

Security Challenges and Their Management in Border Areas

► 10.1 Challenges of Border Security

Borders are the visible symbols of a country's sovereignty, unity and integrity. Borders are seen as a symbol of national pride. There are three distinct sets of borders at the international level:

- Land borders
- Maritime boundaries
- Airspace

Border management in the present world order is a complex proposition. The transgressor is always on the lookout for soft gaps on land, along the coast or if need be, from the air. The 1995 Purulia incident has already demonstrated our vulnerability from the air. It is therefore necessary to adopt a holistic approach to border management.

Managing borders is difficult for several reasons. Some of our maritime boundaries are still unsettled. Land borders are not fully demarcated. Sections of our borders are based on artificial boundaries and not natural features.

► | 10.2 | India's Land Boundaries with Her Immediate Neighbours

India shares approx. 15,000 kilometres of boundary with her immediate neighbours, namely Pakistan (3,323 km), China (3,488 km), Nepal (1,751 km), Bhutan (699 km), Myanmar (1,643 km) and Bangladesh (4,096 km). India's boundary with each of her neighbours runs through a variety of ecological milieus, each with its own unique setting and associated problems. For example, the India-Pakistan border areas are spread across extreme climatic conditions, given that the boundary runs from the hot Rann of Kutch to Thar Desert in Rajasthan to the cold Himalayas in Jammu and Kashmir. Similarly, in the north, the India-China boundary runs along one of the loftiest mountain ranges covered with snow all through the year. The India-Myanmar boundary is draped with lush tropical forests with myriad undergrowths. The Indo-Bangladesh boundary has to cope with the ever-shifting riverbeds in the region. These diverse ecological and climatic conditions create immense hurdles for extending the security and administrative reach in these border areas. Coupled with this, the man-made nature of these boundaries also throws up serious issues, such as border disputes, porous borders, continuance of trans-border ethnic and social ties, etc. Together, they pose a serious challenge to the effective management of the borders. Let's examine each of our borders with our neighbouring countries.

► 10.2.1 Indo-Pakistan Border

The India-Pakistan boundary is categorised under three different heads:

- *Radcliff line*: This is 2,308 km long, stretches from Gujarat to parts of Jammu district in Jammu and Kashmir.
- *Line of Control (LoC)*: This line is 776 km long and runs along the districts of Jammu (some parts), Rajouri, Poonch, Baramulla, Kupwara, Kargil and some portions of Leh.
- *Actual Ground Position Line (AGPL)*: This is 110 km long and extends from NJ 9842 to Indira Col in the North.

The LoC and the AGPL have seen constant tensions with border skirmishes and firing between the armies, and border security forces constantly guarding boundaries of both the countries. The LoC has been vulnerable to constant infiltration by foreign terrorists, Kashmiri separatists and Pakistani army regulars for long.

Like the Bangladesh boundary, the India-Pakistan boundary also does not follow any geographical barrier. It runs through diverse terrain like deserts, marshes, plains and snow clad mountains, and winds its way through villages, houses and agricultural lands, making it extremely porous. Porosity of this border has facilitated various illegal activities, such as smuggling, drugs and arms trafficking, and infiltration. Heroin and fake Indian currency are the two predominant items of smuggling along this border. Other items include saffron, textiles and mercury, which are smuggled from Pakistan. The villagers

adjacent to the border are alleged to be involved in smuggling in a big way. Money laundering is also quite rampant along the border. A large scale hawala network is flourishing in Punjab, especially in Ludhiana. In addition, the border population has also been subjected to hostile propaganda by Pakistan, designed to mislead and sway their loyalties. The Sir Creek area, due to its peculiar terrain, makes the movement of border guarding forces very difficult and thus provides scope for illegal fishing in the creeks.

► 10.2.2 Indo-China Border

The entire boundary is disputed and is known as 'McMahon Line'. As regards border management, the India-China border throws up only a few challenges. There is hardly any circulation of people or goods between the two countries through the border. The Himalayan range which lies astride the boundary has prevented any large scale trans-border interactions between people residing on either side of the border.

► 10.2.3 Indo-Bangladesh Border

India shares the longest border (4,096 km) with Bangladesh. Bangladesh borders the Indian states of West Bengal in the west and north, Assam and Meghalaya in the north-east, and Tripura and Mizoram in the east. The boundary was drawn by 'Bengal Boundary Commission'. Instead of following natural barriers, it meanders through villages, agricultural lands and rivers, rendering the border extremely porous with many disputed pockets. Un-demarcated stretches, existence of enclaves (chhit-mohols), and adverse possessions are cause of constant friction between the border guarding forces of India and Bangladesh.

