

EVOLVING NATIONAL SECURITY CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES: A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS

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Abstract: Within the discourse of Indian public dialogue, the concept of "national security" is frequently intertwined with the defense of borders, a viewpoint conspicuous in recent electoral campaigns. Despite the availability of public information, there has been a limited analysis of structures designed to tackle national security challenges. This article delves into India's shifting governmental stance on national security, the establishment of pertinent structures, and assesses their efficacy. It identifies ongoing challenges and proposes measures to fortify India's national security framework. The article concentrates on six research areas, encompassing the state's perspective on the use of force, the repercussions of recent wars, future warfare dynamics, strategic partnerships, the organization of armed forces, and defense procurements. As India contends with escalating global influence, the imperative for integrated security measures becomes evident.

Confronting a more assertive China and global turbulence stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic, India adopted a measured military balancing strategy in 2020. The concept of "zone balancing" elucidates India's strategic realignment, particularly its heightened involvement in the Quad—an alliance involving the US, Australia, Japan, and India. This article explicates the constraints and strategic rationale behind the Quad, underscoring the challenges and resource-intensive nature of military balancing. India's encounter with China underscores the complexities of balancing power against a significantly superior force. In the Indo-Pacific region, India has transitioned to zone balancing since 2020, integrating military balancing with intensified Quad collaboration. Despite its expanded agenda, the Quad is unlikely to evolve into a comprehensive military alliance and may not effectively deter certain forms of aggression.

Keyword: India, national security, geopolitical landscape, armed forces, strategic partnerships, defense acquisitions, military balancing, zone balancing, Quad, Indo-Pacific, China, COVID-19 pandemic, global instability, assertive strategy, power shift, strategic reasoning.

1.0 Introduction:

In the context of India's public discourse, the term "national security" is frequently equated with the defence of its national borders, as evident in recent election campaign rhetoric. Despite ample information being publicly available, there has been limited attention and analysis of the role and performance of structures designed to address national security challenges. This article delves into the evolution of India's governmental perspective on national security challenges, the establishment of structures to address them, and evaluates their effectiveness. It also identifies ongoing and emerging challenges and suggests ways to further strengthen India's national security architecture. India has a difficult geopolitical landscape with bordering governments possessing significant military might that are undergoing fast modernization. This article looks at India's prospects, obstacles, and limitations as it works to strengthen its armed forces to counter a variety of threats. It looks at six main research areas. It begins by examining the Indian state's perspective on the use of force. Secondly, it evaluates how recent wars have affected Indian thought. Thirdly, it looks at India's viewpoint about the nature of warfare in the future. Fourth, it talks about India's judgements on strategic partners and alliances to deal with changing conflict dynamics. Fifth, it looks at how India plans to organise its armed forces to deal with evolving conflict trends. Lastly, it examines how these considerations may affect defence acquisitions. India is a rising nation that struggles with these issues, and its policies are still being developed. It is imperative that the Indian security domain be integrated, including interservice agreements, procurement procedures, and more comprehensive strategic planning.

When a state confronts a rising great power rival, it must decide how to balance the power shift. However, traditional balancing options may seem too costly or provocative. India, in the wake of a more assertive China and an unstable global system due to the COVID-19 pandemic, has opted for a relatively modest military balancing strategy in 2020. The idea of "zone balancing" is presented in this article to explain India's strategic shift beyond

2020, especially its greater participation in the Quad, a multilateral alliance made up of the US, Australia, Japan, and India. Zone balance foretells some of the Quad's limits and successfully explains the Quad's strategic reasoning. Military balance is a dangerous and resource-intensive strategy. A state may think about "internal" balancing—investing more in national defense—or "external" balancing—forming security agreements with other states—when facing an aggressive and quickly expanding big power like China. These choices, however, could not be feasible if the rising power is far more powerful than the balancing state. India's case with China exemplifies this situation. As China modernizes its military and presses territorial claims, India has grappled with how to balance this without overburdening its resources, provoking China, or neglecting other strategic challenges.

