



Drug Trafficking through the India–Pakistan Border: Emerging National Security Challenges in Punjab

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ABSTRACT

Pakistan is a serious threat to national security of India particularly in the border state of Punjab through trafficking of drugs across the border. The porous nature of some border areas, the presence of transnational criminal networks and the growing use of sophisticated drug smuggling methods like drones and underground tunnels have made the narcotics trade in the border region more intense. Being adjacent to Pakistan, Punjab is the most susceptible to cross border infiltration of heroin, synthetic drugs, arms and counterfeit currency. Through the impact on public health, youth, organized crime, financing of terrorist activities, social instability and internal security, drug trafficking is a threat to the nation. As narcotics trafficking is increasingly linked to terrorism, the problem has emerged as a serious non-traditional security problem. This paper explores the factors, how it is done, the socio-economic impacts and the national security implications of drug trafficking in Punjab. It also examines the role of border management agencies and emphasizes policy measures needed to enhance border security, cooperation in intelligence sharing, anti-narcotic activities and public awareness building. The study calls for a multi-dimensional and comprehensive approach to curbing the menace of narco-trafficking and ensuring the internal security and social

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stability of India.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the link between drug trafficking, money laundering, and terror financing against India.
2. To analyze how illegal drug-generated money is used through laundering networks to support terrorism and threaten India's national security.

Research Questions

Sl. No.	Research Questions
1	How does cross-border drug trafficking from Pakistan pose a threat to India's national security in Punjab?
2	How effective are India's border management and anti-narcotics strategies in countering narco-terrorism along the India–Pakistan border?

Research Methodology

The method of research used in this study is qualitative, analytical, and descriptive in nature, which aims to analyze the increasing problem of drug trafficking with Pakistan through the Indo–Pak border and its impact on the national security of Punjab. The data sources used are mainly secondary data sources, such as reports by government agencies, border security documents, academic journals, policy papers, books, newspaper articles, and publications of national and international organizations related to narcotics trafficking, terrorism, and internal security. The study also involves the analysis of the reports of security agencies like Border Security Force, Narcotics Control Bureau and Ministry of Home Affairs to gain insight into the trend of narco-trafficking and infiltration through borders. The relationship between drug trafficking, organized crime, and threats to national security have been examined from an interpretative and thematic perspective. The research also looks at the strategic, socio-economic and security aspects of narco-terrorism and evaluates the impact of the current border management and anti-drug policies in India.

Introduction

The India-Pakistan border is a major hotspot for drug trafficking, posing a significant threat to the country's national security and internal stability. As a border state with Pakistan, and geographically situated, Punjab

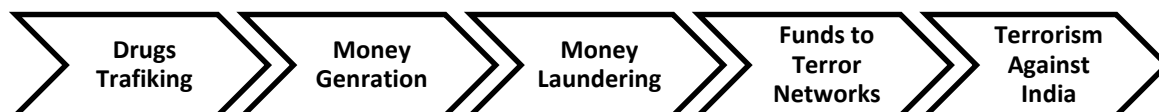
has emerged as one of the most vulnerable areas. Throughout the years, Pakistan's mountainous border with India has seen an unprecedented surge in the smuggling of heroin, synthetic drugs, arms, and illegal currency via criminal networks. The narcotics business has slowly become a border governance, public order and socio-economic security concern, rather than one of crime.

The strategic location of Punjab near the “Golden Crescent” (Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan) has made the region a very vulnerable zone for narcotics trafficking. Advanced technologies like drones, encrypted communication systems, tunnels and cross border couriers are increasingly becoming part of the drug trade by drug syndicates and transnational criminal groups for moving drugs into Indian territory. Such techniques have made the task of surveillance and border management by Indian security agencies rather complicated. The sophistication of the smuggling networks is an indicator of the changing nature of the threat of hybrid and asymmetric threats to the national security apparatus of India.

Besides posing a direct threat to the national security of Pakistan, drug trafficking has created huge socio-economic and demographic effects in Punjab. The increasing incidence of drug addiction among young people has negatively affected the productive labour force and has posed long-term public health problems. The increase of narcotics networks in border areas has brought more crime, social disintegration, unemployment and economic instability to the region. The illegal drug industry has also been a source of corruption, money laundering and organised crime in vulnerable areas.

There is also an increasing linkage between the drug trade and terrorism. The finances of any such groups are frequently being used to fund extremism, acquire illegal arms and anti-national activities with the help of drug money. The drug trafficking and terrorism linkage have turned the issue into one of non-traditional security concerns of significance. Thus, drug trafficking across the India-Pakistan border has become not only a law and order issue but a strategic concern, directly impacting internal security and national stability in India.

This paper looks at the strategic aspects of the cross-border drug trafficking in the province of Punjab and its implications for national security. It also reviews the performance of the Indian Border Management processes and anti-narcotics measures, and recommends policy practices to boost the national security and fight against Norco-terrorism.





