

Safeguarding India: Strategies against Internal Insecurity and Economic Instability

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Abstract

India, as a country being diverse, is alluring and challenging. This paper examines maintaining the link between security and economic stability in a nation by perpetuating law and order, domestic peace, and focusing on the safety of the citizens. The paper focuses on how economic deprivation acts as a gap between economics and extremism. This examines how a lack of governance and development in a region leads to the hindering of the marginalized communities through corruption, lack of effective administration, and negligence by the government. Extremist networks exploit this regional underdevelopment to manipulate affected citizens. Lack of land reforms leads to a prolonged war against the state. Focusing on the historical alienation, economic backwardness creates rage towards the system and complications related to it in India. Socio-economic problems such as religious supremacy, communalism, extremist propaganda, and social differences shape society in the interest of the powerful elite in the country. The macroeconomic indicators, specifically major youth unemployment rates, urban-rural differences, and the lack of quality and affordable education in India, highlight significant challenges. The emerging threat to India's internal security relies on above discussed issues and transnational organised crime for funding, weapons, drug trafficking, and the circulation of the Fake Indian Currency Notes (FICN). My argument here is how socio-economic development in India can solve the above-mentioned internal problems.

Keywords: Internal Security, Economic Instability, Socio-economic Development, Transnational Organised Crime, Economic Deprivation, Historical Alienation, Drug Trafficking, Extremist Propaganda

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Introduction to India's Internal Security Paradigm

Determining Security Boundaries: Conceptual and Administrative Frameworks

Preserving state sovereignty and domestic order depends on clearly distinguishing between internal and external security domains, both conceptually and operationally. Typically, internal security refers to maintaining peace, lawful order, and national sovereignty within a country's borders, while external security focuses on defending against threats from other sovereign nations. Within India's administrative structure, this conceptual separation is formalized via a clear division of ministerial responsibilities: the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) holds sole authority over internal security, civil policing, and the governance of the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF), while the Ministry of Defence (MoD) oversees external territorial defense and the conduct of the regular armed forces (Kumar & Anekant, 2019). This transition from traditional non-alignment to a pragmatic framework of strategic partnerships highlights how India's diplomatic maneuvers have matured over seventy-five years of independent foreign policy (Basu & Arshed, 2024).

However, this inflexible Westphalian binary has become increasingly untenable in the current geopolitical environment. The lines between these conventional security areas have become more unclear due to the rapid digitization of vital infrastructure, the emergence of global cyberthreats, and the use of asymmetric hybrid warfare (Dwivedi & Bajpai, 2022). This convergence of foreign and domestic challenges was long recognized in traditional Indian statecraft; as Kautilya articulated in the *Arthashastra*, a state faces a four-fold threat matrix: internal, external, internally aided external, and externally aided internal. Contemporary South Asian security dynamics reflect a complex combination of all four vectors, as external state actors systematically exploit domestic socioeconomic and political fault lines to execute unconventional proxy operations (Kumar & Anekant, 2019).

This dynamic interplay of internal weaknesses and external provocation necessitates a departure from fragmented security frameworks. According to the Commission on Centre-State Relations, internal security must be defined as protection against threats to a country's boundaries, whether they are caused by internal political upheaval or are provoked, suggested, or proxied by a hostile exterior force. Consequently, any serious assessment of domestic stability must abandon fragmented civilian frameworks and instead study the strategic

environment from an integrated perspective that incorporates traditional defense concerns with non-military, socioeconomic elements (Behera, 2021).

Administrative Fragmentation and the Strategic Multiplication of Threats

A robust strategic studies theory requires an analysis of the historical-institutional decisions that generated structural administrative and infrastructural weaknesses, rather than interpreting India's contemporary security challenges as spontaneous or solely ideological occurrences. The post-independence consolidation of the Indian state was characterized by profound administrative cracks, making the country's geographical periphery vulnerable to both internal subversion and external exploitation. The initial demarcation of state borders, particularly the subsequent reorganizations along linguistic and ethnic lines in the mid-1950s, was frequently carried out with a focus on political containment rather than long-term economic integration or infrastructure defensibility (Kumar & Anekant, 2019).

These initial administrative changes frequently interrupted ancient regional trade networks, resulting in geographically separated and economically deprived enclaves along the country's boundaries. The resulting developmental imbalances and infrastructure gaps served as breeding grounds for localized discontent. Underdeveloped borders, with a complete lack of ordinary civil administration and physical connectivity, presented excellent strategic gaps. Hostile neighbors and rebel networks used administrative flaws to construct safe havens, organize parallel tax and legal structures, and smuggle arms and narcotics (Behera, 2021; Kumar & Anekant, 2019). As a result, early post-colonial border-making and federal restructuring did more than just resolve political disputes; they inadvertently institutionalized the geographic and economic vulnerabilities that continue to fuel protracted insurgencies in the Northeast and Left-Wing Extremism (LWE) across the central tribal belt.

Research Methodology Framework

To systematically examine the junction of internal security and economic instability in the Indian subcontinent, this study employs a qualitative, analytical case-study design based on historical institutionalism and economic determinism (Siyeche, 2021). Rather than considering security threats as isolated kinetic disturbances, this concept sees internal friction as a systemic result of socioeconomic inequities and governance injustices (Behera, 2021).

