

India-Pakistan and the 2025 DIA Threat Assessment

Introduction

The United States Defense Intelligence Agency's (DIA) Annual Threat Assessment, a strategic report outlining global security threats to the US and its allies, was presented to the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Intelligence and Special Operations in May 2025. The report encourages congressional oversight, defense policy-making, and awareness of global threats. It was prepared by one of the top military intelligence organizations in the US defense establishment.

The 2025 edition evaluates over 20 regional and functional threat domains, including emerging technologies, weapons of mass destruction, cyber and space warfare, transnational terrorism, the strategic actions of North Korea, Russia, Iran, and the People's Republic of China, as well as regional hotspots in Africa, the Indo-Pacific, East Asia, Europe, and the Middle East.

The 2025 report covers a wide range of South Asian topics, including in-depth analyses of India and Pakistan's military modernisation, nuclear postures, threat perceptions, and the escalation dynamics that characterise their bilateral relationship. The report focuses on the border crisis in Apr–May 2025, cross-border terrorism, and the strategic use of drones and precision munitions. These developments are assessed within the broader context of great-power influence and regional instability, specifically the relationship between China and Pakistan.

India's Strategic Focus: Principal Dangers and Deterrence Approach

India views China as its biggest security threat, especially in the maritime domain and along the disputed Himalayan border, according to the DIA assessment for 2025. In contrast, Pakistan is characterised as a 'More ancillary' but ongoing threat to Indian security. This distinction is significant because it supports India's overall strategic reorientation to be ready for a rapid escalation against a less symmetrical competitor while also preparing for a high-intensity, protracted war with a peer adversary that is technologically advanced.

India is allegedly pursuing a comprehensive policy of military modernisation and defense reform in response to long-standing security concerns. The report highlights ongoing development of the Agni-V multiple independently guided re-entry vehicles (MIRVs) and the successful test of the Agni-I Prime medium-range ballistic missile. India's

nuclear triad is strengthened by these developments, which also help the nation maintain a credible minimum deterrence.

The 2024 commissioning of India's second nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine is equally significant. This capability improves the survivability and second-strike assurance of India's nuclear posture, thereby fortifying its sea-based deterrent. Although India formally upholds the No First Use (NFU) doctrine, it is clear that its expanding nuclear arsenal and maritime deterrent are intended to counter the dual-front threat posed by China and Pakistan.

The report also highlights India's efforts to achieve strategic autonomy by increasing defence production as part of the 'Made in India' campaign. With Moscow's growing alignment with Beijing, New Delhi is actively working to diversify its defence supply chain, despite its continued reliance on Russian-origin military platforms, particularly for air and land-based assets.

The DIA views India's increasing participation in multilateral organisations like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), BRICS, and the Quad as an attempt to 'Shape regional security architecture' while maintaining its independence. Arms transfers, cooperative drills, and maritime domain awareness programs are all part of India's defense diplomacy in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), which is specifically intended to project power and protect against Chinese encirclement.

Pakistan's Strategic Calculus: Weapons of Mass Destruction Risks, Instability, and Deterrence

According to the DIA, Pakistan continues to see India as an existential threat, a view that guides its military acquisition priorities and doctrinal stance. Pakistan is reportedly actively working on developing battlefield nuclear weapons to challenge India's conventional superiority, despite political and economic unrest. Both tactical nuclear weapons for use on the battlefield and longer-range delivery systems make up its deterrence strategy.

The modernisation of Pakistan's nuclear command and control infrastructure is the most worrisome. The report concludes that Islamabad's warfighting doctrine still conflates conventional and nuclear deterrence, despite the fact that it has not yet formally adopted a declared NFU policy. The risks of a quick escalation in future conflicts are increased by such strategic ambiguity, especially when combined with misunderstandings and cross-border provocations.

The report raises concerns about Pakistan's ongoing acquisition of dual-use goods and technologies related to Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), the majority of which are thought to originate in the People's Republic of China (PRC). These purchases typically circumvent official export control regimes by passing through commercial middlemen and transshipment hubs like Hong Kong, Singapore, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates.

At the same time, Pakistan's internal security situation keeps getting worse. Regional security concerns are heightened by their internal instability, expanding nuclear capabilities, and blurred civil-military boundaries. The persistence of anti-India militant groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed proxies is a major source of bilateral tensions, despite Pakistan's counterterrorism efforts.

According to reports, the Indian government launched missile attacks on Pakistani infrastructure linked to terrorism in retaliation for a terrorist attack in Jammu and Kashmir. Operation Sindoor, as it is known in Indian media, started in early May 2025, despite the report's lack of a direct mention of it. India's decision to take direct action against non-state actors based in Pakistan and those who support them was a well-thought-out change.

The Strategic Nexus between China and Pakistan

The 2025 DIA report emphasises greater strategic congruence between Pakistan and China, its main military and economic ally. China remains Pakistan's top supplier of cutting-edge weapons, such as drones, fighter planes, and surface-to-air missiles, to support Pakistan's traditional deterrence against India. Bilateral military drills, high-level defence discussions, and technology exchange all point to ongoing interoperability planning between the two nations.

However, the report also notes that there are growing tensions within this alliance, especially as a result of Islamist militant groups in Pakistan that target Chinese nationals. These episodes highlight the inconsistencies in Beijing's dual roles as a champion of Pakistan's strategic objectives and a focal point of the unrest it covertly fosters by aiding Islamabad's military buildup. Strategically, this nexus makes India's threat landscape more complicated. It has the potential for concerted pressure against India on both the northern and western borders.

Conclusion and What It Means for Indian Security Policy

A number of crucial imperatives for India are confirmed by the 2025 DIA evaluation. A sign of maturity in India's policy of swift, punitive, and proportionate response to cross-border terrorism is the growing prominence of cross-domain retaliation, such as in Operation Sindoor. Without and until efficient crisis management systems are in place, it raises the risk of rapid escalation and the cost of deterrence.

Second, increased Indian capabilities for surveillance, missile defence, and escalation control are necessary in light of Pakistan's nuclear weapons deployments on the battlefield, as well as institutional insecurity and doctrinal ambiguity. It will be crucial for India to continue investing in layered air defense and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) platforms.

Third, as demonstrated in the May 2025 exchange, the rise in drone warfare will necessitate enhanced electronic warfare capabilities and doctrinal innovation. Both demonstrated competence in using unmanned systems, and they could cause instability in upcoming emergencies.

Fourth, to restrict Pakistan's access to dual-use technologies, India must intensify its diplomatic efforts with significant international export control regimes, including the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) and Wassenaar Arrangement.

Last but not least, India's strategy for communicating internationally both during and after Operation Sindoor was successful in portraying the military response as a counterterrorism effort that complied with international standards. As part of India's broader deterrence and diplomacy strategy, this type of strategic messaging needs to be institutionalised.

Endnotes

1. U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency, Annual Threat Assessment, 2025.
2. "Pakistan Regards India as an Existential Threat," *The Economic Times*, 26 May 2025.
3. "India Views China as Primary Adversary, Pakistan as Ancillary Threat," *Hindustan Times*, 27 May 2025.
4. "India and Pakistan's Drone Battles Mark New Arms Race," *Reuters*, 27 May 2025.
5. "Agni-V MIRV Test Shows India's Growing Deterrence," *Firstpost*, 28 May 2025.
6. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Arms Transfers Database, 2025.

7. "India's Response Was Decisive," *Times of India*, 26 May 2025.

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