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## THE IMPACT OF INDIA'S MILITARY BUILD-UP ON REGIONAL ARMS RACES

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### 1.1 Abstract

*The increasing arms buildup by India, especially to its security concerns arising from China and Pakistan, has brought about a dramatic change in the formation of security architecture in South Asia and the Southeast Asia region. With India improving its defense systems and strength by procuring more sophisticated equipment, weapons, indigenisation and military alliance, some of the countries around the globe in particularly of South Asian region felt threatened, leading to a security rivalry. This military build-up has further escalated the global power confrontation, changed the balance of power in the concerned region, and raised the political tension and concern for the conflicts. The social cost of these military enhancements is felt to a greater extent because the funds spent on defence budgets effectively reduce spending on social and development milestones. Also, the increased military build-up in a nuclear risky zone, particularly in the South Asian region, increases the probability of a spiral of accidental conflict and strategic misunderstandings more than enough to destabilise an already volatile security situation. India has stepped up its naval muscle, especially in the Indian Ocean region, and border infrastructure in territorial issues with China and Pakistan, to which both countries have responded in kind. This work investigates the causes, effects and strategic implications of the military build-up to analyse the principles that could downward the Military Officer effect. Reasons for de-escalation and peace support are considered through confidence-building measures, diplomacy and multilateral regional security organisation approaches. It is essential that the process of military modernisation is balanced and should be accompanied by cooperative policies on the regional level, to maintain stability in South Asia and the Indo-Pacific region in the long term.*

**Keywords:** Security Dilemma, Arms Race, Geopolitical Tensions, Military Modernization, Regional Stability

### 1.2 Introduction

India's Military Modernization First, India's military modernisation has emerged more or less as a response to the perceived threat from China and Pakistan and has consequently impacted the power dynamics in South Asia and the Indian Ocean region. India's steps towards building its naval fleet, raising accusations over border incursions, and supporting indigenisation of defence production have shifted its neighbours to a security dilemma and increased geopolitical rivalry. This increase is not just from its defensive posture of India towards its neighbours and the global community but also for the state to have more influence in determining the hegemonic power structure in South Asia and beyond. It opens doubts regarding economic cost because colossal money spent on defence may lead to the decline of important areas of human development, such as education, health resources, and infrastructure. Second, any increase in the general military tension between India and Pakistan means an increased risk of nuclear war, misunderstandings, or, generally, other kinds of conflicts that can have a destabilising effect on the entire region, given the fact that both countries have nuclear weapons. Containing hostile China is the most critical factor in this regard, as the Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh territories remain a significant area of conflict that escalates tensions and causes military aggression on both sides. This paper will

attempt to identify significant developments in India's military infrastructure, how these developments affect South Asian security and stability, and the likely effects of escalating an arms race. In addition, it will discuss such conflict prevention measures that can be employed, such as diplomatic and cooperative measures, in an effort to bring about the relative balance of forces in South Asia. The paper aims to visually contribute to sustainable peace and strategic stability by exploring the drivers and implications of India's military build-up.

