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The Paradigm Shift Magazine
June '26

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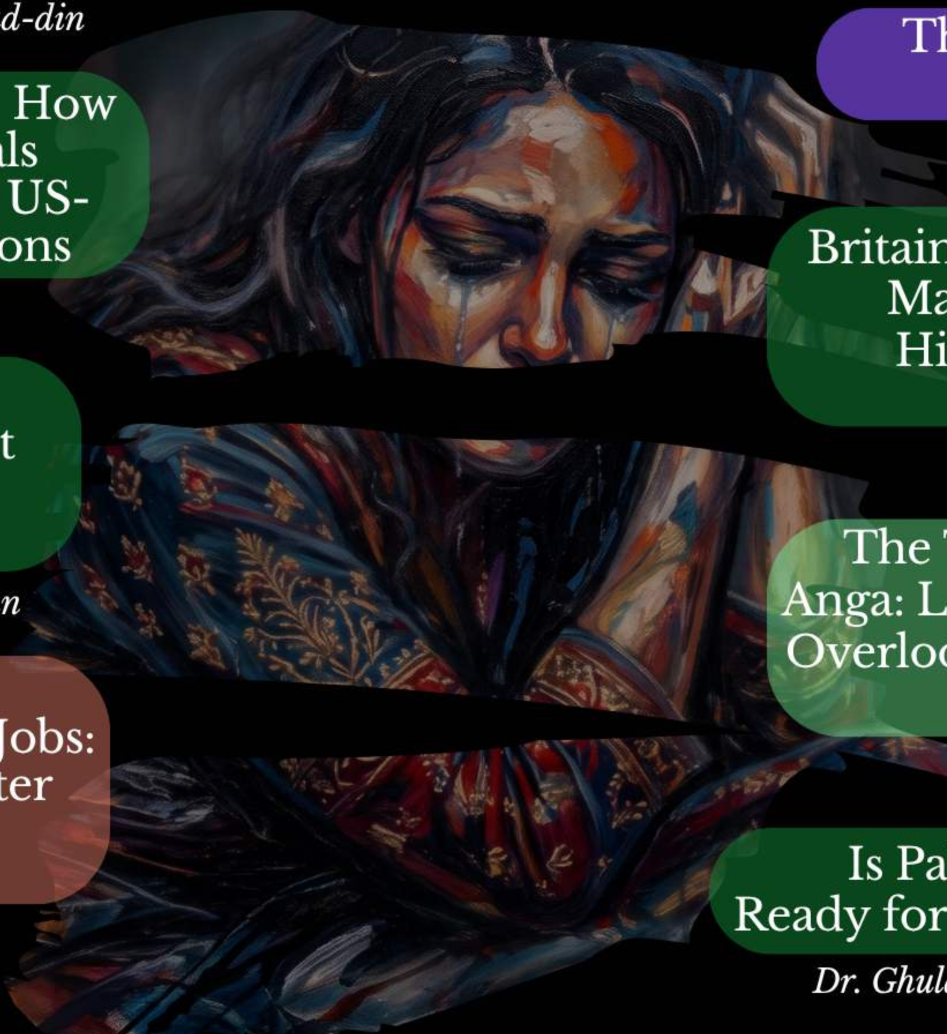

Why Does Every Case of Violence Against Women Feel Familiar?

Fatima Hayat Malik


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Foreword

Welcome to the twentieth edition of the Paradigm Shift e-magazine. Since starting Paradigm Shift (www.ParadigmShift.com.pk) on **August 14th, 2020**, we have come a long way.

With **350,000 followers** on social media and unique traffic on our website, we are now able to serve a wider percentage of the Pakistani youth. All our pieces are sent in by brilliant writers and researchers, and our gifted editors constantly ensure the quality of our content.

We aim for, and work towards three major goals:

1. To become a comprehensive library with high-quality content on **international relations, current affairs, global politics,** and **Pakistan.**
2. To provide a **free medium** where individuals can access research from across the globe - and can send in their own work to share their voice with the world.
3. To **showcase Pakistan** in a **positive and factual manner** through our **'Pakistan Unveiled'** section.

We have handpicked **11 special pieces** from our website for this edition, and we hope that you gain some insights from them. For more content on a variety of topics from across the world, please visit www.ParadigmShift.com.pk

We hope that you consider sharing our website and social media with your friends and family so that we can effectively increase our reach. Thank you again for all your support through the years.

Why Does Every Case of Violence Against Women Feel Familiar?

About the Author

Fatima Hayat Malik is currently pursuing an MSc in Global Mental Health from the University of Glasgow. She obtained her undergraduate degree in Psychology from the National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST), Islamabad.

When does every woman realise her country has failed her? When the aftermath of the horrific acid attack on Dr Mahnoor, an event so catastrophically heartbreaking that the pain echoes through us all, directs us to our social media platforms, where we can only helplessly express a fraction of this outrage, knowing that Dr Mahnoor's life is forever changed for the worse. When one of the most widely circulated posts is not an official law enforcement statement, government action, or a campaign highlighting the need for swift action.

No, you see, a woman realises her country has failed her when one of the most widely circulated posts is a guide titled "Acid Attack First Aid". A step-by-step video explaining what to do when acid is thrown on your face.

Step 1: Wash the affected area continuously with water.

Step 2: Remove contaminated clothing.

Step 3: Seek immediate medical attention.

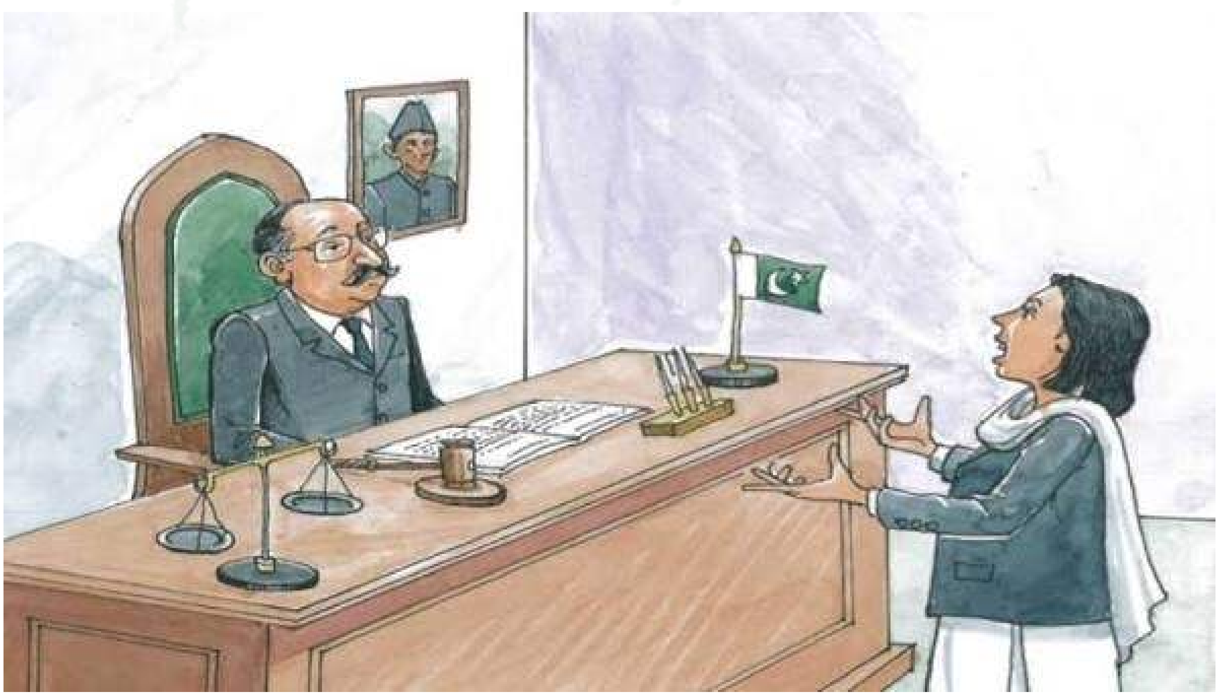
Yes, this post is well-intentioned, practical, and relevant. But why did I have to use the word "relevant" to describe it in the first place? There should absolutely be no context in which a well-meaning, well-informed video such as this is referred to as "relevant". Its widespread circulation poses the question we all want to ask: *Why have we, as a society, become better at teaching women to survive violence rather than ensuring it never has to happen in the first place?*

This is not the first time this question has arisen. Take the events of the past few weeks alone: a mother and daughter burnt alive by their family members, a woman murdered by her husband for refusing intimacy, and the young domestic worker who was brutally assaulted by her employer's son and died from complications when an unqualified practitioner attempted to terminate the pregnancy. The gruesome details differ, but the pattern remains the same. Every case sparks public outrage and demands immediate accountability and justice, but eventually fades into silence until the next tragic headline arrives.

It is becoming increasingly difficult to label these as isolated incidents when this violence continues to occur with such alarming frequency. Domestic abuse, acid attacks, marital rape, assault, cyberstalking, workplace harassment, honour killings, and forced marriages. Call it what you want, but these are *not* isolated incidents; they stem from the same underlying attitudes of power, control, entitlement, and the lack of accountability that remain rampant around us.

This is why we cannot view violence against women as beginning and ending with individual perpetrators. While swift justice and accountability for those who commit these horrendous crimes are a non-negotiable demand, we cannot ignore the broader societal environment that allows this violence to persist.

Yes, institutional shortcomings are a massive part of the problem. Despite Pakistan having several legislations addressing various forms of Gender-Based Violence (GBV), implementation remains weak. Public confidence in justice systems will falter when survivors continue to encounter barriers while reporting, when investigations are slow, and legal proceedings stretch on endlessly. Serving swift justice in response to these inhumane actions is the most effective way to deliver a wake-up call. Yet, we cannot only point fingers at our justice systems, when this violence is also sustained because societal attitudes continue to excuse and normalise harmful behaviour unless it escalates into a "headline-worthy" crime.



Even when these discussions do happen, they are often framed towards how *women* can act differently: how we can protect ourselves by avoiding certain places, wearing different clothing, travelling differently, and now apparently learning first aid in the event of an acid attack. When will we divert our attention to the norms that make these precautions inevitable in the first place?

If we are serious about preventing violence against women, our collective efforts should not only revolve around training girls how to be safe, but also extend to teaching boys emotional regulation, empathy, accountability, and respect for one's boundaries. We must all actively work to dismantle the misogynistic undertones that continue to circulate in classrooms, workplaces, and online spaces and discourage ideas that normalise harassment as a response to rejection, ideas that pass off misogyny as "locker room" humour, and ideas that promote control, violence, and rage as a desirable part of "manhood".

This is not about framing men and women as opposing sides in this conversation. If even a small percentage of the sentiments being expressed by those whose only response to such crimes is "not all of us" were directed toward standing with the survivors and actively working to dismantle the system that allows such violence to persist, we would all be moving in the right direction. The perpetuating violence in our society takes many forms and does not stop to consider one's gender, race, ethnicity, or religion. However, there is an important difference between not participating in said violence and actively opposing the culture that allows it to exist.

This responsibility belongs to all of us. To the parents, educators, media organisations, religious leaders, community leaders, and to the youth. Violence against women is a societal issue, and so the solution becomes a societal responsibility that each of us must bear, whether we wish to acknowledge it or not. Because violence has never existed in a vacuum, and with each passing day, that brings forward a new devastating headline and is met with inaction, the culture enabling violence gets a little stronger.

Unless this issue is addressed at its root, women will continue sharing posts on how to survive acid attacks, how to navigate harassment, and how to avoid violence. The question I leave you with here is not why these guides are being circulated; it is why their necessity feels so normal.

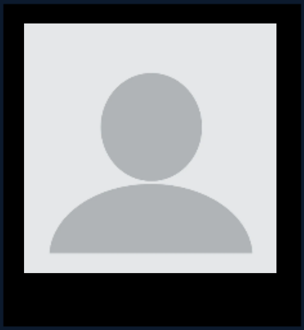
The views and opinions expressed in this article/paper are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the editorial position of Paradigm Shift.

You may like: A 1400-Year Legacy: The Rights of Women in Islam

Also read: Cyberbullying in Pakistan: The Case of Cyber Harassment Against Women

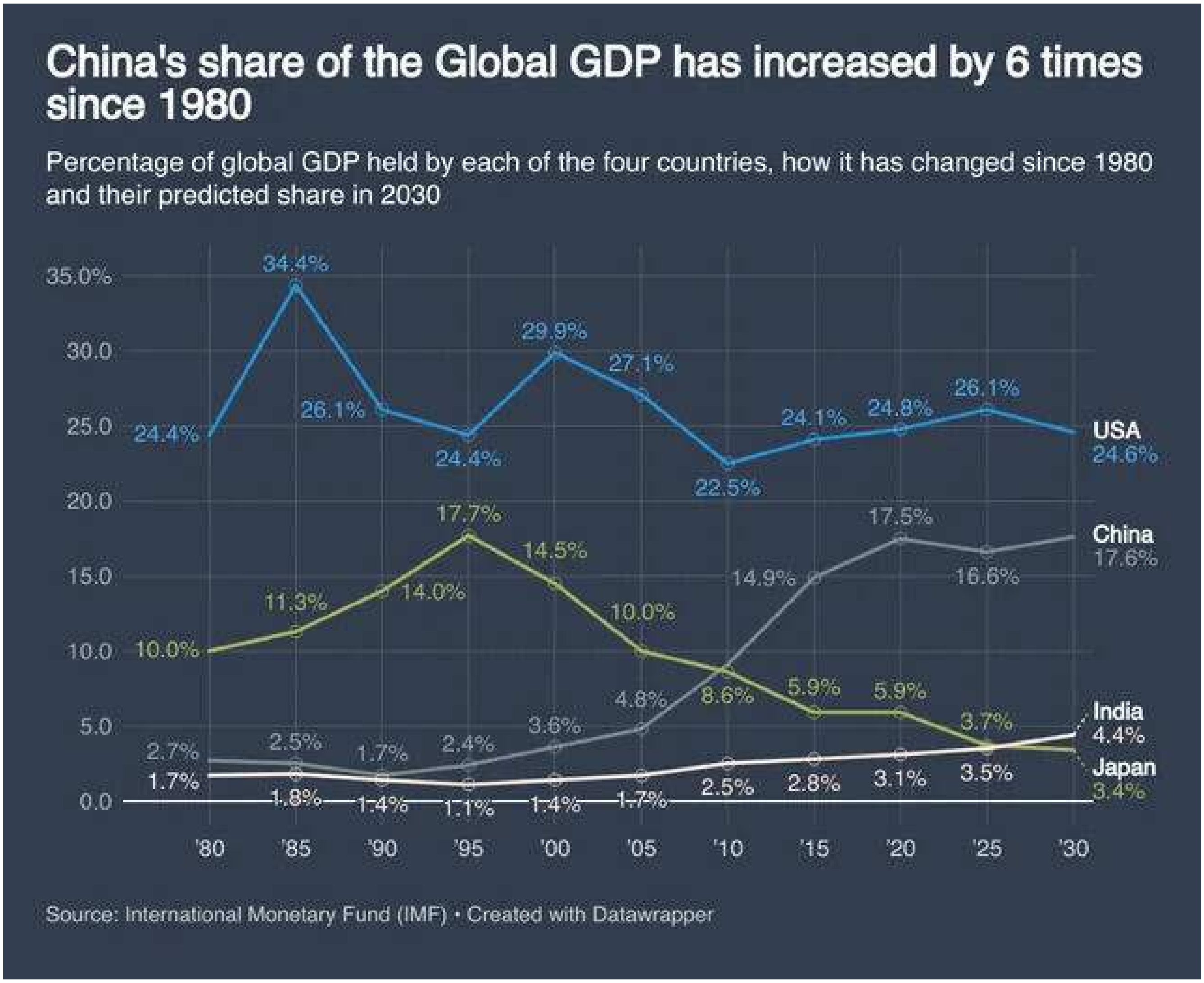
Tradition to Rejuvenation: The Geostrategic Identity of Xi Jinping's China

About the Author



Tehreem Ahmed is a freelance contributor.

China's rise over the past forty years has indeed altered the world's power dynamics and challenged preconceptions about the international order. They transformed from being largely cut off from the world economy to the second-largest economy in the world, a big tech competitor, and a more diplomatic player on the international stage. Data from the World Bank shows that China's share of global GDP grew from around 1.6% in 1990 to over 17% by 2023.



China's ascendancy is not just quantitative and military: it is also about identity. What is China's image of itself? How does it fit in the world in relation to history? Since Xi Jinping ascended to power in 2012, he has stressed China's renewal and rejuvenation, the recovery of ancient glory. Xi is not just trying to portray China as a new power; he sees the country as one that is making a comeback to its former glorious days. Thus, to understand China under Xi, one must take a long-term perspective on the phenomenon of an ancient culture asserting its historical place in the world today.

This change has created a distinctive geostrategic identity that merges the old Chinese strategy with the new great power goals. China is pushing to make the stories of its ancient past a reality with measures such as the Belt and Road Initiative, military enhancements, technological progress, and a more aggressive diplomatic policy. Understanding this evolving identity is essential for understanding China's actions and the broader transformations in the global system.

Here, the piece argues that Xi Jinping's China is a mixture of old and new in terms of its geostrategic identity. Although concepts such as Tianxia, national unity, and being the center of civilization still affect the strategies, they are now employed to promote national rejuvenation and global influence as well.

Historical Foundations of China's Strategic Identity

China's current strategy comes from its history, too. For centuries, imperial China was the big player in East Asia, seeing itself at the center of a region it led. They had a view called Tianxia, meaning "all under heaven." It highlighted cultural authority, political legitimacy, and keeping the region stable.

The traditional Chinese system was quite different from the modern Westphalian one, in which all sovereign states should be equal, because the traditional Chinese order was established on the basis of the belief in Chinese superiority. The system was abolished after imperial China's collapse, but its philosophies remain alive in political discussions and planning in China today. China's identity is shaped a lot by the memory of the "Century of Humiliation," from the First Opium War in 1839 to 1949.

Foreign invasion, the loss of land, and domestic turmoil occurred during this period. As a result, this is a time when leaders emphasize the importance of unity, sovereignty, and self-reliance. Thus, they rely on history in order to make their messages stronger on national pride and independence. Historical memory means more than just symbolism; it's a strong political tool too. It provides a rationalization of the policies. In China, national rejuvenation is thus not seen as a new objective, but as a return to its ancient position in the world.

Xi Jinping and the Chinese Dream

In 2012, Xi Jinping's election was a big deal for China's strategy. Upon the assumption of power, he spoke about the "Chinese Dream of National Rejuvenation. This concept spread rapidly and was the basis for domestic and foreign policymaking as well.

The Chinese Dream is about rejuvenating the prosperity of the Chinese nation, strengthening national cohesion, modernizing the military, and enhancing the nation's global influence. Unlike his predecessors, Xi is much more confident in how China is represented in the international arena.

China's economy has boosted confidence, too. In 2012, when Xi took charge, China's GDP was around US$8.5 trillion. It grew to over US$18 trillion by 2024, making China a major player economically on the global stage.

There is also a political objective, namely, national rejuvenation, which is supported by the process. The legitimacy of the Communist Party and the rise of China are two inseparable issues for Xi, and it is a powerful narrative for the past and future. So, from this perspective, the Party is the savior of the restoration of the glory of China.

Xi has also pushed the idea of a "Community with a Shared Future for Mankind." He believes that the rise of China offers opportunities for cooperation, not conflict, all across the world. This is supposed to console people outside the country and help strengthen China's position in the international arena as well.