The Nexus of drug trafficking and money laundering with terror financing against India

The close nexus and threat of drug trafficking, money laundering and terrorism to India's national security is a serious issue. Drugs supplied into the country illegally through the networks across the country are a source of a massive amount of black money in the country. This black money is then channelled through hawala, fake accounts, shell companies, real estate investments and other such laundering methods to conceal its source. The same amounts of money, after being laundered, are channeled to anti-national groups and terrorist groups working against India. The funds these terror groups use go to buying weapons, attracting militants, funding attacks, spreading violence and creating instability within the country. Hence, the money gained from drug trafficking within the country is ultimately spent on India and the Narco-terrorism is a major traditional and non-traditional threat. The constant drug, black money and terror funding harms economic stability, endangers the security, fosters organised crime and has a negative impact on social harmony. Thus, dismantling the nexus between drug trafficking, money laundering and terrorism is crucial to ensure the sovereignty, peace and national security of the Indian nation.

Date	Place	Agency / Source	Major Incident & Data	National Security Significance
14 April 2021	Fazilka, Punjab (Indo–Pakistan Border)	Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB)	NCB and BSF seized 5.958 kg heroin near BOP Lakha Asli from cross-border smugglers. In November 2025, the accused was sentenced to 12 years imprisonment.	Demonstrates Pakistan-linked cross-border narco-smuggling networks threatening India's border security.
14 February 2025	Amritsar, Punjab	Times of India Report	Punjab Police seized 30 kg heroin transported through drones from Pakistan.	Shows increasing use of drone technology for narco-terror operations along the Indo–Pakistan border.
16 May 2025	Tarn Taran, Punjab	Business Standard Report	Punjab Police busted an ISI-controlled Pakistan-based narco-smuggling module and seized 85 kg heroin.	Reveals direct involvement of Pakistan-backed networks in financing illegal activities inside India.
10 June 2025	Punjab	Indian Express	Punjab Police arrested over 16,533 smugglers, seized 627	Highlights the financial link between drug trafficking, hawala



		Report	kg heroin, froze assets worth Rs.78.52 crore, and recovered Rs.13.03 crore drug money.	networks, and organized crime funding.
3 August 2025	Amritsar & Tarn Taran, Punjab	NDTV Report	BSF seized 1.73 kg heroin and six drones during anti-smuggling operations near the border.	Indicates growing technological sophistication in cross-border narcotics operations.
26 September 2025	Punjab	Hindustan Times Report	Punjab Police recorded an all-time high seizure of 1,450 kg heroin in nine months and arrested 30,854 accused under NDPS Act.	Reflects the large-scale narcotics economy operating through India's border states.
November 2025	Punjab	Times of India Report	NCB data showed Punjab accounted for 44.5% of India's heroin seizures in 2024, with 1,150 kg heroin recovered.	Demonstrates Punjab's strategic vulnerability in narco-terror networks.
27 December 2025	Punjab	South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP)	Authorities seized over 5,119 kg heroin, froze assets worth Rs. 273 crore, and recovered drug money worth ₹52.6 crore.	Shows direct economic dimensions of drug trafficking and financial networks supporting criminal and extremist activities.
7 January 2026	Amritsar, Punjab	Times of India Report	NCB detained alleged trafficker Sandeep Singh "Chatha"; investigations linked him to assets worth Rs.58.6 crore from narcotics trade.	Highlights how drug syndicates convert illegal profits into organized criminal and anti-national networks.
16 May 2026	Delhi & Mundra Port, Gujarat	Times of India Report	NCB seized Captagon ("Jihadi Drug") worth ₹182 crore during Operation Ragepill linked to Middle-East terror networks.	Demonstrates international narco-terror connections and the use of drug proceeds for extremist operations.



The Cross- Borders Drug Trafficking and Emerging Security Threats

The cross-border drug trafficking across the India-Pakistan border has become a serious threat to the national security of India. Smuggling in Pakistan has seen a significant rise in recent years in Punjab, as the transnational criminal networks and the narco-terror organizations are involved. Border regions are exploited by drug syndicates and technologically advanced procedures like drones, underground tunnels and encrypted communication systems are used by drug lords to evade border security checkpoints. This has raised further fears of infiltration and security threats within the country.

Punjab is strategically located and is heavily exposed to narcotics trafficking from the Golden Crescent area. Indian security agencies, particularly the Border Security Force and anti-narcotics enforcement forces are facing fresh challenges after the introduction of the use of drones to drop narcotics. Drug trafficking across borders has also grown the organized criminal groups present in border areas which have led to illegal financial transactions, smuggling of arms and corruption. The blending of narcotics traffickers and extremist groups, in addition to its other functions, has also made it a tool of hybrid warfare against India.

