

Security Forces and Agencies in India

Security forces in India are covered under various topics in the [General Studies syllabus](#) of the IAS exam. Some of these topics are:

- Security Challenges and Their Management in Border Areas
- Various Security Forces and Agencies and Their Mandate

In this article, we will discuss the various Armed Forces of India and the role they play in the security apparatus of the country.

Armed Forces of India – Basic Facts

The various armed forces of the Union of India have separate mandates and are handled by different ministries. The majority of the external security threats in India are managed by the Ministry of Defence with the help of the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Most of the internal security challenges and their management in border areas are also handled by both the Defence Ministry and the Home Ministry. Internal security threats such as insurgencies, separatism and riots etc are the primary responsibility of the Ministry of Home Affairs.

The security forces which handle different threats in India are classified into:

1. Indian Armed Forces
2. Paramilitary Forces of India and
3. Central Armed Police Forces.

India also has dedicated Special Forces within each security force as well as two specialized Anti-Terrorism, Urban Warfare and VIP protection units.

Revise for UPSC:

- India's defence is ensured by the Government of India
- The President is the supreme command of the Indian Armed Forces
- Ministry of Defence formulates policy framework of the Indian Armed Forces

Indian Armed Forces – Introduction

The Indian Armed Forces are the military forces of India. The defence services in India consist of three uniformed services:

- The Indian Army
- The Indian Navy
- The Indian Air Force

The Indian Armed Forces are supported by the Indian Coast Guard, paramilitary forces, and various other organizations.

The supreme commander of the Indian Armed Forces is the President of India. All three services report to the Ministry of Defence.

The Indian Army

Indian Army or Bhartiya Thal Sena is the land-based component of the armed forces. It is evolved from the armed forces of the East India Company, ultimately turned into the British Indian Army and the Indian Army after independence.

It is commanded by the Chief of Army Staff (COAS). It is considered the second-largest active army in the world. The mission of the Indian Army is to guarantee the national security and defend the sovereignty, territorial integrity and harmony of India from external aggression and intimidation. It also includes providing humanitarian support and aid to the common people during natural disasters and unexpected time.

Who is the Chief of Army Staff (2021)? – General Manoj Mukund Naravane. He is the 28th COAS and took over the 27th COAS General Bipin Rawat.

Special Forces of Indian Army – Para Commandos

- The Para Commandos are the most well-known of the Indian Army's special forces.
- It undertakes operations behind enemy lines, anti-terrorist and counterinsurgency missions as well as rescue operations during natural disasters.

The Indian Navy

India has a coastline of 7516.6 km. The Indian Navy secures India's maritime borders and interests. It also safeguards Indian trading vessels by combating piracy on the high seas. Along with this, it assists the common people during disasters.

It is commanded by the Chief of the Naval Staff – an Admiral. The Indian Navy is deployed under three Commands:

1. The Eastern Naval command – Vishakhapatnam is the headquarter.
2. Western Naval command – Mumbai is the headquarter
3. Southern Naval Command – Kochi is the headquarter.

The Naval forces are used to support the foreign policy objectives, to build 'bridges of friendship' and strengthen international cooperation.

Who is the Chief of Naval Staff (2021)? Admiral Karambir Singh is the 24th Chief of Naval Staff. He took over Admiral Sunil Lanba who was the 23rd Chief of Naval Staff.

Special Forces of Indian Navy – MARCOS

The Marine Commando Force (MCF), also known as MARCOS is a Special Forces unit of the Indian Navy. It is involved in anti-terrorism, anti-piracy and special operations.

The Indian Air Force

The Indian Air Force was officially established on 8 October 1932. It was known as the Royal Indian Air Force in recognition of its services during the Second World War. After Independence, the term 'Royal' was omitted.

It is considered the 4th largest Air force in the world. The primary responsibility of the Indian Air Force is to secure the Indian airspace and to conduct aerial warfare during a conflict. Apart from the wars of independent India and humanitarian work, it has participated in many United Nations peacekeeping missions.

Chief of Air Staff (An Air Marshal) is the commander of the air forces in India.

The Air Force Network (AFNet) launched on 14th September 2010, is a digital information grid that enabled quick and accurate threat responses. It is a fibre optic-based network.

Who is the current Chief of Air Staff (2021)? Air Marshal Rakesh Kumar Singh Bhadauria is the 26th Chief of Air Staff. He took over Air Chief Marshal Birender Singh Dhanoa who was the 25th Chief of Air Staff.

Special Forces of Indian Air Force – Garud Commando Force

The Garud Commando Force is the special forces unit of the Indian Air Force, engaged in tasks such as airfield protection during conflicts, suppression of enemy air defence, search and rescue of downed aircrew and humanitarian aid during disasters.

Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF)

Paramilitary Forces in India

Central Armed Police Forces were formerly referred to as Paramilitary Forces. From March 2011, the Ministry of Home Affairs adopted a uniform nomenclature of Central Armed Police Forces to avoid confusion. There are seven central armed police forces. Each of these forces performs a separate function. They operate under the Ministry of Home affairs. Each of the forces is led by an IPS officer with the notable exception of the Assam Rifles which is headed by an Army officer of the rank of Lieutenant General.

The term "paramilitary forces" in India has not been defined in any act of parliament or by the authorities. Since 2011, the Government of India uses an unofficial definition that the Paramilitary forces are the ones that assist the military forces and are headed by Military officers, not by IPS officers.

The list of Paramilitary Forces of India is given below, followed by the description of each:

1. Assam Rifles
2. Border Security Force (BSF)
3. Central Industrial Security Force (CISF)
4. Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF)
5. Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBF)
6. National Security Guard (NSG)
7. Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB)

Assam Rifles – Important Facts:

1. The Assam Rifles was established in 1835.
2. It is considered the oldest of all paramilitary forces and one of the six Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF).
3. This force plays a crucial role in North East India, handling counterinsurgency and border security operations.
4. They are also guarding the 1,643 km long Indo-Myanmar border since 2002.
5. It is the only paramilitary force with a dual control structure
6. It is often referred to as the “Friends of the Hill People”, “Friends of the North East People” and the “Sentinels of the North East”.
7. It is headed by an Army officer of the rank of Lieutenant General. It currently reports to the Ministry of Home Affairs.
8. The administrative control of Assam Rifles is with MHA while the operational control is with the Ministry of Defence.
9. It remains the most awarded paramilitary force in both pre-and post-independent India – Since independence, it has been awarded 120 Shaurya Chakras, 31 Kirti Chakras, five Vir Chakras and four Ashok Chakras, apart from 188 Sena Medals.

Border Security Force (BSF) – Important Facts

1. The BSF is the border guards of the country and is called the ‘India’s First Line of Defence’.
2. This Union Government Agency under the administrative control of Ministry of Home Affairs came into being in the wake of the 1965 Indo-Pakistan war. It was established on 1st December 1965.
3. It ensures the security of the borders of India and headed by an officer from the Indian Police Service.
4. It also undertakes defensive actions during wartime to free up Indian Army troops for offensive operations.
5. Of late, the BSF has also been tasked with assisting the CRPF and army in counter-insurgency operations.
6. The current Director-General of BSF (2021) – Shri Rakesh Asthana, IPS.

Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) – Important Facts

1. Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) was established in 1969, under an Act of Parliament, “Central Industrial Security Force Act, 1968.”
2. It provides integrated security cover to the Public Sector Undertakings, airports and SEZs on a case to case basis.
3. It is currently providing security cover to nuclear installations, space establishments, airports, seaports, power plants, sensitive Government buildings, heritage monuments and large special economic zones.
4. CISF is also responsible to provide protection to the persons classified as Z Plus, Z, X, Y.
5. CISF is the only force with a customized and dedicated fire wing.
6. CISF is a compensatory cost force.

7. The current Director-General of CISF (2021) is S.K. Jaiswal.

Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF)

1. The Central Reserve Police Force was established by the enactment of the CRPF Act in 1949.
2. Initially, it came into existence as Crown Representative's Police in 1939 for internal security.
3. The primary mission of the Central Reserve Police Force is counter-insurgency operations.
4. It also assists the State and Union Territories in police operations to maintain law and order.
5. Apart from this, the force participates as a police force in the UN peace-keeping missions.
6. The CRPF maintains a special operation unit known as Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (COBRA) to combat Maoist insurgents.
7. The current Director-General of CRPF (2021) is Dr. A P Maheshwari, IPS.

Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP)

1. The Indo-Tibetan Border Police was established on 24th October 1962 after the 1962 Sino-Indian conflict.
2. It was created under the CRPF Act.
3. It guards the Indo-Tibetan border and the mountainous regions of the India-China border and monitors the northern borders.
4. ITBP replaced Assam Rifles in Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh in 2004. The Indi-China border covering the following state is guarded by the ITBP (From the Karakoram pass in Jammu & Kashmir to Jechap La in Arunachal Pradesh):
 - Jammu & Kashmir
 - Himachal Pradesh
 - Uttarakhand
 - Sikkim
 - Arunachal Pradesh
5. It detects and prevents border violations.
6. The force also keeps a check on illegal immigration and trans-border smuggling.
7. It has been deployed in UN peacekeeping missions in Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Haiti, Western Sahara, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Afghanistan and Sudan.
8. The current Director-General of ITBP (2021) is S.S Deswal.

Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB)

1. The Sashastra Seema Bal was set up in March 1963.
2. They guard Indo-Nepal and Indo-Bhutan Borders.
3. They are also deployed during elections as polling booth security.
4. Its area of coverage included 15 states
5. Previously, it was known as the Special Service Bureau and they are deployed to control anti-national activities and inculcate feelings of national belonging in the border population among others. It also acts against smuggling and other illegal activities.
6. The current SSB chief (2021) is Kumar Rajendra Chandra, IPS.

Special Forces of India

Apart from the special forces operating under army, navy and air force in the country, the special forces of India also have the following units reporting directly to the Home Ministry for counter-terrorism and VIP protection activities:

National Security Guards (NSG)

1. It was established on 22nd September 1986.
2. The National Security Guards is a special forces unit under the Ministry of Home affairs.
3. It is established to counter the surge of militancy in the country.
4. It has a highly trained force which deals with exceptional situations when local police and special forces need assistance.
5. It was raised to combat terrorist activities and to guarantee the states do not experience any internal disturbances.
6. They played a crucial role in countering the 26/11 Mumbai terrorist attacks.

Special Protection Group (SPG)

1. It was raised in 1985.
2. The Special Protection Group is the most elite, nodal protection agency in the country.
3. It is an armed force of the Union for providing immediate security to the Prime Minister of India, the former Prime Minister and members of their close family members.
4. The Special Protection Group (SPG) under the Cabinet Secretariat commences under Special Protection Group Act, 1988.

Other Important Security Agencies In India

Railway Protection Force (RPF)

Railway Protection Force is a security force of India entrusted with protecting railway passengers, passenger area and property of the Indian Railways. This is the only armed force of the Union which has the power to arrest, investigate and prosecute criminals.

National Disaster Response Force (NDRF)

The National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) was set up under The Disaster Management Act, 2005. It was constituted for the function of specialist response to natural and man-made disasters. The aim of the National Disaster Management Authority is to construct a safer and disaster resilient India by rising a holistic, proactive, multi-disaster and technology-driven strategy for disaster management. It is a force composed of 12 battalions. It is manned by persons on deputation from various CAPFs and also re-employs physically fit members of the armed forces who have retired but are still under reserve liability.

Internal Security Questions UPSC

- For effective border area management, discuss the steps required to be taken to deny local support to militants and also suggest ways to manage favourable perception among locals. (2020)
- What are the determinants of left-wing extremism in Eastern part of India? What strategy should Government of India, civil administration and security forces adopt to counter the threat in the affected areas? (2020)
- Analyse internal security threats and transborder crimes along Myanmar, Bangladesh and Pakistan borders including Line of Control (LoC). Also discuss the role played by various security forces in this regard. (2020)
- The terms ‘Hot Pursuit’ and ‘Surgical Strikes’ are often used in connection with armed action against terrorist attacks. Discuss the strategic impact of such actions. (UPSC Civil service Main (written) Examination 2016)
- Considering the threats cyberspace poses for the country, India needs “Digital Armed Forces” to prevent crimes. Critically evaluate the National Cyber Security Policy, 2013 outlining the challenges perceived in its effective implementation. (UPSC Civil service Main (written) Examination 2016)
- Religious indoctrination via digital media has resulted in Indian youth joining the ISIS. What is ISIS and its mission? How can ISIS be dangerous for the internal security of our country? (UPSC Civil service Main (written) Examination 2015)
- How illegal trans-border migration does pose a threat to India’s security? Discuss the strategies to curb this, bring out the factors which give impetus to such migration. (UPSC Civil service Main (written) Examination 2014)
- China and Pakistan have agreed in the development of an economic corridor. What threat does it dispose for India’s security? Critically examine. (UPSC Civil service Main (written) Examination 2014)
- How far are India’s internal security challenges linked with border management, particularly given the long porous borders with most countries of South Asia and Myanmar? (UPSC Civil service Main (written) Examination 2013)

Frequently Asked Questions related to Paramilitary Forces in India

How many central armed police forces (CAPF) are there in India?

There are 7 security forces in CAPF namely- Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB), Assam Rifles (AR), Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), National Security Guards (NSG) and Border Security Forces (BSF).

What is meant by paramilitary forces?

A paramilitary organization is a semi-militarized force whose organizational structure, tactics, training, subculture, and (often) function are similar to those of a professional military, but is not formally part of a country’s armed forces.

What is the role of the Paramilitary?

A paramilitary organization is organized like an army and performs either civil or military functions. The Central Armed Police Forces (commonly referred to as Paramilitary forces) play an important role in border security as well as internal security.

Which is the largest Paramilitary force in India?

With 246 battalions and various other facilities, the CRPF is considered the largest paramilitary force in India and has been sanctioned by more than 300,000 staff since 2019.

How many Special Forces are there in India?

The Special Force of Indian Army is Parachute Regiment; Indian Navy is MARCOS, and that of Indian Air Force is Garuda Commando Force. Apart from these, NSG, Special Frontier Force, Special Protection Group etc. are special forces of India.