

## **INDIA'S BORDER MANAGEMENT STRATEGY**

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***“Neighbouring states are most relevant as far as foreign policies and national security is concerned” - Chanakya***

The national aim is to “TRANSFORM INDIA TO A MODERN, PROSPEROUS AND SECURE NATION”. As security is a precursor to long term peace, stability and development, securing India's disputed and porous borders is a national imperative.

India's land borders extend 15106.7 km with seven nations including 106 km border with Afghanistan, touching 17 states and 92 districts. India also shares the longest disputed borders in the world, the Sino-Indian border extends 3488 km with China laying claim to over a 1,10,000 sq km of Indian territory. The India Pakistan border extends 3,323 km including 742.1km of line of control (LC) and the Actual Ground Position Line (AGPL) along the Siachen glacier extends another 126.2 km. With Bangladesh India shares the longest border at 4,096.7 km, the Nepal border extends 1751 km, Myanmar 1643 km, Bhutan share 699 km and with Afghanistan the border is 106 km.<sup>1</sup> India's coastline extends 7516.6 km sharing the maritime boundaries with seven nations and includes 5,422 km of coastline in the mainland and 2,094 km of coastline bordering the islands as also touches 13 states and union territories. There are 1197 islands of India accounting for 2094 km of additional coastline.<sup>2</sup> India's exclusive economic zone covers an area of 2,305,143 sq Km which includes 663,629 sq Km of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.<sup>3</sup>

Due to the proclivity of India's neighbours to exploit India's nation building efforts, the country's internal security challenges are inextricably linked with border management. Also, the challenge of coping with long-standing territorial and boundary disputes with China and Pakistan, combined with porous borders along some of the most difficult terrain in the world, has made extremely effective and efficient border management mandatory.<sup>4</sup> There is thus a need to first understand the complexities and many challenges of the borders to arrive at an implementable and effective border management strategy.

### **The Line of actual Control (LAC)**

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1 <https://mha.gov.in/documents/annual-reports>

2 <https://www.neoias.com/neo-notes/281-security-gs-3-border-management>

3 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exclusive\\_economic\\_zone](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exclusive_economic_zone)

4 Gurmeet Kanwal, IPCS Issue Brief No 55 2007, [www.ipcs.org/issue\\_briefs/.../380296651IPCS-IssueBrief-No55-GurmeetKanwal.pdf](http://www.ipcs.org/issue_briefs/.../380296651IPCS-IssueBrief-No55-GurmeetKanwal.pdf)

The 3488 km long Sino-Indian border is a peculiar set of contradictions, being the longest disputed border in the world as also the most peaceful disputed border with the last shot in anger fired in October of 1975. A fragile peace exists ever since, with the disputed border being the ever present potential driver for conflict between the two nuclear armed neighbours - home to one third of humanity.<sup>5</sup>

The mandate of the army is to maintain peace and tranquility along the LAC. The task has its own challenges as there is no common understanding of the LAC. The Sino - Indian border runs along some of the most inhospitable and hostile terrain in the world with altitudes averaging 15,000 feet, and thus while temperatures are low at minus 20 to 30 degree Celsius, tempers run high, due the high altitude effects on troops. As the borders are disputed, intrusions are a common occurrence on account of differing perceptions of LAC. China's growing assertiveness is evident with the increase in frequency and depth of transgressions/ intrusions. These intrusions often lead to a 'face-off' between own Army troops and the PLA, which last from a few hours to a few weeks. Some 'face off' get prolonged, like the 73 day long Doklam crises, the Sept 2014 intrusion coinciding with the visit of President Xi Jinping at Chumar and at Depsang Plains in Apr / May 2013. Such high profile intrusions have the potential to spiral into a skirmish and can become a driver for conflict, however on account of the politico- military- diplomatic combine in concert with a firm stance, professionalism and commitment of the Indian Army, these sensitive incidents have been contained, resolved and status quo maintained. The army is likely to face more and more such situations, especially so, in view of a firm and fair stance being adopted by the present Indian Government in guarding our territories.

