

India's National Security Doctrine 2050

Deter, Deny, Decide, Develop: a strategic posture, force structure and partnership strategy for India to 2050

Eleven chapters, 26 figures and over 45 tables on national security, theatre and strategic commands, the three Services, AI, quantum, drones and directed energy, rivals, partners and the Gulf. 50 pages.

DELTA DOCTRINES

October 2026 | Adviser's white paper. Figures are rounded estimates; positions are the author's point of view. Contains no classified material. Not a statement of Government policy.

CONTENTS

Contents, and how to read this paper

This is a white paper written as if by a planner and adviser to the national leadership. It asks what India's national security doctrine should be until 2050, and answers with a point of view on every major question: nuclear posture, theatre commands, the three Services, technology, neighbours, great powers, the Gulf and East Asia. It does not cite third-party research. Where we use numbers they are rounded and approximate; where we express a view, we say so.

Part	Content	Pages
Summary	The doctrine in one page; twelve principles	3-4
1. Strategic environment	Trends to 2050; the threat picture; the nuclear balance; economic scenarios	5-8
2. National security doctrine	Architecture; core tenets; escalation; national resilience	9-12
3. Integrated theatre commands	Design; authority; transition	13-15
4. Strategic forces	Nuclear doctrine; sea leg; missile defence; command and control	16-19
5. Army, Air Force, Navy	Land, air and sea doctrine; stealth and anti-stealth; Indian Ocean	20-27
6. New technologies	Drones, directed energy, AI, quantum, EW, cyber, space; industrial base	28-33
7. Neighbours and rivals	Pakistan, China, collusion, Bangladesh, Turkey	34-39
8. Great powers and partners	USA, Russia, EU, Quad, IMEC, I2U2, GCC, East and South-East Asia	40-46
9. To 2050	Scenarios; roadmap; budget; risks; decisions	47-50

Label	Meaning
Fact base	A rounded, approximate figure that the author believes is broadly right; validate before using in any official paper
Assessment	The author's judgement on what is happening or likely
Recommendation	What we believe India should do; this is a point of view, not a government position

A NOTE ON USE

Nothing here is classified, and nothing here is a statement of Government policy. Force-level numbers, probabilities and scores are planning judgements. They are meant to structure debate and should be tested against official data before any decision.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The doctrine in one page: Deter, Deny, Decide, Develop

India faces a rare strategic problem: two nuclear-armed neighbours that cooperate, one of them with an economy four to five times larger, while the United States, the one partner with the scale to balance China, has become less predictable. Doctrine cannot assume the problem will go away. It should assume a contested decade, a tense two decades, and an uncertain 2050.

THE DOCTRINE IN FOUR VERBS

Deter with a survivable, flexible nuclear force and an explicit rule that terror is war. **Deny** by making every land, air and sea approach costly through sensors, drones, air defence, submarines and directed energy. **Decide** faster than any adversary through integrated theatre commands, sovereign AI and assured timing and navigation. **Develop** the industrial and economic base that lets India sustain this posture for 25 years.

Dimension	Today (approx.)	Recommended by 2050
Defence spending	About 2.0% of GDP	About 2.5% of a GDP three to five times larger
Command structure	17 Service commands; theatres still planned	4 land-air and maritime theatres plus 3 functional commands
Strategic forces	3 SSBNs, land and air legs	9 SSBNs, 6 SSNs, missile defence, assured second strike
Air Force	About 29 fighter squadrons	About 42 squadrons, one third fifth-generation
Navy	About 140 ships; 2 carriers	About 200 ships; 3 carriers; 15 nuclear submarines; unmanned at scale
Army	Platform-heavy	Fires, drones, sensors and networks lead capital spending
AI and quantum	Pilots and trials	AI supports about 90% of staff tasks; quantum timing and navigation on about 85% of fleets
Neighbours	Reactive on Pakistan; defensive on China	Compel Pakistan; deny China; contain collusion

Our central judgement. India cannot match China ship for ship or rupee for rupee. It must win by geography, asymmetry and alliances, and it must reorganise before it modernises. A reorganised force that is half as well equipped will beat an unreformed force with twice the hardware.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Twelve principles that make the doctrine

The principles are the shortest honest statement of what this paper recommends. Each is expanded in the chapters that follow. Two are controversial and deserve flagging now. Principle 1 turns India's informal posture into a standing policy, which narrows room to manoeuvre. Principle 6 accepts that AI will shape decisions but insists a named human authorises force.

#	Principle	What it means in practice
1	Terror sponsored from abroad is an act of war	Retaliation is a declared option, not an improvisation; no distinction between terrorist and sponsor
2	No nuclear blackmail	India will not be deterred from conventional response by nuclear signalling; its own deterrent must be survivable and flexible
3	One command picture	Integrated theatres with one commander, one plan and one budget line per theatre
4	Sea is the strategic centre of gravity	Under-sea and Indian Ocean control give India leverage over China's energy lifeline
5	Mass beats exquisite in the first week	Attritable drones, cheap interceptors and directed energy complement a small number of high-end platforms
6	Decision speed is combat power	Sovereign AI, assured timing and cross-domain data shorten the targeting chain; humans keep authority to use force
7	Sovereign where it matters, open where it helps	Weights, data, chips for classified use and nuclear command are sovereign; components may be imported
8	Multi-alignment with guardrails	Work with all; depend on none; hold red lines on technology, basing and nuclear policy
9	Two-and-a-half fronts is the planning case	China and Pakistan together, plus internal and maritime pressure
10	Neighbourhood first	Stability in South Asia and the Indian Ocean is a precondition for global ambitions
11	Resilience is deterrence	Energy, food, finance, cyber and civil defence reserves limit what an adversary can coerce
12	Plan for 2050 in decades	Build in the 2020s, scale in the 2030s, harvest in the 2040s, and review every five years

OUR VIEW

The weakest link in India's security today is not any one weapon. It is the lack of a joint command that can use what India already has. We therefore put organisation (principles 3 and 6) before acquisition in the ten-year order of work.

1. STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

The world to 2050: six trends that shape the doctrine

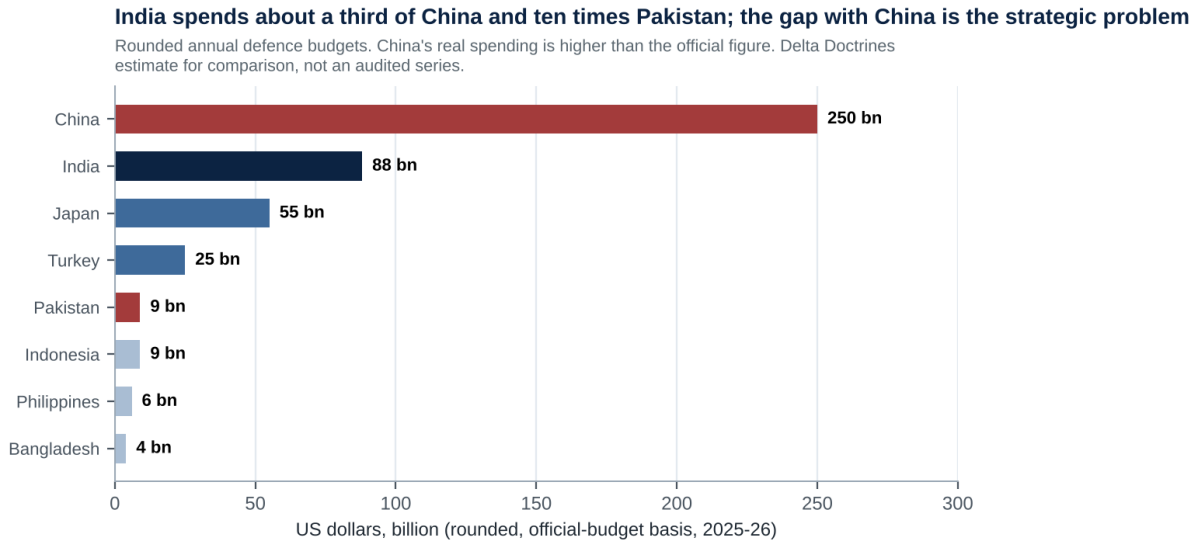


Figure 1. Rounded annual defence budgets (USD billion, 2025-26). China's real spending exceeds the official figure.

Trend	What is happening	What it means for India	Label
Multipolarity	No single power can impose order; middle powers hedge	India's bargaining power rises, and so does the cost of misjudgement	Assess ment
China's rise and assertiveness	Larger navy, nuclear build-up, border infrastructure, presence in the Indian Ocean	A long competition; the sea and the Tibetan plateau are the pressure points	Fact base
Pakistan's military-hybrid model	Army dominates; proxies; Chinese systems; nuclear signalling	Terror and crisis recurrence; limited conventional wars are possible	Assess ment
Technology diffusion	Drones, precision missiles, AI and space sensing are cheap and spread fast	Mass and speed matter; old advantages erode within years	Assess ment
Unreliable guarantees	US policy swings; Russia constrained and tied to China; Europe distracted	India must carry more of its own security	Assess ment
Climate and resource stress	Water, heat and migration pressures across South Asia	Non-traditional security grows; the armed forces will be called on more	Assess ment

OUR VIEW

The most important number in this paper is not a budget but a ratio: China spends about three times what India does and produces warships at many times India's rate. A doctrine built on matching China is a doctrine built to lose. We build on geography, partnerships and cheaper asymmetric systems.

1. STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

The threat picture: from a two-front problem to a networked one

India's security planners have long spoken of a two-front war. We think that framing is too narrow. The more likely pattern is simultaneous, low-intensity pressure on several fronts: a crisis with Pakistan, a quiet build-up on the LAC, a hostile naval presence in the Indian Ocean, a cyber or information attack and instability in the neighbourhood. The challenge is cumulative, not a single big battle.

Challenge	Nature	Capability trend to 2035	India's core problem	Doctrinal answer
China	Long-term strategic rival; border and maritime competition	Rising: navy, missiles, nuclear forces, space and cyber	Scale gap; two-theatre geography	Deny at the LAC; contest the sea; coalition-building; selective decoupling
Pakistan	Persistent adversary using proxies and nuclear signalling	Rising in missiles, drones, Chinese aircraft; economy weak	Terror below the threshold; short-war risk	Compel and deter: punish sponsors; keep escalation control
China-Pakistan collusion	Shared adversary; arms, intelligence and diplomatic support	Deepening, including naval and space	Simultaneous pressure on two fronts	Plan for two-and-a-half fronts; fused intelligence
Bangladesh	Neighbour in political transition; Chinese and Turkish inroads	Modest military; rising drone and naval acquisitions	Eastern stability, borders, illegal migration, radicalisation	Engage; shape; deter hostile basing
Turkey	Supplier and political patron of Pakistan; drone and arms exporter	Growing defence industry	Tech transfer to Pakistan and Bangladesh; information war	Cost-impose; counter-drone; diplomacy in Gulf and Europe
Non-state actors	Terror, drug and arms flows, cyber crime	Using drones and encrypted tools	Attribution and deterrence	Intelligence-led pre-emption; counter-drone grid

OUR VIEW

The planning case should be a 'two-and-a-half front' scenario: a limited war on one front, a crisis on the second, and sustained pressure at sea, in space and cyberspace. A force sized and organised for this case also handles simpler ones. A force sized for a clean two-front war does not handle the hybrid case.

1. STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

The nuclear balance: parity with Pakistan, a widening gap with China

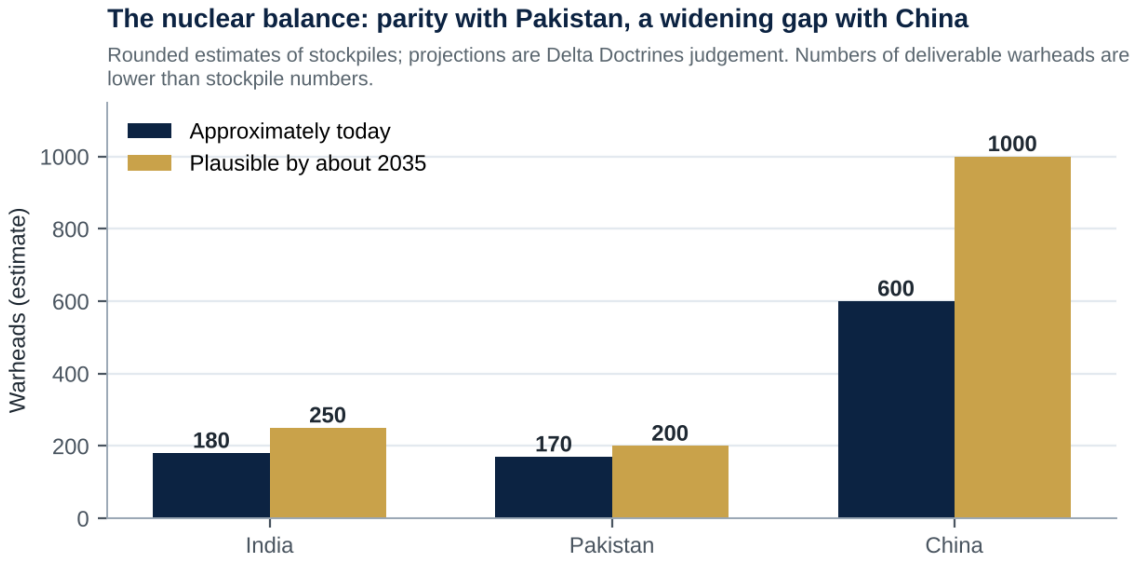


Figure 2. Rounded stockpile estimates, today and plausible by about 2035 (Delta Doctrines judgement).

India and Pakistan are close in numbers and different in doctrine. India declares no first use and credible minimum deterrence; Pakistan keeps a first-use option and has fielded short-range systems to offset conventional inferiority. China's arsenal is growing quickly and is likely to approach several hundred additional warheads over the decade. Raw numbers matter less than survivability, command and control, and the credibility of the threat.

Question	Our view
Should India abandon no first use?	No. The doctrine's value lies in clarity and in the moral and diplomatic position it gives India. But declare explicitly that the first use of any nuclear weapon against India or its forces, anywhere, will be met with massive retaliation
Is 'minimum' still credible?	Not as a label. We recommend 'credible assured retaliation' with a flexible set of options, tied to a survivable force rather than a fixed number
Do tactical nuclear weapons need a separate answer?	No. Retaliation should not distinguish between tactical and strategic use; a separate answer would legitimise the escalation ladder Pakistan wants
How many warheads?	Enough to threaten unacceptable damage after absorbing a first strike. That points to a larger and more varied force than today's, concentrated on sea-based and mobile systems, not simply more warheads

OUR VIEW

India's strategic restraint is a strength, and it should not be read as a sign of weakness. The task is to make the deterrent so survivable that no adversary can imagine a disarming first strike, and so well communicated that no adversary can imagine a nuclear shield for terror.

1. STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

Economic scenarios: the doctrine must assume a persistent gap

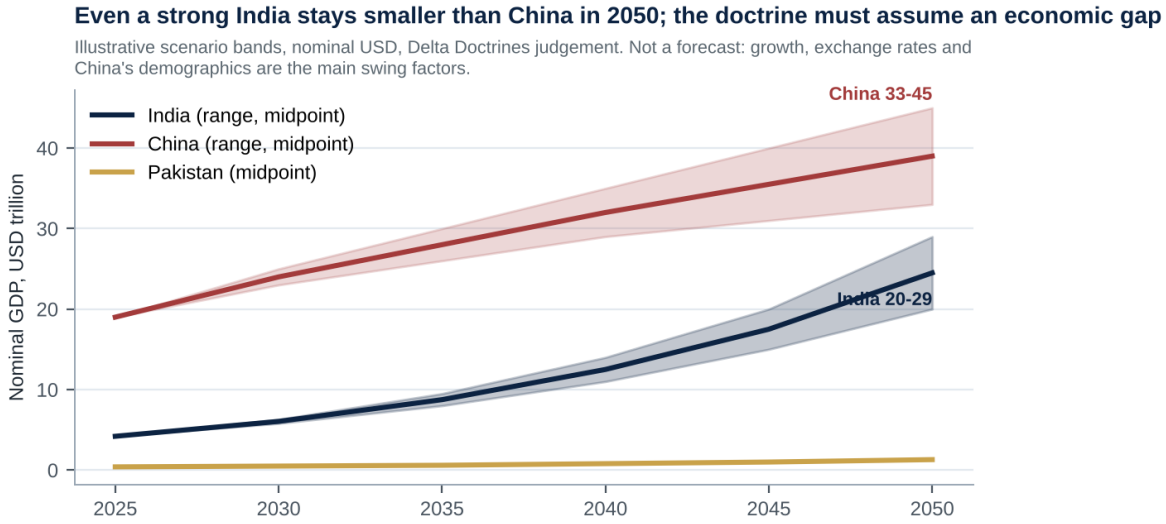


Figure 3. Illustrative nominal GDP scenarios to 2050 (Delta Doctrines judgement, not a forecast).

Implication	Why it follows	Doctrinal consequence
India will be larger but smaller than China	Even in a strong scenario India's economy is well under China's in 2050	Cost-efficiency, partners and asymmetric systems are essential; avoid arms-race symmetry
Time is on India's side only if it uses it	Higher growth lifts spending power, but only if reforms and shipyard and chip capacity are built now	Invest in industrial base in the 2020s, not after
China's demography and debt may slow it	An ageing population and property stress limit growth after 2035	Avoid conflict in the 2030s while China is strongest relative to India; build for the long game
Pakistan risks decline	Weak economy and large youth cohort; reliance on loans and China	Prepare for instability and for assertive military behaviour; do not count on collapse

Economic power is the engine of every other form of power. India's path to 2050 depends on sustaining growth of 6 to 7 per cent, raising manufacturing's share, building shipyards and semiconductor capacity, and managing energy security. The doctrine's budget assumption (about 2.5 per cent of a much larger GDP) fits inside such a path. Anything less leaves the military unable to modernise; anything more is hard to sustain politically.

> OUR VIEW
> The strongest security investment India can make is to grow faster and to build shipyards, chip plants and energy reserves. These are economic policies with security returns. We would have the National Security Council review them each year with the same weight as force structure.

2. NATIONAL SECURITY DOCTRINE

The architecture: from coordination to command

A doctrine is only as good as the institutions that carry it out. India's national security architecture has improved in the last decade: a Chief of Defence Staff, a Department of Military Affairs, a Defence Planning Committee and a growing joint culture. But authority remains diffused. The main gap is not ideas. It is that no one below the Prime Minister can make a trade-off between Services, between budget lines, or between present readiness and future capability.

Institution	Present role	Weakness	Recommended change
National Security Council and secretariat	Coordination on strategy and intelligence	No published national security strategy; limited budgetary control	Publish a classified National Security Strategy every five years with an unclassified summary
National Security Adviser	Principal adviser to the Prime Minister	Overloaded, personality-driven	Create a Deputy NSA for technology and a Deputy NSA for the economy and resilience
Chief of Defence Staff and Department of Military Affairs	Joint planning, procurement and promoting jointness	Limited command authority; Services keep most levers	Statutory authority for theatres, joint budget and joint training
Defence Minister and Defence Acquisition Council	Policy and acquisition decisions	Slow; many reviews; weak incentives for risk	Fast-track track for software and attritable systems; shorter acquisition cycles
Intelligence agencies	External, internal and technical collection	Fragmented fusion; limited joint tasking with military	Fusion centres with theatre commands and a single all-source assessment staff
Parliament and public	Oversight, budgets	Little structured debate on strategy	A Parliamentary committee on national security with cleared members

OUR VIEW

India should publish, at classified and public levels, a National Security Strategy that states ends, ways and means. The absence of a published strategy is a gift to adversaries and a handicap to Services. It also makes procurement look like shopping rather than strategy.

2. NATIONAL SECURITY DOCTRINE

Six tenets: the 'new normal', written down

Since 2016 and 2019, and decisively in 2025, India has shown a willingness to respond to terrorist attacks with cross-border force. We think this is correct and should be made explicit as standing doctrine. The aim is not to invite conflict but to take away the sponsor's confidence that terror is cheap.

Tenet	Meaning	Why we hold it	Cost or risk
1. Terror equals war	A major terror attack traced to a foreign sponsor will be treated as an act of war and met with a calibrated response	Without a standing rule, every attack is a fresh crisis and a fresh negotiation	Narrows diplomatic space; adversary may stage an attack to provoke a response
2. No distinction between terrorist and sponsor	The state or agency that arms and shelters terror is a target	Deterrence depends on hitting the real decision-makers	Escalation; international criticism
3. No nuclear blackmail	Nuclear threats will not stop India from acting below the nuclear threshold	Otherwise nuclear weapons become a licence for terror	Requires good command and control and clear red lines
4. Calibrated, deliberate response	India chooses timing, target and scale	Control of escalation stays with India	Needs ready options and fast decisions
5. Strategic autonomy	India will not join a bloc or be bound by any single partner	Keeps flexibility in a world of shifting alliances	Less guaranteed support in a crisis
6. Hold the line, build the edge	Defend territory and sea lanes; invest in the long-run advantage	Avoid both complacency and adventurism	Needs patience and a steady budget

OUR VIEW

Doctrine should say clearly what India will do and, equally, what it will not do. India will not strike first with nuclear weapons, will not invade to hold territory in Pakistan or occupy a neighbour, and will not make peace talks a reward for terror. A doctrine with explicit limits is more credible and easier to execute than one that is vague.

2. NATIONAL SECURITY DOCTRINE

Escalation: a ladder that India climbs by choice



Figure 4. An illustrative escalation ladder. India sets the pace and keeps the option to stop at each rung.

Rung	Trigger	Instruments	Exit
1	Terror attack with foreign links; border or maritime provocation	Diplomacy; trade, visas, water-use decisions; diplomatic isolation	Adversary acts against the group
2	Attack with mass casualties; pattern of attacks	Covert action; cyber; sanctions; naval signalling	Verified action against the sponsor
3	Clear attribution	Stand-off precision strikes on terror camps and leadership	No retaliation, or limited, controlled retaliation
4	Retaliation by the adversary military	Strikes on air defence, command and logistics of the enabling force	Return to the status quo ante
5	Further escalation	Limited theatre campaign with defined aims (not territorial conquest)	Ceasefire on India's terms
6	Risk of nuclear use	Alerting strategic forces; declared red lines; crisis diplomacy	Third-party and bilateral communication

Three features make the ladder usable. First, each rung has options that are ready now, not to be built in the crisis. Second, India has clear communication channels to Pakistan and China so that signals are understood. Third, India has a plan for what a pause looks like: a statement of success that lets both sides stop.

OUR VIEW

The adversary's best escalation strategy against India is to create fast crises in which India has no ready options. We would therefore treat readiness of rungs 3 and 4, long-range fires, drones, electronic attack and air defence, as the first call on any extra money.

2. NATIONAL SECURITY DOCTRINE

Resilience is deterrence: preparing the nation

Modern wars are won or lost by societies as well as armies. Pakistan's and China's most likely tools of coercion against India include missile and drone strikes against cities, cyber attacks on infrastructure, pressure on shipping and energy supplies, and economic or financial sanctions. India's best answer is to reduce its vulnerability before a crisis so that threats lose their force.

Domain	Vulnerability	Resilience measure	Owner	Target by 2035
Energy	Imports of about 85% of crude; Gulf dependence	Strategic reserves of 60+ days; gas and renewables; nuclear power; diversified suppliers	Petroleum, Power, Defence	60 days
Food and fertiliser	Import dependence for fertiliser inputs	Buffer stocks; domestic production; trade diversification	Agriculture, Fertilisers	6-month buffer
Finance and payments	Sanctions or cut-off from messaging systems	Domestic payment networks; local-currency settlement; gold and FX reserves	Finance, RBI	Sanction-proof core
Cyber and critical infrastructure	Grid, ports, telecom, banks	Segmentation; sovereign cloud; incident drills; national cyber command links	NSCS, CERT-In, Services	Annual drills
Civil defence	Missile and drone attack on cities and bases	Shelters, alert systems, training of local bodies, counter-drone nets at key sites	Home, States	Top 30 cities
Health and supply chains	Medical and electronic components	Stockpiles; domestic production of key drugs, chips, batteries	Health, MeitY	Critical lists covered

OUR VIEW

Resilience gets less attention than weapons because it has no ribbon-cutting. It should be a core security task with a Deputy NSA, a budget and an annual exercise. We estimate that a serious resilience programme costs less than 10 per cent of the defence budget and removes more of an adversary's coercive options than a similar spend on hardware.

3. INTEGRATED THEATRE COMMANDS

Design: four theatres and three functional commands

Proposed theatre structure: four land-air theatres, one maritime, three functional commands



Figure 5. Proposed structure. Boundaries and names are Delta Doctrines proposals, not announced decisions.

Theatre or command	Area of responsibility	Principal adversary focus	Lead Service (rotating deputy)	Key assets
Northern Theatre	Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, high-altitude sectors	Pakistan and China (west)	Army (Air Force deputy)	Mountain divisions, UAVs, long-range fires, air defence
Western Theatre	Punjab, Rajasthan, Gujarat, western desert and coast	Pakistan	Army (Air Force deputy)	Strike corps, air force strike elements, missile and drone forces
Eastern Theatre	Sikkim, Arunachal, north-east, Myanmar border	China (east), insurgency	Army (Air Force deputy)	Mountain forces, air defence, rapid-reaction brigades
Maritime Theatre	Indian Ocean, island territories, chokepoints	China, Pakistan Navy	Navy (Air Force deputy)	Carriers, submarines, maritime air, unmanned fleets
Strategic Forces Command	All nuclear forces and associated early warning	All	Joint, under civilian authority	Nuclear forces, missile defence, NC3
Air Defence and Aerospace Command	Integrated air and missile defence; space	All	Air Force	Radars, interceptors, space assets
Cyber, Special Operations, EW and AI Command	Information, spectrum and special operations	All	Joint	Cyber, EW, special forces, AI core

OUR VIEW

We prefer four theatres and three functional commands to the many variants debated publicly. Fewer, larger theatres reduce seams, but India's geography makes three land theatres and one maritime theatre natural: west (Pakistan), north (the mountains, both fronts) and east (China). The functional commands handle what cuts across theatres.

3. INTEGRATED THEATRE COMMANDS

Authority: three tests every theatre must pass

Theatre commands succeed or fail on authority, not boundaries. They succeed if the commander can plan, command and sustain forces without asking three Service chiefs for permission. We propose three tests. **Command test**: does the commander have operational control of all forces for the mission? **Resource test**: does the commander control logistics and a share of the budget? **Accountability test**: is one person answerable for failure and success?

Question	Our answer	Reasoning
Who commands forces in a theatre?	The theatre commander, from any Service, has operational command of all forces assigned	Unity of command: one person accountable for the campaign
What stays with the Chiefs?	Raise, train, sustain and equip; advise the Government; manage careers and doctrine	Service chiefs remain essential, but as force providers
What does the CDS do?	Principal military adviser; chairs the Chiefs of Staff Committee; owns joint planning and the joint budget	A single military voice to the Government
Who has the money?	A joint capital pool for cross-Service capabilities (air defence, ISR, drones, AI, logistics) of about 15% of the capital budget	Without a joint budget, jointness is a slogan
Who controls nuclear forces?	The Prime Minister, through the Nuclear Command Authority; Strategic Forces Command executes	Civilian control must stay absolute
How is political control kept?	Theatre commanders report to the CDS and, for war, through the Cabinet Committee on Security	A clear chain of accountability to elected leaders
What about air power?	Air assets are allocated to theatres but centrally planned for the strategic air campaign	Air power is flexible and scarce; it should not be fragmented

OUR VIEW

The most common mistake in creating theatre commands is to leave the old structure in place and add a new layer on top. That produces more staff and no more authority. We would rather delay the declaration of a theatre until its commander has real authority, than declare early and then dilute it.

3. INTEGRATED THEATRE COMMANDS

Transition: maritime first, land theatres last

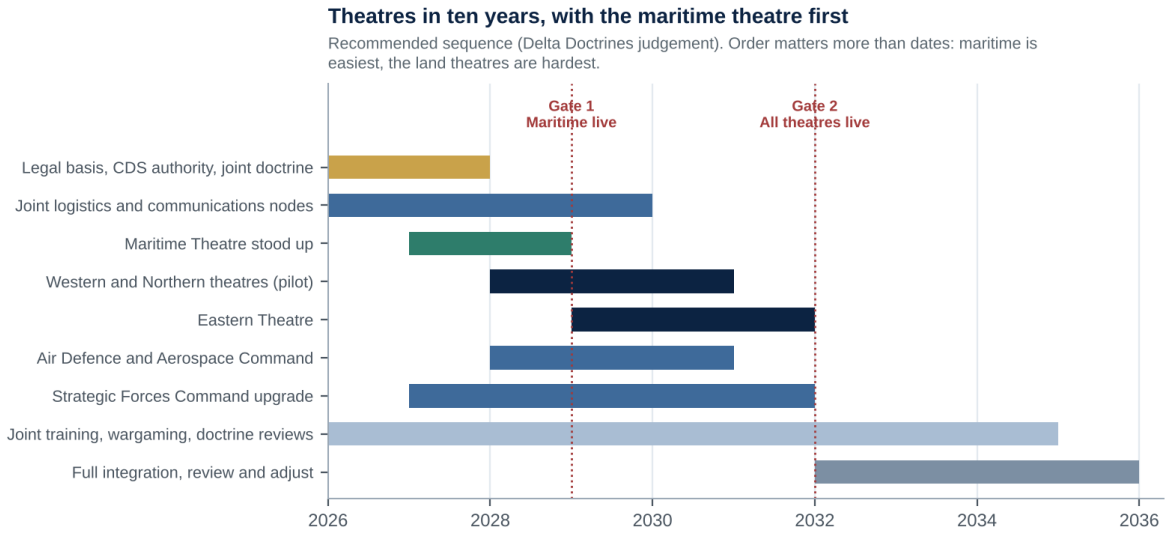


Figure 6. Recommended sequence for theatre commands, with gates.

Stakeholder	What it gives up	What it gains	How to win support
Army	Control of some air-defence and aviation assets; some autonomy in commands	Joint fires and ISR; a strong role in three of four theatres	Make the Army the lead in land theatres; guarantee its force-provider role
Air Force	Fragmentation fear: loss of central control over air power	Integrated air defence; a rising joint capital pool	Keep air power centrally planned; place the Air Force in command of the aerospace command
Navy	Fewer separate commands	A maritime theatre that fits its mission	Maritime theatre first; the Navy leads it
Civil bureaucracy	Some Service-level approvals	Clear joint plans; defence budget logic	Early involvement; a defence reform law with defined civil-military roles
Political leadership	Control of promotions and posting at the margin	A single point of military advice	Clear statute; periodic review

The sequence matters. A maritime theatre has the cleanest boundary and the fewest turf disputes, so it should go first and prove the method. The land theatres, especially northern and western, hold the highest stakes and should start as pilots with joint staffs and a joint logistics base before they take full command. The functional commands, strategic, aerospace and cyber, should progress in parallel.

