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*The Paradigm Shift Magazine*  
August '26

## The US-Israel Military Integration Bill (NDAA)

*Syed Hammad Ali*

## The Weaponization of Silence: How Defamation Laws Target Survivors in Pakistan

*Dur-e-Adan*

## Why Registrations for the CSS Examination Are Declining in Pakistan

*M. Hamza Tanveer*

## The \$10 Billion Bargain: Monetizing Geopolitics in Pakistan-US Relations

*Eman Waseem*

## The Makkah Defence Agreement: Opportunity, Obligation or Strategic Ambiguity?

*Lt. Gen Tariq Khan*

## What if Water Became the New Oil?

*Azhar Ud Din*

## Is Pakistan Closer To Spain Than We Think? A Regional Power in South Asia

*Prof. Carlos Uriarte Sánchez*

## Why Pakistan Became the Security Anchor for the Gulf

*Azhar Ali*



# The Unspoken Sexual Crisis of Pakistan

*Mohaimin Zeeshan*

# Table Of Contents



|                                                                                               |    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Foreword                                                                                      | 3  |
| Article: The Unspoken Sexual Crisis of Pakistan                                               | 4  |
| Article: Acknowledging the Invisible - Judicial Recognition of Homemakers in South Asia       | 17 |
| Opinion: The Fragmentation of NATO - How Unilateralism is Forcing European Self-Reliance      | 25 |
| Article: The US-Israel Military Integration Bill (NDAA)                                       | 30 |
| Book Review: Why We're Getting Poorer: A Realist's Guide to the Economy and How We Can Fix It | 36 |
| Infographic of the Month!                                                                     | 45 |
| Donate to Gaza!                                                                               | 46 |
| Opinion: What if Water Became the New Oil?                                                    | 49 |
| Article: Rethinking Pakistan's Afghan Refugee Policy                                          | 52 |
| Article: Why registrations for the CSS Examination are Declining in Pakistan                  | 59 |
| Opinion: Whither Azaadi?                                                                      | 64 |



# Table Of Contents



|                                                                                         |     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Opinion: Beyond the Thermometer: Why Pakistan's Heatwaves are a Governance Emergency    | 68  |
| Research Paper: Why Pakistan Became the Security Anchor for the Gulf                    | 73  |
| Opinion: The Weaponization of Silence: How Defamation Laws Target Survivors in Pakistan | 87  |
| Article: The \$10 Billion Bargain - Monetizing Geopolitics in Pakistan-US Relations     | 92  |
| Article: The Makkah Defence Agreement: Opportunity, Obligation or Strategic Ambiguity?  | 98  |
| Article: Is Pakistan Closer To Spain Than We Think? A Regional Power in South Asia      | 116 |
| Check Out Our Community Forum!!                                                         | 122 |
| Advertise With Us!                                                                      | 123 |
| Become Part of the Paradigm Shift Team                                                  | 124 |
| Our Social Media Platforms                                                              | 125 |



# Foreword

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

With over **150,000 - 200,000 monthly visits**, and over **65,000 followers** on social media, 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 **15 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](http://www.ParadigmShift.com.pk)

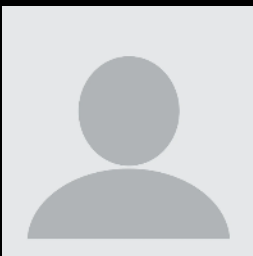
We hope that you consider sharing our website and social media with your friends and family so that we can effectively increase our reach. Thank you again for all your support through the years.

A red-tinted photograph of a protest. In the foreground, a woman in a white headscarf looks distressed. Behind her, other protesters are visible, some holding signs. Large black gender symbols (a circle with an arrow for male and a circle with a cross for female) are overlaid on the image. A green rectangular box in the top right corner contains the word "Article" in white.

Article

# The Unspoken Sexual Crisis of Pakistan

About the Author



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

# We Need to Talk About What We Refuse to Talk About

This article is an attempt to look directly at what we are avoiding. It is not comfortable reading. It is written with the conviction that naming a crisis is the first act of addressing it and that our silence on these matters has cost us dearly in destroyed childhoods, shattered families, spreading disease, and a generation negotiating their sexuality entirely without guidance in the dark, learning from pornography and from the men who abused them.

## The Digital Brothel: Snapchat, VPNs, and the Hookup Economy

The disappearing messages on Snapchat were designed for casual conversation. But they turned into a clandestine underworld. Because of the short-lived nature of the chats, it became the ideal venue for hookups, nude exchanges, and sexual solicitation, from early teens to middle-aged to old uncles. Strangers slide into DMs, asking for age, area, and role. This trinity of anonymous sexual solicitation has become normalized. Beyond Snapchat, Grindr, Blued, Tinder, and lesser-known gay dating apps now operate quietly behind VPNs on the smartphones of millions of Pakistani men who would publicly identify as straight, married Muslims.

The VPN industry in Pakistan has flourished not primarily because of political censorship but because it unlocks pornography. Despite extensive censorship efforts, demand for online pornography persists, and users can readily bypass restrictions using [widely available VPN services](#) — the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority itself has recorded roughly [20 million daily attempts](#) to reach blocked pornographic sites despite over 844,000 websites already being banned. A [Gallup Pakistan survey](#) similarly found men and those under 30 are the heaviest VPN users in the country. We've created a highly developed and sophisticated moral edifice of prohibition and failed to substantively address the conditions that engender the behavior in the first place. A [2022 study on problematic pornography](#) use among Pakistani men and women found that depression, anxiety and low self-esteem drive craving-based pathways into compulsive use — evidence that this is a mental-health and public-health issue, not merely a moral failing.

# The 'Flat Culture' and the New Brotherhood of Anonymous Sex

A new slur, 'flat culture', has now come into use among the young urbanites of Pakistan to describe a particular setup, where a small group of males conducts a clandestine affair designed for sexual encounters. In cities such as Lahore, Karachi, Islamabad, and more mid-sized cities, these flats serve as informal brothels, meeting points, and safe havens for sexual activity, which has no socially sanctioned space to exist.

When desire has nowhere legitimate to go, it goes underground. And underground is where it becomes distorted, exploitative, and dangerous.

## Pornography as Sex Education: What We Are Teaching Our Children

The average age of first exposure to pornography among Pakistani youth is now estimated to be between 10 and 13 years. This is not markedly different from global trends, but for the vast majority of our children, pornography is not supplementary sex education. It is replacing it completely.



Our schools do not teach sex education in any meaningful sense. Pakistani parents, overwhelmingly, do not discuss sexuality with their children — not anatomy, consent, relationships, or what healthy intimacy looks like. A [qualitative study](#) of parents and teachers in Pakistan found that most adults hold only rudimentary, ritualistic notions of what 'sex education' even means, and that parents actively oppose teaching it in schools. Research through the [Shaoor project](#) on parent-led sex education found that 98% of surveyed students were entirely uninformed about sex education before puberty, and that not one of them had first learned about it from a parent — leaving peers and the internet to fill the vacuum. A [Frontiers/PMC](#) study on community resistance to sexuality education documents how religious and cultural taboo actively blocks curriculum reform even when public-health need is acknowledged. The mosque and madrasa certainly don't fill this gap. So, the child who encounters pornography at 11 or 12 years old has no frame of reference, no understanding that what they are watching is a product, not a depiction of reality. And no awareness of consent, performance, or the economics of the industry they are accidentally enrolled in as a consumer.

Consistently, studies show that pornography is the main source of sex education for our generation. [A study in 2024 on pornography](#) use among Pakistani youth found that 72% were consuming pornographic content on a daily or weekly basis and that this heavy use correlated strongly with risky sexual behaviors, distorted attitudes about gender, intimacy, and psychological harm. A related Discover Education (Springer) study on sexual-themed content and schooling in Pakistan points to the same sociocultural stack — religious taboo, parental discomfort, and absent teacher training — as the structural cause. Pornography does not just depict sex; it teaches gender. And what it teaches is dominance, degradation, and the irrelevance of the other person's humanity.

## How Pornography Rewrites Masculinity

Mainstream pornography teaches boys that women exist to be used. It teaches that sex is something done to someone, not with someone. It teaches that power differentials are erotic, that pain is consent, that the body of the other person is a prop.

Pornography’s gender distortions in Pakistan operate in a specific direction that is rarely discussed openly: the overwhelming prevalence of male-male sexual content in the most widely consumed categories, and the way this content is modifying how young men understand their own desires. In a gender-segregated society where male physical intimacy is socially normalized — men hold hands, embrace, share beds without social comment — the line between homosocial and homosexual becomes blurred in ways that do not exist in more integrated societies.

# PORNOGRAPHY IS NOT EDUCATION, IT IS DISTORTION.

What pornography teaches vs what healthy sexuality should be

| WHAT MAINSTREAM PORNOGRAPHY TEACHES BOYS                                                          | PORNOGRAPHY'S GENDER DISTORTIONS IN PAKISTAN                                                                                                                                         | WHAT HEALTHY SEXUALITY SHOULD TEACH                                                        |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>WOMEN EXIST TO BE USED.</b><br/>Women are objects, not human beings.</p>                    | <p><b>OVERWHELMING PREVALENCE OF MALE-MALE CONTENT</b><br/>The most widely consumed categories feature male-male sexual content.</p>                                                 | <p><b>MUTUAL RESPECT &amp; HUMAN DIGNITY</b><br/>Partners are equal, not objects.</p>      |
| <p><b>SEX IS DONE TO SOMEONE, NOT WITH SOMEONE.</b><br/>It teaches dominance, not connection.</p> | <p><b>BLURS THE LINE BETWEEN HOMOSOCIAL &amp; HOMOSEXUAL</b><br/>In a gender-segregated society where male physical intimacy is socially normalized, boundaries become confused.</p> | <p><b>SEX IS ABOUT CONNECTION</b><br/>It is something shared, not something done.</p>      |
| <p><b>POWER DIFFERENTIALS ARE EROTIC.</b><br/>It normalizes control, not equality.</p>            | <p><b>SHAPES DESIRES AND SELF-IMAGE</b><br/>It influences how young men understand their bodies, their desires and what turns them on.</p>                                           | <p><b>EQUALITY, NOT DOMINATION</b><br/>Healthy intimacy is based on trust and balance.</p> |
| <p><b>PAIN IS CONSENT.</b><br/>It glamorizes violence and ignores real consent.</p>               | <p><b>ADOLESCENCE IS A FORMATIVE STAGE</b><br/>Pornography shapes sexual scripts, behaviors and identity—especially when sexuality is still developing.</p>                          | <p><b>CONSENT IS CLEAR &amp; ENTHUSIASTIC</b><br/>No means no. Silence is not consent.</p> |
| <p><b>THE BODY IS A PROP.</b><br/>It reduces intimacy to performance and fantasy.</p>             |                                                                                                                                                                                      | <p><b>HUMAN BEINGS, NOT PROPS</b><br/>Intimacy is about real people, not performance.</p>  |

**PORNOGRAPHY IS NOT SEX EDUCATION. IT IS A CURRICULUM OF DISTORTION.**  
Our children deserve truth, respect, and real education—not exploitation and lies.

Sources: Journal of Sex Research (2026) | Channel 4 – Pakistan's Hidden Shame | PBS Frontline – The Dancing Boys of Afghanistan | Dawn | Sahil (2025 Data)

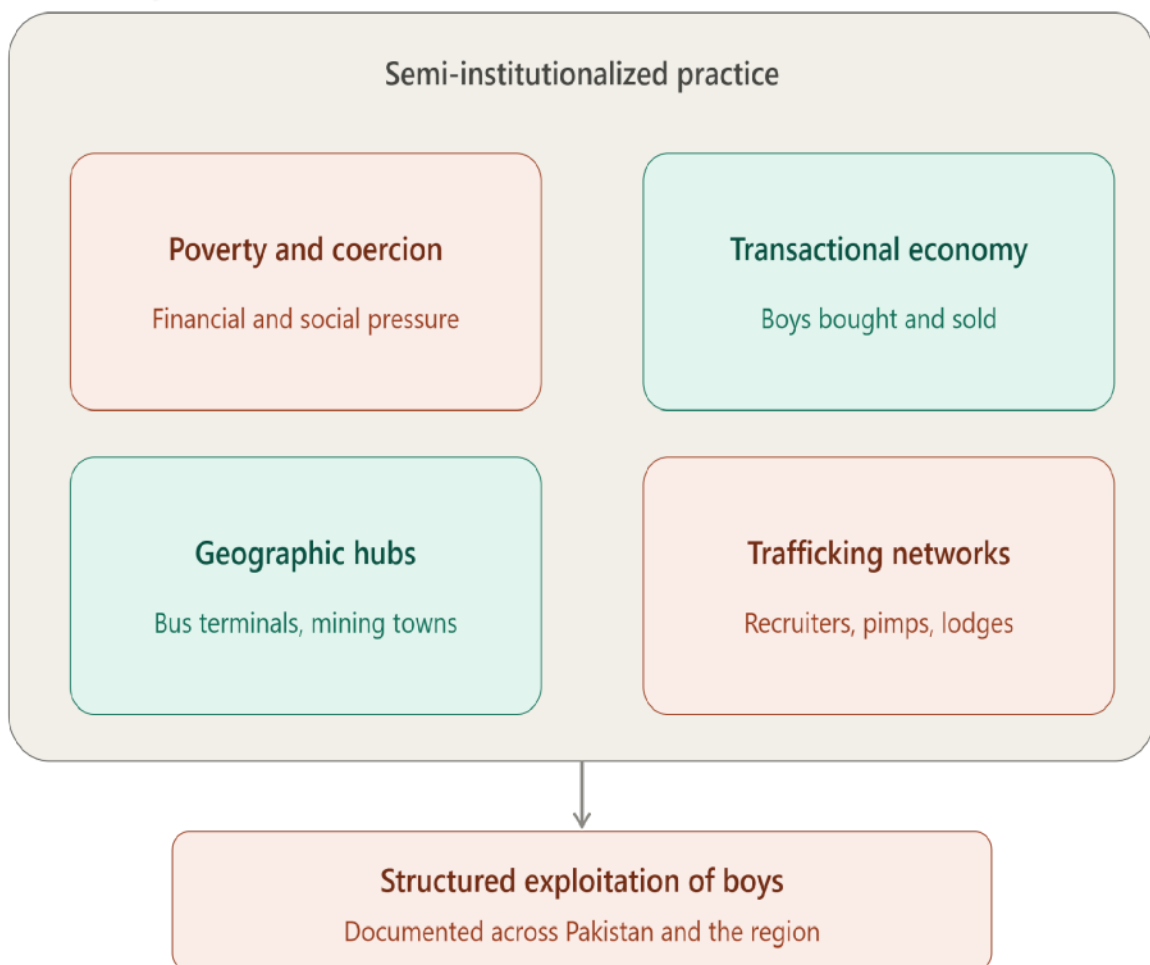
This is not an argument that pornography makes people gay. Sexual orientation is complex, substantially biological, and not simply determined by content consumption. But pornography does shape sexual behaviors, sexual scripts, and sexual

identity — especially in adolescents whose sexuality is still forming.

## Bacha Bazi

This is not the same subject as the section before it. As Susan Brownmiller argued in her 1975 book *Against Our Will*, sexual violence is a tool of power and control, not sex or desire. Let us be blunt about something that is an open secret across Pakistan, especially Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, peripheral parts of Punjab, including Southern Punjab, and the coal-mining districts of Balochistan: the sexual abuse of young boys by older men is not a marginal, infrequent phenomenon. It is a structured, semi-institutionalized practice with its own vocabulary, economy, and social codes.

Bacha bazi describes the sexual exploitation of pre-adolescent and adolescent boys by men of higher social and economic standing. A published academic study in the [Journal of Sex Research](#), based on fieldwork in Mingora, Swat, described the practice as functioning as a 'transactional economy and a culturally embedded expression of power and sexuality' in northwestern Pakistan. The research documented how poverty, class hierarchy, and constrained social possibilities structure the vulnerability of boys, who are coerced into sexual relationships with older men through a combination of financial inducement, social pressure, and outright force. An overview by the [Anti-Discrimination Centre Memorial](#) situates the practice within the Palermo Protocol's definition of human trafficking, and a Humanium child-rights briefing traces how decades of conflict and impunity institutionalized it across the wider region.



The Friday Times investigated how recruiters conned parents into sending their boys as young as six from KPK to coal mine areas, where they were exploited sexually, published in May 2026. The disturbing and thought-provoking [documentary 'Pakistan's Hidden Shame'](#) directed by Mohammed Ali Naqvi, uncovers most of this exploitative economy at the bus and truck terminals in Peshawar. It reports that makeshift lodges are set up every night to serve the needs of passing motorists, and runaway and homeless boys are bought by the lodge operators and sold to paying guests.

According to the documentary, about 95% of the truck drivers they interviewed said their favorite way to pass the time is sex with boys. It also chronicles the tale of a runaway boy who ends up in the terminal, only to become a drug addict and prostitute. A pattern of sexually victimizing younger boys ensued, repeated abuse by others, and then by himself, as he described, showing the cycle of sexual victimization. A comparable investigation, PBS Frontline's [The Dancing Boys of Afghanistan](#), documents the same practice just across the border and traces its modern resurgence to the mujahideen era — underscoring that this is a regional, not purely local, crisis.

According to Dawn, [Jinnah Park in Peshawar](#) is a hub of underage sexual exploitation, where men brag about “their boys,” and pimps operate openly and use coded signals. According to Sahil, more than [80%](#) of child abuse cases in Pakistan are underreported.

In 2025, around 3,630 cases of child abuse were reported — an 8% rise on the previous year, with children aged 11–15 the most vulnerable group and boys making up 47% of victims.

## The Vicious Circle: How Abuse Reproduces Itself

There is a pattern documented by researchers across Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the wider region that needs to be understood clearly: sexual abuse in childhood does not end when the abuse ends. It frequently reproduces itself. The abused child grows up carrying a shattered understanding of sexuality, boundaries, power, and intimacy. Without intervention, without therapy, without any framework for processing what happened to them, a significant proportion of survivors re-enact their abuse — sometimes as perpetrators.

This pattern is documented in the wider clinical literature, not only anecdotally. A review in The British Journal of Psychiatry found that roughly a third of sexual offenders in some clinical samples report a childhood history of being a victim themselves, while a longitudinal birth-cohort study testing the ‘sexually abused–sexual abuser’ hypothesis cautions that only a small minority of male survivors go on to abuse — the link is real but not deterministic, and stigma around this ‘myth’ itself silences disclosure. A neighbouring-region study of male child sexual abuse survivors in Bangladesh found extremely high rates of depression and suicide attempts among survivors, reinforcing how much is at stake when no therapeutic support exists.

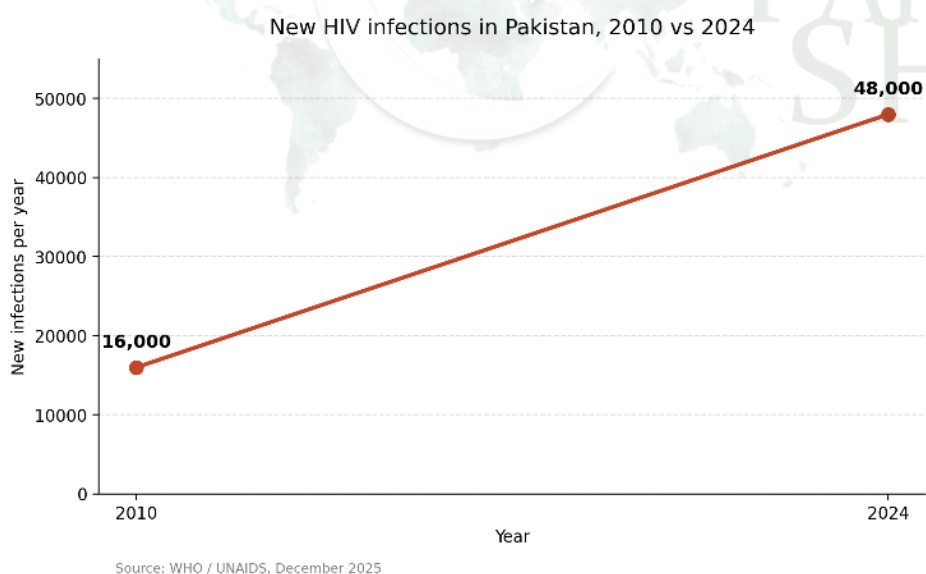
The child sent to a madrasa or to ‘learn’ under a local scholar is often sent because the family has no other options for his education. These families are not negligent. They are poor and trusting. And their trust is, in too many cases, catastrophically betrayed. The Qari Sahab abuses the child. That child grows up. And then, carrying his wound and his warped model of power, he may abuse the next child.

