



INDIA AND ITS HOSTILE NEIGHBORHOOD: AN ANALYSIS OF THREATS AND IMPACTS OF HOSTILITY COMING FROM CHINA AND PAKISTAN

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RESEARCH ARTICLE



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Abstract

The Indian subcontinent is full of turmoil for decades. Since after the independence of India, as a major player in the region, has faced several challenges both externally and internally. In the discourse of external threats, the country faced severe challenging factors due to the hostile attitude of the theocratic state of Pakistan. Not only Pakistan, the Chinese hostility correspondingly makes an addition to more complicate the situation. These threats to India's national security became a major concern (Gupta, 2023). The conceptualizations of security or national security are very ambiguous as the other terms in various disciplines of social sciences. None of the definition can provide the whole picture in defining these terms (Baldwin, 1997). But for a general understanding, it can very loosely be said that the conception of security denotes assurance of the absence of fear from any kind of threat and the conception of national security means the assurance by the government that the country and its citizens are secure from all kinds of internal and external harmful threats (Taylor, 2024; Holmes, 2015). After independence, India has faced numerous internal issues in terms of political instability, economic development, lesser military strength, and other related traditional and non-traditional security issues (Gupta, 2023). The external security threats include the fear of being attacked by foreign countries like China or Pakistan (PIB, 2025). Today these security challenges are not as same as in the past. The fear of external aggression is not the only challenge that exists in this globalizing era, it also includes various transnational security challenges (the threats that are not confined in the border of one country) (Transnational Security Initiative, n.d.). The security concern in the recent era has become more complex. In this paper, hostilities faced by India from its immediate northern and western neighbours, more specifically China and Pakistan, has been tried to be highlighted.

Keywords: *India, China, Pakistan, Internal and External Security Threats, Security Dilemma, National Interest*

Introduction

The Republic of India is facing multi-dimensional challenges towards its national security. The country has been facing security challenges internally and externally that are both traditional and nontraditional in nature (Gupta, 2023). A lot of transnational issues appeared to be more vigorous than ever before due to the technological advancement in such a globalizing era. All are harming India's internal as well as the regional peaceful atmosphere. Eventually it hampers human development in the nation by bringing such challenges that could harm the economic growth. Because, a peaceful atmosphere free from any sort of insecurity would be very helpful for the development of human instinct (Lautensach & Lautensach (Eds.), 2020). Domestically India faced various challenges like, poverty, illiteracy, pollution, malnutrition, medical system, unemployment, and so on, that already effecting the human development (Kumar, 2023). A continuous economic growth to establish stronger economy would be helpful to deal these issues. There are various internal challenges are not just faced by India, on the other hand it has two nuclear armed neighbors, for being located in the region, with a hostile attitude towards India. That makes a supplementary to the concerns in India's security challenges (Vohra & Santhanam, 2003). This article attempts to highlight some international threats coming from these two neighbors namely Pakistan and China.

China Factor in India's External Security Concerns: The Existence of Security Dilemma

The Republic of India and the Peoples Republic of China are the two great powers in Asia have a rich history and parts of their respective ancient civilizations. India gets independence in 1947, and China emerged as the PRC in 1949 (Office of the Historian, n.d.). They established diplomatic relations on 1st April 1950, and India became the pioneer nation from outside the socialist bloc to establish diplomatic relations with China (Embassy of India, 2025). Since 1954, the Principles of Panchsheel have become the

main determinants in Indo-China bilateral relationship. But, in 1962 Indo-China War was a setback that brought a downturn in their relationship (Dutta, 1999). Since then, the lack of trust and the suspicious Chinese activities have bittered the relations between these two neighbors. That is continuing till today. The hidden intention of Chinese expansionism is one among the major causes for the emergence of trust deficit involving these two big neighbors in Asia (Markey & Scobell, 2023; Shivamurthy, Ed., 2022). As a consequence, security dilemmas come into existence.

