and a growing but cautious relationship with China.



## The Internal Security Matrix

While border threats grab headlines, India's internal security challenges are arguably more layered. The insurgencies in Jammu & Kashmir, the Northeast, and the Red Corridor each have unique historical and socio-political roots. The Naxalite-Maoist movement, for instance, is not only merely an armed rebellion; but also, it is a cry of neglect, poverty, and alienation.

As per the Ministry of Home Affairs, around 70 districts across 10 states were affected by Left-Wing Extremism (LWE) as of 2021, though the number of violent incidents has declined steadily due to combined security and developmental efforts.

Additionally, issues such as religious radicalization, communal violence, drug trafficking, and organized crime pose serious threats. In 2022 alone, India registered over 75,000 cases under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act.

The misuse of social media to spread misinformation, hate, and panic is a new-age challenge. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), cybercrimes in India rose by over 5% in 2021, with many cases linked to financial fraud, defamation, and digital harassment.

Climate change, too, is emerging as a non-traditional threat. Erratic weather patterns, environmental degradation, and displacement due to natural disasters are fuelling insecurity and unrest, particularly among already vulnerable populations. These factors demand that internal security be seen not just through the lens of policing, but also governance, welfare, and climate justice.

### Key Challenges

1. **Border Management:** Loosely demarcated boundaries, difficult terrain, and porous borders make India vulnerable to infiltration and smuggling.
2. **Cybersecurity Gaps:** Increasing digitization has created new vulnerabilities, including state-sponsored cyber-attacks and data breaches. India faced over 1.3 million cybersecurity incidents in 2022, as reported by CERT-In.
3. **Terror Financing and Radicalization:** Both online and offline mechanisms for radicalization remain active, requiring advanced surveillance and community engagement.
4. **Institutional Coordination:** Intelligence sharing and operational synergy among agencies like IB, RAW, NIA, and state police forces are still evolving.



5. **Balancing Liberty and Security:** Laws like UAPA and AFSPA have raised legitimate concerns about civil rights, often leading to polarizing debates.

## **The Balancing Act: Navigating India's Security Priorities**

India's national security strategy reflects a calibrated effort to manage both external threats and internal vulnerabilities through an integrated framework that combines military preparedness, diplomatic engagement, socio-economic initiatives, and technological advancement.

### **1. Military Modernization and Strategic Deterrence**

India has undertaken significant efforts to modernize its armed forces with an emphasis on advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), and cyber warfare capabilities. These initiatives aim to enhance the operational readiness of the military and serve as a deterrent against hostile adversaries in an increasingly volatile regional security environment.

### **2. Enhanced Border Management**

In response to persistent challenges along its borders-particularly in regions adjoining Pakistan and China-the Indian government has prioritized physical and technological fortification. This includes the installation of border fencing, deployment of sensor-based surveillance systems, and augmentation of security personnel to prevent cross-border infiltration, arms trafficking, and smuggling activities.

### **3. Counter-Terrorism and Internal Security**

India adopts a zero-tolerance policy towards terrorism, which is operationalized through strengthened legal frameworks, improved inter-agency coordination, and robust intelligence mechanisms. Notably, the state retains the capacity to launch pre-emptive and retaliatory strikes against terrorist infrastructure located across borders when warranted.

### **4. Addressing Root Causes of Internal Conflict**

Recognizing that socio-economic deprivation often underpins insurgency and extremist movements, the government has adopted a development-centric approach in conflict-prone areas. Initiatives aimed at improving governance, expanding access to education, and promoting



inclusive growth have been prioritized to counter Left-Wing Extremism (LWE) and ethnic insurgencies, especially in central and northeastern India.

### **5.Strategic Diplomacy and Global Partnerships**

India continues to rely on proactive diplomacy to maintain regional stability and global partnerships. Strategic alliances with countries such as the United States, France, Japan, and Australia play a key role in enhancing defence cooperation, intelligence sharing, and maritime security. These partnerships also contribute to securing global supply chains and bolstering India's role in the Indo-Pacific region.