The Belt and Road Initiative: Reconnecting History and Strategy

China's geostrategic identity is changing, as evident in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) launched by Xi Jinping in 2013. The idea is to expand linkages across Asia, Africa, Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East via investments in infrastructure, transport, energy, and digital networks. Over 150 countries and many international organizations have signed up for the program.

The BRI is unique due to its historical symbolic value. China projects the initiative as part of a long tradition of trade and culture sharing, connecting with the old Silk Road. This is to help Beijing portray its expanding influence as normal, peaceful, and mutually beneficial.

The Belt and Road Initiative also helps achieve important strategic objectives. It promotes economic cooperation, enhances China's economic influence, and deepens political ties with the countries involved. Engagements under BRI have topped US$1 trillion since it started.

This is a Chinese initiative that combines history and the goals of the current world. Beijing is not only maintaining its tradition but also incorporating a strategy to help the rejuvenation and its global influence; it's creating a coherent image of its vision.

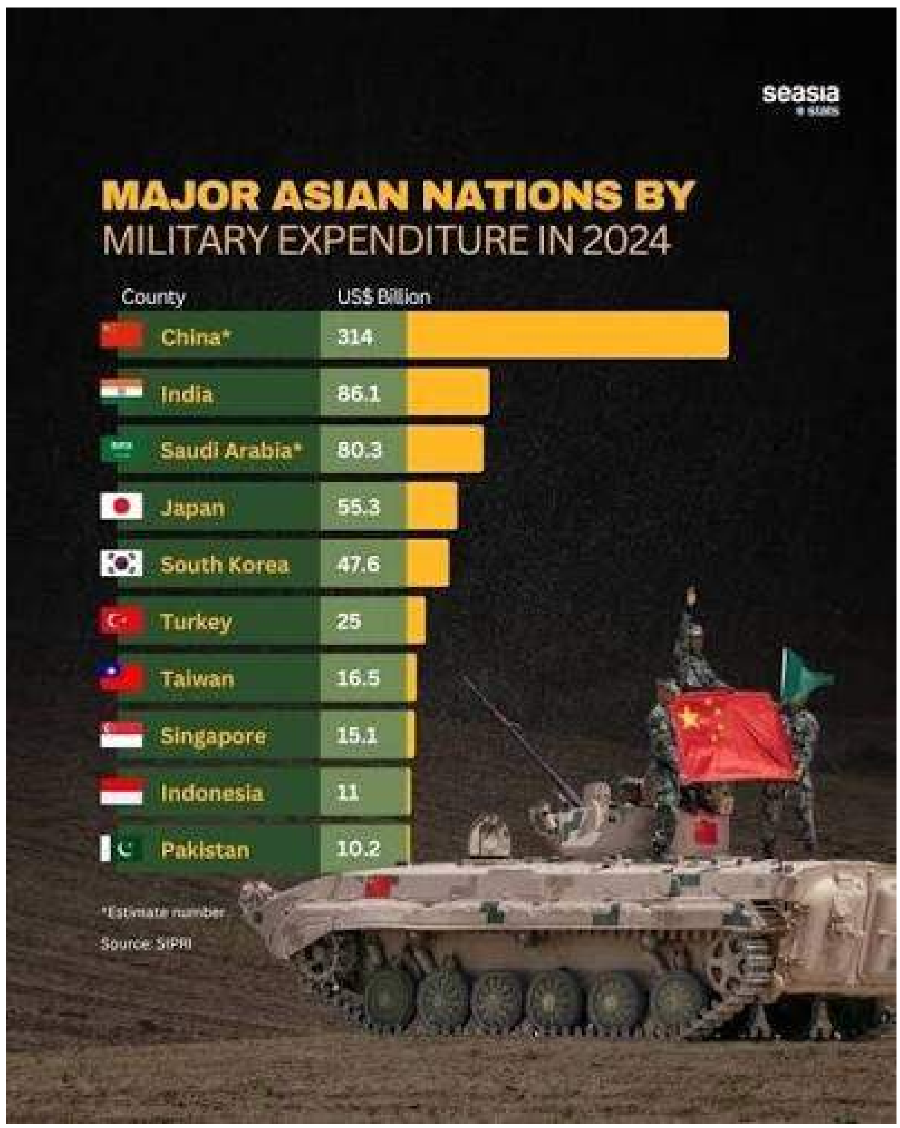
Military Modernization and the Pursuit of Strategic Power

Economic growth and diplomacy are insufficient to bring about the national rejuvenation that Xi Jinping has in mind. One of China's developing geostrategic identities is the modernisation of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). Military reform is one of the biggest reforms in modern Chinese politics under Xi.

In 2015, Beijing started big military reforms aimed at turning the PLA into a high-tech force with a high level of capability, and which can conduct multi-domain operations. That can involve reorganizations, streamlining bureaucracy, and enhancing skills in cyber operations, space operations, and AI.

China's dedication to modernizing its military is clear from its defense spending. In 2024, according to SIPRI, it spent around . That puts it in second place in the world in military spending, only after the US. Almost half of Asia and Oceania's military spending comes from China too, showing its $314 billion rising influence in the region.

Beijing sees military modernization as key to sovereignty and national security. According to leaders, a robust army can defend the country's territory and economy and also prevent the ignominious experiences of the past. So, military power is seen as crucial for national rejuvenation, not just as a way to expand.



Despite this, the growing military power of China is a concern for its neighbours and great powers. Other countries are closely monitoring China due to matters such as the South China Sea dispute, Taiwan's issue, and the competition between China and the US. Every single one of these illustrates Beijing's goal of making itself stronger and changing the security landscape in the region.

Technology, Manufacturing, and the New Foundations of Power

It is no longer the case, China, that its rise will be limited to military power. The country sees tech supremacy as key to national power, too. With nearly 30% of the world's manufacturing output, China leads in making stuff. This enables them to exercise significant influence in world business and supply chains, enhancing their economic position on a global scale. Therefore, Beijing has to rely on this industrial power to enhance its influence in the world.

China has been spending a lot of money on technology in recent years, such as artificial intelligence, quantum computing, renewable energy, semiconductors, 5G. Programs like "Made in China 2025" Demonstrate their commitment to further innovate at home, cut down on foreign tech.

With increasingly fierce competition from the United States, tech development is essential at this time. Both countries are looking at tech as a major component of their competition, given restrictions on the export of advanced semiconductors, growing tech security concerns, and debates over digital infrastructure.

For China, technological self-sufficiency isn't just about the economy; it's a must for strategy, too. Control of key tech is important to their sovereignty, security, and future well-being.

This drive for innovation is indicative of China's evolution in its goals. Economic growth is the main focus of past leaders, but in today's world, tech leadership is an essential key to the country's revival.

The Paradox of China's Rise: Peaceful Development or Strategic Assertiveness?

Currently, China's geostrategic identity leads to a significant gap between its words and deeds. China continues to talk about peace, cooperation, and win-win solutions. They say they are not trying to be hegemonic and that their ascent will be different from others.

But their deeds bring questions to mind. China's military muscle-flexing, increased operations in disputed waters, and attempts to alter some provisions of global governance. So, here are those who ask, can China's rise be peaceful?

This tension is really obvious in the South China Sea. About one-third of worldwide maritime trade goes through that area annually, which is especially vital to international shipping. It's a combination of economic pressures and security concerns that have led China to grow in its presence in the region, but it is causing some of the surrounding nations to sit on the fence.

China thus finds itself in this strange situation: They claim to be engaged in peaceful development, but at the same time, they are developing their economy, technology, and military capabilities to alter the power dynamics in the region.

This apparent contradiction makes sense when you look at it from China's point of view. They consider their policies to be defensive measures and do not read them as evidence of expansionist aspirations. Strengthening is for them only a question of holding on to their side of the deal and defending their own interests in a very competitive environment.

It is fundamental to comprehending the actions of the Chinese to understand that they are not just revisionist nor merely status quo. Rather, it is a matter of gaining more influence within a system that they believe requires change to reflect the changing reality of the present.

Tradition and Modern Power: The Emergence of a New Geostrategic Identity

Under the leadership of Xi Jinping, China has shown that the identity that you have had throughout history is equally important as your economic and military strength. But they are not simply discarding old identities in favor of new ones; rather, they are incorporating both into their efforts in resolving contemporary problems.

The modern rulers are using the notions of unity and ancient civilization in their strategy of regenerating the country. As a consequence, China has managed to present itself not just as a powerful state, but also as a civilization-state. Therefore, in doing so, China is not only able to justify its global identity based on historical identity but also pursue contemporary objectives.

Therefore, we can conclude that the position of China in the international arena cannot be understood through its military and economic strength alone. It requires an understanding of Chinese identity as perceived by them from their history and culture.

Conclusion

The Xi Jinping Era sees China combine continuity and change in its geo-strategy. By coupling its past with its present geopolitical goals via the concept of national rejuvenation, China transcends simply improving its economy and its military capabilities.

The BRI, military reform, technological advancements, and increased diplomatic efforts illustrate how China has used its rich history in shaping its world power status. The concepts of Tianxia and the Century of Humiliation are just some of the examples of ancient narratives still influencing China's strategies, albeit under new interpretations.

China's ambitions follow a long-term political plan. Beijing wants to achieve the "great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" by 2049, the centenary of the People's Republic of China. So, they're working toward this goal on their set timeline.

Since it represents nearly 18 percent of the total world's population, whatever China decides about its project has significant ramifications for the international community. Understanding China's next steps requires consideration of its view regarding the relationship between its past, identity, and power. In its bid for rejuvenation, the combination of its historical heritage and power politics greatly impacts contemporary politics. Therefore, it is clear that such a combination will determine how international politics develop.

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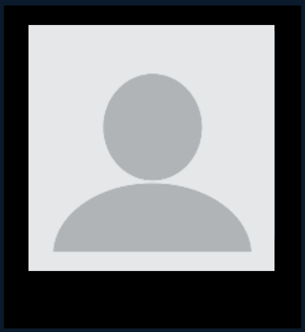
Also read: Examination of the Century of Humiliation and Its Impact on Chinese Strategic Culture

The Architects of Animosity: Britain's Deliberate Manufacture of Hindu-Muslim Enmity

About the Author



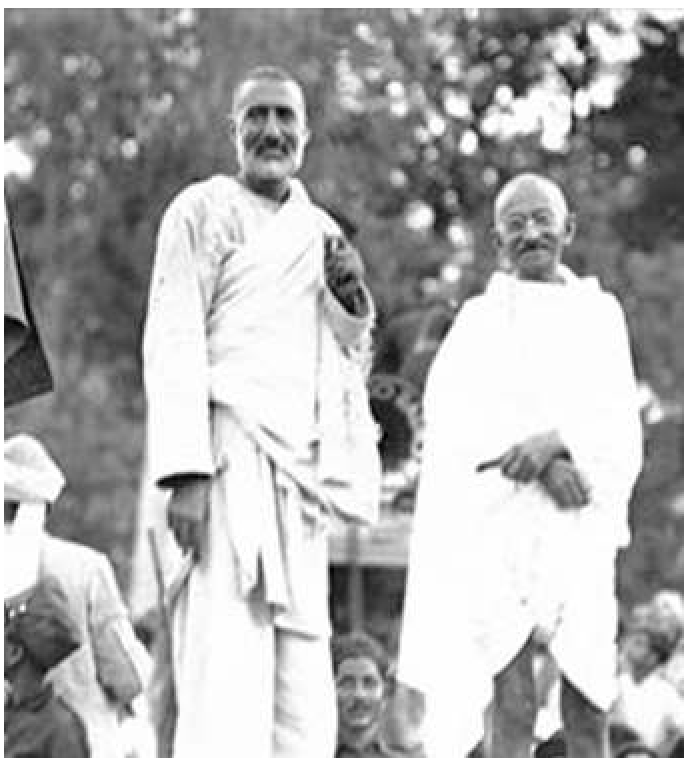
Mohamin Zeeshan is a scholar of International Relations at the National Defense University, Islamabad.

> *“The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed.”*
>
> *– Steve iko*

Empires do not endure through brute force alone. They endure through something far more insidious — the art of making the subjugated destroy one another. Nowhere was this dark alchemy practiced with greater cold-blooded virtuosity than in colonial India, where the British Crown, confronted with a civilization too vast and too tenacious to hold by bayonet alone, chose instead to corrode it from within. What followed 1857 was not merely political administration. It was a calculated, decades-long psychological operation against an entire subcontinent.

A Unity That Terrified the Empire

The proof of Hindu-Muslim solidarity lay not in sentiment but in action. When Bengali indigo farmers revolted in 1860 against the barbaric forced-labor system of plantation landlords, they did so together — Hindu and Muslim shoulder to shoulder, repelling hired thugs, routing police detachments, and ultimately bringing the entire indigo economy to its knees. The landlords capitulated. The factories shuttered. Peasants wrested themselves free from bonded servitude. To London, this spectacle was not inspiring. It was catastrophic. A unified peasantry had defeated imperial economic interests through sheer collective defiance. The lesson was absorbed at the highest levels: unity among Indians was an existential threat to British dominion. It had to be severed — permanently.



Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan of the Khudai Khidmatgars and ohandas Gandhi of the Indian National Congress both strongly championed Hindu– uslim unity.

The formula was neither novel nor subtle. Convince each community that the other is its true adversary, its ancient robber, its existential menace. Let suspicion do what armies cannot. The British, however, faced a peculiar arithmetic: Hindus constituted a sweeping majority. Simply stoking present-day grievances was insufficient. The colonial strategists reached, instead, into history — and proceeded to mutilate it.

Forging a Counterfeit Past

Persian chronicles from the Mughal era were subjected to brazenly tendentious translations, riddled with interpolations and fabrications. Certain rulers — Aurangzeb above all — were selected for vilification, their records distorted into caricature. The History of India as Told by Its Own Historians, one of the period's most widely circulated colonial texts, declared that Muslim rulers had enslaved Hindus en masse, imposed wholesale conversion, and reduced an ancient civilization to rubble.

It was a fiction of breathtaking audacity. As Bipan Chandra and his co-authors meticulously establish in India's Struggle for Independence (1988), the reality was irreducibly complex. Muslim peasants were as destitute as Hindu peasants. Hindu and Muslim rulers coexisted across hundreds of princely states. The epoch was not a religious war — it was a political patchwork of competing kingdoms, alliances, and local loyalties. But the colonial historian demanded a simpler, more combustible narrative: all Muslims were oppressors, all Hindus their victims, and British rule a providential deliverance from centuries of bondage.

To mirror this provocation among Muslims, W.W. Hunter published The Indian Muslims in 1871 — ostensibly a sympathetic diagnosis of Muslim educational and economic backwardness, but in substance a calculated insinuation: that Hindus were advancing while Muslims were being left behind, that Muslim identity required defensive consolidation, and that alliance with the British was the only bulwark against Hindu dominance. Sympathy as a scalpel. Concern as a crowbar.

Literature in the Service of Sedition

Ideology required cultural amplification. The colonial project found its most potent literary instrument in Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's Anandamath (1882) — a novel whose historical fabrications were as deliberate as its communal incitements. It depicted a Hindu militant fraternity waging war against a Muslim ruler in 18th-century Bengal, burning settlements, and chanting eliminationist slogans.

The novel's foundational premise was fraudulent: the Muslim ruler it portrays had died years before the novel's supposed setting, and Bengal at that time was already governed by the East India Company. There was no Muslim administration left to revolt against.

But Anandamath's most revealing passage was its ending — where a Hindu elder counsels his followers to cease resistance, embrace British governance, and wait until Hindus accumulate sufficient civilizational strength. The colonizer, in this text, was never the antagonist. The Muslim was. The novel, wittingly or otherwise, had internalized the British divide-and-rule blueprint so thoroughly that it advocated for British rule as the precondition for Hindu renaissance.

Its cultural legacy proved catastrophic. Right-wing formations hardened on both sides. Hindu extremists, absorbing the imperialist historical framework, began venerating foreign plunderers like Mahmud Ghaznavi and Ahmad Shah Abdali simply because Muslim counterparts, stung by the relentless demonization of their past, claimed the same figures defensively. A mirror-image lunacy consumed both communities.

Peaceful Movements Weaponized

The Arya Samaj's Gauraksha campaign — originally a reformist, non-violent effort to protect cattle considered sacred in Hinduism — was progressively seized by hardliners after the death of its founding leader Dayananda Saraswati in 1883. Under the zealots Pandit Guru Dutt and Pandit Lekhram, it became a vehicle for communal provocation. Pointedly, the mass slaughter of cattle in British military cantonments attracted no agitation whatsoever. The campaign's fury was reserved exclusively for Muslim communities that sacrificed cows. Muslim right-wingers, predictably, declared that any concession on the matter amounted to capitulation. The spiral of mutual provocation had its inevitable terminus in the riots of 1893 — erupting in Azamgarh, spreading from Bombay to Rangoon, consuming over a hundred lives, most of them blameless men and women with no stake in the ideological combat being prosecuted in their names.

The behavior of British administrators throughout these convulsions was striking in its studied negligence. Anti-colonial protests were crushed with immediate, ferocious severity. Communal carnage was permitted to burn. The asymmetry was not institutional incompetence. It was policy.

The Language Conspiracy

Even the quotidian act of writing was conscripted into division. Hindi and Urdu, mutually intelligible in speech across the North-Western Provinces, diverged only in script — Devanagari and Persian, respectively. The British declared Urdu the sole official language of the province, provoking furious Hindu mobilization for Devanagari recognition. When parity was eventually conceded, the damage was irreparable. Two scripts had been branded as the exclusive possessions of two religions. A linguistic inheritance shared across centuries was amputated along communal lines in a single administrative generation. The Supreme Court of India, dismissing a petition as recently as this decade demanding the removal of Urdu from a Maharashtra municipal signboard, was compelled to restate the obvious: Urdu is an Indo-Aryan language that evolved organically on Indian soil, indistinguishable in origin from Hindi and Marathi. The colonial wound, however, refuses to close.