Effective manning of the LAC is one of the more challenging tasks of the army. The infrastructure on own side is poor and non existent. The single road axis to most of the sectors is vulnerable to disruption both during monsoons and winters. This not only impacts operational preparedness and readiness but also affects effective border management. On the other hand China has constructed state of the art multimodal multidimensional infrastructure, focussing on the three 'Rs' Roads, Reserves and Radars for manning the borders. A concept which India could well replicate and practice.<sup>6</sup> It is to the credit of the Indian army and the ITBP, that given the many challenges and sensitivities they have maintained peace and tranquility and ensured equilibrium along the LAC, under the most trying and difficult of conditions.

## **The Line of Control (LC)**

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.dsalert.org/indian-army-sentinels-of-national-sovereignty/1338-manning-the-borders>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

The Indian Army is mandated to ensure sanctity of the 772.1 km long LC and the 126.2 km long AGPL. A fragile agreed upon ceasefire exists along the LC, with frequent ceasefire violations initiated by Pakistan, mostly engineered to help terrorist infiltrate to the Indian side.

Pakistan's traditional hostility and single-minded aim of destabilizing India, is not focussed just on Kashmir but on a search for parity. This arises out of the two-nation theory, coupled with a desire to exact revenge for the 1971 humiliation over the separation of Bangladesh. Pakistan has been waging a proxy war for the last quarter of a century. India faces multiple and varied security threats and challenges across the full spectrum of conflict from small wars to collusive and hybrid wars to conventional and nuclear wars. The internal security threats emanate from across the borders with active support to terrorist and insurgent groups. India's porous borders and lack of development in border areas are a major contributor to security concerns and challenges. The terrorist infrastructure and organisations across the LC are duly supported, funded and controlled by the ISI. The constant and continuous efforts by Pakistan army to push in infiltrators has forced the Indian Army to establish a robust and effective counter infiltration grid based on an anti infiltration obstacle system commonly known as the LC fence. This is backed by an equally effective counter terrorist (CT) grid in depth in J&K. The Counter infiltration and CT grid not only complement each other but are integrated, and this has contributed to ensuring that violence levels in Kashmir are controlled.

### **The Last Frontier- Siachen Glacier**

Siachen sometimes called the "Third Pole" is the highest battlefield in the world. The 126.2 km AGPL has over 150 isolated posts, located at altitudes in excess of 5400m, manned by the army round the clock. The glacier's craggy landscape, paper-thin air, heavy snowfall and bone-chilling temperatures make it one of the most inhospitable places on earth. For soldiers, this is a place where mountaineering is more important than marksmanship. The harsh weather and high altitude terrain pose major challenges for troops to survive. Frostbite, chilblains, avalanches, snowstorms, crevices, lack of oxygen and appetite are a few of the many threats faced in addition to defending the borders. Survival alone is an achievement in itself.



## Indo-Border

## Bhutan

Indo-Bhutan border is 699 km in length and is guarded by SSB. The states that share the border with Bhutan are Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, and West Bengal. The Indian Insurgent groups (IIGs) are known to have established camps in South Bhutan in the past. In a first ever demonstration of solidarity and will to counter terrorism Bhutan launched Operation All Clear in Dec 2003 destroying the IIGs, since then Bhutan continues to ensure that IIGs do not establish any bases in Bhutan.

## Indo-Nepal

Indo-Nepal border is 1751 km long with Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal and Sikkim sharing border with Nepal. The main challenges faced due to a porous border are of illegal immigration for economic reasons, smuggling and terrorism. Pakistan trained terrorists are known to have used this porous border to infiltrate into India as also use Nepal as safe havens and hideout.