In the Indo-Pacific region, India has notably embraced zone balancing since 2020. Previously, India pursued a more cautious "evasive balancing" strategy aimed at softening its stance against China through diplomatic reassurance. However, this approach failed to deter China's aggression in Ladakh in May 2020, leading to a shift in India's approach. India now combines a patchy approach to hard military balancing with a greater willingness to deepen cooperation in the Quad. This engagement is primarily driven by a strategy of zone balancing, explaining the Quad's expanded agenda in offering support to regional states. Nonetheless, the Quad is unlikely to become a full-fledged military alliance under current conditions and cannot effectively deter certain forms of aggression.

2.0 Indian Strategy and Theory of Balancing

International Relations (IR) theory is based on basic ideas about the distribution of power and the balancing behaviours of individual nations. States are likely to amass power in anarchic international systems as a reaction to superpowers, either individually or collectively. More precisely, addressing emerging threats—whose nature is a mix of force and intent—is referred to as balancing. In IR scholarship, balancing conduct takes many different shapes.

The two most well-known theories are external balancing, which entails uniting the might of several states against an adversary or damaging the rival's alliances, and internal balancing, which entails a state strengthening its economic and military might. These ideas are narrowly characterised as creating legally binding treaty alliances or increasing defence spending overall. In actuality, though, balance may be nuanced and situation-specific. Even if overall defence budget or military strength remain unchanged, internal balancing may include obtaining specialised military capabilities pertinent to the state's strategic context or changing force posture against a specific opponent. Forming formal alliances is not the only means of achieving external balancing; joint operational planning and tactical interoperability are also important. According to this logic, external balancing calls for a realistic expectation of a security commitment, while internal balancing must lead to a net gain in military power.

Beyond these two concepts, there is balancing. In order to oppose a dominating power, scholars have coined the term "soft balancing" to refer to non-military measures including diplomacy, participation in international organisations, and economic statecraft. Critics contend that this idea is excessively wide and basically refers to a state's foreign policy as opposed to particular steps taken to counter a security adversary. Some regimes use wedge or negative balancing tactics to subvert an enemy or their coalition directly.

Scholarship has also explored The mechanism of uniting global might against a shared foe. For example, "indirect balancing" describes circumstances in which smaller states use a big power's military might that is generally benign to fend off a great power that is more dangerous. Institutional balance refers to the strategy used by certain smaller governments to try and use international organizations to consolidate power. In order to preserve smaller nations' appearance of policy independence, "covert balancing" entails a great power establishing security relationships with smaller states while disguising these agreements as less aggressive military cooperation.

Balancing states may adopt hedging strategies, maintaining a tolerable level of rivalry by combining rigorous balancing measures with conciliation and compromises. India serves as an example. In the past, India has used a strategy known as "evasive balancing," which entailed balancing actions combined with diplomatic concessions meant to reassure China that India did not have hostile intentions. Five compromises were made as part of the evasive balancing strategy, including a declared position opposing China's containment and membership in international organisations like BRICS. Nevertheless, China's invasion in Ladakh in 2020 was not deterred by this approach. India has renounced at least four of these concessions in retaliation, including strengthening ties inside the Quad framework.

India has long attempted to counterbalance China in a number of ways, and it has stepped up its attempts to do so both within and externally since the Ladakh conflict. Internally, India has continued to maintain a sizable and continuous soldier presence along the China border, accelerated the creation of permanent military facilities, and reallocated one of its army strike corps from its previous role against Pakistan to one that is focused on China.

Nevertheless, India's attempts at internal balance are not without restrictions. Its defence budget is almost unchanged, while its economy grows somewhat. While India has not sought a significant military development as

some other nations have, it may gradually increase specific capabilities pertaining to China. Unaffected by the events of 2020, defence expenditures as a proportion of GDP and government spending has been steadily declining over the last 10 years. India has had to reduce the amount of resources allocated to various military forces due to resource shortages, and the "Atmanirbharta" or self-reliance strategy may lead to equipment quality compromises. Although the foundation has been laid for more domestic innovation and private sector participation in defence acquisition, this is still a long-term and uncertain future.

