

# India's National Security: Challenges and Response

Suresh Rangarajan

**Abstract:** The primary obligation of any nation-state is to ensure security for the nation's territory and its nationals. Traditionally, possessing defence forces commensurate with its size, resources, and borders decides the nature of national security policy and consequent arrangements to ensure national security. As human society progressed from food gathering to settled food grains cultivation and systematic food production, there have been changes in life and livelihood and consequent changes in their threat perception. Concurrently, there are different approaches to ensure security. The evolution of all institutional mechanisms, including the origin of the nation-state and international organisations, can be traced to the sense of insecurity and different strategies to ensure security at each stage of human progress. The evolutionary theories of State pointed towards the evolution of family to clan small city-states and finally nation-states. In each stage, insecurity prompted humankind to establish a higher institutional mechanism to ensure security. Moreover, various challenges are faced at each stage of a nation's evolution to ensure security for its territory and nationals. Nation-states are driven to frame their response regarding security policy to address the abovementioned issues. This article attempts to examine India's national security challenges and response.

**Keywords:** Dharma, International peace, Nonviolence, Security policy, Geopolitical strategy

## Evolution of India's National Security

India, a dominant power in the South Asian subcontinent, has a rich historical approach to national security. The ancient Indian text, *Arthashastra*, reveals that the dharma-based monarchical form of rule incorporated the basic principles of good governance. (Rangarajan, 1992) This historical perspective provides a deep understanding of India's

(Rangarajan, 1992) approach to national security, enlightening us about its unique principles and strategies.

India's historical approach to national security was deeply rooted in the principles of peace and nonviolence. The regime in ancient India was a people-oriented welfare administration, with human security and national security as the primary concerns. The renunciation of war as an instrument of state policy and the acceptance of peace and nonviolence, as demonstrated by the Mauryan Emperor Asoka the Great after the Kalinga War, continues to inspire and offer hope for peaceful security strategies.

Moreover, they never endeavoured to spread Buddhism coercively (Bapat P V, 2009). The voluntary acceptance of Buddhism by neighbouring nations expanded India's sphere of influence to the South and Southeast Asian region. Thus, India's use of soft power and practice of peace and nonviolence contributed to ensuring its national security and peace in South and Southeast Asia.

In the medieval and modern period till 1947, India was under foreign rule for a long time, including the colonial rule of Britain for 200 years. The national security policy during this period had less native influence in its formulation and implementation. The aspirations of the native people were not reflected in domestic and external policies. The colonial powers were interested in economic exploitation and framed the national security policy to pursue national concerns and interests. As a result of this, India was dragged into World War I and II without the consent of the native people. However, the transformative impact of India's freedom movement, led by Mahatma Gandhi, united the people again and influenced the country's national security policy. India achieved independence in 1947 from British colonial rule through peace and nonviolence. The native people once again gained the freedom to frame the national security policy to pursue their aspirations and concerns.

Independent India adopted a parliamentary form of government, and the role of citizens in framing the domestic and external policies has been ensured through the periodic, accessible, and fair election of representatives. However, the partition of India dismayed not only the age-old peace and security in the region but also created a perpetual unresolved border issue. Add fuel to it was the elimination of a buffer state, Tibet, from the Himalayan region through its annexation by the People's Republic of China (PRC). Unrest along the India-Pakistan border and India-China border prompted India to focus more on protecting its land borders along the North, North East, and North West. Thus, India's national security concerns were mainly engrossed in the threat from its immediate neighbours, China and Pakistan (Suresh Rangarajan, 2020). The threat from China originated as a result of the annexation of Tibet, a buffer state during the colonial period. Tibet, as a neutral state, has

maintained peace and tranquillity in the Himalayan region for a long time. However, the annexation of Tibet by China in 1950 jeopardised the security scenario in the Himalayas.