Data Selection and Scope

The empirical underpinning of this research is based on data triangulation across three key streams:

- **Statutory and State Policy Frameworks:** Official reporting and legislative baselines include Ministry of Home Affairs data, regional security appropriations, and significant legal factors, such as the landmark Supreme Court majority ruling on constitutional integration (Supreme Court of India, 2023).
- **Economic Development Metrics:** Macroeconomic data points that assess regional inflation, youth underemployment, and infrastructure distribution discrepancies in places with asymmetric security concerns (Mazy, 2024).
- **Strategic Defense Literature:** includes peer-reviewed security studies, institutional reviews from defense think tanks (such as the Centre for Land Warfare Studies), and foundational historical analyses of socio-cultural and communal processes (Behera, 2021).

Analytical Matrix

The qualitative data is screened by a tripartite diagnostic matrix:

- **Socio-Economic Undercurrents:** Identifying areas where structural changes in regional labor markets or institutional alterations in land rights generate disenfranchised pockets ripe for radicalization (Behera, 2021; Siyech, 2021).
- **Governance and Infrastructure Deficits:** Mapping geographic and administrative vulnerabilities, particularly regional border tri-junctions, where institutional monitoring fails to keep up with the localized pattern of instability (Kumar & Anekant, 2019).
- **Asymmetric Threat Triggers:** Investigating the operational mechanics of non-traditional threats, such as cyberspace weaponization and decentralized digital assets, as well as the exploitability of cross-border proxy pipelines and transnational crime networks (Davar, 2015; Dwivedi & Bajpai, 2022).

The Nexus of Economic Instability, Governance Deficit, and Extremism

The Political Economy of Relative Deprivation and Jobless Growth

The junction of economic instability, regional inequality, and internal security is characterized by a causal link in which structural socioeconomic deprivation acts as a main force multiplier

for non-traditional threats (Behera, 2021). Domestic instability is rarely an isolated or spontaneous event; rather, it is deliberately developed when localized economic grievances are turned into structural threats to state sovereignty. This transition occurs when marginalized groups feel deeply alienated due to top-down, non-consensual development frameworks that fail to account for local ecological and resource relationships. This friction is most acute in the systematic disruption of the Jal-Jangal-Jameen (water, forest, land) dynamic in the Indian security paradigm, where state-led conservation policies and industrial developments have historically relocated indigenous tribal communities and curtailed their customary rights under the Forest Conservation Act of 1980, without providing equitable resource profits or viable economic substitutes (Kumar & Anekant, 2019).

To understand the operational mechanics of extremist recruiting, strategic analysis requires considering specific socioeconomic variables rather than general observations of poverty. The structural dilemma of jobless growth in India is a significant source of internal instability, with a severe discrepancy between aggregate economic progress and employment prospects (Mazy, 2024). While the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has consistently expanded at rates greater than 7% per year, employment growth has stagnated at around 1.1% (Khalid, 2021). This macroeconomic imbalance is exacerbated by a heavy reliance on the agriculture sector, which employs a substantial proportion of the workers but contributes a disproportionately small share of national GDP (Mazy, 2024). Rural people endure severe economic instability due to climate vulnerability and seasonal job patterns, which encourages distressed migration to urban informal labor markets typified by precarious, low-wage employment (Mazy, 2024). This structural mismatch creates a large population of underemployed and educated young who confront significant impediments to social mobility, leading to a deep sense of relative hardship, institutional unfairness, and psychological abandonment (Mazy, 2024; Khalid, 2021). Extremist networks systematically exploit economic despair by providing financial incentives, alternative social safety nets, and ideological frameworks of resistance to recruit disillusioned youth to carry out complex sub-conventional operations (Behera, 2021; Kumar & Anekant, 2019). This recruitment pipeline is further accelerated by structural inflationary pressures, particularly food and fuel inflation, which significantly erodes real purchasing power in low-income and rural communities, decreasing the cognitive resistance of local populations to radicalization (Mazy, 2024).

Governance Deficits and the Emergence of Parallel Legal Orders

Economic grievances are inherently linked to a severe lack of governance in rural and geographically isolated areas (Behera, 2021). A governance deficit is described not just as an administrative failure, but also as the entire or partial lack of routine civil administration, institutional transparency, and the rule of law (Kumar & Anekant, 2019). In these administrative vacuums, the state's field institutions fail to provide public services, safeguard basic human rights, or execute protective legislation, which is frequently complicated by profit-seeking and corruption, resulting in a significant sovereignty deficit (Kumar & Anekant, 2019). When the state fails to project administrative authority or safeguard individuals' rights and entitlements, non-state actors take advantage of the following vacuum (Behera, 2021). The Communist Party of India-Maoist (CPI-Maoist) has traditionally developed parallel administrative, fiscal, and judicial systems in the areas most severely hit by Left-Wing Extremism (LWE) in the central heartland. These parallel orders are reflected in the institutionalization of Jan Adalats (people's courts), where insurgent leaders administer summary justice, settle local disputes, and impose arbitrary norms of conduct (Kumar & Anekant, 2019). By operating these parallel courts, the insurgents systematically undermine the constitutional authority of the state judiciary and police, while also establishing parallel taxation regimes that extort protection money from local infrastructure projects, mining companies, and multinational corporations operating in mineral-rich areas (Kumar & Anekant, 2019).