Now, the question is: What is a security dilemma? And which incidents proved the existence of a security dilemma between the two militarily powerful Asian giants? The three original proponents of the concept of the security dilemma are Herbert Butterfield, John Herz, and Robert Jervis. However, so many thinkers have defined the term in different ways. John Herz was privileged as the foremost one who coined the term "security dilemma" in 1950 (Mearsheimer, 2001). According to John Herz, the sense of insecurity among individuals or groups of people for being attacked, dominated, subjugated, or exterminated by other groups or individuals compelled them to struggle for security. Due to the pursuit of security, they try to turn out to be stronger enough to protect themselves by acquiring more and more power. In turn, the quest for power by one party may increase the sense of insecurity to other group of individuals, and they may also try to acquire more and more power to secure themselves (Tang, 2009). Eventually, all of them would engage in an endless struggle to become powerful enough so that they can protect themselves. Robert Jervis has also tried to elucidate the correlation between anarchy and the security dilemma. The condition of security dilemma may emerge in a situation where no higher authority or other higher government existed to control the parties involved in the race of power persuasion. To him, the increase in power to secure one country decreased the sense of security for the other country (Jervis, 1978). Whereas the term security dilemma has been described by Herbert Butterfield as mutual suspicion and lack of trust between the parties (Wheeler, 2008).

In conceptualization of security dilemma, various thinkers significantly stressed on the fear of insecurity. But they did not be able to provide an unanimously accepted definition of the term. For a general understanding of the term, it can very laxly be said that the term *security dilemma* demarcated the interconnected circumstances in which the measures taken for the security by one country, that could be in various manifestations, may become a cause of concern for other country. In other words, a situation has been depicted in defining the term where acquisition of power for securing a country can be regarded as challenges to the security of others (Bloor, 2022). The countries would be suspicious to each other about the possibilities of being attacked in securing the national interest of the concerned attacking country or may be for some other reasons. In most of the circumstances, the environment of security dilemma always be encloded with mutual distrust, anxiety, and threats to be attacked by others.

In Asia, the Indo-China relations have witnessed the condition similarly related to the security dilemma for long decades. Historically, both the nations have been carrying their respective rich civilizational legacy. Their relations in the continent of Asia have been guided by the mutual consensus. Before 1962, Indian leadership was very optimistic about the Chinese regime in India-China relations. But, the lack of trust emerges due to 1962 war when China suddenly attacked India in this year (Gokhale, 2021). After 1962 war the India's optimistic perception regarding China is broken and India visualized the true picture of reality. The experience of that incident has left a deep impact on India's foreign policy, force India to drop optimistic perception regarding China and taken the policies based on realistic point of view. In that realistic foreign policy, self-help become very important to achieve the target of self-reliance sometimes by catching up. As it can be seen regarding the development of nuclear weapons. With the test of nuclear weapon in 1964 by the PRC have increased India's external security concerns. It brought a direct impact on India by generating a possibility of future aggression by China. In response, India has developed its own nuclear weapons in 1974 to defend the country from any kind of these possible threats (Sahni, 2024). Since 1962, various ups and downs have been observed in the trajectory of the Indo-China relationship.

The political systems operating in their respective countries are different. There is also a enormous gap in terms of GDP, military expenditure, and so on. India is not as economically powerful as China. Chinese defense expenditure is near about four times of India's defense expenditure. China expended approximately 293 billion USD for its defense purposes in 2021 (SIPRI, 2022). Whereas India's Defense budget is approx. 76.6 billion USD (Press Trust of India, 2022). Both countries want to augment their military capability, despite the huge economic gap between the and engaged in a competition for acquiring more and more power according to their concerned objectives (Anwar, 2022).

The requirement in the atmosphere of security dilemma forced them two engage in the competition. Even though their objectives are not similar. The PRC wants become a global power capable enough to control the world order, whereas India mainly with its defensive purposes, continuously trying to enhance its military capability through the procurement of lethal weapons or by indigenously developing the next-generation cutting edge defense equipment. In this regard, the deal in 2015 between Russia and China regarding the S-400 air defense system can be taken as an example (Heath, 2016). To defend the country from any probable threats, India also signed a deal with Russia in 2018 about the same type of air defense system. But the missiles supplied to India with S400 defense system are came up with an extended range rather than the missiles provided to China with this system. The PRC has indigenously developed J20, a fifth-generation fighter aircraft. Whereas, India is working on the AMCA project, an indigenous 5th generation fighter aircraft program with a possibility of induction in 2034 (Peri, 2025). There are various weapons like ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and other related defense items have been indigenously developed by them or through the joint venture with their respective friendly countries and also, they have home-grown aircraft carrier and anti-satellite missile programs (Missiles of China, 2018). They have made numerous types of missiles operational by China and India with different ranges and both are working on the hypersonic technology as well. All of these developments intensify the fear of each other due to their offensive capabilities.