### **Tibet as a Buffer Zone**

The annexation of Tibet by the PRC in 1950 posed a significant challenge to India's national security. The hitherto peaceful border along the Himalayas had become a contested border when the buffer zone was eliminated, and two equally powerful nations emerged and shared a common contested border. The cogency of the Mc Mahon line, the border between British India and Tibet, demarcated in the Shimla conference of 1914 by British India, Tibet and China, was questioned by the newly established PRC in 1949. The annexation of Tibet by the PRC had prompted it to question the validity of the British negotiated Mc Mahon line. Tibet, as a neutral and buffer state, had played a crucial role in preserving peace and tranquillity in the Himalayan region for a long time (Viswambharan, 2021)

In pursuance of the Buddhist tradition of peace and nonviolence, the then Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, signed the Panchasheel agreement with the PRC in 1954. Through this action, India surrendered its British-inherited claims on Tibet and endangered Tibet's independence. The former foreign secretary of India, Krishnan Srinivasan, had rightly pointed out that Nehru saw China as a partner to create a new post-colonial world. His aspirations for a global role linked to a significant power neglected India's national and security priorities at great cost (Krishnan, 2020). The appeasement policy followed by the Indian leadership without proper consideration of the wise counsel of senior cabinet ministers had adversely affected peace and tranquillity in the Himalayas. Further, eliminating a buffer zone from the Himalayas has also endangered India's national security as India had no border with China except through Tibet. (Arpi, 2020)

### **Tibet in the Security and Strategic Concerns of India and China**

The significance of Tibet in the security and strategic concerns of India and China was recognised long ago. In the great game played by empires during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the buffer zone played an essential role in maintaining peace, as explained in the balance of power theory. The balance of power approach upholds that the buffer zone is the most important method of maintaining power equilibrium and peace. Eliminating the buffer zone in the Himalayas with the annexation of Tibet by the PRC altered the geostrategic situation in the region ( Suresh R, 2015).

Further, Tibet is known as the water tower of Asia. Ten major Asian rivers, including Indus, Sutlej, Brahmaputra, Irrawaddy, Salween, Yellow,

Yangtze, and Mekong, originate in Tibet, and they flow through countries like China, India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Pakistan, Vietnam, Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos. About two billion people living in South and Southeast Asia depend on this water source from Tibet. China's occupation of Tibet enabled it to control the water flow, and as an upper riparian state, it can obstruct or divert water in case of a conflict. For instance, after the Doklam crisis in 2017, China did not share the hydrological data of the Brahmaputra and Sutlej rivers for one year with India. The upper riparian data is required for the lower riparian nations for water management, flood modelling, and other related activities.

### **India and China: Clashes of Civilisation**

India has a tradition based on *vausdaivakudunbakam*, or the perspective of considering the entire humanity as one family. It also follows the Buddhist tradition of peace at the individual and societal levels, which has been reflected in the freedom struggle. Through a nonviolent struggle, India achieved its independence from British colonial rule. Further, the father of the nation, Mahatma Gandhi, also urged the principle of peace and nonviolence. Thus, the Indian tradition has been based on nonviolence and world peace.

On the contrary, the PRC was established through a violent struggle in mainland China under Mao Tse Tung's leadership. Moreover, Chinese tradition is mainly based on the ancient text *The Art of War*, which Sun Tau authored. It incorporates discourse on war strategy and expansionism as the instrument of state policy. The PRC still follows this ancient text and follows the policy of expansionism. Again, the policy of expansionism has been provided with a new shape by the communist party of China during the long march undertaken by Mao Tse Tung. The PRC came into existence after a bloody war fought along with mainland China.

The clashes of civilisation are well reflected in the political system they follow. Independent India, following its democratic tradition, adopted a parliamentary democratic system of government. The constitution-based institutional mechanism facilitated the success of the democratic system of government through a systematic, accessible, and fair election process. However, following its authoritarian tradition, the PRC has followed one-party rule and democratic centralism. The communist party of China takes every decision in the PRC. Furthermore, the communist government in the PRC follows expansionism as an instrument of foreign and security policy.

### **India and Pakistan: The Unavoidable Neighbours**

No two nations in the world share a common identity and culture than the people of India and Pakistan. However, at the government level, both have been fighting each other since the birth of the two nations in 1947.