France 24’s [documentary investigators](#) found exactly this pattern inside Pakistan’s madrasas. A former pupil, now himself an abuser, bore witness to the cycle: he had been abused, had normalized it, and had gone on to abuse others. This is not inevitable — most survivors do not become abusers — but the conditions in Pakistan are almost designed to maximize the risk of the cycle continuing. There is no therapy. There is no support structure. There is a massive stigma attached to being a victim. And the model of sexuality that the abused child has internalized is one of power, secrecy, and violation.

The [AP’s 2017 investigation](#) found dozens of police reports from across Pakistan documenting rape, molestation, and physical abuse by madrasa clerics. [A high-profile 2023 case in Khanewal](#) documented a prayer leader and senior student gang-raping a nine-year-old boy. The head of the seminary and the student were arrested — because the victim’s uncle came forward. Most victims’ families never come forward. Many are pressured or paid to ‘forgive’ — legally permitted under Pakistan’s Qisas and Diyat provisions — sending the abuser back into the institution and back to the children.

# HIV and STDs: The Biological Consequence of the Silence

The physical consequences of Pakistan's silent sexual crisis are now measurable in disease data that should alarm every health official, every policymaker, and every parent in this country. Pakistan is currently home to one of the fastest-growing HIV epidemics in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region. [WHO and UNAIDS reported in December 2025](#) that new HIV infections in Pakistan rose by 200% over the last 15 years — from 16,000 new infections in 2010 to 48,000 in 2024. In the first nine months of 2024 alone, approximately 9,700 new infections were recorded. A [CDC systematic review of HIV outbreaks in Pakistan \(2000–2019\)](#) and a more recent *Retrovirology* (Springer) analysis of the current epidemiology both confirm the same trajectory: an epidemic moving from concentrated drug-use networks into the wider sexually active population.



Crucially, the nature of transmission is shifting. Where HIV in Pakistan once predominantly affected people who inject drugs, it is now spreading through sexual transmission — particularly among men who have sex with men, sex workers, and transgender individuals, and

increasingly into the general population through their sexual partners. MSMs (men who have sex with men) now account for [22% of people living with HIV in Pakistan](#), making them the second-largest group of those affected. A ScienceDirect critical appraisal of Pakistan's high-risk populations reaches the same conclusion from a review of roughly 700 studies, warning explicitly of spillover into the general population. A BMJ Open cross-sectional study of MSM and transgender women in Karachi further found alarmingly high rates of HPV co-infection tied to inconsistent condom use, and UNAIDS's own 'Be in the Know' country snapshot confirms new infections rose 84% between 2010 and 2020 alone.

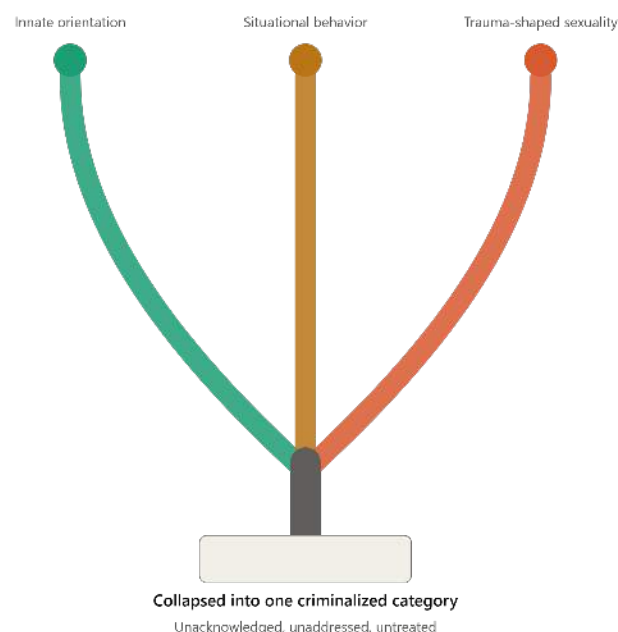
This is the biological signature of a society where a large number of men are having same-sex sexual encounters they will never acknowledge, using no protection, taking no precautions, getting no testing, and then going home to their wives. The HIV epidemic in Pakistan is, in significant part, a consequence of the pressure placed on gay and bisexual men to live entirely closeted lives — to marry, to perform heterosexuality — while their actual sexual behaviors continue in the darkness where there is no education, no healthcare engagement, and no safety.

Islamabad alone recorded [618 new HIV cases between January 2025 and March 2026](#) — an average of approximately 41 new cases per month, according to official Ministry of National Health Services data.

HIV does not respect moral declarations. It travels across the silence itself, through the denial, through the bodies of men who must pretend to be something they are not.

## Nature, Trauma, and the Question of Sexual Identity

One of the most contested and important questions in this entire landscape is: to what extent is the apparent prevalence of homosexual sexual behavior in Pakistan a reflection of innate sexual orientation, and to what extent is it a product of trauma, situational factors, and social structure?



Some Pakistani men experience same-sex attraction from the earliest moments of their sexual awareness. This is sexual orientation — it is not chosen, not learned, not cured, and not caused by pornography or abuse. These men exist. They have always existed. In a society that denies them any legitimate identity or expression, they find hidden ways to express themselves.

Simultaneously, there are Pakistani men whose same-sex sexual behavior is situational — a product of gender segregation, of the absence of access to women, of early sexual experiences with other males during adolescence. Some of these men would, given different social conditions, identify and behave as heterosexual. The hookup culture of anonymous same-sex encounters in gender-segregated environments is not identical to homosexual orientation.

And then there are the men whose sexuality was shaped — deformed, one might say — by early sexual trauma. The boy who was raped by a madrasa cleric at 9 did not choose his sexuality. Neither did the teenager whose first sexual experience was with an older male cousin, nor did the boarding school student whose sexual awakening happened in circumstances of coercion and fear. Their subsequent sexual behavior and identity are not simply 'homosexuality.' It is the sexuality of someone who was abused before they had any chance to discover who they actually were.

Pakistan refuses to engage in any of these discussions. It cannot recognize intrinsic homophilic feelings without criminalizing them. Without addressing gender segregation, it is impossible to recognize situational homophilia. Furthermore, it cannot accept trauma-shaped sexuality without addressing the widespread problem of child sexual abuse. As a result, the harm increases and nothing is acknowledged.

## From Platonic to Sexual: The Erosion of Innocent Intimacy

There is something genuinely valuable that is being lost in Pakistani youth culture, and it deserves to be mourned: the tradition of deep, non-sexual male friendship. Pakistani men have historically had access to a rich sphere of platonic intimacy — friendships of great emotional richness, physical closeness normalized by culture, bonds that lasted lifetimes. This is a genuine feature of traditional Pakistani social life that has real worth.

What is happening now is that the hyper sexualization driven by pornography and the hookup culture is colonizing this space. Young men no longer know how to have close male friendships without those friendships becoming sexualized — either in reality or in the anxiety about how they might be seen. The intimacy and closeness of traditional Pakistani male friendship is being corrupted by a sexual landscape that has no healthy grammar.

When the only models of male intimacy available to a teenager are pornographic content and anonymous Snapchat solicitations, the possibility of genuine platonic friendship becomes harder to access. This is a loss that doesn't yet have an adequate name, but it is real and important.

## Can Pakistan Reverse This Crisis? A Sober Assessment

Let's be truthful about the magnitude of the situation. A generation of young people in Pakistan has grown up with pornography as their primary source of guidance, exploitative digital sexuality, a lack of sex education, and sexual assault. HIV is spreading at a high rate. There are at least nine reported incidents of child sexual assault per day, and that is before accounting for the 80% Sahil says goes unreported. Bacha bazi is still widely used and deeply ingrained.

It is not reversible without confronting enormous resistance from powerful interests — religious lobbies that profit from the current madrasa system, political structures that depend on conservative social norms, and families that have built their honor systems on public denial of private realities. Pakistan's HIV epidemic will not plateau on its own. The cycle of abuse does not self-interrupt. The sexual confusion of a generation navigating desire in the dark does not resolve without light. Something must change, and the question is what and how. The time has come for religious scholars and liberals to take revolutionary action rather than get caught up in a confrontation.

Many conservatives believe that Western ideals have undermined and are destroying our traditional family structures. Another question must be raised: what have religious authoritarian forces had to offer except for an excessive focus on blasphemy laws, sectarian divisions, and mob violence? Rather than making excuses or engaging in blame games, Pakistan must have the courage to look at the facts without any hypocrisy. While engaged in unnecessary ideological warfare, it is essential not to ignore these structural social issues; otherwise, the crisis will only get worse.

Talking about it won't change it, and silence won't change it either. Silence comes at a price, and Pakistan has paid it for decades — in shattered childhoods, in the bodies that bear the burden of disease they were never taught to ward off, in men living double lives which damage everyone they touch. Naming the crisis — as this article has attempted — is the first act. What follows must be tangible: sex education that treats children as human beings who deserve real information, not silence dressed up as protection; institutions that investigate, prosecute, and punish offending clerics and abusers rather than turning a blind eye; public health measures on HIV that reach the men who are at risk, rather than pushing them aside as if they don't exist; and a national conversation honest enough to hold the complexity of trauma, orientation, culture, and poverty — without collapsing it into a single, comfortable villain. Talking about it will be awkward. It should be. It's comfort that brought us here.

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*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: [Patriarchy in Progress: Lack of Safety for Women in India](#)

Also read: [Pornography As a Non-traditional Security Threat in Pakistan](#)

# Acknowledging the Invisible: Judicial Recognition of Homemakers in South Asia & Saudi Arabia in the Middle East

About the Author



Zainab Fatima is a freelance contributor.

India has progressed significantly in providing homemakers with the financial independence they truly deserve but are often denied. In 2021, [118 million women from 12 states](#) across India began receiving cash stipends from state governments; what started as an election campaign manifesto became a small step towards a sense of independence for homemakers and an act of gratitude by the state for their unpaid work. As of now, 15 states in India are running this program.

While these welfare initiatives by state authorities have had a lasting impact on state policies, the judiciary has equally contributed to providing legal protections and recognition to homemakers on a national level. Recently, in what many characterize as a landmark ruling, the Indian Supreme Court recognized the contributions of “homemakers” in domestic settings as possessing “independent economic value.”

Shishu [Pal @ Shis Ram & Ors vs. Surjeet & Ors](#), a case that started as a regular road accident compensation case, ended up becoming one of India’s most celebrated judicial decisions of recent times. It restores the dignity and value that unpaid domestic workers, mostly women, have the right to as human beings and paves the way to mitigate the false stereotype that stay-at-home women are not socio-economic contributors. The Supreme Court’s ruling in this 20-year-long case also significantly reshaped the legal recognition and nature of contributions made by unpaid domestic caregivers.



# What Exactly Does It Mean?

According to the [United Nations](#), women across the world spend 16 billion hours doing unpaid domestic work and care, yet the value of this work remains structurally unrecognized in most parts of the world, and the social stereotype that they do not contribute to the economy often remains supported. The issue of low monetary compensation in cases involving the death of a “housewife,” or more generally, any individual who does not earn a wage but instead manages the household and cares for its members, was addressed in the judgment delivered in this case.

Previously, there had been multiple cases with similar facts; however, the courts rarely acknowledged the various non-pecuniary losses suffered by the surviving family members. Usually, the court merely determined and calculated the monetary loss to the family caused by the death of a caregiver or homemaker based on the expenses that would be incurred while hiring househelp to complete tasks that were otherwise taken care of by the deceased.

## UNPAID, UNSEEN, UNRECOGNIZED: THE HIDDEN VALUE OF WOMEN'S CARE WORK

Women around the world power economies and sustain families through unpaid care and domestic work—yet their contribution remains economically invisible and socially undervalued.



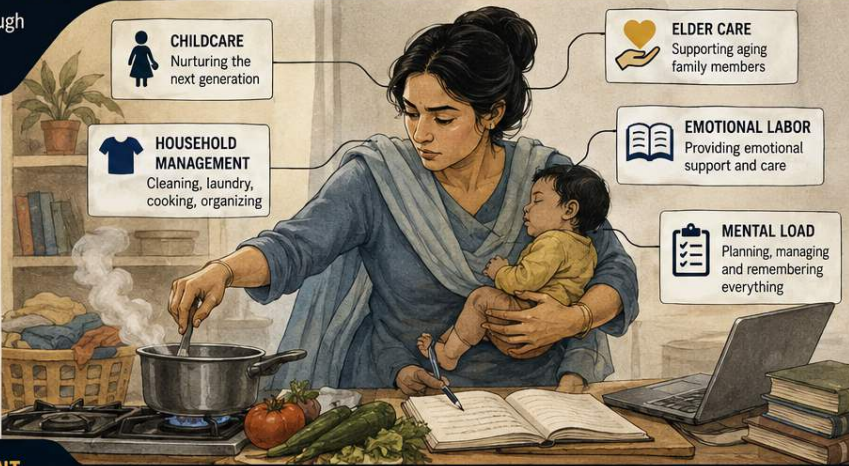
ACCORDING TO THE UNITED NATIONS

# 16 BILLION HOURS



Women across the world spend 16 billion hours doing unpaid domestic work and care.

**YET, THE VALUE OF THIS WORK REMAINS STRUCTURALLY UNRECOGNIZED IN MOST PARTS OF THE WORLD.**



- CHILDCARE**  
Nurturing the next generation
- HOUSEHOLD MANAGEMENT**  
Cleaning, laundry, cooking, organizing
- ELDER CARE**  
Supporting aging family members
- EMOTIONAL LABOR**  
Providing emotional support and care
- MENTAL LOAD**  
Planning, managing and remembering everything

### RECOGNIZING THE UNRECOGNIZED: A LANDMARK JUDGMENT

The courts have now acknowledged that the death of a homemaker or caregiver causes not just financial loss, but also deep, non-pecuniary losses to the family. This was addressed in a significant judicial ruling.



HOUSEWIFE IS NOT 'NON-EARNING'. SHE IS ECONOMY-BUILDING.



FAMILIES SUFFER EMOTIONAL, PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL LOSS.



COMPENSATION MUST REFLECT THE TRUE VALUE OF UNPAID CARE WORK.

#### THE OLD APPROACH: LIMITED AND INADEQUATE



In earlier cases with similar facts, courts rarely recognized the full scope of loss. Compensation was usually limited to the cost of hiring domestic help to do the tasks the deceased used to perform. The emotional, social and personal loss suffered by the family was largely ignored.



**UNPAID CARE WORK IS WORK.  
IT HAS VALUE. IT SUSTAINS LIVES. IT POWERS ECONOMIES.**

**IT IS TIME THE LAW RECOGNIZES WHAT SOCIETY IGNORES.**

Source: United Nations – 16 billion hours of unpaid care and domestic work: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/articles/faqs/faqs-what-is-unpaid-care-work-and-how-does-it-power-the-economy>

# The Judicial Stance Taken by the Indian SC

To determine the compensation for Ms. Shanti Devi's death, the court went above and beyond this time around, highlighting three main contributions that were previously neglected. Firstly, their contributions to the economy: it took into account the "Times Use Survey" of 2019, which suggested that the [contribution of women's unpaid domestic work was 15 to 17% of India's GDP](#).

Secondly, it highlighted the role of mothers and caregivers in transmitting the core sense of community and fostering the sense of social bonding that later sustains individuals as they become a part of the wider society, thus preparing the future "human capital." Lastly, it also emphasized the significant support homemakers provide to the family's income-earning members, both emotionally and materially, by relieving them of household chores and everyday responsibilities, thereby enabling them to focus entirely on earning a living.

Thus, in light of these considerations, the Supreme Court of India held that the monthly compensation for the death of a homemaker would be 30,000 Indian rupees per month. This judgment not only creates a precedent to be followed to ensure fair compensation for a homemaker's death, but it also achieves a much bigger milestone—that of elevating the social status of a non-earning homemaker by monetizing their contributions and by providing them with legal protections.

## How Does It Legally Protect Unpaid Domestic Workers?

While the ruling adequately addresses and recognizes the value and contributions of women in the domestic sphere, the question is whether it truly provides any practical legal protection to them or not. On the surface, it seems like the ruling concerns itself more with the protection of legal entitlements that a deceased homemaker's family should be provided with rather than with forming protections for the homemakers. However, that is not entirely true.

The ruling does protect these entitlement rights, but it also paves the way for easier access to compensation for women in divorce settlement cases, domestic abuse cases, and other domestic disputes. While not explicitly mentioned, the ruling has still skillfully addressed the issue of fair alimony by monetizing the worth of housework, providing a legal method for the courts to account for women's unpaid domestic labor when determining alimony.

## The Rest of the Subcontinent

This makes one wonder where Pakistan stands on such an issue, and what about other countries within the subcontinent? Bangladesh has stepped up in recent years to ensure the inclusion of homemakers in public financial systems by providing women from low-income households with stipends and other benefits.

On the other hand, Pakistan has barely ever acknowledged the need to bring structural change in the status of homemakers or provide them with legal



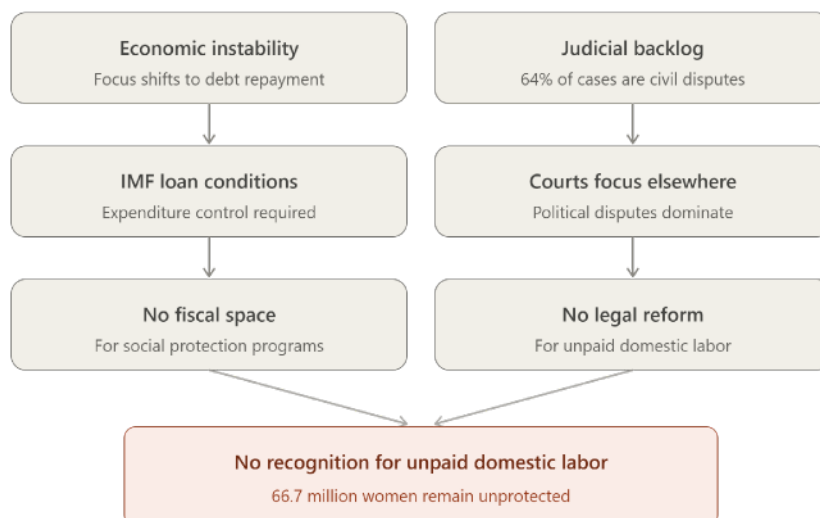
protections. The Benazir Income Support Program and the Ehsas Program may seem like initiatives targeted towards this issue; however, they are not. [BISP focuses on achieving the objective goal of providing financial assistance to low-income households](#) rather than focusing on integrating unpaid domestic workers into the country's economic structures.

Additionally, the state provides no legal protection to women who perform unpaid domestic labor, and while such schemes work wonders for lower-income households by providing the financial support necessary for survival, they cannot be considered as initiating the socio-legal change that the society truly requires to reshape the recognition that unpaid work by homemakers receives.

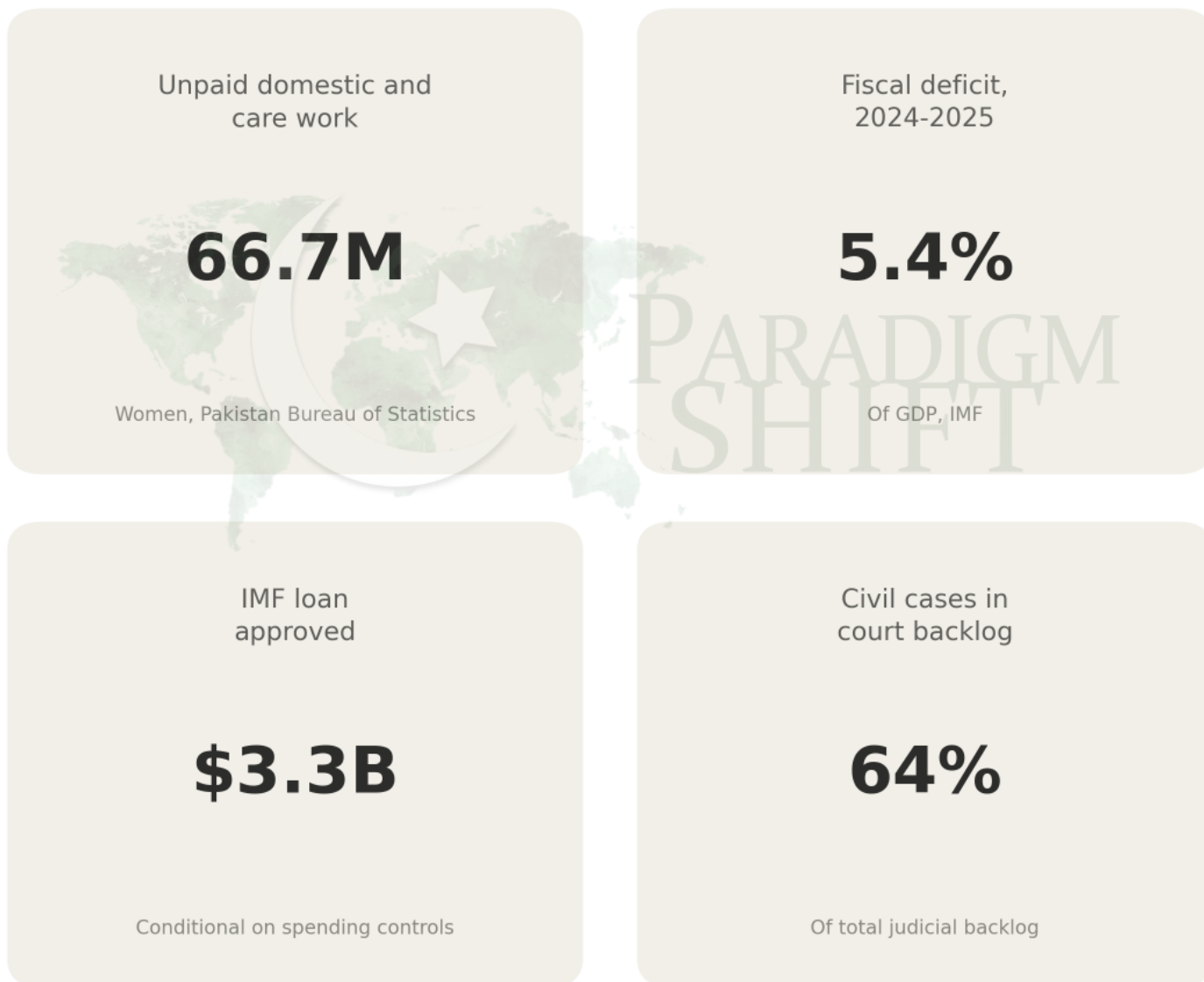
## What Stops Pakistan From Bringing Such Change?