This competitiveness is not limited in the development of these weapons or in martial preparedness only. It has been extended beyond of this development by exploring the geopolitical advantages in various other sectors. It can also be found in securing their strategic interest. In this regard, a strengthening relationship with the smaller states all over the world have become very important for China. The PRC has been trying to make a stronger presence in the smaller and less influential nations holding significantly important strategic locations. Chinese presence in these smaller states, primarily in the African and Asian Continent, is a very concerning issue not just for India but for the whole world because the track record of China for maintaining the freedom of navigation is not very appreciable (Baruah, 2018). The infrastructure development in these countries holding important strategic locations have been funded by the Chinese authority under its “Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)”.

Chinese debt trap diplomacy in these countries makes a major strategic threat for India. The hidden interest of the Chinese regime behind its presence is also one of the greatest strategic challenges for India. The PRC claims that the BRI is a developmental initiative to boost connectivity and trade. But if the country failed to repay the loan, China acquires that infrastructure for long time and it could be used for surveillance or even as oversea bases. Some countries have witnessed such activities by the PRC. After acquiring the infrastructure, China starts to use it for military purposes. The case of Hambantota port in Sri Lanka can be a highlighted example. The port in Sri Lanka had been developed with Chinese funding with the help of Chinese engineers. Now China has acquired this port with 99 years lease for commercial purposes. But in 2022, China docked a surveillance ship called Yuan Wang 5, used by China to track satellites and ballistic missile launches (Gunasekara & Mashal, 2022). The Chinese authority stated that these infrastructures will be used for noncombatant purposes, but China have docked the naval vessels capable of spying and the data gathered through the spying can actually be used for military functions (Ni & Agencies, 2022).

The growing naval activity by the China is also observed in other parts of Sri Lanka. In 2014, Chinese submarine docked in Colombo port. In 2019, China has also permitted to enter in Chittagong and Mongla port in Bangladesh. The Chinese authority has articulated its intentions to engage in other connectivity projects in Bangladesh (Bhattacharjee, 2021). China is developing the Gwadar port in Pakistan which is an integrated part of CPEC. According to the Chinese version, the CPEC project could be used for civilian purposes to boost connectivity and regional trade (Rauf & Zeidan, 2025). But after considering Chinese activities, the questions once again arise about the real intention of China regarding the purposes of these infrastructure projects. There are tremendous possibilities of that infrastructure can be used by China for military purposes and in that scenario India’s concern for regional peace will be increased and eventually it impacts the Indian national interests. Because a conflictual region is not in the national interest of India.

All such policies and activities executed by the PRC may become a major stake for the democratic principles and freedom of navigation in the Indian ocean region. These Chinese actions are responsible for the appearance and persistence of security dilemma in the contemporary atmosphere enclouded with trust deficit. This situation is conducive for accelerating the arms race to defend their respective national interest. To coming out of the situation, the process to develop a mutual understanding is need of the hour between these two countries and it would help to reinstate harmony in the region. Until it would happen, both the countries along with the region will suffer with uncertainties created by lack of trust and live in the condition of security dilemma.

Pakistan factor: A Threat of Provocation to Engage in a War

With the changing dynamics in Indo-Pak relations, it has witnessed various setbacks since independence. Even though both the countries have share almost similar experience of being a part of same civilizational history. But, the hostile activities from Pakistan government have significantly contributed to the development of such an antagonistic relationship with India. They have engaged in wars with each other for several times viz., 1947, 1965, 1971, and 1999 (PTI, 2025). All of these wars have been triggered by Pakistan Army’s provocations with violating the cease fire on LoC as well as various other offensive activities. Apart from the full-fledged war, Pakistan has provided all the safety measures to the terrorists and provide them support to foster in their country. Through these terrorists, Pakistan have continuously launched terrorist attacks and indulged in different trans-border criminal activities on Indian soil. This type of proxy war (a war where the smaller units fought for the interest of a major power with help of that power. But there is no direct involvement of that major power (Ghantous, 2025). These smaller units can be terrorist organizations, insurgent groups, or other third-parties) launched by Pakistan is a most important cause of acrimonious relations between India-Pakistan that has been ongoing till today. As far as India’s national security is concerned, this proxy war by Pakistan becomes a major cause of insecurity for India. After the 09/11 terrorist attack, Pakistan-based Islamist terrorist groups launched attacks on Indian soil more than 45 times during the period 2002 to 2004 (SATP, n.d.). The North-East Indian region in particular has been attacked by the ISI, and DGFI-supported groups more than 30 times between 2001 to 2003 (SATP, n.d.). During the tenure of the NDA government, the relations between these two neighbours was going to worsen after the Pathankot attack launched by the Pakistan-based terrorist group Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) in 2016 (Martusciello, 2016). There are, in the same year, some other terrorist attacks occurred in India including Nagrota Attack and Uri Attack. All of these attacks were executed by JeM, a Pakistan-based terrorist group (Express News Service, 2019).