In 1974, three years after the liberation of Bangladesh, the then prime ministers of India and Bangladesh, Indira Gandhi and Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rahman, inked an agreement to settle the land boundary issue. The Indira-Mujib Agreement laid down the methods for demarcating various disputed stretches of the India-Bangladesh boundary. Under the agreement, India retained the southern half of enclaves and Bangladesh retained the other half.

The Enclave bill pending in Parliament needs to be discussed in detail. At present, there are 111 Indian enclaves in Bangladesh and 51 Bangladeshi enclaves in India. Since India does not have access to these enclaves, it has not been possible to establish administrative set-up to provide facilities like police stations, courts, schools, roads, hospitals, banks, markets, etc. for the residents.

A major consequence of the porous border is the ease with which it is crossed illegally. The trend of illegal migration from Bangladesh into India has continued since independence. Various 'push' factors, such as poverty, political upheavals, religious persecution, demographic pressures and environmental crises, and 'pull' factors, such as availability of land, employment opportunities, medical care and education, have contributed to the large-scale influx of Bangladeshis into India. The porosity of the border also allows Indian insurgents to cross over to Bangladesh and other neighbouring countries for asylum.

Porous border, lack of economic opportunities, poverty and underdevelopment, attitude of the people towards petty crimes, laxity in vigilance, alleged nexus between criminals and police and border guarding forces all contribute to the escalating trans-border crimes.

Smuggling of cattle has become a serious concern. Truckloads of cattle from Haryana, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh are shipped to the India-Bangladesh border everyday, ostensibly for grazing purposes. From here, these cattle are smuggled into Bangladesh. The Border Security Force (BSF) regularly seizes cattle. Along with cattle, smuggling of arms and other essential items, such as sugar, salt and diesel, human and narcotics trafficking, counterfeit Indian currency, kidnapping, and thefts are quite common along this border.

► 10.2.4 Indo-Nepal Border

India and Nepal have shared an open border (1,700 Km) since 1950 under the 'Treaty of Peace and Friendship'. There are many points of dispute, mostly a result of the constantly shifting courses of the turbulent Himalayan Rivers (especially Kalapani and Susta). The submergence, destruction and removal of border pillars and encroachment into no-man's land by people from either side add to the problem. Allegations of excesses, such as intimidation and forcible grabbing of land by either side along the disputed border, also surface from time to time. The disputed border has created unease not only between the two countries but also among their local populations. Unrestricted migration over the years has produced territorial pockets dominated by people originating from the other country.

An open border allows easy access to terrorists and insurgents. In the late 1980s, Sikh and Kashmiri terrorists sneaked into India via Nepal. ULFA, NDBF and KLO have misused the open border in the past. Earlier, reportedly, Maoists often escaped into India when pursued by Nepalese security agencies. Apart from insurgents and terrorists, many hard-core criminals pursued by Indian and Nepalese security forces escape across the open border. ISI, LeT and other terrorist organisations are continuously using Nepal as a transit route and are also operating from soil of Nepal. They are taking advantage of the open and porous border.

► 10.2.5 Indo-Myanmar Border

The boundary was demarcated in 1967 under an agreement signed by both countries. However, numerous earlier treaties and acts had affected the alignment of portions of the boundary and formed much of the basis of the new agreement.

The location of the Indo-Myanmar border throws up many challenges for its effective management. Though the boundary is properly demarcated, there are a few disputed pockets. The rugged terrain makes movement and overall development of the area difficult. The internal dynamics of the region in terms of clan loyalties of the tribal people, inter-tribal clashes, insurgency and trans-border ethnic ties also adversely affect the security of the border areas. There

is practically no physical barrier along the border either in the form of fences or border outposts and roads to ensure strict vigil. Close ethnic ties among the tribes, such as Nagas, Kukis, Chin, etc., who live astride the border, help insurgents in finding safe haven in Myanmar.

The location of the boundary at the edge of the 'golden triangle' facilitates unrestricted illegal inflow of drugs into India. The smuggling of arms and ammunition, precious stones and Chinese made consumer items finds its way into India illegally. Red Sanders, ATS (amphetaminic type stimulant), grocery items, bicycle parts, etc. are smuggled from India. Human trafficking is also rampant along the border. The provision of allowing the tribal communities of both countries to travel up to 16 km across the border without any passport or visa called 'Free Movement Regime' has also contributed to increased smuggling in the region.