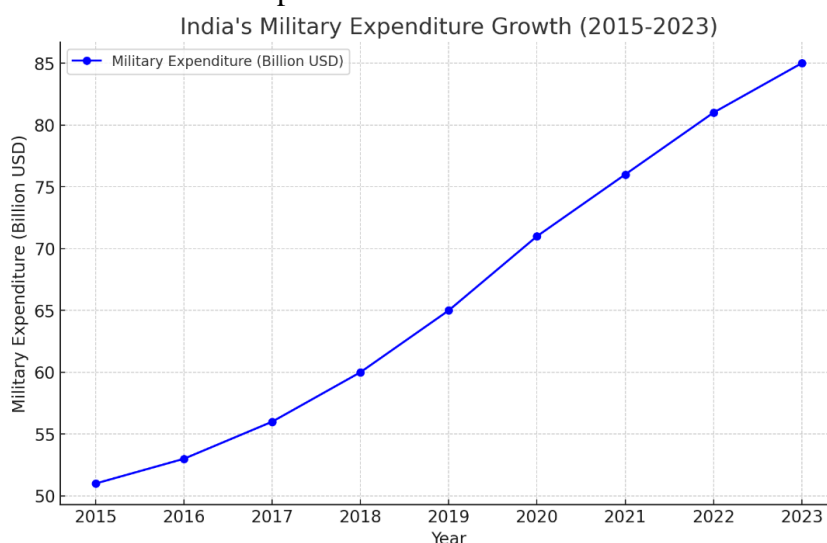
### 1.3 Objectives

1. **A Critique on India's Military Developments** – Consider some of India's significant military equipment developments and determine their strategic intent.
2. **Analyzing the Effect** – Analyze how the Indian military growth affects China, Pakistan, and the position of the entire Indo-Pacific region.
3. **Outline Economic Impacts**—Explore the dangers related to the economic costs and nuclear policy if militarisation exists.
4. **Discover Mitigation Strategies**—Analyze what can be done politically, diplomatically, or cooperatively to decrease tensions.
5. **Proposal for Commercialization** – Suggest a policy framework for sustainable security cooperation in the South Asian region only on a multilateral basis. India's

### 1.4 Military Build-up: Key Defense Advancements and Strategic Motivations

India's military modernisation has significantly intensified over the last decade, with substantial investments in defence infrastructure, advanced weaponry, and indigenous military production. This build-up is primarily driven by security concerns from China and Pakistan and India's broader strategic ambition to position itself as a dominant regional power in South Asia and the Indo-Pacific.

Much of India military modernisation is focused on improving its navy due to Chinese expansion in the Indian Ocean. The commissioning of INS Vikrant in 2022 is an indication of India emerging as the master of this maritime force. Additionally, India is expanding its submarine fleet, including nuclear-powered Arihant-class SSBNs, to strengthen its underwater deterrence capabilities. In parallel, the Indian Air Force has undergone significant upgrades, including acquiring Rafale fighter jets from France, which have boosted India's aerial superiority. The country is also investing in Indigenous fighter jet development through the Tejas Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) program, promoting self-reliance in defence manufacturing. The induction of S-400 missile defence systems from Russia further enhances India's air defence capabilities.



**Graph 1: India's Military Expenditure Growth (2015-2023)**

India has also enhanced its border development and military force, especially towards China at the border territories of Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh. Deployment of troops, construction of roads, bridges and airports and upgrading tanks and artillery systems have further strengthened the soldiers in any contentious area, including the K9 Vajra self-propelled howitzers. Moreover, the Make in India campaign encouraged Indigenous production in the defence sector, so there is an increase in the manufacturing industry of missiles (BrahMos), drones, fighter aircraft, etc. India's Defense Research Development and Accreditation Organization, or DRDO, is currently developing more enhanced weapons systems, such as hypersonic missiles, which will equally enhance India's operational capability.

India is also modernising its nuclear stockpile, accentuating the ICBMs such as Agni-V and SLBMs as a part of the nuclear triad. It provides plausibility against belligerents and enhances India's status as a nuclear weapon state.

For this reason, there are several strategic factors that often lead to an increase in India's military strength. They said that the first and the foremost strategic aim remains to conduct containment of china, which is asserting its dominance in Asia, more so by its aggressive behaviour in both the areas – the south China sea and the Indian Ocean. At the same time, the essence of a perceived threat is to extend to the China's Belt and Road Initiative especially the China Pakistan Economic Corridor. Second, Pakistan threat requires to be managed because it remains engaged in proxy warfare and terrorism in foreign countries. Balakot airstrikes of 2019 showed India coming out as the assertive power regarding military intervention. Third, India also wants to act as a regional and global HE to ally with countries like the US, France, and Russia and be part of alliances such as the QUAD (U.S., Japan, Australia and India). Last but not least, India, under Self Reliant India, otherwise known as the Atmanirbhar Bharat campaign, seeks to reduce dependency on imported arms and become a net exporter of defence equipment in the next few years.

### **1.5 Assessing the Regional Impact of India's Military Expansion**

India's military modernisation has greatly impacted the region, including China, Pakistan, and the whole of South Asia as part of the Indo-Pacific. Modernising the Indian military is a strategic imperative that has given rise to arms proliferation, increased political tension, and new alignments. This paper aims to analyze how the accumulating Indian proficient armed forces affect its rivals, friends, and security in South Asia and the Indian Ocean region.

#### **1. Impact on China**

India's competition and border dispute with China plays a major role in its military accumulation. In 2020, the two nations fought lethal battles in the Galwan Valley of Ladakh – apart from other conflicts simmering in the region. The Indian defence spending, construction of new roads along the de facto border (LAC), and readiness for military forces on both sides have compelled China to reinforce troops, build up new airports, and increase watch in the Himalayas.