According to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 66.7 million women participate in unpaid domestic and care work throughout the country, yet why is it that, unlike India or Bangladesh, Pakistan fails to recognize and bring change to their circumstances? The answer to that is a multi-layered one, with problems that align one after another creating a structural barrier towards substantial change.

First and foremost, the state of economic instability that the country has been dealing with for the past decade or more prevents the government from focusing on social development; rather, the focus is heavily towards paying off national debts. The overall fiscal deficit that Pakistan was under in the year 2024-2025 was 5.4% of the GDP, which leads the country into a vicious cycle of taking loans to prevent sliding into a default state and then trying to pay them off; in the midst of this, social concerns regarding development and change are completely sidelined due to pressures and expectations of the loaning parties.



The IMF, for example, [approved a total of 3.3 billion dollars in loans to Pakistan](#) under the condition that government expenditure remains controlled. Such arrangements between the government and the IMF have time and time again limited the expenditure that is truly required to initiate and enforce cashback programs for unpaid domestic labor; the main fields of focus for government expenditure remain defense, business, and infrastructural development.



Furthermore, unlike India, [civil cases in Pakistan make up 64% of the backlog in courts](#), which is more than half of the backlog, showing how the Pakistani judiciary's focus remains far from civil law and its reform. Lately, Pakistani courts have had their hands full with political disputes and a devastating shift in intra-judicial power dynamics with the introduction of the Federal Constitutional Court and sudden constitutional amendments.

This has led to a rift in the upper floors of our judicial structure, destabilizing the institution as a whole. While it is a nation's judiciary's responsibility to ensure that it takes notice of disadvantaged communities in society and brings substantial change to better their condition, it would not be wrong to suggest that our judiciary remains focused elsewhere. It is evident that with the judiciary's focus on political disputes and conflict within its own walls, it has no concern for problems faced on an individual level in society, let alone those faced by an invisible part of society that remains hidden behind four walls while contributing to the economy.

Thus, unlike neighboring countries, Pakistan remains miles behind in providing homemakers access to social and domestic protection mechanisms. Pakistan is yet to adopt comparable mechanisms that directly acknowledge and value homemakers' work, and to do that, our legal and legislative structures would have to step up and take notice of unpaid domestic labor and its contributions in society. Bridging this gap will require targeted policy-making for legal reform and judicial interest by the courts in the lives of individuals.

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# The Fragmentation of NATO: How Unilateralism is Forcing European Self-Reliance

## About the Author



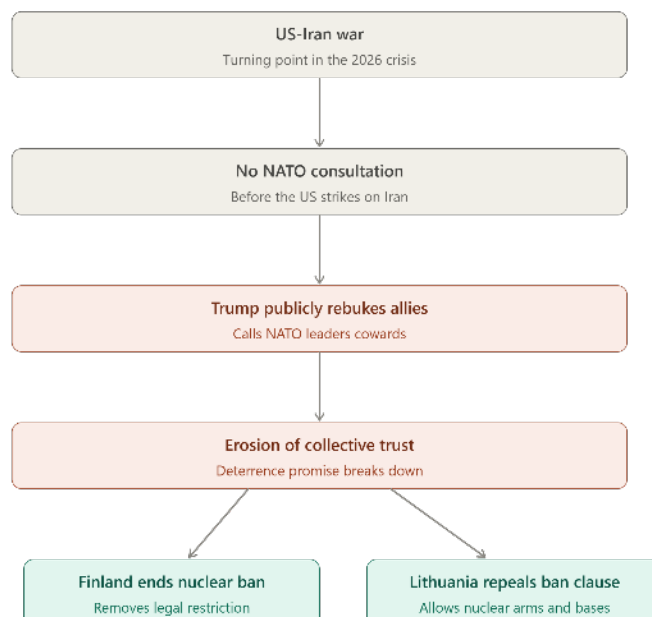
Khansa Waris is associated with the Center for Counter Terrorism and Violent Extremism, Institute of Regional Studies, Islamabad. She is a scholar of international relations from Government College University, Lahore.

# Lithuania's Nuclear Turn

On July 2, 2026, the lawmakers of Lithuania agreed to strip [Article 137](#) out of its constitution, the clause that banned nuclear weapons and foreign military bases from Lithuanian soil. Before Lithuania, [Finland](#) had already decided to lift its own legal restrictions on nuclear weapons. Two frontline NATO states, with borders close to Russia, decided to strengthen their borders themselves.

Their decision reveals that NATO members no longer fully trust the system that was built to protect them. For more than seven decades, NATO's real power was the promise that no member would have to face a threat alone. That promise depended on trust that Washington would always look up to its allies before any military invasion and trust that the burden of defense would be shared properly. In 2026, all these expectations were shattered at once.

The US-Iran war was the turning point. When the key NATO allies, including Germany, France, Italy, and the UK, said that there was [no consultation](#) by the US before the attacks and refused to help with the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz. President Trump called [allied leaders cowards publicly](#) and warned that Washington would "[never forget](#)" how they behaved.



NATO lacked a proper mechanism to manage this and resolved the disagreement. Lithuania's and Finland's decisions to allow nuclear weapons and foreign military bases on their soil were not conventional adjustments. It was the direct aftershock of this rift among the allies. States have admitted that collective deterrence alone is not enough, and they have to be self-sufficient for their own defense and national interests. In short, NATO lacked certainty in its decisions for the mutual benefits of members.

## From Collective Security to Strategic Autonomy

A similar kind of response is shown by Germany from a different angle. In May 2026, the Pentagon suddenly cancelled the planned US missile deployment to Germany. Chancellor Friedrich Merz did not wait for Washington to overlook its decision and, at the recent Ankara summit in July, announced its own deal to buy American [Tomahawk cruise missiles](#) and Typhon launchers. Germany is building an independent long-range strike force owned by Germans, funded by Germans and most significantly operated by the Germans because America can no longer be relied on during wartime to show up.

Poland is doing something parallel. Along with the United Kingdom and France, Warszawa has opened discussions on a European [nuclear-sharing](#) arrangement outside NATO's official structure. None of this is happening through NATO's collective machinery. It is happening in bilateral discussions and in national parliaments, because states no longer believe in the alliance's shared institutions to consult them when it is required.

## The Rise of Bilateral Defense Pacts

This is the real backdoor story of traditional photographs from the July [2026 Ankara summit](#). NATO's twelve-member Deep Precision Strike Pact and its [\\$50 billion](#) budget, signed by these twelve countries acting together, ignoring the alliance framework, are not unity. It is kind of [quietly replacing the existing](#) and already established working system. When members build their own nuclear weapons, their own missile stockpiles, and their own bilateral deals instead of working for collective reforms and betterment of NATO. As a result, the alliance cohesion is getting weaker and losing the trust of its member states as well.



**“2026 summit-nac 0045” by Stenbocki aja is licensed under [CC BY 4.0](#).**

NATO is [not finished yet](#); the main purpose of collective protection and mutual coordination is being renegotiated by bilateral agreements without any official platform. Lithuania and Finland did not leave the alliance by changing their laws; they just assumed that NATO’s promise of everyone’s security was not enough on its own. This is a more dangerous kind of crisis than an [official summit](#) because it is not revealed in a single meeting. It shows up years later, when allies understand that they have built their own defenses instead of a shared one to protect their borders.

If NATO wants to overcome these growing concerns, it needs more summits like this and a real and practical diplomatic rule that binds all the members to [consult](#) with each other before any major military operation. If Washington had consulted with European states before attacking Iran, the circumstances might be different. Lithuania's constitutional amendment was not a betrayal of NATO. It was a message NATO should be listening to very carefully.

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# The US–Israel Military Integration Bill (NDAA)

## About the Author



Syed Hammad Ali is pursuing a BS in International Relations programme from the International Islamic University, Islamabad, and has a keen interest in research works, policy analysis, defence and strategic studies, and conflict resolution.

# A New Chapter in the US-Israel Alliance

*"In preparing for war, I have always found that plans are useless, but planning is indispensable."*

*-Dwight D Eisenhower*

The US House has [passed](#) the most expensive bill in American history, and buried inside it is a provision that's dividing both parties. Lawmakers voted 216 to 212 to pass the fiscal year 2027 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) – a bill worth \$1.15 trillion. But the real controversy isn't the price tag; it's section 219, a measure that would merge American and Israeli military technology and supply chains.

Republican Congressman Thomas Massie put it bluntly, warning that the country should not be merging its military tech and supply chain with Israel's. He and Democrat Ro Khanna tried to strip the provision out entirely. Their amendment never even got a vote. Thus, once again the decades-long bromance between the US and Israel is in the limelight.

## What is the NDAA?

The National Defense Authorization Act will approve approximately \$1.15 trillion for defense spending, including pay increases of 5%-7% for military personnel, increased weapon and ammunition manufacturing, and additional spending on missile defense, [autonomous technologies](#), hypersonics, and other future technologies. It will also rename the Department of Defense as the Department of War, making any mention of the Secretary of Defense or the Department of Defense in any legislation refer to the Secretary of War and the Department of War.

## What does Section 219 of the bill say?

Section 219 of the bill actually creates a permanent Pentagon position just to oversee joint weapons development and expanded intelligence sharing with Israel, giving Israel a level of military integration most NATO allies don't even have.

Section 219 provides for the creation of an initiative called the “United States–Israel Defense Technology Cooperation Initiative.” Under this project, jointly developed or Israeli-developed technologies that could be integrated into the United States system would be identified; collaborative research programs involving both governments, industry, and academe from both countries should safeguard “sensitive technology”; and finally, military efforts in coordination with the Department of Defense, which includes the Irregular Warfare Technical Support Directorate, Defense Innovation Unit, Missile Defense Agency, and United States Space Command, among others, would be pursued.



The voting was largely done on party lines, though there were exceptions. Six Democrats voted for the measure, while one Republican voted against it. It will go before the Senate, where Senator Bernie Sanders has already registered his objection to it.

## Is It a Merger or Integration?

In various media outlets and reports, this bill passed by the US House is being portrayed as the merger of US-Israeli military tech. However, to simply say it's a '*merger*' is not accurate at all. Because what this is is a further '*integration*' of the US and Israeli defense technology sectors, acquisition pipelines, the research and development systems, and operational planning. In literal terms, a merger means a legal accord where two independent entities combine to form a new legal entity.

Whereas integration means to blend the ongoing work or systems under a novel deal or agreement. Thus, the recently passed bill is not an inflection point; rather, it's just a further integration, doing it in such a way that it becomes harder to dismantle and separate. So, militaries are not being merged. If we look at the [relationship](#) of the US and Israel specifically from the 1950s onwards, we can see that this is naturally the next phase of what this relationship looks like for over 60-70 years as well.

## Is AIPAC Once Again in Action?

Since the inception of the US-Iran war this year, the American-Israeli partnership has been witnessing a continuous up-and-down trajectory where it seems like, for the first time in history, both allies have been pursuing [divergent](#) regional policies. The rapidly changing public opinion throughout the world, and in particular the US, about Israel and its atrocities against humanity, especially in Gaza, has created a wave of hatred not only against Zionists but also against those who support or adore them.

Moreover, Trump's recurring remarks about the US's superiority in the region, forcing Israel to halt attacks in Lebanon, establishing nominal peace in Gaza, resuming F-35 sales to Turkey, and most recently concluding a nuclear deal with Saudi Arabia were all hinting towards one thing: if not altered completely, the relationship between the two partners is now deteriorating. In an interview in May 2026, PM Netanyahu explicitly stated that Israel now wants to drop the American financial aid to zero.

Likewise, US VP JD Vance, while appearing on Joe Rogan's podcast, accepted the fact that Israel has been spying on US officials and that it has significant influence in American politics. However, all this suddenly shifted when the US House successfully passed the integration bill. It seems like when all cards were going against the Israeli perspective, the Israeli [AIPAC](#) played its part, bribing both the Republicans and the Democrats in the House. And what most of the analysts fear is that such close integration with Israel would expose classified US defense tech to Israelis, which could be used against humanity disproportionately, and then the US would not be able to halt any single piece of ammunition.

*"It's just making it more palatable [for Israelis to say], 'Well, we're not asking; we don't have to ask for money anymore because we're partners in this,'"* Ivan Ingraham, a former United States Marine Corps special operations officer, said in an interview with Middle East Eye. Moreover, the visit of Netanyahu to Washington on 28th July 2026 would further clarify the upcoming trajectory.

## Perils and Pitfalls

- The deeper the military integration, the smaller Washington's strategic exit options. This bill would become an Israeli trap for the US.
- Rather than deterring Iran, the bill may intensify confrontation. Continuous pressure from the nuclear deal with the Saudis and now military integration with Israel would only exacerbate the situation.
- One state's pursuit of security often makes others feel less secure. If the US were doing so, the others would follow suit. One might see a more institutionalized Iran-Russia or China partnership.
- As the US has [identified](#) China as its primary long-term strategic competitor, every additional commitment in the Middle East comes at an opportunity cost elsewhere—a clear diversion from America's Indo-Pacific Strategy.
- Moreover, this bill, if passed successfully in the Senate, could result in a civil war in the US, where the public might appear on the streets against the decision.

## Conclusion

Security is rarely free; every guarantee carries a strategic cost. The NDAA has fallouts for both the American domestic situation and the regional status quo. By passing such bills, the US is itself proving the very fact that it's Tel Aviv that controls Washington. In spite of the fact that public opinion is changing, regional order is now in Iran's favor, and a [multipolar moment](#) has finally arrived, the US is sticking to its traditional realist mindset. The hijacking of American politics by Israelis has now become a burden for Americans themselves. Thus, there is a need for a new regional order where no single party (traditionally Israel) enjoys sole superiority in the Middle East.

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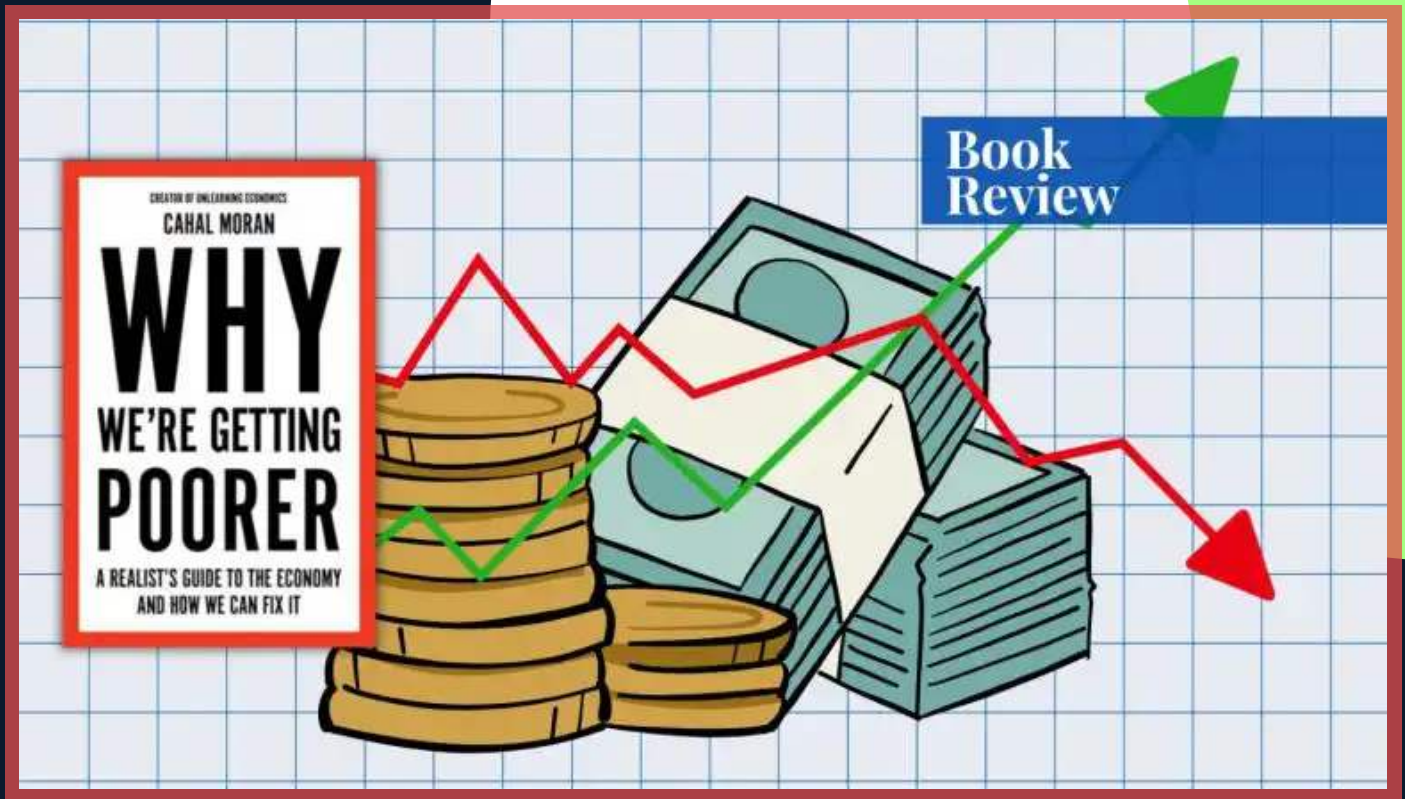
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# Why We're Getting Poorer: A Realist's Guide to the Economy and How We Can Fix It

## About the Author

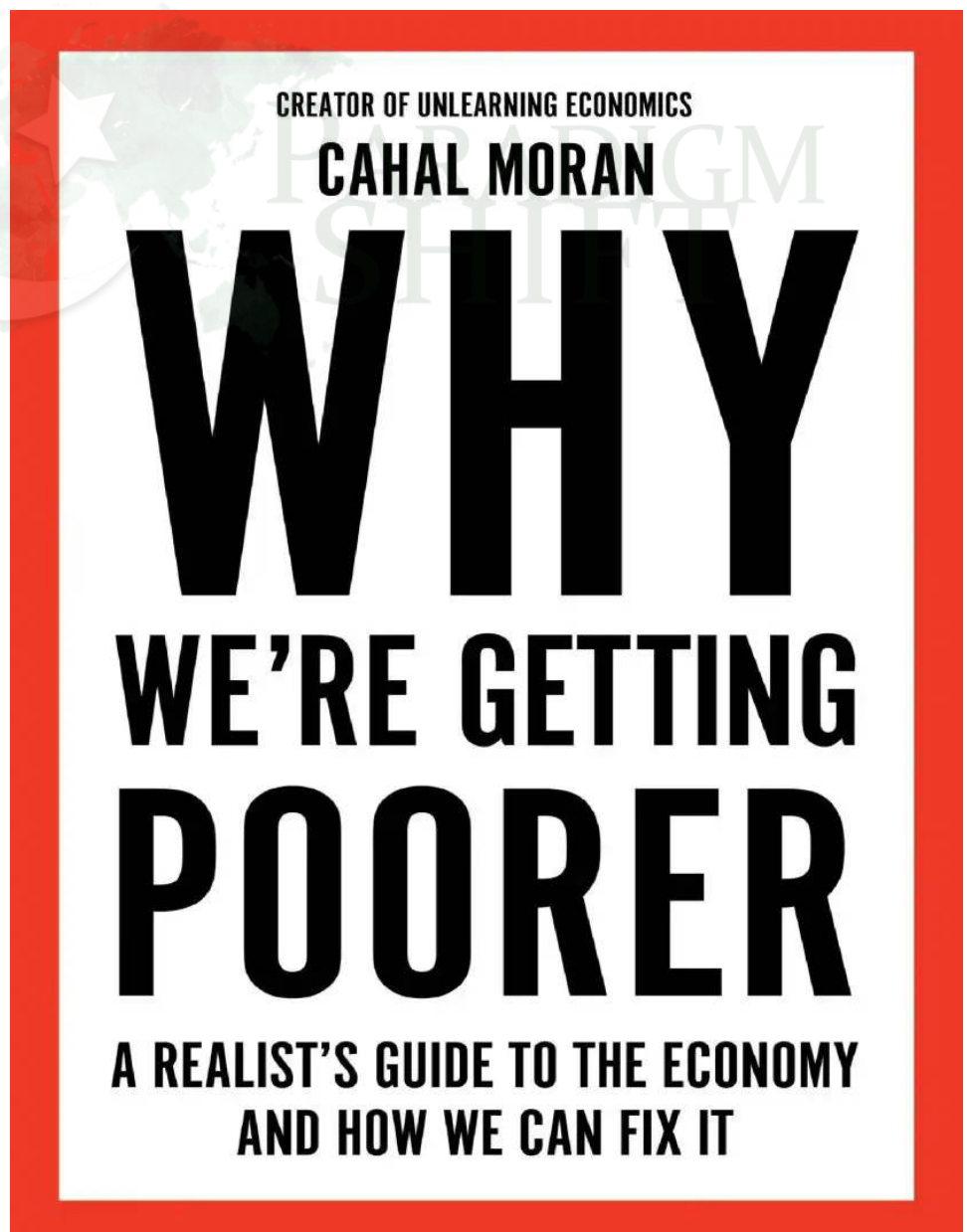


Dr. Ahsan Abbas is Director at the Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies (CASS), Lahore, Pakistan. He can be reached at [info@casslhr.com](mailto:info@casslhr.com).