► 10.2.6 Indo-Bhutan Border

The boundary is demarcated except along the tri-junction with China, where the boundary is open. The border was peaceful till Indian insurgent groups such as KLO, ULFA and NDBF established camps in the southern districts of Bhutan though these were flushed out later. Taking advantage of the open border, these insurgents would sneak into Bhutan after carrying out extortions, killings and bomb blasts. Smuggling and trafficking are also rampant along the border. Chinese made goods, Bhutanese cannabis, liquor and forest products are major items smuggled into India. Livestock, grocery items and fruits are smuggled to Bhutan.

► 10.3 Coastal Security and Island Territories

Water channels, most of which are interconnected and run deep inside the land, render the coastline porous and hence vulnerable to cross-border infiltration, smuggling and arms and drugs trafficking. Existence of mangrove forests, sandbars and uninhabited islands along the coast provide ideal hideaways for infiltrators and criminals. In recent years, the use of sea by terrorists to carry out attacks, as was seen during the 1993 Mumbai serial blasts and the November 2008 attack on Mumbai, have also added a new dimension to the vulnerability of the coastline.

The matter is made worse by the existence of several high value targets such as oil refineries, atomic power plants, space stations, ports and naval bases along the coastline. There is growing worry about non-conventional threats as well as terrorist attacks, sabotage, etc., on such targets which could potentially inflict massive damage.

Straying of both Indian and Pakistani fishermen into each other's territorial waters and their subsequent arrests has also been a perennial source of concern. It is feared that at least some of the arrested fishermen could be recruited by Pakistan's Inter Service Intelligence (ISI) and used as agents against India and their boats could be used to sneak in arms, explosives and operatives into India.

Since these boats have Indian make and registration number, they could easily evade attempts by Indian security agencies to track them. This is what

seems to have happened when the Coast Guard let off the 'Kuber', the vessel in which the terrorists travelled in November 2008.

Strategic location of the island territories, i.e. their proximity to the important Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOC) and Southeast Asian and African countries, coupled with considerable distance from the mainland add to their vulnerability. In recent years, intelligence reports have suggested that many uninhabited islands are being misused by terrorist groups and criminal gangs as transit points for smuggling arms and narcotics. Internal disturbances in India's neighbouring littoral countries also make the security scenario of the island territories extremely grim. The Andaman and Nicobar islands have seen large scale influx of illegal migrants from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka (Tamils), Myanmar, Thailand and Indonesia. Besides, the Indian Ocean has been a theatre of intense rivalries between great powers, mostly extra-regional powers.

➤ **10.4 Challenges to Managing Our Borders**

The challenges include:

- Confronting the challenges to the unity and integrity of India
- Upholding our sovereignty
- Defending our territorial jurisdiction
- Preventing infiltration and illegal movement across the border
- Inculcating a sense of safety and freedom among people living in border areas
- Checking trafficking of all kinds (arms, humans, drugs)
- Controlling the trafficking in Fake Currency Indian Notes (FCIN)
- Prevention of smuggling of goods like cattle, gold etc

➤ **10.5 Techniques of Effective Border Management**

The following techniques would help in managing and securing the borders:

- Building of fences and erecting floodlights
- Creating effective Border outposts (BoP)
- Step-up infrastructure development, like roads
- Effective patrolling and building of observation post towers
- Building of Naka/machan
- Equipping the security forces with night vision technologies
- Installation of CCTV and thermal imaging equipment

➤ **10.6 The Kargil Review Committee Report and its Observations on Border Management**

The concept of border management assumed greater importance in the government lexicon only in the wake of the Kargil conflict of 1999, and the subsequent report submitted by the Kargil Review Committee. Based on the

recommendations of the Review Committee, the Government of India, in April 2001, set up a 'task force' on border management under the chairmanship of Madhav Godbole. This task force was part of a Group of Ministers (GoM) constituted to review the national security system as a whole and the recommendations of the Kargil Review Committee in particular. The task force's objective was to 'consider measures for border management and, in particular, to consider the recommendations of the Kargil Review Committee in this regard and formulate specific proposals for the GoM's consideration'.