OUR VIEW

Pushing hard on the timetable would be a mistake. A bad theatre command is worse than none. We recommend a statute in 2027, a maritime theatre by 2029 and all theatres by 2032, with a 2035 review. If gate tests are not met, the date moves.

4. STRATEGIC FORCES COMMAND

Nuclear doctrine: survivable, flexible and clearly communicated

India's nuclear doctrine has served the country well because it is simple and restrained. It faces three new pressures: China's larger and faster-growing arsenal, Pakistan's short-range systems and first-use option, and the arrival of missile defences, hypersonic weapons, AI-enabled targeting and space sensing that can threaten second-strike forces. Our recommendation is evolution, not revolution.

Issue	Present posture (approx.)	Recommended posture	Reason
Declaratory policy	No first use; credible minimum deterrence; massive retaliation	Retain no first use; adopt 'credible assured retaliation'; clarify that any nuclear use triggers massive retaliation	Keep moral position; make signals clearer
Force structure	Triad: land missiles, aircraft, three SSBNs	Rebalance to sea-based and mobile land-based systems; modernise the air leg	Survivability
Delivery systems	Missiles up to ICBM range; MIRV tests	Add hypersonic and manoeuvring options; a mix of ranges	Counter missile defence; flexible options
Command and control	Nuclear Command Authority; Strategic Forces Command	Hardened, redundant communications; satellite and fibre; two-person rules; strong political control	Prevent loss of control and accident
Early warning	Radars; limited space-based capacity	Space-based early warning; layered radars; shared warning with partners where safe	Reliable warning cuts false alarms
Arms control and risk reduction	Few bilateral channels; no agreements with China	Hotlines, notification of tests, a crisis communication channel with both neighbours	Reduce miscalculation
Fissile material and testing	Moratorium on testing; no stated plan	Keep moratorium; preserve the technical ability to test if the situation changes	Strategic flexibility

OUR VIEW

We would not change India's principal declaratory commitment, but we would make its consequences clearer. The risk of a vague doctrine is that an adversary might test it. The risk of an overly detailed doctrine is that it creates targets for political argument. Short, clear statements win.

4. STRATEGIC FORCES COMMAND

The sea leg: the heart of a survivable deterrent

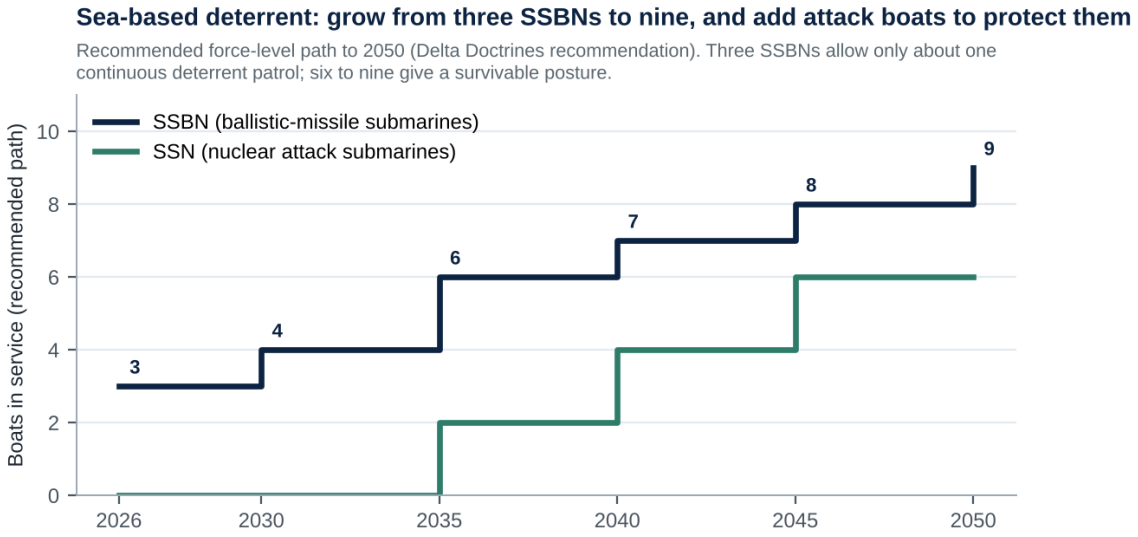


Figure 7. Recommended nuclear submarine force path to 2050.

Platform class	Today (approx.)	2035	2050	Role
SSBN (ballistic-missile submarine)	3	6	9	Survivable second strike; continuous patrol
SSN (nuclear attack submarine)	0	2	6	Escort SSBNs; hunt adversary submarines and carriers
Conventional submarines (AIP)	About 16	18	18	Coastal patrol; mine and special operations; chokepoints
Submarine-launched missiles	Short and medium range	Longer-range, MIRV-capable	Multiple types	Flexible deterrence
Undersea support	Limited	Seabed sensors; unmanned patrol	Seabed networks	Detect adversary subs; protect cables

A deterrent at sea is survivable only if the submarines can hide, patrol and communicate. That requires quiet boats, secure communications, protection from adversary submarines, and enough boats to maintain at least one patrol at all times. With three SSBNs India has, at best, a part-time patrol. With six to nine it can have more than one at sea in a crisis. The investment is large, perhaps USD 20 to 25 billion over two decades for submarines, missiles and support, but nothing else buys as much deterrence.

> OUR VIEW
> We would give the SSBN and SSN programmes the highest priority in the naval budget, above a third carrier. A carrier without a survivable deterrent invites coercion. A survivable deterrent without a carrier does not.

4. STRATEGIC FORCES COMMAND

Missile defence, hypersonics and space: protecting and projecting

Missile defence cannot defeat a determined, large nuclear adversary and should not be sold as if it can. Its purpose is narrower: to defeat limited attacks, protect key command and nuclear assets, deny a cheap first strike by Pakistan, and complicate planning for China. A balanced approach combines defence with offence and avoids a costly, unwinnable race.

Layer	Purpose	Recommended development	Timeline	Label
Early warning	Detect launches; track missiles and aircraft	Space-based infra-red satellites; over-the-horizon radars; large phased arrays	2027-2035	Recommendation
Upper-tier missile defence	Intercept ballistic missiles in space	Expand the programme to cover major cities and key bases; invest in kill vehicles	2028-2038	Recommendation
Lower-tier and air defence	Defend against missiles, cruise missiles, drones and aircraft	Layered long, medium and short-range interceptors; directed energy; guns	2026-2040	Recommendation
Hypersonic weapons	Penetrate defences; time-critical targets	Hypersonic glide vehicles and cruise missiles; test infrastructure	2028-2040	Recommendation
Space protection	Protect satellites; retaliate against attackers	Resilient constellations; manoeuvrable and small satellites; jamming and tracking	2027-2040	Recommendation
Counter-space	Deny adversary use of space in war	Non-destructive options first (jamming, cyber); retain destructive capability	2030 onward	Recommendation

OUR VIEW

Do not over-invest in hit-to-kill interceptors for homeland defence. They are costly and defeated by cheap penetration aids. Invest first in early warning and in layers that can defeat drones, cruise missiles and short-range ballistic missiles, which are the real near-term threats. This is where the cost-exchange problem (Chapter 6) matters most.

4. STRATEGIC FORCES COMMAND

Command and control, and managing risk in a crisis

The most dangerous moments in a nuclear crisis are the first hours, when information is poor and fear is high. A tight, secure, redundant command and control system, and a culture of caution, reduce the risk of catastrophe. New technologies make this harder: AI can compress decision time, space and cyber attacks can blind warning systems, and hypersonic missiles reduce warning time.

Task	Present gap	Measure	Owner
Secure nuclear command and control	Dependence on a few channels; vulnerability to jamming and cyber	Redundant fibre, satellite and high-frequency links; quantum-secure encryption on core links	Strategic Forces Command, DRDO
Keep humans in control	Rising pressure to automate decisions	A written rule: no AI or autonomous system can authorise nuclear use; human control at each step	Nuclear Command Authority
Prevent accident and false alarm	Reliance on short warning	Multiple warning sources; delayed-launch procedures; no launch on a single sensor	Strategic Forces Command
Protect against cyber compromise	Supply-chain and software risk	Air-gapped systems; trusted hardware; regular red-team exercises	NSA, cyber agencies
Communicate with adversaries	Few reliable crisis channels	Hotlines with Pakistan and China; regular military-to-military contacts	MEA, MoD
Control the information space	Disinformation can trigger a crisis	Rapid, credible public communication; verified imagery sharing	MEA, I and B, Services

OUR VIEW

India should be a leader in human-control norms for nuclear decision-making. A national commitment that AI will never authorise nuclear use is cheap, popular and strategically sound. It also gives India credibility in international debates, where it can argue that restraint is a form of strength.

5. ARMY

Doctrine: from holding ground to winning the first week

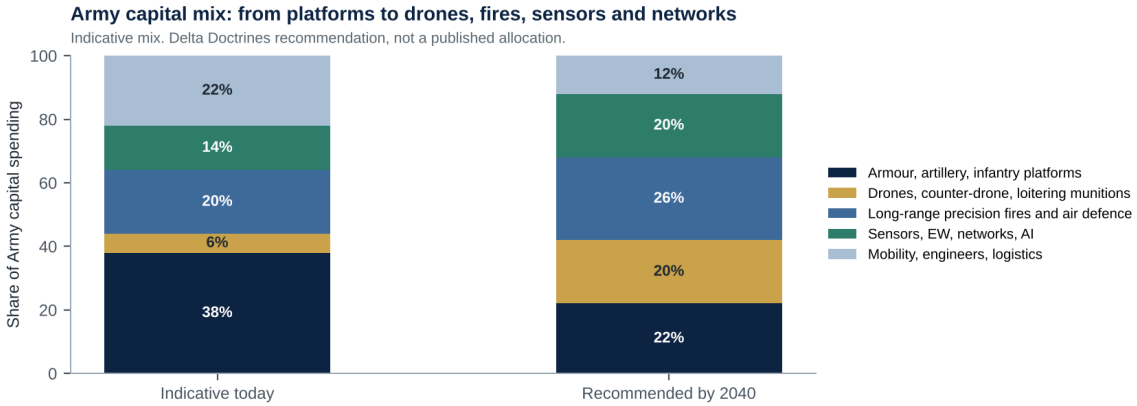


Figure 8. Indicative Army capital mix, today and recommended by 2040.

The Army is India's oldest and largest instrument of national power and it remains essential for deterrence and territorial integrity. But the character of land war is changing: drones, precision missiles and electronic warfare make large formations visible and vulnerable, while small, networked, well-supplied forces can do much more. The question is not whether the Army should modernise but what it should buy.

Shift	From	To
Organisation	Large divisions, heavy corps	Integrated battle groups of combined arms, supported by drones and fires, under theatre commanders
Fires	Gun artillery in the main	Long-range rocket, missile and loitering-munition brigades; guns for volume
Air defence	Point defence; legacy systems	Layered networks with counter-drone, directed energy and gun-missile systems at every formation
Reconnaissance	Human patrols, a few UAVs	Persistent drones and sensors at battalion level; AI-assisted fusion at brigade level
Logistics	Road and mule based	Drone resupply, autonomous convoys, forward stockpiles, local production of spares
People	Large, manpower-heavy force	Smaller, more technical force; stronger reserves; career paths for technologists

OUR VIEW

The Army's biggest strategic problem is not its size but its mix. We recommend shifting 15 to 20 per cent of capital spending from heavy platforms to drones, counter-drone systems, fires and networks by 2040. That shift is more important than any single tank or gun.

5. ARMY

Posture: hold the mountains, win the plains, defend against drones everywhere

Front	Threat	Posture	Priority investments	Risk
Line of Control	Cross-border terror, artillery, drones, limited raids	Strong forward defence; counter-infiltration grid; rapid retaliation options	Counter-drone; surveillance; fires; hardened shelters	Escalation from a single incident
Line of Actual Control (west)	Build-up; salami slicing; air and missile threat	Defence in depth; mobile reserves; infrastructure to move forces quickly	Roads, tunnels, rail; air defence; mountain mobility	Rapid fait accompli
Line of Actual Control (east)	Same; larger terrain and weaker infrastructure	Same; plus rapid reaction	Roads, airfields, forward bases	Surprise
Plains and desert (west)	Pakistan armoured and mechanised forces; drones and missiles	Strike corps; air-land integration; strong air defence	Long-range fires; integrated battle groups; EW	Short intense war
Internal	Insurgency, extremism, unrest	Central armed police and Army in support	Intelligence; mobility; counter-drone	Overstretch

Mountains. The LAC dictates a defensive posture with strong reserves, high mobility and heavy investment in infrastructure. The aim is deterrence by denial: to make a limited seizure so costly that China does not attempt it. Drones, long-range fires and air defence are force multipliers. Infrastructure, roads, tunnels, bridges and airfields, is a weapon too, and India should continue to build it at a rapid pace.

Plains. In the west, India's aim should be a rapid, limited-objective campaign backed by overwhelming fires and air power, aimed at military targets, not at holding territory. Speed and electronic dominance matter more than mass.

People. A shorter-service, high-technology model suits the future; it needs better career design and skills, and good training for reserves. The Army should pay attention to retention of trained personnel and to the quality of leadership at junior levels.

> OUR VIEW
> We would resist the temptation to expand the Army's strength. India's land power rests on quality, mobility and speed, not numbers. A smaller, better-equipped, better-trained Army with high mobility and strong support from drones and long-range fires would be a more credible deterrent than a larger one that cannot be supplied and moved.

6. AIR FORCE

Rebuilding the squadron base: the first ten years decide the next thirty

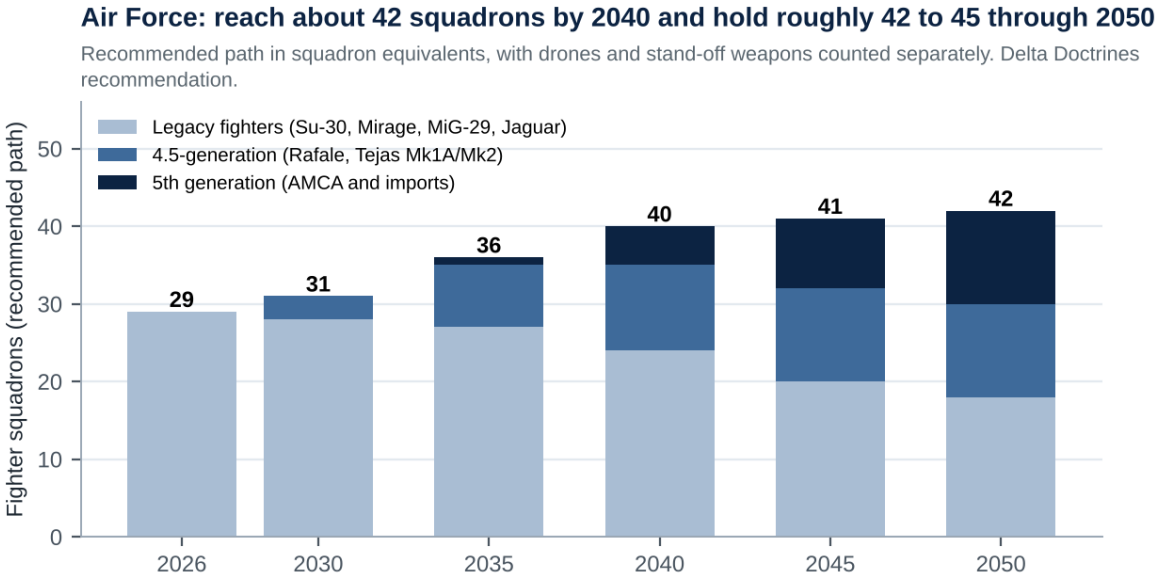


Figure 9. Recommended fighter squadron path to 2050.