To address this strategic vulnerability, the Government of India's National Policy and Action Plan to Address LWE, approved in 2015, established a multifaceted framework to supplement affected states' efforts by integrating security-related measures with targeted developmental interventions (Lok Sabha, 2026). On the development front, the state has allocated enormous resources to remedy crucial infrastructure gaps in the most badly impacted LWE areas, principally under the Special Central Assistance (SCA) initiative, which has given Rs. 3,953.67 crore since its establishment in 2017 (Lok Sabha, 2026). Physical and digital connectivity projects have been prioritized as strategic imperatives for reclaiming these administrative enclaves; the state has built 15,016 km of road networks under the Road Requirement Plan (RRP) and the Road Connectivity Project for LWE Affected Areas (RCPLWEA), as well as 9,233 telecom towers to eliminate telecommunication dead zones (Lok Sabha, 2026). This physical reclamation is structurally paired with programs designed to promote educational,

financial, and vocational inclusion, such as the operationalization of 179 Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) for tribal youth, the opening of 6,025 Post Offices with banking services, the establishment of 1,804 bank branches and 1,321 ATMs in the most affected districts, and the creation of 46 Industrial Training Institutes (ITI) and 49 Skill Development Centers (SDC) (Lok Sabha, 2026). The state systematically dismantles the governance deficits that allow parallel legal orders to persist by combining kinetic area dominance with targeted infrastructure spending and land title distribution under the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act of 2006 (Behera, 2021; Lok Sabha, 2026).

The Tri-Junction Theory and Border Land Security Gaps

The Tri-junction Theory conceptualizes governance inadequacies in terms of geography and administration. According to this theory, territories near the junction of three or more state boundaries experience severe structural neglect since they are often located distant from the centers of state authority and administrative scrutiny (Kumar & Anekant, 2019). As a result, tri-junction locations lack basic physical infrastructure and routine policing, leaving administrative and operational gaps (Kumar & Anekant, 2019). The Dandakaranya region, which straddles the overlapping boundaries of Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Maharashtra, and Andhra Pradesh, is the best illustration of this situation in India's internal security landscape. Historically, a lack of coordination, intelligence sharing, and operational synchronization among multiple state police units allowed insurgent networks to exploit these jurisdictional barriers with great efficiency (Kumar & Anekant, 2019; Behera, 2021). When confronted with targeted counter-insurgency operations in one state, such as Andhra Pradesh's highly successful elite Greyhounds operations, militant cadres easily crossed borders into neighboring states to seek refuge, taking advantage of the legal and operational limitations of state-level law enforcement (Behera, 2021; Kumar & Anekant, 2019).

To eliminate these safe havens and close the tri-junction security gap, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has funded the construction of 656 Fortified Police Stations (FPS) in LWE-affected districts to serve as secure operational hubs for the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) and state police (Lok Sabha, 2026). Since 2014-15, the Central Government has released Rs. 3,681.73 crore through the Security Related Expenditure (SRE) scheme to reimburse states for operational expenses, security force training, community policing, and

vocational rehabilitation of surrendered LWE cadres (Lok Sabha, 2026). This financial underpinning of capacity-building supports comprehensive Surrender-cum-Rehabilitation policies, which provide an immediate grant of Rs. 5 lakhs for higher-ranked LWE cadres, Rs. 2.5 lakhs for other cadres, and a monthly stipend of Rs. 10,000 for three years during vocational training, resulting in 2,337 surrenders in 2025 alone (Lok Sabha, 2026). The tight application of this integrated policy framework has limited the geographical expansion of Left-Wing Extremism, lowering the number of LWE-affected districts from 126 in 2018 to only 08 in December 2025, with only three districts remaining "Most LWE Affected" (Lok Sabha, 2026). Furthermore, LWE-perpetrated violence has decreased by 88%, from 1,936 incidents in 2010 to 234 in 2025, while civilian and security force deaths have decreased by 90%, from 1,005 in 2010 to 100 in 2025, demonstrating the strategic efficacy of combining kinetic containment with structural governance consolidation (Lok Sabha, 2026).

Left-Wing Extremism (Naxalism): Operational and Ideological Realities

Ideological Foundations and the Strategic Paradigm of Insurgency

The Left-Wing Extremist (LWE) movement, traditionally known as Naxalism, is a long-running unconventional challenge to the Indian state's constitutional legitimacy and Westphalian sovereignty (Behera, 2021). Based on Marxist-Leninist-Maoist political philosophy, the movement rejects the structural premises of parliamentary democracy as a bourgeois sham, instead advocating for the complete overthrow of existing state structures through a peasant-led protracted people's war (Behera, 2021; Kumar & Anekant, 2019). Unlike localized ethnic insurgencies seeking regional autonomy, the Communist Party of India-Maoist (CPI-Maoist) maintains a highly structured, hierarchical military apparatus through the People's Liberation Guerrilla Army (PLGA), with the explicit political goal of establishing a "People's Democratic Federal Republic" through armed class struggle.

This movement's survival and tenacity have historically depended on the exploitation of "ungoverned zones" located along the country's physical and administrative borders (Behera, 2021). In these periphery enclaves, such as central India's mineral-rich tribal forest belts, a chronic lack of basic civil administration, land tenure uncertainty, and infrastructure isolation provide fertile ground for insurgent consolidation. Maoist ideologues exploit localized grievances, specifically the historical alienation of tribal and forest-dwelling communities and

the disruption of the Jal-Jangal-Jameen (water, forest, land) resource dynamic, to systematically mobilize, radicalize, and recruit impoverished youth, transforming localized socioeconomic grievances into a protracted war against the state.

Operational Doctrine: The Shift toward the Development-Security Hybrid Model

To deconstruct Left-Wing Extremism's operational infrastructure, the state's counter-insurgency response has evolved from an ad hoc law-and-order police framework to a unified, national "Development-Security Hybrid" model (Behera, 2021; Lok Sabha, 2026). This strategic change is principally driven by the implementation of the 2015-approved "National Policy and Action Plan to Address LWE," which conceptualizes security and development as mutually reinforcing foundations of state stability (Lok Sabha, 2026). The operational elements of this strategy, which are included in the Ministry of Home Affairs' (MHA) SAMADHAN doctrine, actively reshape state-level operational doctrine by emphasizing aggressive strategy, smart leadership, motivated training, and actionable intelligence to carry out coordinated, multi-agency counter-insurgency operations across overlapping jurisdictions, as opposed to acting as a passive administrative checklist (Kumar & Anekant, 2019; Lok Sabha, 2026). This hybrid model combines tactical area dominance by security forces with targeted developmental interventions to reclaim administrative enclaves, eliminate insurgent funding, and rebuild institutional trust among marginalized populations (Behera, 2021; Kumar & Anekant, 2019).