## The Core Premise

The book, *Why We're Getting Poorer: A Realist's Guide to the Economy and How We Can Fix It*, is written by Cahal Moran, a behavioural economist and Fellow at the London School of Economics. He is also the founder of the popular YouTube channel *Unlearning Economics*. This book was published in 2025, and it is a timely and accessible contribution to heterodox economic thought. The author opens with a candid autobiographical frame of his adult life that has been defined by a succession of economic crises, such as the 2007–9 Global Financial Crisis, austerity, Brexit, the Covid-19 pandemic, supply chain disruptions, and the cost of living crisis.

The writings state that this relentless sequence of shocks does not happen because of unavoidable accidents, but rather because of the systematic design of any economy. The book covers all these themes and sketches the alternatives as well.



This book consists of three parts, including the “Uneven Economy,” which highlights who is important for the economy and who gets the reward and, similarly, how the billionaires are protected with the consequences faced by society at large. The second part of the book includes the “Dysfunctional Economy.” In this section, the book explores the four areas where economies face failure, such as housing, money creation, inflation, and global supply chains. Similarly, the last part of the book is “Redefining the Economic Landscape,” which is a conclusion that both political and economic reforms are necessary for the overall progress and governance of any economy.

*Why We’re Getting Poorer* highlighted the idea that the economy consists of a complex web of practices, laws, and institutions that are shaped by the choices required. These choices have consistently and disproportionately favoured the already wealthy and powerful. The book’s title requires an immediate qualification that the author is quite careful to make. He does not argue that people are getting poorer in the absolute sense, though he acknowledges that many still are. His claim is more precise and arguably more troubling. According to him, most people across the globe are considerably poorer than they could and should be, given the productive capacity in accordance with a modern economy. The gap between what is possible and what most people actually experience is, for Moran, not an accident of nature but a failure of design.

## Unpacking the Paradox: Undervalued Labor vs. Billionaire Influence

Moran is at his most persuasive in Part I, where he uses the Covid-19 pandemic as an organising lens. The coronavirus lockdowns made starkly visible what wage structures habitually conceal, without which labour society cannot survive, including healthcare workers, farmers, logistics drivers, sanitation workers, and food retailers. They are consistently among the worst-paid members of the workforce, earning on average some 15 per cent less than other workers in the US alone.

A major part of the economy is mainly derived from bankers and investors, whereas their absence does not attract public attention. These investors decide labour wages based on their working capacity; normally, we may say based on productivity. The juxtaposition of [Goldman Sachs receiving \\$125 billion in public bailout](#) funds while its CEO publicly claimed his employees were among the most productive people on earth provides a particularly sharp illustration of this contradiction.

Furthermore, why are there so many billionaires? Moran stated that between 1990 and 2000, being a millionaire was worth talking about. However, from 2000 to 2022, the number of millionaires has grown rapidly with their wealth, from \$41 trillion to \$222 trillion, far faster than inflation. Being a millionaire no longer counts: billionaires are the ones who rule the economy and big corporations today. In 2024, 2,781 billionaires controlled a total wealth of \$14.2 trillion. The growth of so much wealth in one private man's favour is not only personally successful but also represents a fundamental change in money and power around the world.



Famous personalities/owners of big companies, for instance, Bernard Arnault, Jeff Bezos, and [Elon Musk](#), are examples of people whose wealth gives them influence over industries, labour conditions, media, and political debate, and even over the rules that govern markets themselves. In other words, wealth is a form of control, not only a high bank balance.

At the same time, control is maintained through structural mechanisms, instead of personal greed alone. But this is not the end. Weakening of anti-monopoly laws and use of intellectual property protection by dominant firms and capture of political lobbying help billionaires to maintain and expand their power. Extensive growth of wealth, an indication of an economy that is organised for the protection of wealth, causes high inequality, and it is a systematic issue instead of any incident.

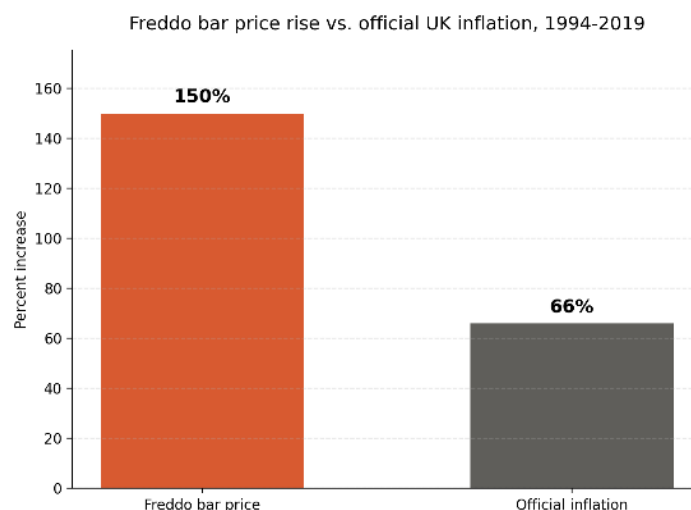
Throughout Part I of *Why We're Getting Poorer*, Cahal Moran uses the German economic model as a productive counter-example. Germany's system of worker representation on corporate boards (*Mitbestimmung*) is a network of locally owned credit cooperatives, none of which required a bailout during the 2007–9 financial crisis, while its geographically dispersed industrial base serves as evidence that economies can be organised in ways that distribute their benefits more widely/evenly without undermining growth.

The chapter on meritocracy extends this argument, demonstrating by research from the United Kingdom, the US, and beyond that social mobility is far more constrained by class background, educational access, and entrenched prejudice than the dominant ideology of individual effort and reward. In the UK, a worker from a privileged background earns, on average, 25 per cent more than a comparable worker from a disadvantaged or marginalised class. Furthermore, it explains the reliability of the measurement standard adopted by the World Bank. The reduction in poverty in these statistics does not highlight the real improvements in living standards.

# Institutional Failures: From Housing Crises to Inflation Myths

The second part of *Why We're Getting Poorer* examines the part of the economy where institutions fail to uphold basic operational effectiveness. The housing chapter observes that a 2023 survey of 94 housing markets across the developed world found every single one to be some variety of “unaffordable”. It is a remarkable indictment of what is perhaps the most fundamental economic need beyond food. According to Moran, this is due to the fusion of housing and land subsequent to deregulation, commercial banks’ acquisition of the mortgage market, and the financing of property. His policies of social housing, Community Land Trusts, and land value taxes are logical but perhaps innovative. Most of the circulating money is not created by the government, but it is circulating through the banking system. This banking system consists of the credit creation mechanism, which is complex to understand for the public.

One of the book’s most interesting chapters is on the topic of inflation, which shows how official inflation statistics consistently understate the cost of living, especially faced by the lower segment of society. Their spending or expenses significantly differ from the national average. The book referenced a case of the British Freddo chocolate bar, a frog-shaped treat that for many years has been sold for 10 pence, which is regarded as a good test of reasonable pricing. Between 1994 and 2019, the price of Freddo increased by 150%, which is double the increase in official UK inflation (66%).



Source: *Why We're Getting Poorer*, cited UK inflation data

The author puts forward these examples to back a larger heterodox thesis: that greater rates of interest needed to fight inflation are a simplistic and retrogressive policy. It disproportionately affects mortgage holders, small business owners, and people in precarious jobs, while hardly hitting the asset-rich class and the elite. The analysis suggests more focused options, namely investments to increase production capacity, subsidies, and profit and price caps. Against this backdrop, the author has quoted Spain's reaction to the energy inflation following the war in Ukraine as an example.

## Critical Evaluation

The book's claim that the economy is a political arrangement to be disputed rather than a natural system to be observed is its most important intellectual contribution. The author illustrates the ubiquity of decisions that orthodox economics frequently portrays as inevitable by presenting this argument on such a wide range of subjects, from corporate governance to home tenure to monetary sovereignty.

His examination of the global supply chain crisis, framed through the worsening working conditions of American truck drivers, provides a striking illustration of how the very workers who supply the flexibility necessary to keep intricate logistics systems operating have had their working conditions deteriorated to the point where the systems' resilience is compromised. The book's language is continuously captivating, with examples ranging from the German Bundesliga's fan ownership model to LVMH's extractive tactics throughout northern France. The analysis is quite rich in terms of historical contexts and uses relevant statistics on economic indicators.

However, the book is not free from limitations. The ambitious and simple writing outweighs the analytical rigour. For example, certain important issues such as global governance, the political economy of tax reform, and the structural imbalances and relevant reasons causing the 2008 global financial crisis need more conscious attention because they cover three key addressed aspects of inequality, dysfunction, and reform.

Pertinently, in Part III, the policy recommendations are plausible in terms of democratic spirit but naively optimistic and inadequately address the political economy of reform. Moran's acceptance of slow development when facing opposition is the result of an afterthought instead of an integral part of the study. Similarly, the idea of regulating inflation through collective bargaining, exemplified in the book, is not unconventional or unusual in concept. However, the institutional preconditions as well as the peculiar historical experience of the UK's economy for such a strategy with income programmes are not properly attempted in this regard.

The book also has a pronounced Anglo-American orientation. Although Moran draws on international examples of Spain, Finland, Germany, Brazil, and West Africa, they typically function as illustrations of problems experienced primarily in the UK and the US, or as models from which those countries might learn. Readers from different regions, for instance, Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Latin America, may notice that major structural forces influence their economies, like commodity dependency, dollar hegemony, and IMF conditionality. However, the transformation of wealth is acknowledged, but not placed at the centre of the analysis. These global domains remain secondary in the book, instead of a primary focus such as the internal dynamics and policy failures of Western, particularly Anglo-American, capitalism.

For readers already versed in heterodox economics, such as post-Keynesian, institutionalist, or political economy traditions, this book will cover familiar ground without much that is analytically novel. It is best suited to the educated non-specialist: policy professionals, students at the onset of their knowledge of political economy, or curious and engaged readers who have lived through the past fifteen years of economic turbulence and want a coherent framework for making sense of it.

To conclude, *Why We're Getting Poorer* is an honest, well-intentioned, and often illuminating contribution to the growing body of accessible heterodox economic writing. Its greatest service is to make visible the political choices embedded in economic arrangements that mainstream discourse too often presents as neutral or inevitable. The argument that the economy is simultaneously uneven and systematically favouring the wealthy as well as dysfunctional, failing to deliver even on its own terms, is a useful and well-sustained organising framework.

Its weaknesses, however, include limited policy depth, an Anglo-American bias, and a tendency to survey rather than excavate complex terrain, reflecting the constraints of its genre rather than fundamental analytical failures. *Why We're Getting Poorer* is ideally suited for young people seeking to understand the economic forces shaping their lives. Moreover, it is useful for educated readers who are confused by economic concepts and frustrated by prevailing economic outcomes. Additionally, the book is quite interesting for those readers who are willing to consider an alternative approach to understanding the present moment. Nevertheless, the book is written with genuine moral seriousness about whose interests the economy serves.

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Human rights  
defenders estimate that  
**roughly**  
**1,000 women**  
are murdered in  
so-called  
**“honor killings”**  
every year.

Source: Human Rights Watch



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Opinion

# What if Water Became the New Oil?

About the Author



Azhar Ud Din is a student of international relations at Government College University, Lahore.

This year, all eyes are on artificial intelligence stocks and oil markets. Water, by contrast, draws little attention, despite a quiet transformation taking place. Clean water infrastructure, long seen as a cost borne by charities or governments, may finally be gaining recognition as a tangible financial asset. The shift is not driven by breakthrough technology, but by the real-world application of a climate policy that has been on the books for years: Article 6 of the Paris Agreement.

Under Article 6.2, countries can collaborate on emissions targets by trading verified reductions across borders, as described in the [official UNFCCC Article 6 overview](#). For example, a solar-powered water purification system that replaces wood-burning stoves can generate an internationally recognized credit known as an Internationally Transferred Mitigation Outcome, or ITMO. As of December 2025, over 100 bilateral agreements involving more than 60 nations had been established under this framework, according to a [legal analysis by Addleshaw Goddard](#). Meanwhile, Article 6.4 has already issued its first credits, one from a cookstove initiative in Myanmar in February 2026, as reported by AlliedOffsets.



In practice, this means that reducing carbon emissions by preventing wood combustion can be measured, verified, and turned into a tradeable asset. A company or country can purchase these credits to meet climate goals. Suddenly, a water purification unit

is more than a public health tool. It is a small-scale instrument for reversing emissions.

The financial case for such projects typically hinges on credit pricing. At low prices, projects barely break even; at higher ones, they become economically compelling. While this logic holds in theory, reality is messier. In 2026, voluntary carbon credit prices vary widely. Ecosystem Marketplace estimated an average of six dollars per tonne in 2025, but corporate buyers seeking high-quality, verified credits often pay significantly more, between twenty-five and eighty euros per tonne, through curated portfolios, according to [Senken's 2026 market report](#). Gold Standard notes that water and cookstove initiatives, due to their co-benefits in health and social development, frequently command higher prices than standard renewable energy projects, sometimes valued well beyond the carbon reduction alone, as outlined in their pricing research.



Gold Standard also estimates that water-related carbon projects globally could deliver over 1.6 billion tonnes in annual emission reductions, potentially unlocking 160 billion dollars in investment over 20 years at a ten-dollar average credit price, based on their [decarbonizing water report](#). This figure is credible and cited, helping explain why investor interest is growing, even if the sector remains under the radar.

Still, caution is warranted. Projects using solar devices to displace wood burning closely resemble clean cookstove initiatives, which have faced serious criticism. A 2024 peer-reviewed study from the University of California, Berkeley, published in *Nature Sustainability*, found that cookstove projects were, on average, credited more than nine times their actual impact, as reported by [Carbon Market Watch](#). Gold Standard challenged the study's methods, and the debate continues. But one outcome is clear: the Integrity Council for the Voluntary Carbon Market has since rejected several older cookstove methodologies and approved new ones requiring direct, sensor-based monitoring of fuel use and device operation, rather than assumptions, as detailed by [Climate Change News](#).

This shift is critical for any water project seeking carbon finance. Going forward, only those using digital sensors, satellite tracking, and automated reporting, rather than usage estimates, are likely to withstand scrutiny from investors and regulators. As outlined in technical guides from organizations like RMI, this is the direction the sector must take to be seen as a legitimate financial asset, not just a sustainability talking point.

None of this suggests the concept is illusory. Rather, it is still in its early stages, and early stages are precisely when careful evaluation matters most. A water purification system that demonstrably reduces wood burning delivers real benefits: cleaner air, reduced deforestation, and safer drinking water for households that previously lacked both. If the emissions savings can be verified with reliable, objective data, not projections, and sold into markets that value integrity over volume, then the financial models start to look feasible, not fanciful.

The realistic takeaway is not that clean water will inevitably become the next major asset class. It is that the foundational elements-Article 6 frameworks, robust verification methods, and buyers willing to pay for genuine impact- are now in place for the first time. Whether any given project fulfills that potential depends on one fundamental factor, common to all credible climate investments: can you prove, with indisputable data, that the emissions reduction actually occurred? That question, more than any price tag, will determine whether clean water becomes a lasting balance sheet asset, or just another idea that sounded good on paper.

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Article

AFGHANISTAN

KH

PAKTIKA

# Rethinking Pakistan's Afghan Refugee Policy

## About the Author



Hifsa Nadeem is associated with leadership and mentorship initiatives and has an academic interest in human rights and contemporary social issues.

Afghan Refugee management is no longer a humanitarian issue – it is a defining test for Pakistan’s policy oversight. The gradual influx of refugees has pushed Pakistan to the crossroads, where the question lies in balancing humanitarian responsibility with national concerns. Every repatriation is a reflection- not only about migration but about the nation’s institutional and regulatory measures.



**Afghan Refugees**

## Recent Developments in Repatriation Drive-July 2026

Pakistan commenced a new initiative on 10 July, aimed at identifying, detaining, and deporting Afghans lacking valid visas, as migrants in Islamabad observed a rise in police checkpoints and heightened scrutiny of documents. This enforcement initiative follows a directive from Pakistan’s Interior Ministry issued over a week ago to provincial governments, special administrative regions, and authorities in the Islamabad Capital Territory. The instruction urged local officials to expedite the identification, detention, and deportation of Afghans without appropriate visas.

The implementation of this measure has raised concerns among Afghans residing in Pakistan, including refugees and asylum seekers, who express fears of arrest and involuntary repatriation to Afghanistan. According to statistics mentioned by Pakistan’s Interior Ministry and the [United Nations refugee agency](#), over 1.1 million Afghans have returned from Pakistan since the onset of 2025. United Nations figures also show that nearly 2.4 million Afghans returned from Pakistan between September 2023 and the end of May 2026.

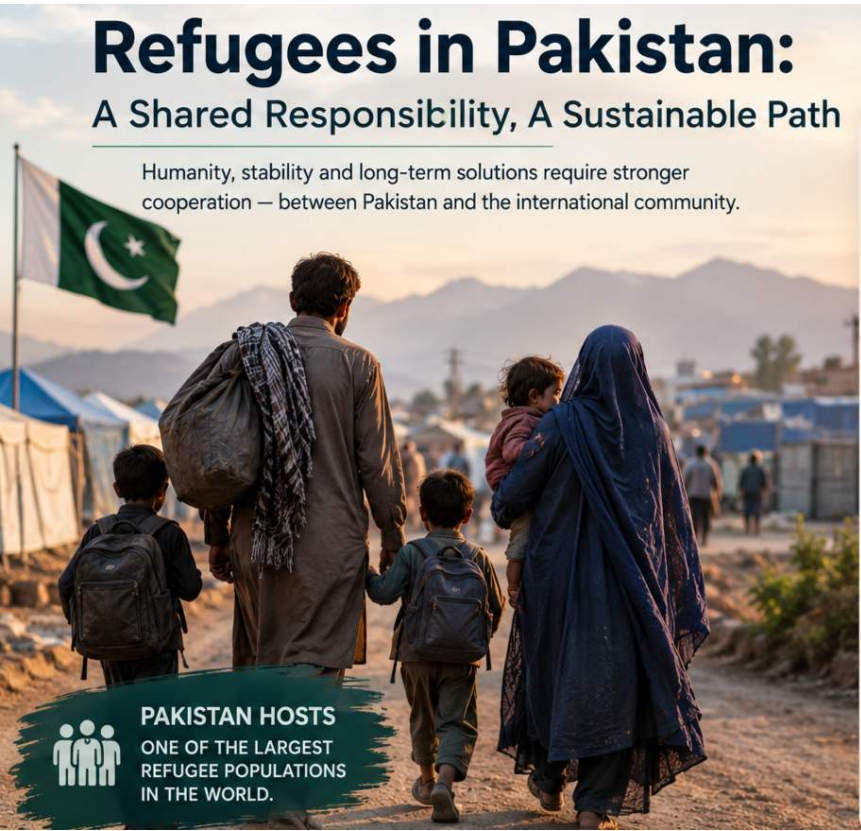
## Towards a Balanced Afghanistan Refugee Policy

As Pakistan is the host to one of the [largest refugee populations](#), it is a need of the hour to consider actionable steps for sustainable and humane policies. The absence of any national refugee law, marked by a difficult asylum-seeking process, has no doubt exacerbated the refugee crisis. On the other hand, this influx has caused demographic, security, and economic dilemmas. The recommendations emphasize the need for better and strategic collaboration between Pakistan and other international organizations to ensure long-term solutions for Afghan refugees and the host country as well.