The Air Force is India's fastest instrument of force and the one most exposed to a numbers shortfall. With about 29 fighter squadrons against an authorised strength of 42, it cannot fight two fronts at once. Retirements of MiG-21 and earlier types, delays in Tejas and the lag in a fifth-generation programme have widened the gap. The first decade is about closing it.

Action	Detail	Timing
Raise Tejas and Rafale numbers	Complete Tejas Mk1A; field Tejas Mk2; buy more Rafale-class aircraft	2026-2035
Upgrade Su-30MKI	Radar, EW, missiles and structural life extension	2026-2032
Fifth-generation fighter	Complete AMCA; consider a bridging import if delays persist	2030-2045
Combat drones and loyal wingmen	Large unmanned platforms that accompany manned fighters	2028-2040
Stand-off weapons	Long-range air-launched missiles; hypersonic options	2026-2038
Training and maintenance	Simulators; indigenous trainers; engine support	2026-2035

OUR VIEW

India must not wait for a perfect fifth-generation aircraft before rebuilding numbers. We would buy proven fourth and 4.5-generation aircraft now, in quantities that close the squadron gap by 2035, and invest in unmanned and stand-off systems as a force multiplier. The right measure is not squadron count but the ability to defeat the adversary's air defences and aircraft in the first days.

6. AIR FORCE

Air and missile defence and the enablers that make fighters useful

A fighter fleet is only as good as its enablers. In the first days of a war against a capable adversary, the decisive factors are airbase survival, airborne early warning, electronic warfare, tanker support and integrated air defence. India's investment in these enablers has lagged that in fighters. We would reverse the priority.

Enabler	Present gap	Recommendation	Priority
Airborne early warning and control	Few platforms; ageing	Triple the fleet with a mix of large and small platforms; drone-based radar balloons and aircraft	High
Aerial refuelling	Small tanker fleet	Double the tanker fleet; add unmanned tankers by 2040	High
Integrated air and missile defence	Layers exist but are poorly connected	One national air picture; common command; mixed layers; counter-drone	Very high
Electronic warfare and stand-off jamming	Limited dedicated platforms	Stand-off jamming aircraft; escort jammers on drones; self-protection suites	High
Suppression of enemy air defence	Limited weapons and doctrine	Anti-radiation missiles, decoys, drones; joint fires with the Army	High
Airbases and resilience	Concentrated; vulnerable to missile attack	Hardened shelters; dispersal airstrips; rapid repair; mobile air defence	Very high
Space-based ISR	Growing, but dependent on few satellites	Constellation of small radar and optical satellites; tasking by theatre	High

OUR VIEW

The best use of the next rupee in the Air Force is not a squadron of fighters but a hardened base, a refuelling tanker or an airborne radar. We would set enabler spending at no less than 30 per cent of the Air Force's capital budget.

6. AIR FORCE

Super-stealth and anti-stealth: stay in the race on both sides

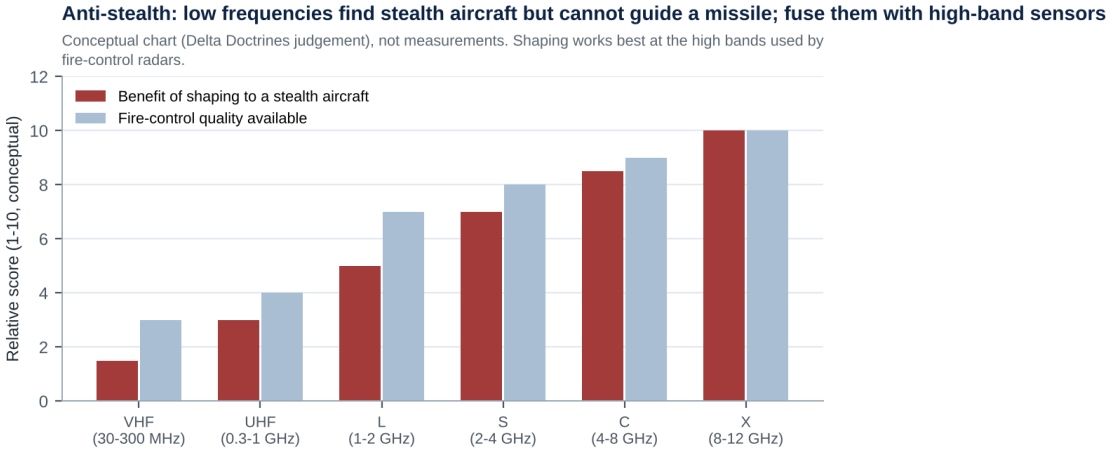


Figure 10. Conceptual: shaping benefits stealth most at the high bands used for fire control, while low bands detect but cannot guide weapons.

Sensor approach	How it works	Strengths	Limits	Role in the stealth-defeat chain
VHF and UHF radars	Long wavelengths are less affected by shaping	Detect stealth aircraft at useful range	Poor accuracy; large; vulnerable	Cue other sensors
Passive and multistatic sensing	Use broadcast and other transmissions; separate transmitters and receivers	Hard to jam or target; no emissions	Complex processing; coverage gaps	Persistent warning
Infra-red search and track	Detect heat from engines and skin friction	Passive; good accuracy at close range	Weather and range limits	Fire-control on fighters
Networked radars	Fuse many radars and angles	Different aspects reveal weak points in shaping	Needs strong communications and fusion	Core of air defence
Quantum and Rydberg receivers	Atom-based detection of faint radio signals	Very wide bandwidth; sensitive	Early stage; lab-based	Electronic-support upgrade after 2032
Space-based sensing	Radar and infra-red from orbit	Wide coverage; hard to hide from	Revisit time; countermeasures	Cueing and tracking

India faces stealth aircraft on both fronts. China has fielded fifth-generation fighters and is developing next-generation designs; Pakistan has pursued stealth and Chinese systems. India must therefore do two things at once: field a stealth aircraft of its own and build a layered chain to defeat adversary stealth. No single radar defeats stealth. A mix of sensors does.

> OUR VIEW
>
> Anti-stealth should be treated as a system, not a sensor purchase. The stealth-defeat chain is: detect with low-band and passive sensors, cue with networked radars, track with infra-red and space sensors, and engage with long-range interceptors and fighters. We would fund each link and measure the whole chain in exercises.

7. NAVY

A navy for the Indian Ocean: more submarines, more mass, more unmanned

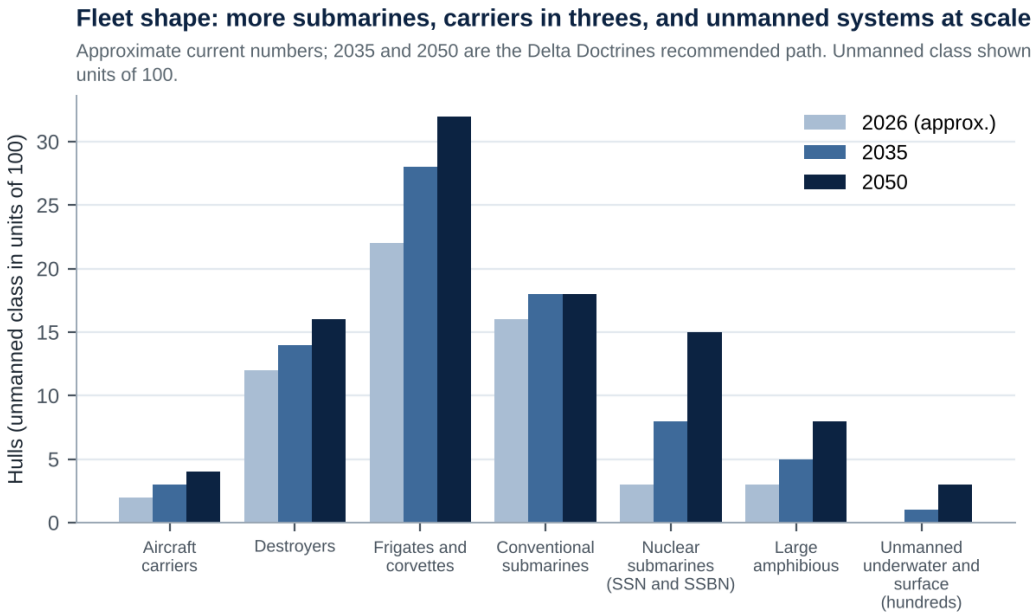


Figure 11. Fleet shape, approximate today and recommended for 2035 and 2050.

Class	2026 (approx.)	2035	2050	Comment
Aircraft carriers	2	3	4	Sea control and power projection; protect them with submarines and air defence
Destroyers	12	14	16	Air defence and strike
Frigates and corvettes	22	28	32	Escort, patrol, anti-submarine warfare
Conventional submarines	16	18	18	Quiet, cheap, good for chokepoints
Nuclear submarines	3	8	15	Deterrent and sea denial
Large amphibious ships	3	5	8	Island defence; humanitarian response
Unmanned vessels	Few	Hundreds	Thousands	Surveillance, mine warfare, decoys, strike

The Navy's job is to be the dominant power in the Indian Ocean and to hold China's energy and trade lifeline at risk in a crisis. It does not need to match the PLA Navy in the Pacific. It needs the ability to see, track and, if necessary, stop adversary forces in the Indian Ocean, and the ability to protect India's own sea lanes, island territories and offshore assets.

> OUR VIEW
>
> The Navy is the Service where India has the greatest relative advantage. We would increase its share of the defence capital budget from about 18 per cent to about 25 per cent by 2035. That is the single biggest reallocation we recommend, and it is justified by the maritime geography that favours India.

7. NAVY

Under-sea, seabed and sea denial: the Navy's decisive tasks

The 21st-century naval contest is increasingly under the surface. Submarines, seabed sensors, cables and undersea drones will shape who can operate in the ocean. India's advantage lies in its long coastline, its island chain and its location astride the sea lanes that carry a large share of China's oil imports (commonly put at around 80 per cent). These are leverage points, and doctrine should be built to use them.

Capability	Priority actions	Why it matters
Anti-submarine warfare	Maritime patrol aircraft, helicopters, towed arrays, seabed sensors, unmanned hunters	PLAN submarines are entering the Indian Ocean in growing numbers
Nuclear attack submarines	Six by 2050; first two by 2035	Hunt adversary submarines and carriers; protect SSBNs
Seabed and cable protection	Seabed sensor networks; undersea drones; cable repair capacity	Cables carry most of India's data; attacks would be hard to attribute
Carrier strike groups	Three carriers with fixed-wing aircraft, plus unmanned air wings; escorts and tankers	Sea control and strike; reassure partners
Maritime domain awareness	Satellites; radar; AIS; shore stations; information-fusion centres; partners' data	Know what is in the ocean at all times
Long-range anti-ship missiles	Hypersonic and supersonic missiles on ships, aircraft, submarines and shore	Hold adversary surface ships at risk; the cheapest sea denial tool
Mine warfare and chokepoint control	Mines, drones, special forces; coastal defence	Close or open straits at will

OUR VIEW

On carriers we part with the conventional wisdom. We support a third carrier, but not before the SSN and SSBN programmes, the P-8 and maritime air fleet, seabed awareness and long-range anti-ship missiles. Carriers are valuable but vulnerable, and India should build the means to protect them before buying more.

7. NAVY

Indian Ocean geography: bases, partners and the PLA Navy's reach

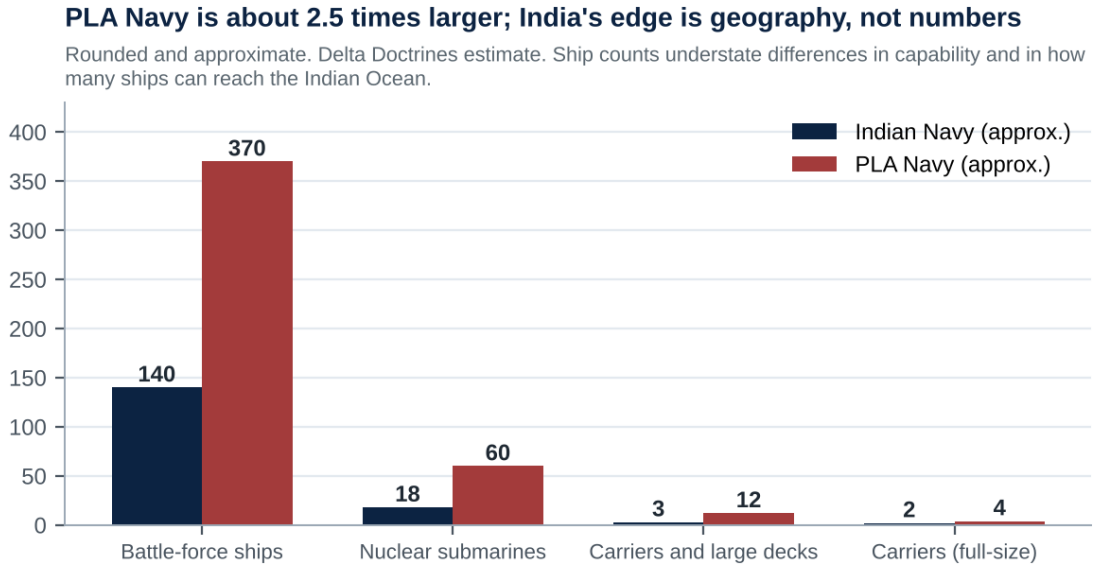


Figure 12. Rounded comparison of India's and China's navies, approximate.

Location	Value	Doctrinal use	Action
Andaman and Nicobar Islands	Overlooks the Malacca approaches	Forward air and naval bases; sensors; submarine support	Expand airfields, ports, and air defence; station a joint force
Lakshadweep and Minicoy	Western Indian Ocean position	Surveillance, air and naval presence	Upgrade airstrips and logistics
Agalega and Mauritius	Southern Indian Ocean	Maritime patrol and logistics	Keep facilities open and welcomed by local partners
Seychelles, Reunion (via France), Madagascar	Western Indian Ocean	Access and logistics	Develop agreements with France and local governments
Oman (Duqm), UAE, Saudi ports	Gulf approaches	Naval access and logistics	Pursue defence agreements; expand training
Indonesia, Singapore, Vietnam, Philippines	Eastern approaches and South China Sea	Access and visits; exercises	Deepen access arrangements
Djibouti and the Horn of Africa	Red Sea and Bab el-Mandeb	Anti-piracy; logistics	Maintain access; partner with France and Japan

OUR VIEW

India does not need a ring of foreign bases. It needs a network of assured access: agreements that let Indian ships and aircraft use friendly ports and airfields for logistics and repair. We would give the Andaman and Nicobar command the same priority as a land theatre, and treat the island chain as a fortress that can host long-range sensors and missiles.