Internationally, India has increased strategic collaboration with chosen capable partners, including the United States, Japan, Australia, and France. India has negotiated reciprocal agreements with these countries to share logistics, putting an end to its previous hesitation. Still, India prefers to retain an internal balancing strategy and avoids any suggestion of external military obligations, especially in the South China Sea. Developing India's own military capabilities is the main objective of the country's foreign defence cooperation, not uniting global force against China. Even in the event that such accords were possible, New Delhi is still hesitant to make political commitments or build official alliances overseas.

3.0 The Idea and History of Zone Balancing

Influencing the balance of power between the balancer and its enemy is the main goal of most military balancing strategies, whether they be indirect, covert, harsh, or soft. Usually, the objective is to achieve security by thwarting attack or building up enough strength to win a battle. When additional governments participate, they are frequently seen as allies in the same geopolitical project, giving one side of the dyad varied degrees of political clout and influence. It's crucial to remember that balance doesn't always follow a dyadic pattern.

Zone balancing, on the other hand, seeks to affect the larger global competitive arena in which the balancer and its adversary participate. By increasing the capacity and resilience of third-party states, zone balancing aims to lessen the rival's ability to exert pressure on them. It deviates from conventional dyadic balancing, but it is still a balancing tactic because its goal is to restrict the rival's potential for global power and influence. Zone balancing places more emphasis on the power of third-party regional states than it does on the balancer's or the rival's might. Zone balancing gives the balancer less direct control on the dyadic balance of power since its effectiveness is dependent on the decisions and might of the regional governments involved. Any political influence the balancer may unintentionally acquire in the target state is incidental to the main goal of zone balancing, which is to help the target state resist pressure. Zone balancing functions differently from external balancing in that it places no priority on influence, political commitment, or formal alignment.

Zone balancing works best when it attends to the unique strategic requirements of the target state, making it less susceptible to any predatory impact. The ability of the competing state to exert pressure on the target state is reduced with every rise in its sovereign capacity. In this way, zone balancing is theoretically similar to deterrence by denial, which aims to prevent violence by strengthening the ability to withstand it. As such, zone balancing may be less suitable to repel overt military threats to the target's territory, but it is most successful in lowering the possibility of coercion or subversion against the third-party state. Not all types of international aid fit within the zone balance category; others may focus more on achieving humanitarian goals or increasing influence with the target. Zone balancing only comes into play when the assistance that the balancer provides to the target state is a purposeful reaction to a rival, particularly one that is viewed as expansionary or determined to exert pressure on the target state. Non-military instruments of power, such as diplomacy and economic statecraft, can be used to carry out zone balancing as long as they are essential to the balancer's security plan. This is especially important in the Indo-Pacific region where, in the wake of the epidemic, national security plans are beginning to emphasise public health, supply-chain resilience, economic self-reliance, and other unconventional security measures. Zone balancing is unique in that it targets the third-party state rather than the adversary, in contrast to internal or external balancing or even more recent ideas like "soft" balancing.

States may choose zone balance based on the Indian example for a number of reasons. They might not have the financial means or the political will to engage in more costly internal or external balancing measures. Alternatively, they can favour measures that pose less of a direct threat to the opponent since they don't want to start an expensive or unproductive security conundrum. An additional explanation would be the necessity of mitigating indirect strategic risks, such as coercion and subversive political or economic influence, instead than focusing on direct military threats to their territory. For all the reasons mentioned above, zone balancing is more likely to be viewed by states as an adjunct to internal and external balancing than as a replacement in the case of India.

In the past, American zone balance was advantageous to India. In an effort to balance communist China, the United States gave India military and economic support in the late 1950s. This was motivated by worries about India's possible political and economic fragility rather than the expectation of a direct military danger from China, as was shown in the 1962 conflict. India's resistance against communist influence was to be strengthened, and the United

States supported India's status as an autonomous Asian democracy. The fact that this support was given without the expectation of a strategic trade-off underscores the goal of enhancing India's ability and adaptability.