### **6.Technological Self-Reliance in Defence**

Under the "Atmanirbhar Bharat" (Self-Reliant India) initiative, the government is striving to strengthen domestic defence manufacturing capabilities. Policies such as the Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP) and support for startups and MSMEs in the defence sector are aimed at reducing dependence on foreign military imports and fostering indigenous innovation.

### **The Way Ahead**

To address both external and internal threats effectively, India needs to adopt a layered, forward-thinking strategy. This includes:

- **Modernizing Armed Forces:** Continued investment in indigenous defence production (via Make in India) and next-gen warfare capabilities like drones and AI.
- **Integrated Intelligence Architecture:** Strengthening inter-agency communication, leveraging big data analytics, and enhancing human intelligence.
- **Grassroots Engagement:** Addressing the root causes of insurgency and unrest through education, health care, land reforms, and inclusive development.
- **Cyber Readiness:** Investing not just in firewalls, but in training ethical hackers, cyber law enforcement, and public digital literacy.
- **Environmental Security:** Incorporating climate risk into national security planning, from water-sharing agreements to disaster resilience.



- **Legislative Reforms:** Ensuring security laws are robust but also aligned with constitutional safeguards and human rights.

## Conclusion

India's national security paradigm is as intricate as the country itself. It is not merely a defensive shield but a proactive, inclusive pursuit of stability, justice, and resilience. From safeguarding borders to securing minds, from preventing conflict to fostering development-the task is monumental, but not impossible.

India must remain vigilant, but also visionary. It must be prepared to respond with strength, but also lead with compassion. And most importantly, it must continue to evolve-because security, in the truest sense, is the freedom to live without fear, and the opportunity to grow without threat. In the end, national security is the silent scaffolding that holds up the structure of a thriving democracy. And in protecting it, every citizen has a stake-and a role.

## References

- Mehrotra, S. (2021). Vocational education and training in India: The NEP 2020 opportunity. *Indian Journal of Human Development*, 15(1), 23–36. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09737030211014432>
- Ministry of Home Affairs. (2022). *Annual report 2021–22*. Government of India.
- Pant, H. V., & Joshi, Y. (2020). *Securing India: Strategic thinking and practice*. Bloomsbury India.
- Planning Commission. (2014). *Development challenges in extremist-affected areas*. Government of India.
- Ministry of External Affairs. (2023). *India's foreign policy review: Strategic partnerships in the Indo-Pacific*. MEA Policy Briefs.
- Ministry of Defence. (2021). *Defence Acquisition Procedure 2020*. Government of India.
- Harsh V. Pant and Kartik Bommakanti. (2019), "India's national security: challenges and dilemmas," *International Affairs* 95, no. 4, 835–857.



- Shivshankar Menon, (2012), "INDIA'S NATIONAL SECURITY: CHALLENGES AND ISSUES," Centre for Air Power Studies, <https://capsindia.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Shivshankar-Menon.pdf>.
- Michael Kugelman, (2010), "Looking In, Looking Out: Surveying India's Internal and External Security Challenges," *INDIA'S Contemporary Security Challenges*, Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars.
- Hu Shisheng and Wang Jun, (2023), "India's National Security Strategy: Pursuits, Origins, and Practice," *CICIR Contemporary International Relations*, 1–17.
- P.S. Raghavan, (2019), "The Evolution of India's National Security Architecture," *Journal of Defence Studies* 13, no. 3, 11-40.
- S. Jaishankar, (2020), *The India Way: Strategies for an Uncertain World*, HarperCollins.
- "India to bring in a National Security Strategy: what is it, why is it important?" *The Indian Express*, November 6, 2023.
- Suresh Rangarajan, (2024) "India's National Security: Challenges and Response," *ISDA Journal* 34, no. 2, : 81–89.