8. NEW TECHNOLOGIES

Drone warfare: mass, cost and defence

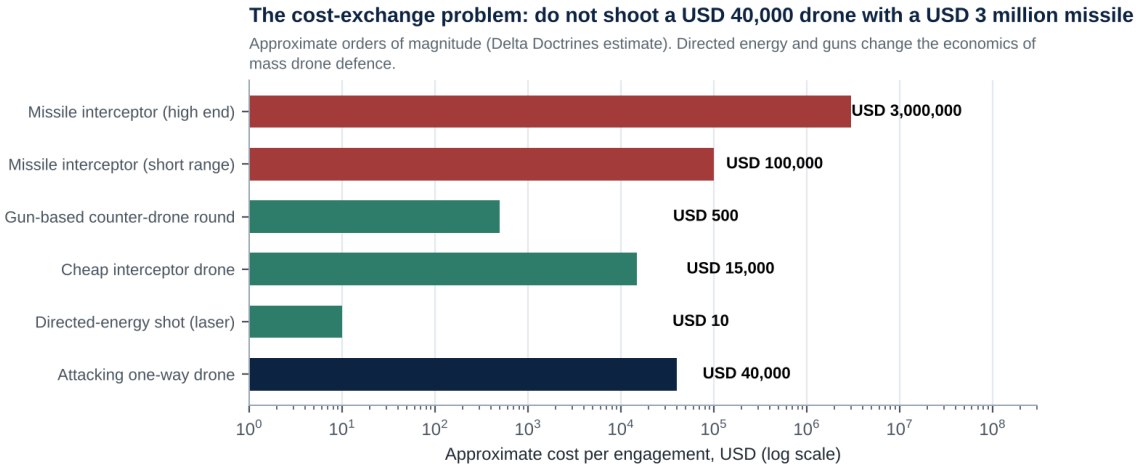


Figure 13. Approximate cost per engagement for drones and defences (log scale).

Principle	Doctrine	Implication
Mass and attritability	Buy thousands of cheap drones, not dozens of expensive ones, for ISR and strike	Drone production lines; spares and software; training
Layered defence	Counter-drone nets at every level, from soldier to city	Sensors, jammers, guns, interceptor drones, lasers
Cost-exchange discipline	Never use a USD 3 million missile to kill a USD 40,000 drone	Cheap interceptors and directed energy as the first line
Swarm and autonomy	Swarms with human oversight for time-critical tasks	AI at the edge; electronic-warfare hardened datalinks
Sovereign supply chain	Domestic motors, batteries, optics, navigation chips and software	Support industry; avoid imported components that can be switched off
Integration	Drones as part of every unit, trained and used daily	Doctrine, training and logistics change at the battalion level

Drones have changed war in Ukraine, in the Middle East and in the 2025 India-Pakistan conflict. They give small states and non-state actors cheap precision, persistence and surprise. For India, with long borders and long coastlines, drone warfare is both the biggest threat and the biggest opportunity. A bold doctrine would treat the drone as the infantry rifle of the 21st century.

OUR VIEW

Counter-drone defence should have the priority that anti-aircraft guns had in the 1940s. We recommend a national counter-drone grid, funded jointly and operated by all Services and the police, covering military bases, ports, airfields, cities and critical infrastructure by 2032.

8. NEW TECHNOLOGIES

Directed-energy weapons: from experiments to a layer of defence

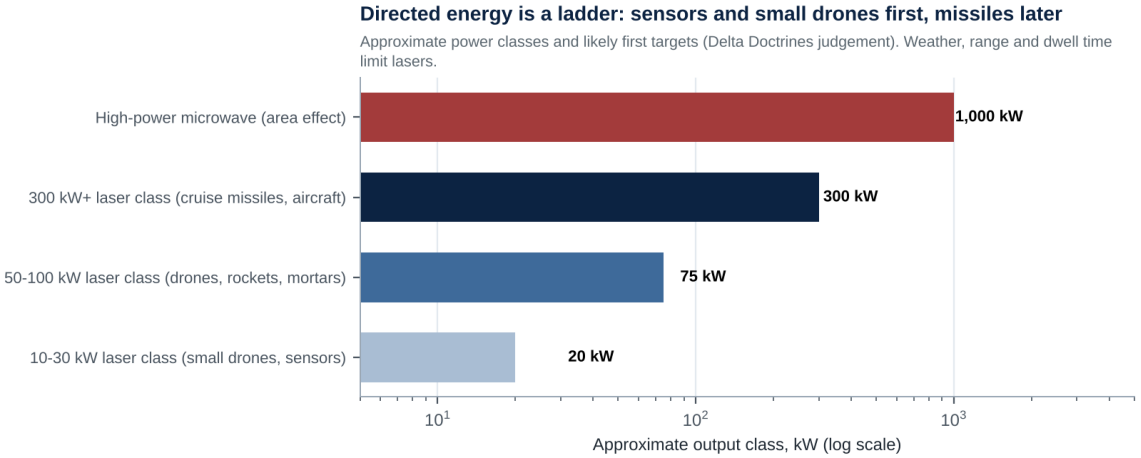


Figure 14. Directed energy by power class and first targets (approximate).

Programme	Target	Timeline	Remarks
Vehicle-mounted 10-30 kW laser	Small drones, optical sensors	2026-2029 fielding	First step; proven concept; needs integration with sensors
50-100 kW laser (land and sea)	Drones, rockets, mortars, small boats	2029-2034	Cost per shot is very low; weather and range limit
300 kW+ laser (ships, fixed sites)	Cruise missiles, aircraft	2034-2042	Power, cooling and beam control are the limiting factors
High-power microwave	Drone swarms, electronics	2028-2035	Area effect; fratricide risk to own systems; needs shielding
Integration with sensors and C2	Cueing from radars, cameras, AI	2027-2032	Key to practical use

Directed-energy weapons offer a low cost per shot and a deep magazine as long as there is power. They change the economics of defence against drones and, later, missiles. They are not a miracle: lasers are limited by weather, range and dwell time, and high-power microwaves affect friendly systems too. India has begun trials of vehicle and ship-mounted systems; it should now move from technology demonstration to units in service.

OUR VIEW

India should set a goal that by 2032 every major base, ship and strike group has an organic, layered counter-drone capability that includes at least one directed-energy element. The programme would cost about 1 to 2 per cent of the capital budget and would pay for itself in saved interceptors during the first serious drone attack.

8. NEW TECHNOLOGIES

Artificial intelligence: sovereign, supervised and everywhere

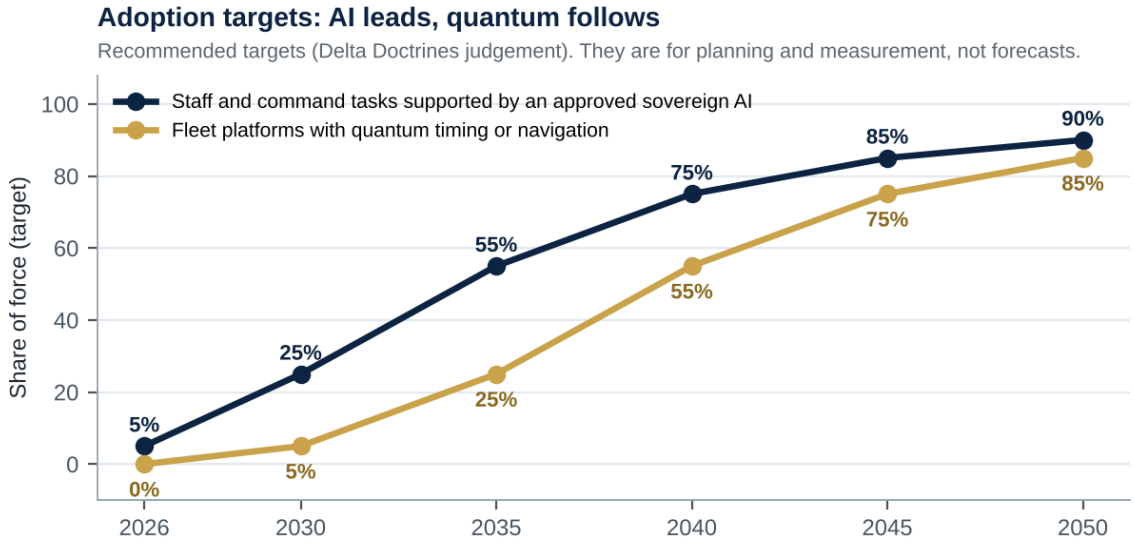


Figure 15. Adoption targets for AI and quantum, recommended.

Principle	Rule	Detail
Human authority	A named human authorises the use of force; AI advises	No autonomous authorisation of lethal action, and never of nuclear use
Sovereign core	Classified models run on a dedicated, air-gapped national stack	A three-tier model family (strategic, operational, tactical) with weights held in India
Independent evaluation	No release without testing by a body outside the chain of command	Military test sets; red teams; calibration
Data before models	Build the data fabric and cross-domain rules first	Joint data charters; accredited cross-domain guards
Edge capability	Tactical AI runs on the platform without connectivity	Quantised models; ruggedised hardware
Fail safe	Degraded mode when AI is down or compromised	Manual procedures drilled regularly

We have set out the economics and architecture of an armed-forces AI stack in a companion paper (DD/RP/2026-13): a sovereign model family on an air-gapped tri-service data centre, with a ten-year cost of the order of Rs 18,000 crore for the AI track. The doctrine point is different. AI changes the speed of decisions, so doctrine must also change who makes them, how they are checked, and what the machine may never do.

OUR VIEW

AI will make India's armed forces faster only if it is trusted, and it will be trusted only if it is tested by someone independent. The greatest AI risk is not that machines will go rogue but that commanders will over-trust them. We would build training, drills and a culture of questioning machine outputs into every command course.

8. NEW TECHNOLOGIES

Quantum: clocks, navigation and receivers first; quantum radar last

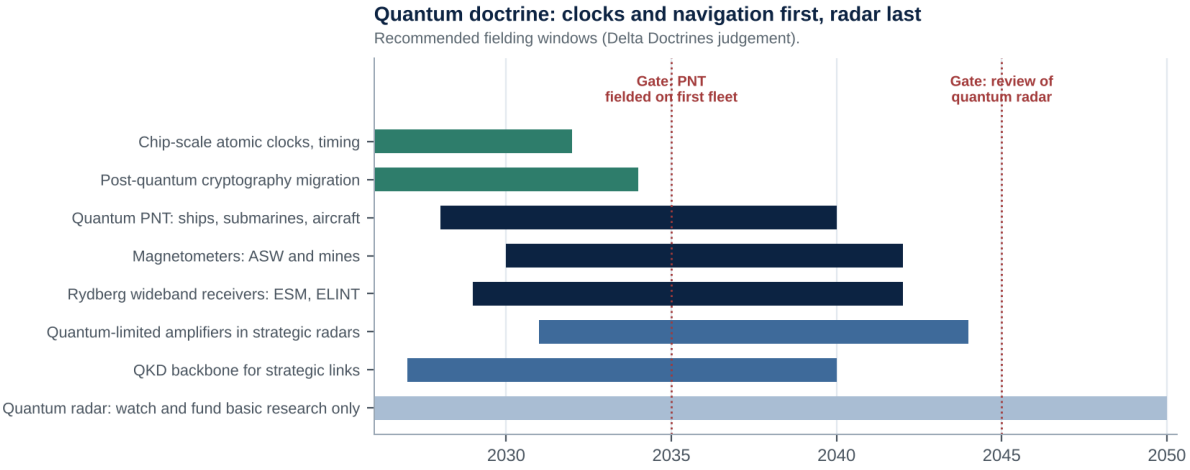


Figure 16. Recommended fielding windows for quantum technologies.

Technology	Doctrinal use	Timeline	What to avoid
Chip-scale atomic clocks	Holdover timing for radars, comms and networks when satellite time fails	2026-2032	Waiting for perfect optical clocks
Quantum inertial navigation	Navigation without GNSS on ships, submarines, aircraft and missiles	2028-2040	Buying before field trials
Quantum magnetometers	Submarine detection, mine detection and magnetic navigation	2030-2042	Over-promising detection range
Rydberg receivers	Wideband electronic support, signals intelligence	2029-2042	Assuming lab results transfer to the field
Quantum-limited amplifiers	More sensitive receivers for strategic radars	2031-2044	Dependence on a single cryogenic supplier
Post-quantum cryptography and QKD	Long-term secure communications	2026-2040	Relying on QKD alone
Quantum radar	Basic research only; not a procurement	2026-2050	Planning for stealth detection from it

Quantum sensing should enter doctrine in three roles. The first is assured timing and navigation: it lets forces operate when satellite signals are jammed or spoofed. The second is better electronic support: faster, wider, more sensitive reception. The third is secure communications. A quantum radar that sees stealth aircraft at long range is not a credible near-term plan, and we would not build doctrine on it. We detail costs and a ten-year plan in the companion paper.

OUR VIEW

The test for each quantum programme is simple: does it improve a capability the forces already use in a way that a field trial can show? If so, fund it. If it promises to replace an existing capability with something wholly new and unproven, fund research but not procurement.

8. NEW TECHNOLOGIES

Electronic warfare, cyber, information and space: the contest before the first shot

Modern wars begin in the electromagnetic spectrum, in cyberspace and in space, before any bullet is fired. India's armed forces have excellent people but have not given these domains the same priority as the physical ones. In a conflict with China or with Pakistan using Chinese systems, these domains will decide whether India can see, communicate and strike.

Domain	Doctrine	Key investments	Decade-1 milestone
Electromagnetic spectrum	Treat the spectrum as a domain of war; dominate it in the first hours	Stand-off and escort jamming; digital RF memory; cognitive EW; spectrum management at theatre level	A national electronic order of battle
Cyber defence	Assume breach; segment and monitor; sovereign cloud for classified work	Zero-trust networks; secure supply chains; red teams	Joint cyber range and annual exercises
Offensive cyber	Use for deterrence and pre-emption, under political control	Capability against military and critical-infrastructure targets of adversaries; legal framework	Defined rules of engagement
Information operations	Contest the narrative; protect against disinformation; deter through credibility	Rapid media response; verified imagery; partnerships with platforms	National information command
Space	Space is a war-fighting domain; protect India's satellites; deny adversary use in war	Resilient constellations; launch-on-demand; tracking; jamming; defensive cyber	Constellation of 100+ small satellites by 2032
Intelligence fusion	One picture for each theatre; AI-assisted fusion	Fusion centres; data fabric; satellite and signals feeds	Fusion centres in all theatres

OUR VIEW

Our rule is that no platform should enter service without an electronic-warfare, cyber and space-denial plan. A fighter without a jammer, a ship without cyber hardening, or a division without secure timing is not a modern unit. Spend on resilience first and exquisite capability second.

8. NEW TECHNOLOGIES

The industrial base: shipyards, engines, chips and speed

Doctrine is not delivered by speeches but by factories. India's defence industrial base has grown strongly in the last decade, with higher indigenous content and a growing private sector. But it still depends on foreign engines, chips, key electronics and, in some cases, platforms. The recommendations below focus on the bottlenecks where a failure would stop the doctrine from being carried out.