# Refugees in Pakistan:

## A Shared Responsibility, A Sustainable Path

Humanity, stability and long-term solutions require stronger cooperation — between Pakistan and the international community.



**PAKISTAN HOSTS**  
ONE OF THE LARGEST  
REFUGEE POPULATIONS  
IN THE WORLD.

### THE CHALLENGE

No national refugee law leads to a difficult asylum-seeking process.

This has worsened the refugee crisis.

### THE IMPACT

#### Demographic

Changes in population and social dynamics.

#### Security

Increased risks and pressure on resources.

#### Economic

Strain on jobs, services and infrastructure.

### THE WAY FORWARD

Stronger and more strategic collaboration between Pakistan and international organizations to ensure long-term solutions for Afghan refugees and the host country.



PAKISTAN



INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS



SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS

# Introducing a National Legal Framework

Refugees in Pakistan are governed by two legal statutes, the Tripartite Agreement and the Foreigners Act 1946, which was amended in 2001. The Foreigners Act states that refugees are not entitled to Pakistan's citizenship. No provision of law or agreements allows for legal citizenship status to refugees. Therefore, it can be said that Pakistan has allowed the entry of refugees not on legal grounds but based on humanitarian grounds. It is imperative to enact comprehensive national asylum legislation to deal with future scenarios.

The legislation should be based on the following features:

1. Rights guaranteed to refugees: This framework should clearly highlight the rights given to refugees, including healthcare, education, employment, etc.
2. Compatibility with International Law: Although Pakistan is not a signatory state to the 1951 Convention on Refugees and 1967 Protocol, legislation enacted should be based on international humanitarian standards.
3. Clear asylum procedures: The law should state clear procedures followed by transparency, fairness, and accountability in granting asylum

Enacting a proper piece of legislation is crucial for establishing predictable frameworks for protecting the rights and clarifying the obligations for better refugee management in Pakistan.

## Fostering Global Participation in Refugee Management

Of equal importance is International Responsibility sharing. The international community shall focus on burden sharing at the global level, particularly by wealthier nations. The Global Compact on Refugees calls for burden sharing. This Compact has a purpose to respond to the world's large-scale displacement by considering the principle of international responsibility sharing and highlighting the protection, assistance, and pursuit of comprehensive solutions. This Compact has different dimensions, which include: easing pressure and burden on the host states, elements of self-reliance of refugees, access to safe solutions for the issues, support conditions, and mechanisms for safe return.

Pakistan should actively engage in different forums for this cause to get the much-needed support. Both states' relevant institutions must agree and communicate long-term goals and solutions around migrant management and Afghan refugee policies. This could lead to the betterment of diverse frameworks and different implementation mechanisms for internationally recognized solutions to the refugee crisis. The U.S and other stable states should consider diversifying their humanitarian aid portfolio for Afghan refugees residing in Pakistan, along with the assistance of UNHCR and the government of Pakistan.

## Revitalizing Solution Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR)

A comprehensive conceptual and operational framework such as the Solution Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR) is the need of the hour. Such new frameworks will help and assist in reconciling the concerns and needs of host countries such as Pakistan, including the convergence of interests of all stakeholders and bringing tangible and productive benefits for entire communities in

refugee-

majority

areas.

This can be

achieved by

strengthening

social and

physical

health.

infrastructure,

offsetting the

negative

impacts of protracted refugee presence on the weak environment and local economies



## Civil Society as a Partner in Refugee Management

Strong civil society engagement can also prove beneficial in this regard. This requires positive participation and productive engagement of a variety of civil society actors. National and international NGOs should be proactively involved in developing refugee-specific protection portfolios and play a role in their effective implementation. Furthermore, these active bodies can ensure that measures are undertaken to build the capacity of the vulnerable, as well as the delivery of services in remote areas or places inaccessible to other stakeholders.



The engagement of civil society can prove beneficial, as evidenced by current approaches; for instance, in Iran, the International Consortium for Refugees and the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief seek to ensure effective coordination and joint advocacy. Pakistan should seek

to adopt international administrative practices within a security-conscious and rights-based compliant structure.

## Final Reflections

To meet the demands of both the host nation and the refugees, Pakistan’s recent repatriation policy for Afghan refugees needs to be revised strategically. It is a fact that Pakistan, one of the main destinations for Afghan migrants, has its own set of difficulties, such as civil unrest, security issues, and economic hardship. Afghan refugees continue to live in unstable circumstances with little access to opportunities, resources, or rights at the same time. A balanced repatriation policy is essential to properly handle these problems.

Returnees would be guaranteed access to fundamental services like housing, healthcare, and education through a voluntary, gradual process that is coordinated with the Afghan government and foreign organizations like the UNHCR. Pakistan can meet its humanitarian commitments and solve its internal problems more effectively with an updated, comprehensive repatriation strategy.

It is an undeniable reality that compulsion and coercive means can never provide sustainable and long-lasting solutions to the crisis. Pakistan must focus on dialogue, legal safeguards, and cooperative strategies.

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# Why Registrations for the CSS Examination Are Declining in Pakistan

## About the Author



Muhammad Hamza Tanveer is a political analyst specialising in South Asian and Middle Eastern affairs. His work focuses on religious nationalism, regional security, and minority rights. He has been featured in *Stratheia*, *Pakistan Today*, *Pakistan Observer*, and the *Asian Mirror*. He is also working as a research analyst and political commentator for *Paradigm Shift* and contributes to the monthly magazine of *Nearpeer*.

For many years, the [civil services](#) have been one of the most sought-after careers in Pakistan. The Federal Public Service Commission (FPSC) conducts the CSS exam in February every year. Thousands of aspirants from across the country join different CSS preparatory institutes, investing roughly one to two lakhs, to prepare for the CSS examination. However, due to the low passing ratio in the CSS exam, many aspirants remain unable to join their dream job in the civil services.

In the past few years, the civil services have been glamorized by social media and electronic media. In many TV dramas, bureaucrats have been shown living a luxurious lifestyle and moving their middle-class and lower-middle-class families up the social ladder. Moreover, some CSS officers from groups with comparatively lower office burden have been seen showing off their protocol and luxurious lifestyle on social media to gain fame among CSS aspirants. Moreover, through their social media profiles, they also gain PR campaigns from different local businesses and companies.

This strategy resulted in increased interest among the [Pakistani youth](#) in the CSS examination. However, over the past four years, FPSC data show that CSS registrations in Pakistan have declined from 35059 in 2022 to 18,139 in 2025. Various factors contribute to this decline in CSS registrations in the FPSC.

## Low Passing Ratio in CSS Exams

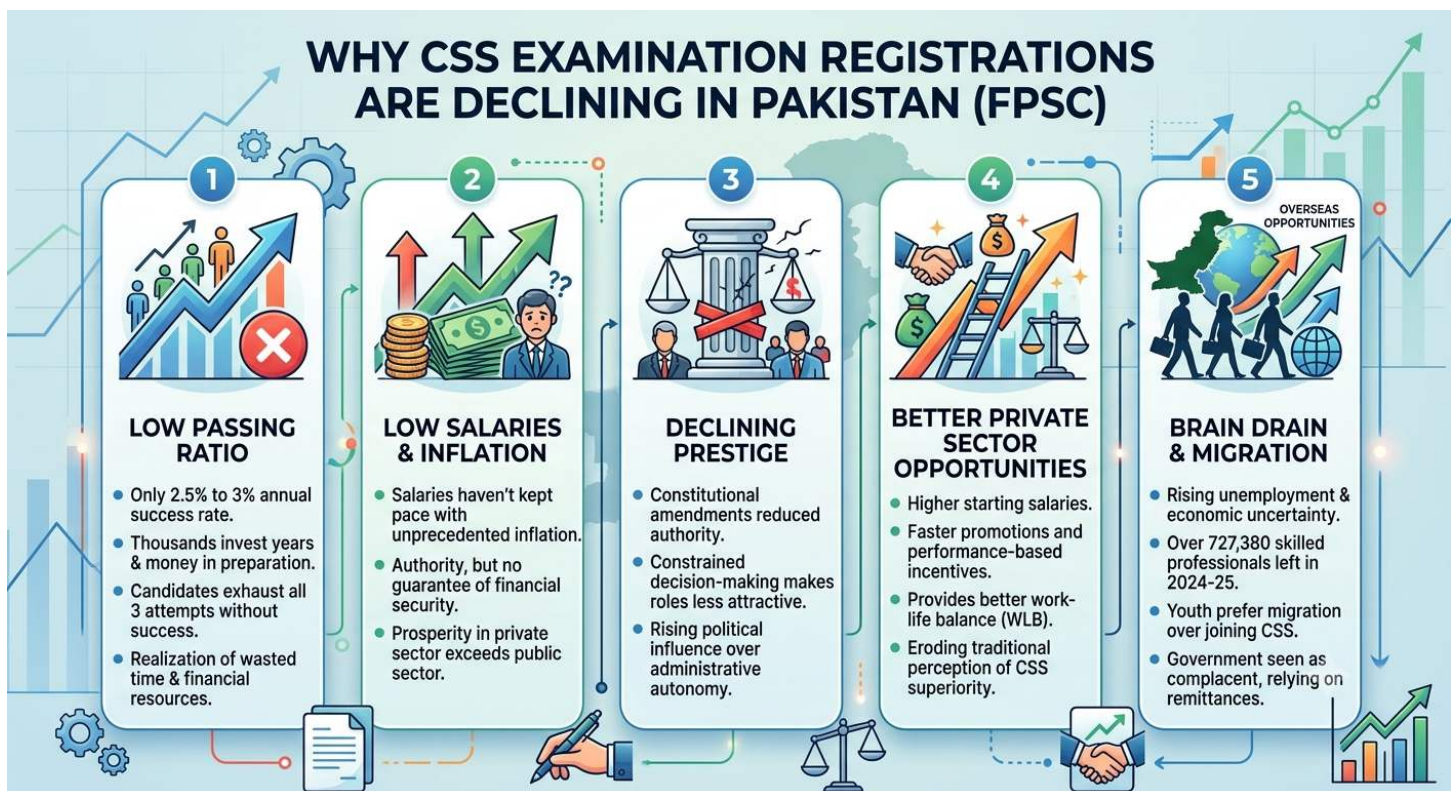
One of the main reasons behind this sharp decline in [CSS examination registrations](#) is the low passing ratio. Over the past few decades, only 2.5 to 3 percent of candidates appearing in the examination succeeded in passing the exam annually. In most cases, youngsters invest the most precious years of their lives in preparing for the CSS exam. They also invest huge sums of money to prepare for the CSS examinations through different CSS preparatory institutes. However, after exhausting all three attempts, they realize that this preparation not only wasted their money but also the most important years of their lives. Their fellows gain years of experience in their relevant fields in the private sector and earn handsome salaries during the years CSS aspirants prepare for the competitive examination.

## Low Salaries amid Rising Inflation in Pakistan

Another major reason for this decline in CSS registration in the FPSC is the low salaries in the federal government jobs. The Central Superior Services were once considered among the most prestigious jobs in Pakistan. However, over the past few years, inflation in Pakistan has increased to an unprecedented level. However, the salaries and income of the bureaucracy have not increased much, leading to the realization that the civil services may give the authority but will not guarantee a secure and prosperous future.

## Declining Prestige of the Civil Services in Pakistan

Over the past few years, the prestige of the Civil Services has declined in the country due to numerous factors. Due to constitutional amendments, the bureaucratic authorities in Pakistan have declined. Moreover, decision-making in Pakistan's bureaucracy is strictly constrained, which makes the civil services less attractive. In addition, limited administrative autonomy due to rising political influence over the civil services has also contributed to this decline.



## Better Opportunities in the Private Sector

One of the main aspirations behind the interest of CSS candidates in the civil services was career progression and social prestige. The widespread use of social media has eroded the traditional prestige of Pakistan's bureaucracy by increasing public awareness of its institutional challenges, political interference, and career limitations. The suicides of some CSS officers in the past few years have further strengthened the public narrative about political pressure and a corrupt bureaucratic structure in the country.

On the other hand, the private sector provides better opportunities to youth. In the private sector, the employees not only enjoy higher starting salaries, but they also get promotions faster. Moreover, the private sector also offers performance-based incentives to employees. In addition, unlike the bureaucracy, private sector jobs also provide work-life balance to employees.

## Brain Drain and Overseas Migration of Pakistani Youth

Due to rising inflation and unemployment in the country, a huge number of Pakistani youth prefer overseas migration over joining the civil services. In 2024-25, around 727,380 skilled Pakistani professionals have left the country in pursuit of a better and more secure future. The government of Pakistan, being unable to produce jobs and employment opportunities, appears complacent, as this migrated youth is a source of remittances.

## Is CSS Really a Life-Changing Career in Pakistan?

A huge number of Pakistanis still find CSS an attractive opportunity to change their social stature. Many CSS candidates also aspire to this job due to prevalent power hunger in Pakistani society. This power hunger and pursuit of a better lifestyle in Pakistan have resulted in the wastage of around 3-5 years of many CSS aspirants.

However, in the past few years, this trend has changed. The FPSC's official data shows that the number of registered CSS candidates has declined sharply in 2022-2025. The number of candidates appearing for the CSS written part is even lower. The reason for this is the realization that private-sector jobs offer more lucrative packages than the civil services in Pakistan. In addition, the lack of meritocracy in the country, political pressure, and corruption have eroded the confidence of Pakistani youth in federal jobs. Therefore, the country has witnessed a decline in applications for the CSS exam registrations.

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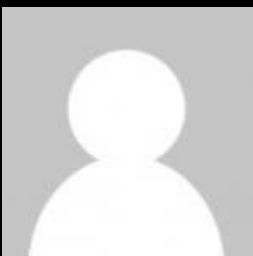
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The image shows the national flag of Pakistan, which consists of a white field with a green vertical stripe and a white crescent and star, flying against a clear blue sky. The flag is attached to a tall pole on the left side of the frame.

Opinion

# Whither Azaadi?

About the Author



Mir Adnan Aziz is a columnist whose writing explores the forces that shape power, belief, and society.

Recently, an extraordinary episode unfolded in Pembrokeshire, Wales. Hundreds of Harry Potter fans protested when the planned route of the \$581 million Greenlink energy interconnector between Wales and Ireland threatened the fictional grave of Dobby, an even fictional house-elf. Dobby dies heroically while saving Harry Potter and his friends from Malfoy Manor in Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows. The project's planners listened. The 200-kilometre power cable, linking Pembrokeshire with Wexford, Ireland, was rerouted to spare a memorial to a fictional character. The episode is revealing. A fictional grave commanding public sentiment altered the course of a major public project.



How starkly different is the lesson at home? Large-scale anti-encroachment drives by the CDA have left thousands of homes in Islamabad's informal settlements reduced to rubble. Entire low-income communities of long-settled residents and laborers have been uprooted with little warning, displacing thousands whose modest homes represented years of work, savings, and precarious security.

In the latest Bahria Town episode, after years of acquiescence, the CDA has suddenly issued notices to residents in some of its phases over alleged construction on land designated as open space. Whatever the legal merits, the human consequence is painfully familiar. The developer remains beyond reach, while the residents who bought homes, invested their savings, and built their lives there are left to bear the uncertainty. When institutions awaken belatedly to their own failures, it is ordinary people who are left to absorb the devastating fallout.

The pattern shadows Karachi's Nasla Tower. Years of regulatory and institutional failure culminated in the demolition of a building whose residents had invested their life savings in their homes. The Monal saga offers another unsettling variation. A SC order that led to its closure and demolition was set aside by the Federal Constitutional Court, which described the earlier decisions as a grave miscarriage of justice. The argument is not that law should be defied; it is that when institutions act belatedly, inconsistently, or without accounting for the human cost, justice can become indistinguishable from punishment for those least responsible.

Most horrifyingly, this institutional rot transforms protectors into predators, as exposed by the custodial rape of an intellectually disabled girl at a Lahore Police Station. Then there is the deepest cut of all. Nothing captures our institutional dysfunction more bleakly than the fact that even death does not bring closure. For families whose loved ones are murdered, grief is compounded by botched investigations, institutional indifference, and the agonizing suspicion that incompetence, or something more deliberate, has buried the truth alongside the departed.

Exhumations and repeated autopsies driven by institutional failure, desecration that they are, prolong the agony, anguish, and trauma of those left behind. What, then, have we made of a country where the powerful can reverse and reassert decisions while ordinary people are left to absorb the consequences? It is invariably the citizens who lose their homes, livelihood, dignity, and sometimes even the peace owed to the dead.

As Pakistan approaches its 79th Independence Day, perhaps the most patriotic act is not another national song, flag-waving ceremony, or message extolling the virtues of Azaadi but a moment of unforgiving introspection. This 14 August, we need less orchestration of Azaadi and more self-examination about the ever-widening chasm between what it represents and what we, the mere mortals, actually live.

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# Beyond the Thermometer: Why Pakistan's Heatwaves are a Governance Emergency

## About the Author



Fiza Rashid is a Monitoring Officer at the Suthra Punjab Authority and an MPhil graduate in Environmental Science from Government College University Lahore.

Heat is not the only problem in Pakistan. It exists without proper safeguards, silently and repeatedly. The country is in a state of reaction and not prevention, and Sindh, Punjab and Balochistan record-breaking temperatures year after year. The heatwave is no longer an annoyance of the summer. Behind the mask of ordinary weather lies a public health emergency, and institutional failure and industrial neglect sit at its core.

The evidence keeps mounting. In the spring of 2026, a record-breaking pre-monsoon heatwave swept across South Asia, pushing temperatures in parts of Pakistan and India towards 45–50°C and killing at least ten people in Karachi in a single stretch, according to World Weather Attribution. By July 2026, an extraordinary heatwave had killed at least 196 people nationwide as temperatures again passed the 50°C mark, with Punjab the worst hit at around 120 dead and Jacobabad once more reaching 52°C. This was no isolated year. In 2024, an extreme heat event killed more than 568 people and caused over 7,900 hospitalisations, while the 2025 India–Pakistan heatwave arrived early and pushed Balochistan close to 49°C. Hundreds of lives are lost in Karachi in a matter of days. The government’s response is invariably a few relief camps and some public announcements, and that is it, until the next summer. The loss is not bad luck. It is a deliberate

policy choice to look away.



Although Pakistan accounts for less than 1% of global greenhouse gas emissions, it ranks among the top ten most climate-vulnerable countries in the world. This is not a problem that can be ignored. Yet it is intellectually dishonest to blame global emitters while

overlooking domestic negligence. This is not a matter of climate change alone; it is also a policy failure at home. There is no excuse for refusing to face both facts at once.

In Pakistan, urbanisation has proceeded without planning, and urban areas have become dangerous heat islands. Trees are being replaced by concrete. Housing schemes have consumed green spaces without any environmental impact assessment. There are no thermal regulation standards in industrial zones. Each season, the NDMA issues warnings, and yet there is no law or binding policy requiring industries or provincial governments to take precautionary action. Warning without enforcement is just noise: it makes governance look responsive while offering no real protection.

Those least to blame bear the brunt of the human cost. Daily-wage labourers, brick-kiln workers, rickshaw drivers and agricultural workers toil for long hours in the sun, unprotected by any occupational heat safety legislation. A construction worker in Lahore has no legal right to a heat break. A peasant in Rahim Yar Khan has no assurance of a cooling centre. Meanwhile, the companies that rely on their labour bear no responsibility for unsafe heat exposure. Older adults, outdoor workers and those in the informal sector are consistently the most susceptible to heat stress.

Public health systems are weakest exactly where the need is greatest. Every summer, hospitals across interior Sindh and southern Punjab report outbreaks of heatstroke, dehydration and cardiac attacks. Yet investment in heat emergency preparedness remains tiny. The routine acceptance of preventable deaths during extreme weather is a form of normalisation, and that normalisation is itself a political act.