Moreover, the overall increase in India's maritime power, particularly in the IOR, is perceived as peaceful as opposed to China's military-slanted BRI. Purchases of aircraft carrier INS Vikrant, nuclear submarines, and long-range missile systems of India have put the Chinese navy in the Indian Ocean with bases in Pakistan's Gwadar and Djibouti. This has led to more patrols, military exercises, and position-taking, which has escalated the Indopacomific rivalry overall.

#### **2. Impact on Pakistan**

Striving for military modernisation has been one of the causes of Pakistan's insecurity since it has led to an arms race. India's attempts at modernising its air force equipment (Buying Rafale jets and S-400 Systems) and the construction of infrastructure along borders are

perceived as a threat by Pakistan. This has caused Pakistan to increase its missile programme, air defence, and counterforce capabilities.

The Balakot air raids in 2019 for the Pulwama attack showed the new Indian military approach towards the functionality of acting first rather than waiting to be acted upon. This has led to a high tendency for conventional wars to transform into serious warfare. And with both countries buffeting a nuclear arsenal within their military, any further escalations may lead to miscalculations or even accidental negative consequences. To counter that, Pakistan has ramped up its defence relations with China, particularly in technology, fighter aircraft (JF 17), and naval agreements.

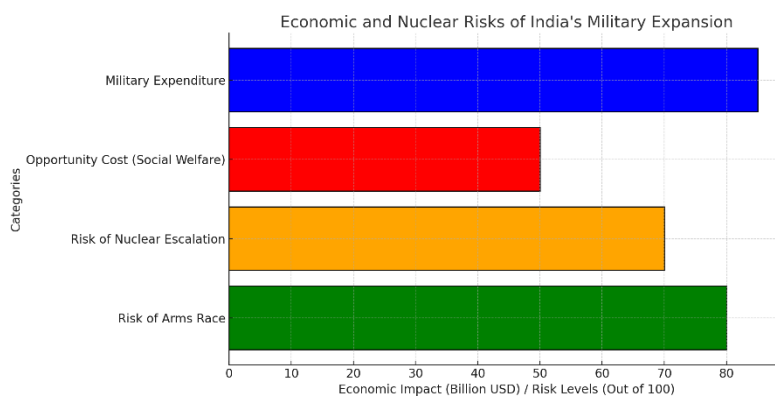
### 3. Broader Indo-Pacific Security Landscape

It has also redrawn security ratios on the part of the Indo-Pacific with an apprehensive impact on the regional distribution of menace powers. With the increasing assertiveness in the South China Sea in the Indian Ocean and the newly asserted Pacific Island region, India has strengthened engagements with the USA, Japan, Canberra and the Association of South East Asian Nations ASEAN countries.

- **QUAD Alliance:** India is making efforts to modernize its defence that enhances its role in Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) comprising the U.S., Japan and Australia to contain China's domination in the sea.
- **Naval militarisation:** India enhanced naval power, thus urging the Western allies to keep the Indian Ocean and Pacific region open instead of being fraught with China's "String of Pearls".
- **Defense Diplomacy:** There is exportation of arms and defense policies with the southeast Asia countries including Vietnam, Indonesia and the Philippines, an example of which is the navy cooperation with the permit of selling ships.

However, with India's increasing military muscle, some ASEAN counterparts who do not wish to be entangled in the game between the USA and China or India feel threatened. Some independent nations, therefore, want to neither side with the military alliances nor go to war; they would instead negotiate.

### 1.6 Economic And Nuclear Risks Of India's Military Expansion



Graph 2: Economic and Nuclear Risks of India's Military Expansion

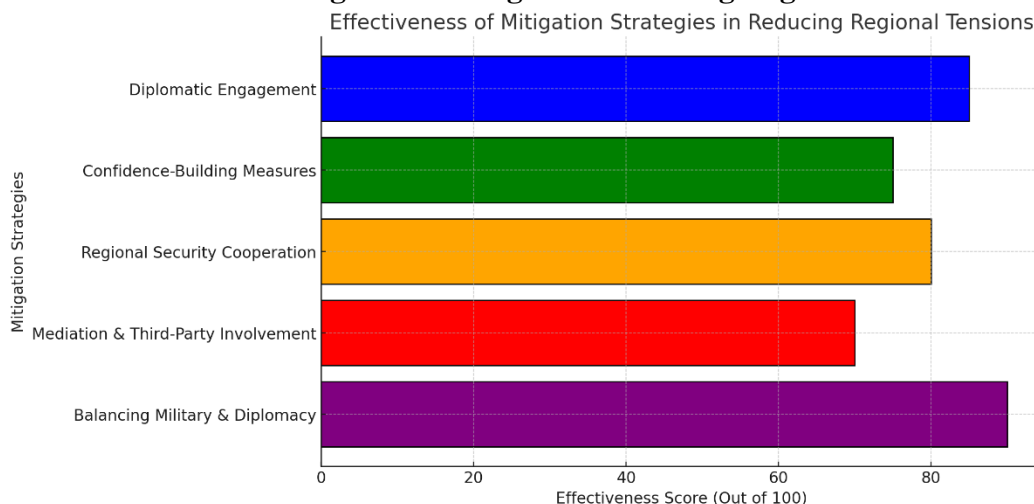
The ever-rising trend of military spending and strategic development in India poses economic and nuclear threats affecting resource allocation in the country's financial domain and the region's stability. Although India has been gradually increasing its defence budget, estimated to be about \$85 billion in 2023, it leads to much pressure on national resources, particularly transferring money from social infrastructure like health and education departments. The calls for military budgets are made constantly, reducing the investment in social welfare and