In 2019, JeM conducted one of the most heinous terrorist attacks in India’s history. 44 CRPF personnel were killed in this attack. According to the Centre for Policy Research (CPR), the Pulwama attack on the CRPF convoy in India was raises concerns that brings a threat to the national security and deteriorate the trajectory of India-Pakistan relationship (Karnad, Chellaney, Saran, & G, 2019). The consular relations have been hindered between them for such anti India activities executed by Pakistan (PTI, 2025). As per a commentary by Anvish Patel for RUSI (The Royal United Services Institute), India’s responses were vulnerable and limited to Pakistan after any terrorist attacks (Patel, 2009). The military alternatives have been taken as granted for very few

or limited number of times in response since 1947. The Indian government has wanted friendly relations that helps to establish peace in the region. But in recent times after India's strained response for long period, India is pursuing a "terror and talks can't go together" policy against this neighbor because Indian leadership believes that an environment free from terror, hostility, and violence is necessary to maintain good and friendly relations. Pakistan-based terrorist groups were continuously launching terrorist attacks in India (IANS, 2016). There wasn't any kind of decrease in these attacks even though the diplomatic talks between India and Pakistan.

Apart from terrorist attacks, the territorial dispute is also one of the major concerns to the national security of India. Pakistan has illegal and coercive possession of 78000 square kilometers of Indian area in Jammu and Kashmir. Recently in 2018, Pakistan passed the so-called "Gilgit Baltistan Order 2018" for the region that is illegally occupied by Pakistan. Pakistan has also gifted 5180 square kilometers of the illegally occupied area to China under the so-called Sino-Pakistan Boundary Agreement of 1963. There are also some other aspects of disputes between India and Pakistan in the Sir Creek region and International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) have impacted the Indo-Pak relationship. (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, n.d.).

Armaments, both nuclear and conventional, have presented a serious concern for India's national security. The nuclear policy and irresponsibility of Pakistan also threaten India over the year. The threat of a nuclear strike to India have been appeared for so many times from Pakistan. The Pakistani government, parliamentarians and military establishment are continuously threatening to use its nuclear weapons against India. The country doesn't have any kind of "No First Use" policy regarding nuclear weapons (Tasleem, 2016). Another major concern is that Pakistan has 45 active and more than 80 proscribed terrorist groups in their country (SATP, n.d.). Since Pakistan is providing the safe heaven to foster the terrorists, the possibility of nuclear weapons might go to the terrorists' hand have not been overruled. Pakistan's profile as a responsible country regarding nuclear weapons is not translucent. Pakistani scientist and self-designated "father" of Pakistan's Nuclear Program, Abdul Quadir Khan, is accused as a nuclear proliferator in the past. He has sold the nuclear enrichment technology, that is very crucial to produce nuclear bombs, to Iran, Libya, and North Korea (Cronin, Kronstadt, & Squassoni, 2005).

The struggle for power between the Army and its civilian Government is a very significant reason behind this instability in Pakistan. In this particular circumstance, a tremendous possibility of the emergence of a nuclear armed terrorist group cannot be ignored. The former US President Barack Obama in the past, have expressed his concerns about the possibility of nuclear-armed terrorist organizations. These groups don't have any kind of responsibility make the concern very severe. Their activities aim to generate such results as they and their masters wanted. Such terrorist groups pose a major threat not only to India but also for the whole world because they have no accountability at all like the countries do.