They fought three major wars and intermittently fought many border clashes with or without the direct involvement of their regular armed forces. Moreover, Pakistan's practice of terrorism as an instrument of state policy poses the gravest threat to India's national security. Though the system of government in Pakistan is democratic, the military and religious fundamentalists control the civilian government. The governmental agencies are not fully functional in performing their mandated responsibilities per the constitution. The defence forces and the religious fundamentalists believe that the hostilities with India are the rationale for the existence of Pakistan. Moreover, they consider that once the civilian administration in Pakistan develops a cordial relationship with India, both defence forces and religious fundamentalists will lose their grip over the administration and the rationale for its existence. ( Suresh R, 2015)

### **Threat from PRC and Pakistan Government Nexus**

A nation that practices expansionism as an instrument of its foreign and security policy poses the gravest threat to its immediate neighbours and the world. Similarly, a nation reluctant to accept internationally recognised general principles and practices also endangers a rule-based international order accepted by all civilised democratic nations. Again, as long as nations are unwilling to share a domestic situation, especially health hazards that have global ramifications, it would be difficult to subdue a pandemic like COVID-19 effectively. The loss of human life and damage to human livelihood unleashed by the pandemic could have been averted had China effectively contained the spread of COVID-19 at the place of its origin with international cooperation.

India's national security concerns increase, especially in an unsettled border with expansionist China. China once again proved this recently with its border incursion along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in the Galwan Valley, when the international community and India awkwardly confronted the pandemic. This shows that China places less importance on the generally accepted principles and practices of civilised democratic nations and follows a policy of expansionism.

### **INDIA'S NATIONAL SECURITY CHALLENGES**

Threat From China -Direct and Indirect
Threat From Pakistan – Direct and Indirect
China And Pakistan (NEXUS) -Direct & Indirect Threat
Human Security Issues

## Nontraditional Threat to Security

In addition to the traditional threats, India faces some nontraditional security issues. Among the nontraditional security issues, terrorism remains a significant threat to India, with various extremist groups operating within and across its borders. These groups often have transnational connections and threaten internal security and regional stability. India has zero tolerance for terrorism. In all international forums, India strongly opposes terrorism and states that it follows terrorism as an instrument of foreign and security policy.

As technology advances, cyber threats have become a significant concern for India. Cyber-attacks targeting critical infrastructure, government institutions, and financial systems can disrupt essential services, compromise sensitive information, and undermine national security. Further, the prospect of cyber warfare presents a severe challenge. State and non-state actors may use cyber warfare tactics such as espionage, sabotage, and disinformation campaigns to destabilise infrastructure and institutions. India faces challenges related to illegal border infiltration, smuggling of drugs, arms, and humans, as well as organised crime syndicates operating across its borders. These activities threaten national security and contribute to social and economic instability.

Another nontraditional threat is radical ideologies and extremist movements, both religious and ideological, as they pose a significant security concern. Preventing radicalisation and countering extremist movements are crucial for maintaining social cohesion and stability. Energy, water, and food security are nontraditional security issues closely connected with national security.

## India's National Security: Response

The Ministry of External Affairs, in its Annual Report of 2022-2023, clearly stated that *“pragmatic and outcome-oriented engagements to promote India's interests and facilitate domestic economic transformation. This was done proactively by strengthening bilateral, regional and multilateral partnerships and setting diplomatic agendas in key global forums. Our foreign policy continues to be directed towards diversifying the country's strategic and economic options to ensure that India continues its upward trajectory as a fast-growing economy with a rising profile in global affairs.”* (Ministry of External Affairs, GOI, 2023)

In tune with the above strategy, India has initiated the ambitious *Atmanibhar Bharath* or a self-reliant India, 'Make in India' programme and will become a developed nation by 2047. A strong military is a sine qua non in a global order where every nation depends on its military power to protect and promote the national interest. India has been moving in that direction for the last ten years because of external and internal changes,

especially since the NDA government has reprioritised its security policy and strategies. India has gained the status of a significant player in international politics. Through diplomatic manoeuvring, strengthening its defence capabilities and becoming the world's fifth-largest economy, India strengthened its International standing in the economic and military sphere.

India maintains a sizable military force, including an army, navy, and air force, equipped with modern technology and capabilities to defend its borders and other national interests. It invests in defence research and development to enhance Indigenous defence production. Similarly, India engages in diplomacy to foster alliances and partnerships with other regional and global nations. Bilateral and multilateral agreements help address common security challenges and promote regional stability. The successful leadership of G-20 under its chairmanship, setting the agenda for international cooperation on security and economic development, and addressing global environmental issues demonstrate India's deft diplomacy.