The substantial reduction in the LWE operating footprint empirically supports the strategic efficacy of this "Development-Security Hybrid" model (Lok Sabha, 2026). Resolute policy implementation has resulted in an 88% drop in LWE-perpetrated violent occurrences, from a high of 1,936 in 2010 to 234 in 2025 (Lok Sabha, 2026). This operational success is paralleled by a 90% decline in civilian and security force casualties, which fell from 1,005 in 2010 to 100 in 2025 (Lok Sabha, 2026). Crucially, the geographical distribution of Maoist influence has shrunk significantly, with the number of LWE-affected districts in the country falling from 126 in 2018 to only 8 in December 2025 (Lok Sabha, 2026). To consolidate these operational gains and prevent any potential relapse of extremist control in cleared enclaves, the state established a new administrative category in 2024, designating 30 enclaves as "Legacy and Thrust districts" to ensure the continuation of targeted developmental assistance and prevent the re-emergence of security vacuums (Lok Sabha, 2026).

Institutional Consolidation, Surrender-Rehabilitation, and Area Reclamation

The long-term stability of the LWE Theater is dependent on replacing rival extremist systems with a credible, permanent state-led institutional presence (Behera, 2021). In remote and geographically isolated regions characterized by a complete deficit of routine civil administration, the CPI-Maoist historically established parallel governance mechanisms to contest the Westphalian state, manifesting through Jan Adalats (people's courts) and coercive parallel taxation regimes that extorted protection money from local infrastructure contractors and mineral-extraction industries to fund their military campaigns (Behera, 2021; Kumar & Anekant, 2019). The "Tri-junction Theory" explains how this parallel governance is geographically operationalized, positing that the intersections of state borders are marked by significant governance shortfalls and infrastructural gaps. The Dandakaranya region, which spans Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Maharashtra, and Andhra Pradesh, has historically served as an administrative safe haven for insurgent networks to evade state-level law enforcement due to a lack of road connectivity and telecommunication towers (Kumar & Anekant, 2019; Lok Sabha, 2026).

To dismantle the youth recruitment pipeline and ensure long-term deradicalization, the state must provide realistic, long-term economic alternatives that promote social mainstreaming (Behera, 2021). The state's current Surrender-cum-Rehabilitation policy, which is supported by the SRE program, is an important weapon for de-radicalization because it addresses the material motivations of insurgent recruitment (Lok Sabha, 2026). The rehabilitation plan includes an immediate relocation grant of Rs. 5 lakhs for higher-ranked LWE cadres and Rs. 2.5 lakhs for lower cadres, and financial incentives for surrendering weapons and ammunition (Lok Sabha, 2026). To prevent a relapse into militancy, the policy requires extensive trade and vocational training supported by a monthly stipend of Rs. 10,000 for three years (Lok Sabha, 2026). Together with extensive public infrastructure development, such as the building of 15,016 km of road networks, the commissioning of 9,233 telecom towers, and the distribution of land titles under the Forest Rights Act of 2006, this lucrative rehabilitation framework has effectively reduced the insurgency's economic appeal, enabling 2,337 surrenders in 2025 alone (Behera, 2021; Lok Sabha, 2026). The state systematically delegitimizes the insurgent presence and restores the state's constitutional writ in previously ungoverned enclaves by replacing parallel extremist courts with transparent civil administration, the rule of law, and institutional pathways for social mobility (Behera, 2021; Kumar & Anekant, 2019).

Insurgency in the North-East: Ethnicity, Alienation, and Borders

Geostrategic Vulnerability and the Resource-Scarcity Lens

The historical and contemporary trajectory of militancy in Northeast India necessitates a shift away from traditional, chronological narratives of ethnic conflict and toward a careful assessment via a geostrategic and economic resource-scarcity lens (Behera, 2021). Geopolitically, the Northeast is a highly vulnerable territorial periphery, sharing more than 99 percent of its international borders with China, Myanmar, Bhutan, and Bangladesh, while remaining physically connected to the Indian mainland only by the narrow, 22-kilometer Siliguri Corridor (Arshed, 2024; Kumar & Anekant, 2019). This severe geographical isolation has historically fostered a deep sense of alienation and economic backwardness among over a hundred tribal groups, who regard themselves as bystanders to their own economic future (Arshed, 2024; Kumar & Anekant, 2019). Administrative border reorganizations interrupted traditional regional trade routes, creating physically separated, economically marginalized pockets, complicating the region's post-independence consolidation (Arshed, 2024; Behera, 2021). In a resource-scarce context, these administrative and federal fissures have exacerbated inter-ethnic competition for stagnating land markets, restricted public sector employment, and contested agricultural resources (Kumar & Anekant, 2019). Insurgent organizations have methodically weaponized economic fear, transforming localized grievances about resource exploitation and demographic shifts into persistent sub-conventional challenges to the sovereign writ of the state (Behera, 2021; Kumar & Anekant, 2019). The narrow Siliguri Corridor thus acts as a crucial strategic choke point; any interruption to this physical corridor or its surrounding infrastructure directly affects the Northeast's territorial cohesion and economic stability (Arshed, 2024; Dwivedi & Bajpai, 2022).

