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THE WORSENING GEOPOLITICAL CLIMATE IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE ROLE OF PAKISTAN

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28 April 2025

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National Academies

1. PAKISTAN-U.S. SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COOPERATION PROGRAM

<https://www.nationalacademies.org/our-work/pakistan-us-science-and-technology-cooperation-program>

Description

The National Academy of Sciences (NAS) will provide assistance to the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the U.S. Department of State (DOS), and other government and non-government organizations in managing cooperative activities under the Pakistan-U.S. S&T Cooperation Program. This program, which offers cooperative research grants of up to three years in duration, is designed to increase and strengthen cooperation between researchers in various fields that contribute to human and economic development in Pakistan.

By supporting collaboration in fields of practical relevance to Pakistan, the program helps to establish and strengthen professional and personal linkages between Pakistani participants, their American colleagues, and experts. U.S. participants in the projects supported under the program will also benefit by gaining access to unique scientific data and field sites and to new opportunities to make progress on problems of common interest to each country. NAS will provide technical and administrative support to implement, manage, and expand science, technology, and engineering (STE) activities of economic and developmental importance. NAS program oversight includes but is not limited to announcing calls for proposals, managing the scientific review of proposals received, selection of awards, and disbursement of funds to participating institutions as well as monitoring program participant progress and providing related technical and administrative assistance to sponsors. With recent interest and emphasis on STE innovation and commercialization, training events and seed grants that empower and advance researcher development in STE entrepreneurship will be incorporated into the program. All activities under this program will be undertaken in collaboration with partners in Pakistan.

Council of Foreign Relations (26/6/2008)

2. U.S-PAKISTAN MILITARY COOPERATION

Pakistan is key to success in U.S.-led counterterrorism efforts, with its tribal areas serving as terrorist havens. But covert U.S. military actions inside Pakistan put the future of the U.S.-Pakistan military alliance in jeopardy.

<https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/us-pakistan-military-cooperation>

Extracts

Military cooperation between the United States and Pakistan has undergone a tactical renaissance since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Moribund at the end of the Cold War, when concerns about nuclear proliferation and the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan diminished Pakistan's importance in the eyes of U.S. policymakers, bilateral military cooperation accelerated during the Bush and Musharraf administrations. In 2006, U.S. arms sales to Islamabad topped \$3.5 billion (PDF), nearly matching total purchases by Pakistan from the United States during the fifty years prior to 2001. Now, with Pakistan's tribal areas serving as the base of operations for Taliban and al-Qaeda operatives in Afghanistan, the United States has tried to strengthen these bonds. But U.S. covert military operations inside Pakistan along the Afghan border (including revelations of possible ground raids by U.S. Special Operations Forces), Pakistan's political instability, and Islamabad's questionable record on terrorism have thrown one of America's most important military alliances into disarray.

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Covert Operations

In January 2008, the United States' top intelligence officials traveled to Islamabad to request permission to hunt down militants inside Pakistan. The request was rebuffed by then President Musharraf (NYT), but some analysts believe a quiet understanding was hashed out during that meeting. K. Alan Kronstadt, a specialist for South Asian affairs at the Congressional Research Service, writes in an April 2008 report that "three Predators are said to be deployed at a secret Pakistani airbase and can be launched without specific permission from the Islamabad government." Pakistan officially denies the planes exist, but reports of operational successes inside the country suggest a beefed-up U.S. presence in the tribal areas. In February 2008, the Washington Post reported that a CIA Predator had fired two Hellfire missiles inside Pakistani airspace three weeks earlier, killing a senior al-Qaeda commander. A month later, Jane's Defense Weekly reported that a strike by an unmanned aerial drone on March 16, 2008, killed fourteen people in southern Waziristan. The Washington Post in September 2008 reported a threefold increase in Hellfire missile attacks by Predator drones from 2007 to 2008.

Debate over Washington's covert tactics inside Pakistan's tribal region took on new significance with a September 11, 2008, report by the New York Times detailing secret orders signed by President Bush allowing for unilateral ground assaults. The report brought condemnation from Pakistan's army chief, Gen. Ashfaq Pervez Kiyani. "The sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country will be defended at all cost (ABC) and no external force is allowed to conduct

operations against inside [sic] Pakistan," he said. Shuja Nawaz, a journalist and author of *Crossed Swords*, a history of the Pakistani military, says the government of Pakistan has never allowed unilateral ground assaults by U.S. Special Operations Forces inside Pakistani territory.

Even so, some military analysts have advocated increased U.S. activity in the region. "Congress should encourage the CIA and other agencies in the [i]ntelligence [c]ommunity to take more active and aggressive measures to gather intelligence and act against al-Qaeda and Taliban militias [in Pakistan's tribal regions]," Steven Emerson, executive director of the Investigative Project on Terrorism, told lawmakers in April 2008 (PDF). But U.S. diplomats see things differently. According to Kronstadt, opponents of the policy, including some State Department officials, fear mounting Pakistani anger will eventually outweigh the military gains, a concern that is borne out in public opinion surveys. A national poll conducted in mid-2008 found that 74 percent of Pakistanis oppose direct U.S. military (PDF) action against Taliban and al-Qaeda militants.

