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Europe's Shadow War: Indian perspective

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Across Europe, a quiet but escalating shadow war is unfolding. A series of sabotage attempts, mysterious fires, drone incursions and hybrid operations—linked by investigators to Russian intelligence networks—has unsettled capitals from Brussels to Copenhagen, Tallinn and Warsaw. What once seemed like isolated anomalies now forms a coherent pattern: a sustained campaign designed to weaken Europe’s resilience, fracture its unity and test the limits of its security structures.



For India, these developments are neither distant nor abstract. A country with decades of experience confronting terror networks, proxy violence and sophisticated attempts to destabilise its society and institutions, India understands with unusual clarity what Europe is now facing. This shared understanding of asymmetric threats creates an opening for a deeper India–Europe partnership in counter-sabotage, counter-terrorism and the protection of critical infrastructure.

Russia's Expanding Footprint in Hybrid Aggression

European security services have quietly raised alarm bells about the intensifying scale of operations attributed to Russian-linked actors. These actions do not resemble classical espionage alone; they are part of a broader toolkit of “active measures” aimed at eroding confidence in public institutions and undermining logistical and military support for Ukraine.

Investigations in Brussels have uncovered operatives involved in planning attacks against warehouses supplying defence equipment. In Denmark, naval authorities identified attempts to interfere with undersea communication cables and energy infrastructure. In Estonia, border guards have intercepted reconnaissance drones near bases supporting NATO logistics. And in Poland, authorities uncovered networks involved in sabotage, including an explosion on the railway line. Investigators have also linked earlier attempts to damage railway infrastructure and a series of arson incidents to operatives acting on behalf of Russian intelligence. Crucially, these incidents are not isolated. They reflect a strategic calculus: to stretch European security services thin, create political pressure by instilling a sense of vulnerability, and undermine the continent's ability to act with coherence.

A War below the threshold

What Europe encounters today is an evolved form of aggression—deliberately calibrated to remain below the threshold of open conflict. This “grey-zone warfare” blends cyber



operations, disinformation, coercion, covert action and deniable violence. Its purpose is not immediate destruction but attrition of political will.

This playbook is familiar to India. From urban attacks to infiltration attempts, from drone drops across sensitive sectors to efforts targeting infrastructure and crowded public spaces, India has lived through every variant of hybrid pressure. It has built intelligence architectures, improved inter-agency coordination, hardened its infrastructure and invested in UAV mitigation systems before such conversations became mainstream in Europe.

This accumulated experience—painful, hard-earned, and continuously refined—has real value for Europe at this moment.

India's perspective

India's long struggle with violent extremism and cross-border sabotage has shaped a particular mindset: the recognition that asymmetric threats require anticipatory intelligence, institutional resilience and political steadiness. Europe is now learning this lesson in real time. Three parallels stand out:

- **Attacks on infrastructure.**

Europe's transport corridors and logistics hubs face growing physical and hybrid threats. India's energy and transport networks, primarily exposed to cyber risks, employ layered surveillance and coordinated efforts between civilian and military agencies, offering a practical example of enhancing infrastructure resilience in the digital domain.

- **Use of drones for reconnaissance and attacks.**

Drone warfare is no longer restricted to military theatres. The detection of Russian-linked drones near sensitive sites in Latvia, Estonia and Poland mirrors patterns India has confronted along its northern and western perimeters. India's investments in counter-UAV radars, jammers and electronic warfare are areas ripe for shared learning.



- **Infiltration of criminal networks.**

European investigators confirm that several sabotage attempts were facilitated by criminal groups hired for operational tasks. India's long history with networks operating in the grey space between illicit trade and political subversion provides analytical frameworks Europe could adapt.

Europe's structural weakness

Europe's challenge is not capability but structure. Security is fragmented across sovereign states, each with its own legal constraints and intelligence cultures. This creates inevitable gaps.

India, by contrast, operates under a unified national-security framework where intelligence, counter-terrorism and border management feed into an integrated system. While India's system is not without shortcomings, it has evolved through repeated crises into a coherent architecture. It took India years to build the platforms, protocols and doctrines it now possesses. Europe does not have that time.

India–Europe security convergence

The geopolitical moment is unusually favourable for structured India–Europe security cooperation, still lagging behind shared concerns over supply-chain security, emerging technologies, and a stable global order. Collaboration could be particularly fruitful in three areas: intelligence sharing on hybrid threats, critical infrastructure protection, and counter-drone and electronic warfare efforts.

The partnership offers tangible benefits for India. It provides access to European technologies, including advanced counter-drone systems, AI-driven surveillance, and next-generation cyber defence. India can also gain operational insights into hybrid tactics emerging on Europe's eastern flank—scenarios it may face in the future. Finally, closer alignment with Europe's strategic community strengthens India's diplomatic and security posture in a rapidly shifting global environment.



A shared reality

The pattern emerging in Brussels, Denmark, Estonia and Poland is not peripheral turbulence. It signals a structural shift in Europe's security environment. The continent is entering a phase where sabotage, coercive technologies and deniable proxies will become persistent tools of statecraft.

India has already lived through this reality. Because it has, it possesses both credibility and practical experience to contribute meaningfully to Europe's evolving defence posture. This is not merely a matter of exchanging best practices. It is an opportunity to craft a new pillar of India–Europe partnership, rooted in a shared understanding that the threats of the 21st century do not obey borders, treaties or conventional definitions of warfare.

If Europe and India act together, they can build a framework of resilience that goes far beyond crisis response. They can help shape the norms, technologies and partnerships needed to defend open societies in a world where the grey zone is quickly becoming the primary theatre of contestation.

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