In the nontraditional arena, India faces threats from terrorism, mainly operating from its immediate neighbourhood. India works to strengthen counter-terrorism measures, intelligence sharing, and coordination with other affected countries to combat terrorism effectively. Terrorism can be addressed only through multilateralism. India, in all international forums, including the UN, highlighted the grave threat to humanity and effectively addressed the issue by monitoring the international terrorism sponsors, including nation-states that follow terrorism as an instrument of foreign and security policy. India's consistent stand against terrorism, to a large extent, helped to curb international terrorism, especially by isolating the nation-states that sponsor terrorism.

India also adopted a well-conceived policy to ensure land and maritime border security—the land borders along the Himalayas, especially with Pakistan and China. India prioritises securing the borders through physical barriers, surveillance technology, and border patrolling to prevent infiltration and transnational threats. The 7516 km long coastline is protected by a three-layer security in the maritime domain – the coastal police in the territorial limits of 12 nautical miles, the Indian Coast Guard in the Exclusive Economic Zone up to 200 Nautical miles, and the Indian Navy in the high seas ensure maritime security. The vigilant coastal community acts as the eyes and ears of the marine security matrix. (Suresh R, 2014)

Another major concern in the sphere of security is cybersecurity. India initiated a calibrated attempt to ensure cyber security. India strengthens its cyber defences to safeguard critical infrastructure, government systems, and private enterprises from cyber threats and attacks.

## India's National Security: A Future Perception

The national security perception has undergone a significant transformation with the spread of the global pandemic COVID-19 towards the end of 2019. The virus that originated at Wuhan in the PRC spread to all continents in a brief period. The loss of life and livelihood and the fear it created in human society have no anecdotes in the history of humankind. The virus spread and its havoc at the individual, national, and international levels are beyond any security-related studies' comprehension. The origin and spread of the pandemic underscore the necessity for increased transparency in international relations. Thus, in the post-COVID-19 global order, there would be greater demand for democratic governance.

The emergence of a democratic nation-state alliance at the international level would be a deterrent against the uncompromising attitudes of totalitarian nations and the persistence of expansionism as an instrument of foreign policy. The magnitude of the COVID-19 pandemic not only calls for greater transparency in interactions among nations but also emphasises the imperatives of democratic governance. It appears that democratic countries abide by a rule-based international order compared to a totalitarian system. The international organisation mandated to maintain international peace and security often needs to be a more active player in its mandated responsibility, especially when confronting traditional and nontraditional threats to the security of nations and nationals posed by intransigent totalitarian nations. Such a situation demands a new initiative through the global alliance of democratic nations towards establishing a rules-based international order. Thus, security in the emerging global order depends mainly on the solidarity of democratic nations and their exertion to maintain a law-based international order. Thus, India's national security depends primarily on its capacity to lead in forging a global alliance of democratic nations against the intransigent moves of authoritarian regimes in its immediate neighbourhood. This would be the second time India has had such an opportunity to play a leading role in the seventy-four years of its modern history.

### References

- China, Arpi, C. (2020). *India Tibet Relations 1947-1962 Part 4* . New Delhi : Vij Books India Pvt. Ltd. .
- Krishnan, S. (2020, September 19). India China Tibet . *The Statesman* , p. 6.
- Rangarajan, L. N. (1992). *The Arthashastra* . Gurgaon : Random House India .
- Viswambharan, R. (2021). *India China and Tibet: A Quest for Autonomy* . New York : Nova Science University .
- Suresh R. (2015). *The Changing Dimensions of Security: India's Security Policy Options*. New Delhi: Vij Books India Pvt. Ltd.
- Suresh R. (2014). *Maritime Security of India: The Coastal Security Challenges and Policy Options*. New Delhi: Vij Books India Pvt. Ltd.



- Bapat P V. (2009). *2500 Years of Buddhism*. New Delhi: Publication Division.
- Suresh Rangarajan. (2020). *Changing Dimensions of Security:An Indian Perspective*.  
*Palgrave Encyclopediadia of Interest Group Lobbying and Public Policy*.
- Ministry of External Affairs ,GOI. (2023). *Annual Report*. New Delhi: MEA.
- (n.d.).