Ungoverned Territories and the Transnational Narco-Terrorism Pipeline

The operational resilience of Northeast insurgent networks is structurally predicated on the ability to exploit cross-border sanctuaries located in "ungoverned territory" along the India-Myanmar border (Behera, 2021). The physical lack of normal civil administration, physical infrastructure, and state-led law enforcement produces excellent tactical enclaves for rebel consolidation (Behera & Bhattacharjee, 2021; Kumar & Anekant, 2019). The National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) and the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) have historically used this porous, lightly policed 1,643-kilometer border to establish operational

safe havens, run training camps, and evade Indian counter-insurgency operations (Behera, 2021; Kumar & Anekant, 2019). This geostrategic vulnerability is exacerbated by the convergence of local ethnic militancy and transnational organized crime networks based in the neighboring Golden Triangle (Kumar & Anekant, 2019). Cross-border drug smuggling has become a major problem in states like Manipur, where local insurgency organizations act as armed couriers for illegal narcotics, firearms, and counterfeit Indian currency in exchange for funding and material logistical assistance (Behera, 2021; Kumar & Anekant, 2019).

A crucial operational synchronization gap in the state's border intelligence and defense infrastructure is highlighted by the continued existence of these transnational pipelines (Davar, 2015). According to Davar's (2015) analysis of intelligence-management paradigms, combating such hybrid, sub-conventional threats necessitates an "intelligence-guided" counterterrorism approach that closes the structural divide between state-level law enforcement, central intelligence, and the military forces. Historically, militant cadres have been able to take advantage of jurisdictional gaps between state police organizations and central forces, such as the Assam Rifles, which are under the operational control of the Army but the administrative control of the MHA, due to the lack of unified operational commands and real-time intelligence synchronization (Kumar & Anekant, 2019). To eliminate these enclaves, modern doctrine requires the Multi-Agency Centre (MAC) and the Joint Task Force on Intelligence (JTFI) under the Intelligence Bureau (IB) to be operationalized in a systematic manner, allowing for real-time data fusion and synchronized cross-border interdictions to disrupt the crime-terror nexus.

The "Act East Policy" and Peace Accords as Stabilizing Instruments

To transform the Northeast from a "remote frontier" into a thriving regional gateway, the Indian government has implemented a multi-pronged approach known as the "Act East Policy," which combines kinetic containment with a powerful geoeconomic plan. The AEP acts as an institutional countermeasure to economic alienation by connecting the Northeast to Southeast Asian trade networks via major infrastructure projects such as the Kaladan Multi-modal Transit Transport Project and the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway (Arshed, 2024; Kumar & Anekant, 2019). This approach attempts to ease spatial claustrophobia in landlocked states, produce long-term employment, and lessen the resource grievances that drive insurgency recruitment (Arshed, 2024; Behera, 2021).

The integrated "Development-Security Hybrid" model's strategic efficacy is experimentally supported by a remarkable decrease in regional violence (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2023). In 2023, there were 71% fewer insurgency occurrences, 60% fewer Security Forces losses, and 82% fewer civilian deaths due to the tenacious implementation of this dual-track policy since 2014 (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2023). This improved security environment has enabled the progressive reduction of "disturbed areas" under the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) of 1958, resulting in its complete removal from Tripura (2015) and Meghalaya (2018), as well as its significant constriction in Assam, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, and Nagaland (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2023).

This kinetic stability is reinforced by the implementation of comprehensive peace treaties that formalize political accommodation and replace parallel rebel formations with stable, constitutional rule (Behera, 2021). The Achik National Volunteer Council (ANVC) Peace Accord of 2014 disbanded 751 armed cadres in Meghalaya, while the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT/SD) Peace Agreement of 2019 disarmed and mainstreamed active cadres in Tripura (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2023). Similarly, the Bru Agreement of 2020 addressed a long-standing resettlement and demographic dilemma by allocating Rs. 661.00 crore to the permanent settling of Bru migrants in Tripura (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2023). The Bodo Peace Accord of 2020 in Assam surrendered 1,615 cadres of the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) and established the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) to fulfill sub-regional autonomy ambitions within the constitutional framework (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2023). This model of local empowerment was replicated by the Karbi Peace Accord of 2021 and the Adivasi Peace Accord of 2022, which collectively disarmed over 2,100 cadres in Assam's contiguous hill tracts, as well as the Dimasas National Liberation Army (DNLA) Peace Agreement of 2023, which resolved long-standing ethnic militancy in the Dima Hasao district (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2023). These accords successfully transform armed insurgents into democratic stakeholders by prioritizing political talks and localized autonomy above permanent militarization, providing long-term institutional stability throughout the Northeast (Behera, 2021; Ministry of Home Affairs, 2023).

State-Sponsored Proxy Warfare: The Jammu & Kashmir Paradigm

Asymmetric Proxy Warfare and the Stability-Instability Paradox

The security landscape of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) is a complex confluence of internal and external threat vectors that is gradually eroding the traditional line between domestic law enforcement and national defence (Behera, 2021). Following conventional military setbacks in 1947, 1965, and 1971, Pakistan's military and intelligence apparatus implemented a low-intensity, sub-conventional proxy warfare strategy aimed at inflicting maximum attrition while maintaining plausible deniability (Kumar & Anekant, 2019).