Center of Defense, Energy and Geopolitical Research (October 2021)

3. AFGHANISTAN AND IRAN IN FOCUS. THE OPENING OF THE FATAL BOX

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/355166735_AFGHANISTAN_AND_IRAN_IN_FOCUS_The_opening_of_the_Fatal_Box

Extracts

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The strongest ideological and social influences on Afghanistan are exerted by Iran, mainly on the basis of ethnic origin (approximately 80% of Afghan people have an Iranian origin) and secondary on the basis of religious denomination (7-30% of Afghan people are Shia). Specifically, Iran exerts strong influence on the predominantly Shia Hazaras who represent the third largest ethnic group in Afghanistan.

The prospect of an Israeli attack on Iran in the near future act as a powerful accelerator of geopolitical and security events in the Region, determining to a considerable degree Afghanistan's internal affairs and also the plans and reactions of the key international actors (USA, India, Russia, China, Pakistan, Iran and Turkey) for Afghanistan and the surrounding countries.

Following an Israeli attack (which is expected to take place at a massive scale combined with destabilizing actions) the expected destabilization of Iran will automatically and greatly enhance existing similar processes in Afghanistan. **Among the factors contributing to the destabilization of Taliban regime the most important one is evidently the viability/strengthening of Northern Alliance and its military wing NRF a fact well understood by the key actors in Afghanistan, especially those openly (Pakistanis) or covertly supporting the mullah's regime. UN warned that Afghanistan is at risk of 'total breakdown' and its special envoy for Afghanistan urged Security Council to release assets frozen overseas to avoid economic and social collapse.** Also, UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) said that humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan demands urgent action since the country is on the brink of universal poverty that due drought, COVID-19 pandemic and political upheaval could reach the level of 97 percent. Under the pressure of growing protests Taliban started to resort to their old methods of terror enforcing in this way the elements of destabilization in their country.

In the case of a growing and unchecked support and territorial gains for NRF it is expected that Taliban terror (with the support of their allies) will reach unprecedented levels. According to Hall, sources in the US Central Command informed Fox News that the Pakistani military supported the Taliban with combat drones, helicopters and special forces. "The Pakistani military are assisting the Taliban offensive in Panjshir – Including 27 helicopters full of Pakistani Special Forces, backed up by Pakistani drone strikes," Hall wrote on Twitter without elaborating. On 9/9/21 NRF spokesman Ali Nazari said on CNN that NRF controls 60-65% of Panjshir Province territory and continues its armed resistance against Taliban. Also, on 4/9/21 AJ reported that Mullah Baradar promised an 'inclusive' government in an interview with it. One cannot exclude the possibility that Baradar, being a moderate politician, could have in mind the formation of an inclusive government but later hardliners as Haqqani forcefully rejected it.

On 6/9/21 Taliban announced the new government of Afghanistan led by Mahammad Hasan Akhud. All members of the cabinet are Pashtun. **They are also pro-Pakistani except for Baradar and possibly Muttaqi, the only moderate members of it. Women were excluded from the cabinet. Akhundzada (the supreme leader of IAE) is considered as a hardliner and pro-Pakistani. According to western sources. Akhund (prime minister) is primarily a political person exerting strong influence on Taliban's religious affairs and much less on military ones. Following strong American pressures, Baradar (deputy prime minister) was released from the custodian imprisonment in Pakistan and moved to Qatar where he was appointed head of Taliban's political office overseeing the troop withdrawal agreement with the US. The support to Baradar was most probably the result of Washington's worries regarding the suffocating control of Islamabad on the Taliban regime and its aim to balance it with a**

pro-Iranian leading figure. Time magazine gave an overall assessment of Baradar by including him on 15/9/21 in the list of the "100 Most Influential People in 2021".

Haqqani (minister of the Interior) is considered as pro-Pakistani. He is an advocate of extremely radical practices, like beheadings and suicide bombings, that paved his path towards the ministry of interior. Yaqoob (minister of defense) is considered as moderate personality, supporter of peace and pro-Saudi having, as rumored, ties with the Saudi regime as well as with the former government of Afghanistan. Muttaqi (minister of Foreign Affairs) is considered a moderate politician.

Following the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 by NATO and the USA and throughout the period 2001-2020 (Karzai and Ghani regimes) Russian - Afghan relations were more or less good with Russia investing in business and cultural programs and offering financial and military support to the Afghan government. On the other hand the Russia-India relations have the greatest strategic depth among SCO members that rather easily absorb such tribulations at least in the short term. In the long term the emerging AUKUS will most probably try its best to attract India (and there are indications on that) among other aims to weaken SCO. Thus, in the long term it is probable that such tribulations will be less manageable but in any case India will not abandon SCO despite the wishful thinking of some analysts or key actors.