Pakistan's acquisition of weapons from China have also brought a threat to the national security of India. A joint collaborated CPEC project between China and Pakistan is going through the Indian territory illegally possessed by Pakistan is a direct threat to India's territorial sovereignty. This project challenged the territorial integrity of India. Pakistan has always threatened India with war. But the economic conditions of Pakistan are not conducive to war. The total forex reserve of SBP is stood at less than USD 10 billion and the amount that they have also been parked by China, Saudi Arabia, along with a few other countries (PTI, 2019).

The rivalry is one side of the relations between India and Pakistan. The cooperation on the other hand can also be observed in Indo-Pak bilateral relations. In this scenario, the India-Pakistan Joint Working Commission has identified eight areas (health, education, IT & Telecommunication, information, Science and Technology, Tourism, and agriculture) of cooperation in 2012 (PTI, 2012). However, the cooperative engagements between them not lasted for long term, the relations have been damaged by severe challenges originated from Pakistan.

The country with so many terrorists and an economy that is almost knocking the door to collapse, a possibility of the country that it may breaking up into various parts with the emerging regional aspirations of independence in their homeland and so many other traditional and nontraditional security concerns always endangered the prosperity and peace in Pakistan along with the region. Despite this condition, the country can use or using conflicts and uncertainties to distract the public sentiments by engaging their country into a war with India. So, a possibility of war provoked by Pakistan to divert the public opinion from its domestic issues or may be for favoring the Pakistan Army would always be there with Pakistan. The country would also be engaged into war with India to favor the interest of any third party (Karnad, Chellaney, Saran, & G, 2019). Here the third parties are may be those countries who looked the growing strength of India, aiming towards self-reliance would be capable enough to defend its national interest and would not be controlled by any global power, in a negative way. This type of India would not fit in their foreign policy agenda to defend their interests. They may try to contain India's strength at a certain level by controlling India's economic growth or may force the country to indulging into conflicts on various external and internal challenges with the help of the proxies like Pakistan. Where the national interests of Pakistan aligned with the interests of third countries (who wants to contain India) and they may cumulatively work for the containment of India's strength.

Conclusion

From the above discussion, it may say that the issues concerning to India's national security is very severe apprehension, not solely for India but also for the regional peace. A peaceful south Asian region is very important, since India aims toward a prosperous economy that can be achieved through a continuous economic progress from this particular point of economic strength. Over the year, India is taking some appropriate measures to deal with these issues and tried to restore peace in the region. But India can do what it able to do. All the things are not controlled by India in the region. A lot of interests of various

parties are involved in the region. India's engagement in any conflict hampered the continuity in its economic growth. So, the country must guarantee its safety and security first and side by side continuously working to secure regional peace as per its strength.

The prevailing condition of Security dilemma between China and India have been forcing them to focus on the military modernization and increase their military budget to defend their respective national interests in an uncertain world. There are various factors may be responsible for the appearance of security dilemma but the lack of trust has been playing a noteworthy role in generating such condition. Their respective motives are different to become powerful enough economically and militarily that helps them to achieve their corresponding objectives. In acquiring such capability, they have been continuously expending financial resources to increase their military might and this is somehow affecting the allocation of financial resources for human development. The resources used for military modernization would be allocated after compromising the uses of resources for human development. Because the military strength is very important for the existence of the country along with the human development. So, the countries must take a balanced approach to dealing the issue and uninterruptedly focused on their economic growth.

Whereas in the case of Pakistan, the terrorists with radical mindset are a huge threat to India's domestic and external security. The interconnected functioning of the state along with its terrorist groups, spy agencies, army, and civilian government is severe concern for India (Vohra & Santhanam, 2003). The recent pictures after "Operation Sindoor" have exposed the true face of working of Pakistan government with the links between terrorists, Pakistan army and its civilian government (Ojha, 2025). There are democratic values have been undermined in Pakistan for several decades and it generates a big question mark on the reality of power holding authority in the country. The probability to solve the problem by negotiation with its civilian government have big concern in this regard. The process generated through the integrated working of different stake holders in Pakistan complicated the scenario to deal the threats coming from this country. To deal with these challenges coming from Pakistan would be based on the realistic approach. Due to the complexity of threats and the engrossment of third-party interests, the self-reliance is significantly important milestone to be achieved by India as soon as possible. Parallely, India must interruptedly work to strengthen diplomatic ties with rest of the world that would be helpful for the country to fulfill the objectives. With these measures along with some other actions specific to the nature of threats, a substantive solution would be possible that is essential for relentless economic growth and human development in the country.

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