

Border Management and Regional Security: Challenges and Strategic Options for India in a Volatile Neighborhood

Dr. Upendra J. Dhagadhage*

Assistant Professor & Head, P.G. Dept. of Defence & Strategic Studies, G.T.P. College, Nandurbar, Maharashtra.

*Corresponding Author: upendra.dhagadhage@gmail.com

Abstract

In today's changing world, managing borders has become a top priority for India's national security. India shares long and difficult borders with several neighbour's, many of whom face political instability, terrorism, or influence from global powers. Weak border governance contributes to illegal migration, cross-border terrorism, smuggling, and military standoffs—all of which undermine regional stability. This paper examines border management as a multidimensional security issue rather than a purely military task. It analyzes India's border challenges across its western, northern, and eastern frontiers and evaluates existing institutional and policy responses. The paper argues that effective border management requires the integration of security, development, diplomacy, and technology. It suggests policy recommendations aimed at strengthening India's border security architecture while supporting regional stability and cooperative security.

Keywords: Border Management, Regional Security, India, Conflict Prevention, Peace Building, Internal Security.

Introduction

Borders are more than just lines on a map—they are among the most sensitive and contested features of international politics. Despite globalization, borders continue to shape security perceptions, political identities, and state behaviour. For India, borders are active security zones where military, political, social, and economic challenges converge.

India shares land borders of more than 15,000 kilometres with seven countries. These borders vary in terrain, population density, and political context. Some borders are settled and peaceful, while others remain disputed, heavily militarized, or porous. Border-related tensions have repeatedly escalated into crises, as seen in India's relations with Pakistan and China. At the same time, poorly managed borders facilitate terrorism, insurgency, smuggling, and illegal migration.

Therefore, border management has emerged as a core component of national and regional security. It directly affects conflict dynamics, internal stability, and diplomatic relations. This paper adopts a broader perspective, treating border management as a comprehensive security challenge linked to conflict prevention, peace building, and regional cooperation.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research strategy, utilizing a descriptive and analytical framework to examine the complexities of India's border management. The research relies primarily on secondary data sources, ensuring a comprehensive review of existing literature, official statutes, and contemporary security dynamics.

*Copyright © 2026 by Author's and Licensed by Inspira. This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work properly cited.

*A Special Issue for the papers accepted for publication in the International Multidisciplinary Conference on India's Foreign Policy and International Relations: A Future Roadmap (IFPIR-2026) (Hybrid Mode) (22-24 January 2026) Organized by Geo-Politics & Defence Study Research Cell, Faculty of Arts, Education and Social Sciences, Jai Narain Vyas University, Jodhpur, Rajasthan.

Data Collection

Data has been sourced from:

- **Government Reports:** Annual reports from the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), Government of India.
- **Academic Literature:** Seminal books, peer-reviewed journals, and strategic papers from think tanks to provide theoretical grounding.
- **Media and News Records:** Verified news reports from reputable sources are used to track recent incidents (2024–2025) and validate emerging trends.

Data Analysis

The study adopts a multidimensional approach, analysing border management through the lenses of military security, international relations, and socio-economic development. Furthermore, a case study method is applied in Section 5 to analyse specific recent events—such as the 2024 India-China patrol agreement and 2025 border infiltration statistics—to validate theoretical arguments with empirical evidence.

Conceptualizing Border Management as a Security Issue

Border management refers to the policies, institutions, and practices through which a state regulates the movement of people, goods, and activities across its borders. Traditionally, border management focused on territorial defence and sovereignty. In the contemporary security environment, its scope has expanded significantly.

Modern border management involves multiple dimensions: military defence, internal security, economic regulation, humanitarian concerns, and diplomatic engagement. Borders are sites where external threats intersect with internal vulnerabilities. As a result, weak border governance can transform localized problems into national security crises.

From a **conflict prevention** perspective, effective border management reduces opportunities for violence by limiting the cross-border movement of armed groups and weapons. From a **peace-building** perspective, regulated borders can function as bridges for trade and people-to-people contact, reducing mistrust. Thus, border management plays a dual role: it deters threats while enabling cooperation.

India's Western Border and the Security Challenge

India's western border with Pakistan is one of the most volatile in the world. It is shaped by unresolved territorial disputes, historical hostility, and persistent cross-border terrorism. The Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu and Kashmir remains heavily militarized.