## Indo-Myanmar Border

India shares a 1643 km long border with Myanmar, of which 171 km is not demarcated. Till the 19th century, border was alien to the tribes. It was and still is irrelevant for them, posing a challenge for border management. Terrain along this border is semi mountainous with steep slopes covered with dense forest, perennial and seasonal rivers and nullahs with numerous waterfalls. The Indo-Myanmar border is presently guarded by 15 Assam Rifles battalions. There is a proposal to handover the border guarding

duties to ITBP/ BSF. It will entail raising of 41 additional battalions, 12 sector HQs and four frontier HQs. There is also a proposal to construct a barbed wire fence along the border. Myanmar is important to India due to historical, ethnic and cultural ties. Myanmar is of great strategic importance as it is a gateway to South East Asia and India's Act East Policy. The northeast region has been facing insurgency since independence. Many insurgent groups have their bases, headquarters and training camps in Myanmar. The Indo-Myanmar border is vulnerable due to narco-terrorism, smuggling of arms, and FICN making it imperative for the security of this border to be addressed in a holistic manner as compared to other Indian borders. Proximity of Indo-Myanmar Border with the "Golden Triangle" is one of the important aspects to be considered while deciding the doctrine of deployment. It will be prudent to let the present time tested responsibility continue with border and CI with one force ASSAM RIFLES.

### **Indo-Bangladesh Border**

The 4096.7 km Indo-Bangladesh border is characterised by varied terrain comprising of plains, low hills, forests and riverine segments. The entire area is heavily populated with cultivation right upto the IB. BSF is responsible for operations only within one km of the IB. Area beyond one km is secured by the local police. A barbed wire fence has been constructed along the border. The biggest challenge on Indo-Bangladesh border is illegal migration of people for economic reasons from Bangladesh to India. Due to ethnic and cultural similarities detection of illegal migrants is difficult. The problem is further compounded by local state politics which wants to integrate the immigrants for vote bank gains. Another challenge is rampant smuggling across the border. Indian insurgent groups are also known to have their training camps across though this issue is well taken care off by the present dispensation.

To summarise the ground situation varies at India's borders. There is almost war like situation along the LC, relatively tranquil borders along China except regular incursions, a humanitarian problem on Bangladesh border due to illegal migration and Bhutan and Nepal borders are porous leading to smuggling and frequent crossover of inhabitants. The Myanmar border, due to thick vegetation cover and rugged terrain has been an easy conduit for drug smuggling as well as insurgent movement. Due to such large magnitude of concerns, border management remains the most complex operation during peacetime. The Management of Borders encompasses Border defence, Border security, Border infrastructure, economy i.e. trade and border trade, Border population and perception management. Every border is unique in respect of the challenges requiring unique solutions. Some of these are:

- Ensuring territorial integrity.
- Reinforcing Claims on our territories.
- Ensuring sanctity of LC.
- Counter Infiltration.
- Illegal migration.
- Illegal activities, like drug and arms trafficking and smuggling.
- Fake Indian currencies (FICN).
- Activities of Indian insurgent groups (IGs).
- Varied terrain poses peculiar challenge to border management.
- Lack of development and Infrastructure specially roads.
- Ethnic and cultural similarities with people across the borders.

## **Maritime Security**

It is often seen that when faced with a territorial dilemma people tend to equate far more with a land-centric dispute because it can be seen whereas any maritime dispute is generally invisible from the public eye and may be of lesser significance in public perception.<sup>7</sup> The legal dimensions of territorial waters, contiguous zone and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) are generally not well known. India's coastline is 7516.6km long which includes 13 major and 187 minor ports along with offshore infrastructure which has to be secured. India's maritime neighbourhood is characterised by close proximity to major sea lines of communication and energy lines, drug centres of Golden Crescent and Golden Triangle and two major hot-spots of piracy i.e. the Horn of Africa and Malacca. India's maritime security policy should factor the India's maritime concerns and Indian Navy is responsible for overall maritime security including coastal security, assisted by the Coast Guard and State Marine Police. Coast Guard is responsible for coastal security in territorial waters including areas to be patrolled by coastal police. It is also responsible for overall coordination between central and state agencies in all matters relating to coastal security. Marine Police is responsible for patrolling and surveillance of infrastructure of coastal areas.<sup>8</sup>

## **Challenges and Policy Options**

“The term border management must be interpreted in its widest sense and should imply co-ordination and concerted action by political leadership and administrative, diplomatic, security, intelligence, legal, regulatory and economic agencies of the country to secure