Some argue that Pakistan cannot afford detailed heat action plans. That position is indefensible. Ahmedabad, India, introduced South Asia's first Heat Action Plan in 2013 after a deadly 2010 heatwave, and it has since been credited with averting roughly 1,190 deaths a year, achieved with modest investment and sustained political commitment. After the 2015 Karachi heatwave, which claimed over 1,200 lives, a similar framework was drawn up for Karachi. But funding for implementation was inadequate and limited. Poverty is not the real obstacle in Pakistan. The problem is the absence of continuity in political attention.

Three straightforward steps must be taken now, through legislation. First, there must be a legally binding National Heat Emergency Framework, one that can be activated to open cooling centres through the provincial governments, to restrict outdoor activity during identified hot hours, and to prepare hospitals well in advance of summer rather than after the casualties begin to mount.

Second, industry must be held legally accountable. Employers in high-temperature environments should be required to meet occupational heat safety standards, and penalties should be set at a level that genuinely ensures compliance.

Third, urban greening must be built into development policy. No project should be approved without verified green-cover and heat-mitigation plans. Shaded public spaces in cities should be a legal requirement, not a matter of political discretion.

## THREE STRAIGHTFORWARD STEPS MUST BE TAKEN **NOW**, THROUGH LEGISLATION.

### 1 NATIONAL HEAT EMERGENCY FRAMEWORK

A legally binding framework that can be activated to:



Open cooling centres through provincial governments.



Restrict outdoor activity during identified hot hours.



Prepare hospitals well in advance of summer, not after casualties begin to mount.



### 2 HOLD INDUSTRY LEGALLY ACCOUNTABLE

Employers in high-temperature environments must meet occupational heat safety standards.



Penalties should be set at a level that genuinely ensures compliance.



### 3 BUILD URBAN GREENING INTO DEVELOPMENT POLICY

No project should be approved without verified green-cover and heat-mitigation plans.



Shaded public spaces in cities should be a legal requirement, not a matter of political discretion.



HEATWAVES ARE NO LONGER RARE. BUT OUR RESPONSE CAN NO LONGER BE REACTIVE.



THE TIME FOR LAWS THAT **SAVE LIVES** IS NOW.



Beyond this, the Loss and Damage climate financing agreed at COP27 must be pursued vigorously. Pakistan has a moral and legal claim on the international community, but realising it demands evidence and institutional seriousness of the highest order.

Every summer without structural reform is a political choice, and one whose cost in health and life falls on the poor and the vulnerable. The state has committees to spare. What it lacks is the political resolve to recognise heat as the deadly emergency it is, to legislate for it, and to invest in readiness. The hot weather will return. The real question is whether governance will finally rise to meet it.

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# Why Pakistan Became the Security Anchor for the Gulf

## About the Author



Azhar Ali holds a master's degree in Development Studies and has over 15 years of experience in the development sector. He specializes in election research, electoral observation, parliamentary monitoring, and training on electoral processes. He has contributed to major electoral research projects in Pakistan and authored numerous institutional reports.

# Abstract

Pakistan plays an important role in the security of the Gulf, but it is not the sole provider. The Gulf security system is multi-layered, encompassing the United States, internal defense forces, and various bilateral and multilateral partnerships, including with Pakistan, Turkey, France, the United Kingdom, and China.

Despite the United States as the key external security provider, regionally, a mix of crises and emerging threats has led Gulf states to lessen reliance on one security provider. Pakistan offers an extra level of security in this dynamic landscape, offering defense cooperation, military training, operational knowledge, intelligence sharing, and strategic consultations.

In the future, Pakistan-Gulf security cooperation is expected to not only include the traditional defense domain but also the emerging domains, including cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, space technologies, maritime security, defense production, defense missiles and drone defense, and intelligence cooperation. The military prowess, strategic location, and defense cooperation of Pakistan make it a valuable asset in the evolving security architecture in the Gulf region.

## Introduction

Pakistan has had a unique role for over seven decades in the security setup of the Gulf region. The United States has been the primary source of security for the Gulf monarchies, but recent security concerns in the region between Iran and Israel and the United States have helped push the Gulf States to seek other means of security. In this changing landscape, Pakistan has become one of the most reliable security partners of the region in the Gulf (Ayoob, 1995; Berti & Guzansky, 2021; Ulrichsen, 2016).

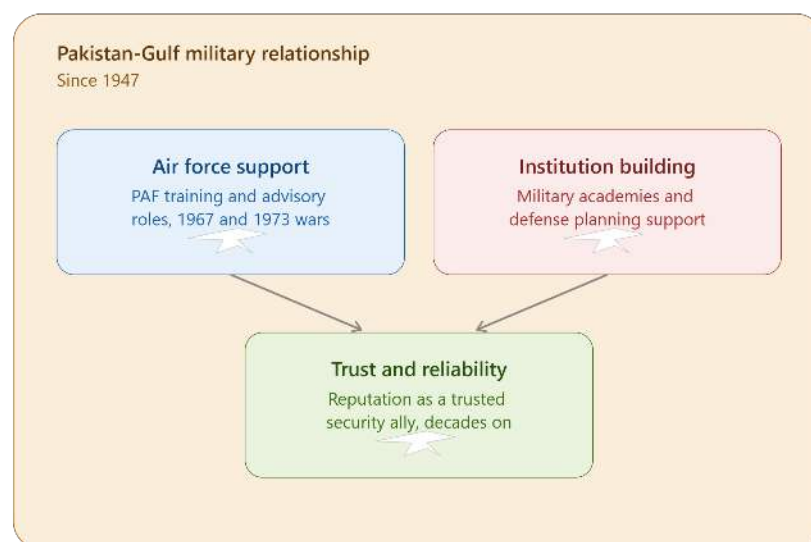
The engagement of Pakistan in Gulf security is not just a single event; it is a culmination of a long period of military cooperation, strategic concerns, defense ties, economic interdependence, and geopolitical factors (Fair, 2014; Rizvi, 2000; Ulrichsen, 2016). Pakistan has contributed in the form of military training, military advisory support, military joint exercises, intelligence sharing, counterterrorism cooperation, and strategic interaction (Cloughley, 2016; MoFA, 2020).

Institutional cooperation and military coordination, along with military exercises, have enhanced defense collaboration between the governments of Pakistan and the Gulf countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, over the last few years. The developments are a continuation of the long-standing trust between the two countries and the mutual interest in providing security in the region by increasing the capacity of the two countries' partner countries (MoFa, 2020; Ulrichsen, 2016).

To comprehend the significance of Pakistan's role as a security ally of the Gulf monarchies, one must delve into the historical roots, military strengths, security alliances, and geopolitical dynamics that have influenced this relationship over the past few decades (Ayoob, 1995; Davidson, 2012; Ulrichsen, 2016).

## Historical Foundations

Since the inception of Pakistan's independence in 1947, the country had established diplomatic relations with the Gulf monarchies (Rizvi, 2000; MoFA, 2020). The Gulf states in the 1950s and 1960s were fairly new and had relatively little militaristic tradition. However, in Pakistan, there was a tradition of discipline which was handed down from generation to generation, and the military soon became one of the most professional armies in the Muslim world and beyond (Cloughley, 2016; Fair, 2014; Rizvi, 2000). Pakistan's contribution to the security of the region, outside of South Asia, further bolstered the military image of the nation (Cloughley, 2016; Fair, 2014).



Gulf monarchies: Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait

During the Arab–Israeli wars of 1967 and 1973, the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) provided training and advisory missions and operational support to the Arab air forces. The Pakistani pilots and military specialists assisted in the enhancement of the other partner air force’s capabilities, such as training, technical assistance, etc. In this way, these contributions added to Pakistan’s reputation as a good and reliable military ally in the Arab world. Concurrently, the Gulf States started to modernize their security institutions, and Pakistan emerged as a natural ally (Cooper & Bishop, 2003; Fricker, 1979; Nordeen, 1985).

Training of armed forces and military academies and enhancing operational readiness were done with the help of Pakistan military advisers, instructors, and technical experts. Pakistani officers helped in the development of the air force, the training of the special forces, defense planning, and building capacity for institutions. It gave birth to a culture of trust, which has been nurtured and carried forward over decades and which has been a part of the security relationship with the Gulf monarchies (Cloughley, 2016; Fair, 2014; MoFA, 2020).

## Pakistan’s Military Strength

The armed forces’ capability is amongst the main reasons for Pakistan’s significance. Pakistan is one of the biggest militaries in the Muslim world, with much experience in conventional warfare, border security, counter-insurgency, and counter-terrorism (Cloughley, 2016; Fair, 2014; Rizvi, 2000).

While the militaries of other countries have been used mainly to defend the country against external threats, Pakistan has learnt by experience how to conduct a number of intra-state wars and long-term counterterrorism operations. This is an operational capability which has made Pakistan a high demand for military training in the entire Gulf region (Fair, 2014; Hussain, 2019; Jones, 2014).

In the event of an Indo-Pak military confrontation in May 2025, one of the biggest military escalations between the two nuclear-armed neighbors in recent decades, the operational trustworthiness of the armed forces was also reinforced.

The battle proved a testament to Pakistan's quick mobilization of conventional forces and was a demonstration of its ability to use air, land, cyber, and electronic warfare and command and control (C2) in high-intensity battle seamlessly. It underscored Pakistan's professionalism, combat readiness, and operational maturity and strengthened the military's reputation as a trusted regional security partner of the policymakers of the Gulf countries (Cloughley, 2016; Fair, 2014).

The Pakistani officers have been on the training, advisory, and defense mission in various countries of the Arabian Gulf region. They have helped in the training of pilots, special forces, air defense, logistics, military planning, institutional development, and much more. This has established a good rapport between the two and Pakistan has always been an indispensable ally in the preparedness of the Gulf monarchies for decades in the field of defense (Cloughley, 2016; MoFA, 2020; Rizvi, 2000).



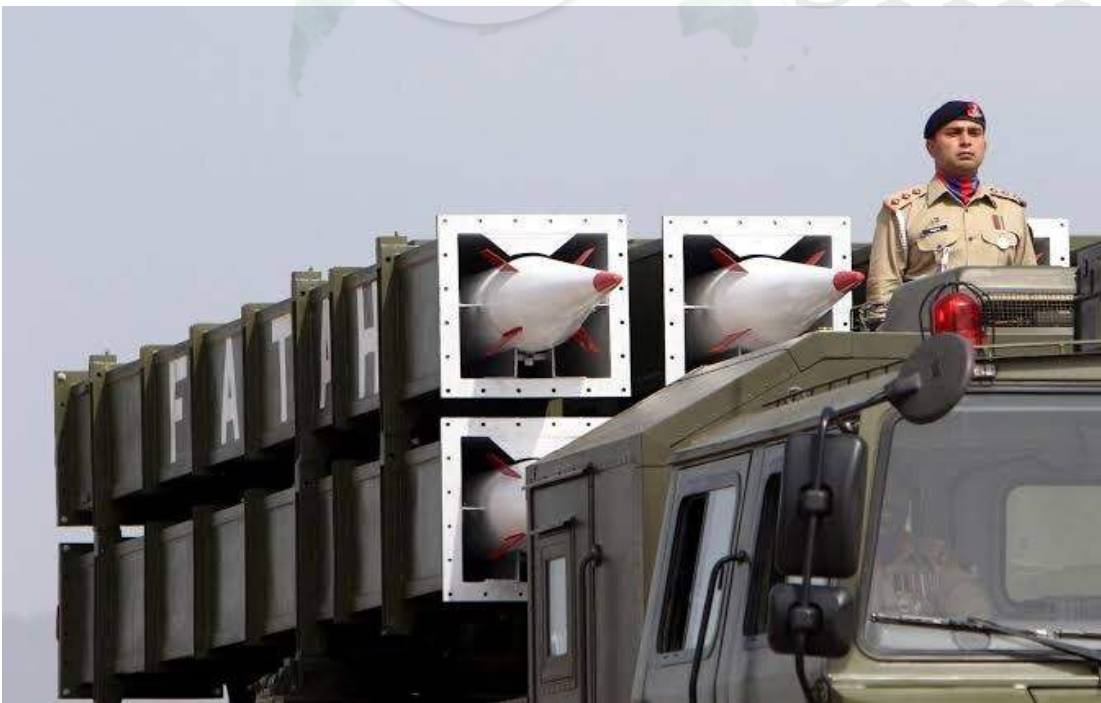
## Pakistan's Military Presence and Defense Partnerships in the Gulf

In terms of multidimensional cooperation, Pakistan, with other countries in the Gulf,

has gone beyond military cooperation to a wide range of defense cooperation, training programs, military exchanges, and strategic agreements with each other. The Pakistani army has been a long-time member in the advisory role, joint exercises, institutional cooperations, and training programs with Saudi Arabia, Oman, Bahrain, Kuwait, and the UAE to assist the region in various ways for decades (MoFA, 2020; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan, 2020; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan, 2023).

Saudi Arabia continues to be the mainstay of the Pakistani government's security policies in the Gulf region. Pakistan has been conducting military drills and defense exchanges in Saudi since the 1970s, and they have always been holding regular military drills and defense exchanges in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In 2025, the strategic relationship was further reinforced by signing the Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement, which was a result of decades of cooperation and a common desire to improve security coordination in the region (MoFA, 2020; Ulrichsen, 2016).

Pakistan has also beefed up defense ties with other Gulf countries. In 2023 Pakistan and Kuwait signed a Defense Cooperation Memorandum to enhance military training and share ideas and institutional cooperation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan, 2023). Similarly, Pakistan and Oman have inked Military Cooperation MoU in 2020 to further promote exchanges in defense knowledge, training and professional development (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan, 2020).



In addition to the Gulf, Pakistan has also had defense relations with other countries like Jordan, Turkey, and Bahrain in various fields such as defense exchanges, training cooperation, military exercises, naval

cooperation, and defense production programs (Berti & Guzansky, 2021; Fulton, 2020; MoFA, 2020).

Overall, Pakistan's defense posture in the region is a combination of permanent military presence and defense partnership which encompasses military capabilities, experience, defense diplomacy, intelligence sharing, and defense capacity building. Today, the Gulf monarchies are seeking Pakistan's military experience and vital support in the broader security system in the region, as they struggle with regional conflict, missile attacks, terror, and strategic competition (Berti & Guzansky, 2021; Fair, 2014; Ulrichsen, 2016).

## The Strategic Significance of Pakistan's Nuclear Capability

This is the only Muslim-majority country that can develop and possess nuclear weapons. The Pakistan-Gulf countries' relationship has been untidy from the nuclear defense front as well because for decades the strategic deterrence capability has been a consideration in the strategic calculations of the region (Khan, 2012; Ayooob, 1995).

Pakistan's nuclear capability adds strategic value to the Gulf countries and helps bolster its reputation as a trusted security ally (Khan, 2012; Ulrichsen, 2016). The Strategic Review of defense might occasionally mention the nuclear umbrella, but there are no formal agreements or official arrangements readily available in the public eye to support the view of the nuclear umbrella.

Therefore, Pakistan's nuclear capability cannot be seen as a direct security assurance for the Gulf countries but as one of the elements that adds to the strategic superiority, credibility of deterrence and significance of Pakistan in the regional security sphere (Khan, 2012; Ayooob, 1995).



## Shared Strategic Interests

Security interests also play an important role in the strategic importance of Pakistan in the Gulf. The Gulf monarchies are beset with a complicated security landscape characterized by regional instability, terrorism and violent extremism, threats to maritime security, protection of vital energy supply routes, missile proliferation and more general geopolitical competition with Iran (Ayoob, 1995; Berti & Guzansky, 2021; Kaplan, 2010; Ulrichsen, 2016).

Pakistan's geographical location, military experience, and established military relations with the countries of the Gulf region have always been helpful in supporting initiatives for regional stability. It has cooperated with the Gulf countries in the areas of counterterrorism, intelligence sharing, maritime security, defense training, and diplomacy in the region (Cloughley, 2016; Fair, 2014; Kaplan, 2010; MoFA, 2020).

On the other hand, Pakistan has attempted to carve out a niche for itself as an independent country which will not be involved in any sectarian rivalry and will maintain cordial relations with all the big powers in the area. Despite the proximity of Pakistan's geo-security relationship with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and other Gulf monarchies, Pakistan has made an effort to keep its diplomatic relations and dialogue with Iran on historic, geographical and economic issues (Ayoob, 1995; Hussain, 2019; MoFA, 2020).

This evenhanded strategy has contributed to Pakistan's increased reputation as a responsible regional actor. Pakistan's ability to maintain a security balance without falling prey to unhelpful polarization in the region is significant for the Gulf countries in combating new security threats and promoting stability in the vast Middle East (Berti & Guzansky, 2021; Ulrichsen, 2016).

## Intelligence and Counterterrorism Cooperation

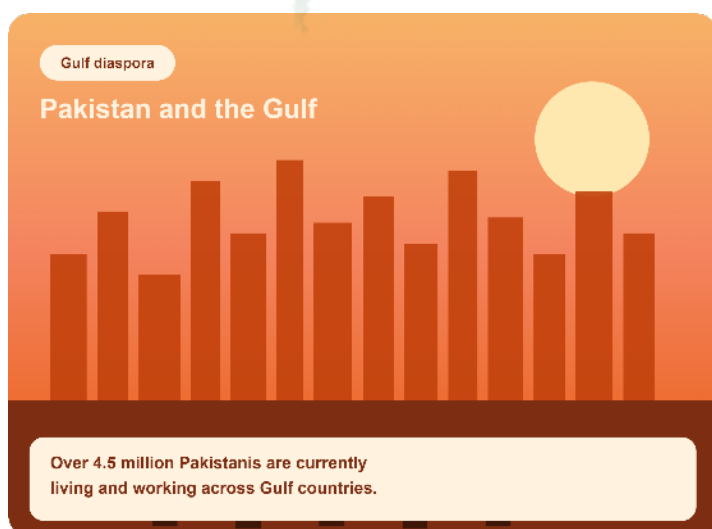
The other crucial aspect of the Pakistan-Gulf cooperation is counterterrorism. Pakistan has rich experience in combating the terrorist organizations and destroying the extremist networks.

The experience has resulted in intelligence sharing, law enforcement cooperation, and joint security operations with the governments of the Gulf (Fair, 2014; Hussain, 2019; Jones, 2014).

Security cooperation has become more than military cooperation with the advent of the transnational nature of the security threats of today, such as the security threats of terrorism, cybercrime, organized crime, and illicit financial networks (Jones, 2014; Berti & Guzansky, 2021).

## The Pakistani Diaspora: An Economic Security Bridge

Economically, the dependency on each other has further enhanced Pakistan-Gulf ties. Employment of millions of Pakistanis in various sectors of the GCC countries, including construction, healthcare, engineering and education, services, etc. Their remittances will continue to boost the economy of Pakistan, and their contributions continue to be valuable to the economy of the Gulf (IOfM, 2023; SBP, 2026). Such close people-to-people relationships give rise to mutual interests that are unrelated to security and defense cooperation (IOfM, 2023; Ulrichsen, 2016).



## Religious and Political Affinity

The religious and cultural similarities have also helped strengthen the relations between Pakistan and Gulf monarchies. Pakistan and the Gulf states share historical and cultural ties, which have facilitated diplomatic and defense cooperation and people-to-people ties in the Muslim country hosting Islam's holiest places

(Al-Rasheed, 2010; MoFA, 2020; Ulrichsen, 2016). But the foreign policy of Pakistan has always been pragmatic and pragmatic in nature, with religious affinity being an accompaniment and not a replacement of strategic and national interests in Pakistan (Ayoob, 1995; Hussain, 2019).

## Pakistan's Geostrategic Location

Pakistan's geographical location is a great asset to its strategic significance. Pakistan is a nation of South Asia, Central Asia, the Middle East, and the Arabian Sea, and it has a significant geopolitical value. Its coastline opens access to critical shipping lanes that link the Gulf to international trade, and its construction of Gwadar Port enhances its role in regional shipping, security, and energy links (Kaplan, 2010; Small, 2015; Fulton, 2020). The region's security dynamics continue to change, and Pakistan's strategic position will play a crucial role in the future security and economic frameworks (Kaplan, 2010; Small, 2015).

## Pakistan's Role of Security as an Additional Pillar for the Gulf

Pakistan plays a significant role in the Gulf as a security provider, but it should not be assumed that it is the sole provider of security in the Gulf. Multi-layered defense, external guarantees, in-house defense, and several partnerships are still the foundations of the security of the Gulf (Ayoob, 1995; Berti & Guzansky, 2021; Ulrichsen, 2016).

The U.S. is the world's largest external security provider with military bases, naval deployments, intelligence sharing, and advanced defense equipment. But several regional crises have spurred the Gulf states to think again about relying on one security provider (Berti & Guzansky, 2021; Ulrichsen, 2016).