The report observed that the country's borders cannot be effectively managed because of certain inherent problems, such as their disputed nature, artificiality and porosity, which according to it give rise to multiple problems like illegal migration, smuggling, drugs trafficking, and trans-border movement of insurgents. In addition, the multiplicity of forces employed to guard the same border, their repeated withdrawal from the borders for other duties, the lack of adequate infrastructure along the border, etc., prevent them from efficiently guarding the border. To address these vital issues the GoM recommended:

- Concerted efforts are to be made to settle border disputes and demarcate the borders at the earliest opportunity
- 'Department of Border Management' be created
- One border guarding force should be deployed on one border and it should not be distracted from its principal task and deployed for other internal security duties
- Establishment of a marine police force, strengthening of Coast Guard and setting up of an apex institution for coordinating various maritime issues
- Accelerated development of infrastructure along the border, especially to wean away the border population from illegal activities

India's neighbourhood is in turmoil. Several of India's neighbours are undergoing political and economic instability. India also has continuing border disputes with several of her neighbours. Uncertain borders not only raise bilateral tensions but also facilitate cross-border infiltration, illegal migration, smuggling and crime. Of these, illegal migration has emerged as one of the major national security challenges.

The Group of Ministers undertook a thorough review of border management issues and made several recommendations in 2001. Many of these recommendations are being implemented. One of the major recommendations was the setting up of a separate Department of Border Management within the Ministry of Home Affairs. This has been done. Yet, other major recommendations like the early settlement of our maritime borders and the demarcation of land boundaries has not yet been fully implemented. The GoM had strongly recommended the principle of 'one border one force' for better accountability. It emphasised the imperative of not deploying the border guarding forces for law and order duties and counter insurgencies. It made some recommendations specific to better management of India-Pakistan, India-Nepal and other borders. It lamented the neglect of maritime borders and island territories and made recommendations to strengthen coast guard and police. As a result of

these recommendations, border management has got more attention but the Mumbai terrorist attacks have once again shown that a lot more needs to be done to improve border management.

In the last two years, India has built several thousand kilometres of fences on India-Bangladesh and India-Pakistan borders. Border guarding forces have been augmented. Several thousand crores of rupees have been spent on their modernisation and expansion. The Government has announced a policy of setting up 13 modern integrated check posts to improve border management. Technology will play a major role in improving border management. We may have to learn how other large countries manage their borders.

Approach to Border Management

The approach as employed by the Government towards managing the borders has four important elements, viz. (a) guarding, (b) regulation, (c) development of border areas, and (d) constituting bilateral institutional mechanisms for resolving disputes and ironing out conflicts with neighbours. We shall examine each one of the above elements.

► 10.6.1 Guarding

The BSF has been assigned responsibility for the India-Pakistan and India-Bangladesh borders, Assam Rifles (AR) for the India-Myanmar border, the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) for the India-China border, and the Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) for the India-Nepal and India-Bhutan borders.

For managing the borders effectively, it is important to have better surveillance. Surveillance is carried out by conducting regular patrols by the personnel guarding our borders. To house these personnel and to send regular patrols and to interact with the nearby villages, border out posts (BOP) have been set up all along the borders. The inter-BOP distances along various borders are far greater than the recommended 2.5 km.

For securing the riverine and creek areas along the India-Bangladesh and India-Pakistan borders, the water wing of the BSF is deployed.

In addition, several electronic surveillance equipment like Night Vision Devices, Hand Held Thermal Imagers, Battle Field Surveillance Radars, Direction Finders, Unattended Ground Sensors, High Powered Telescope, etc. are used by the border guarding forces as force multipliers for greater surveillance.

► 10.6.2 Regulation

Efficient regulation of movement of people and goods is the hallmark of an effective border management strategy. For this, the government has to facilitate legitimate trade and travel while simultaneously checking illegal migration, infiltration of insurgents and terrorists and prevent smuggling. Building barriers is an effective means and for this fencing is employed but it is not an easy task. Some problem areas are:

- Acquisition of land
- Inordinate delay due to non-cooperation by local bodies
- In many instances, vested interests and state governments try to halt the process due to vote bank politics by illegal migrants

Another method of regulation is issuance of multi-purpose national identity cards and construction of Integrated Check Posts (ICPs) to facilitate legal trade and movement.

► 10.6.3 Development of Border Areas

Border areas remain inaccessible and underdeveloped due to difficult terrain and lack of facilities like proper roads, educational institutions and hospitals. Lack of economic opportunities makes the border population more susceptible to take up smuggling and trafficking. Keeping in mind these problems, the Union government initiated the 'border area development programme' (BADP) in 1987 to provide adequate social and economic infrastructure, promote participation in development, eliminate sense of alienation, and instil a sense of security among the border people. BADP schemes comprise of development of community based infrastructure like forestry, pasture land, fishery ponds, floriculture parks, community centres, mobile dispensaries, mini marketing yards, etc. Over the years, the nature of the programme has changed from a schematic one with emphasis on education to a state-level programme with emphasis on balanced development of border areas. Grass-root level institutions such as panchayati raj institutions, district councils/traditional councils are encouraged to participate in deciding the priority schemes for their areas.

