INDIA'S DEFENCE PREPAREDNESS IN THE FACE OF A TWO-FRONT WAR SCENARIO (CHINA & PAKISTAN)

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1.1 Abstract

India has always expected a two front war that may involve fighting along two fronts with both Pakistan and China. Though scholars have been speculating on this possibility for years, fresh aggression witnessed along the LAC with China and LoC with Pakistan further elevated the war sentiments. , war like situation in Ladakh, further escalation of terrorist activities in kashmir valley indicated that situation in the region has become more complicating and challenging for India. It presents the problem of force allocation to many theaters to the Indian Armed Forces and especially to IAF. Even during the mega exercise such as Gagan Shakti 2018 it is far from achieving the sanctioned fighter squadron strength by the government. Thus, the high-profile infiltration of China's technological dominance in Indian security systems, including key players Hikvision, marks a new form of a threat – cyber and surveillance. Pakistan's silence on the India-China tension is an element of strategic prudence but it brings out the best of times to escalate the tensions. The current stance of India involves building up forces and infrastructure for forces; augmenting air and missile capabilities; and striving for indigenous technologies that can circumvent various threats from China's information gathering assets. As such, in order to manage the situation in the face of a two-front threat, India may need to build up forces, upgrade air defense systems, and protect the country's technology from external influence. This paper aims to discuss the concept of the two-front threat, India's military readiness, weak points in surveillance systems, and the conspiracy of secrecy of Pakistan while stressing on the fact that India requires improving its strength of both conventional and technological warfare.

Keywords: Two-front war, India-China border tensions, India-Pakistan conflict, defence preparedness, strategic deterrence, military modernization, Indian Armed Forces, joint military operations.
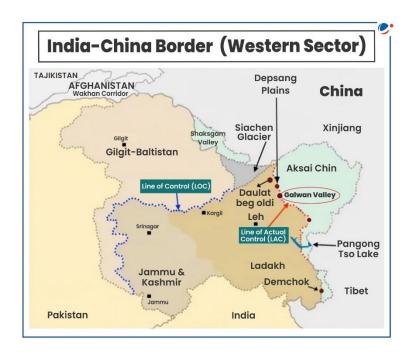
1.2 Introduction

The idea of India being threatened by two fronts, on one front China and on the other Pakistan is no longer something hypothetical but is gradually becoming a reality. Emerging trends are apparent given that lately there has been a deadly face-off between Indian and Chinese soldiers in the Galwan Valley and raising of the level of terrorist activities near the Pakistan border (Hall, 2020; CERT-In, 2022). Technically speaking, despite having fought a war against both the countries individually India has never fought a war with both Pakistan as well as China at the same time. The prospect of managing such a scenario is quite challenging for India's military and strategy overall.The Indian Armed Forces, particularly the Indian Air Force (IAF), are geared doctrinally and in terms of training but suffer from squadron deficit and slow modernization (USI, 2022). But it does not end at territorial concern, Chinese companies like Hikvision have established themselves deep into India's surveillance market raising more concerns of cybersecurity and privacy threats (The Print, 2020). Meanwhile, Pakistan's strategic silence during the India-China standoff suggests a calculated approach, possibly awaiting an opportune moment to escalate tensions without directly involving itself prematurely (Durrani, 2020).This paper explores the multifaceted nature of India's two-front threat: the traditional military challenges across mountainous and difficult terrains, the cyber and surveillance vulnerabilities emerging from Chinese technological penetration, and the diplomatic tightrope India must walk to avoid overextension. It underlines the need to strengthen indigenous capabilities in the defense field up, physical security of infrastructure and flexibility. Apeing the fact that the modern warfare incudes physical confrontation as well as dominance of technology, India will be required to transform and come up with more strategies in order to effectively counter coordinated threats emanating from two of its most bitter enemies.

1.3 Objectives of paper

1. Assess India's military response to simultaneous China-Pakistan border threats.
2. Analyze strategic vulnerabilities in India's two-front war preparedness.
3. Explore China's surveillance role in India's national security threats.
4. Examine Pakistan's silent tactics during Indo-China military tensions.
5. Propose defense, technology, and diplomatic solutions for India's security.

1.4 Evolving Threat Perception: From Hypothesis To Reality

The concept regarded as the two-front wars for long has been the subject of debate in the defense corridors of India that has become a possibility today due to the emergence of threats on both the western and northern fronts. The two red zones illustrated above are Galwan Valley in the few of Ladakh and in the few of Jammu & Kashmir called Line of Control (LoC).