The Indicted Real Criminal

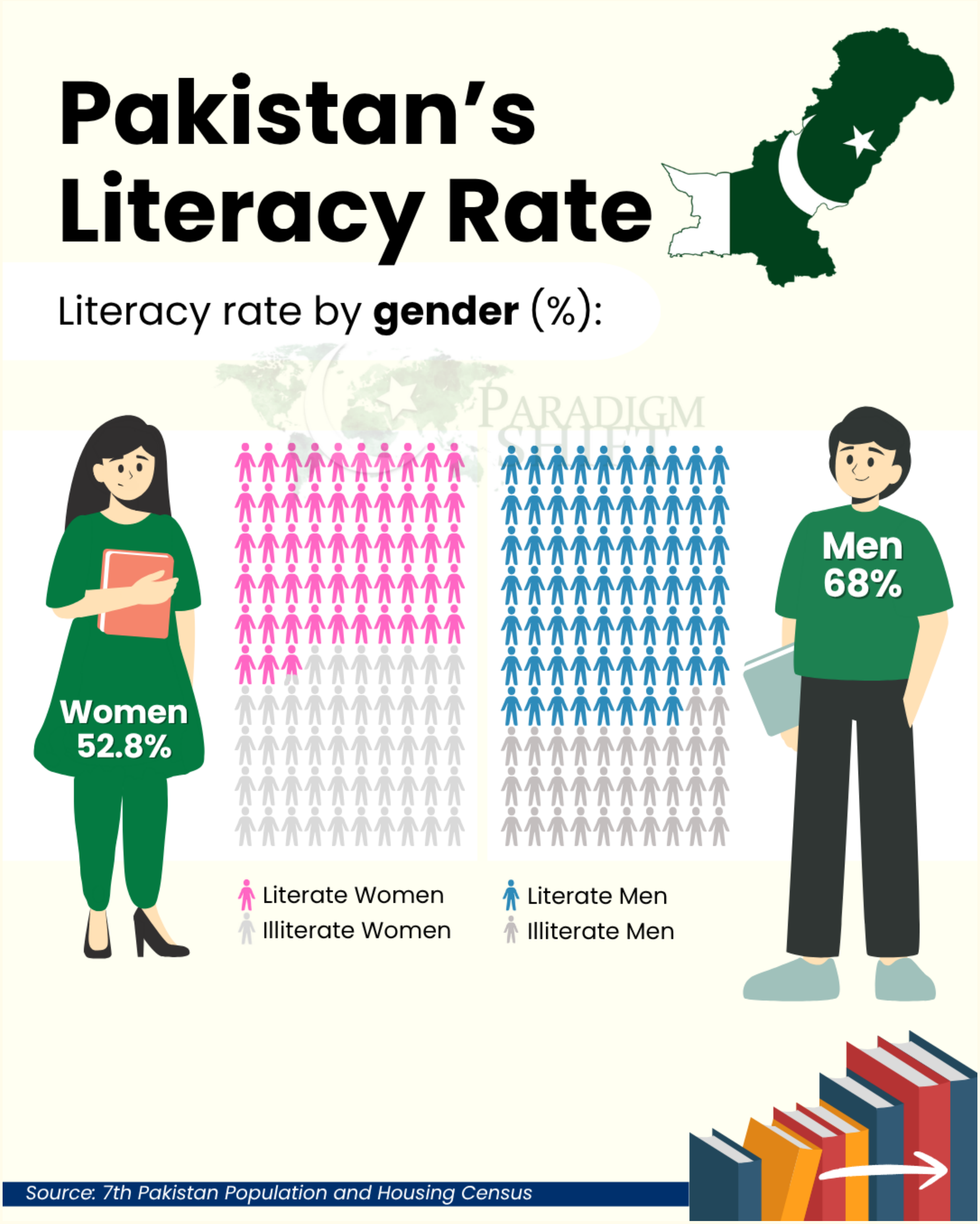
While Hindus and Muslims bled each other over sacred animals, competing scripts, and falsified histories, the machinery of actual plunder ran unimpeded. Indian soldiers died in British wars across three continents, their campaigns financed from Indian revenues. Legislative assemblies were ornamental facades; real power resided with the colonial administration and its allied landlord class. The Indian economy was systematically cannibalized for metropolitan enrichment. None of this galvanized the communal factions, because their hatreds had been precisely calibrated — pointed inward, at each other, rather than upward, at the colonizer who had engineered those hatreds in the first place.

This is the testimony history bequeaths us: sectarian hatred is rarely spontaneous. It is cultivated. It is seeded in falsified textbooks, amplified through communal legislation, and harvested in blood by those who profit from the division of the dispossessed.

The subcontinent still lives inside this inheritance. Recognizing its architects is the beginning of escaping them.

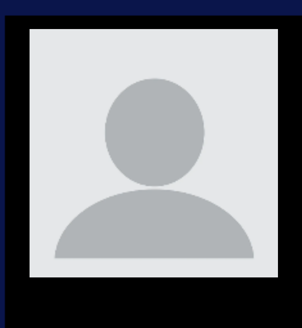
> *"He who controls the past controls the future. He who controls the present controls the past."*
>
> *– George Orwell, 1984*

Infographic of the month!



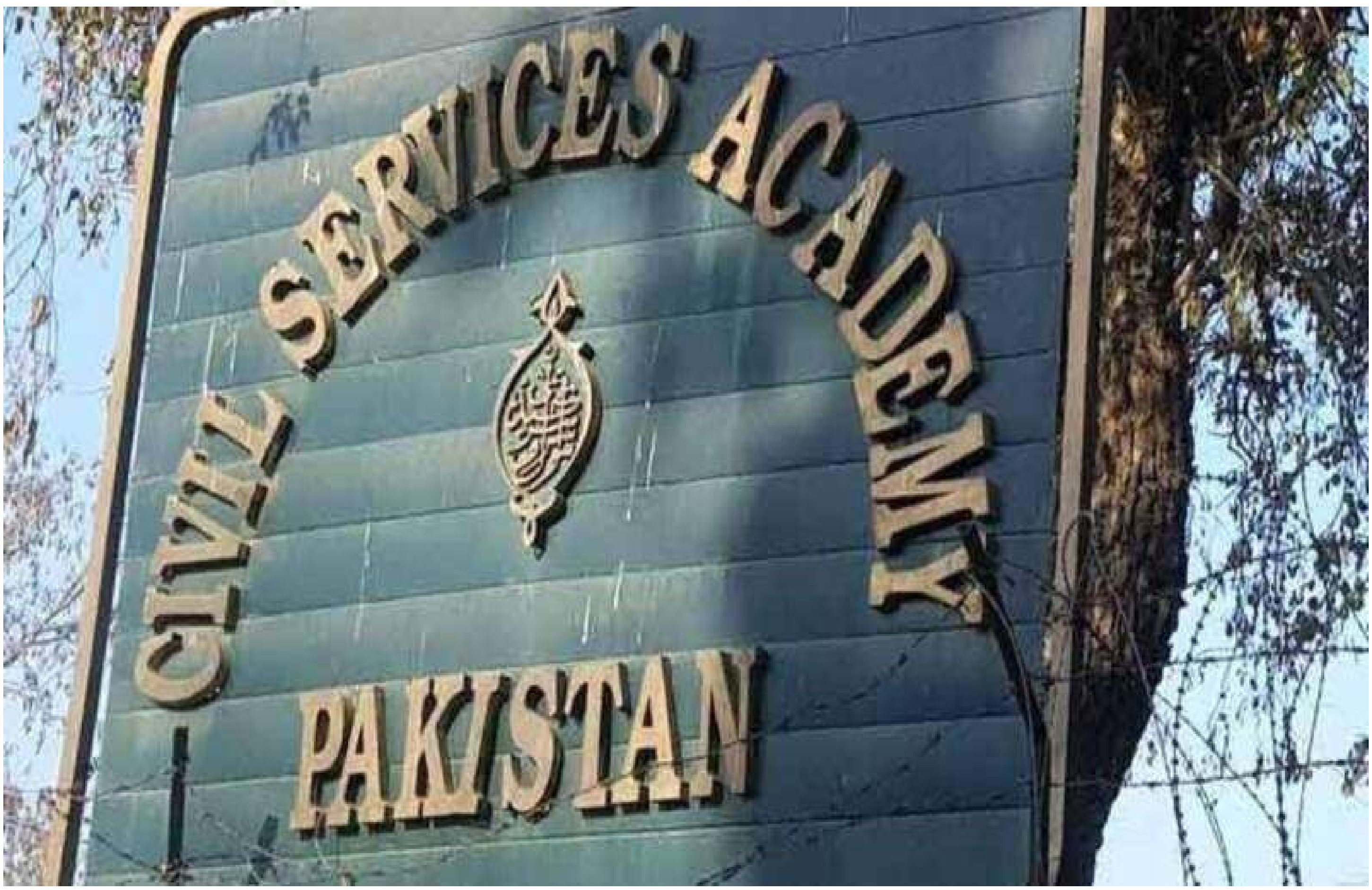
CSS Exam vs Private Sector Jobs: Which Is a Better Career Path in Pakistan?

About the Author



Abdullah Nisar holds a degree in journalism and mass communication from the International Islamic University, Islamabad. He is currently working as a freelance journalist.

Every semester, hundreds of universities across Pakistan pass out thousands of students. All these young students dream about a better future. However, due to Pakistan's unfortunate economic plight, the Central Superior Service (CSS) is considered a prestigious career path and a shortcut to achieving a higher social status. Therefore, after graduating from university, many students opt to prepare for the CSS exams, leading to high competition among people aspiring to join the civil services. However, the passing ratio of the CSS exam is merely around 2.5 to 3 percent per year, resulting in the loss of precious years of the country's youth. During this time, their peers gain years of experience and earn high salaries in the private sector. Nonetheless, many believe that the CSS examination is their only option for gaining social prestige and earning a handsome salary.



The CSS Exam in Pakistan: Pros and Cons

The Federal Public Service Commission (FPSC) conducts the CSS examination every year. Thousands of aspirants from across the country appear in the CSS exam to become civil servants. However, passing the CSS exam requires not only hard work but also good luck. Many believe that passing CSS in Pakistan only requires hard work, but that’s not the case. Aspirants must have a bachelor’s degree to appear in the competitive exams. The age limit set by the FPSC for appearing in the CSS exams is 30 years maximum.

Aspirants join different CSS academies for preparation for their civil services exam. Many CSS preparatory academies in Islamabad, Lahore, and Karachi attract aspirants from the country by advertising that their students have successfully passed the exam and joined the civil service of Pakistan. Moreover, they also appoint many bureaucrats and CSS officers as teachers in their academies to attract CSS aspirants. However, in most cases, these CSS preparatory institutions only provide superficial guidelines to aspirants. The reason behind the ever-increasing popularity of the CSS examination is that people think that a government job provides significant perks and privileges, along with job security.

Salaries in the Civil Service of Pakistan

Most Pakistani youth think that the civil services offer huge salaries. However, this is not true. In Pakistan, a CSP starts his service as a grade 17 officer. Therefore, their salary is equivalent to that of a grade 17 officer. They only get the salary of a regular 17th-grade officer. Meanwhile, their expenses are much higher than those of a regular officer. Moreover, the duty hours of a CSP are much higher than those of a regular 17th-grade officer. For CSS officers in the Police Service of Pakistan (PSP) and the Pakistan Administrative Service (PAS), there are no fixed duty hours, as they must respond to every unusual situation in their area.

Perks, Privileges, and Powers of a CSS Officer in Pakistan

Many people in Pakistan believe that the CSS exam is key to a luxurious lifestyle. The key reason behind this perception is the social media glamor of some CSS officers. However, the actual reason behind this sham glamor is to attract many CSS aspirants to their academies and online preparatory institutes. In reality, bureaucrats belonging to PSP and PAS enjoy most of the perks, privileges, and power in Pakistan.

In Pakistan's bureaucratic structure, the powers, perks, and privileges of other CSS groups are lesser than those of the two aforementioned groups. The CSP officers in the Foreign Services of Pakistan (FSP) have very little power in the country, as they serve abroad for most of their careers. However, the bureaucrats in the FSP earn huge salaries and also enjoy tours to different countries.

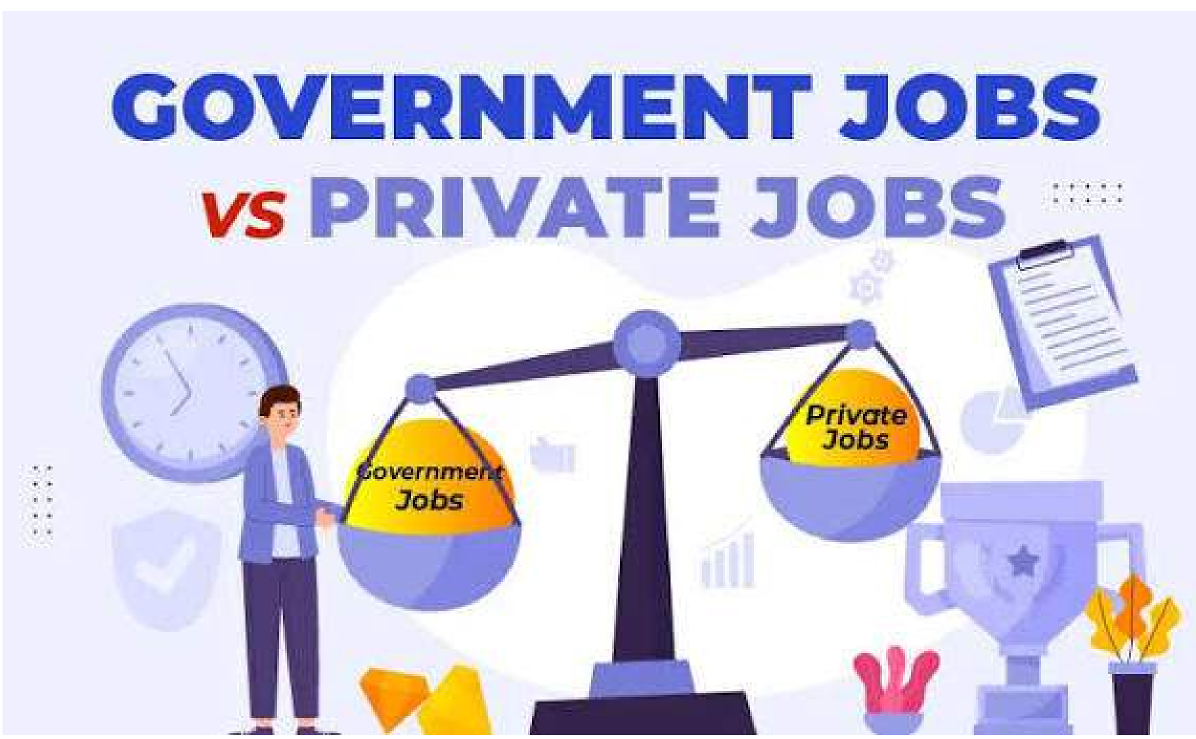
For CSP officers in groups like the Office Management Group, the Railways (Commercial & Transportation) Group (RCTG), the Information Group (IG), and the Military Lands and Cantonments Group (MLCG), the perks, privileges, and salaries are less than those of the FSP, PSP, and PAS groups. Moreover, the prospects of promotions to higher ranks in these groups are also low.

Political Pressure on Bureaucracy in Pakistan

Indeed, the civil services have emerged as a popular career path in Pakistan. However, the reality of this job is much different than common perception. Civil servants in Pakistan face regular political pressure due to corrupt practices in the country. Many times, a CSS officer has to follow the directions of corrupt politicians because they hold the power to hinder a bureaucrat's career progression and stability. This makes the CSS a highly competitive and pressurizing career path. The suicide of many CSS officers in the past is also allegedly attributed to significant political pressure and stress.

Private Jobs in Pakistan: Pros and Cons

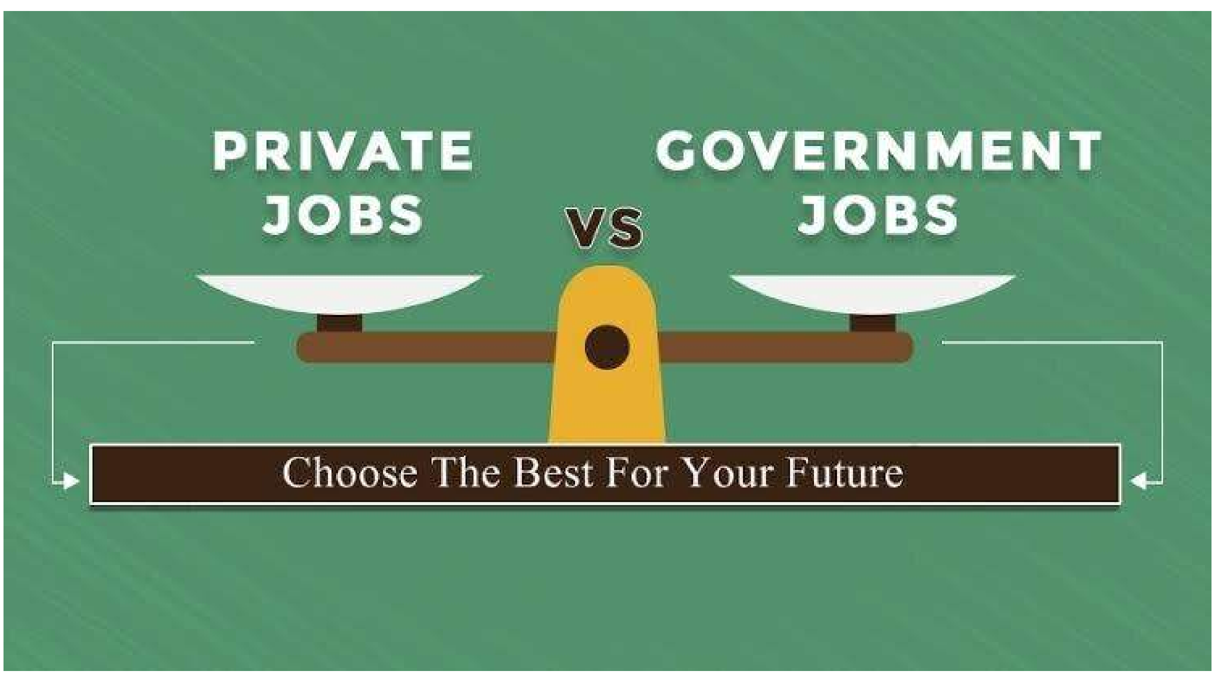
While many people prepare for the CSS exams after completion of their graduation, their peers opt for private-sector jobs in their respective fields. While most CSS aspirants waste their precious years preparing for CSS exams, those employed in the private sector gain years of experience and promotions. The private sector in Pakistan is increasingly blooming. It offers greater incentives, perks, privileges, and salaries than the government sector in the contemporary era.



The private sector also offers diverse opportunities to people. It also offers fast career growth options based on their skills and performance, rather than seniority alone. People working in the private sector also have the opportunity to build and develop strong professional connections nationally and internationally. In addition, private sector employees gain practical experience, technical expertise, and exposure to modern tools and business practices.

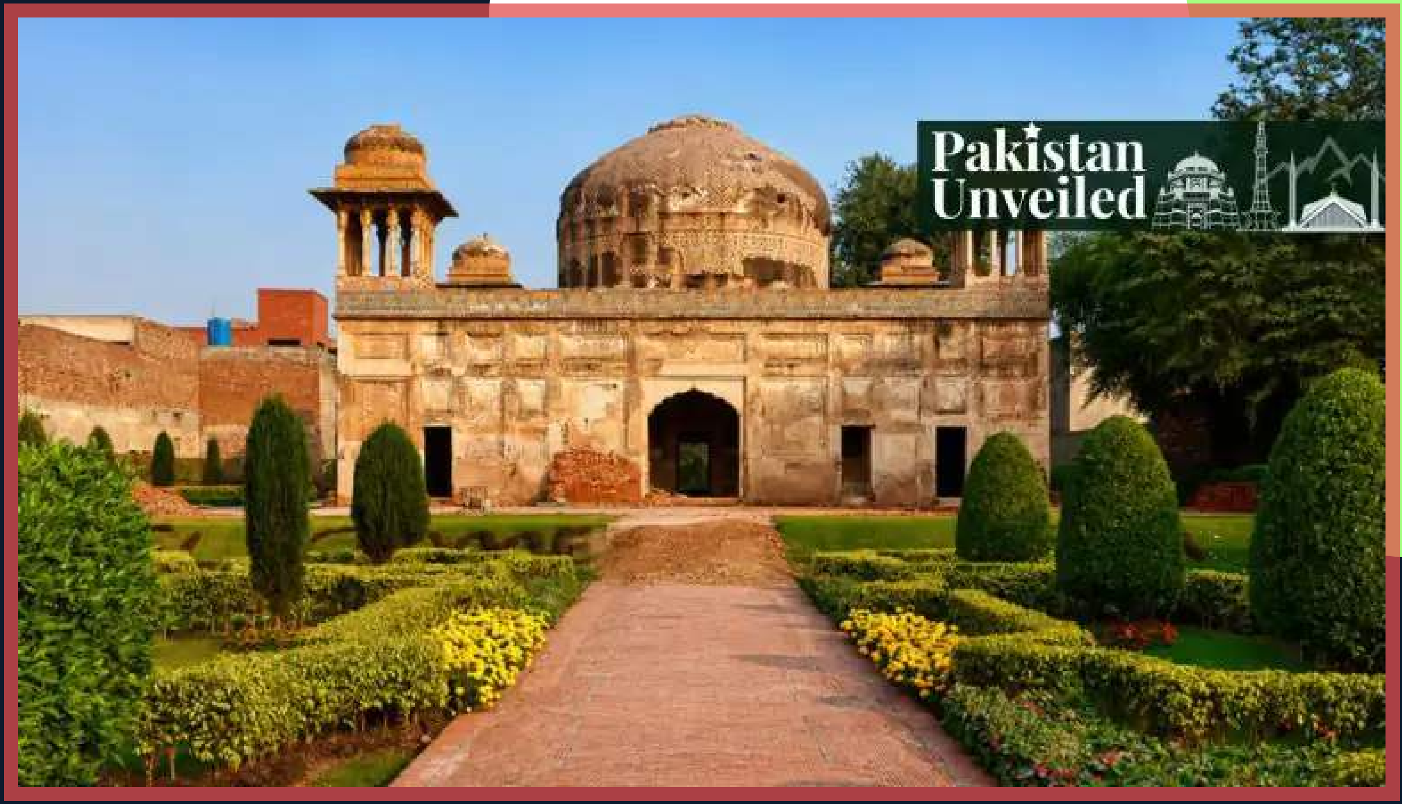
Unlike the corrupt governmental and bureaucratic structure in Pakistan, recruitment and promotions in reputable private firms are usually more merit-oriented. Moreover, many firms offer bonuses, health insurance, transport allowances, and other incentives. Furthermore, multinational companies and remote work opportunities allow professionals to work with global teams and standards.