During the Cold War India and Soviet Union developed a strong strategic relationship (military, economic and diplomatic) which was further enhanced, this time between Russia and India, after the dissolution of the latter. To give emphasis to this relationship both countries term it as a "special and privileged strategic partnership". Furthermore, the very good relations between the leaders of the two countries, Putin and Modi, contributed much to the steady growth of this partnership. According to Ranjan Mathai, former foreign secretary of India, the viability and strength of this relationship is based upon the following major factors: political, defense, anti-terrorism and nuclear cooperation. Israel rightfully expects that a massive attack against Iran will destabilize its regime leading to the opening of the 'pandora box' for both Iran and Afghanistan: (a) collapse if it and (b) its territorial disintegration probably through intervention of foreign powers (Kurdish Peshmerga towards NW Iran and Russian advance towards NE Iran or/and the central provinces of Afghanistan populated mainly by anti-Taliban Hazaras). **In the context of the above scenario one cannot exclude completely the possibility of a joint Russian-Indian invasion (with Tajik assistance) of Afghanistan from their military bases in southern Tajikistan. On the other hand such an invasion will certainly meet the fierce reaction of Pakistan since its encirclement by Indian forces from east and west will most certainly cross the Islamabad red lines.**

The invasion and occupation of Afghanistan (justified on geopolitical and security grounds but with no clear and communicable objectives) for 20 years was the decision of US 'deep state' and of powerful lobbying centers acting mainly on the part of Israel. On geopolitical grounds this unprecedented intervention seems to serve two strategic objectives: (a) to create a state-barrier under the American control that will stop any long term and covert plans of Russia to advance towards the Indian Ocean and (b) to guard and check from the east Iranian's emerging nuclear ambitions.

Despite the significance of the above objectives both for NATO, Washington and Israel, it was the enormous economic, military and political cost of occupation that weighted more in favor of the abandonment of Afghanistan by the Americans. Furthermore, the over reliance on corrupted political and military elites further augmented this cost whereas the inability of corrupted Afghan military leaders and their disorganized military units resulted in the quick victory of the ideologically highly inspired Taliban. It is interesting to note at this point the objection of London to the abandonment of Afghanistan by Washington.

The British have the best geopolitical 'view' of the Region extending to all aspects of it (military, economic, social and ideological). This 'view' developed during a long period of time during which Britain was the occupier and ruler of major parts of the Region. Since British objections seem to ignore or downgrade the enormous occupation cost, borne mainly by USA, it is the longtime Russian and the recent Chinese threats that most probably weighted most for them. One cannot also exclude the possibility the Americans (having acquired during the last 20 years in depth knowledge of every aspect of Afghanistan and its surrounding powers) did not abandon last August the country as a defeated power. They rather did it assessing that, in the light of an Israeli attack on Iran, the country will be disintegrated quickly introducing a complex system of conflicts among Russia, Pakistan and India that (they expected) would weaken SCO cohesion, drawing at the same time India closer to AUCUS.

Karkazis et al (2020) argued that in the case of an Israeli attack on Iran and destabilization of its regime Russia will move quickly and decisively to establish a sphere of influence in Iran, possibly through a geopolitical understanding with Israel. According to a RW report (18/7/21) Jaishankar and the foreign ministers of seven other nations, including China and Russia, met at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in Tajikistan where he stressed that confronting extremism and terrorism should be a key purpose of the grouping which is seen as a counterweight to the US-led NATO military alliance. The revival of the Northern Alliance was theoretically possible. But it needs charismatic and respected leaders". On 20/8/21 BM, a European news agency known to be well informed on Russian affairs, raised the question of

a Russian military interference in Afghanistan reporting the following: “Is Russia preparing to strike Afghanistan? Many Russian journalists are asking such questions after sources on the Russian website Aviapro noticed the deployment of Tu-22M3 bombers on the border with Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, or Turkmenistan. BulgarianMilitary.com reminds us that in the last month the Russian Federation carried out a series of exercises near the border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan

During the period 2001 – 2020 and despite the deterioration of USA – Iran relations (mainly due to emerging nuclear ambitions of the latter) Karzai government was engaged in cordial relations with Tehran. In the context of this relation Iran heavily contributed to the reconstruction of the country with most of the contributions directed (for obvious political reasons) to ethnic Hazaras and Tajik communities. As it is obvious, Washington was developing serious concerns over the above increasing Iranian influence on Afghanistan. **As a result pro-American news agencies, politicians and experts started to circulate rumors for an ongoing Iran-Pakistan conspiracy to weaken the Karzai government. It is characteristic the report of the news agency ‘Pathwok Afghan News Reflecting the Truth’, under the title “Iran – Pakistan out to weaken Afghanistan, MPs told” concluding that “Pakistani and Iranian spies have joined hands to weaken the Karzai government by killing Afghan elders and trying to disrupt the current system, senior security officials told parliamentarians on Sunday”.**

On the other hand, the emerging powerful anti-Iranian axis has certain inherent vulnerabilities that may surprisingly and seriously disrupt the plans of Israel and Turkey. All these vulnerabilities are associated with the Russian unknown decision variable in the Caucasian and Syrian fronts (mainly in the former) which are alarmingly enhanced by the nuclear ambitions of Turkey and its anti-Russian policies in Ukraine and Crimea. The recent USA-Russia top-level dialogue, provoked mainly by the prospect of the enormous regional geopolitical and security earthquake shakes that will follow an Israeli attack on Iran, most probably contains secret elements emanating among other factors by their opposition to Israel’s war plans. The Russian unknown factor could be also activated in the case of a serious violation of the military balance between Greece and Turkey and/or the violations of the red lines of the former by the Blue Homeland pursuits. Note at this point that for a long period of time, according to polls, the Greeks were much more in favor of Russia than the USA.

