

Analyzing the Rise in Conventional Defense Force of India and its Impact on the Strategic Stability of South Asia

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Publication History:

Received: September 13, 2024

Revised: September 27, 2024

Accepted: October 10, 2024

Published Online: November 01, 2024

Keywords:

Strategic Stability,
Conventional Military Modernization,
Security Dilemma,
Regional Dominance,
Arms Race,
Socio-Economic Impact,

Research related to Academic Areas:

Pakistan Studies, Social Studies &
Defense and Strategic Studies

Acknowledgment:

This paper is a sole academic venture of the author.

Ethical Consideration:

This study has no aim to hurt any ideological or social segment but is purely based on academic purposes.

DOI:

10.5281/zenodo.14009261

Abstract

This paper explores the rise in India's conventional military forces and its implications for strategic stability in South Asia, framed within the security dilemma theory, which posits that one state's increase in military power heightens perceived security threats for neighboring states. Since independence in 1947, India's aspirations to establish regional dominance have intensified, resulting in significant investments in military modernization, including technologically advanced weaponry and defense agreements with powerful states. This study will address critical questions about India's modernization efforts, the regional impact of the resulting conventional military imbalance, the effects on Pakistan's security, and the implications for South Asia's strategic stability. Furthermore, the study examines the socio-economic repercussions of heightened defense spending on regional stability and development. Through qualitative research, using content analysis of primary and secondary sources -- including government statements, military doctrines, and official document -- this analysis seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of India's defense ambitions, which may exacerbate regional tensions and elevate the arms race, challenging nuclear thresholds. By examining the responses of Pakistan and other regional actors, the study contributes to understanding how such power asymmetries can threaten peace and development, underscoring the necessity for a balanced approach to regional security to promote lasting stability and mutual respect among neighboring nations.

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Introduction

India after the independence in 1947 aspires to be a regional power and claims that with the huge geography and population count it has more shares in the regional politics than any other state. India wanted to have a role of big brother and wanted to dictate other sovereign states in the region. Pakistan

has always rejected the dominant posture of India and emphasize on the respect for sovereignty of all states. India initiated its nuclear program in order to get strategic advantage over Pakistan. There were several doctrines in the Indian military curriculum for the intervention in the Pakistan's territory. After 1998 the overt nuclearization of both states, the international community raised concerns about the security of the region and destabilization keeping in view the hostile history of both states. At that time both states claim that the nuclear weapons for political purposes and it will deter both states to engage in conflict, thus it will enhance the strategic stability in the region. But the political and military elite believe that still there is room for limited war with Pakistan to have strategic advantage. Since 2001 there is a doctrinal and policy shift in Indian military thinking and they drifted from Sundar Ji Doctrine to quick, limited and strategic surprise, and gave Cold Start Doctrine. Indian military and political leadership believe that they can get strategic benefit through short range, precise and technologically advanced weapons. India is investing heavily on modernizing its conventional military force, by buying sophisticated military equipment from the developed countries.

India is the third largest buyer of military arsenals in 2018 and it has also made defense agreements with many powerful states. Keeping this context this paper will focus on the analyzing that the rise in conventional force of India will have impact on the strategic stability of the region. The paper will give account of India conventional rise, its aims in modernizing its military capabilities and achieving advanced technology in its weapons. The paper will further shed a light on the impact on the region's strategic stability due to this asymmetry in conventional terms. The Indian leadership vision of becoming a power in military terms will also affect the nuclear threshold and increase the arms race. The paper will further discuss the impact on Pakistan and how it will respond to the India. The theoretical frame work which is applied on this study is the security dilemma. The theory explains that the increase in the military force of one state create security threats for another state. This paper will also discuss the effect of increasing defense spending on the socio-economic condition of the region. The significance of this study is that it will provide the critical analysis of the Indian military modernization and the way it destabilizes the region. It will also contribute to analyze its effect on the domestic sphere of both the countries in the region.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research methodology, utilizing content analysis to examine both primary and secondary sources. A wide range of research materials, including academic articles from peer-reviewed journals, newspaper reports, seminar proceedings, and relevant books, forms the basis of the investigation. Primary source materials, such as official statements from government representatives, political leaders, and authoritative documents, provide insight into the numerical growth and qualitative advancements within India's defense forces. These resources facilitate a comprehensive examination of India's military expansion, specifically focusing on its advanced weaponry acquisitions and modernization efforts, alongside the strategic intentions of its leadership. This approach enables a nuanced understanding of how these developments contribute to regional instability and elevate security concerns, particularly for Pakistan. Through this methodology, the study aims to critically assess the implications of India's military ambitions on South Asian strategic stability and regional dynamics.