Private organizations often encourage creativity, efficiency, and adaptability. Experience in the private sector can help individuals develop business and management skills useful for starting their own ventures later. This makes private sector jobs in the contemporary era more lucrative than government jobs.



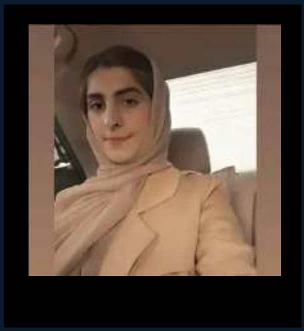
Conclusion

In *sum*, the CSS exam conducted by the FPSC every year is considered a shortcut to gain social prestige and power in Pakistan. However, due to a low passing ratio and mammoth syllabus, the CSS preparation wastes precious years of Pakistan's youth. Meanwhile, those opting for private jobs earn significant experience and career progression in these years. Moreover, private sector jobs also offer diverse opportunities, merit-based promotions, perks, and privileges. Therefore, one must consider all the pros and cons of the CSS and private sector jobs before investing their precious years in the CSS exam prep.



The Tomb of Dai Anga: Lahore's Most Overlooked Mughal Secret

About the Author



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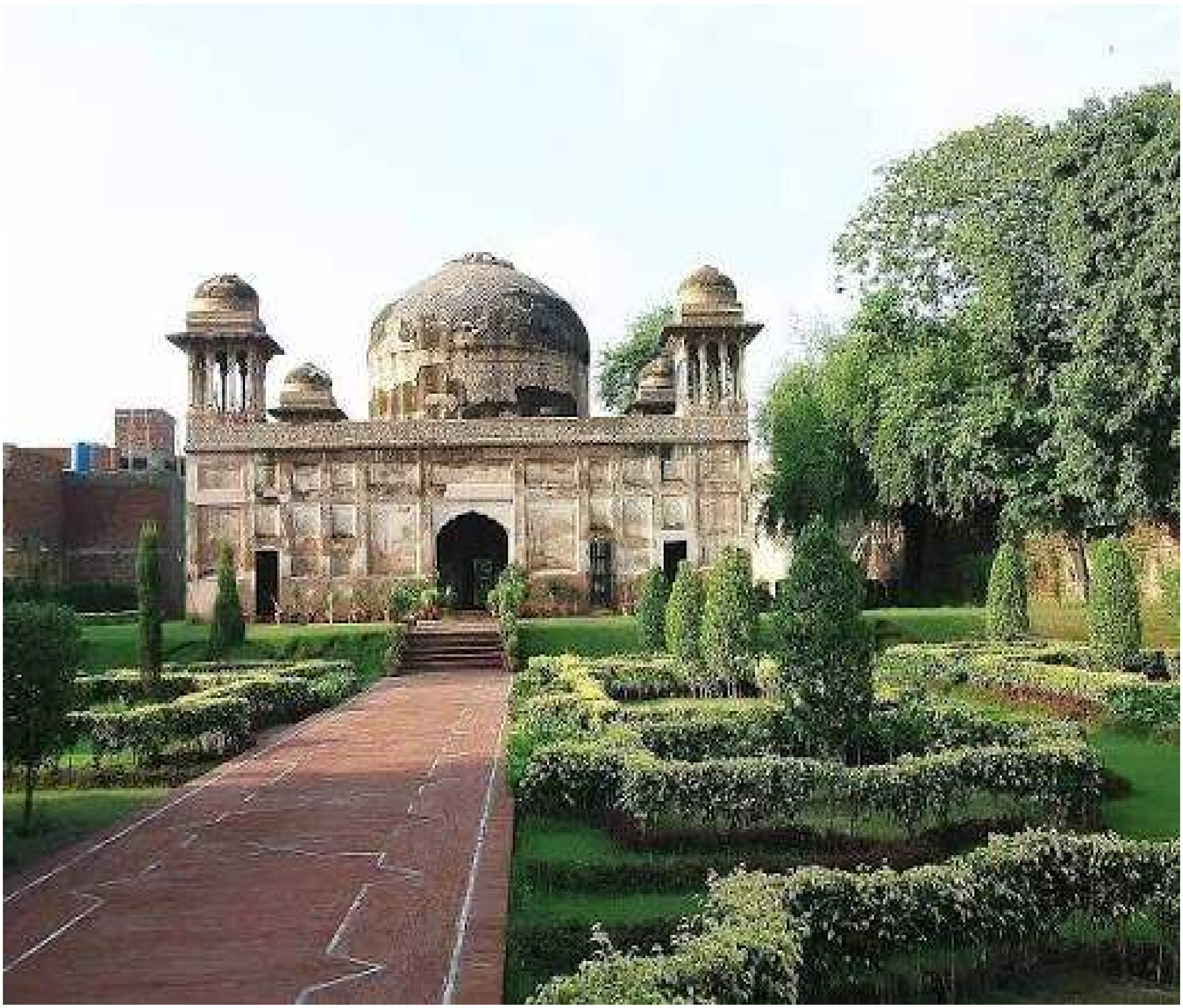
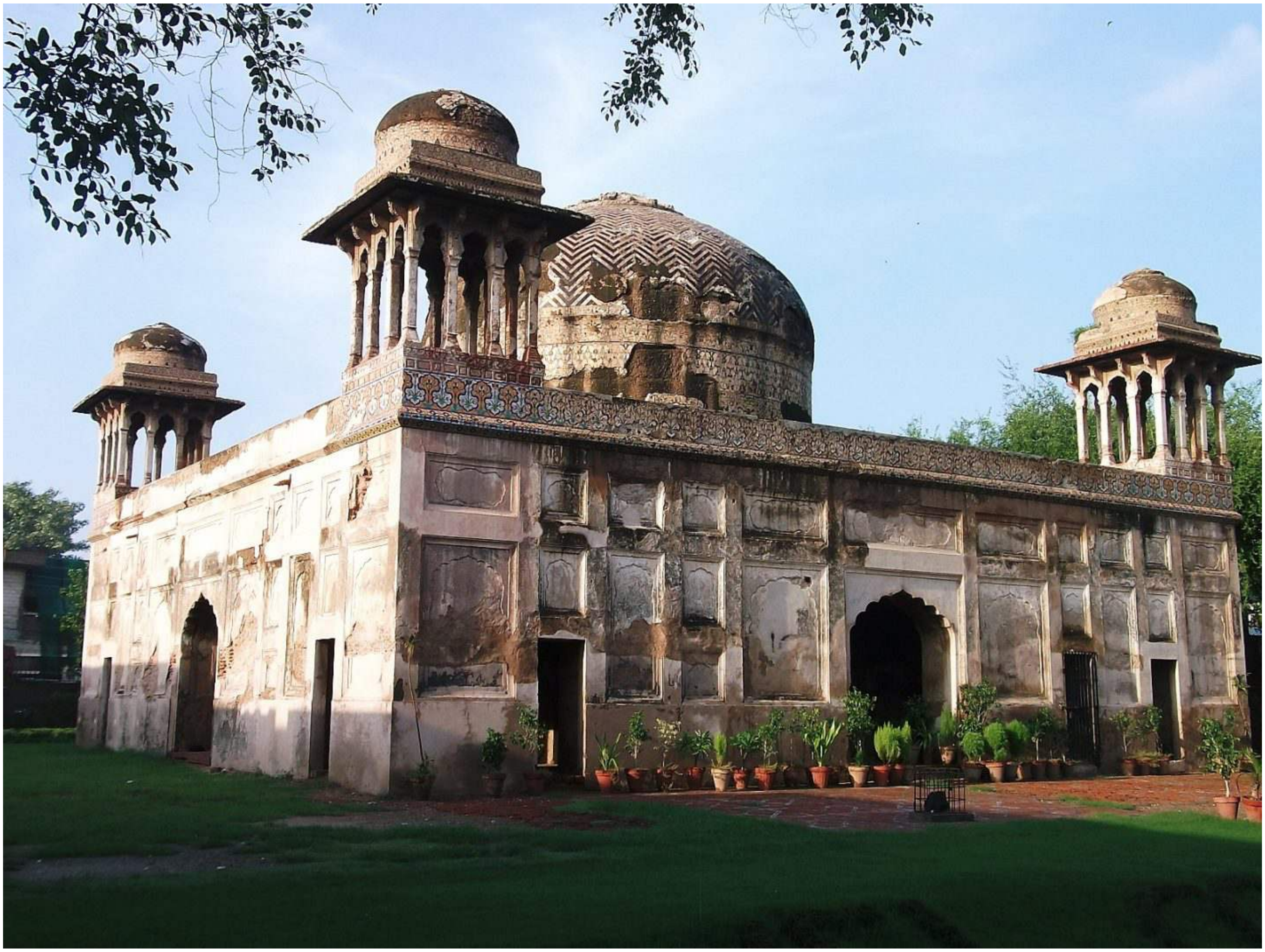
Rediscovering Dai Anga's Tomb on the GT Road

Monuments hold a peculiar kind of silence, a silence that speaks about how certain places are waiting to be remembered. Everything in this world holds significance for as long as it has an eye to appreciate its existence. I felt this while I was standing inside the tomb of Dai Anga in Begampura, Lahore. While life goes on as usual on the busy road ahead of it, no one really notices the stories that lie behind the silent walls of this tomb.





"Southern view of Dai Anga Tomb" by Umair Astro is licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0.

Lahore has always been known as a place rich in its history and culture, dominating conversations around Mughal art, whether it concerns places like the Badshahi Mosque or Masjid Wazir Khan. Yet people often overlook places like the tomb of Dai Anga, which carries an equally profound history and significance.

A Woman Worth Remembering

The real name of Dai Anga was Zaib-un-Nisa. *"Dai"* is an Urdu word meaning "nurse." Zaib-un-Nisa was the wet nurse of Emperor Shah Jahan. Under the Mughals, the wet nurse held a sacred place in the life of the royal child. Such a bond translated into real power and influence that lasted lifetimes.

Dai Anga's family had deep-rooted relations with the royal family. Her husband, Murad Khan, served as a magistrate under Emperor Jahangir. Her son, Muhammad Rashid Khan, gave his life in service to Shah Jahan's eldest son, Dara Shikoh. Likewise, the counsel of Dai Anga carried weight in one of the most important courts the subcontinent has ever known.

"Dai Anga osque" by Kaleem Ullah is licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0.

Before leaving for her pilgrimage, Dai Anga commissioned a mosque in the Naulakha area of Lahore. This mosque is still functioning today, and people offer prayers in it. This itself is a telling example of the position and stature Zaib-un-Nisa held at the court of Shah Jahan, as she had the means to build a mosque at a time when such patronage was reserved for the most powerful.

What the Gateway Tells You

“Front side of Dai Anga Tomb along with garden” by uhammad Ashar is licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0.

Before reaching the tomb, one passes through a lush green garden on both sides. It is believed that this garden was built before the tomb in 1655 by the Persian nobleman Mirza Sultan Baig. Despite the dust of the GT road, the garden still stands beautiful with a variety of flowers.

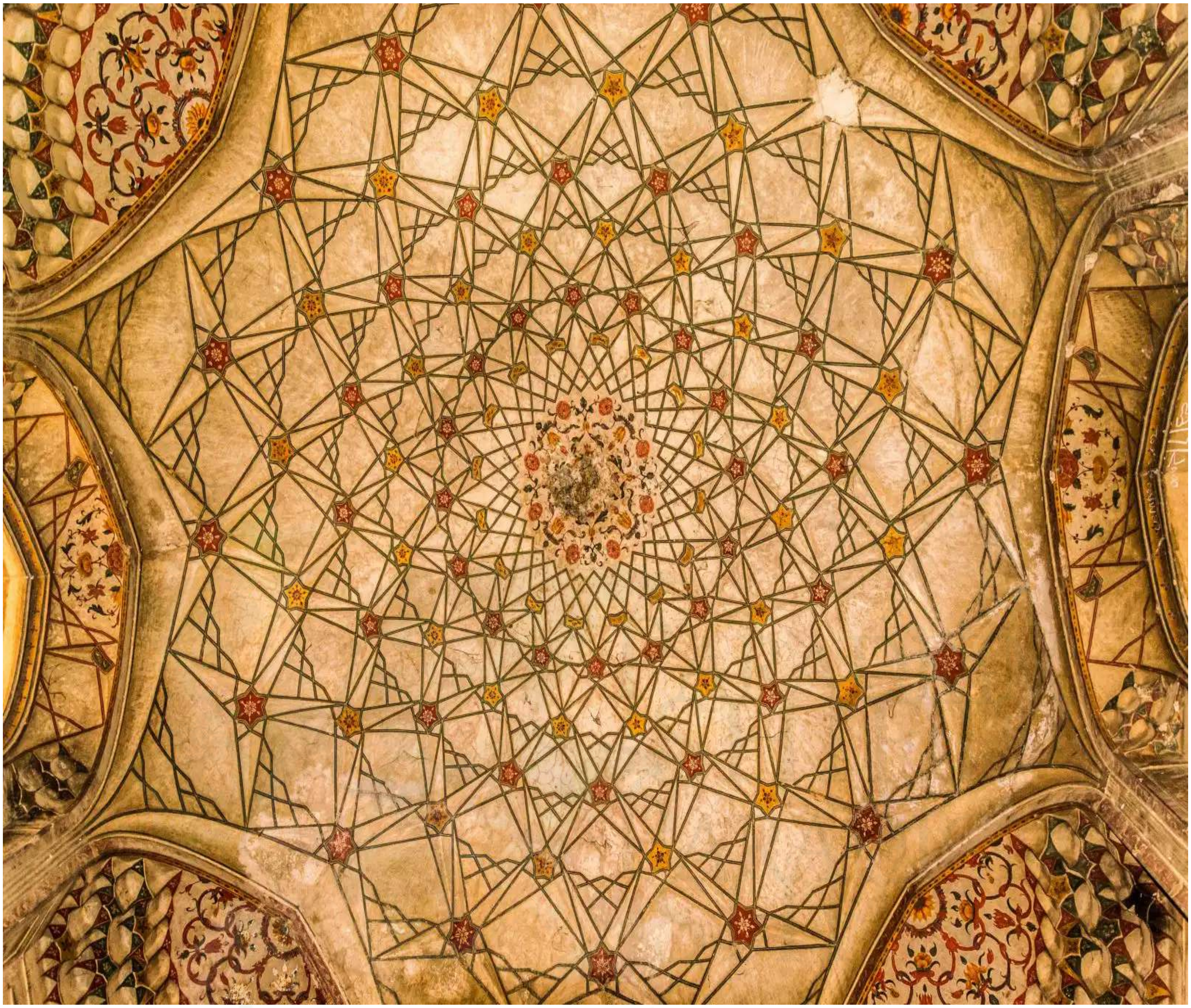
The front is covered with beautiful Mughal-style tiles in flower-like patterns. The colors—blue, green, and white—are bright and have endured despite the scorching heat of Lahore’s summers. The entrance is tall, spanning two floors, and has curved openings on each side that make it look like a stage ready for a big show. The Archaeological Department of Punjab considers it one of the best examples of this tile work in the area, and when you see it, that assessment sounds just right.

Inside the Tomb

The tomb sits further in, quieter and more composed, with multiple archways leading towards the heart of it. Its unconventional structure does not follow the grand demeanor of the Mughal buildings. The corners of the tomb have towers on each side whose bases are beautified with mosaic work. There is still some *kashi kari* work visible beneath the towers.

The center of the tomb offers a rich experience of architecture and history. A large central chamber, whose interior is covered with richly decorated stone carvings, tile work, and frescoes, is connected by archways to eight rooms. The chamber walls are filled with Quranic inscriptions depicting the intricate artistry and the patience of the craftsman.

By observing such delicacy, one realizes how such a place was used for meditation and prayers. Furthermore, the mysterious and spiritual nature of the tomb lies in knowing that the real tomb of Dai Anga, along with that of her daughter, Sultana Begum, does not lie on the floor of this chamber but somewhere beneath it. It is believed it was done to protect the graves from public access. So, standing in this chamber is like standing over the woman who raised an emperor.



“Beautiful Interior of Dai Anga Tomb” by uhammad Ashar is licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0.

What Remains of the Dai Anga’s Tomb

It is important to be honest about the condition of this place. Over the years, some of the tiles on the outside have fallen off. Nearby buildings have taken over parts of what used to be a large garden, leaving only a narrow strip of green between the gateway and the tomb. What was once a lively site has slowly been encroached upon.

A few years ago, the construction of the Orange Line Metro brought attention to this tomb, along with Shalimar Gardens and other monuments. People who care about heritage asked the Lahore High Court to stop construction too close to these protected sites. The court agreed and ordered that no construction should happen within 200 feet of any heritage site. UNESCO had warned that the project could cause serious, permanent damage. This legal fight was a small win for Lahore's hidden history.

Some restoration work is now visible in parts of the site. Whether it is enough, or whether it keeps the original look without making it appear artificially perfect, is a different and important question. But the essence of this place is extraordinary. The tiles still surviving on the gateway towers show how beautiful the whole building once was.

Why You Should Visit the Tomb of Dai Anga

Unlike grand mosques like Badshahi Mosque and Masjid Wazir Khan that attract visitors daily, hidden gems like Dai Anga still echo with silence. What stood out to me most during my visit was how easy it was to get there and how few people were around. There were no long lines, no vendors pushing souvenirs, and no crowds taking photos. It was just the monument and those who quietly came to see it.

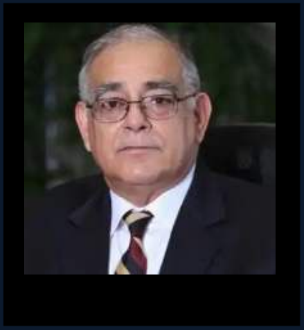
This is a side of Lahore that exists quietly beneath the city's busier face. The tomb of Dai Anga is located on GT Road in Begampura and is open every day from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM. You can easily reach it by car, rickshaw, or public transport from the city center. There is no reason not to visit except that many people simply don't know it exists.