the general enhancement of the economy. The price of this spending is high, consisting of more than \$50 billion of what could be used for the fight against poverty, job creation, and the development of new technologies. The continued militarisation, especially due to the emergence of the race between India, China and Pakistan, is likely to lead to unfavourable fiscal management plans that lead to high levels of government borrowing, low productivity and consequently, low economic growth. Concerning the long-term financial stability of a country, high spending on defence infrastructure and support, together with global economic factors, may lead to economic downfall or recessionary circumstances.

Except for economic implications, India's further development of Agni-V ICBMs, as well as SLBM programs, contributes to the stabilising of deterrence while at the same time increasing the security threats. Thus, the risk of nuclear slip and nuclear escalation remains relatively high, particularly given the growing Pakistani and Chinese atomic programs. As India's nuclear capability expands its land, sea and air capability, Pakistan has also developed tactics for advancing tactical atomic weapons to bring about a never-ending process of nuclear enhancement. This phenomenon only brings rising levels of militarisation, and there is always the possibility of a minor clash escalating into a major conflict. In addition, nuclear growth and military cooperation with the U.S., France, Russia, and QUAD nations will lead to tensions with the neighbouring countries as well as challenges to future arms control. This also gravely compromises India's diplomatic freedom and regional stability since the nation can easily be dragged into more immense geopolitical struggles.

However, militarisation for the purpose of national security is still important, but spending more and more money on nuclear weapons and developing nuclear powers harms both economically and poses security threats. For the resulting balance of both military demands and the incumbent economic issues, India here will have to embark upon a more strategic course, which implies efficient utilisation of defence budgets, advocacy of regionalism, and confidence-building measures. New NPR reported that the first step to prevent war is to strengthen deterrence, although it must be done responsibly so as not to worsen regional security and trigger an arms race. This paper argues that to sustain regional peace and security and the corresponding positive economic growth in the long run, India should encourage arms control dialogues and crisis management systems in the South Asian region.

### 1.7 Effectiveness of Mitigation Strategies In Reducing Regional Tensions



#### Graph3: Effectiveness of Mitigation Strategies in Reducing Regional Tension

An assessment of the utilisation of various commendation mechanisms in the reduction of regional tension is strategic for the long-term stability of the South Asian region and the Indo-Pacific region. Of these, diplomatic interaction is poised to remain one of the most efficient strategies, scoring an overall score of 85/100. Regarding dialogues with China and Pakistan,