Literature Review

There is an extensive literature present on this subject as it is of great importance for the region and for the international community. Here is some of the extracts from reviewed is presented which highlighted different aspects of this subject.

Whalter C Ladwig in his article "India's military modernization and conventional deterrence in South Asia" presents both sides of argument while analyzing the increased military budget by the Indian government have implication on conventional misbalance in the region and create security problem for Pakistan. There were preferences from the scholars who agree with this position and their references who do not agree with this argument. By analyzing both sides, the main argument highlighted in this research was India is modernizing and spending huge on its conventional force is trying to get edge on Pakistan but will not be able to reap the strategic and quick benefits of strategic surprise due factors like geography, military irrelativeness and other factors included in conventional deterrence theory.

Masood u Rehman Khataq argues in his article "Indian military modernization implications for Pakistan" [2019] that India in the post overt nuclearization of the region is trying to get an upper hand on Pakistan and there is shift in its doctrine and practical approach. Indian policymakers believe that there is a room for limited war with Pakistan in post nuclear era and for that it adopted different new doctrines like CSD and Land Warfare Doctrine and India is equipping its force with such robust, short range and agile arsenals. This increase in Indian military conventional force created security threat for Pakistan, and it is also trying to respond India in the same manner.

Rodney W Jones presented in his article "Strategic stability and imbalance in conventional force a case study of South Asia" numerical data of India's increasing defense budget in ratio with Pakistan for almost three decades causing instability in the region. India is heavily investing in tactical weapons and purchasing sophisticated military weapons.

Saad Khalid numerically analyzes the impact of India's increase in military expenditure on Pakistan's economy. Pakistan has to allocate huge amount of its budget in order to compete with India to ensure its security and sovereignty. This ultimately takes out resources from another developmental sector.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that better explain this issue is Security Dilemma. The concept introduced by neo-realist's, according to this concept the increase in the military power of one state creates the security dilemma for another state. If one state increases its military budget and acquire military arsenals the other state felt threatened and will also try to increase its military power or will try to make alliance with other states in order to deter its enemy. In the same way the increase in the conventional defense force of India created security dilemma for Pakistan. Both the states will engage in increasing their military power thus it will destabilize the region.

India modernization of Military Force

There is a shift in strategic thinking of Indian policymakers in the changing regional and global environment. After the conduction of nuclear test by both India and Pakistan, it was thought by the strategic analysts and endorsed by the leadership of both states this will enhance the strategic stability in the region. The escalation on Cargill and Pakistan India standoff of 2001-2002 and Mumbai attacks, Indian leadership realized that the Sundar Ji Doctrine was unable to reap the strategic objectives as it is costly and time consuming. There was a shift in the thinking that there is a room for limited war with short-range, sophisticated precision and agile weapons with complimentary support of air force. Indian military leadership presented Cold Start Doctrine proactive operation in 2004. The concept was to "mobilize forward division close to the border which will be equipped with latest mechanized infantry, MBTs, potent air defense for robust command and control and it will be operationalized within 72 to 96 hours". The CSD aims to destroy the reserve force of Pakistan and give a surprise element by grasping some of the territory for bargaining or inflicting confusion in the decision making. The CSD was preceded by other doctrines which emphasize on the modernization of army, air force and navy, like the "2018 Land Warfare Doctrine which aims at quick, fast and limited war". This has further widened the scope of conventional build up. Other doctrine is India Air Force Doctrine of sub-Conventional ops 2012 and Indian Maritime strategy of 2015 Sea Dominance, then the Surgical Strike, that aims for a specific military target avoiding any collateral damage.

This massive military modernization and offensive doctrinal concepts are depicting the mindset of sitting political and military leadership. The political party which is dominating the center BJP has an anti-Pakistan narrative and posture India as an emerging power at global level possessing strong muscles. The current Prime Minister and the National Security Advisor emphasized on the material power to dominate the region. Ajit Doval who is the current National Security Advisor gave his own doctrine and emphasizes that India increases its military muscle and exploit the vulnerabilities of its neighbors so that they cannot be able to come into its pursuit.