You may like: Sethi House, Peshawar: An Architectural Gem

Also read: Inside Pakistan Monument: History, Architecture, and the Story It Represents

The Corridor Wars – The Art Of Strategic Ambiguity

About the Author



Lt Gen (Rtd) Tariq Khan is a retired army officer who has served as the head of Pakistan's Central Command.

> **The darkest places in hell are reserved for those who maintain their neutrality in times of moral crisis.**
>
> *Dante Alighieri*

The chain of events is triggered by US initiatives, albeit driven by an overwhelmingly Israeli influence, but conflict and events are controlled by Iran since they were always designed to affect Iran's decision-making. Iran has neither been overcome by them nor affected by them. Iran is not willing to settle for US-Israeli terms. This has frustrated the US as well as Israel, who had hoped on the 28th of February, with the commencement of the Operation Epic Fury, a quick and easy acquittal of Iran was likely. They were wrong.

Epic Fury gradually faded away on the 7th of May 2026, after 62 days, since it did not have the mandatory Congressional approval needed. A grace period of 60 days allowed the President to pursue a conflict in the national interest, but he would need Congressional approval within a 60-day period. The 60 days were up; Congress was not ready to approve Trump's Iran war. This led to Project Freedom, which started on the 4th of May but petered out after a couple of days on the 6th of May. It was designed to escort commercial shipping in and out of the Gulf but failed and was dropped. We are now sitting on the edge of Operation Sledgehammer, but the real shooting war has not started, though some skirmishes took place when the US bombed Bandar Abbas on May 26th, and Iran retaliated by hitting a US base in Kuwait on 28th May 2026. The new 60-day grace period has not yet started under US Constitutional Laws!

In roughly 90 days of conflict, we hear of US-Israeli rhetoric switch from a 48-hour war, to regime-change, to unconditional surrender, to be given custody of the enriched uranium, to end any nuclear program – civil or military, and now the opening of an already opened Hormuz Strait. The changing objectives and shifting war demands projected by the US indicate a conflict marked by incompetence, total miscalculation, and in search of a strategy – a kind of on-the-job learning. The facts and figures are gradually coming out now and cannot be hidden – destruction to the tune of dysfunctionality of 8 US bases and multiple facilities, including those of NATO, in the Gulf Region, a total of 42 aircraft lost, and the figure keeps rising, an unknown number of dead and wounded, yet to be ascertained, but reported by the Intercept to be around 700. Iran, on the other hand, has lost leadership and infrastructure but was prepared to undergo these losses to protect their sovereignty. The missile launching silos comprising 30 of the 33 batteries are still fully functional, and Iran has 70% of their inventory of what was there prior to the conflict starting. The ceasefire has allowed them to address redundancy through the auspices of the Chinese, and there has been a radical improvement in their air defense systems, cyber warfare, and ballistic missile capacity.

To make sense of what the cost of war has been for the US, a look at the official statistics gives a real story. The Pentagon stated that the expenditure on the war was about $25 billion; independent economists put the figure at $ 63 billion to about $ 1 trillion. The Congress was presented with a defense budget to the tune of $ 1.5 trillion, which is a 50% increase from what it was. The US is now mulling over the merger with the Israeli military through a new law being proposed, i.e., Section 224 of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). Israel knows that the public blowback within the US society, to Israel's blatant manipulation and interference in US policy-making, is finally coming to an end and that this President and his stay in office will be their last opportunity. The cost indicates the war has not gone too well, the merger indicates that Israel is trying to capture the United States in a life-long bear hug – a parasite living off the US.

The impact of the war on the global economy has been horrendous. It has affected 20% of global oil and LNG. Brent Crude rose from $72 to $120 at the peak of the conflict, while LNG costs rose by 100%. Brent Crude is expected to average at $90 for the rest of this conflict, but could rise if the Straits are not opened. Global growth has gone down from 2.9% to 2.6% as reported by OECD (Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development). Projected losses for this year if the conflict continues are estimated to be about $ 1.5 trillion. Iran, relatively, at this time has the cheapest fuel, i.e., 3 to 5 cents per liter or a maximum of 22.5 cents a gallon. The energy costs are $.002 per kWh. Compared to prices in the US, where it stands at $ 4.30/gallon, and energy is at 18 cents per kWh, Iran is not doing too badly, though there is a substantial economic inflation suffered by the people, affecting food and services. Iran is still selling a substantial amount of oil to the Chinese and Russia through sea as well as land routes.

The US is in the grip of an administration that cannot see reality and remains blinded by Israeli influence. The Trump set-up appears to be led by a man who is suspected of cognitive degeneration and can no longer make cohesive sense of things. His administration is either blackmailed by the Epstein Files and their revelations, or some individuals are heavily bribed by Israel. The style of governance evolves around nepotism, conflict of interest, and insider trading. The foreign policy is in the hands of Steve Whitkof and Jared Kushner, both unelected and Trump nominees who are openly and blatantly supportive of Israeli policies, even at the cost of the US. The US public has had enough, and Trump has lost support all over, but especially from within the Republican Party itself. There is a strong possibility that Trump may lose the mid-term polls and set himself up for impeachment. While the political scenario is fast changing in the US, it is also being linked to the Iran War, and unless Trump can portray some sort of notion of victory, there may be regime change in the US long before it ever changes in Iran. Trump knows this and is in a desperate search for some sort of victory dance.

In Israel, Netanyahu is in a similar position but for very different reasons. He is already an almost convicted man, for whom jail is a definite future location in the event this war ends. It is in his personal interest that the war and conflict go on for some time, eventually securing his political standing. This puts Trump and Netanyahu in a conflictual posture – the former in search of an early end to the war and the latter looking for a prolonged engagement. It has led to a confusing war rhetoric between these two leaders, confounding any firm commitments. In the meantime, Israel has walked into a Hezbollah trap, something they have already experienced in the past when they had to withdraw in 2000 because of Hezbollah resistance. Though the ceasefire included an end to further military incursions in Lebanon, Israel pursued their operations, ignoring calls for peace. However, as they go in deeper, the resistance will get more intense and dynamic – since the Hezbollah are now armed with new weaponry such as the Russian drones. Israel is also hiding the impact of Iranian missiles on their Haifa facilities and Dimona installations, along with the destruction within the cities of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, etc. Mass immigration and protests have occurred in Israel, not being reported but known to the public in general, which are now showing the resentment people have against the current Israeli Regime. With both regimes under pressure, there is a search for victory in the Gulf, allowing the US to withdraw from the conflict and Israel to end in a better strategic posture that facilitates their concept of 'Greater Israel', in the long term.

The point now is, how can this victory come about? The current stand-off has turned into a blockade by the US Navy, indicating a siege war. The problem is that siege warfare is time-related, and the process involves exhausting the enemy's options. In this case, Iran has access through land and the Caspian Sea to Russia, China, and the Central Asian Republics – they cannot be put into an unsustainable position, whereas the US Naval Blockade cannot sustain itself indefinitely. On the other hand, the Global Economy that is being affected so negatively lies at the feet of the United States and has now become its responsibility. This creates the dilemma of strategic orientation – a military term that describes whoever arrives at their military culmination point earlier – loses the conflict. Here, the Iranians have time on their side, sustainability clearly visible, and redundancy under control – the US-Israeli side does not. Thus, Iran enjoys a superior strategic orientation and is not in any hurry to come to a negotiated settlement till it is in their favour. In the meantime, the US wants to end this conflict as soon as it can, whereas Israel wants it to go on for as long as needed. This makes it a three-dimensional conflict with differing national goals, complicating any negotiations even further.

Since the US is leading the application in this conflict cycle, it will have to make the choices that bring an end to this crisis. The sooner the better; the choices are:

- Put in a multi-dimensional shock offensive to get Iran to agree to a negotiated settlement. Iran is never going to allow itself to be beaten into submission; however, the US-Israeli duo will consider it worth a try.
- To keep the blockade in place, hoping that Iran exhausts its potential and gives in. Another unlikely scenario since Iran has much better sustainability in the region than the US-Israel alliance.
- Using a combination of the upper two is a most likely outcome of the immediate stalemate. However, this too does not seem too likely to see success, and Iran's retaliation may denude the region of power, water, and supply lines.
- The unlikely possibility of going nuclear is another option that appears to be open. Unlikely because of the Chinese and Russian deterrence, as well as their stated ultimatum.

In my opinion, the US- Israeli duo is likely to try scenario one, a surprise attack, intended to take temporary control of the Hormuz Straits, declare victory, and then quickly withdraw. Any fresh Iranian moves to retake control would be blamed on the rest of the world for not doing enough, after the US had done so much for them.

For the US to walk away without any further escalation would imply agreeing to Iran's demands of lifting sanctions, unfreezing their assets, guaranteeing a permanent peace, leaving the enriched uranium under Iran's control, relegating the nuclear discussions to a later time, and containing Israel from attacking Iran's allies, i.e., Hezbollah in Lebanon and Syria, Hamas in Gaza, and the Houthis in Yemen. Now the US cannot agree to these terms, and thus a surprise concentrated attack, i.e., scenario one, is very imminent.

Having assembled the requisite forces and prepared for such an attack during this ceasefire, the US is likely to carry out sea-borne marine attacks on the critical islands at the tip of Oman's Peninsula and strung across the Straits of Hormuz. These include the following Islands:

- Abu Musa.
- Greater Tunb.
- Lesser Tunb.
- Qeshm Island.
- Larak Island.
- Hormuz Island.

Militarily, other than the Hormuz Islands, all other Islands are critical to physically hold if the Straits must be controlled. It is expected that the Allied forces would conduct deep bombing runs targeting infrastructure, missile sites, and command structures, and hope that the combination of targeting would be enough of an incentive for Iran to concede. Iran is likely to attack the US Navy and shipping, Israel with ballistic missiles, and the UAE with short-range missile systems. The Houthis would be activated, Bab al Mandab would be used to disrupt international communication between the eastern and western hemispheres, global oil and gas supply chains would be disrupted, fertilizer supply would be affected, and other critical raw material halted from going across the world. The Gulf would experience critical energy and water shortages.

The Iranians are past masters of horizontal escalation as opposed to the conventional vertical escalation and will be able to weather the onslaught and yet remain viable. This implies the US-Israeli duo may then fall back to the blockade position as it is now, for another prolonged siege going nowhere – this could result in an endless war. The result would be devastating for the global economy, a dysfunctional UAE, an Israel that would be close to annihilation, and a US in political turmoil domestically as well as internationally. What started as a plan for a 'Greater Israel' in control of international trade corridors running through IMEC (India-Middle East-Europe economic corridor) would be a dead dream.

It would give in to the Chinese BRI (Belt and Road Initiative). The region would find a new regional peace structure to include Iran, Turkey, and Pakistan with Chinese support and Russian help. The US would have to retreat from the region. BRIC would become a prominent world forum, and SCO would coordinate global trade. The new world order would now be based on a multi-polar complexion where no one would be more equal than any other. The United Nations would lose its significance in its current form; the World Bank would have other alternatives that would not be politicized. Dollar economies would give in to other universally acceptable currencies. The world may become a better place to live in after this crisis is finally done and over with.

For Pakistan to ride this storm, it is crucial to understand that by remaining neutral, Pakistan did itself a lot of good. However, CPEC remains a thorn in the side of the US, Israel, and its allies, i.e., India and the UAE. They shall continue to pursue war by other means to disrupt CPEC at all costs. These attempts would be made through people with real or perceived grievances, leading to insurgencies within Pakistan, i.e., terrorism, violence, and instability. Afghanistan would now become a ready and willing aider and abettor to any such hostile design. If this is not contained now, then as the world celebrates the bounties of a multi-polar world, we in Pakistan may remain relegated to the fringes of human civilization, existing but only surviving – living but simply not yet dead. To address the current situation, the first and foremost recommendation is to hold a free and fair election, allow a popular government to settle in, and to make the people relevant in the running of 'their' country. If this is not acceptable, then to put in place a national government, dismiss the present illegitimate government, and ensure that funds and material assets are recovered from all these pretenders, and the IMF stranglehold is addressed. Something must be done; the present system is not going to work, not by a long shot, nor by any miracle.

> Leaders who don't listen will eventually be surrounded by people who have nothing to say.
>
> *Andy Stanley*

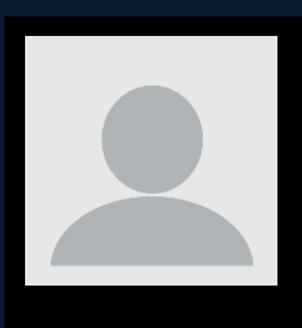
The views and opinions expressed in this article/paper are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the editorial position of Paradigm Shift.

You may like: Insight into the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC)

Also read: Security Challenges Facing the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC): Concerns for Pakistan and China

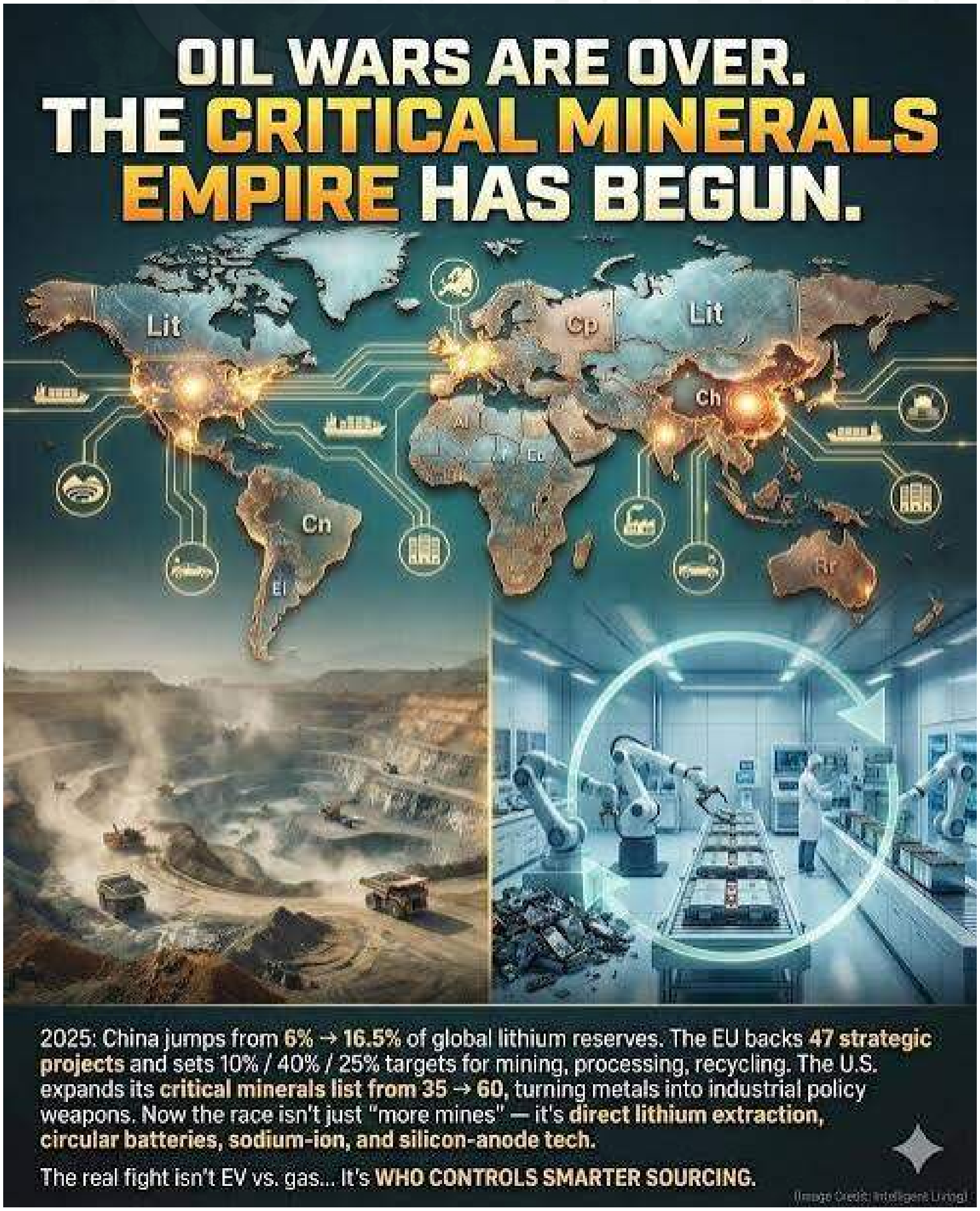
The Race for Critical Minerals and the Future of Global Power

About the Author



Kainat Farooq is a passionate International Relations student with a strong interest in diplomacy, policy, and global affairs. She is dedicated to contributing thoughtful analysis and research on international issues.

Power dynamics during the greater part of the previous century were rather predictable; whoever owned oil ruled the planet. Countries were fighting over oil, making alliances to acquire more of it, and even creating new territories in order to gain access to these valuable resources. In 2026, a similar, yet much more subtle situation can be observed; the only difference is that the resources at stake in the present scenario seem rather unfamiliar to most of us.



These are critical minerals, and the fight to secure access to them is quickly turning into one of the key battles of the decade. The battle over these resources is playing out through various forms of international trade policy, outright embargoes on exports, massive government stockpiles, and agreements made in places such as Kyiv, Kinshasa, and Canberra. But as with most resource wars in history, those who live in closest proximity to the mines that produce them are rarely the biggest beneficiaries.

What Counts As A Critical Mineral, And Why Now?

The term "critical minerals" applies to the particular category of minerals regarded as vital for contemporary economic activities, and also non-renewable. Lithium and cobalt are used for making batteries; rare earth elements such as neodymium and dysprosium are necessary for manufacturing powerful magnets; nickel and graphite for batteries; copper is used everywhere when it comes to electrical stuff; and finally, gallium, germanium, antimony, scandium, and yttrium for semiconductors and military equipment.

The difference here lies in the demand. It has not been that there was no need for these resources; some of them were being mined for decades. There was a need, but now the scale and importance of the need have become different. With the transition towards electric cars and the construction of green energy facilities, along with AI data centers, it all became a problem all at once. In 2025, according to an industry analysis done by IEA and cited in 2026, investments in the extraction and processing of such resources made up a total of $128 billion compared to $80 billion in 2023, which marks a 62 percent increase.

And then factor in the aspect of defense, which includes modern missiles that use sophisticated guidance mechanisms and fighter planes with specialized alloys, and you get a range of materials that exist at the crossroads of three things simultaneously: green technology, technological supremacy, and military readiness. That crossroad is exactly why critical minerals carry such geopolitical weight.

What is missing from most media headlines is that China's dominance in critical minerals is not due to the quantity of its mining. Rather, it is what comes next after mining.

As stated by CSIS in its analysis in March 2026, while China accounts for only 10% of the total global production of lithium, cobalt, and copper, it has an estimated 40 to 90% market share in their processing. Furthermore, a multi-institutional study conducted earlier in 2026 estimates that China has 90% share in rare earth processing, alongside its dominant market share in tungsten (80%) and antimony (60%). Simply put, even if the mineral was mined elsewhere in Australia, Chile, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, or wherever else, the chances are high that they would still go through Chinese refining.

This choke point allows Beijing to leverage without having to rely on stockpiles, and over the last two years, China has applied it more and more often and effectively. Specifically, in December 2024, China halted the exportation of germanium, gallium, and antimony, three mineral resources extensively utilized in military-related manufacturing from the US. Later, on April 4, 2025, China imposed export restrictions on seven rare earth elements and all their derivatives. As reported by the IEA, export volumes dropped so drastically that automakers in the US, Europe, and other regions faced difficulties in acquiring permanent magnets, leading some companies to scale down operations and even suspend production entirely. While volumes eventually rebounded, the price levels in Europe were still six times higher compared to those within China.