The "stability-instability conundrum" in South Asian strategic affairs provides a structural explanation for the endurance of this proxy conflict. Pakistan has used sponsored non-state proxy networks such as Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) to carry out low-intensity gray-zone operations in the shadow of nuclear deterrence, which effectively prevents full-scale, conventional interstate warfare (Behera, 2021; Pant & Bommakanti, 2019). This strategic conundrum is exacerbated by the Sino-Pakistani strategic nexus, including Chinese investments and military infrastructure projects in Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir (PoK) through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) (Pant & Bommakanti, 2019). As a result, J&K functions as a primary theater for asymmetric gray-zone warfare, with the sub-conventional proxy network historically using regional socioeconomic grievances, local alienation, and radicalization to challenge the Indian state's constitutional writ (Behera, 2021; Kumar & Anekant, 2019).

Legal-Constitutional Integration: Abrogation of Article 370 as a Security Imperative

To dismantle the legal-administrative enclaves and parallel political spaces exploited by these proxy networks, the Government of India executed a fundamental strategic and constitutional paradigm shift on August 5, 2019, by repealing Article 370 and reorganizing the state into two distinct Union Territories. This institutional reconfiguration was affirmed by the landmark Supreme Court majority ruling in *In Re: Article 370 of the Constitution*, which provided the definitive constitutional basis for Jammu and Kashmir's complete integration. Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, who wrote the majority opinion, ruled that when the Instrument of Accession (IoA) and the subsequent Proclamation of November 25, 1949 were signed, Jammu and Kashmir retained no element of internal or external sovereignty distinct from the Union of

India (Supreme Court of India, 2023). The Court explained that Article 370 was a temporary and transitional clause in Part XXI of the Indian Constitution, intended to be a feature of asymmetric federalism rather than acknowledgment of independent state sovereignty (Supreme Court of India, 2023).

This constitutional consolidation specifically tackles J&K's historically volatile administrative exception. Under the previous regime of asymmetric federalism, the requirement for J&K State Government concurrence for the application of central laws created significant administrative gaps and legal barriers, impeding the enforcement of critical national security and social welfare legislation (Supreme Court of India, 2023). The Supreme Court established the supreme authority of the Indian Constitution as a complete code for constitutional governance in the territory by declaring the separate Constitution of Jammu and Kashmir to be completely subordinate to the Constitution of India, rendering it inoperative and redundant (Supreme Court of India, 2023). This legal-constitutional integration is a security imperative; it systematically dismantled the administrative and legal exemptions that secessionist networks and proxy handlers, such as the Hurriyat leadership, have historically used to incite civil unrest, coordinate stone-throwing, and run parallel radicalization pipelines (Behera, 2021; Kumar & Anekant, 2019; Supreme Court of India, 2023).

Tactical Doctrines, Jointness, and Military Reform Dilemmas

The underlying constitutional changes in J&K must be combined with the combat-orientation requirements and military reform quandaries confronting the Indian defense establishment. Indian military strategists have always struggled to deploy conventional forces to punish Pakistan-sponsored sub-conventional terrorism without starting a larger conventional escalation under nuclearized conditions (Pant & Bommakanti, 2019).

According to the ancient "Sundarji doctrine," the Indian Army depended on slow-mobilizing defensive "holding corps" posted near the international boundary, supported by heavier "attack formations" in the rear (Pant & Bommakanti, 2019). The time-consuming mobilization needs of this continental stance precluded quick, punishing responses to cross-border terror attacks, as evidenced by the strategic limits of Operation Parakram in 2001-2002 (Pant & Bommakanti, 2019). This operational gap prompted the development of the "Cold Start" doctrine, which seeks to reconfigure heavy strike corps into smaller, division-strength Integrated Battle Groups

(IBGs) capable of executing rapid, surprise offensive operations to achieve limited territorial gains before the international community or adversary's nuclear escalation threshold is activated (Pant & Bommakanti, 2019).

However, deep-rooted structural and civil-military obstacles prevent these proactive ideologies from being fully institutionalized. The lack of integration and "jointness" among the Army, Navy, and Air Force is a significant flaw in India's military modernization (Pant & Bommakanti, 2019). The Indian military still suffers from service parochialism and a "single-service syndrome" in which each branch plans, trains, and functions independently, despite the need for smooth, combined-arms coordination to execute high-speed, maneuver-oriented doctrines like Cold Start (Pant & Bommakanti, 2019). While the establishment of Integrated Theater Commands (ITCs) and the office of the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) are designed to bridge this chasm, civilian decision-makers have historically resisted delegating overriding command authority to a single military head, fearing a dilution of tight political control over the military instrument (Pant & Bommakanti, 2019).

Additionally, because counter-insurgency operations require a lot of manpower, the army's ability to reallocate funds toward purchasing cutting-edge technology, precision-guided ammunition, and cyber-defense assets required for contemporary gray-zone warfare is hampered by the ongoing deployment of large infantry divisions to fight the proxy conflict in Kashmir (Behera, 2021; Pant & Bommakanti, 2019). Therefore, long-term deterrence in the J&K Theater depends on resolving these persistent joint-operability and civil-military planning issues within India's higher defense organization, even though the constitutional abrogation of Article 370 successfully consolidated the state's sovereign administrative control (Pant & Bommakanti, 2019; Supreme Court of India, 2023).

Communalism and Religious Radicalization: A Threat to the Secular Fabric

The Political Economy of Communalism: Identity as a Strategic Threat Multiplier

The weaponization of identity within a highly polarized strategic terrain is reflected in the evolution of communalism from a localized socio-political conflict to a systemic, sub-conventional assault on state sovereignty. Communalism acts as a modern political ideology that develops a false consciousness of actual reality, stating that religious communities possess

homogeneous, mutually exclusive, and essentially conflicting secular interests (Chandra, 1984). Driven by systemic socio-economic distress and fierce rivalry for limited resources, modern identity friction serves as a strategic threat multiplier rather than arising from spontaneous theological debates (Das & Saikia, 2023). Due to their relative impoverishment and increased worry about social mobility, marginalized communities in a stagnant or unevenly developed economic order are particularly susceptible to exclusivist narratives (Chandra, 1984; Das & Saikia, 2023). Extremist networks and political elites use these material weaknesses to turn legitimate economic complaints into zero-sum, identity-based resource claims (Chandra, 1984; Das & Saikia, 2023).