Technological modernization of Indian Military

The strong economic base in the post 2001 and aggressive mindset leadership sitting in the office enabled the Indian military to get technical advanced and sophisticated weaponry from Russia, United States, Israel and France. India is among the top five countries that are buying military weapons, defense equipment, and sophisticated air defense systems in the world. Indian Army launched two programs³. The Battlefield Management System and Arming the Infantry with better Offensive and Defensive gear". In this regard India bought almost 65000 rifles of 7.62mm for conducting special operations. In order to have strong coordination of the field soldiers with central and field command Network Centric Warfare was introduced. The quick maneuvering tank force was also inducted by the Indian army for quick and

¹ Iqbal Summar, "India's Military Modernization and its Impact on Strategic Stability of South Asia", School of Politics and International Relations Quaid ed Azam University, b2019.

² Khatak Masood u Rehman, "Indian Military Modernization Implications for Pakistan", Strategic Studies, April 2020

³ Khatak Masood u Rehman, "Indian Military Modernization Implications for Pakistan", Strategic Studies, April 2020

offensive operations -90[MBT] to enhance the capabilities of infantry. There are ⁴“124 Arjun tanks, 1950 T-72 Tanks and around 900 T-90 tanks and it ordered 464 T-90 from Russia”. The capabilities of this tank which make it superior are its night vision capacity; it has an ability to fire multiple ammunition like Anti-Tank Missile, Shrapnel, and Armored Piercing Discarding Sabot. It can also target low flying helicopter at an altitude of 5km and it is very effective in deserts and plains. India is also upgrading its artillery with enhancing the capability of having destructive power, long range and mobility through ⁵“M777A2/LW155 ultra-light howitzers from United States at the cost of US\$737 million, they can fire two rounds just in five min at the range of 30km”. India has also developed highly advanced gun Dambhush which has more long range of 39km and have more accuracy in targeting. This will provide an edge to Indian force on Line of Control. India is developing the new version of Dambhush. It will have caliber of 55mm/52, its advantaged other than its accuracy and long range is that its light weight and can be easily moved to the operational areas. India has made a contract with South Korea of US\$720million for Vajari

India is also improving its air defense system, and acquiring long range air defense system. India has already concluded a deal with Russia for S-400 air defense system in 2016. It can detect aircraft, missile and drone at a distance of about 600km and it can also destroy them. India is also buying Un-manned Aerial Vehicles from United States for surveillance and spying purposes. India is buying Barak 8 air defense system from Israel at US\$ billion and will get 16 launchers and 560 missiles.

Indian air force is the fourth largest air force in the world. There thirty-three quadrants and sixty airbases from where it operates at present there are 806 fighter jets in Indian air force. Air power is one of significant factor for both India and Pakistan. In the new doctrine in order to achieve the objectives India has increase its air power both quantitatively and qualitatively. Indian air force has made a contract with Russian firm to buy 53 SU-30MKI multi mission aircraft. This aircraft has advanced avionics and firepower, and it has 30mm Gash-30-1 cannon and BrahMos cruise missile. India has also made deal with one of the defense firm of France to supply thirty six Rafael aircraft at the cost of US\$6.7 billion. Rafael jet is a high-speed jet that can take different warheads at a distance of 1,850km and at 1,915km/h. It can fire 2500 rounds in one min and can target 8 positions at one time.

The advancement in weapons it is important to have an efficient transport system. India is also investing in buying equipment, aircrafts, and vehicles for its efficient logistics supply to operational areas. India has bought C-1300 Hercules aircraft from United States to increase its reach in the region. India has plans to increase six more aircrafts in addition to the present five of these aircrafts. It can fly up to 2600ft carrying 20227 kg logistics; it can fly in tough environment for rescue purpose. In addition to C-1300 India is also buying C-17 globe master aircraft to increase the capability of transportation for Indian military. Along with aircrafts India is also buying fifteen Chinook helicopters from US at US\$ 8 million. These helicopters are very sophisticated and can supply ammunition, food and other logistics in operational areas I difficult weather conditions. Another value addition in the Indian military is Aptchie helicopter. These are the agile

⁴ Khatak Masood u Rehman, Indian Military Modernization Implications for Pakistan”, Strategic Studies, April 2020

⁵ Khatak Masood u Rehman, Indian Military Modernization Implications for Pakistan”, Strategic Studies, April 2020

helicopters with massive firepower to enhance India's ability of swift and intense operations. These helicopters will also be bought from US of US\$2.5 billion. This helicopter has night vision, 70mm rockets, automatic guns and hellfire missile capability.