Area	Gap	Recommendation	Metric by 2035
Shipbuilding	Small share of global output; long build times for warships and submarines	Two new national shipyard clusters; modular construction; private-sector participation; naval and commercial synergy	Build time for destroyers cut by a third
Submarines and nuclear propulsion	Few boats; reactor and quiet-propulsion constraints	Dedicated nuclear submarine yard; reactor supply chain; AIP and lithium-ion batteries	Two SSNs launched
Aero-engines	Dependence on foreign engines	Fund a national engine programme with a partner; build test infrastructure	Indigenous engine certified for fighter use
Semiconductors and electronics	Import of advanced chips and power devices	Defence-grade fabs; compound semiconductors; trusted foundry	Domestic supply of critical chips
Drones and munitions	Fragmented, small suppliers; imported components	Mass production lines; open architecture; government stockpiles and orders	1 million drones a year capacity
Procurement and finance	Long timelines; limited risk appetite	A parallel fast track for software, drones and EW; multi-year contracts; a defence innovation fund	Contract to field in under 24 months for the fast track
Exports and partnerships	Modest exports	Push BrahMos, radars, patrol vessels and drones to friendly states	Annual exports of USD 5 billion or more

OUR VIEW

India's largest strategic gap with China is not weapons but shipbuilding and industrial capacity. We would treat shipyards, submarine production, aero-engines and trusted chips as national strategic infrastructure, funded and protected like the nuclear programme, and aim for self-reliance in each by 2040.

9. NEIGHBOURS AND RIVALS

Pakistan: compel, deter and contain

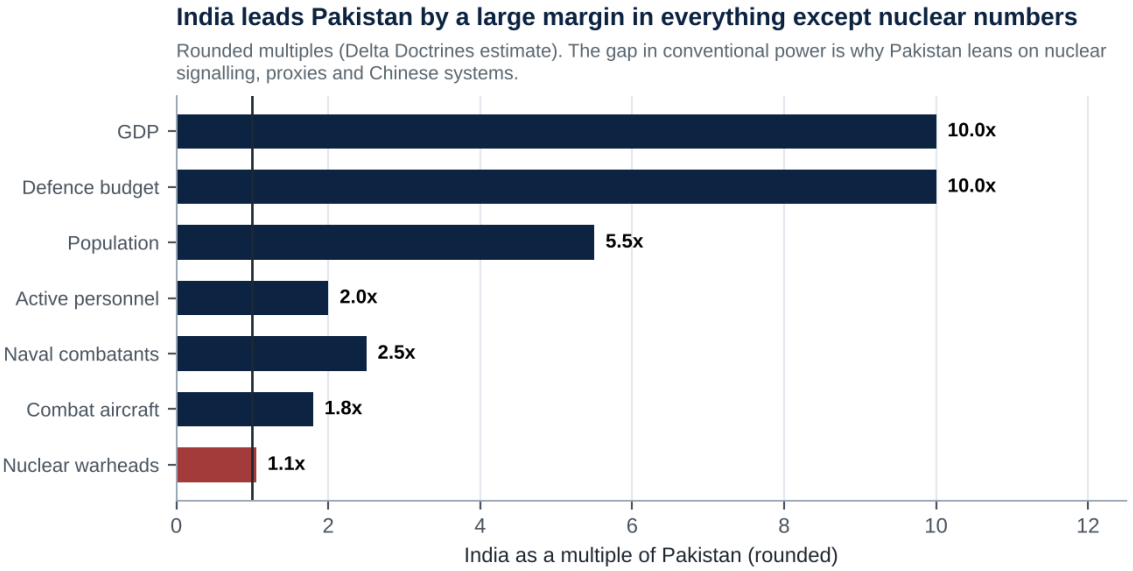


Figure 17. India as a multiple of Pakistan on rounded measures.

Pakistan's strategic problem is that it is weaker than India in almost every conventional measure and has built its security around three things: nuclear weapons, proxies and the support of China. Its military dominates politics and keeps a hostile posture toward India as a core justification. We think this will not change soon. India should plan for a persistent adversary, not a partner in waiting.

Aim	Our approach	Tools
Deter terror	Make the cost of sponsoring terror higher than the benefit	Declared policy (terror is war); ready options; intelligence-led pre-emption
Compel	Make Pakistan change behaviour, not collapse	Calibrated strikes; economic and diplomatic pressure; international isolation (FATF-type measures); water-use decisions
Contain	Limit Pakistan's access to advanced weapons and funds	Diplomacy with the US, Gulf and Europe; sanctions; counter-arms-transfer efforts
Dominate	Own the escalation ladder	Air superiority; air and missile defence; stand-off fires; electronic dominance
Keep the door open	Talk only when terror stops and only on India's terms	Back channels; confidence-building measures that do not reward terror

OUR VIEW

India's aim is not to destroy Pakistan. A collapsed nuclear-armed neighbour is a bigger threat than a hostile one. The aim is to make Pakistan's sponsorship of terror unaffordable, to expose the weakness of its nuclear threats, and to leave Pakistan's leaders in no doubt about the costs of the next attack.

9. NEIGHBOURS AND RIVALS

Pakistan: options and positions on specific questions

Issue	Situation (assessment)	Option	Our recommendation
Terror attack recurrence	Likely at some point; timing unpredictable	Retaliate or restrain	Retaliate in a calibrated way under the declared doctrine; keep options ready
Saudi-Pakistan mutual defence arrangement (2025)	Extends Pakistan's diplomatic cover and possible financing	Ignore, oppose or engage Riyadh	Engage Riyadh directly; make clear India's red lines; deepen India-Gulf ties so Saudi Arabia has more to lose from backing escalation
Indus Waters Treaty	India has held the treaty in abeyance following the 2025 attack	Revert, abrogate or manage	Use as pressure, not an aim; build storage and canals for domestic use; avoid steps that would breach international law without strong grounds
Chinese weapons in Pakistani service	Fighters, missiles, ships and submarines	Counter by capability	Defeat them in the field and document it; invest in EW and stealth defeat
Pakistan's tactical nuclear weapons	Short-range systems aimed at deterring Indian conventional response	Answer with nuclear threats or conventional dominance	State that India will respond to any nuclear use with massive retaliation; do not fear the signal
Afghanistan and the Taliban	Tension between Pakistan and Kabul	Engage or ignore	Engage pragmatically with Kabul; exploit the Pakistan-Afghan rift for diplomatic gain

A decisive feature of the 2025 crisis was the speed with which each side used drones, missiles and electronic warfare, and the speed with which a crisis can escalate. The lesson for India is to have ready options, ready defences and ready communication. India's military showed what air and missile power can do against an adversary's bases. It also showed how important air defence and information control are.

OUR VIEW

We would pay special attention to one point: India must be able to win quickly. The deterrent value of the 'new normal' depends on the ability to deliver a visible, decisive response within days, and on a clear exit. A long war is neither in India's interest nor in the interest of its economy.

9. NEIGHBOURS AND RIVALS

China: deny at the border, contest at sea, build from strength

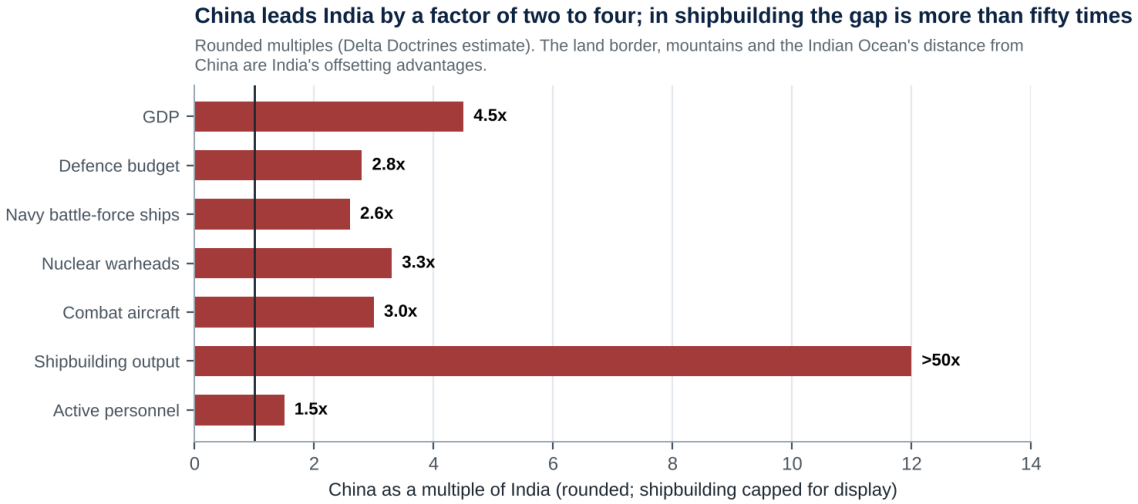


Figure 18. China as a multiple of India on rounded measures.

China is the long-term strategic competitor and the main driver of India's force requirements. It is wealthier, better armed and now positioned in India's neighbourhood. At the same time, China faces its own limits: a long supply line into Tibet, a vulnerable sea route through the Indian Ocean, and a need for stability on its western flank. India's strategy should use these limits.

Domain	China's posture	India's strategy
Land border	Infrastructure build-up; dual-use villages; large exercises	Deterrence by denial: infrastructure, reserves, fires, air defence; no concessions on territory; talk but verify
Indian Ocean	Growing PLAN presence; ports; research vessels; submarines	Track, shadow and deny; build SSNs and seabed sensors; partner with Quad, France, Japan and the Gulf
Space and cyber	Large counter-space and cyber capability	Resilience; sovereign systems; deterrence by retaliation
Economics and technology	Leverage over supply chains and rare earths	Diversify; invest in domestic capacity; selective decoupling in critical sectors
Diplomacy	Partners with Pakistan, Bangladesh and others; global narrative	Build coalitions; counter-narratives; steady engagement
Nuclear	Rapid expansion	Survivable deterrent; arms-control diplomacy with transparency

OUR VIEW

We would pursue a policy of firm deterrence and controlled engagement: deter on the border, compete at sea, cooperate where interests align (climate, trade) and avoid a head-on arms race. The 2020 confrontation showed that India can hold the line; we should prepare for the next one in the 2030s, when China is at the peak of its relative power.

9. NEIGHBOURS AND RIVALS

China-Pakistan collusion: plan for two and a half fronts

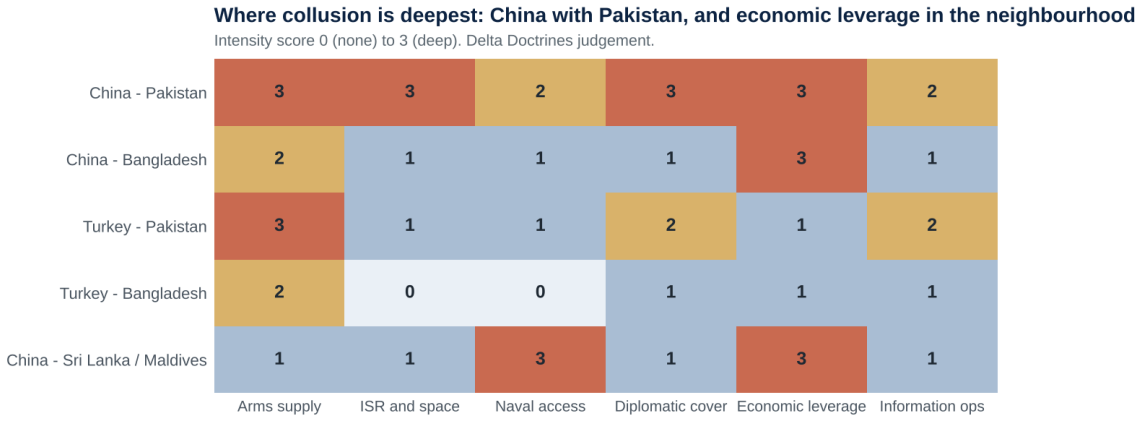


Figure 19. Intensity of collusion among adversaries and neighbourhood actors (score 0-3, Delta Doctrines judgement).

Planning rule	Meaning	Force implication
Collusion is the base case	In any serious India-Pakistan or India-China crisis, the other will take advantage	Forces and plans must be able to hold a second front while fighting on the first
Prepare for a fait accompli on the second front	A limited grab or pressure when India's forces are committed elsewhere	Strong holding forces and reserves; theatre commands with flexibility to move assets
Attack the connections	China's links to Pakistan (CPEC, ports, satellite services, arms supply) are vulnerable	Cyber, space and naval options against the supply chain
Drive a wedge	Offer Pakistan and China diplomatic costs for collusion; exploit differences	Diplomacy with the US, Gulf, Europe and Russia to raise the price
Fuse intelligence	One all-source picture of China-Pakistan military cooperation	Joint intelligence cell in every theatre

The 2025 conflict highlighted how deep China-Pakistan military cooperation has become: Chinese-origin fighters, missiles and air-defence systems, and, by various accounts, intelligence and satellite support. It was a live test of Chinese systems against Indian forces, and a preview of what a more coordinated effort might look like.

OUR VIEW

A formal China-Pakistan military alliance is unlikely, but informal coordination is deepening. India should plan on the assumption that China will provide Pakistan with intelligence and arms, and will use the moment to pressure India elsewhere. The answer is not to expand the Army but to improve joint command, reserves, air defence and fires.

9. NEIGHBOURS AND RIVALS

Bangladesh and the neighbourhood: stability through engagement and strength

Country	Situation (assessment)	Risk to India	Doctrinal posture
Bangladesh	Political transition since 2024; elected government; strong Islamist and nationalist currents; Chinese and Turkish defence ties growing	Hostile basing; border and migration problems; radicalisation; pressure on the Siliguri corridor	Engage, and attach conditions to economic benefits; defend the Chicken's Neck with a dedicated formation; maritime and air cooperation; intelligence links
Myanmar	Civil war; Chinese influence; border insurgents	Insurgent sanctuaries; Chinese ports; refugee flows	Engage all sides pragmatically; secure the border; support Kaladan and other connectivity projects
Sri Lanka	Recovering economy; Chinese-built ports; non-aligned posture	Chinese military access	Provide credit and security help; offer alternatives to Chinese projects
Maldives	Shifting alliances; Chinese and Indian influence	Hostile presence near sea lanes	Economic support; defence cooperation; keep the islands as friends
Nepal and Bhutan	Nepal's politics unstable; Bhutan close to India but under Chinese pressure on boundaries	Chinese influence; border issues	Maintain special ties; support Bhutan's security; infrastructure and trade

India's neighbourhood policy has two aims: keep the region stable and keep it free of hostile military presence. The first aim favours generosity and patience; the second needs firmness. In Bangladesh, a stable and friendly government would be an enormous asset: it controls the eastern approach and a long land border. A hostile or unstable Bangladesh would be a major problem for the north-east and for the vulnerable Siliguri corridor.

OUR VIEW

India's neighbours have options now, and some will use China or Turkey as counterweights. India should compete by offering what neighbours need: markets, credit, power, connectivity and security, and by being a predictable partner. It should also be clear about red lines: no foreign bases, no hostile intelligence nodes, no support for anti-India militants.