As seen by the Belt and Road Initiative, India's zone-balancing policy now targets regional governments that may otherwise be lured into Beijing's sphere of influence by threats or rewards. Policies like Act East, Neighbourhood First, and Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR), which aim to improve the ability and resilience of target states, show India's efforts in zone balancing. With these measures, India hopes to defend its interests abroad and vie for global sway in a multipolar world. India's strategy is driven by the need to address the risk of Chinese coercion and to strengthen the target states in response to an expansionist rival. While zone balancing can involve non-military tools like diplomacy and economic statecraft, they are part of the broader security strategy. Notably, zone balancing doesn't attempt to shape the behavior of the rival; instead, it focuses on enhancing the third-party state's capacity.

4.0 The Strategic Adjustment of India

India changed its strategic approach, going into effect in 2020, in reaction to what it saw as a suddenly riskier international climate. China's advances into Ladakh over the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and the COVID-19 outbreak occurred at the same time, undermining India's faith in the political and institutional barriers preserving regional stability. As a result, India mounted a thorough but a little erratic response. In this section, we contend that although the simultaneous crises affected India's strategic perception, they had little effect on conventional military balancing efforts.

For a number of years, tensions have been rising along the border between China and India. Chinese intrusions into the LAC have been increasing in regularity and intensity, leading to many standoffs, including Chumar in 2014, Demchok in 2016, and Depsang in 2013. The Doklam standoff in 2017—during which Indian military moved in to stop Chinese road development in territory that Bhutan claims—sent a strong message to India about the growing strategic competition between the two countries. India thought it could still employ an evasive balancing tactic, nevertheless. In an effort to improve bilateral relations and restore balance in their relationship following the Doklam crisis, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi had a number of one-on-one summits in 2018 and 2019. Crucially, unlike what it believed the 2020 crises to be, India did not see Doklam as a permanent break in the bilateral relationship or as a sign of a worldwide systemic illness.

5.0 Security in the context of the informal Quad

The Quad's agenda does not centre on security, but it also does not ignore it. With a strong commitment to concepts like freedom of passage and maritime security, a portion of the Quad's agenda is still devoted to regional security issues, especially at the level of foreign ministers. They have also looked at certain security-related initiatives that involve the four member nations, such as terrorist tabletop drills. Many of the Quad's efforts, especially those pertaining to technology, space, and cybersecurity, have a security component by nature, even at the summit level. These programmes frequently contribute to strengthening national security of individual members, expanding their capacity for cooperation, and striking a balance between domestic and foreign security concerns.

The Quad leaders' security-focused measures are in line with the idea of "zone balancing." The Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA), a collaborative maritime surveillance initiative, and a framework for disaster relief and humanitarian aid have been committed to by the members. Understanding the need of quick and precise situational awareness in preventing illegal actions at sea, IPMDA seeks to collect, process, and disseminate information concerning crucial maritime regions around the region. The objective of the Quad is to enhance the capacity of neighbouring governments to safeguard their security and economic interests while lowering the likelihood of China surreptitiously using their resources by arming them with this maritime domain knowledge.

6.0 Conclusion

The Quad, an alliance made up of the US, Japan, India, and Australia, has adopted a "zone balancing" tactic at its summit gatherings. This strategy adheres closely to the zone balance theory, which protects regional stability. It should be highlighted, nevertheless, that neither the Quad members nor the other states in the region are completely protected against assault by this policy. The Quad, for example, has no intention of stopping China from using force against Taiwan. Zone balance can facilitate some military preparations, but it works best when the military might and political will of the area powers are committed to taking decisive action.

The essay underlines that developing military might is still necessary for maintaining national security and discouraging military aggression, and that zone balance does not replace internal or external balancing. States usually use a mix of these balancing techniques, zone balancing serving as an addition to other balancing methods. The Quad's activities encompass formal and informal cooperation, including military agreements among members, which can create the "habits of cooperation" and strengthen collective responses to regional security challenges.

However, it is acknowledged that the Quad's actions may trigger a security dilemma and prompt China to counter its initiatives, even if not feeling directly threatened.

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