Key challenges include infiltration by terrorist groups, smuggling of arms and narcotics, and the use of border populations for intelligence gathering. India has adopted a robust security posture, including fencing, electronic surveillance, and specialized forces. While these steps have reduced infiltration, they have not eliminated the threat entirely.

A key limitation is the broader political context; border management alone cannot resolve tensions rooted in political disputes. Moreover, excessive militarization can alienate local populations, creating new security risks. Therefore, strong border control must be complemented by diplomatic engagement and development initiatives.

The Northern Border and Strategic Competition with China

India's northern border with China presents a different set of challenges. Large sections of the boundary remain disputed and undefined on the ground. Harsh terrain, high altitude, and limited infrastructure complicate surveillance and logistics.

Recent standoffs have highlighted the risks associated with inadequate border clarity and differing perceptions of the Line of Actual Control (LAC). Border management here is closely linked to military preparedness and deterrence. India has accelerated infrastructure development to address past asymmetries. At the same time, crisis management mechanisms such as hotlines and border meetings play a vital role in preventing escalation, though trust remains limited.

Eastern Borders and Internal Security Dynamics

India's eastern borders with Bangladesh and Myanmar present challenges related to migration, insurgency, and transnational crime. These borders are relatively porous due to terrain and dense population settlements.

- **Bangladesh:** Illegal migration and cross-border movement of insurgent groups have historically affected internal security. However, improved coordination through joint patrols and intelligence sharing has contributed to stability.
- **Myanmar:** The border remains complex due to political instability within Myanmar. Spillover effects pose risks for India's internal security.

In these regions, border management must balance security concerns with humanitarian obligations and local livelihoods. Heavy-handed measures risk alienating border communities whose cooperation is essential for effective governance.

Case Studies of Border Security Challenges (2024-2025)

• Indo-Pakistan Border Drone and Smuggling Threats

In 2025, the Indian Defence Ministry reported 791 drone incursions along the western border, indicating a significant rise in unmanned aerial system-based threats linked to smuggling and infiltration. The BSF countered these with electronic spoofers and jammers [9]. In a related incident, police and BSF units in Sriganganagar district intercepted a drone-delivered heroin consignment valued at several crores. The operation led to the arrest of three suspects, illustrating how cross-border smuggling has evolved technologically [10].

• Indo-Bangladesh Border Infiltration

According to government data presented in the Lok Sabha, the Indo-Bangladesh border recorded 1,104 infiltration attempts between January and November 2025, along with over 2,500 arrests. This was the highest among all Indian land frontiers [8]. Authorities imposed night curfews along the West Garo Hills border region to curb illegal movement, highlighting ongoing vulnerabilities in porous sectors.

• Illegal Migration Enforcement

Urban police enforcement in Pune led to the deportation of 104 foreign nationals in 2025, of whom 81 were Bangladeshi nationals identified as illegal migrants [11]. While necessary for security, these actions have drawn criticism on human rights grounds, illustrating the tension between security imperatives and legal rights protection.

• India-Myanmar Border Management

India continues to tighten movement rules along its border with Myanmar, including reducing the free movement regime and introducing QR code-enabled border passes. Notable initiatives included the biometric mapping of 42,000 Myanmar nationals to map cross-border movement [12].

• India-China Border Patrol Agreement (2024)

A significant diplomatic development occurred in October 2024 with the India-China Border Patrol Agreement. The agreement restored patrolling norms to pre-2020 levels and established mechanisms for coordinated patrols and dispute de-escalation [7]. This illustrates how diplomatic measures can stabilize volatile frontier zones.

Institutional Framework for Border Management

India's border management architecture involves multiple agencies: the armed forces, central armed police forces, intelligence agencies, and civil administration. While specialization improves operational effectiveness, it creates coordination challenges.

Technological integration has improved surveillance through sensors, drones, and satellite imagery. However, technology cannot substitute for human intelligence. Institutional reform is necessary to improve coordination, reduce duplication, and ensure border management functions as a unified national mission.

Border Management and Regional Stability

Border tensions often spill over into broader regional instability. Conversely, stable borders contribute to predictability and cooperation. India's experience shows that effective border management can serve as a foundation for regional peace, as seen in the improved cooperation with Bangladesh. In contrast, unresolved disputes with Pakistan and China continue to generate crises, underscoring the link between border governance and regional security architecture.