9. NEIGHBOURS AND RIVALS

Turkey: a rival supplier and political patron of Pakistan

Area	Turkey's role	Impact on India	Response
Pakistan	Arms supplier (drones, corvettes, missiles); political support; defence-industrial partnership	Strengthens Pakistan's drones and naval power; political cover at the UN and OIC	Raise the cost: restrict economic ties; counter-drone priority; coordinate with Greece, Cyprus, Armenia, France and Israel
Bangladesh	Growing defence ties; drone and naval sales	Possible Turkish presence in the Bay of Bengal	Counter-offers; early engagement; monitor
Azerbaijan and Central Asia	Pan-Turkic partnership; Pakistan-Azerbaijan-Turkey axis	Diplomatic alignment against India	Engage Armenia, Iran and Central Asia; use Indian defence exports
Information and ideology	Support for Pakistan on Kashmir; influence operations	Narrative pressure in the Muslim world	Counter with facts; work with Gulf partners and moderate states
Industry	Fast-growing drone and missile industry	Competitor and supplier to adversaries	Learn; build Indian drone industry; deny Turkish firms Indian market access where harmful

Turkey is not a military threat to India but a force multiplier for Pakistan and a political challenger in the Muslim world. Its drones and ships strengthen Pakistan's capabilities, and its leadership seeks influence in South and Central Asia. India should avoid overreacting but should make the cost of Turkish support for Pakistan clear in trade, tourism and diplomacy, and should deepen its own ties with Turkey's rivals.

OUR VIEW

We would treat Turkey as a competitor to be managed, not an enemy. The main risk is that its drones and naval systems make Pakistan and Bangladesh stronger. The best response is to out-compete: build better and cheaper Indian drones, counter-drone systems and corvettes, and sell them to partners who want alternatives.

10. GREAT POWERS AND PARTNERS

The United States: an indispensable but unpredictable partner

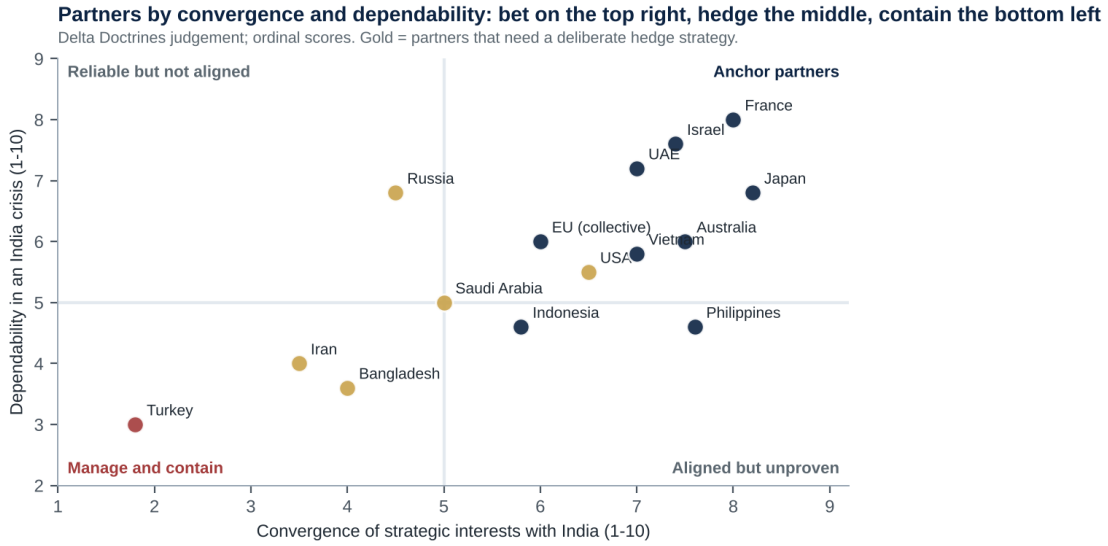


Figure 20. Partners by convergence and dependability (Delta Doctrines judgement).

The US is India's largest technology and defence partner outside Russia, a major trading partner and a key part of any balance against China. But US policy has become more volatile: tariffs, sudden changes in tone, transactional demands and shifts in attitude to Pakistan, to Russia and to China. India should not depend on any single US policy line. It should seek a durable partnership that survives changes in administration.

US policy shift	What to expect	India's response
Tariffs and trade pressure	Abrupt changes; linked to other issues	Diversify exports; negotiate on a package; do not trade away strategic autonomy
Warmth toward Pakistan	Transactional; minerals, counter-terror, crypto	Make clear what is not acceptable; use dialogue; do not over-react
Technology controls	Case-by-case; may change	Co-development and local production so that supply is not at the mercy of politics
Russia and China policy	Swings between pressure and deals	Keep ties with Russia; ask for consistent treatment; avoid being used as a pawn
Indo-Pacific commitment	Uncertain in some scenarios	Build coalitions that function without the US

OUR VIEW

Our rule for the US is 'engage fully, rely partly'. Take every opportunity for technology, training and co-production; build joint capability with Quad partners; but never plan a war that requires US help in the first month.

10. GREAT POWERS AND PARTNERS

Six rules for handling the United States

India has experience of US policy that swings from sanctions to partnership and back. The sensible response is not to guess the next swing but to build a posture that works whichever way it goes. The six rules below turn that into practice.

Rule	Meaning	Examples
1. Rely partly	Build a force that can defend India without US combat support	Own stocks of munitions; domestic production; own satellite and communication systems
2. Buy technology, not dependence	Prefer co-production, licensed manufacture and joint development to off-the-shelf purchases	Jet engines, drones, munitions, undersea systems
3. Separate the file from the climate	Keep defence and technology cooperation moving even when trade or political relations are turbulent	Joint exercises, intelligence sharing, 10-year defence framework
4. Hold your red lines	No basing, no nuclear or missile restrictions, no limits on ties with Russia or Iran beyond what India chooses	Public and private clarity
5. Use the multiplier	The Quad, Europe, Japan and the Gulf can offset swings	Frequent summits; minilateral exercises
6. Prepare for both extremes	A US that is a close ally and a US that is distant	Plans that work either way

PRIORITY US PROGRAMMES

Engines and propulsion for fighters; **drones and counter-drone systems**; **critical technologies** (AI, semiconductors, quantum) under joint initiatives; **undersea domain awareness**; **space domain awareness**; and **logistics agreements** that give Indian forces assured access to US stores and facilities at sea. These are areas where India gains the most and where a policy reversal would hurt the least.

OUR VIEW

We think the US relationship is better thought of as a portfolio than a bet. If the US stays engaged, India gets a powerful partner; if it retreats, India still has what it built. The danger is in overcommitting to a single outcome. A mature relationship accepts disagreement without losing trust.

10. GREAT POWERS AND PARTNERS

Russia and Europe: two portfolios, one logic

Partner	What India needs	What the partner wants	Risk	Our posture
Russia	Spares and sustainment for Russian-origin equipment (the majority of India's inventory); S-400; submarines; oil and fertiliser; UN diplomacy	A major buyer and political partner; reduced reliance on China	Russia's dependence on China; sanctions risk; weaker industrial base	Keep ties; reduce new dependence; shift to indigenous and Western sources for new systems; keep support for existing fleet; use Russia to limit China's weight
European Union and France, Germany, UK	Technology, engines, submarines, finance, markets; the India-EU trade agreement	Market access; defence sales; a hedge against the US and China	Slow decisions; sanctions and values disputes	Make Europe a second pillar of the technology and defence portfolio; prioritise France and the UK for co-production; Germany for submarines
Israel	Missiles, drones, EW, air defence, intelligence	Market and political ties	Regional politics	Continue and deepen; co-production in India

Russia. Russia remains important to India in the short term because most of India's major weapon systems are Russian-origin and need spares and upgrades. But it is increasingly dependent on China, and its industrial base is stretched by war. We recommend a deliberate 'managed transition': keep supply for existing systems, avoid new large Russian orders where alternatives exist, and use Russia's ties to limit China's pressure. India should not give up the relationship or the benefits of cheap energy, but should not tie its future to Moscow.

Europe. The India-EU trade agreement and a growing defence and technology agenda make Europe a natural second pillar. France is the closest defence partner; the UK and Germany have a growing role in the sea and air domains. The EU's slow, rules-heavy approach is a drawback, but its long-term stability is an advantage. India should ask for co-production, not just sales.

> OUR VIEW
> Do not choose between Russia and the West. Choose between dependence and self-reliance. Each decision about a new platform should ask: does it reduce or increase India's dependence on any one supplier? If it increases it, find a way to build the capability at home or in partnership.

10. GREAT POWERS AND PARTNERS

Quad, IMEC, I2U2 and other groupings: tools, not alliances

Grouping	What it is	Real value	Weaknesses	Our position
Quad (US, Japan, Australia, India)	Dialogue on maritime security, technology, health and infrastructure	Maritime awareness; supply chains; technology; a signal to China	Dependent on US attention; limited military content; political friction	Keep it as a forum for maritime awareness and technology, not as an alliance; push the maritime-awareness and critical-technology pillars
IMEC (India-Middle East-Europe Corridor)	Rail, shipping and digital corridor across the Gulf and Israel to Europe	A counter to China's Belt and Road; trade and energy links; Gulf ties	Regional conflict; funding; slow progress	Support, but do not treat as a strategic anchor until the Gulf is stable; use it to deepen India-Gulf-Europe ties
I2U2 (India, Israel, UAE, US)	Food, water, energy and technology cooperation	Gulf-Israel-India-US links on civil tech	Dormant since the Gaza war; overlap with other forums	Revive selectively on technology and food security
BRICS and SCO	Large groupings with China and Russia	Voice for the Global South; diplomatic leverage	China-led agenda; limited military use	Participate and shape; do not rely on them for security
Minilaterals (India-France-UAE, India-Japan-Australia, others)	Small groupings around common interests	Fast, flexible, practical	Many overlapping groups	Use as a toolkit; keep a few and drop the rest

India's strategic culture favours flexibility over formal alliances. That suits a world of changing partnerships. But flexibility has a price: less assured help in a crisis. The way to manage this is to build a dense network of practical cooperation: exercises, shared awareness, logistics access and co-production. These create habits and expectations that serve the same purpose as a treaty, without its constraints.

OUR VIEW

We recommend treating each grouping as a means to a concrete end: the Quad for maritime awareness and technology; IMEC for trade and Gulf ties; I2U2 for civilian technology; BRICS and SCO for the Global South and diplomatic cover. None of them substitutes for India's own defences or for bilateral partnerships.

10. GREAT POWERS AND PARTNERS

The Gulf: yes, India needs a policy shift

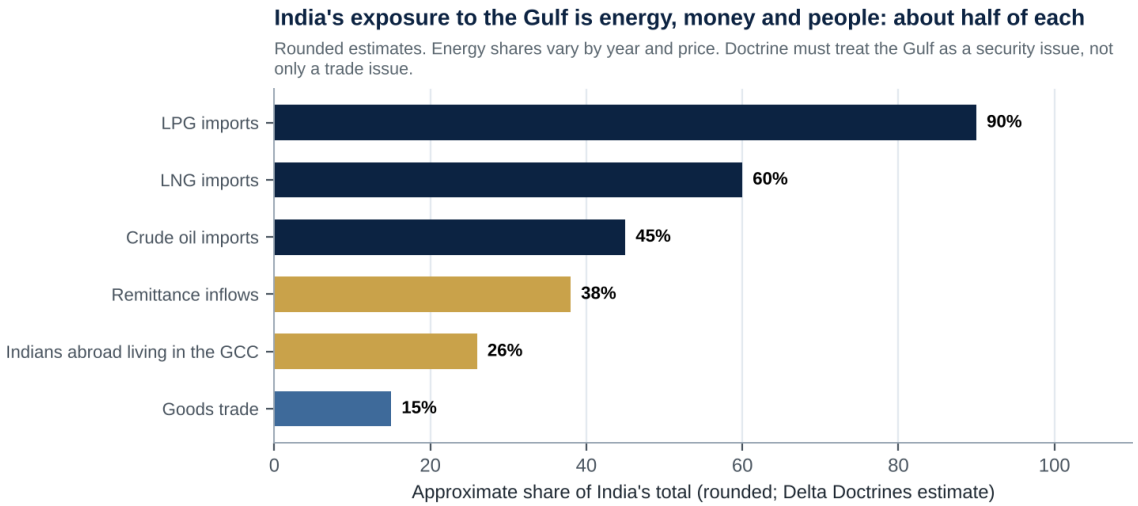


Figure 21. India's exposure to the Gulf (rounded estimates).

Policy question	Present approach	Recommended shift	Reason
Security role	Economic and energy focus; limited defence cooperation	A true strategic partnership with the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Oman and Qatar: exercises, training, co-production, intelligence sharing	The Gulf is part of India's security perimeter, and the Saudi-Pakistan pact has changed the calculus
Pakistan factor	Avoid linkage	Make clear to Gulf partners that backing Pakistan against India has consequences; reward partners who keep balance	Reduce Gulf financing and diplomatic cover for Pakistan
Energy	Buyer relationship	Long-term supply, joint storage in India, Indian investment in Gulf energy and Gulf investment in Indian energy infrastructure	Reduce supply risk; give the Gulf a stake in India's stability
Diaspora	Welfare and remittances	Contingency evacuation planning; protection arrangements; skill-based mobility	About 9 million Indians are at risk in a Gulf conflict
Maritime	Occasional visits	Access agreements; joint patrols; shared maritime awareness; naval logistics at Gulf ports	Protect sea lanes and the Gulf approaches
Iran	Careful, transactional (Chabahar)	Keep channels; avoid being drawn into US-Iran confrontation; protect the Chabahar corridor to Central Asia	Access to Afghanistan and Central Asia; hedge against Pakistan
Israel and Gulf	Separate tracks	Link through IMEC and I2U2; support normalisation efforts	Practical trade and technology benefits

OUR VIEW

India has treated the Gulf as a source of oil and jobs. That is no longer enough. The Gulf is a security partner, an investor, a diaspora home and a diplomatic swing player between India and Pakistan. We recommend a formal Gulf security framework: strategic dialogues with each major state, a defence-industrial offer, an evacuation plan and a political message that India's friendship comes with expectations.

10. GREAT POWERS AND PARTNERS

East and South-East Asia: from Act East to Defend East

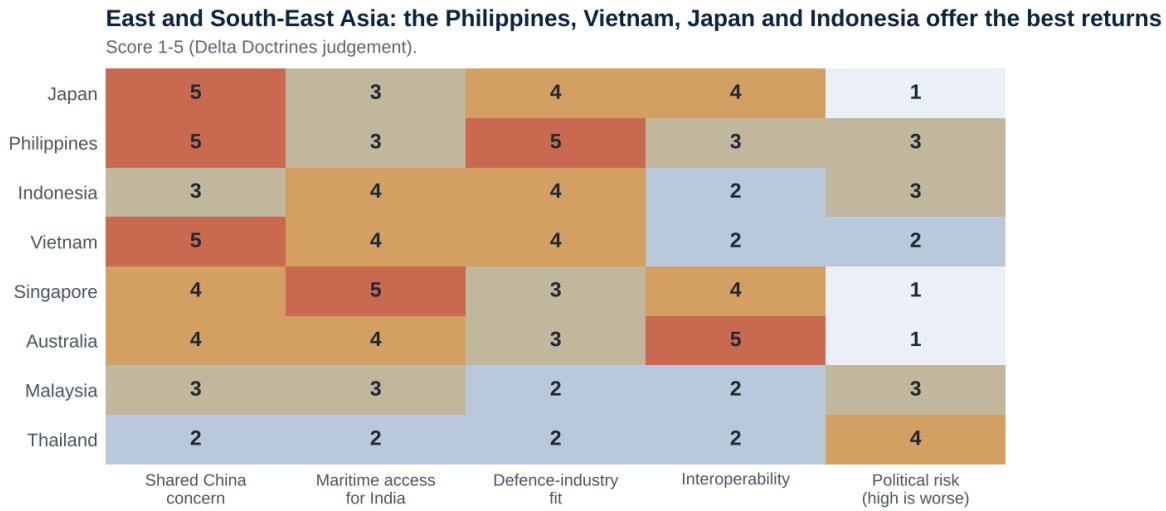


Figure 22. Partner scores for India's East and South-East Asia strategy (Delta Doctrines judgement).