The forthcoming Israeli attack on Iran will most probably open the Fatal Jar (Pandora’s Box) with the timelessness of the realities behind this mythical jar being astonishing. There is a controversy about the contents of this jar with some arguing that they have a positive effect on mankind (through the painful realization of wrong attitudes and decisions) and others that they have a punishing effect. Mark Atteberry in his book “The Samson Syndrome: What You Can Learn from the Baddest Boy in the Bible”, makes an interesting psychological analysis of the realities behind the Samson myth and the Samson Syndrome stressing the following: “Why do some strong men fail while others succeed? Like the biblical character Samson, all strong men—those who are successful, influential, self-confident, aggressive, or widely respected—face twelve tendencies that can lead to sin and even personal tragedy”. By putting in the place of the word “men” the word “people” one can identify the Samson myth together with the menace of nuclear weapons as the main contents of the Fatal Jar in its present deciphered form.

4. Middle East Institute (21/11/2022)

PAKISTAN IN CRISIS: HOW SHOULD THE US RESPOND?

<https://mei.edu/events/pakistan-crisis-how-should-us-respond>

Extracts

A power struggle among the political elites has dangerously polarized Pakistan and plunged it into a state of disarray, even as the country continues to suffer from a crippled economy and has yet to recover from a humanitarian crisis that was exacerbated by climate change-driven extreme weather events. For nearly a year, former Prime Minister Imran Khan’s populist campaign has pitted him and his large, energized following in a dangerous stand-off with Pakistan’s dynastic power centers and the formidable military establishment. Ever since his ouster in parliamentary proceedings in April, Khan has been propagating a foreign conspiracy narrative, accusing the United States of having joined with a motley coalition of Pakistani opposition parties to topple his government. Although Khan suddenly reversed himself more recently, his previous strident rhetoric and the prospect of his political return to government leave strong reason to question what will come of Pakistan’s long-troubled relationship with the United States. Khan may be trying to put his anti-American rhetoric behind him, but such messaging has already weaponized his young and largely conservative base by invoking Pakistani nationalism. It has also possibly increased the dangers of the many smoldering fires across Pakistan and the region’s sprawling religious and militant landscape.

Strategic Reports (January 2023)

5. THE WORSENING GEOPOLITICAL CLIMATE IN EASTERN EUROPE AND THE MIDDLE EAST

Extracts

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GEOPOLITICAL PURSUITS OF RUSSIA, USA, INDIA AND PAKISTAN IN THE REGION

Karkazis (2021) analyzed in depth the Iranian-Israeli nuclear conflict and the role and capabilities, in such a conflict, of Iranian ballistic missiles and the Israeli anti-missile systems concluding that the case of a nuclear Iran constitutes an existential threat for Israel. Our assessment regarding this issue is that with the highest probability Israel will attack Iran in the near future with the only strategic issue left open being if this attack will combine also nuclear weapons or not. Israel rightfully expects that a massive attack against Iran will destabilize its regime leading to the opening of the 'pandora box' for both Iran and Afghanistan: (a) collapse if it and (b) its territorial disintegration probably through intervention of foreign powers (Kurdish Peshmerga towards NW Iran and Russian advance towards NE Iran or/and the central provinces of Afghanistan populated mainly by anti-Taliban Hazaras, map 3). In the context of the above scenario one cannot exclude completely the possibility of a joint Russian-Indian invasion (with Tajik assistance) of Afghanistan from their military bases in southern Tajikistan. On the other hand such an invasion will certainly meet the fierce reaction of Pakistan since its encirclement by Indian forces from east and west will most certainly cross the Islamabad red lines.



MAP 3. The possibility of an invasion of Afghanistan from the north

The invasion and occupation of Afghanistan (justified on geopolitical and security grounds but with no clear and communicable objectives) for 20 years was the decision of US 'deep state' and of powerful lobbying centers acting mainly on the part of Israel. On geopolitical grounds this unprecedented intervention seems to serve two strategic objectives: (a) to create a state-barrier under the American control that will stop any long term and covert plans of Russia to advance towards the Indian Ocean and (b) to guard and check from the east Iranian's emerging nuclear ambitions. Despite the significance of the above objectives both for NATO, Washington and Israel, it was the enormous economic, military and political cost of occupation that weighted more in favor of the abandonment of Afghanistan by the Americans. Furthermore, the over reliance on corrupted political and military elites further augmented this cost whereas the inability of corrupted Afghan military leaders and their disorganized military units resulted in the quick victory of the ideologically highly inspired Taliban. It is interesting to note at this point the objection of London to the abandonment of Afghanistan by Washington. The British have the best geopolitical 'view' of the Region extending to all aspects of it (military, economic, social and ideological). This 'view' developed during a long period of time during which Britain was the occupier and ruler of major parts of the Region. Since British objections seem to ignore or downgrade the enormous occupation cost, borne mainly by USA, it is the longtime Russian and the recent Chinese threats that most probably weighted most for them.

The American intervention in Afghanistan seemed to lack from the beginning clear-cut objectives that could be easily communicated and understood by other state and non-state actors in the Region. For example, regarding Washington's announcement that U.S. forces in Afghanistan will desist from combat missions in 2013, leaving the burden of those operations to U.S. special and elite forces and to trained Afghan forces, Blank (2012) commented that "This decision has caused great turbulence in NATO and throughout Central Asia, adding that the Central Asian governments continue to warn that their security problems will grow in the wake of the U.S. and NATO withdrawal. Yet these governments, along with Russia, Iran, China, and Pakistan, also oppose any long-term U.S. strategic presence in Afghanistan or Kyrgyzstan at the base at Manas". In his concluding remarks the author

stressed the following: “This Administration and its successors must decide whether or not Central Asia is truly important to U.S. interests and policies, and if so, what the threats to those interests are and how they may be countered effectively. Then and only then, can we afford in the future to deploy the enormous resources, both tangible and intangible, at our disposal to advance those interests. However, if our rhetoric points one way and our actions in another direction, nobody will be fooled except our own policymakers and analysts”.