North-east India, which shares 98 per cent of its borders with Bhutan, China, Myanmar and Bangladesh, has been plagued by insurgency and under-development. Its strategic location as a gateway to South East Asia has propelled the government to undertake various developmental programmes in recent years. To study the situation of the North-east region and suggest suitable projects for its development, the Government constituted the I. C Jain Committee and the high level commission under the chairmanship of S P Shukla in the 1990s. The Commission in its report titled 'Transforming the North-east' noted the inadequate infrastructure in the region and strongly advocated the need to develop them, especially road networks. Consequently, a series of schemes were initiated to develop the road network in the region. Among these, the three most important schemes are National Highway Development Programme Phase II, National Highway Development Programme Phase III B and Special Accelerated Road Development Programme for the North-east Region (SARDP NE) 2007-2008.

► 10.6.4 Constituting Bilateral Institutional Mechanisms

To facilitate bilateral dialogue on matters of mutual concern regarding border management, the Government of India has constituted a system of institutionalised interaction through the meetings of home secretaries, area commanders of border guarding forces and the joint working group on border management. For instance, to discuss issues of insurgency and smuggling along the Indo-Myanmar border, foreign office consultations (FOC) at the level of Foreign Secretary on the Indian side and Deputy Foreign Minister on Myanmar's side take place regularly.

National level meetings (NLMs) and sectoral level meetings (SLM) also take place under the Home Secretary and the Joint Secretary of the Ministry of Home Affairs, respectively. The primary objective of these meetings is 'to maintain peace and tranquillity all along the border' and to attain this objective, the two sides have agreed to 'prevent inadvertent violations of each others' territories by their security forces' and also to 'monitor and curb effectively all illegal and negative activities such as trans-border movement of insurgents, narco-traffickers and others involved in nefarious activities'. Border liaison meetings (BLMs) take place between local Area Army Commanders at designated places every six months.

The Surveyor Generals of India and Myanmar also meet to discuss the work plan for joint inspection, repairs, restoration and maintenance of boundary pillars on the border. India has also constituted similar institutional mechanisms with Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal and Bhutan. On Indo-Bangladesh border, several bilateral mechanisms with BGB (Border Guards of Bangladesh) exist, such as Company Commander level meeting, Commandant level meeting, Sector Commander level meeting, Inspector General BSF-Deputy Director General BGB level meeting, Nodal officer level meetings and Director General BSF-Director General BGB level Border Coordination Conference. A similar layered bilateral mechanism with Pakistan Rangers also exists.

These bilateral mechanisms have been helpful in sensitizing each other about their respective security concerns and formulating strategies for better management of the border.

► 10.7 | Securing the Coasts and Island Territories

For securing the coasts, the Government of India has implemented a three-layered mechanism. At the *outermost layer*, the Indian Navy patrols the high seas and carries out aerial reconnaissance with ship-based aircraft. The *intermediate layer* comprising the Exclusive Economic Zone (between 12 and 200 nautical miles) is patrolled by the Coast Guard. The areas around the land-sea interface are patrolled by the Coastal Police. On the recommendation of the Task Force, the Indian government launched the coastal security scheme in 2005-06. The scheme envisaged the establishment of '73 coastal police stations equipped with 204 boats, 153 jeeps and 312 motorcycles for mobility on coast and in close coastal waters' over a period of five years.

Coastal police stations do not have adequate trained manpower, nor sophisticated arms or patrol boats. The personnel deployed in these police stations are reluctant to undertake sea patrolling. They complain of sea sickness, lack of proper training and absence of high speed patrol boats.

Following the Mumbai terror attacks, the government has also announced a series of measures for strengthening coastal security of the country. These include:

- Expediting the implementation of coastal security scheme
- Speedy delivery of 204 interceptor boats
- Easing of environmental norms for setting up coastal police stations

- Issuance of multi-purpose identity cards to all fishermen, sea ferrying personnel and coastal villages
- Implementation of uniform licensing of fishing boats across the country
- Installation of special transponders and global positioning system on registered boats for identification and tracking,
- Deployment of commando units of Central Industrial Security Force in all ports
- Constitution of a unified command for coastal districts to counter terrorist threats from the sea

For the security of the Island Territories, the Indian Government has set up a joint command in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, called the Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC), comprising personnel of the Army, the Navy, the Air Force and the Coast Guard. Among other responsibilities, the ANC is also mandated to look after the defence of Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

PROBABLE QUESTIONS BASED ON THIS CHAPTER

1. What are the challenges to border management in India?
2. How far are internal security challenges linked with border management?