The Challenges We Face

Even though we have made progress, the road ahead is bumpy. Here are the main hurdles:

- **Politics Gets in the Way:** Often, political disputes stop us from working with our neighbors. If the political will isn't there, cooperation on the ground fails.
- **Tough Terrain and Money:** The land itself is an enemy. Mountains and jungles make it hard to build roads. We also struggle with limited budgets and manpower in these harsh areas.
- **Too Many Bosses:** We have many agencies—the Army, BSF, local police, and spies. Sometimes their jobs overlap. This creates confusion and slows things down.
- **Ignoring the Locals:** This is a big mistake. We often leave border communities out of security planning. If they feel alienated, we lose their trust. Without their help, we lose our best source of local intelligence.
- **New Kinds of Threats:** It's not just about guns anymore. Climate change is altering the terrain. Pandemics change how we manage movement. These are new problems that old rules can't fix.

Policy Recommendations

To fix these issues, India needs a fresh strategy. It should focus on both safety and peace.

- **One Master Plan (Integrated Doctrine):** We need a single rulebook. It must link everything together: military power, internal police work, economic development, and diplomacy. Everyone should read from the same page.
- **Fix the Chain of Command:** We must strengthen how agencies work together. Intelligence sharing needs to be seamless. If the Army knows something, the police should know it too.
- **Smart Tech & Human Spies:** Build better infrastructure, but do it smartly. Invest in technology like drones and sensors. But remember, machines can't replace people. We must prioritize human intelligence.
- **Talk to Neighbors:** We need to lower the heat. Expand "hotlines" and crisis communication with our neighbors. Talking prevents small misunderstandings from turning into big wars.
- **Make Locals Partners:** The border people are our assets. Involve them in security. Give them development projects. If they feel like stakeholders, they will protect the border better than any fence.

Conclusion

To sum it up, managing borders is the central piece of India's security puzzle. It is not just a side task; it is the heart of our national safety. A poorly managed border is a breeding ground for trouble. It fuels conflict, fear, and mistrust. But a well-managed border does the opposite. It prevents wars and builds peace. It turns a dividing line into a bridge for cooperation. India has a unique challenge. We have deserts, mountains, and jungles. One rule cannot fit all borders. We need a flexible approach that fits each specific terrain.

Ultimately, strengthening our borders does two things. First, it keeps India safe from enemies. Second, it shows the world that India is a responsible power capable of maintaining order in a tough neighborhood. We must move from just "guarding territory" to "managing the future."

References

1. Bajpai, K. P., & Pant, H. V. (Eds.). (2013). *India's National Security: A Reader*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
2. Ministry of Defence, Government of India. (2024). *Annual Report 2023–24*. New Delhi.
3. Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India. (2024). *Annual Report 2023–24*. New Delhi.

4. Tellis, A. J. (2017, September 14). India's Strategic Choices: China and the Balance of Power in Asia. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
5. United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT). (2018). Compendium of Good Practices in the Area of Border Security and Management in the Context of Counterterrorism. New York: United Nations.
6. Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India. (n.d.). Border Management Division. Retrieved from <https://www.mha.gov.in>
7. Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. (2024, October 21). Press Statement on Patrolling Arrangements along the Line of Actual Control in India-China Border Areas. New Delhi.
8. Indo-Bangladesh infiltration and arrests, government data.
9. [Indo-Bangladesh border records highest infiltration cases in 2025: Govt data | India News - The Times of India](#)
10. Drone incursions along western border, 2025. [791 drone incursions in 2025: Defense ministry cites Pakistan-backed infiltration attempts; spoofers, jammers counter threat | India News - The Times of India](#)
11. Heroin smuggling foiled by BSF in 2026.
12. [Sriganganagar cops seize heroin worth 20cr dropped by Pak drone, 3 arrested | Jaipur News - The Times of India](#)
13. Pune illegal migrant deportations, 2025.
14. [Pune cops deport 104 foreigners, 81 of them Bangladeshi | Pune News - The Times of India](#)
15. Free Movement Regime biometric mapping, 2025.
16. [Free Movement Regime helps map 42,000 Myanmar nationals since Dec: Biren Singh - The Economic Times](#)
17. Movement restrictions along Indo-Myanmar border, 2024.
18. [New Limits on Movement Upend Lives, Long-Held Traditions on India-Myanmar Border - The Wire.](#)