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7 [http://www.claws.in/images/events/pdf/1356231052\\_ChallengesToBorderManagement17JulyReport.pdf](http://www.claws.in/images/events/pdf/1356231052_ChallengesToBorderManagement17JulyReport.pdf)

8 [http://www.claws.in/images/events/pdf/1356231052\\_ChallengesToBorderManagement17JulyReport.pdf](http://www.claws.in/images/events/pdf/1356231052_ChallengesToBorderManagement17JulyReport.pdf)

our frontiers and serve the best interests of the country. Looked at from this perspective, the management of borders presents many challenging problems.”<sup>9</sup>

Border management does not just include guarding, defending and managing the borders but it also includes the local people, the trade, growth and development of the region. There is a subtle difference between border guarding and border defence and border management. While border guarding is a policing task, border defence as the name indicates is a security task and management is an all-encompassing task. The management policies should be laid down clearly and should be the responsibility of the MHA.

India does not have a border management policy or a national. The National Security Advisory Board (NSAB) has formulated the Draft National Security Policy, which is still under consideration. Though the Department of Border Management was created under the Ministry of Home Affairs in 2004, the critical issues of command and control have not been resolved even after ten years.<sup>10</sup> India is the only country in South Asia which has not yet settled its boundary issues with any of its neighbours. With multiple ministries responsible for various domains of Border management there is conflict and competition on the ground among the different agencies.

The challenges along each border are distinct and varied, covering multiple threats from external, internal, havens/bases to Indian Insurgent Groups (IIGs), immigration, economic, smuggling, narcotics, FICN, and trafficking. The border guarding and defence forces need to be integrated and function seamlessly across all agencies from custom and excise, state police, state armed police, home guards and civil defence and more importantly the various intelligence agencies of various hues and cries mostly working at cross purposes.

The Kargil Review Committee (KRC) Report, brought to light many grave deficiencies in India's security management system particularly in the areas of Intelligence and Border and Defence Management. A Group of Ministers (GoM) was convened in April 2000, to review the national security system in its entirety and in particular, to consider the recommendations of the KRC and formulate specific proposals for implementation. The report of the Group of Ministers (GOM) on National Security identified the various problems of border management. Para 5.1 of the report categorically states ***"Multiplicity of forces on the same borders has inevitably led to the lack of accountability as well as problems of command and control."*** The major problem identified, the GOM vide para 5.12 recommends ***"At present there are***

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.vifindia.org/sites/default/files/GoM%20Report%20on%20National%20Security.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Gurmeet Kanwal, IPCS Issue Brief No 55 2007, [www.ipcs.org/issue\\_briefs/.../380296651IPCS-IssueBrief-No55-GurmeetKanwal.pdf](http://www.ipcs.org/issue_briefs/.../380296651IPCS-IssueBrief-No55-GurmeetKanwal.pdf)

***instances of more than one force working on the same border and questions of conflict in command and control have been raised frequently. Multiplicity of forces on the same border has also led to lack of accountability on the part of the forces. To enforce the accountability, the principle of 'one border one force' may be adopted while considering deployment of forces at the border."*** Multiplicity of forces on the same border has led to lack of accountability on the part of the forces. To enforce accountability, the GoM decided that the principle of 'One Border One Force' be adopted while considering deployment of forces at the border. The unsettled borders with China (LAC) and Pakistan (LC) were mandated to be manned and defended by the army.<sup>11</sup> The LC and AGPL are manned by the army and the few BSF battalions deployed on the LC are under command and operational control of the army. The recommendations of the GOM have been implemented along all our borders with neighbouring countries except the most sensitive and important border with China. The ITBP deployed alongside the army continues to function under the directions of Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA). As the ITBP is not under the operational control of the army there is a lack of coordination and accountability, defeating the very concept of the one force one border as enunciated by the GoM. This needs to be corrected and the ITBP placed under operational control of the army to ensure a more effective management of the sensitive LAC.