1.5 Galwan Valley: The Northern Flashpoint

The Galwan Valley region in the eastern Ladakh area, across the LAC, is already a strategic security area after the killing of 20 Indian soldiers and several Chinese ones on June 15, 2020 (Hall, 2020). This was the worst conflict in South Asia in the past forty years, which focused on the state borders between India and China, two nuclear powers. Since then, both the countries have continued to station large number of forces, deployed a major portion of artillery and have also established sophisticated air defense systems in this area (CERT-In, 2022).

Kashmir: The Western Theatre

At the same time, the situation along the Line of Control (LoC) with Pakistan is still rather uneasy. About more than half a dozen ceasefire violations were reported in 2020 itself, and this new trend is significantly higher than those witnessed in the previous years (Gupta & Kumar, 2022). This situation is evident in acts of cross-border firing and attempts at infiltration

preceding increased militant activities in the southern areas of the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir where Indian forces were involved in a 15-hour-long gunfight with terrorists barely a week after the Galwan Valley incident.

The Reality of Two-Front Conflict

However, the two-front threat is real not by mere geographical propinquity but when it comes to strategic timing and coordination threats. The standing relations between China and Pakistan in military and technology are cordial and long-standing. Whereas there is evidence of their separate aggression, their activeness raises India's military and diplomatic capacities to different heights (Narang, 2021).

Implications and Strategic Shift

Amid these two crises, there is only a prerequisite for India to have a multi-domain defense—military preparedness, technological protection, and diplomatic strength. The Indian Armed Forces and specifically the India Air Force has a problem of distributing limited number of squadrons on two hostile frontiers (Jain, 2022). Additionally, the occupation of strategic subordinate organizations of the Indian digital structure by Chinese surveillance companies such as Hikvision gives a cybersecurity aspect to this conventional geographical rivalry (The Print, 2020).

1.6 India's Military Preparedness: Strengths And Gaps

A two-front war is still uncharted in the present and the future despite the fact that the Indian armed forces are known for their preparedness. The Indian Air Force (IAF), central to India's strategic defense, faces significant capability gaps. The IAF has an authorised squadron strength of 42.5 but has less than the authorised number of 35 squadrons, which has resulted in problem concerning operational preparedness and sustaining combat intensity during the long-duration operations (Pandit, 2022). However, these exercises, which are designed and conducted in a very detail, reveal the cornerstone of developing enough lead time, which is impossible in real combat situations.

In practicality, with possession of the C-17 Globemaster, Chinook helicopters and Apache attack helicopters among others; it has boosted its capacity to quickly transport troops and resources. However, India's journey to modernise missile and air defense system has remained

an unfinished process, which requires frequent improvement in tune with threats in the region especially from China missile complex (Joshi, 2021). Procurement of advanced weapons like Rafale fighter jets and Russian made S-400 missile system are commendable but the country still heavily relies on imports. Projects such as the indigenization of LCA Tejas are crucial but production rates continue to lag so as to adequately fill existing voids (Stimson Center, 2021).

1.7 China's Technological Infiltration and the Surveillance Dilemma

This Chinese incursion into the technological and surveillance systems of the neighbour nation represents a mammoth national security threat to India in all its dimensions. On the focal of this concern is Hikvision, a leading Chinese firm that currently supplies about 35% of all CCTV cameras in India (The Print, 2020). Hikvision has rightly carved out for itself as a major supplier of surveillance products to various important establishments of India, such as government offices, defence establishments, metro railways, transport centres, and even defence related complex.Analysing the competitiveness and extensive market penetration of the company, it is possible to explore that Hikvision has the competitive advantage in the Indian market due to the competitive prices of the products, advanced technologies, and the active advertising that corresponds with the Indian government's developmental schemes, including 'Make in India'. Although the firm has been partially assembling its products in Nigeria, Hikvision continues to have close ties with Chinese government interests. United States Department of Defence has directly identified Hikvision as one of the entities affiliated to the Chinese military and analogously controlled, raising deep-seated concerns over espionage, intelligence gathering, and cyber risks canker (U.S. Department of Defence, 2020).The implications of Hikvision surveillance system infiltrating India are strategic. Surveillance infrastructure by default practically deals with highly classified data, which can be anything regarding governmental and defence activities, traffic situation within large city, demonstrations, and important facilities. One must consider the situation in which these systems have hidden backdoor or flaws in their design that would allow China a method of espionage. It would enable surveillance in real time, disabling of key operations in infrastructure during calamities, or psy-warfare since the targets' confidence and morale can also be demoralised.