One cannot also exclude the possibility the Americans (having acquired during the last 20 years in depth knowledge of every aspect of Afghanistan and its surrounding powers) did not abandon last August the country as a defeated power. They rather did it assessing that, in the light of an Israeli attack on Iran, the country will be disintegrated quickly introducing a complex system of conflicts among Russia, Pakistan and India that (they expected) would weaken SCO cohesion, drawing at the same time India closer to AUCUS. The Americans enhanced in an indirect and highly innovative way their strategic pursuits for India and SCO through a very interesting inclusion, in the conclusions of QUAD recent summit (Sep. 2021 in the White House) of the following statement: “Quad partners will organize their work by launching a Quad Shipping Taskforce and will invite leading ports, including Los Angeles, Mumbai Port Trust, Sydney (Botany), and Yokohama, to form a network dedicated to greening and decarbonizing the shipping value chain. The Quad Shipping Task Force will organize its work around several lines of efforts and aims to establish two to three Quad low-emission or zero-emission shipping corridors by 2030”. Evidently, the Mumbai Port Trust, represents a “small piece of cheese in the mousetrap” that will gradually distance India from China’s new Silk Road mega-plans along the highly strategic Euro-Asiatic Rimland, by creating the “Green-Shipping Network”, a parallel and highly competitive road to Chinese ‘Belt and Road Action Plan’.

(<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/09/24/fact-sheet-quad-leaders-summit/>)

Regarding the issue of participation of India in the AUCUS there exist conflicting signals. For example, Abhijit Singh, in article in the Hindu (25/9/21) titled “India is not a bystander in the AUKUS saga” says that observers in New Delhi profess mixed feelings — some joy for Australia, but more commiseration with France.

(<https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/india-is-not-a-bystander-in-the-aucus-saga/article36659188.ece>).

On the other hand Hindustan Times reported on 1/10/21 that according to Australia PM India is positive about AUKUS (<https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/aucus-complements-quad-embraced-by-india-japan-morrison-101633000169054.html>)

Karkazis et al (2020) argued that in the case of an Israeli attack on Iran and destabilization of its regime Russia will move quickly and decisively to establish a sphere of influence in Iran, possibly through a geopolitical understanding with Israel. In the case of a civil war in Iran, the Russian army may intervene militarily in the northern part of the country (considerable Russian army forces have already taken positions across the Iranian borders) and Peshmerga/PMOI forces may invade the western part of it with the aim to ‘clear’, under international inspection, Iran from dangerous nuclear installations and to help establishing democracy in the country. After all the Russians have a history of interventions in this country and know well the whereabouts there, at least in the northern part of it.

Note at this point that Russia has a military base in Tajikistan, near its capital Dushanbe (201st military base), having the following strength: Men: 6,000–7,000, Tanks: 96, Armored personnel carriers: 300, Artillery pieces: 54, Other vehicles: 1100, Helicopters: 8, Ground attack aircraft: 5 (source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_201st_Military_Base).

Brookings (3/4/2024)

6. PAKISTAN’S DEMOCRACY, ITS MILITARY, AND AMERICA

<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/pakistans-democracy-its-military-and-america/>

Extracts

The Pakistani army and America

The Biden administration claims that democracy at home and abroad is a key focus. Yet, it has largely dropped the ball when it comes to Pakistan’s democracy. The U.S. administration’s tepid stance on the subversion of Pakistan’s democratic process in this election cycle belies more than a lack of interest: it reflects the very nature of the U.S.-Pakistan relationship. Pakistan’s army has long been America’s partner of choice in the country, through periods of both military and civilian rule.

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America’s partnership with Pakistan’s military is also a product of U.S. anxieties about Pakistan’s stability and the fear that its nuclear arsenal might fall into the wrong hands. Pakistan’s military projects itself as the most competent institution in the country to both domestic and foreign audiences, and America has internalized that notion. U.S. support to Pakistan’s military—both financial and non-financial—has in turn cemented the army’s strength.

In the past the Pakistani army’s conduct has also been a cause of great frustration for the United States. America has long alleged that the army played a double game in Afghanistan by providing the Afghan Taliban sanctuary in Pakistan after 2001, to try to achieve an elusive “strategic depth” in Afghanistan—a friendly government in its western neighbor,

to counter a foe to the east in India. That policy has also hurt Pakistan's own citizens: since the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, Pakistan once again faces a serious security challenge from the Pakistani Taliban, who have sanctuary and a logistical base across the border in Afghanistan.

Yet America still relies on the Pakistani army, especially on counterterrorism concerns in Afghanistan and the region. While America's relationship with Pakistan's civilian government has seen a downgrade during the Biden administration, the relationship between the two militaries has remained intact and strong. Pakistan's current army chief visited the United States in December, and met U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, among other civilian officials.

The PTI's leader Imran Khan baselessly and repeatedly blaming the United States for his April 2022 ouster has also not won him friends in Washington.

