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Reassessing the One-Front War Strategy

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As Pakistan faces growing regional instability and complex hybrid threats, the concept of a “one-front war strategy” – which prioritizes defense efforts on a single conflict theatre – is once again being debated. Originally intended to avoid overstretching military resources, this doctrine is now being reexamined in the context of Pakistan’s unique strategic challenges.

Traditionally, Pakistan has confronted a two-front security dilemma. On one side lies the conventional threat from India, particularly along the Line of Control (LoC), and on the other, asymmetric threats from its western border with Afghanistan, including militancy in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. Recent attacks in Balochistan and incidents involving Chinese workers on CPEC projects have added new layers of complexity to Pakistan's internal and external security landscape.

Some analysts argue that focusing resources on one primary threat axis – for instance, internal militancy or the eastern border – could improve operational efficiency. However, given Pakistan's strategic location between key powers like China, India, Iran, and Afghanistan, shifting focus from any one front could have significant repercussions.

The idea of a one-front strategy has historical roots in Cold War-era U.S. defense planning, where focus was placed primarily on deterring the Soviet Union in Europe. For Pakistan, however, the threat spectrum is broader and more fluid. Military operations like Zarb-e-Azb and Radd-ul-Fasaad, while focused on internal terrorism, still required a strong presence along the eastern frontier to deter potential Indian aggression.

Today's threat environment is also defined by hybrid warfare – a combination of conventional military threats, cyberattacks, disinformation campaigns, and proxy militancy. Allegations of foreign involvement in Balochistan's insurgency and cyber vulnerabilities affecting both civil and defense infrastructure highlight the evolving nature of these threats.

While a one-front strategy may offer temporary relief for budgeting and logistics, it risks leaving the country exposed to opportunistic attacks

elsewhere. Pakistan's military leadership continues to prioritize a balanced approach that maintains deterrence on all fronts while enhancing internal security operations.

Moving forward, Pakistan must adopt a flexible doctrine that allows for shifting priorities without full disengagement from any theatre. This includes investing in modern defense technologies such as drones, cybersecurity, indigenous arms production, and improved intelligence-sharing. Partnerships through platforms like the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) can also help Pakistan navigate regional tensions without overcommitting militarily.

In conclusion, a rigid one-front strategy does not align with Pakistan's complex security environment. A better approach lies in strategic flexibility – focusing where threats are most acute, while maintaining credible deterrence and readiness across all domains. This balance is essential for safeguarding national sovereignty in an increasingly unstable region.