This weaponization of identity is predicated on the spread of majoritarian fears, particularly the fabricated anxiety that a minority "Other" will erase a dominant community's demographic or existential identity (Siyech, 2021). Extremist ideologues divert public dissatisfaction away from the government and toward competing social groupings by framing socioeconomic competition through the lens of communal peril, obscuring the underlying structural realities of joblessness and wealth concentration (Chandra, 1984; Siyech, 2021). Thus, communalism serves as a competitive de-secularization process in which religious symbols, myths, and limits are forcefully extended into political and public realms to strengthen exclusive vote banks and institutionalize societal differences (Vanaik, 1997). This competitive motivation hardens communal identities, fraying the secular fabric of civil society and escalating minor local disagreements into systemic security risks (Das & Saikia, 2023; Vanaik, 1997). Localized identity-based conflict is therefore made a national security priority because the ensuing polarization seriously weakens the state's constitutional authority and Comprehensive National Power (Behera, 2021).

The Digital Ecosystem: Algorithmic Polarization and Contemporary Extremism

The rapid integration of the digital ecosystem into asymmetric warfare theories has significantly expedited the current growth of ethno-nationalist extremism and community polarization. Religion serves as a tactical veneer for modern right-wing and ethno-nationalist extremism, which employs advanced digital communications to carry out psychological operations and mass mobilization. The digital landscape has evolved from a passive medium of information distribution to an active, decentralized accelerator of radicalization, fueling violence through algorithmic polarization (Kumar & Anekant, 2019; Siyech, 2021).

Engagement-maximizing algorithms are used by social media platforms, instant messaging apps, and video-sharing networks to favor emotionally charged, antagonistic, or fear-inducing content to maximize user attention, resulting in very insular online echo chambers.

Within these digital enclaves, the systematic weaponization of disinformation and fake news targets vulnerable demographics, particularly unemployed and underemployed youth with limited social mobility (Das & Saikia, 2023; Siyech, 2021). Hostile state actors and domestic extremist networks take advantage of these echo chambers, using doctored multimedia, highly polarized historical revisionism, and inflammatory rhetoric to incite localized violence (Mehta, 2024). Due to the speed and volume of this digital transmission, traditional, centralized moderation is impossible. As a result, **minor** local issues, such as petty criminal activity or personal altercations, can be quickly nationalized and recast as organized civic attacks (Behera, 2021; Kumar & Anekant, 2019). The 2012 mass panic and consequent departure of Northeast students from southern states, and the 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots, show the strategic effectiveness of digital disinformation in inciting large-scale, decentralized disturbance (Kumar & Anekant, 2019). Furthermore, transnational terrorist organizations, such as al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, use these localized digital fault lines to distribute targeted propaganda, such as the "Voice of Hind" publication, in order to exploit domestic communal divides, recruit domestic cadres, and coordinate sub-conventional operations without leaving a physical footprint (Behera, 2021; Siyech, 2021).

Crisis Management and the Counter-Radicalization Policy Deficit

The decentralized, digitalized spread of hate speech and disinformation reveals a fundamental operational gap in the state's crisis management and counter-radicalization frameworks. While the constitutional ideal of Indian secularism mandates equal respect and non-discrimination for all religious groups, the reality of decentralized, digitalized subversion constantly challenges this ideal (Das & Saikia, 2023; Kumar & Anekant, 2019). Historically, the state has responded with a reactive, law-and-order mindset, viewing communal violence and internet radicalization as episodic police difficulties rather than fundamental national security threats (Behera, 2021; Kumar & Anekant, 2019). Political pragmatism and electoral rivalry compromises frequently drive administrative inactivity during the early stages of communal mobilization, exacerbating operational passivity (Chandra, 1984; Das & Saikia, 2023).

To address these vulnerabilities, the state's modern counterterrorism and internal security apparatus must shift from reactive containment to proactive, multilayered policy designs (Behera, 2021; Kumar & Anekant, 2019). Immediate, tactical crisis management is based on kinetic interventions such as temporary suspension of bulk SMS services, regional internet shutdowns, and the deployment of specialist riot-control forces such as the Rapid Action Force (Kumar & Anekant, 2019). However, these limited interruptions simply treat the symptoms, failing to address the underlying digital infrastructure or the psychological motivations of radicalization (Behera, 2021; Kumar & Anekant, 2019). Long-term stabilization necessitates a structural shift toward comprehensive de-radicalization and counter-radicalization strategies that involve the state, civic society, and families to delegitimize extremist ideology. This necessitates the systematic implementation of values-based, secular educational reforms to dismantle deep-seated communal prejudices, as well as the establishment of local, multi-community peace committees to rebuild inter-group trust at the grassroots level (Chandra, 1984; Das & Saikia, 2023; Kumar & Anekant, 2019). Furthermore, the state must upgrade its regulatory and legal structures to ensure rigorous accountability on digital platforms, including transparent algorithmic supervision and real-time surveillance of coordinated misinformation campaigns (Kumar & Anekant, 2019; Siyech, 2021). By combining strong legal and technological surveillance with inclusive socioeconomic development, the state may progressively recapture the parallel spaces exploited by extremist networks while preserving the secular democratic state's constitutional writ.