Middle East Institute (4/9/2024)

7. PAKISTAN'S SHIFTING POSITIONS ON THE PLIGHT OF PALESTINIANS AND RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL

<https://mei.edu/publications/pakistans-shifting-positions-plight-palestinians-and-relations-israel>

Extracts

It is ironic that Pakistan and Israel are both countries created in the name of religion, at around the same time (in 1947 and 1948, respectively), and yet they have no formal relations. All Pakistani passports include the inscription that the document is valid for travel to all countries around the world, except Israel. While Pakistan's animosity toward Israel is rooted in the displacement of Palestinians, it has also served as a means of burnishing the country's credentials within the community of Muslim nations and pushing back against India, which maintains increasingly close ties with Israel.

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A complex history

Soon after its own establishment, Pakistan opposed the idea of creating a Jewish state in Palestine and voted against the partition plan for Palestine via the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine. Having gained an independent homeland for Muslims through the British partition of the Indian subcontinent, Pakistan's leaders were motivated by ideas of pan-Islamic solidarity as well as realpolitik compulsions to ingratiate themselves with emerging Middle Eastern powers. Pakistan sided with the Arab countries during their conflicts with Israel. Pakistan was the only country, besides Iraq and the United Kingdom, that recognized the Jordanian annexation of the West Bank during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. A Pakistani pilot even shot down an Israeli aircraft using a Syrian fighter jet in the Arab-Israeli war in 1967.

However, Pakistan was not always a staunch supporter of the Palestinian people themselves, particularly when their cause conflicted with the national interests of another Arab nation. In 1970, Zia-ul-Haq, Pakistan's future army chief and president but then a brigadier, led a major assault on restive Palestinian refugees in Jordan who were backed by Iraq and Syria, in what has since become known as Black September. Conversely, many prominent Pakistani democratic and military leaders over the past several decades have tried to explore the possibility of normalizing ties with Israel. Pakistan's then Army Chief and President Gen. Pervez Musharraf even attended a high-profile dinner with American Jewish leaders in New York in 2005, where he stated he would take steps to forge ties with Israel if the Middle East peace process progressed. Israel, too, has been keen to create a relationship with the populous South Asian Muslim nation, beginning with the establishment of commercial ties. However, Pakistan officially still endorses the need for a two-state solution that leads to a viable, sovereign, and contiguous state for Palestine, established based on pre-1967 borders, with Jerusalem as its capital.

Middle East Institute (11/10/2024)

8. PAKISTAN'S DEEPENING STRATEGIC RELIANCE ON CHINA

<https://mei.edu/publications/pakistans-deepening-strategic-reliance-china>

Extracts

The strategic alliance between Pakistan and China, driven largely by opportunism and geostrategic interests, seems unshakable. However, the extent of its mutual benefit remains under scrutiny, especially for Islamabad, whose reliance on Beijing continues to deepen. Although China claims to base its foreign policy interactions on five key principles — respect for sovereignty, non-aggression, non-interference, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence — its dealings with Pakistan indicate an unequal power dynamic that primarily serves its own interests. This imbalance in the Pakistan-China strategic alliance has led to a situation in which Islamabad's autonomy is increasingly curtailed, and its vulnerability to Beijing's influence is becoming more apparent.

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Consequences

CPEC's ambitious goals have largely fallen short, exacerbating Pakistan's security and economic challenges, with Gwadar Port serving as a prime example of this failure. If Pakistan cannot protect Chinese workers and projects, it risks

losing control over its own security governance. China, which has already shifted its focus from economic expansion under the BRI to a more security-driven approach through its Global Security Initiative, may increase its security involvement in Pakistan. Though China has not yet formalized overseas military deployments or bilateral security agreements under this initiative, it has begun using BRI-related port facilities for military purposes, as evidenced by the opening of its naval base in Djibouti in 2017. There is no agreement between China and Pakistan that explicitly states whether China will or will not pursue a similar security strategy in Pakistan in the near future; however, the signs indicate that it may. The ongoing security and economic challenges only intensify Pakistan's vulnerability to China. If this situation remains unchanged, Pakistan may be compelled to concede to Chinese interests to stave off a looming debt trap crisis, potentially offering military access in exchange for crucial economic and military assistance. The question remains whether Pakistan's civil-military elites will acknowledge this changing reality or continue to deny the inevitable shift in its foreign policy autonomy. With the stakes so high, the need for clarity and decisive action has never been more critical. Pakistan stands at a crossroads, and its choices now will shape its future role in an increasingly polarized world.

First Post (14/10/2024)

9. WHY THE US CAN'T AFFORD TO SEVER MILITARY TIES WITH PAKISTAN DESPITE DEEP SUSPICIONS

Despite concerns over Pakistan's closeness with China and its ties with terror outfits, the US remains compelled to sustain military relations for its own geopolitical calculations

<https://www.firstpost.com/world/united-states/why-the-us-cant-afford-to-sever-military-ties-with-pakistan-despite-deep-suspicions-13825127.html>

Extracts

The recent naval exercises between the US and Pakistan in the Arabian Sea reflect a renewed commitment to military cooperation, even as Washington remains cautious of Islamabad's geopolitical manoeuvres. The joint efforts, aimed at enhancing maritime interoperability, shows the complex but enduring relationship between the two nations. Despite historical mistrust, particularly around Pakistan's ties with terror groups and its relationship with China, these military collaborations perhaps point to a pragmatic approach driven by mutual strategic interests.