As it is argued by many strategic and international relation analysts, that the 21st century is of Indian Ocean and the country who will dominate this region will dominate international politics. India had historical claim of the true heirs of Indian Ocean. India claims that it is the littoral state of this Ocean, so it has a right to dominate it. India has also presented its naval force modernization program as sea dominance in 2015. Under this program India increasing the capabilities of its naval force to secure its strategic interests in Indian Ocean and in Arabian Sea. The Indian naval force is divided into three commands which are equipped with 250 aircrafts, 16 submarines and almost 171 vessels and an aircraft carrier which provides an edge to India over the other states of the region. India along with conventional built up also planning to get assured second strike capability by making five nuclear submarines, it will also provide it strategic advantage as well. India is also negotiating an agreement with France of worth US\$3.5 billion for Scorpene Submarine which has highly advanced weapons and has stealth technologies. India has already launched Brahmos cruise missile and also developing the hypersonic version of it. Its range is 290km. The hypersonic Brahmos 11 missile which is under developing stage will have the capacity to destroy arms storage and underground bunkers at a higher speed. India has also bought from US 8 P-8 Long Range Maritime Reconnaissance and Anti-Submarine Warheads aircraft of US\$2.1 billion. The aircraft has Brahmos Block 11 missile, MK-54 Torpedoes. It can detect the threat far before it entered into the strategic sphere of India.

India has also developed a sophisticated Battlefield Radar system which can track the targets like creeping men, combat vehicles and low flying helicopters. These radars are light weight and can easily be moveable. There are around four Weapon Locating Radars, which India has installed near Pakistan's border; it can detect short-range missiles at 50km distance. India has also launched Spy Satellite for the surveillance on Pakistan.

Application of Theory

Impact on Pakistan's security

Indian political and military leadership always claim that they felt threatened by Chinese and security enhancing measures they are adopting are in response to China, for instance the nuclear test they conducted in 1974 they argue that India security is vulnerable because of China's nuclear test. In the same manner the recent rise in the conventional force is to deter Chinese growing influence. On contrary the strategic thinking of India is also directed towards Pakistan as well and it has serious implications on Pakistan's security sphere.

The shift in doctrine to CSD and Surgical Strike is basically designed for Pakistan. Pakistan and India share a long border which is mostly the flat plains where penetration might be easier. The military modernization and inclusion of such highly advanced and precision weaponry in the Indian coups is mostly placed near the Pakistan's border. India has placed 18 regiments of T-90 Tanks near Pakistan border in Rajasthan desert and in Punjab. India is also using these long range ultra-light guns on Line of Control. The

Indian force is acquiring such highly advanced artillery guns and will be helpful in the operations on Line of Control. This will create a security challenge for Pakistan. Pakistani analysts believe that the S-400 will make Pakistan's air force and missile system vulnerable. The inclusion of such highly advanced weapons in the army, air force and navy will threaten Pakistan and create security dilemma for it. Thus, Pakistan in order to ensure its security will also increase its military arsenal and will opt for strategic partnership with China. Pakistan has to make relevant its nuclear weapons to meet this asymmetry in conventional terms. Pakistan will also increase its military spending and it will also go for tactical weapons in response to India conventional rise. This will ultimately affect the strategic stability and conventional deterrence of the region.

Impact on the strategic stability of the region

The Indian hegemonic ambitions generally at global level specifically at regional level have cast a sharp impression on the strategic stability of the region. The historic hostilities between Pakistan and India and unresolved disputes like Kashmir and water issue led Pakistan to suit the India in order to preserve its security and sovereignty. India's continuous increase in its hard power had pushed the region into never ending arms race. As India is opting for limited war and Surgical strikes and building up its conventional weapons, this will create security dilemma and Pakistan will have to choose for acquiring such conventional weapons which will deter India for limited war by increasing its cost. India even though after the nuclear tests from both still was looking for limited war without realizing its escalatory value will continue if it's not deterred. This will create the conventional arms race in the region which will have far reaching affect. Both states will try to overcome each other increase their military spending and run after the weapons.