To make it worse, considerable recent threats originate not only in the hardware of the devices but also in the software and firmware solutions provided by the adversary foreign entities. Experts have often detected such backdoors and significant threats within surveillance

systems that led to concerns about stealthy spying. India's significant reliance on Hikvision's equipment in vital sectors, including sensitive installations such as the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation, the Special Protection Group (which safeguards the Prime Minister), and even facilities operated by Bharat Electronics Limited (a critical supplier to India's defense establishment), highlights the depth of the security risk.In response to this threat, India's strategy needs to shift from reactive measures such as isolated app bans to proactive, strategic-level responses aimed at ensuring digital sovereignty. Such a strategy should involve an initial security audit of all the surveillance installations in the country that are deemed critical. However, India has to address the issues of development and deployment of surveillance systems domestically by using local resources and talent available in the nation that is rapidly developing in terms of technology and cybersecurity. Despite this, shifting brings in its wake possible short-term organisational and, sometime financial, New Delhi gains a strong competitive advantage for optimal and strategic control over defence production that yields long-term national security dividend.

Nonetheless, policy level decisions should ban the purchasing of any surveillance technology from companies affiliated with hostile states. It is as legislative mandates which would be similar to what has been done for countries like the United States and Australia. It should directly compel transparency, security cheques on a regular basis, localization of data, and regular third-party security audits along with hefty fines for non-negligence or compliance. Last but not the least, the creation of a domestic technology ecosystem whose core business is surveillance and cybersecurity must be a foundational part of India's planning. Such favourable policies, easy grant of licences for domestic manufacture, availability of domestic venture capital finance for emerging performers, and healthy public-private partnership can collectively create indigenous technological champions collectively. The proposals identified the crucial need to develop indigenous capability as the only means to address the threat posed by technological superiority from other countries for enhancing national security and sovereignty of the country.

1.8 Pakistan's Strategic Calculations and Silent Maneuvers

A non-excitable reaction in the part of the Pakistan in recent confrontational episodes with China is not coincidental but a part of the deliberate strategic policy. Pakistan and China have had a long-standing relationship which is defined as an 'all-weather strategic cooperative

partnership' based on geopolitical and defence ties (Fair, 2021). Thus, Pakistan's deliberate restraint during heightened India-China tensions reflects a sophisticated geopolitical calculus, leveraging China's assertiveness to indirectly apply pressure on India without prematurely escalating hostilities.At the tactical level, Pakistan has continued measured provocations along the Line of Control (LoC), involving periodic ceasefire violations, increased militant infiltration attempts, and limited border skirmishes aimed at maintaining pressure on Indian security forces. Such calibrated actions hold several functions. First of all, they occupy India military capacities and strategic vision on several fronts, focusing on east and north where China is located. This kind of selective engagement can put pressure on the enemy and make them suffer damaging impacts without necessarily mean that Pakistan will have to fully escalate the war by declaring a full-blow war against them.

It is worth continuing this line of argument by showing that Pakistan's domestic politics also support this cautious but forces adventurist approach in the region. Political instability has been a protracted issue within the country and which makes the military and civilian authorities look for a common enemy outside the country, especially regarding Kashmir. This can be especially seen with respect to the case of Pakistan where despite having an 'asymmetric rivalry' with China, Islamabad has more or less maintained a low-profile and dancing diplomatic diplomats during high tensions between Beijing and New Delhi. Further, Pakistani reluctance to openly commit its militarily to back China in recent episodes demonstrates that for Islamabad, plausible denial has been a preferred strategy of choice as it allows the country to take advantage of the situation in India without facing the terrain of international reproach.

Additionally, the changes that took place when the Indian government abrogated the special status of Jammu and Kashmir in August 2019 escalated Pakistan's strategic incentives. This combined with increased security operations and banned local political activities in India offered Pakistan a good reason to claim they are the protector of the rights of the people of Kashmir. At the same time, it brought both risks and possibilities of developing Initiatives based on India's domestic and international tensions. Pakistan's diplomatic efforts to draw international attention to the alleged violation of human rights in Kashmir is essentially an attempt at furthering just the diplomatic isolation of India while coinciding nicely with its low level but constant military provocations on the LoC.With such layered tactics at those who must say something about the situation, India has its work cut out for itself. Broad schematically,

Indian reactions should be seen as follows: at the diplomatic level one can and should step up efforts focused on the formulation and dissemination of Pakistan's negative role on the international stage; secondly, on the level of border control, one has to tighten the measures aimed on preventing infiltration and terrorism activities; and finally, on the military level one has to be ready for a possible aggression and always respond to it. At the same time, disseminating themes that counter the Pakistani propaganda can also serve to give credence to India's counter-terrorism operations in the international arena.Also, the key underlying logic that underlies Pakistan's strategic behaviours means that there is a need for India to be on the diplomatic and militaryoffensive. It is equally important to identify and counter the covert actions Islamabad is likely to take in order to control the situation during the duel menace.