Major Causes of Drug Trafficking

Sl. No.	Causes	Security Implications
1	Proximity to Pakistan border	Increased cross-border infiltration
2	Golden Crescent drug production	Large-scale heroin availability
3	Use of drones and tunnels	Difficulties in border surveillance
4	Organized criminal syndicates	Expansion of illegal networks
5	Weak socio-economic conditions	Recruitment of local youth
6	Terror-financing networks	Growth of narco-terrorism

Socio-Economic and Strategic Impact on Punjab

The social and economic fabric of Punjab has been seriously disrupted by the drug trade. The most alarming has been the speedy increase of drug addiction among youths, especially in the districts along the borders. The increase in reliance on narcotics has contributed to a decline in the labor force and have given rise to future public health issues for the state. Social disintegration of families and communities has resulted from the increasing criminal activities, unemployment, poverty and psychological distress due to drug abuse.

The growth of the drug trade has helped to bring organized crime and corruption to the border regions. Money laundering, the sale and distribution of weapons and extortion are common business practices of

criminal syndicates that engage in drug trafficking. These changes undermine governance frameworks and have an impact on the citizens' trust in institutions of the law. In addition, the indirect impact of drug trafficking on National security is that it also helps in financing of terror and support for anti-national elements who operate across the border. The drug menace thus poses a social problem and is also a strategic threat to the internal stability of India in the of Punjab state.

Impact of Drug Trafficking in Punjab

Sl. No.	Major Impact	Consequences
1	Youth Drug Addiction	Decline in human capital
2	Organized Crime	Increase in violence and smuggling
3	Economic Instability	Loss of productivity
4	Public Health Crisis	Rising rehabilitation burden
5	Social Disintegration	Family breakdown and insecurity
6	Terror Financing	Threat to internal security

Border Management and Anti-Narcotics Strategies

India has taken various steps to improve the border management and to combat Narcotics trafficking with Pakistan. Anti-drug operations and surveillance activities are important on agencies like Border Security Force, Narcotics Control Bureau, Punjab Police and intelligence agencies etc. To control cross-border infiltration and smuggling activities, border fencing, flood lighting, electronic monitoring system and anti-drone technology have been installed. The measures have enhanced operational capability of security forces in India for countering narcotics consignment.

The government has also launched awareness programmes and rehabilitation centers/de-addiction camps to tackle the socio-economic aspects of drug abuse. Coordinated intelligence sharing, strengthening intelligence coordination, has been further enhanced between central and state agencies to enhance coordinated operations against organized criminal networks. Yet, despite these endeavours, problems like corruption, lack of technology, difficult terrain and the changing smuggling strategies persist and impede efficient border control. Narco-terrorism is becoming more sophisticated, and India need to develop a more integrated and technologically advanced security strategy.

Major Anti-Narcotics Measures

Sl. No.	Strategies	Objectives
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1	Border Fencing	Prevent infiltration and smuggling
2	Anti-Drone Technology	Detect aerial narcotics delivery
3	Intelligence Coordination	Improve operational efficiency
4	Surveillance Systems	Strengthen border monitoring
5	International Cooperation	Control transnational crime
6	Awareness Campaigns	Reduce drug addiction among youth

4. Policy Recommendations and Conclusion

Cross-border drug trafficking is a multifaceted and multifarious issue and the Indian State needs a global and multidimensional approach to the problem. Given the nature of today's smuggling operations, border security is being strengthened by employing cutting-edge technologies such as surveillance systems, anti-drone technology, and intelligence integration. The coordination of the security forces, including the Border Security Force, the Narcotics Control Bureau and state police departments, can greatly enhance the anti-narcotics activities. Financial monitoring mechanisms should also be enhanced to sever the financial networks involved in terror financing and money laundering suspected of being linked to the narco-trafficking.

In addition to security measures, socio-economic measures also play an important role in combating the root causes of drug abuse and criminal recruitment in border areas. Awareness campaigns, youth employment schemes and rehabilitation schemes should be scaled up to minimize local vulnerability. The involvement of communities and the cooperation of the people can be an important factor in identifying unlawful networks and enhance community resilience to the narcotics menace.

Recommendations

Sl. No.	Recommendations
1	Deploy advanced anti-drone and surveillance technology
2	Strengthen intelligence-sharing among security agencies
3	Enhance border fencing and night-monitoring systems
4	Increase rehabilitation and de-addiction programs
5	Launch large-scale awareness campaigns in border districts
6	Strengthen financial monitoring to curb terror funding
7	Improve employment opportunities for border youth
8	Enhance regional cooperation against transnational narcotics trade



In conclusion, drug trafficking through the India–Pakistan border has evolved into a major non-traditional and hybrid security threat for India. Narcotics smuggling, organized crime and terrorism have become increasingly intertwined, thus raising national security issues in Punjab. Narco-trafficking, apart from being harmful to public health and youth development, also undermines border security, fosters criminal activities and undermines social order. Anti-narcotics efforts have also become more difficult due to the use of drones and new and advanced smuggling techniques. It is, therefore, necessary to have a well-developed holistic approach that integrates the elements of technological upgrading, intelligence cooperation, socio-economic development, and public awareness to effectively fight against the threat of narco-terrorism and protect the country's security.

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