



India's Two-Front Challenge

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This article is based on “**Dealing with India’s two-front challenge**” which was published in The Hindu on 29/12/2020. It talks about the two-front war scenario for India.

In the last century, Indian strategic thinking was overwhelmingly focused on Pakistan and the security considerations emanating from there. However, in recent decades India’s military intelligentsia is firm on the view that a collusive China-Pakistan military threat is a real possibility.

The Chinese intrusions in Ladakh in May 2020 and the deadlock in negotiations have now made the Chinese military threat more apparent and real. But some media reports had indicated that Pakistan had moved 20,000 troops into Gilgit-Baltistan, matching the Chinese deployments in Eastern Ladakh.

Given this, it would be prudent for India to be ready for a two-front threat.

Growing China-Pakistan Military Links

- The Sino-Pakistan relationship is nothing new, but it has far serious implications today than perhaps ever before.
 - China has always looked at Pakistan as a counter to India’s influence in South Asia.
 - China, through its chequebook diplomacy, wants to exercise this hegemony over the South-Asian neighbours. In this pursuit, China would want to drain India’s economic resources on the border confrontation.
 - Thus, a two-front war scenario can be a strategy by China to undermine India’s role in its neighbourhood.
- Over the years, the ties between the China & Pakistan countries have strengthened and there is a great deal of alignment in their strategic thinking.
 - This can be understood by the fact that China has made massive investments in Pakistan via the **China-Pakistan Economic Corridor**.
 - Apart from this, military cooperation is growing, with China accounting for 73% of the total arms imports of Pakistan between 2015-2019.

India & Issues Related to Two-front War Scenario

- **Threat to Regional Peace:** A two-front war scenario that might lead to a full-blown war between three nuclear-armed states.
- **Dilemmas For India:** A two-front conflict presents the Indian military with two dilemmas — of resources and strategy.
 - **Resources:** A major decision will be the quantum of resources to be allocated for the two-front attack scenario.

For example, according to some estimates that about 60 combat squadrons are needed to deal with a serious two-front threat. This is double the number of squadrons currently with the Indian Air Force (IAF).
 - **Strategy:** If a majority of the assets of the Indian Army and the Indian Air Force are sent towards the northern border, it will require the military to rethink its strategy for the western border.

Also, adopting a more offensive strategy against Pakistan could draw limited resources into a wider conflict.
- **Economic Constraints:** Capability building also requires a serious debate, particularly in view of the fact that the country's economic situation will not permit any significant increase in the Defence Budget for the foreseeable future.

Way Forward

- **Requirement of Security Doctrine:** Developing a doctrine will require close interaction with the political leadership. Any doctrine that is prepared without a political aim and guidance will not stand the test when it is actually to be executed.
- **Finding the Right Balance of Technologies:** There is too much focus on major platforms such as aircraft, ships, and tanks, and not enough on future technologies such as robotics, artificial intelligence, cyber, electronic warfare, etc.

The right balance will have to be struck based on a detailed assessment of China and Pakistan's war-fighting strategies.

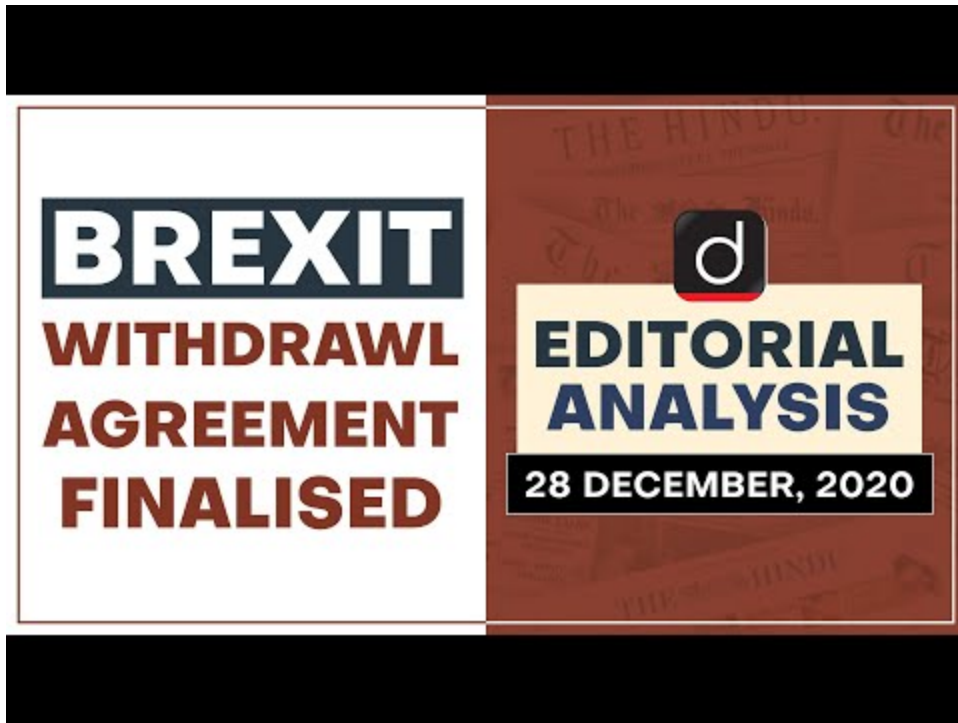
- **Crucial Role of Diplomacy:** Diplomacy has a crucial role to play in meeting the two-front challenge.
 - **Improving Relations in South Asian Neighbourhood:** To begin with, India would do well to improve relations with its neighbours so as not to be caught in an unfriendly neighbourhood given how China and Pakistan will attempt to contain and constrain India in the region.
 - **Improving Relations in Extended Neighborhood:** The government's current engagement of the key powers in West Asia, including Iran, should be further strengthened in order to ensure energy security, increase maritime cooperation and enhance goodwill in the extended neighbourhood.
 - **Improving Relation With Russia:** India must also ensure that its relationship with Russia is not sacrificed in favour of India-United States relations given that Russia could play a key role in defusing the severity of a regional gang up against India.
 - **Improving Condition in Kashmir:** From a long-view perspective, a political outreach to Kashmir aimed at pacifying the aggrieved citizens there would go a long way towards that end.

Conclusion

China, a rising and aggressive and a superpower next door is the bigger strategic threat for India and with Pakistan being a second-order accessory to **China's Contain India strategy**. In this context, it is certain that the threat of a two-front war cannot be ignored and therefore we need to develop both the doctrine and the capability to deal with this contingency.

Drishti Mains Question

The threat of a two-front war cannot be ignored and therefore India needs to develop both the doctrine and the capability to deal with this contingency. Comment.



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<https://youtu.be/cGAkmKLEePQ>

This editorial is based on “**New Britain**” which was published in The Indian Express on December 28th, 2020. Now watch this on our Youtube channel.