This had been shown in the 2019 attacks on Abqaiq and Khurais oil facilities in Saudi Arabia by the vulnerability of even advanced defense systems against drones and asymmetric attacks. For its part, Gulf interest in pursuing multiple security partnerships has been further bolstered by more recent regional escalations that have involved Iran, Israel, and others (Berti & Guzansky, 2021; IEA, 2026; Ulrichsen, 2016).

In this context, Pakistan is not the replacement of the United States, but another bastion of security, which will be provided through military training, defense cooperation, operational experience and strategic consultation (Cloughley, 2016; Fair, 2014; MoFA, 2020).

# An Analysis of the Future of Pak-Gulf Security Relations

Pakistan-Gulf security cooperation is likely to grow beyond the traditional security cooperation with Gulf nations and into new fields emerging in view of changing security threats and technology changes. The relationship between the two will continue to include the usual areas of military cooperation, military training, and strategic coordination, but both sides will also look for new areas of cooperation (Berti & Guzansky, 2021; Fulton, 2020; Ulrichsen, 2016).

Possible future areas of cooperation involve cybersecurity, artificial intelligence applications for defense, space technologies, maritime domain awareness, defense manufacturing, drone and missile defense systems, intelligence integration, and addressing climate-related security issues (Berti & Guzansky, 2021; Fulton, 2020; Small, 2015).



In an increasingly complex and interconnected regional threat, sharing of information, preparedness, and technological capabilities will be essential in security cooperation. Pakistan is an important and reliable security partner due to its vast experience garnered in extensive military engagements, professional armed forces, strategic location, and established defense cooperation with Gulf countries (Cloughley, 2016; Fair, 2014; MoFA, 2020; Ulrichsen, 2016).

The changing security dynamics in the Gulf region will make it increasingly important for Pakistan to shift from an erstwhile role of defense cooperation to a more comprehensive one that will include technology, innovation, intelligence sharing and overall regional security (Berti & Guzansky, 2021; Fulton, 2020; Small, 2015).

## Conclusion

The shift of Pakistan from being such a small security partner to a big one for the Gulf monarchies is not a recent phenomenon but rather the culmination of decades of institutional cooperation. A combination of its professional military forces, experience, defense ties, strategic location, counterterrorism capabilities, and political connections has enhanced its regional significance.

Today, however, the security of the Gulf is a matter of networks of partnerships rather than one protector. The U.S. is the key external security provider, while Pakistan is a unique country that is a trusted regional security provider.

However, with the strategic diversification of the Gulf countries under a new phase of geopolitical instability, Pakistan is expected to remain a key player in maintaining regional peace and stability through various defense cooperation efforts, military capabilities, and strategic engagements.

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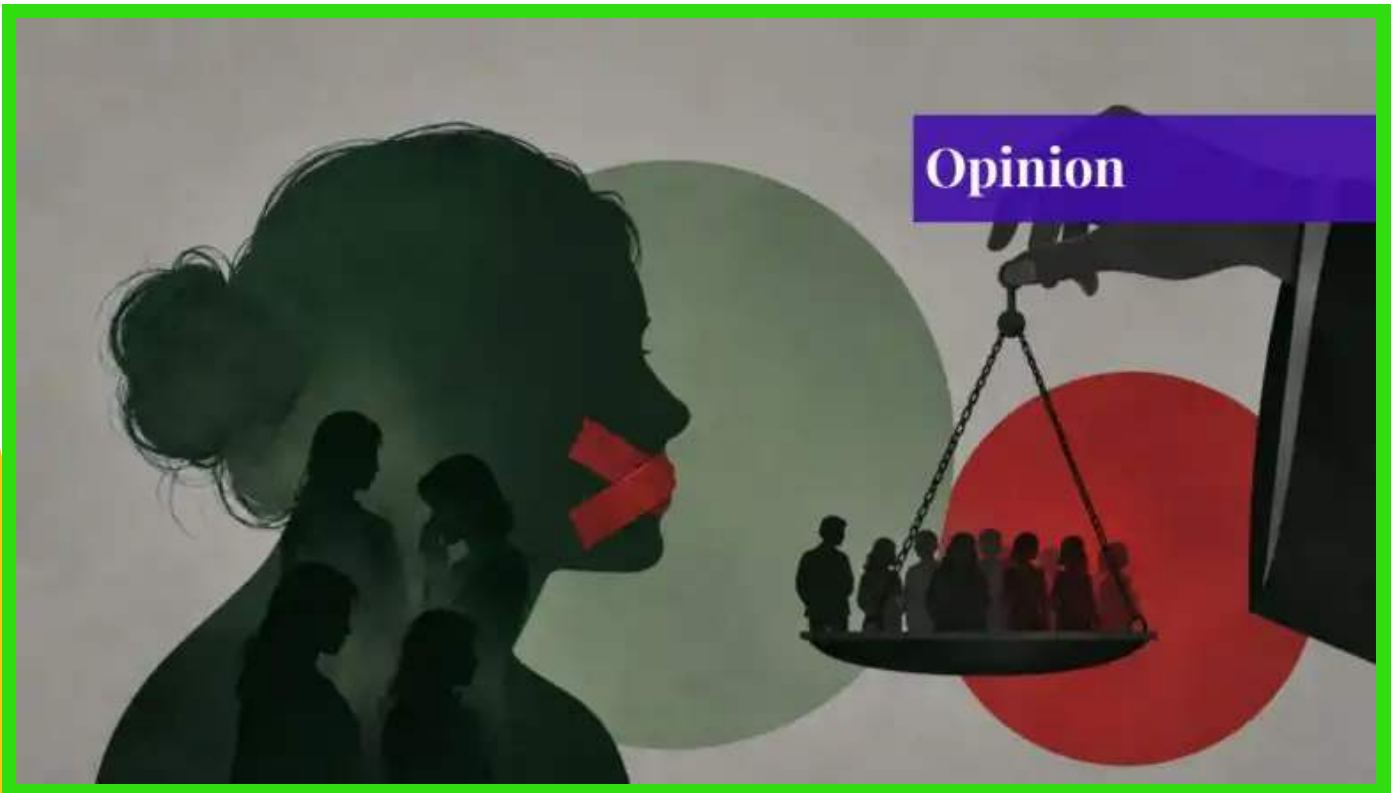
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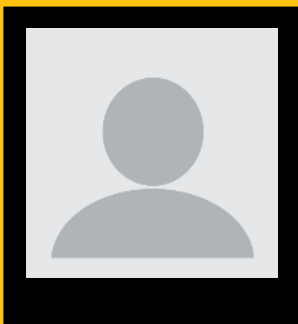
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# The Weaponization of Silence: How Defamation Laws Target Survivors in Pakistan

## About the Author



Dur-e-Adan is a dedicated International Relations student at Government College University Lahore with a keen interest in geopolitics and diplomacy. With strong writing skills, her academic pursuits are complemented by a commitment to critical thinking and analysis.

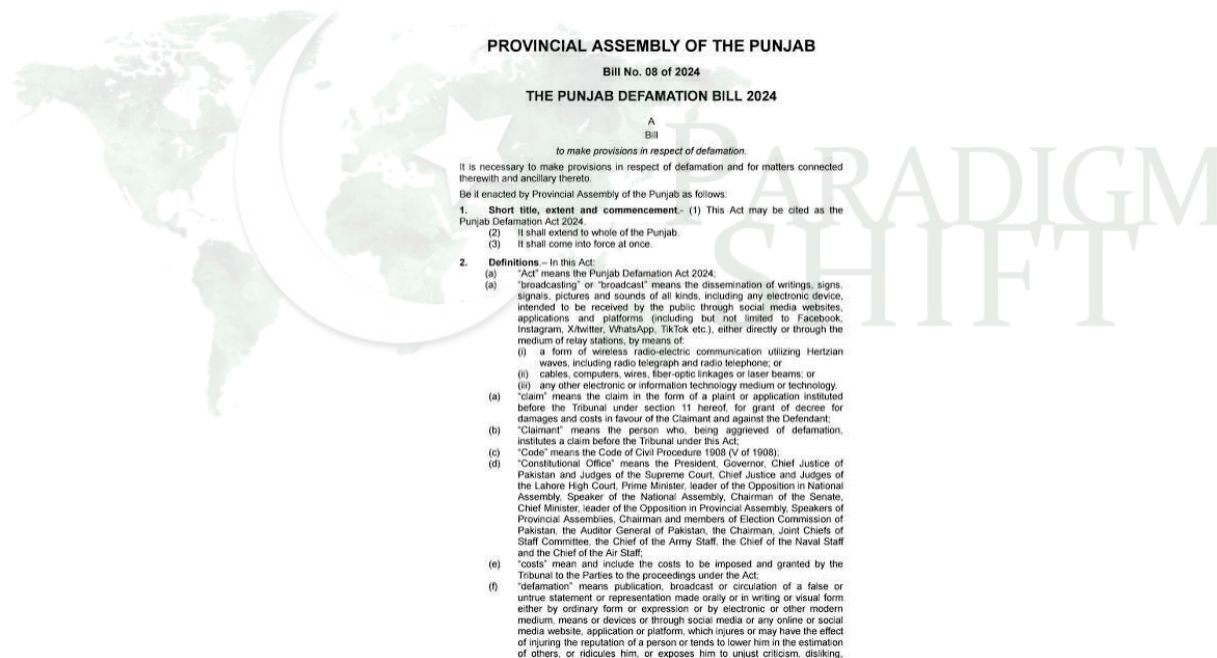
The fast growth of internet accessibility in Pakistan, in which the majority of the population has mobile broadband coverage, was assumed to lead to the democratization of access to justice. As for victims of gender-based violence, online platforms represent an outstanding opportunity to overcome traditional barriers set by patriarchy and announce their stories publicly. However, legal distortion has occurred. The legal system and judicial activity in Pakistan have turned the cybercrime and defamation legislative frameworks into a weapon of legal revenge. Using the so-called SLAPPs (Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation), perpetrators have been diverting the judiciary from dealing with sexual harassment cases to punishing the survivors for their stories. This article presents examples of how the laws aimed at protecting online environments are being manipulated to suppress victims through the analysis of constitutional disputes, changes in the police system, and important court rulings till 2026.

The government of Pakistan maintains a tight grip on online conversations through a mixed set of civil and criminal regulations. Introduced in 2016 after the Peshawar Army Public School attack, PECA (Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act) was originally devised as a measure for national security. Gradually, its application shifted towards facilitating the protection of public personalities and people who are charged with malpractices. Section 20 of PECA penalizes spreading known false information intentionally if such an act damages a person's reputation or invades their personal privacy.

The PECA Amendment Act of 2025 brought the growth of digital law enforcement as it instituted four bodies of regulated enforcement, such as the National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency (NCCIA) and the Social Media Protection Agency. Section 26-A of the 2025 Act made it a crime to disseminate any fake news, with a possible punishment of three years of imprisonment and a fine of up to two million rupees. In July of 2026, the NCCIA revealed that a special section had been formed in Punjab to deal with crimes that were committed through cyber media against women and children. Nevertheless, there is a key contradiction in the structure of the legislation discussed by human rights activists: the NCCIA is using its digital forensic technologies against the victims of the crimes.

# Provincial Overreach: The Punjab Defamation Act of 2024

The laws became harsher with the passing of the [Punjab Defamation Act of 2024](#). The Act defines defamation simply as a civil offense. This means that there is no requirement to show any financial loss suffered because of defamation to get a hold of compensation for damages. The law provides for the creation of Defamation Tribunals, which are run by government officers. The tribunal works on summary procedures and requires defendants to seek leave to defend themselves within thirty days to avoid getting a preliminary decree.



The Lahore High Court witnessed the petition filed by some journalists and civil society organizations challenging the law. In March 2026, Justice Anwaar Hussain called the law officers to discuss the basic constitutional flaws in the petition filed by the counsels, Faisal Siddiqi and Asad Jamal. The petitioners argued that the provincial assembly did not have any constitutional mandate regarding social media and defamation, that the summary tribunal's procedure violated the right to a fair trial guaranteed by Article 10-A, and that giving special protection to those holding constitutional positions results in the formation of a parallel judiciary in violation of the Constitution. In April 2026, Justice Hussain forwarded the combined petitions to the Chief Justice for setting up a wider bench, linking all ongoing proceedings related to defamation at the provincial level with the final decision in the case.

The implications of such laws are best illustrated by the famous legal battle between the singers Ali Zafar and Meesha Shafi, which can be termed Pakistan's [#MeToo case](#). In 2021, the Supreme Court allowed an appeal in the case for reconsidering this narrow definition.

Although an appeal was pending for Shafi's principal claim in the Supreme Court, her civil case continued to proceed in the lower courts. Lahore Sessions Judge Asif Hayat ruled in favor of Zafar, awarding him five million rupees in damages along with issuing a permanent injunction prohibiting Shafi from making accusations against him through any medium. Shafi appealed the decision before the Lahore High Court. On May 4, 2026, Justices Ahmad Nadeem Arshad and Malik Waqar Haider Awan provisionally granted a stay against the monetary award, dependent upon securities and a cash deposit. However, the bench refused to lift the permanent injunction on the basis that there cannot be any repetition of the accusation during the process of appeal. By doing so, the ruling could be seen to have created a precedent wherein a survivor has been silenced while her primary abuse claim is pending judicial determination before the Supreme Court.

## Evidentiary Barriers, Empirical Realities, and Reform

The concept of the perfect victim plays an instrumental role in the operation of law and impacts the pursuit of justice. In the courts, the criteria list includes the appearance of trauma, the expedient reporting of events, and the disconnection of any association with the perpetrator. Any deviation from this model is taken as a sign of malice. Although [Section 509 of the PPC](#) outlaws any form of insult to a woman's modesty, the definition of the notion is left to the arbitrary interpretation of the mostly male gender. The situation becomes even more complicated because of defamation cases, where the burden of proof is actually reversed, shifting onto victims, who would need to prove all their allegations or pay a fine for misleading accusations.

To resolve this systemic contradiction, Pakistan needs to bring in prompt legal reforms. The Parliament must stop digital defamation from being illegal, and in the laws dealing with defamation, it must only be treated as a civil matter. The national and provincial assemblies must pass [anti-SLAPP laws](#). The law would enable early dismissal of retaliatory claims against victims and offer complete protection in matters of safety and law enforcement. Lastly, the Workplace Harassment Act of 2010 needs to be amended to cover the protection of independent contractors, and judicial training institutes need to incorporate courses on how to deal with victims of gender-based violence.

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# The \$10 Billion Bargain: Monetizing Geopolitics in Pakistan-US Relations

## About the Author



Eman Waseem is an undergraduate student of international relations with a strong passion for research and analytical writing. Her academic interests include terrorism studies, security, and gender studies, and she enjoys exploring contemporary global issues through evidence-based research.

# Introduction

Pakistan may have discovered something that powerful states have known for decades: geopolitical relevance can be converted into bargaining. In international relations, states cooperate when their interests converge, bargain when they can, and walk away when the costs outweigh the gains.

Great powers have long turned military alliances, strategic access, and diplomatic influence into bargaining chips. Yet Pakistan's effort to turn a moment of diplomatic relevance into economic opportunity is labelled as transactional diplomacy. Transactional diplomacy involves the use of diplomatic relationships and strategic usefulness to negotiate concrete benefits.

## The \$10 Billion Request

Pakistan's reported request on July 22 for a [\\$10 billion](#) US exchange stabilization facility has stirred an uncomfortable debate over whether Pakistan is wisely monetizing its geopolitical relevance or turning diplomacy into a transaction.

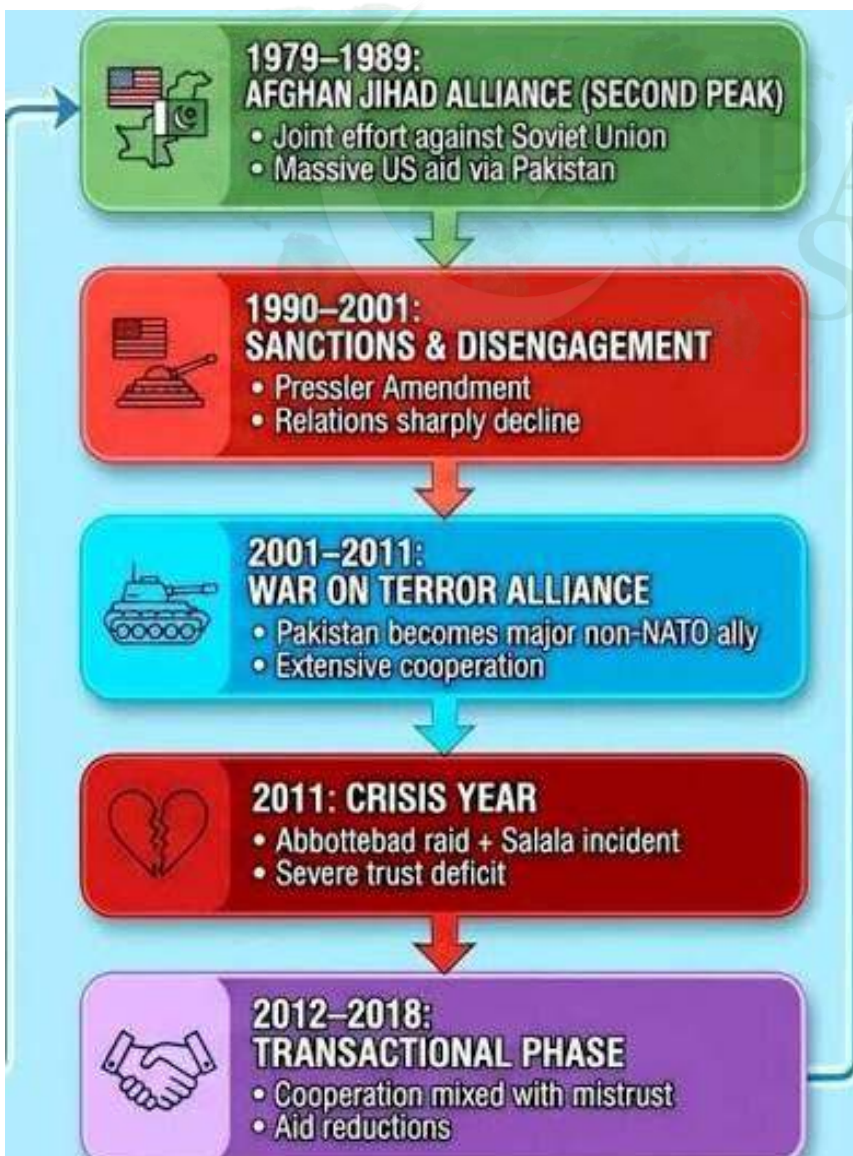
[Reuters](#) reported that Pakistan's finance minister, Muhammad Aurangzeb, requested US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent for this facility, and this request was followed by Pakistan's role in facilitating mediation talks during the US-Israel war on Iran, which had raised Pakistan's diplomatic profile.

Provision of this facility can give Pakistan breathing room by bolstering its reserves, easing pressure on the rupee, and reducing its reliance on multilateral financing.

Pakistan has not publicly claimed this request as a mediation fee; it is about economic and financial support. The controversy arises from the timing of this request, which is in the wake of mediation. Pakistan may be entitled to capitalize on its geopolitical relevance, but analysts should be careful not to mistake strategic timing for an explicit transaction.

# Transactional Nature of Pakistan-US Relations

Pakistan has been hit hard by the Iran war, given its dependence on the Gulf energy imports, remittances, and financial support from the region. It would be a mistake to assume that Pakistan would be choosing between diplomacy and self-interest. In a realpolitik world, international relations is not a charity house. States rarely enter negotiations empty-handed. Washington does not engage Pakistan simply out of goodwill, and Islamabad does not maintain relations with Washington merely for friendship.



Pakistan's glorification of Jihad during the Afghan war stands as a testament to the fact that every relationship is shaped by interests, cost, and expected return. Pakistan has often possessed geopolitical importance without consistently converting that importance into durable economic strength. Its geography, security relevance, and relationships across the region have repeatedly made it useful to larger powers. But strategic usefulness has not automatically translated into economic resilience. If the US can use Pakistan when Pakistan is strategically useful, why can't Pakistan use that moment to pursue its own interests?

# Policy of Pragmatic Realism

This time, Islamabad appears to be trying to negotiate from a position of greater diplomatic relevance. If Islamabad possesses something strategically valuable like diplomatic access, regional relationships, the ability to communicate across hostile camps, or the credibility to facilitate dialogue, it has every right to use those assets in pursuit of national interests.