On October 9, 2025, Beijing escalated its approach by introducing export controls on five additional rare earth elements. For the first time, it also added extraterritorial rules, requiring export licenses for products made outside China if they contain Chinese-origin materials or rely on Chinese technology. Although these measures were suspended for one year after the Trump–Xi summit, China Briefing noted that the underlying licensing system remains fully intact. In effect, the framework is designed to allow Beijing to tighten or loosen restrictions at will; the immediate level of harm is secondary. The system itself functions as the leverage, whether or not it is actively applied at any given moment.

The impact is already visible. CSIS research published in May 2026 found that yttrium exports to the United States dropped sharply after the April controls took effect, from more than 333 metric tons in the eight months prior to just 17 metric tons in the eight months after. Aerospace manufacturers reported shortages and had to ration supplies of a material essential for turbine blade coatings. Dr. Gracelin Baskaran, who leads CSIS’s Critical Minerals Security Program, has emphasized the structural challenge facing Washington: while efforts to build alternative supply chains are underway, most credible assessments agree they will not be able to replace Chinese supply before the November 2026 deadline and likely not for several years beyond it

How The Rest Of The World Is Responding

Governments outside China have moved on multiple fronts simultaneously, building stockpiles, signing bilateral deals, and trying, slowly, to construct alternative supply chains.

The United States has leaned most heavily into state-backed industrial policy. The Department of Defense committed $400 million to MP Materials, currently the country's only fully integrated mine-to-magnet rare earth producer. MP Materials, in turn, signed a $500 million long-term supply agreement with Apple. According to NYU Stern's Center for Business and Human Rights, the 2025 "One Big Beautiful" legislative package allocated $2 billion to a National Defense Stockpile transaction fund. The Trump administration also announced a separate $12 billion critical minerals stockpiling initiative designed to bring in private-sector capacity. In Congress, lawmakers from both parties have introduced proposals for a broader Strategic Resilience Reserve.

Washington has also pursued a wave of bilateral mineral agreements. CSIS tracks deals involving Ukraine, Saudi Arabia, Thailand, Malaysia, Japan, and the DRC, each focused on upstream investment, processing cooperation, and long-term supply arrangements. The most politically charged of these is the Ukraine deal. President Trump initially framed it in blunt transactional terms, telling Fox News he wanted "the equivalent of $500 billion worth of rare earth," and the negotiations were rocky enough that a planned February 2025 signing in Washington was shelved after a public clash between Trump and President Zelensky. The deal that eventually emerged established a jointly governed reconstruction investment fund, with Ukraine retaining full control over its mineral resources, while profits for the first decade are reinvested domestically rather than distributed. Ukraine's Geological Survey estimates the country holds around 5 percent of the world's critical raw materials, including 19 million tons of proven graphite reserves and roughly a third of Europe's lithium deposits.

However, it is clear that the EU's position is much weaker, and the EU acknowledges this. Within its Critical Raw Materials Act, which was passed in 2024, the EU has declared that the EU will not rely on imports exceeding 65% from one specific third-country source for any particular strategically important raw material, with at least 10% of this resource being sourced domestically. There is a lot of ground to cover because the EU owns just 0.5 percent of global reserves of rare earths and sources none domestically, making it fully reliant on imports from China. In March 2026, the European Commission presented the Industrial Accelerator Act to follow up on the earlier measure, and according to the article by Foreign Policy, the issue of critical minerals seems to be the only area where cooperation between Washington and Brussels has been achieved in an otherwise tense relationship regarding Greenland, NATO, and Ukraine.

Australia has taken a more confrontational tack closer to home. In May 2026, Canberra ordered six Chinese shareholders in a domestic rare earth company to divest their stakes within two weeks, a direct move to keep rare earth assets out of Chinese hands, and a sign that the contest over these minerals is now playing out inside the borders of supplier nations themselves, not just between Washington and Beijing.

Africa And The New Resource Politics

The only place where the abstract concept of "supply chain security" meets real life is perhaps the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This African country accounts for over 70% of the global supply of cobalt, an element that powers the rechargeable batteries used in smartphones, laptops, and electric vehicles.

Luwowo Coltan by ONUSCO Photos, licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0

The magnitude of human cost contained within that supply chain is enormous and widely known. According to a report by The Wilson Center, among the approximately 255,000 Congolese engaged in artisanal cobalt mining, there may be around 40,000 children under the age of 14 who earn only $2 a day through manual work and mining with bare hands. According to testimony delivered to the US House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa in February 2026, the numbers could reach up to 200,000 children under 14 years old working in the cobalt mining sector, pointing to a structural issue which replicates the global one – mined cobalt manually mixed with industrially-mined cobalt before refining, done in places other than mines sites, “often beyond effective oversight or accountability.”

A separate 2026 sustainability industry report estimates that 15 to 30 percent of all DRC cobalt production still originates from artisanal mines with documented child labor, unsafe conditions, and environmental contamination despite years of industry initiatives like the Responsible Cobalt Initiative and the Fair Cobalt Alliance. Full traceability from mine to battery cathode, the report concludes, remains “technically and logistically difficult” in regions with limited governance capacity.

The DRC has become the latest country drawn into the great-power minerals scramble on terms it largely did not set. Following a June 2025 peace agreement between the DRC and Rwanda, Kinshasa approached Washington with a proposed “minerals for security” arrangement explicitly modeled on the US-Ukraine deal for access to mineral wealth in exchange for security guarantees. Companies, including KoBold Metals, backed by Bill Gates and Jeff Bezos, are actively pursuing access to Congolese deposits. Public Citizen’s Global Trade Watch has criticized the negotiations for a lack of transparency, noting that the communities living in the mineral-rich regions at the center of these deals, communities that have already endured years of documented human rights abuses, have not been consulted at all.

The pattern here is not new. What is new is the framing. A century ago, the language used to justify resource extraction from Africa was explicitly colonial. Today, it is the language of supply chain security, energy transition, and strategic partnership.

The deals are negotiated in Washington boardrooms and signed by heads of state. The cobalt is still dug out of the ground by hand, often by children, for less than the price of a cup of coffee a day.

Conclusion

By the measures that get reported most often, export volumes, stockpile sizes, and the number of bilateral deals signed, it is tempting to score this race like a sporting contest, with China currently ahead and the US, EU, and their partners scrambling to close the gap. There is truth to that framing. China's near-monopoly on processing capacity, built up over three decades while the rest of the world treated refining as a low-value, low-priority activity, is not something that gets reversed in a single presidential term, regardless of how many billions are committed to stockpiles and subsidies. The 2026 industry consensus is fairly stark: rebuilding independent processing capacity at scale is a project measured in decades, not years. But the scorecard framing has a real problem. China's leverage comes from a licensing system that can be tightened or loosened, which means it is a tool of pressure rather than a wall. Every time Beijing deploys it aggressively, it accelerates exactly the diversification it is trying to prevent.

The suspended October 2025 controls, the Australian divestment order, and the sudden burst of US-EU-Japan cooperation are all direct responses to Chinese pressure, and all of them chip away, slowly, at the dependence that gives China its power. Beijing appears to understand this, which is part of why its restrictions have so often been calibrated and temporary rather than total.

The other problem with the scorecard is harder to shake. Framing this purely as a contest between great powers obscures who actually bears the costs. The cobalt miners in the DRC, the communities near lithium and rare earth deposits in Ukraine, whose resources are now bargaining chips in a geopolitical settlement, the artisanal workers whose labor gets laundered into clean, traceable-looking supply chains before it reaches a phone or a car battery, none of these people are "winning" or "losing" this race in any meaningful sense. They are the terrain on which it is being fought.

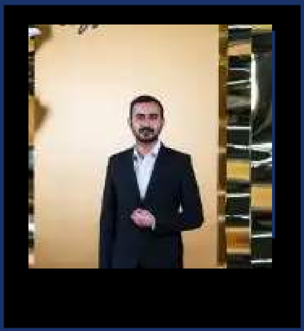
That is, in the end, the oldest story in resource geopolitics, wearing new clothes. The minerals have changed. The language has changed from oil to lithium, from colonies to supply chains, from gunboats to export licenses and sovereign wealth funds. But the basic shape of the contest, and the question of who pays for it, will look uncomfortably familiar to anyone who has read this story before.

You may like: Pakistan's Minerals: The New Arena of Great-Power Competition

Also read: The Electro-state: Infrastructure, Surveillance, and the New Geoeconomics of Decarbonization

The Education Emergency

About the Author

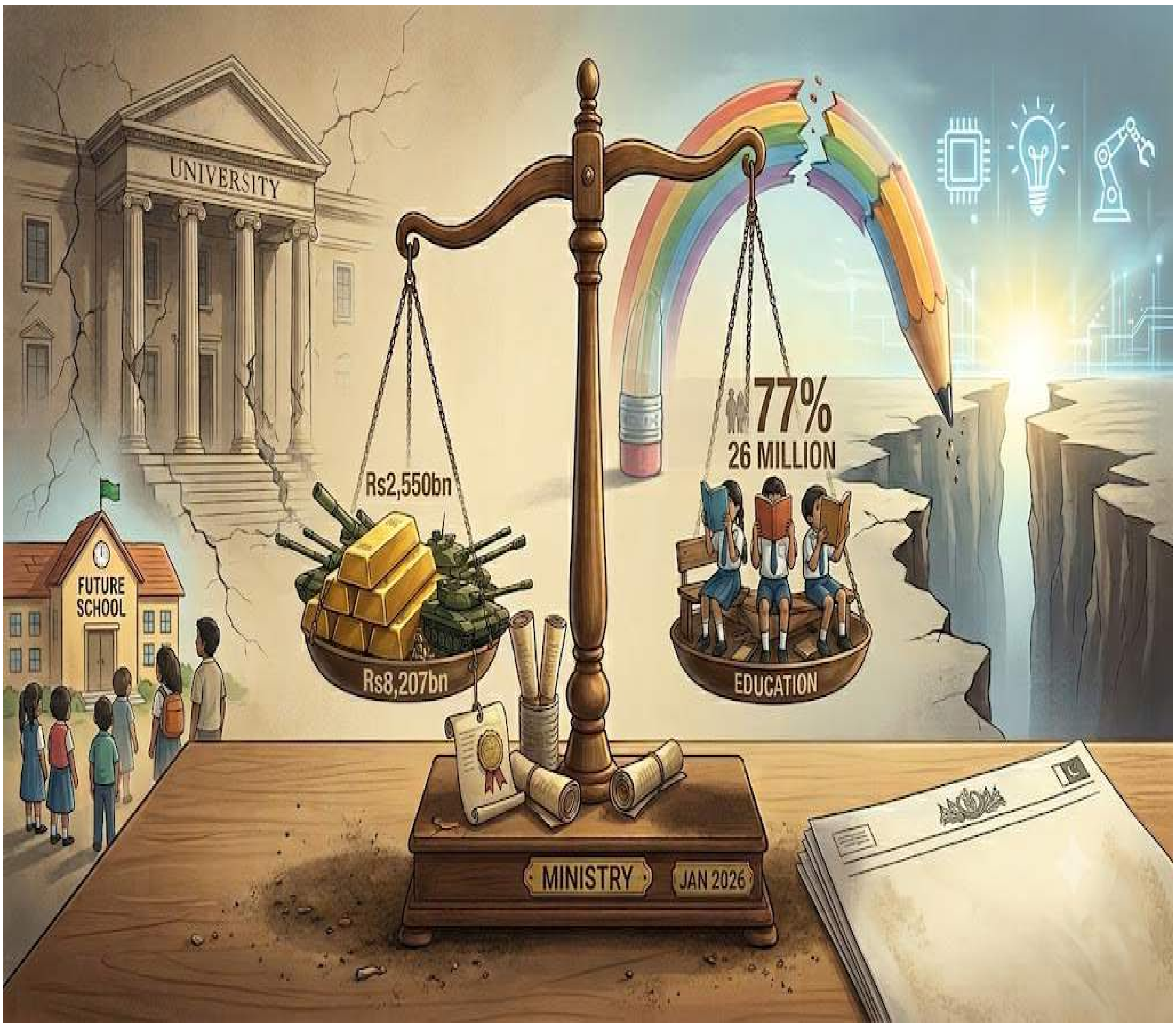


Saqib Raza is an education policy scholar and writer working at the intersection of higher education, governance, equity, and reform. His research has been published in international journals and presented at international conferences, while his policy writing has appeared o international platforms.

Pakistan has declared education an emergency. The coming budget will show whether the state meant it. The federal budget process for FY2026–27 is already underway. The Finance Division's Budget Call Circular, issued on Jan 27, 2026, asks ministries and divisions to submit FY2024–25 actuals, FY2025–26 revised estimates, and FY2026–27 budget estimates. In other words, the next budget is now being shaped. This is where Pakistan's education emergency will either become a governing priority or remain a public performance.

The emergency is not rhetorical. UNICEF Pakistan notes that more than 26 million school-age children are out of school, over 10 per cent of all out-of-school children globally, although Pakistan has only around three per cent of the world's population. It also notes that 77pc of children cannot read and understand a simple text by the age of 10. (UNICEF)

Yet the public purse tells another story. The Pakistan Economic Survey 2024–25 states that cumulative education expenditure by federal and provincial governments in FY2025, from July to March, was estimated at 0.8pc of GDP. It also records that education-related expenditure decreased by 29.4pc, falling to Rs899.6bn from Rs1, 251.06bn.



An emergency funded at less than one per cent of GDP is not an emergency response. It is a contradiction written into the budget. The usual defence is fiscal constraint. Pakistan is indebted, undertaxed, and under pressure from external financing needs. This is true. The Federal Budget in Brief 2025–26 places interest payments at Rs8,207bn and defence affairs and services at Rs2,550bn, against total expenditure of Rs17,573bn. No serious education argument can pretend that the state has unlimited room to spend. But fiscal pressure does not erase political choice. It reveals it. Even in difficult budgets, some commitments are protected, some expanded, and some deferred. Education is too often deferred. This is the deeper failure. Pakistan not only spends too little on education. It spends heavily on the consequences of not educating its people.

It spends on poverty management, but not enough on the institutions that could reduce inherited poverty. BISP and other forms of social protection are necessary. In a country where inflation and insecurity have weakened household survival, cash support is not a luxury. But cash transfers cannot repair classrooms, prepare teachers, teach children to read, keep adolescent girls in school, strengthen colleges, or sustain universities. If relief expands while education weakens, the state becomes better at cushioning deprivation than ending it.

It spends on security, but underinvests in the social foundations of security. A country with millions of children outside school and millions more inside classrooms without learning cannot build durable stability through force alone. Illiteracy, exclusion, unemployment, and institutional mistrust are not soft problems. They are slow-burning national risks.

It speaks of economic transformation, but neglects the system that produces human capability. Pakistan wants IT exports, artificial intelligence, skilled labour, entrepreneurship, and innovation. These ambitions sound modern. The educational base beneath them does not. A digital economy cannot be built on weak schools, under-resourced colleges, and universities struggling for basic research capacity. This is why the FY2026–27 budget matters. It will show whether the education emergency was a governing commitment or a communicative gesture.

A serious budget should not be judged only by a nominal increase. Inflation can turn increases into illusions. Salary pressures can absorb entire allocations. Development funds can be announced and later squeezed. The real test is whether the state begins to change the structure of education financing. There are three tests. First, the budget must set a credible multi-year path for education spending. Pakistan cannot repair decades of neglect in one fiscal year. But it can stop moving in the wrong direction. It can commit to staged increases, protect them from inflationary erosion, and report progress publicly each year. Second, the budget must protect learning-related investment. Salaries matter, and teachers must be paid. But recurrent expenditure alone cannot transform classrooms. The crisis is not only that children are out of school. It is also that many who enter school do not learn enough. Money must reach teacher preparation, foundational literacy and numeracy, school facilities, girls' retention, digital access, college improvement, and university research. Third, money must be tied to public accountability. Pakistan's education debate often swings between two incomplete positions that spend more, or blame governance. The country needs both financing and accountability. Provinces and institutions should be judged against visible benchmarks like enrolment, retention, teacher attendance, learning outcomes, transition to secondary education, gender gaps, and support for disadvantaged districts. Budgets should not disappear into systems that cannot show what changed.

This also requires a more intelligent link between social protection and schooling. A family protected from hunger today should not be abandoned to illiteracy tomorrow. Cash support should help keep children, especially girls and the poorest children, in education. Relief and human development should not operate as separate bureaucratic worlds.

Higher education must also return to the national conversation. Pakistan often treats universities as an elite concern, but they are part of state capacity. They train teachers, doctors, engineers, administrators, researchers, and policymakers. A country that weakens its universities weakens its ability to govern, innovate, and solve problems.

The central issue, then, is not whether Pakistan values education in principle. Almost every leader says so. The issue is whether education can survive the budget table, where slogans meet competing claims and political courage is measured in rupees. For too long, education has been treated as a promise to the future. That is precisely the problem. The future does not vote in budget meetings. Children outside school do not lobby. Weak public universities do not command the urgency of debt repayments or security shocks. So the crisis persists, familiar enough to be acknowledged, but not powerful enough to reorder priorities. That is what the FY2026–27 budget can change, or confirm. If education again appears as a residual item after debt, defence, administration, subsidies, and short-term political needs, the message will be clear. Pakistan will have chosen to manage the fallout of educational failure rather than confront its causes.

Budgets reveal what speeches conceal. The next one will tell us whether Pakistan's education emergency has become policy, or whether it was only another performance of concern.

The Rs 8,484 Question: What Pakistan's Poverty Line Debate Gets Wrong

About the Author

Dr. Ghulam Mohey-ud-din is an urban economist from Pakistan, currently based in the Middle East. He holds a PhD in economics and writes on urban economic development, macroeconomic policy, and strategic planning.

There is mostly a difficulty in defining or explaining fundamental concepts, for they form the basis for a plethora of things, whilst lacking their own. A physicist is yet to find out the building block of sub-atomic particles, a biologist, despite having a vast and extensive understanding of life's working mechanism, would find himself wrestling with the concept of life's origin, and a philosopher with the questions related to the temporal dimensions he resides in.

What are the questions I referred to in my most recent statement? They are, certainly, embedded in the social and cultural context one is a denizen of. What's life and its purpose? How did life begin? What is the normative framework for life? These questions have, since humanity's inception, troubled them. And as if it is some natural law, wherever there is an intellectual vacuum, a variety of forces come in to fill the void. That has happened in the aforementioned case.

The Realms Of Knowledge:

There have historically been two major forces trying to fill the vacuum, with each of them trying to degrade the other while standing on solid ground. These two are, namely, science and religious myths, forming two distinct realms of knowledge. Since the beginning of humankind, myths have enjoyed an absolute monopoly over the fundamental questions, with each one being addressed against the backdrop of metaphysical sayings. Science, *sed contra*, emerged initially as a peripheral force, beginning the conquest of the realm of knowledge, and now enjoys a predominant position. That is to say, even religious myths and explanations are now subjected to scientific scrutiny. However, the ultra-rationalistic position of science has created an existential and spiritual void in recent times, which has produced the result of the populace retreating to religion, and the former force is enjoying a resurgence.

However, in the middle of these two realms, therein lies a no-man's land which derives spirituality from religion and rationality from science, serving as an exemplary "golden mean", to employ Aristotle's terms, who happened to be one of the pioneers of this no-man's land called philosophy. This no-man's land has the honour of being the mother of all disciplines, since every discipline commences with asking questions, which happens to be the brain-child of philosophy.