This will also reduce the nuclear threshold. As there is conventional imbalance there is a room for escalations and conflicts between two states. The Indian quest for limited war for strategic benefits will increase the chances of escalations and it will reduce the nuclear threshe hold. The conventional asymmetry between Pakistan and India will leave no option for Pakistan to rely on its nuclear weapon for its security.

There will be room for war between the two states under nuclear weapons. Pakistan and India had been indulged in the conflict even after conducting nuclear tests, in the Cargill conflict of 1999, 2001 border standoff, then in 2008 after the Mumbai attacks. These incidents prove that the conventional imbalance between India and Pakistan could lead to limited war and it can turn into total war under nuclear umbrella. India due to its over confidence and pursuit of its ambition can commit any mischief act like it claim in 2016 of Surgical Strikes and the Bamako episode of 2019, these instances can escalate the situation and result could be dangerous for both of them.

The regional peace and stability will be threatened and there will be room for terrorism to further destabilize the region. The non-state actors might be used for strategic benefits. There will be more unrest in the Kashmir valley as the induction of such sophisticated weapons in the Indian military will be used on LOC and to curb the freedom movement in Kashmir.

There will be inclusion of tactical weapons in the region. As Pakistan in order to compete with the conventional rise of Indian forces has to develop some short range tactical nuclear weapon so that India could be deter from any action. This inclusion can also increase uncertainty as there might be misjudgment on the side of India force that they responded tactical nuclear weapon with strategic weapon it will destroy the whole region.

Impact on the socio-economic condition

India is among the leading countries that are spending on the military buildup. According to the report by Stockholm's International Peace Research Institute India is the second largest buyer of defense related equipment after Saudi Arabia. India has signed numerous defense agreements with Russia and other Western countries, it recently concluded defense deal with United States of US\$3 billion, for buying advanced, agile and lethal weapons into its stock pile to influence other states in the region through its military might. This ambitious attitude of India dragged the region into instability; even in its domestic sphere the increase in military spending have impact on the socio-economic situation of the region. India is increasing its defense budget around 9.37%. In the year 2020 its defense budget is around US\$73.65, but the other indicators of society are going down. The report published by SOS Children's Village Canada highlighted that the poverty rate in India is in a horrible condition; almost two-third of the population is living below the poverty line. The increase in military spending means that resources will be reduced from other social and economic development sector to maintain military stockpile. The figures presented in the budget clearly indicate that the funds in education, healthcare and other social development sector are not significantly increased as the defense budget in India. This will increase the rate of unemployment and poverty and social and economic disparity emerged that result in social unrest and increase in crime rate. There is a debate on bread vs guns arise, people are dying due to hunger and lack of health care facilities India government recently placed an order to buy fighter jets from Russia. The education budget increase in 2020 is only 5%, which is far lesser than military expenditure

Pakistan also faces such problems the military rise by India creates security dilemma for Pakistan, thus it is bound to increase its defense spending to cope up with India's modernization. The defense budget of Pakistan in 2020 is US\$1.152 billion and its education and health budget is 2.3% of the GDP and same ratio is for health. The budget indicators of both countries show that the India's conventional rise has great impact on the domestic sphere of both the countries. The economic indicators are in bad condition it will destabilize the social fabric and ultimately the country. Just by building arms cannot ensure the dominance and security to any state until it is showing positive indicators at domestic level. There is economic slowdown in the region.

Response from Pakistan

Pakistan's strategic leadership was aware of the ambiguous CSD of India and its objective of carrying out limited and intense operation under nuclear threshold. Pakistan tried to negotiate India over the issues but the Indian massive military buildup and shift in the doctrine led Pakistan to counter this concept and maximize the cost for India in implementing its new doctrine. Pakistan also presented New Concept Warfare in response to Cold Start Doctrine. Pakistan has to depend on its nuclear capability, it developed

low yield tactical nuclear weapon of short range⁶ “ less than 500km for land missile and 600km for sea and air missile, it is surface to surface multi tube ballistic missile”. This low yield tactical weapon, Al-Nasar will prevent the any attack on Pakistan soil and deter India for misadventure. Pakistan organized Azm e Naw exercise in 2009 to train its troops to improve mobilization that will give time to the forces to establish in the operational area. Pakistani forces were swifter than India in mobilizing. There was series of such military exercises were conducted in 2010 Azm e Naw 111 near the Sialkot and Rajasthan border almost 20000 troops participated in this exercise. Another objective of the conduction of this exercise is to enhance coordination in all the three forces for joint operations especially air force and army. There was High Mark air force exercise was conducted from higher altitude in the north to the sea line in the south. Pakistani military leadership was also building its conventional weapon so that it can even deter through its conventional force. There was a significant increase in the military spending and Pakistan invested in aircrafts and missiles. Pakistan was also focusing on making indigenous weapons and also trying to modernizing them technically. Pakistan also shifted its doctrine to Full Spectrum Deterrence; this doctrinal shift provides leverage to Pakistan to develop tactical weapon and continue production of fissile material for its maintenance.