A major disconnect in challenges and policy options is the turf wars between the forces and agencies that are prevalent. The various issues along our borders are in the domain of the big four ministries and the states concerned. Ministry of Home with the border management division is the lead ministry as per the charter and exercises operational control of all CAPF less Assam Rifles. The other ministries are the MOD which is responsible for border defence, MEA for resolving border disputes and demarcating the borders, and the ministry of Finance for customs and Excise. More often than not directions and policies emanating from the various ministries are conflicting and contradictory leading to confusion. The various forces deployed along the borders too are competing with each other often leading to turf wars, with cooperation and coordination based on the personalities and the needs of the commanders deployed at various levels. In addition there is the Cabinet secretary whose charter is to ensure inter-ministry coordination. Over and above all is the National Security Advisor (NSA) who is again directly responsible to the PM on all issues concerning national security. To compound these complex and confusing structures is the presence of various intelligence agencies each one with its own agenda and interpretation from State IB, RAAW, IB, CID, MI and DIA, BSF, ITBP and SSB among other int agencies.

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.vifindia.org/sites/default/files/GoM%20Report%20on%20National%20Security.pdf>

At present, border management is manpower intensive and there is a need to supplement human surveillance and patrolling. A greater infusion of technology into border guarding is required in keeping with the peculiarities of terrain and threats. Some of the key technologies that can be 'force substitutes' and can be exploited are:-

- Multi layered autonomous systems.
- Smart Fences with sensors and surveillance systems.
- Integrated C4ISR.
- UAVs/ Drones including tethered drones.
- Satellite Imagery.
- GIS and digitised maps.
- Communication systems.
- Artificial Intelligence.

The maritime security policy needs to be implemented effectively. The sparsely populated and unattended vast coastal areas are most vulnerable to all kinds of security threats and smuggling. The terrorist threat from coastal areas as witnessed in 26/11 Mumbai attacks may become the preferred option as infiltration through the fenced and guarded land borders becomes more and more difficult. Regular training and checks must be carried out to ensure efficacy of marine police and state structures.

In the recent Land Border Agreement (LBA) with Bangladesh, pending since 1974, the assent of West Bengal and Assam was the key factor. Along various borders the role and responsibility of the states need to be factored as they are a very important stakeholder.

Certain Key recommendations are.<sup>12</sup>

- An Apex body for Border Management and Inter Ministry Coordination under NSA.
- Integrated Intelligence machinery with clearly defined role and charter.
- Army for border defence and lead for disputed borders as per the GOM on National security i.e. LAC and LC. Any additional forces like BSF and ITBP to function under Operational control of army.
- ASSAM Rifles for India- Myanmar Border including Tirap & Changlang districts of Arunachal Pradesh and Counter Insurgency in Nagaland, Manipur and Tripura.
- CRPF as the nations Internal Security force including Assam but less J&K, ably supported by State armed police.
- Rashtriya Rifles as Counter Insurgency force in J&K.

- SSB responsible for India- Nepal and India - Bhutan borders.
- ITBP to be deployed along the LAC under operational control of Army.
- BSF continues to effectively manage the India-Pakistan and India-Bangladesh Border.
- Indian Navy with Coast Guard integral to it for Maritime security.
- There is also a need to recruit more personnel from within the areas of deployment of the various forces, sons of soil concept, as they would be able to withstand weather and difficult living conditions better as also contribute to intelligence gathering.
- The development effort in border areas must be carried out to integrate and meet the aspirations of our people living along border areas.
- State governments must be actively involved in the process of finding solutions to the concerns of the border population.

These could cover the systematic and structural changes required for a more effective securing of our borders in keeping with the envisaged threats. The proper management of borders is vitally important for national security. Different borders have a variety of problems specific to them, which have to be appropriately addressed. These problems have become aggravated in recent times with Pakistan's policy of cross border terrorism, along with its intense hostile anti-India propaganda designed to mislead and sway the loyalties of border population. The India China border needs a mature and disciplined handling at all levels as it has a potential to flare up.

There is an urgent and immediate imperative to propagate and practice an effective border management strategy including maritime security to safeguard our borders, mitigate threats and integrate our people ensuring the nation's security.

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