A single statement has been making the rounds on social media for several days now. The prime minister of Pakistan has said, *"Anyone who makes over Rs 8,483 per month is not poor."* As would be expected, the line was greeted with a deluge of outrage, ridicule, and memes. However, the claim is based on a misconception. It is not the prime minister's choice of this number, nor is a poverty line predetermined by any ruler's signature. It is a measure of statistics, not a statement of politics.

The actual source is the poverty line figure of Rs 8,484 adult equivalent monthly per capita in 2025 as per . That figure was taken out of context; "per person" was interpreted as "per household," and a statistical threshold was set the Pakistan Economic Survey to a prime ministerial verdict. Three mistakes and one viral post.

The poverty line is a level of consumption that is insufficient for a person to meet the basic requirements of life, including food, housing, clothing, education, health, and transport. Each country has a different line based on its price levels, the level of consumption, and its standard of living. There is no single specific number that can be used all over the world as an indicator of "poor."

This is where things get lost in debate. In Pakistan, the poverty line does not exist as a decision taken by the prime minister or finance minister sitting and deciding on it. It is clear and formulated through an institutional chain. The Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) has the responsibility of conducting the household surveys and providing the data. The estimation is carried out by the Ministry of Planning (MoP) using a Technical Committee on Poverty, which includes PBS. The Economic Survey merely publishes the result, and this number is not the whim of anybody but a settled statistical method.

The Rs 8,484 figure is approximately on a per-person basis per month rather than on a per-family basis per month. However, the official way it's calculated is on an "adult equivalent" basis, meaning that a child is given less than an adult's worth for his calories, since a child's caloric requirements are less than an adult's.

If it is roughly calculated per head, it will be around Rs 50,900 per month for a six-member family and Rs 59,400 per month for a seven-member family. The practical limit as per the "adult-equivalent" method (which has reduced weight for the children) comes to about Rs 40,000–55,000 per month, based on the family's composition. Put another way, the message is obvious. This is far from "eight thousand four hundred and eighty-three rupees for a whole family."

With this change, Pakistan adopted the Cost of Basic Needs (CBN) method in 2013-14, which includes all necessary non-food expenses, not only food, and is based on the daily requirement of 2,350 calories per adult equivalent (2,150 urban; 2,450 rural). This is an important fact that is often overlooked. In other words, the original 2013-14 line (around Rs 3,030) is merely updated by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) every year. A line that has been around for 10 years and was continued by inflation. It is that very thing, as we shall see, that makes it its biggest weakness.

Why the debate centered on the number rather than on the news is a mystery since nobody seemed to notice the news. The national poverty rate is 28.9% in 2024-25 as against 21.9% in 2018-19, a rise of 7 percentage points in six years, the maximum increase since the series on poverty began, according to the Economic Survey 2024-25.

The question that never should have been asked was "Why Rs 8,483?" The real question was, "Why has poverty increased?"

Also, the current government is not the first to have employed a line of this type to the detriment of its efforts. The official poverty estimation was done under the PPP government, PML-N government, and PTI government and followed the same official methodology. The disparities have been virtually only in the data, the prices, and the survey methodology, not in any idea that there is a set amount fixed by a government. In fact, implementing the CBN approach in 2013-14 was a more rigorous and more accurate yardstick than the rosy old one would have been.

The World Bank has three different poverty lines for countries in the world, which include extreme poverty, lower-middle-income, and upper-middle-income countries. Both of these are valid figures, and approximately 44.7% of Pakistanis are poor on the Bank's lower middle-income line (at $4.20 a day), while 28.9% are poor on the national line (at $3.50 a day) (2021 PPP). They simply respond to different questions.

This is also the case throughout the region. While India's official monetary line is kept at the 2011-12 (Tendulkar Committee) estimate, the others, such as Bangladesh, Nepal, etc., use their own CBN-style national lines. Some national lines indicate local prices and conditions, and some global lines are constructed for cross-country comparisons; these lines will never meet.

All of this does not fall below the poverty line. It is true that the official measure is not always reflective of the true cost of living and that basic rent, education, and healthcare costs are increasing. Many households that are not considered to be poor are in fact facing considerable financial problems, where the line is being built on a ten-year-old basket, the price differences for urban versus rural are not fully captured, and the surveys are not conducted on a regular basis. It is in these cracks that the economic insecurity of the middle class is concealed.

In the last decades, poverty has not just been defined by a lack of income or expenditure but measured by multidimensional indices around the world, which include education, health, clean water, sanitation, and housing. Pakistan has had an official version since 2016; now all it needs is discipline. It should be timely and frequent, rebase the aging 2013-14 basket with new data and the 2023 census, incorporate the price differences between provinces and urban areas, and make the methodology transparent and reproducible.

So, the only question is why the prime minister "set" the figure at Rs 8,484. That question is flawed at the bottom. Now the questions are truly relevant. Is the current measure of poverty a true representation of the economic life of the present-day? Are official statistics a true reflection of ordinary people's reality? Is poverty alleviation the only aim of our social policy, or is it to safeguard the middle class from economic insecurity?

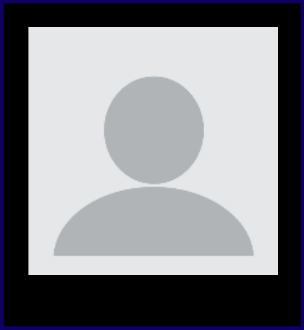
Giving and taking criticism is welcome and essential, but it should be based upon facts and the proper context. Otherwise, we lose sight of the real policy debate, forget the real question, "Why has poverty risen?," and become lost in social media noise.

You may like: Power to the People, Until the Bill Arrives

Also read: Sanctions as Foreign Policy: Do They Work, and Who Bears the Cost?

Beyond CPEC: How Critical Minerals Are Reshaping US-Pakistan Relations

About the Author



Javeria Abbas is an International Relations student with a deep interest in global governance, development economics, and climate policy. Her work focuses on examining contemporary global challenges through the lenses of sustainability, international cooperation, and equitable development. She is passionate about research, policy analysis, and amplifying perspectives from the Global South on issues shaping the international system.

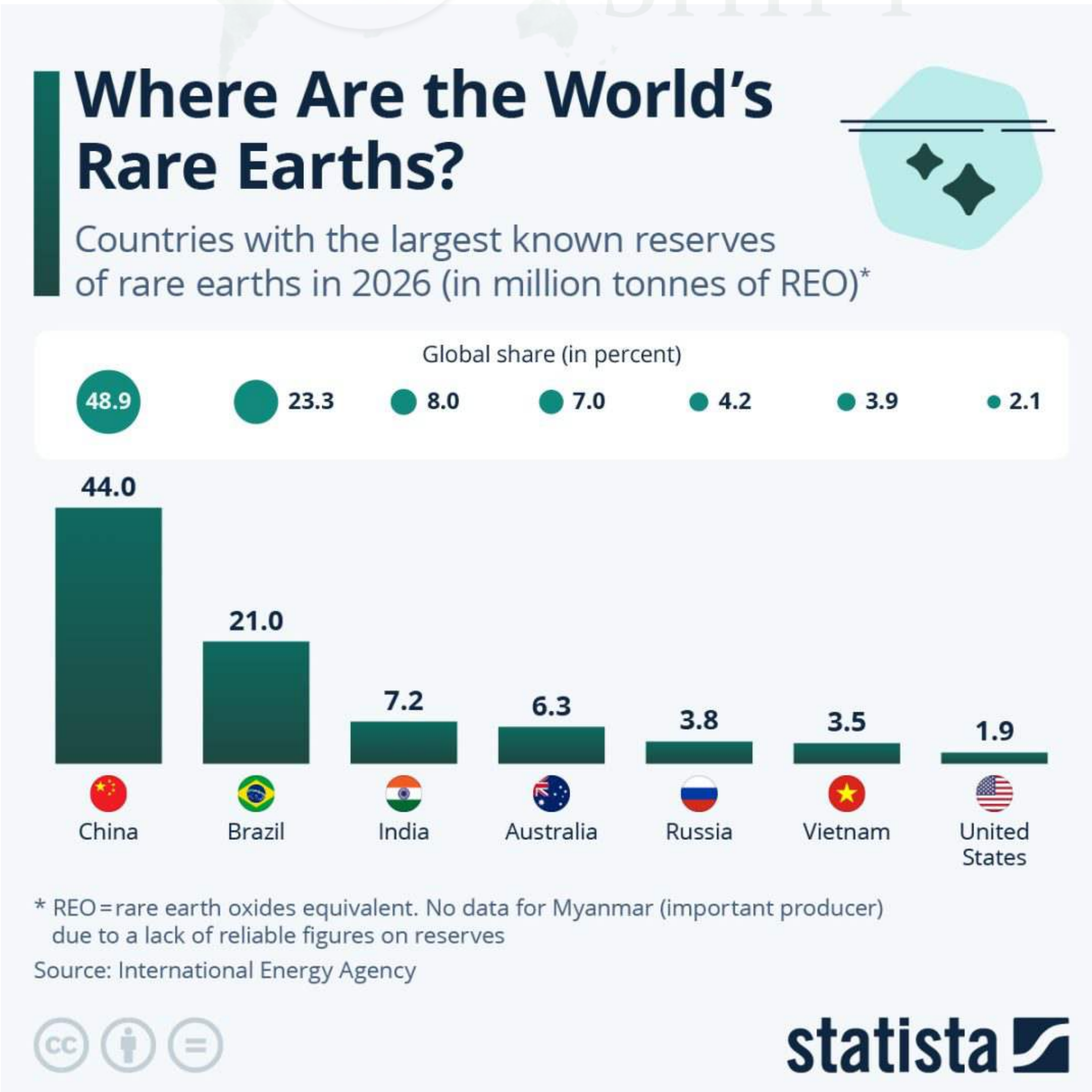
Pakistan-USA relations have been fluctuating significantly since the War on Terror era, indicated by fiery embraces or icy drifts during various time periods. These on-and-off relations can be attributed to Washington's tilt towards India as a strategic partner in South Asia and Pakistan's cordial relations with China. Under the Biden administration, Pakistan went through a period of relative diplomatic isolation. However, Trump's 2.0 and post-2025 developments in Pakistan's regional context have flipped the tables, with Pakistan emerging as the USA's potential partner.

Besides this diplomatic shift, Trump's 2.0 protectionist policies and trade war invoked China's retaliatory export controls on rare earth elements, signalling the need for America to diversify its REE imports away from China. Rare earth metals power everything from electric vehicles and wind turbines to advanced missile guidance, stealth systems, and fibre-optic networks, all of which are lifelines for America's protectionism. Pakistan's critical minerals sector, constrained by tech dependency on China, offered a valuable source of supply to Trump's America Great Again ambitions, thus repositioning Pakistan from a peripheral state to a central stakeholder in America's Great Game against China. While Pakistan is maintaining, even exploring new avenues for strengthening its "all-weather friendship" with China, the underlying scepticism about China's debt terms under CPEC and developmental returns from projects like Saindak has pushed Islamabad to hedge its bets – diversify its strategic partnerships.

Great Game for Critical Minerals: US and China as Cold Rivals

China holds a rare earth monopoly, as it controls approximately 70% of global rare earth mining and over 90% of global rare earth processing capacity, thus maintaining near-total domination of global supply chains. This monopoly has been enabled by decades of strategic state interventions and a whole-of-government approach, including the Communist Party, the state apparatus, the military complex, industry, and research institutions.

However, the stage for this dominance was set by the late Chinese leader, Deng Xiaoping, who noted, “The Middle East has oil. China has rare earths.” His pro-market reforms set the country on its path to becoming an economic powerhouse. Chinese strategy for gaining a monopoly over rare earth supply chains included subsidising domestic mining and processing, buying rare earth assets abroad, offering cheap exports to push foreign competitors out of business, centralising mining under state-owned enterprises, and tightening export quotas to increase geopolitical leverage.



While China holds strategic dominance in REE processing, the USA holds a rare earth consuming monopoly (more than 80% of Western demands). The USA heavily relies on critical minerals and rare earths for development in both defence (F-35 avionics, missile guidance systems, and Golden Doom strategy) and commercial (electric vehicles, wind turbines, etc.) sectors, consuming ~12,000-15,000 tonnes of REO equivalent in 2024. The United States was the main global source of rare earth minerals, with Mountain Pass in California as the leading supplier, until the mid-1990s.

However, a combination of environmental constraints, corporate outsourcing, off-shoring polluting industries, and shortsighted government policies gradually dismantled the domestic supply chains. The major turning point that ended US dominance came in the 1990s, when US companies began offshoring rare earth processing to China, initially as a cost-saving measure and a way to avoid the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) tightening regulations. Thus, China's recent monopoly has also been subsidised by the West itself, or Beijing's dominance is a self-inflicted wound from 1980s- 2000s globalisation.

However, the recent developments have pushed both the USA and China into a "Great Game over Critical Minerals and Rare Earth Elements". For decades, the United States watched its manufacturing base erode as it chased low-cost labour overseas, easy access to raw materials, and the pursuit of environmental regulatory standards during the offshoring era of the 1990s and 2000s. Trump's 2.0 reshoring movement and protectionist policies, which aimed at bringing manufacturing back to American soil, served national interests but triggered longer-term geopolitical and geo-economic repercussions.

To narrow the USA's trade deficit, President Donald Trump targeted top economic rivals, mainly China, with a cascade of tariffs on imports worth billions of dollars, launching a trade war. China retaliated by imposing export controls on rare earths, critical to Trump's "Make America Great Again" (MAGA) ambition.

Announcement No. 61 imposed extraterritorial control on rare earth materials, while Announcement No. 62 introduced restrictions on rare earth extraction and processing technologies, starting a deliberate war on rare earths. Though Beijing suspended the implementation of both announcements in November 2025, following a broader trade truce between China and the USA, this exposed the vulnerability of the USA's supply chain dependence and accelerated Washington's push for diversification.

USA, Pakistan & China: A Rare Earth Trinity

Beijing's Announcement No. 61 hit America the hardest; F-35 magnets and Tesla NdPr choked overnight. Desperate to diversify its REE imports away from China, Washington discovered Pakistan, China's ally in South Asia, jolting from the shocks of Announcement No. 62. Pakistan has a massive mineral potential, with world-class copper-gold deposits at Reko Diq and Saindak. Saindak is an old project run by Metallurgical Corporation of China under a long-term lease, producing around 20,000 tonnes of copper, 1.5 tonnes of gold, and 2.5 tonnes of silver each year.

China has extracted Saindak's resources for nearly 15 years now on a long-term lease basis. However, Beijing's cash cow, Saindak, after years of extraction, is now dead, and so are the developmental promises made. Balochistan, Pakistan's province where Saindak is located, has benefited little from its enormously valuable resources, as the low-value minerals are extracted in Pakistan and exported to Chinese smelters for conversion into high-value end products. Pakistan's lack of mainstream capacity, such as infrastructure and expertise for chemical separation, solvent extraction, and oxide-to-metal conversion, has facilitated this exploitation of its resources.

However, Saindak's story is not an isolated case but a microcosm of a much broader structural failure associated with Pakistan-China relations through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Introduced as a development ladder for Pakistan's collapsing energy sector and stagnating economy, CPEC, over time, has started to resemble a "financial trap." According to the World Bank, China has become Pakistan's single largest bilateral and commercial creditor, with Pakistan owing approximately $29 billion to China. Pakistan's debt to China makes up nearly 30% of its total external debt.

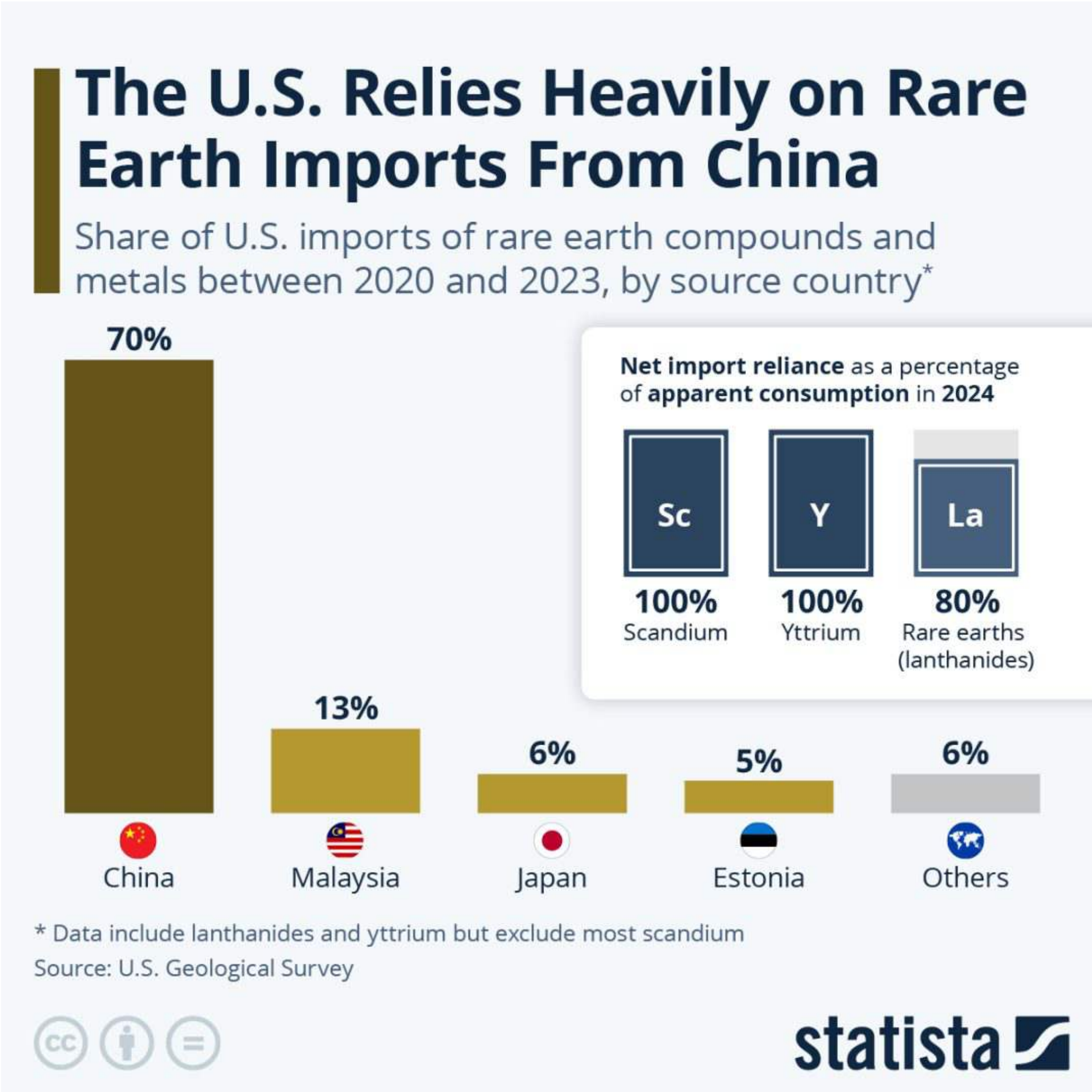
Chinese bilateral deposits accounted for the largest share in Pakistan's repayment of $22 billion of external debts in the 2025 fiscal year alone. Despite the soaring debts, the developmental returns for Pakistan's economy are deeply asymmetrical. Saindak's MCC operations have generated a revenue of $2.6 billion in foreign exchange between 2002 and 2022.

However, Balochistan, the land that has provided the resources and paid the social and environmental costs, received a minimal share of 2%, which was later revised to 5%, of the overall revenue generation. Locals have also reported no visible development in the living standards or infrastructure.