In order to counter the India strategic partnership with United States, Pakistan moved towards China and seek its assistance in developing conventional weapons, J F 17 Thunder is an example of such partnership. The Chinese and Pakistani defense forces also conducted several military exercises for instance the AMAN exercise which PLNA and Pakistan Navy conducted in Indian Ocean, China and Pakistan Air Force conducted joint exercise in 2016. Pakistan and China also conducted joint border patrol near Kashmir border. Pakistan also extended its strategic and diplomatic relationship with Russia, as United States announced India as its strategic partner. Pakistan responded India in a calculated and non-strategic level that deters the India from any misadventure and also increasing the cost of implementation of Cold Start Doctrine. The recent Bala Kott episode when India attempted to conduct a surgical strike, Pakistan Air Force responded quickly and in a professional manner. Pakistani leadership was aware of the level of destruction and cost which both the countries could pay if this crisis gets escalated. The responsibility also lies on the shoulders of International Institutions and other global powers to realize that such hegemonic designs of India and its adoption of such an offensive doctrine could lead this region into the instability, and is also dangerous for international peace.

Conclusion

India is aspiring for the dominance of the region and for that it shifted its doctrine keeping in view the changing regional environment. India believes that in the post overt nuclearization of the region there is a space for limited war that has specific targets but below the nuclear threshold. India strategic thinking has an effect on Pakistan and is framed keeping in view Pakistan, the change in the doctrine they aspired

⁶ Khan Azhar, Kabir Iqra, “Tactical Nuclear Weapon and Deterrence Stability in South Asia Pakistan’s Rationale”, JASSA, October, 2017.

for intense, limited and quick action against Pakistan to deter its involvement in Kashmir. India introduced Cold Start Doctrine in 2004 and similar other doctrines on the same line afterwards with the same objectives. To materialize these objectives India massively increased its military muscle and modernizes its conventional forces. This modernization of military by India disturbs the conventional deterrence stability in the region. It created security dilemma for Pakistan and Pakistan in order to compete with India will also increase its military force and developed robust command and control system and developed tactical nuclear weapon to respond India. Pakistan felt insecure because of this Indian posture. Pakistan also responded India on doctrinal front, it gave Full Spectrum Deterrence Doctrine to respond Cold Start Doctrine. This will cause an arms race in the region and also reduced the nuclear threshold. There will be more chances of limited conflict that can escalate; neither of the country will be able to control it.

The hegemonic designs of India will destabilize the strategic stability of the region. This Indian military modernization and increased expenditure will also have impact on the domestic environment of the two states. There is economic slowdown in the region. Indian government is investing so much on military arsenals but the poverty in the state is at the horrible stage. There is lack of health facilities, education, employment opportunities and better living conditions for the public, it takes out resources from this sector and increasing its military might. This move also drags Pakistan in arms race and increasing its military expenditure, which also need a lot of resources and Pakistan is also compromising the social development for military buildup. This can also contribute to the strategic instability in the region; two nuclear weapon states competing in weapons with each other can open room for limited conflict which ultimately lowered the nuclear threshold. This will create strategic instability, because the misadventure by any side could escalate into a situation which leads towards the mistake that devastate the whole region.

There is a socio-economic cost of this conventional rise, which region has to pay. The budget allocation to the defense by Indian government is increasing and in the recent one and half decade it has increased massively and there is decreasing trend in funds for developmental, education, health and other social sectors. The security threat perception causes Pakistan to also increase its military budget and taking out funds from other sectors. The poverty rate in both countries is increasing and ultimately the economic indicators also decline, this will cause eruption of social problems, The crime rate will increase; it will also give space to non-state actors to propagate their narrative. There will be social unrest, which will lead to violent activities in both states. Thus, all the arguments, statistical data presented in the paper try to give a comprehensive analysis that how the military modernization of India is threatening the strategic stability of the South Asian Region.

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