India's 'Act East' policy has been mainly economic and diplomatic. The security situation in the East and South China Sea, and China's growing presence in the Indian Ocean, make that insufficient. A doctrine for the East should aim for three things: increase India's military presence and access in the Indo-Pacific, help partners resist Chinese coercion, and build a regional defence-industrial network that includes India.

Doctrinal change	From	To
Role	Dialogue and visits	Security provider: exercises, patrols, training, arms sales and loans
Presence	Occasional naval deployments	Persistent presence: a rotating naval and air task group in the western Pacific and South China Sea
Industry	Selling a few systems	Co-production hubs: BrahMos, drones, patrol vessels, radars with the Philippines, Vietnam and Indonesia
Intelligence	Limited sharing	Maritime domain awareness sharing; undersea cable protection; joint analysis
Access	Port calls	Logistics and repair agreements; airfield access for maritime patrol aircraft

OUR VIEW

India should be careful not to over-extend. Its core job is the Indian Ocean. But India's best deterrent against China in the Indian Ocean may be its visible ability to make life harder for China in the South China Sea. Selling weapons and offering access to partners there is cheap and sends a signal.

10. GREAT POWERS AND PARTNERS

Country by country: Japan, the Philippines, Indonesia and others

Partner	What India offers	What India seeks	Next step (3 years)
Japan	Large market; technology partner; Indian Ocean access	Advanced technology; shipbuilding; coast guard; funding; shared surveillance	Co-development of unmanned undersea systems and engines; a logistics agreement; joint exercises with Australia
Philippines	BrahMos, training, patrol vessels	Access in the South China Sea; a partner at China's maritime front	More BrahMos batteries; a training programme; a joint maritime patrol
Indonesia	BrahMos, submarines, aircraft support	Control of Malacca and Sunda approaches; access to Sabang	A deal on missiles; joint patrols; port access in Sabang
Vietnam	Credit lines, patrol vessels, missiles, training	A fellow claimant opposed to Chinese coercion	Further patrol vessels; submarine support; Nha Trang access
Singapore	Training areas; naval cooperation	Access to Changi and other facilities; technology	Extend naval logistics access; air-defence cooperation
Australia	Indian Ocean partnership; critical minerals	Intelligence; submarine technology; shared maritime picture	Joint exercises; defence logistics; minerals supply deals

The list is selective. Priority should go to partners where India can add capability quickly, where Chinese pressure is greatest and where the partner is willing to commit. The Philippines and Vietnam are the front-line states; Japan is the most capable partner; Indonesia and Singapore control the chokepoints at the eastern gate of the Indian Ocean.

> OUR VIEW
> India's special advantage in the region is that it is not a treaty ally of anyone. That makes it a safe partner for countries that fear being forced to choose between the US and China. We would build on that: be the reliable, non-aligned supplier of security, with no strings but with clear expectations of respect for the rules and for the law of the sea.

11. TO 2050

Four worlds for 2050, and how the doctrine copes

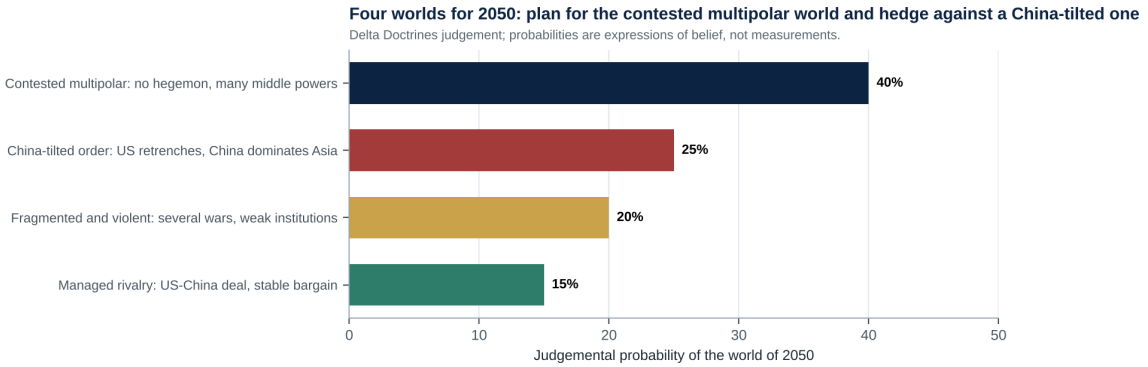


Figure 23. Judgemental probabilities for four 2050 worlds.

World of 2050	What it looks like	Implication for the force	Hedge
Contested multipolar	No hegemon; many middle powers; recurrent crises	The base case: balanced posture, strong partners, flexible forces	Regional networks; resilience
China-tilted order	US retrenches; China dominates Asia; more coercion	Greater emphasis on deterrence, nuclear forces, the Navy and Quad-plus partners	Higher defence budget; faster submarine build
Fragmented and violent	Several wars; weak institutions; terror and migration	Counter-terror, resilience, expeditionary and humanitarian capability	Rapid-reaction forces; civil defence
Managed rivalry	US-China bargain; stable competition	More room for economic growth and technology cooperation	Lower budget growth; keep the base

The scenarios are not predictions. They are a stress test. A good doctrine should do reasonably well in all four, and very well in the most likely. The doctrine we propose is robust in the first three because its core commitments (survivable deterrent, joint command, sea control, sensors and drones, resilience, partnerships) are valuable in any of them. It is least efficient in the managed-rivalry world, where it would cost more than needed, but even there the capabilities retain value.

OUR VIEW

The biggest strategic mistake would be to plan for only one world. We recommend a formal review every five years, in which the National Security Council reassesses the probabilities and adjusts the pace of investment, but not the core commitments.

11. TO 2050

The roadmap: three decades, ten workstreams

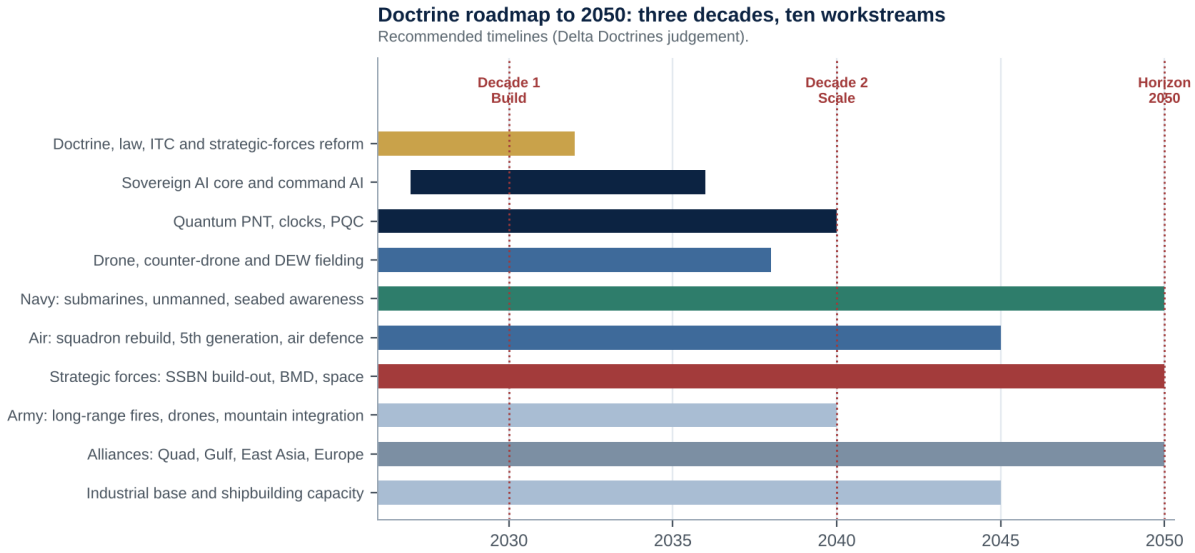


Figure 24. Doctrine roadmap to 2050.

Decade	Theme	Force posture	Key milestones
2026-2035 Build	Reorganise and rebuild	Theatres stood up; squadron gap closed; SSBN force at 6; counter-drone grid; first DEW units; sovereign AI core; quantum clocks fielded	Theatre statute (2027); maritime theatre (2029); all theatres (2032); AI core (2031); 3rd carrier decision (2030)
2036-2045 Scale	Scale new capabilities	SSN force of 4-6; 5th-generation fighters in numbers; quantum navigation on fleets; DEW against missiles; space constellations	Quantum PNT fielded (2035-40); AMCA in service; 2nd shipyard cluster
2046-2050 Harvest and review	Mature and adjust	9 SSBNs; integrated multi-domain force; assured second strike; resilient economy	Doctrine review (2045); 2050 force

The roadmap is front-loaded on organisation and enabling investments. The reason is practical: the years to 2032 are likely to be the period of greatest risk, as China peaks relative to India, Pakistan builds up and the US remains uncertain. Capabilities that take 15 to 20 years to produce, submarines, shipyards, engines, must be started now to be ready in the 2040s.

OUR VIEW

The sequence that matters most is: law and command first (2027), industrial base next (2027-2032), hardware third (2030 onward). Our biggest fear is the reverse: a rush of hardware purchases on top of an unreformed system.

11. TO 2050

Budget: about 2.5% of GDP, with a different mix

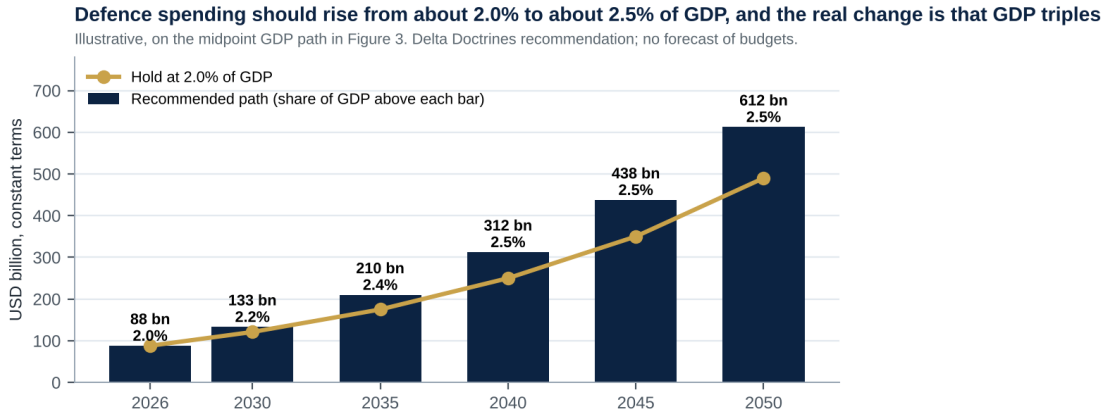


Figure 25. Recommended defence spending path to 2050, compared with holding at 2.0% of GDP.

Allocation (share of defence budget)	Today (approx.)	2035 (recommended)	Rationale
Army	About 50%	About 38%	Shift from manpower and platforms to fires, drones and networks
Navy	About 14%	About 22%	Sea is the strategic centre of gravity
Air Force	About 22%	About 22%	Squadron rebuild and enablers
Strategic forces and missile defence	About 5%	About 8%	Survivable deterrent
Joint technology (AI, cyber, space, quantum, EW)	About 3%	About 6%	Decision speed and resilience
Resilience and civil defence	Small	About 2%	Reduce coercion
R and D and industrial base	About 5%	About 8%	Self-reliance

India's defence budget is dominated by pay, pensions and operating costs, with capital spending at about 28 per cent in 2026-27. A larger capital share (to about 40 per cent by 2035) would be more valuable than a larger total. We therefore recommend a modest rise in the share of GDP, a restructuring of personnel costs through leaner manpower and a different pension model for new recruits, and a more strategic allocation among Services.

OUR VIEW

India can afford this doctrine. The real constraint is the quality of spending, not its quantity. We would offset part of the rise by reducing manpower-heavy structures and legacy platforms, and we would tie every rupee of new capital to a joint capability, not to a single Service's wish list.

11. TO 2050

Risks, and twelve decisions

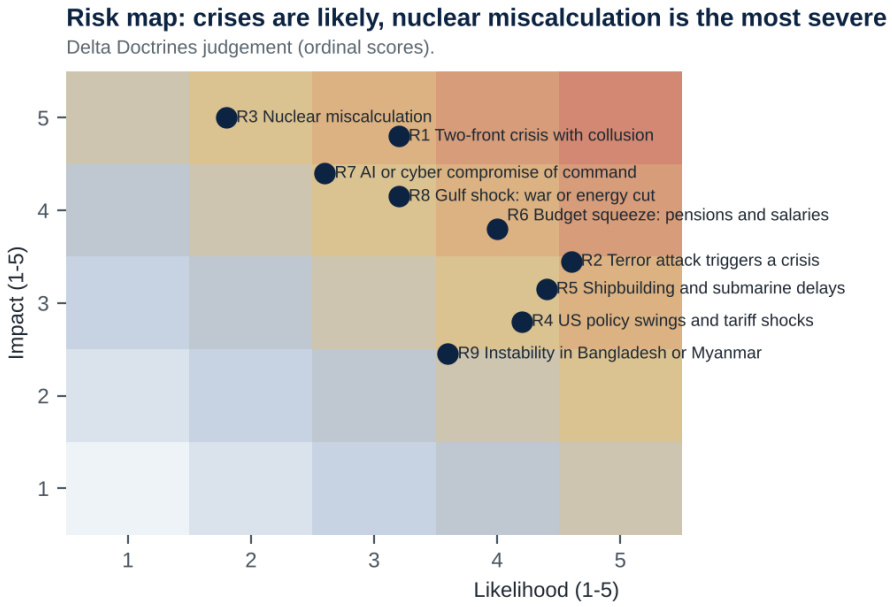


Figure 26. Risk map for the doctrine (Delta Doctrines judgement).

#	Decision	By
1	Publish a National Security Strategy and adopt the doctrine's twelve principles	2027
2	Pass a statute for theatre commands and the joint budget	2027
3	Stand up the Maritime Theatre	2029
4	Approve 6 SSBN and 2 SSN programmes in full; set up a nuclear-submarine shipyard	2027
5	Adopt 'credible assured retaliation' language; confirm human control of nuclear decisions	2027
6	Close the fighter squadron gap through proven aircraft and fund enablers	2028
7	Launch the national counter-drone grid and field directed-energy units	2032
8	Establish the sovereign armed-forces AI stack with an independent evaluation body	2028
9	Fund quantum clocks, navigation and receivers; hold quantum radar to research	2027
10	Launch a Gulf security framework and a Defend-East partnership package	2027
11	Set up a resilience programme under a Deputy NSA	2027
12	Review the doctrine every five years	2031, 2036, ...

OUR VIEW

A doctrine is a set of choices. This paper's central choice is to put organisation, the sea, survivable deterrence, speed and the industrial base ahead of numbers. We believe these are the right priorities for a country that wants to be secure in 2050 without being militarised. They are the author's views and are offered for debate.

Limits of this paper. Figures are rounded and approximate and have not been verified against classified or official data. Scores, probabilities and force levels are judgements. The paper does not cover offensive cyber operations in detail, covert action or nuclear targeting, and it makes no recommendation on the use of force in any particular situation.