Even after the 18th constitutional amendment, which delegated full authority to the provincial government over the management of natural resources, the federal government has blocked Balochistan government's efforts to gain operational control of Saindak, citing the lack of technical capacity and development infrastructure. While it is framed as bureaucratic red tape, hindering Balochistan in achieving its constitutional rights, it is a self-fulfilling justification of how nearly two decades of Chinese operation involved no significant technology transfer. Therefore, now Pakistan's efforts to diversify the strategic partnership in the critical mineral sector are less of a geopolitical gamble and more of an economically rational response to a partnership that has delivered dependence over development.

Reko Diq: Flipping the Script on America's Critical Mineral Dilemma

The Reko Diq project can flip the script for both the U.S. and Pakistan. Pakistan formally entered the global critical mineral trade on October 2, 2025, sending its first consignment of enriched rare earths and critical minerals, containing antimony, copper concentrate, neodymium and praseodymium, to U.S. Strategic Metals (USSM) under a $500 million agreement. While the consignment was deeply symbolic, as Pakistan currently lacks industrial infrastructure for REE extraction and processing, it established a political framework for deeper cooperation. Antimony diversification for Washington addresses a glaring supply-chain vulnerability, as the metal is integral to ammunition primers, flame-retardant compounds and other advanced electronics.



For Pakistan, antimony represents a credible near-term export opportunity and a path to earn strategic credibility while REE development proceeds. Copper represents another indispensable material in modern defence production, forming part of almost every element of the military industrial base, from power systems and communications to weapons platforms and infrastructure. Thus, copper forms the backbone of U.S. defence capability, and any disruption to its supply or processing capacity carries strategic consequences.

While China controls over half of global smelting, Pakistan's copper concentrates at Reko Diq provide incremental diversification for Washington, which accounts for just 5% of global production and 3.3% of refining capacity. These estimated Reko Diq reserves, among the largest undeveloped copper and gold deposits in the world, represent a long-term anchor for this Pak-USA strategic partnership.

However, China's Announcement No. 62, made on October 9, 2025, and suspended later on in November following the trade truce, signalled Beijing's intent to restrict the technology transfers. China's retaliatory response to the USA served as a warning shot for Pakistan as well, signalling a threat to Pakistan's ambition to develop domestic processing capabilities, export value-added minerals to the United States, and diversify its critical minerals supply chains.

Pakistan's Next Move

China overplayed its monopoly hand, with announcements 61 and 62, before a partial retreat in November, and exposed a structural vulnerability that neither Washington nor Islamabad can afford to ignore. This also revealed that America's dependency on Chinese processing and Pakistan's reliance on China's extraction technologies are strategic liabilities and not just economic inconveniences. From this shared vulnerability, a strategic partnership between the two begins to take shape.

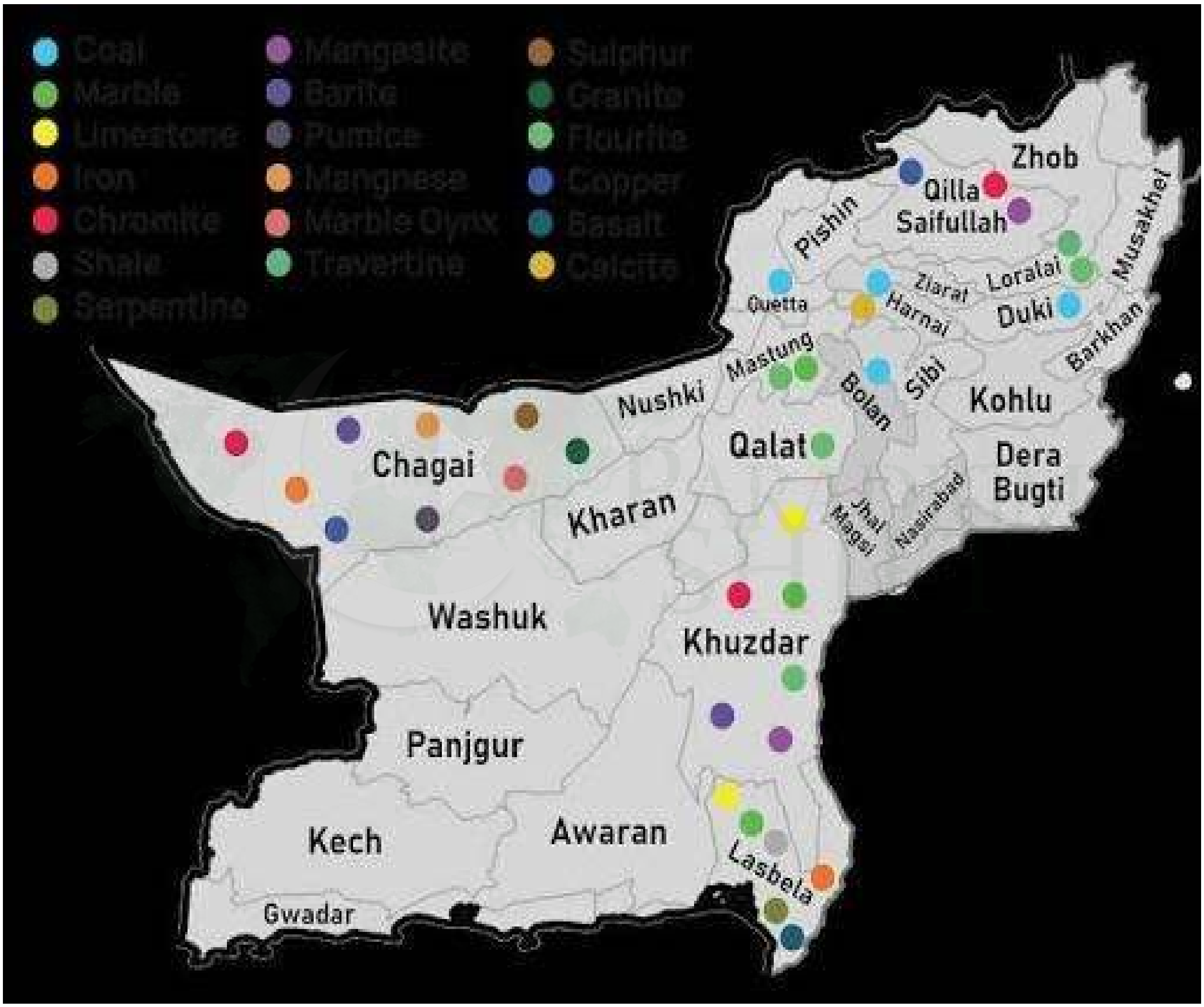
The United States has partnerships and critical minerals deals with Japan and Australia. But most of these deals are focused on developing rare earth processing technologies and building joint supply chains through joint financing mechanisms and stockpiling systems. However, these Japan-USA & USA-Australia partnerships, while significant, are constrained by the limited scale of new untapped resources. Pakistan's estimated $6T mineral jackpot, a figure drawn from Pakistan's geological survey, while contested by independent analysts, offers a resource base of genuine strategic significance.

Japan, like the USA, depended on China for most of its rare earth imports until 2010, when a diplomatic dispute between the two led China to impose export controls on rare earths. Japan responded with unusual urgency, deploying more than $1.1 billion to diversify supply chains, invest in overseas mining and processing projects, support domestic recycling and help manufacturers redesign components to use fewer rare-earth elements. Central to Japan's long-term resilience was its partnership with Lynas Rare Earths in Australia. This partnership created the only significant non-Chinese rare-earth separation capacity in the world, showing that diversification is possible. Recent critical mineral deals with the United States have added to the significance of this partnership.

Pakistan's immediate entry point into this supply chain is shipping Balochistan's raw critical mineral concentrates to the USA and its critical mineral bloc, a near-term revenue generation stream while domestic industrial, processing, and technological infrastructure is built. This should not be taken as a permanent position where Pakistan is once again made a raw material supplier, but as a deliberate first phase mirroring Japan's own trajectory after 2010, when it first diversified sourcing before building domestic industrial capacities.

The second major step in Pakistan's strategy that can add value at home is "technology transfer" from the American bloc, supported by the USA's Export-Import Bank (EXIM) financing to Pakistan. This will not only reduce Pakistan's technological dependence on Chinese extraction and processing systems but also create jobs for locals in Balochistan, directly addressing the asymmetry that Chinese extraction partnerships never resolved.

Thirdly, the construction of Pasni Port could significantly alter regional trade and energy dynamics. Pasni sits in the province of Balochistan, which borders Afghanistan and Iran, between the Strait of Hormuz, Central Asia, and the Balochistan mineral belt. Whoever controls this coastline will influence energy, trade, and data routes of the next decade. Pakistan has pitched an idea of a new deep-sea port at Pasni to Washington, which, if materialised, could reshape China's strategic dominance over regional trade routes.



Conclusion: The Long Game of Critical Minerals

The window for this "strategic partnership" is real but narrow. China's suspension of announcements 61 and 62 was tactical and not structural. Beijing still holds a monopoly over rare earth reserves, and its extraction and processing technology leverage is still intact. For Washington, Pakistan is no longer a peripheral state that needs to be managed through a security-development or counter-terrorism nexus but a potential node in critical mineral architecture that America desperately wants to build and develop.

For Islamabad, this minerals pivot represents an exit ramp from decades of dependence and an opportunity to diversify its partnerships in an evolving international political environment. However, one thing that needs to be clear from the outset is that this is a "long-term game", rather than a short-term venture ensuring quick revenue generation.

If Pakistan can hold its nerve, invest in processing capacity, and deliver its supply commitments, it will not only be a mere raw material exporter to a powerful patron but also a strategic node in global critical minerals supply chains. Pakistan's critical mineral bet can earn it a seat at the table of the next industrial order, one where whoever controls the inputs to clean energy and advanced defence will shape the century or theoretically "rule the world". Pakistan has the minerals. The question is whether it has the institutions, security, and resolve to stay in the match long enough to have all the cards in its court.

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Is Pakistan Really Ready for Investment?

About the Author

Dr. Ghulam Mohey-ud-din is an urban economist from Pakistan, currently based in the Middle East. He holds a PhD in economics and writes on urban economic development, macroeconomic policy, and strategic planning.

Beyond Conferences and Promises

Pakistan has another investment summit, a new memorandum of understanding, and another multi-billion-dollar opportunity every few months. However, the development of investment conferences would not result in an economic revolution; if it did, Pakistan would already be a number one investment hotspot in Asia. And, unfortunately, the global capital isn't just looking for opportunity; it's looking for predictability, institutional capacity, and confidence.

The investment challenge is not limited to attracting investment to Pakistan; it is creating the environment that will make investment sustainable. According to the World Bank, in recent years, the net foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows in Pakistan have been less than 1 percent of the GDP, far below the level seen in other countries in the region, like Vietnam and Bangladesh. In 2024, Vietnam received around $38 billion in FDI commitments, with the manufacturing, electronics, and export sectors leading the way. Despite its own challenges in infrastructure and governance, Bangladesh has consistently been able to grow industrial exports and investments through continuity of policy and emphasis on export competitiveness.

When institutional indicators are looked at, the contrast is enhanced. Contract enforcement, regulatory consistency, tax administration, and the reliability of infrastructure have been areas of weakness for Pakistan in the past. Frequent overlapping approvals, uncertainty over taxation, foreign exchange restrictions, and inconsistent policy enforcement by the federal and provincial authorities are some of the difficulties that investors encounter when entering Pakistan. These structural tensions have a high cost and risk premium.

The industry has, on the other hand, evolved into a long-term state policy, not a one-off public relations campaign, all over the Gulf and Southeast Asia. The United Arab Emirates developed internationally competitive free zones, featuring streamlined business regulations, speedy regulatory processes, and dispute resolution systems.

Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 initiative has been an amalgamation of infrastructure investment, institutional changes, regulatory reform, and aggressive economic diversification.

Vietnam had a very stable export-led industrialization strategy for decades, while Bangladesh adopted an industrial clustering and labor-intensive approach, which allowed it to become part of global value chains. However, my analysis of the issue indicates that the real issue with Pakistan is not its lack of potential. What is lacking is a credible, consistent, and investor-friendly economic ecosystem.

Core Structural Bottlenecks

The first and perhaps worst gap is policy discontinuity. Industrial incentives, tax regimes, import policies, and investment priorities are frequently altered in Pakistan as a result of political change or fiscal needs. Frequent changes in industrial incentives, tax regimes, import policies, and investment priorities are a result of political changes and/or fiscal pressures in Pakistan.

Global investors make investment decisions keeping in view the next ten to twenty-year time horizon, and Pakistan takes a policy turnaround within a matter of months. This volatility can result in economists' "institutional uncertainty," which inhibits long-term investment in capital.

The second is fragmented governance. The process of investment facilitation in Pakistan is scattered around ministries, provincial agencies, regulators, and bureaucratic processes, which often do not work in sync. While multiple approval layers, administrative delays, and uneven enforcement of single-window investment facilitation are discussed, the facilitation remains unevenly implemented. The majority of the special economic zones (SEZs) are underutilized due to a lack of fully coordinated provisioning of infrastructure, access to utilities, customs integration, and land administration, as they have not developed into industrial ecosystems.

Third, Pakistan is still not considering the quality of infrastructure as an important factor in investment competitiveness. Labor costs aren't the only factor that influences modern investment decisions; logistics efficiency, energy reliability, digital connectivity, urban livability, and integration of supply chains also play a crucial role.

In the absence of an energy supply, port congestion, unbalanced transport infrastructure, and high financing costs, export-oriented industries cannot compete at the international level.

A Five-Pillar Blueprint for Reform

Additionally, there is a deeper strategic concern about Pakistan's investment story: it has a short-term investment focus. While a big announcement might make headlines, it's those elements of industrial capacity, human capital, export competitiveness, and regulatory trust that make the difference in sustainable investment ecosystems.

Vietnam's development as a manufacturing nation was not just a result of a series of conferences; it was the outcome of long-term development of a well-designed industrial policy, trade integration, and infrastructure investments. Likewise, the UAE did not turn into a global center for investment based on incentives only, but due to institutional credibility and governance efficiency.

First, Pakistan needs a long-term investment environment that is legally secure and goes beyond the political fence. Major policies of industrial, taxation, and investment should be based on parliamentary consensus instead of the executive alone. Investors require some degree of certainty about fiscal incentives, repatriation policies, and industrial policies over a reasonably foreseeable period. The investment success of Vietnam is an example of the significance of continuity in export and industrial policy from one government to the next.

Second, the government should go beyond mere "one window" systems to have more realistically integrated digital investment governance. All taxation, licensing, customs, utilities, and land approvals must be pulled together on a single digital application, and all matters must be legally binding with timelines. Saudi Arabia's investment reforms under Vision 2030 dramatically cut down the number of procedural hurdles, centralizing them in a digital platform and improving regulation.

Third, the focus should be on industrial development rather than on real estate development based on speculation. SEZs need to be fully developed industrial complexes that are connected to ports, logistics corridors, vocational training, and export ecosystems. Expansion of the garment industry in Bangladesh was not only due to low labor costs but also due to the coordination of industrial clusters, export facilities, and policies around a clear economic goal.

Fourth, investment promotion should be export-driven, not consumption-driven. Historically, Pakistan had been successful in attracting investment into the protected sectors like energy, telecom, and real estate, and export manufacturing was comparatively weak.

Future incentives should focus on value chain sectors that offer global export opportunities such as engineering goods, agri-processing, advanced manufacturing, information technology components, and renewable energy components. The UAE has been focusing on diversification more on technology, logistics, advanced manufacturing, and innovation ecosystems, and less on traditional sectors.

Fifth, urban and institutional governance reforms need to be at the heart of economic strategy. Productive cities, efficient transport, reliable public services, and skilled labor markets are the foundations of competitive economies. Financial incentives are not the only thing that investors consider when looking into cities; they are also interested in whether or not cities can support talent, logistics, and operational efficiency. The inadequacies in urban planning, congestion costs, and poor municipal government are putting at risk the economic competitiveness of Pakistan.

Conclusion

Pakistan has not been facing any shortfalls in terms of strategic location, market size, or economic potential. Its challenge is credibility. Today, investment is not guaranteed by conferences, slogans, or individual incentives, as it was in the past. It is gained through institutional trustworthiness, infrastructure readiness, policy continuity, and governance competence.

The countries that have better accomplished attracting foreign capital do not do so in a single day. They developed systems that minimized uncertainty, maximized productivity, and matched state capacity to economic ambitions. If Pakistan continues to rely on an announcement-driven economy to generate competitiveness, it will be more a dream than a reality in terms of investment promotion.

But global investors don't invest in promises. They invest in systems that are effective.

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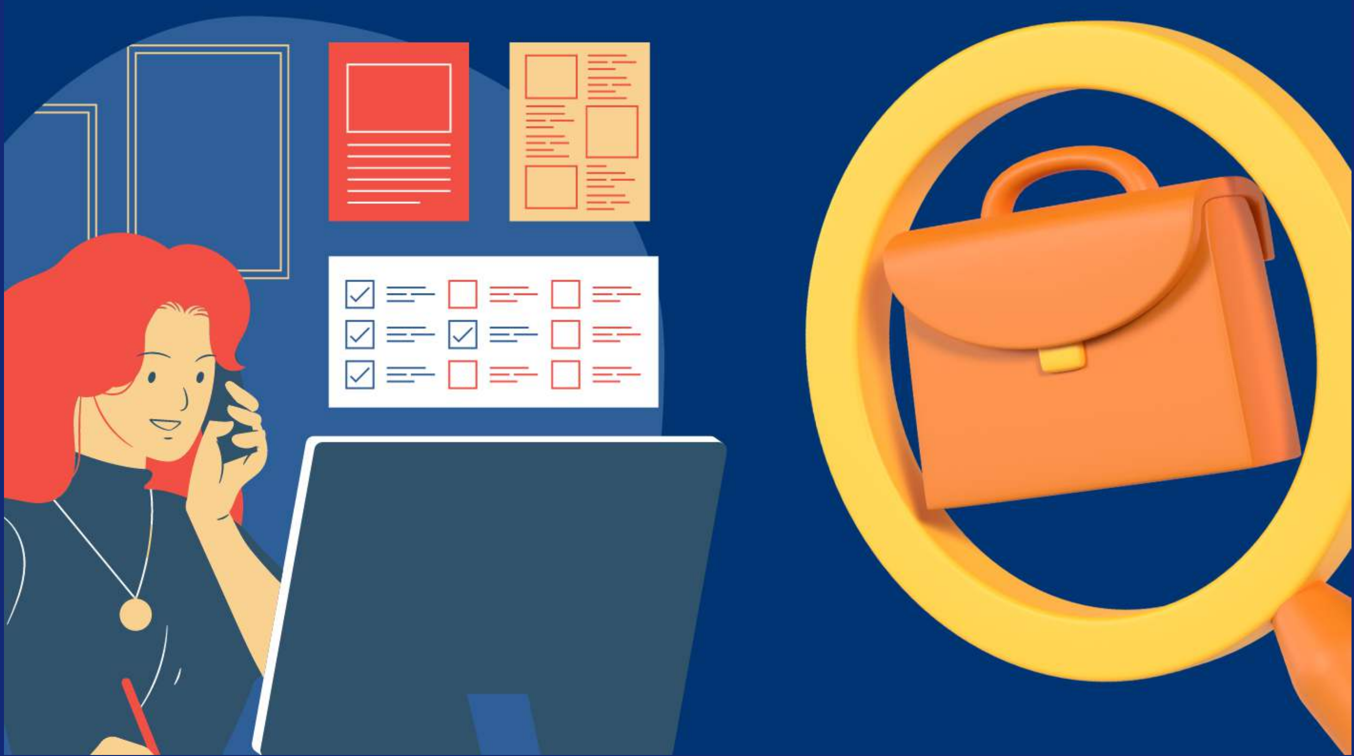

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