Strategic Countermeasures, Threat Multipliers, and Policy Roadmap

Inter-Agency Synchronization and the Digital/Financial Intelligence Architecture

Maintaining state sovereignty in today's strategic environment necessitates a fundamental shift away from the traditional Westphalian distinction between the Ministry of Home Affairs' (MHA) domestic law-and-order jurisdiction and the Ministry of Defence's (MoD) external territorial defense mandate. The irreversible convergence of India's internal and external security sectors has rendered this administrative compartmentalization outdated, leaving institutional gaps that sub-conventional networks and hostile state sponsors routinely exploit (Behera, 2021).

The resulting coordination deficits generate severe command friction and intelligence-sharing delays, particularly along porous international frontiers and tri-junction border enclaves where state-level police, central paramilitary units, and the regular armed forces operate in administrative isolation (Davar, 2015; Kumar & Anekant, 2019). To eliminate these tri-junction blind spots, the state must implement a structural overhaul by establishing permanent, cross-ministerial Joint Border Commands (JBCs) (Davar, 2015; Kumar & Anekant, 2019). These unified commands should place all border-guarding units, state-level Counter-Terrorism units, and contiguous military formations under a singular operational head to facilitate synchronized patrolling, cross-border interdictions, and rapid tactical responses (Davar, 2015; Kumar & Anekant, 2019).

Preemptive Socio-Economic Security and Climate Migration

A comprehensive national security policy must acknowledge that, unless combined with economic resilience used as a major tool for kinetic prevention, kinetic containment and physical hardening are insufficient to end ongoing internal conflicts (Behera, 2021). Educated youth experience a profound sense of relative deprivation and psychological abandonment as a result of the structural crisis of "jobless growth," which is typified by a stark disparity where real GDP has historically expanded above 7% annually while employment growth has stagnated at roughly 1.1% (Mazy, 2024).

To carry out sub-conventional operations, insurgent networks systematically take advantage of these circumstances of economic precarity, using young underemployment and local poverty as major recruitment multipliers (Behera, 2021; Lok Sabha, 2026). The state must set up specific operational indicators that connect vocational security programs to national infrastructure corridors to combat this recruitment pipeline (Mazy, 2024). The strict protection of land and resource rights under the Forest Rights Act of 2006, along with the integration of marginalized border populations into active economic gateways under the Act East Policy (AEP), systematically undermines the governance deficiencies that extremist groups exploit (Behera, 2021; Lok Sabha, 2026).

Growing non-traditional security (NTS) threat multipliers, including migration motivated by climate change, further challenge this socioeconomic stabilization (Chatterjee, 2024). Distressed, climate-induced population relocation from nearby susceptible zones is being

driven into India's Border States by slow-onset environmental degradation, riverbank erosion, and shifting monsoonal cycles (Chatterjee, 2024). Urban informal labor markets and border-region resources are severely strained due to this ecological displacement, which modifies local demographic structures (Chatterjee, 2024; Mazy, 2024). According to a resource-scarcity perspective, this unrestrained demographic pressure intensifies competition for public utilities and stagnating agricultural land, escalating ethnic division and intercommunal conflict (Chatterjee, 2024). The state must establish proactive frameworks for climate adaptation, sustainable urban planning, and bilateral resource-sharing policies to stop these ecological disruptions from turning into civil unrest. This will formalize ecological resilience as an essential component of India's internal security posture (Chatterjee, 2024; Lok Sabha, 2026).

Toward a Comprehensive National Power (CNP) Posture

India's strategic planners must deal with a persistent "stability-instability paradox," in which nuclear deterrence prevents full-scale conventional interstate warfare but encourages hostile neighbors to use asymmetric gray-zone proxy warfare and digital radicalization to challenge the state's sovereign writ (Pant & Bommakanti, 2019). To overcome this unconventional threat scenario, India's internal security threshold must be redefined in terms of a unified Comprehensive National Power (CNP) posture.

True state sovereignty in the twenty-first century necessitates a two-pronged strategy that combines military modernization with strong societal resilience against digital subversion. The state must expedite the shift to Integrated Theater Commands (ITCs) to overcome service parochialism in the military (Pant & Bommakanti, 2019). Cultivating tri-service jointness is required for deploying smaller, highly mobile Integrated Battle Groups (IBGs) capable of executing fast, punishing doctrines below the nuclear threshold, effectively calling the adversary's nuclear bluff.

At the same time, this hard-power upgrade must be accompanied by broad societal defense measures to defend the nation's secular fabric from digital polarization. The fast growth of smartphones and high-speed internet has made cyberspace a key battlefield for psychological warfare, with decentralized networks spreading coordinated disinformation and hate campaigns to spark community uprisings (Siyech, 2021). To counteract this, India must strengthen its regulatory and legal structures to ensure tight algorithmic supervision and

platform responsibility, and values-based, secular educational reforms to neutralize exclusivist narratives at the grassroots (Siyech, 2021).

Conclusion

An integrated strategy that links economic stability and national defense is necessary to protect India's territorial integrity and secular fabric in the twenty-first century (Behera, 2021). Finally, India's resilience is dependent on its ability to project administrative authority and promote economic inclusion at its fringes, transforming fragile frontiers into stable gateway regions of a rich, sovereign republic (Behera, 2021). By breaking down bureaucratic barriers, engineering economic inclusion at the edges, and neutralizing both digital and environmental threat multipliers, India may turn its domestic weaknesses into the stabilizing foundation of its Comprehensive National Power (Behera, 2021). Domestic stability is the ultimate and irreversible foundation for the country's international strategic autonomy and global power projection (Behera, 2021).

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