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Suspicion and strategic cooperation

Despite the ongoing military exercises, Washington's relationship with Islamabad is marked by suspicion and caution. The US has long harboured concerns over Pakistan's nuclear ambitions and its dual dealings with militant groups like the Taliban, which have strained bilateral trust. The 1985 Pressler Amendment, which curtailed US aid due to Pakistan's nuclear programme, is a stark example of how strategic concerns can lead to a rift in relations.

However, the need for counterterrorism cooperation, especially following the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021, has kept security ties afloat. Pakistan's geographic location, with its long border with Afghanistan, makes it a crucial partner in regional stability efforts. The US continues to engage with Pakistan on security issues, providing military aid and conducting joint exercises, even as it keeps a wary eye on Islamabad's broader geopolitical moves.

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Future of US-Pakistan military relations

The future of US-Pakistan military relations remains uncertain shaped by both longstanding concerns and new geopolitical realities. As the US shifts its focus from counterterrorism to great power competition with China and Russia, Pakistan's role in this new strategy will be critical. The naval exercises and joint military collaborations demonstrate that despite the challenges both nations see the value in maintaining strong defence ties.

However, much will depend on how both sides manage their broader geopolitical interests. Pakistan's close relationship with China will continue to be a point of concern for Washington, while Islamabad will seek to balance its ties with both superpowers. In this delicate balancing act, military cooperation remains one of the few areas where the US and Pakistan can continue to find common ground.

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China factor

Pakistan's participation in China's Belt and Road Initiative and its deepening economic ties with Beijing have raised concerns in Washington. While the US seeks to balance its relationship with Pakistan, it must also navigate the broader geopolitical implications of Pakistan's growing alignment with China. Nonetheless, the US recognises the importance of maintaining military and security cooperation with Islamabad, particularly in areas like counterterrorism and regional stability.

Middle East Institute (20/8/2024)

10. PAKISTAN'S INDEPENDENCE DAY HIGHLIGHTS DEEPENING IDEOLOGICAL DIVIDE

<https://mei.edu/publications/pakistans-independence-day-highlights-deepening-ideological-divide>

Extracts

On Aug. 14, Pakistan celebrated its 78th Independence Day against the backdrop of a widening ideological and societal divide between proponents of Islamic nationalism and those championing democracy. Seizing the occasion, both the military and political leaders, recognizing Pakistan's vulnerability to political instability and eroding social cohesion, have sought to shape the national discourse and sway public opinion with their respective narratives.

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Politicians' democratic principles vs. military's Islamic nationalism

As politicians rely heavily on the democratic framework for their survival, they have portrayed their allegiance in terms of the fundamental principles of democracy, constitutionalism, and the separation of powers, linking these values to the legacy of the historic political struggle of Pakistan's founding fathers. By contrast, the military, which often operates independently of the democratic system, has stressed the Islamization of Pakistan's ideology and its centrality to shaping national identity. This close relationship between Islam and the military's strategic vision has been articulated by the army from time to time, most clearly during the Zia-ul-Haq years in the late 1970s and 1980s.

Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff Gen. Asim Munir is known for his strong conservative religious beliefs and, as a *Hafiz-e-Quran* (one who has memorized the Quran), consistently infuses his statements with religious appeals. He frequently references Islamic scripture and draws analogies from Islamic history, reflecting his effort to position himself as a military leader with profound Islamic knowledge, capable of providing religious guidance to his troops. Under his leadership, Pakistan's military has presented itself as agents of God engaged in a righteous struggle against God's enemies, with victory assured by divine promise.

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Gen. Munir's Independence Day address: Key highlights

In keeping with this tradition, Gen. Munir, in his latest Independence Day address, once again invoked Islamic principles and linked them to national ideology and identity, delivering a rhetorically powerful speech that can be divided into four distinct parts. His speech, blending offensive and defensive rhetoric, served as a direct rebuttal to many of Imran Khan's accusations against the military.

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Imran Khan's counter-narrative

Khan's populist narrative focuses on portraying the military establishment as responsible for leading the country to a dangerous crossroads. He not only accuses the military of imposing undeclared martial law and waging an oppressive campaign against him and his party, but also characterizes his resistance as righteous — a *jihad* (holy war) for *Haqeeqi Azadi* (true freedom), aimed at defending the constitution and restoring democracy.

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In this looming confrontation between Khan and the army chief, it seems clear that, given the high stakes, the outcome will likely be a lose-lose situation. Neither Khan's goal of achieving constitutional supremacy and restoring democracy, nor the army chief's aim of instilling religiously inspired stability is likely to be realized. This confrontation will leave a lasting scar on the nation's collective memory, further eroding the reputation of state institutions and reducing the chances of national reconciliation and unity. While the state may survive this unprecedented crisis, a fractured and polarized Pakistan will fail to achieve the goals envisioned by its founders more than three-quarters of a century ago.

Voice of America (5/3/2025)

11. US-PAKISTAN CAPTURE OF 'TOP TERRORIST' SIGNALS DEEP COUNTERTERRORISM COOPERATION DESPITE COLD TIES, EXPERTS SAY

<https://www.voanews.com/a/us-pakistan-operation-to-capture-top-terrorist-signals-deep-counterterrorism-cooperation-despite-cold-ties-experts-say-/7998510.html>

Extracts

Cooperation with Pakistan

Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif thanked Trump for acknowledging his country's contribution in a post on the X social media platform.