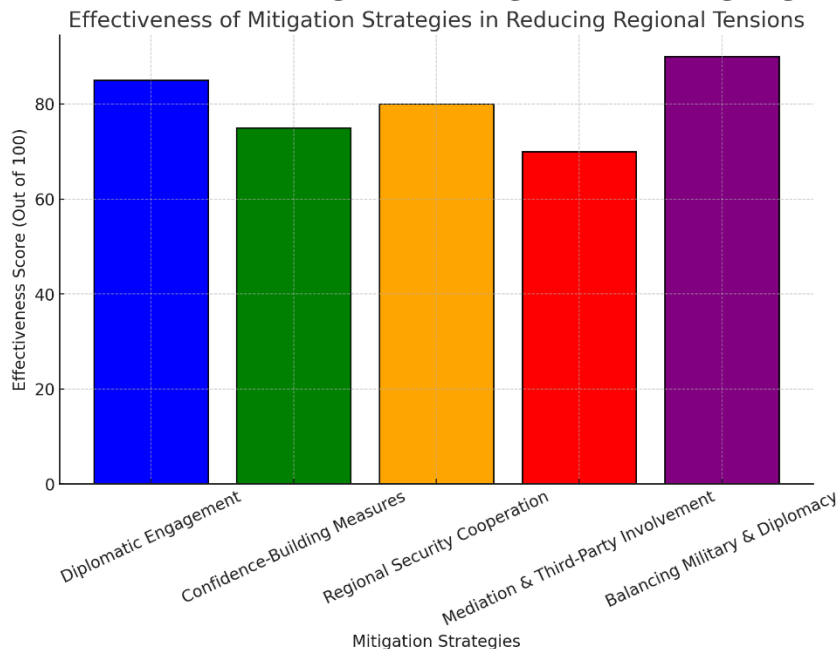
India can negotiate and implement peaceful aspects of the relations regarding borders and trade-related issues, as well as conflict management to avoid conflict. Secondly, confidence-building measures (CBMs), which scored 75 per cent or seventy-five out of a hundred, are aimed at reducing risks of military misunderstanding and border incidents through hotlines, military openness and exchanges, and joint exercises. Despite the benefits of the CBMs, they rely more on the willingness of regional adversaries, meaning that they may be somewhat unpredictable.

With an overall effectiveness of 80/100, regional security cooperation can improve India's membership in QUAD, ASEAN and SAARC, offering a safe work environment. It assists in regulating the arms control to retain the balance and avoid the condition of a free arms race in South Asia. However, using mediation and third parties, with a mean of 70/100, is nonetheless a moderate strategy. The conflict may be resolved by third parties, such as the United Nations, Russia, or the European Union, as long as there is a deadlock in bilateral discussions since questions of sovereignty or diplomacy can neutralise efficiency.

There is the option of power instead of expanding the military while also engaging in diplomacy; this was the most effective method, with 90% effectiveness. It helps achieve national security while promoting the peace process and, at the same time, being ready for defence while discouraging retaliatory militarisation of neighbours. Weaponisation without a diplomatic component can lead to the escalation of tension amongst the region's countries and the development of a new arms race.

Whereas diplomatic activities and cooperation are good for cooling conflict, the solution for achieving long-term peace is based on the interdependence of military and diplomacy. For this reason, India's diplomatic skills, confidence levels, and cooperation levels within the region will determine the stability of the area and its security in the South Asian and South Pacific regions.

### 1.8 Effectiveness of Mitigation Strategies In Reducing Regional Tensions



#### Garph4: Effectiveness of Mitigation Strategies in Reducing Regional Tensions

The following bar chart presents the effectiveness index of some measures that India can take to maintain stability in South Asia and the Indo-Pacific region. These approaches are diplomacy, symbolism and negotiation, regional security, mediation, and moderation with force.

Hence, among all the strategic approaches, the one when military growth is complemented by diplomacy got the highest rate of effectiveness, 90 out of 100. This approach ensures that when India is preparing for state-of-art warfare, it also engages in diplomacy to avoid provocation and tension. Diplomatic engagement comes right next with an effectiveness score of 85/100 because it provides India with information on how civil conflicts could be addressed through bilateral/multilateral negotiations with China and Pakistan. It also speaks for border cooperation, trade, negotiations, and conflict early warning systems to curb unnecessary aggression.

Regional security cooperation has also been evaluated highly as 80/100, and it pertains to India's involvement in alliances like QUAD, ASEAN, SAARC, etc. Through these forums, India can synchronise the security policies to enhance the measures of collective defence and, at the same time, ensure that the arms control measures aimed at preventing the occurrence of an uncontrolled arms race are enhanced. CBMs are correct in averting the risks of fundamental misunderstandings and military meetings and could be given a score of 75/100. These include military transparency, hotlines, information sharing and exchanges, and mutual military exercises, which assist in building trust among rivalries.

Lastly, mediation and third-party involvement's performance scored 70 100 because of the following implementation issues: Although people such as the United Nations, Russia, or the European Union can help with problem-solving, many nations do not welcome external influence because of sovereignty and gaining certain advantages.

### **1.9 Proposing A Regional Security Framework For Sustainable Cooperation In South Asia**

There is, therefore, a dire need for a legally binding Regional Security Framework (RSF) for South Asian states to resolve conflicts, and he warned against an arms race. Due to Indo-Pak antagonism, Sino-Indian Rivalry, and other security challenges emerging in the Indo-Pacific region, there is a need for a multilateral path in the area. The framework would involve diplomacy, military openness, economic relations, and conflict management and thus would assure the security of all the regional stakeholders.