1.9 Strategic Roadmap: Securing Borders and Digital Sovereignty

By evaluating these two fronts revolutionary and upgraded armour then depends on a multilayered strategic Indian model that looks at military build, India's own technology, and diplomatic aggression to tackle the China-Pak axis conclusively. This visionary guide should incorporate both physical borders protection and online protection because the current warfare is not only conventional but also incorporates cyber-related attacks.Secondly, military defence cannot be overemphasised. As for the IAF, India must immediately initiate the modernization of its armed forces, as the force is lacking sufficient number of squadrons to meet its requirements. Air defence networks, own pedigree fighter aircrafts like the Tejas, and enhanced production rates contradict the need for importation of defence equipments. Moreover, regularly held intense and realistic exercises for war and also different preparedness, including rapid mobilisation and management of two-fronts, similar to those practised in Gagan Shakti must continue to be conducted from time to time to ensure operational and strategic preparedness of the Indian Armed Forces.

Secondly, the strategic roadmap has to position itself to indigenously develop technology to combat the continued encroachment from China in all vital spheres of life especially in surveillance and in matters related to security. There is an expectation that improvements be made to public funding on domestic R&D in the strategic technology fields, policies that encourage private actors to participate in the areas, and procedures for the procurement of technology products that favour Indian-developed products. It was found that government backing and collaborations between authorities and local vendors help cultivate

indigenous giants capable of providing stable and safe technologies necessary for the construction of defence systems.

Thirdly, the digital sovereignty entails proper policies that help in regulation of the national cybersecurity situation. India should hence develop better laws to protect critical information infrastructure by including periodic cybersecurity assessment, localization of data, the clear purchaser of technologies, and monitoring of foreign technologies. Such solutions would weaken risks that come from foreign technologies which can be espionage tools provided by unfriendly countries.The fourth solution can deal with the lack of diplomatic assertiveness yet strategic realism through enhancing relations and cooperation internationally as well as in the region. With relations with the emerging strategic actors – the Quad partners (Australia, Japan and the United States), as well as with the traditional European allies, there is a possibility to build a countervailing power to the China – Pakistan partnership. At the same time, India should seek political and diplomatic channels to address the borders issues so as to avoid any chance of conflict. The practised narratives must specify India's strategic interests, threats, and intentions in the region to the international constituencies. The counter-narratives for countering misinformation campaigns originating from adversarial states will strengthen India's strategic presence in the international sphere even more.The Politicians and the government in this regard need to sustain political will power, inter-agency coordination and policy consistency for the implementation of this broad strategic framework. Forcedly tackling these multifaceted threats with suitable and timely actions will greatly enhance India's power to safeguard its territorial integrity and sovereignty in such a heated world political environment.

1.10 Conclusion

The character of India's security progressively evolved and turned the previously discussed abstract concept of two-front war into the real strategic threat. Some of the emerging issues which have come to the fore very recently include the Galwan Valley faceoff with China and the upsurge in insurgency related activities in the valley. The chances of two front wars are not remote as Pakistan had proven in 1999 and China continues to assert in the recent past; thus, the scenarios that can unfold require a multifaceted, versatile approach from India in terms of the military and non-military diplomacy, technology, and economy. Indian Armed Forces, despite its elite demonstration in exercise Gagan Shakti, have shortcomings in terms of tonnage, squadron strength, and delayed modernization programmes. Therefore, there is the need for

rapid acquisition efforts, the development of indigenously based technologies, and improvements in defence structures. In the same manner, comparable to what has happened to India, China has penetrated its technological surveillance through firms like Hikvision and has posed various questions on espionage and sovereignty. That is why the need to improve domestic technological developments, as well as protecting critical technologies and infrastructure from foreign threats, remains both pressing and self-evident.

Pakistan's approach has been more cautious, though not passive: this type of strategy only adds to the existing set of Indian concerns. It tactfully escalates during the Sino-Indian tension thus optimally applying pressure on Indian diplomacy and military without overt confrontation.In the present context, the strategic vision of India would require the convergence of increased military capability, technological autonomy, diplomatic flexibility, and communicative strategy. Therefore, the most important defence strategies are investing in indigenous defence capacities, prioritising the domestic security technological domain, and taking the diplomatic lead to undermine the Chinese and Pakistani threats efficiently. This way approaches will not only help to localise present threats to security but will also strengthen the sustainable statehood of India and the stability of the region.

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