"We thank U.S. President Donald Trump for acknowledging and appreciating Pakistan's role and support in counterterrorism efforts across the region," Sharif posted.

"We will continue to partner closely with the United States in securing regional peace and stability," the prime minister added.

The arrest signals Islamabad and Washington are working closely on some security issues despite relations reaching a low since the end of the U.S. war in Afghanistan and the return of the Taliban to power.

“The arrest shows that counter-terrorism cooperation between Pakistan and the US remains robust even though relations are largely confined to a narrow bandwidth focused on counterterrorism,” former Pakistani ambassador to Washington, Maleeha Lodhi, told VOA.

“This is the first major development between both countries since the Trump administration took office,” Firdous said. “It also exemplifies the dependence of both countries on each other when it comes to counterterrorism cooperation.”

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In a post on X, Washington-based South Asia expert [Micheal Kugelman](#) said Pakistan is interested in a new security partnership with the U.S.

“Pakistan wants to leverage U.S. concerns about terrorism in Afghanistan and pitch a renewed security partnership with the U.S.,” said Kugelman, director of the South Asia Institute at the Wilson Center, adding “it will be a hard sell to the administration.”

The joint counter-terrorism operation comes just days after the Trump administration released \$397 million for a program that supports Pakistan’s use of F-16 fighter jets acquired from Washington. Islamabad is stipulated to use the fighter jets for only for counterterrorism purposes, and not against archrival India.

Foreign Policy (12/3/2025)

12. USA SECURITY COOPERATION WITH PAKISTAN?

Despite a shoutout in the U.S. president’s speech last week, don’t expect a renewed security partnership.

<https://foreignpolicy.com/2025/03/12/pakistan-us-counterterrorism-security-cooperation-trump/>

Stimson Center (29/3/2024)

13. BREAKING THE MOLD: THE EVOLUTION OF US-PAKISTAN COOPERATION BEYOND SECURITY

The US and Pakistan can develop a sustainable relationship by focusing on nontraditional security areas, such as technology, health, climate, and education

<https://www.stimson.org/2024/evolution-of-us-pakistan-cooperation-beyond-security/>

Extracts

The memo offers a pragmatic blueprint for how Pakistan and the US can recalibrate their relationship amidst shifting geopolitical dynamics. It signals a departure from the past toward a future built on mutual understanding, cooperation, and shared prosperity. It proposes concrete actions to promote sustainable bilateral relations based on consultations with stakeholders and policy circles. From leveraging Pakistan’s growing tech sector to addressing climate change and enhancing public health cooperation, the memo outlines a roadmap for mutual benefit and calls for a nuanced, multifaceted approach to engagement, moving beyond traditional security concerns.

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Looking Ahead

It is crucial to acknowledge the deep-rooted mistrust and structural issues that plague U.S.-Pakistan relations. Overcoming these challenges may take years, but allowing the relationship to be shaped solely by changing international trends and past mistakes will only weaken it further. This paper has proposed addressing the remnants of the Afghan war, navigating great power competition, and promoting cooperation in four non-security areas: technology, education, climate, and health. While the U.S. should seek out opportunities that are of mutual interest in the current milieu, Pakistan should focus on becoming a more competitive and attractive market for cooperation and engagement outside the security space. The new Pakistani government’s biggest challenge will be strengthening Pakistan’s economy and preparing for upcoming negotiations with the International Monetary Fund to use its Extended Fund Facility.⁴⁷ While Pakistan has a lot of work to do internally, focusing on these practical measures can build a more stable foundation for the future of U.S.-Pakistan relations.

Modern Diplomacy (1/4/2025)

14. PAKISTAN – US STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP IN COUNTERTERRORISM

Pakistan has consistently played a pivotal role as a frontline partner of the United States (US) in the global fight against terrorism through unparalleled cooperation and immense sacrifices.

<https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2025/04/01/pakistan-us-strategic-partnership-in-counterterrorism/>

Extracts

Pakistan has consistently played a pivotal role as a frontline partner of the United States (US) in the global fight against terrorism through unparalleled cooperation and immense sacrifices. Following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, Pakistan emerged as a key ally in the US-led War on Terror (WOT), providing logistical, intelligence, and operational support and dismantling numerous terrorist networks operating in the region. Thus, Pakistan became a crucial partner of the US in counter-terrorism efforts as it provided naval and air force bases to the US military. Intelligence sharing between the two countries was vital in disrupting major terrorist plots and capturing high-profile Al-Qaeda operatives.

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The US has recognized Pakistan's efforts, emphasizing trust in Pakistan's support to address evolving security threats. High-level diplomatic and military engagements reflect the ongoing commitment of both states to strengthen their counter-terrorism collaboration. Strengthening Pak-US counter-terrorism cooperation is crucial to stabilizing Afghanistan and addressing regional security threats. Improved relations can be achieved through a shared commitment to advancing their alliance with a collaborative framework and mutual interests. Pakistan's sacrifices and contributions have cemented its role as a frontline ally of the US. The enduring trust and shared objectives of this partnership ensure that it will remain a vital pillar of global counter-terrorism efforts in the years to come.