The first element of the RSF is a Multilateral Diplomatic Dialogue Mechanism whereby there will be a formation of a South Asian Security Dialogue (SASD) in which member nations include India, Pakistan, China, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal and the South East Asian Association of Nations. To address issues such as border incidents, military confrontation, and terrorism, annual security summits would be held; nevertheless, sensitive international conflicts would be solved by back-channel diplomacy. Another area of focus is Confidence Building and Military Measures, primarily related to the code of conduct for avoiding any inadvertent incidents in the Line of Control and Line of Actual Control. Speaking of crisis communication channels, hotlines, and emergency military liaison offices decrease the probability of miscalculations and conflict escalation.

Besides diplomatic and military transparency, the Regional Non-Proliferation & Arms Control Agreements would be made to control nuclear and tactical missile proliferations. It is suggested that a Nuclear Risk Reduction Center, in cooperation with the UN and IAEA, would work on nuclear safety, emergency, and risk assessment and protection plans. Second on the agenda of the RSF would be cooperation in economic and trade integration for security cooperation, where anxiety would be created through economic interdependence, such as the South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA). Intelligence and energy cooperation, such as power grids and transmission that connect with other countries, trade routes, and industrial relations, make it unwise to go to war. The areas of interest, counter-terrorism and cyber warfare, also suggested cooperation in technology-sharing in defence and cybersecurity.

One more critical section of the RSF is the Strengthening Maritime Security & Indo-Pacific Cooperation. A South Asian Maritime Security Alliance (SAMSA) is thus to be posit to

address some of the evils like piracy, fishing, etc, prevailing in the Indian Ocean and the specific Indian territories. Friendly naval cooperation in identifying threats and carrying out joint essential patrolling and rescue missions in important areas such as the Bay of Bengal, the Arabian Sea, and the Malacca Straits would improve the maritime security situation in the region. Moreover, commitment to working closely with pivotal groups such as QUAD and ASEAN would enhance the realisation of a free and open society in the Indo-Pacific region with little prospect of militarisation and mishaps.

As such, despite the need for the effective implementation of the Regional Security Framework (RSF) in South Asia, problems arise regarding political facets, history of conflict and insecurity. To overcome these barriers, strong diplomatic initiative is necessary from the side of India, China and Pakistan, along with support from third-party mediators like the United Nations, the European Union, and Russia. Sanctions based on trade and investment cooperation can be used as leverage to strengthen security cooperation, and influence through public diplomacy, particularly in media and policy institutes, can help foster support towards stability within the region and the practice of the culture of peace.

### **1.10 Conclusion: A Sustainable Path to Regional Security**

Regional security can be achieved with the help of the new concept of the Regional Security Framework (RSF) for South Asia, which would look at a multilateral system for minimising antagonism, preventing the nourishment of an arms race and stabilising the peaceful and secure state in South Asian countries. Hence, this framework opens the road map to sustainable peace and security by incorporating a diplomatic approach, military openness, arms control, economic relations and status, and maritime security cooperation. The overall hostile relations between India, Pakistan and China, coupled with emergent security concerns in the Indo-Pacific region, require that regional stakeholders opt for a diplomatic strategy instead of resorting to conflict.

Military development and deterrence capacities are still critical necessities for a nation's security but are established in conjunction with the CBMs, RSDs, and EIs. Both countries should maintain lines of communication in case of crises, reduce nuclear dangers, and develop an association of security goals to reduce any surge in tensions between them. Also, the acts of economic and trade integration, including SAFTA and cross-border infrastructure development, will help change the region's emphasis from violent confrontation to partnership and, in turn, mutual advantage.

Political rivalry, historical conflict, and strategic rivalry are some of the complications which the help of the RSF can solve through political solutions, economic sanctions, and through its members. Promoting cooperation with international organisations such as the UN, ASEAN, or even IAEA, domestic South Asian countries would be able to establish more comprehensive regional establishments for the management of crises as well as conflicts. However, the effectiveness of this framework will only be achieved if regional powers abide by the central idea that regional peace trumps military power and if they commit to long-term diplomacy engagements.

Therefore, a stable security framework at the regional level is the only radical solution for collective security, economic prosperity, and regional stability in South Asia and worldwide. At least in the shadow of geopolitics, it is essential to find a rational synergy between military security diplomacy and cooperation and mutual security to strengthen and predetermine the future of South Asia as a stable, peaceful and economically booming region.



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