That is not necessarily opportunism. It may simply be pragmatic realism. From this perspective, seeking a financial backstop is not irrational. States rarely act purely out of goodwill. If Pakistan's diplomacy contributes to regional stability, de-escalation, protection of trade and energy flows, and US strategic interests, then Islamabad can reasonably ask, what does Pakistan gain from doing all this? It is bargaining and smart statecraft. From Islamabad's perspective, however, the logic is clear: if a bilateral facility can strengthen reserves, reduce pressure on the currency, and diversify financing sources, why not negotiate for it?

# Economic Turmoil in Pakistan

Pakistan's economic vulnerability is not simply the shortage of dollars; it is structural. The IMF's 2026 projections put Pakistan's gross reserves at around \$20.9 billion, equivalent to only about 2.8 months of the following year's imports. The IMF has also continued to emphasize fiscal reforms, revenue mobilization, and structural changes as essential to sustainable growth.

Pakistan's liquid foreign-exchange reserves stood at about \$22.67 billion on July 17, 2026, according to the State Bank of Pakistan, including about \$17.26 billion held by the central bank. The statistics show that provision of a bilateral exchange support facility can help to form breathing room for the state. But only the bilateral exchange support facility alone can not automatically fix the low tax collection, energy sector problems, weak exports, and fiscal deficit; it requires reforms at a structural level.

## Commodification of Diplomacy

Yet there is a fine difference between leveraging diplomacy and commodifying diplomacy. It is a normal statecraft to use strategic relevance to seek better economic opportunities and financial support. On the contrary, if the world begins to interpret Pakistan's mediation as something that comes with an invoice, it can build up the reputation of Pakistan as an opportunistic state. The diplomatic relevance (that makes Pakistan stand at the bargaining position) can be damaged if it becomes way too transactional. Pakistan presents mediation as a service and expects a predetermined financial reward, which risks undermining its diplomatic credibility.

There is another side of the debate that is often overlooked: the interests of Washington. The US cannot provide \$10 billion straight out of generosity. It would expect a greater role in Pakistan's future mining and critical minerals sector in return. Along with this, Pakistan's strategic location has always been of great importance to US history, showing the amount of time that Pakistan has been of strategic importance to the US.

## Way Forward

The goal is not about the commodification of Pakistan's diplomatic role. It should be about making its diplomacy worth in the international arena. Provision of the exchange stabilization facility will have Pakistan gain a headline, but not a structural strategy. The real danger is not about transactional diplomacy but about transactional dependency. If Pakistan uses the success of brokering diplomatic talks to diversify its partnerships and attract foreign investment, it can pave the way to greater autonomy.

On the other hand, accumulation of external financial aid without addressing the structural problems can make its strategic relevance a temporary source of rent. States do not mediate, negotiate, or cooperate in a vacuum. They calculate. Pakistan should calculate too. But it should also recognize the limits of calculation. Pakistan needs to turn temporary relevance into lasting leverage. It must decide whether it wants to be valued as a mediator or priced as one. The real measure of Pakistan's diplomatic success will not be whether it secures \$10 billion, but whether it can turn temporary relevance into lasting leverage.

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# The Makkah Defence Agreement: Opportunity, Obligation or Strategic Ambiguity?

## About the Author



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

## *“The US-led Middle East order is over. The Makkah Agreement proves it.”*

*Council on Foreign Relations*

Let me begin this piece by acknowledging that the appropriate time for public critique of a government decision is normally before that decision is made, while the matter remains under contemplation and consideration. At that stage, public discussion can usefully contribute towards strengthening the government’s intent, identifying weaknesses and offering alternatives.

Once a decision has been made, however, the responsibility changes. It becomes incumbent upon citizens to support the national decision and, more importantly, to contribute towards ensuring its success.

The Makkah Joint Defence Agreement between Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye was signed in Makkah on 7 August 2026. Its central principle is that an armed attack against any one of the three signatories will be regarded as an attack against all three. The agreement is described by the signatories as defensive and not directed against any particular country.

The difficulty is that, at present, the public has not been provided with the complete text of the Agreement. Consequently, much of what we know concerns its political intent rather than its detailed legal, operational and military architecture. Türkiye has subsequently indicated that mechanisms for strategic political and military coordination, joint exercises, defence-industry cooperation, technology transfer and other areas of cooperation are envisaged. A ministerial committee and secretariat are also to be established.

This leaves an important space for public discussion. The agreement has been signed; it must therefore succeed. But its success will depend not upon the declaration itself but upon how its institutions, procedures, command relationships, operational parameters and strategic objectives are subsequently developed.

## Why Was This Agreement Necessary Now?

Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye have enjoyed close relations for decades. Their military relationships are not new. Pakistan and Türkiye, for example, already possess an extensive institutionalised defence relationship, including the High Level Military Dialogue Group, which held its 20th round in April 2026 and discussed defence cooperation, training, defence industry, capacity-building and strategic partnership.



Pakistan and Saudi Arabia likewise formalised a [Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement in 2025](#), which Pakistan's Foreign Office described as defensive in nature and not directed against any third country.

So the obvious question is: what suddenly necessitated a trilateral commitment on paper, particularly now? There was no obvious trust deficit between these countries. Their expectations of mutual support have existed for decades. Why, therefore, was it considered necessary to formalise a commitment that an attack on one would be regarded as an attack on all?

The answer may lie less in the bilateral relationships between the three countries and more in the transformation of the regional security environment.

# The Strategic Environment

The Middle East and its surrounding strategic geography are passing through a period of extraordinary fluidity.

First, the traditional American security architecture in the Gulf has been seriously tested. This does not mean that the United States has withdrawn from the region, nor that an American withdrawal is inevitable – though some feel that the situation is heading in that direction. Washington continues to reaffirm its commitment to Gulf security. But the events of 2026 have demonstrated the vulnerability of Gulf states even under the existing US security umbrella and have encouraged regional states to reconsider the extent to which their security can depend upon an external power.

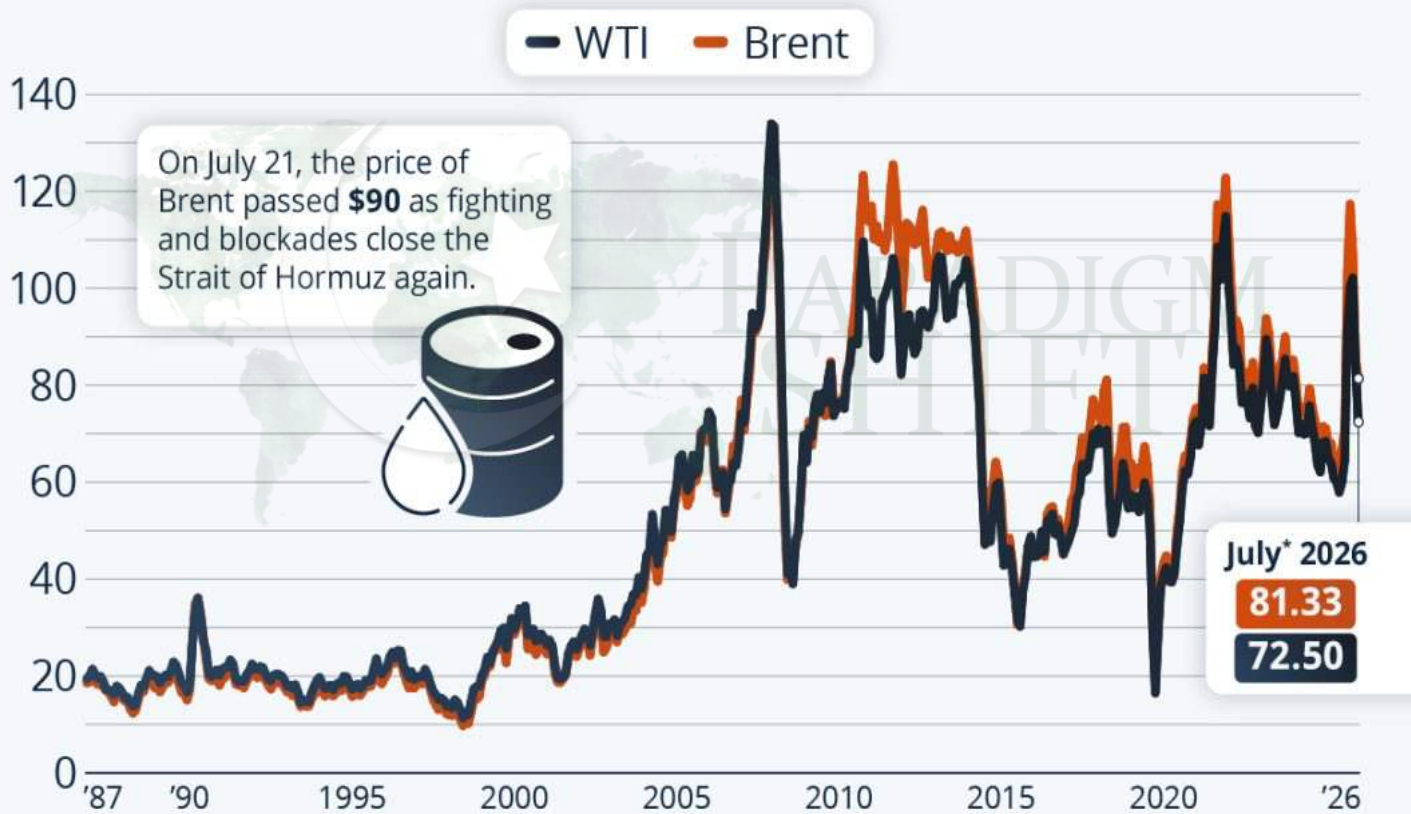
Secondly, the regional order increasingly displays characteristics of a more plural and multipolar system. The United States remains the dominant external military power, but China, Russia, Iran, Türkiye, India and the major Gulf states are acquiring greater strategic room for manoeuvre.

China's expanding diplomatic role is particularly significant. Beijing has sought to position itself as a participant in Gulf diplomacy rather than merely an economic actor, while its relationships with Iran, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan give it a strategic presence across the region.

Thirdly, Iran has emerged as one of the region's most consequential strategic powers. I would hesitate to describe Iran simply as the dominant regional power, for the moment, because it has considerable military and economic vulnerabilities to resolve. Nevertheless, its geographical position, missile capability, asymmetric capacity and ability to influence the Strait of Hormuz give it extraordinary strategic leverage. The present disruption of Hormuz demonstrates the point. Shipping through the strait has fallen dramatically, with the waterway historically carrying roughly one-fifth of global oil and LNG shipments. The Strait of Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb are therefore not merely regional waterways. They constitute strategic chokepoints whose disruption can affect global energy supplies, shipping, insurance, inflation and supply chains.

# Oil Price to Spike Once More on Renewed Closure at Hormuz?

Average monthly price per barrel of WTI/Brent crude oil  
(in U.S. dollars)



statista

**“Oil Price to Spike Once More on Renewed Closure at Hormuz?” by Statista is licensed under CC BY-ND 4.0.**

Hydrocarbons remain a critical component of the global economy. If disruption of Gulf energy exports and maritime traffic becomes prolonged, the consequences will extend well beyond the region and could affect global economic growth.

# The United States and the Search for Burden-sharing

The United States now faces a difficult strategic dilemma. It cannot easily abandon the Gulf without significant political and strategic consequences. Equally, an indefinite commitment to defend every element of the regional order carries increasing military and financial costs, which for now, more and more, appear to be beyond American capacity.



The likely American objective, therefore, may not be a simple withdrawal. It may instead be a transition from direct security provision towards burden-sharing, in which regional powers assume greater responsibility while the United States retains influence, access and strategic relationships. This distinction is important.

Thus, the agreement is compatible with an American preference for greater regional burden-sharing while simultaneously being compatible with the desire of the three signatories to develop greater strategic autonomy. However, the efficacy of how the US will still be able to exercise control or influence in the region becomes highly questionable and appears more to be a product of assumptions than strategic logic.

The agreement may therefore represent something more complicated than either an American project or an anti-American project. It could be a form of strategic hedging. The three countries can reduce their dependence upon any single external security provider while retaining their existing relationships with the United States, China and NATO. Indeed, Türkiye has explicitly stated that the Makkah Agreement does not replace existing alliances. Something of hunting with the hounds and running with the hares.

## What Is the Threat?

This brings us to the central question surrounding any defence agreement: What is the threat? The Makkah Joint Defence Agreement does not name an adversary. Pakistan and Türkiye have described it as defensive and not directed against any particular country.

Is Iran the threat? The agreement's signatories say it is not directed against Iran. Would Pakistan and Türkiye be expected to fight in support of [Saudi Arabia against the Houthis](#)? Would Saudi Arabia and Pakistan support Türkiye if Turkish forces or interests were attacked in Syria or Libya? Would Saudi Arabia and Türkiye be expected to support Pakistan if Pakistan were attacked by Afghanistan or India? Would the agreement extend to the Red Sea and Bab el-Mandeb? Would an attack upon a member's commercial shipping constitute an armed attack for purposes of collective defence? And what would happen if Israel undertook military action against one of the members?

These are not hypothetical questions designed to create a doomsday scenario. They are the fundamental questions that must be answered if the Agreement is to evolve from a political declaration into a functioning defence mechanism. Pakistan's Foreign Office has itself acknowledged that questions concerning deployment, the definition of an attack and the operational red lines are matters requiring technical determination.

## The Geography of Collective Defence

The problem becomes even more complicated when one examines the geography. Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb are connected through the broader maritime architecture of the region, but they are not the same strategic theatre. Hormuz principally involves Iran, Oman and the Gulf states. Bab el-Mandeb connects the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden and involves Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Djibouti, Eritrea and international shipping. This is why the Red Sea becomes important to any future Makkah architecture. Saudi Arabia is already pursuing a multinational maritime coalition for the protection of Red Sea shipping, while Türkiye and Pakistan have expressed support for regional maritime-security efforts.

# The World's Piracy Hotspots

Piracy incidents and successful hijackings of vessels between 2000 and 2024, by region\*

■ Total reported incidents ● Successful hijackings



\* Includes armed robbery of ships. The real number of pirate attacks is likely higher due to cases going unreported.

Source: International Maritime Organization



statista

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The obvious question, therefore, is: How will the Makkah Defence Agreement relate to these existing and emerging maritime-security mechanisms? And if a Pakistani, Saudi or Turkish commercial vessel is attacked in the Red Sea, who has responsibility? These are precisely the issues that need to be defined. The regional architecture is already becoming crowded. The Makkah Agreement does not emerge into an empty strategic space.

The region is increasingly characterised by overlapping bilateral and multilateral security relationships. India, for example, has developed a Strategic Defence Partnership Framework with the UAE, while India and Israel maintain a deep and expanding defence-industrial relationship. However, an accurate description is that the region contains multiple overlapping bilateral security relationships and not one of UAE-Israeli-sponsored animosity.



The emerging regional order is not necessarily going to consist of two opposing military blocs. It is more likely to resemble a network of overlapping partnerships, in which countries cooperate in some areas while competing or disagreeing in others.

The UAE is particularly important in this respect. Its relationships with Saudi Arabia, India, Israel, the United States and other powers make it impossible to construct a durable Gulf security

architecture while simply ignoring Abu Dhabi.

Likewise, the serious strategic differences that have emerged between Saudi Arabia and the UAE over Yemen, regional influence and energy policy demonstrate that even ostensibly friendly states do not necessarily possess identical strategic interests.

# The Interoperability Question

The Agreement's most important challenge may ultimately be military rather than political. The three countries operate within different defence ecosystems. Türkiye is a NATO member and operates extensively with NATO-standard systems. Pakistan operates a mixed ecosystem, including substantial Chinese-origin equipment and technology alongside Western systems. Saudi Arabia remains heavily dependent upon American-origin defence systems and associated support architecture. This does not necessarily make interoperability impossible. In fact, Türkiye has now explicitly identified joint exercises, advanced military technologies, unmanned systems, electronic warfare, artificial intelligence, joint production and technology transfer as areas of future cooperation. But it does mean that interoperability cannot be assumed. It must be built. The issues include:

- Secure communications
- Data links
- Command-and-control systems
- Intelligence sharing
- Friend-or-foe identification (IFF) systems
- Air-defence integration
- Electronic warfare
- Satellite communications
- Logistics
- Ammunition standards and storage
- Maintenance of cybersecurity
- Rules of engagement
- Common operating procedures

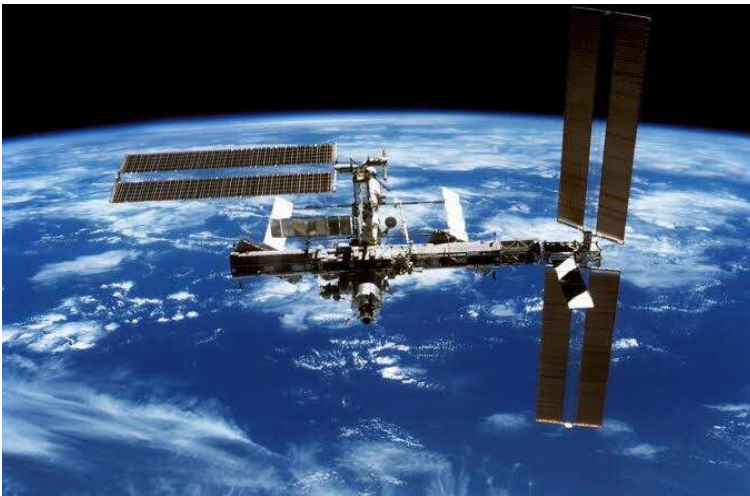
The greatest challenge is not whether Turkish, Pakistani and Saudi forces can fight well. They undoubtedly can. The question is whether they can fight together as an integrated force. That requires years of training, exercises, common doctrine, operational cohesion and institutional development.

# The Satellite Problem

The same issue applies to space-based systems. All three countries use multiple navigation and satellite capabilities, and their militaries possess varying degrees of indigenous and foreign-supported capacity but still remain dependent, to some extent, on the US, NATO or China respectively. The underlying concern, however, is that where critical military functions depend upon externally controlled satellite, communications, navigation or intelligence infrastructure, strategic autonomy remains incomplete. A genuinely autonomous regional security architecture must therefore progressively develop:

- Indigenous satellite communications
- Regional earth observation
- Secure military communications
- Independent positioning and timing capabilities
- Integrated intelligence systems

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This is a long-term project, but it is precisely the sort of project that could transform the Makkah Agreement from a political arrangement into a genuine regional capability.

## Iran Cannot Simply be Excluded

This brings me to what may be the most important recommendation. If the objective is genuinely to create a regional security architecture, Iran cannot permanently remain outside it. Iran possesses the geography of Hormuz. It is a major military power. It is an essential actor in the Gulf. It has influence in Iraq, Yemen and elsewhere.

And it has already stated publicly that it does not regard the Makkah Agreement as necessarily threatening, while also saying that a regional security mechanism could be useful if it is inclusive and reflects the realities of the region. The long-term objective should therefore not be to create a new military bloc against Iran. It should be to create a regional security architecture in which Iran eventually has a place. This is not appeasement. It is strategic realism. A Gulf security architecture that excludes the country controlling one side of the Strait of Hormuz will always have a fundamental structural weakness.

## Egypt and the Expansion of the Architecture

Egypt should be the next obvious candidate. Egypt possesses the Suez Canal, has a major military establishment and occupies the geographical junction between the Mediterranean, the Red Sea and the wider Arab security environment. Türkiye has already identified Egypt as a potential future participant in the Makkah arrangement. An architecture comprising Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and Egypt would therefore have a substantially different geographical character. It would connect South Asia, the Gulf, the Red Sea, Suez, and the Eastern Mediterranean.

Later, other regional countries could be incorporated progressively. The founding members should remain the core, while other states could participate at different levels according to their geographical interests, military capacities and political commitments. The objective should be concentric rather than exclusive.

## What Does Each Country Actually Bring?

It would be a mistake to regard Pakistan merely as the recipient of Saudi financial assistance. Pakistan brings considerable strategic capital to the arrangement. It brings one of the region's largest and most experienced armed forces, extensive operational experience, a substantial defence-industrial base and nuclear deterrence. Though at this time the nuclear capacity is not relevant to any defence agreement and nor can be even in the future without risking serious controversy. It also brings a long-established defence relationship with Türkiye, including institutional mechanisms for defence-industry cooperation, training and capacity building.

Saudi Arabia brings financial weight, energy resources, regional centrality and considerable defence expenditure. Türkiye brings a rapidly expanding defence industry, military technology and strategic reach across the Middle East and Mediterranean. There is therefore genuine strategic complementarity between the three countries. The challenge is to convert these complementary assets into integrated capability.

## What Does Pakistan Receive?

Pakistan's economic circumstances cannot be ignored. Pakistan is struggling to achieve a degree of macroeconomic stabilisation and remains constrained by high public and external debt, heavy debt servicing, weak revenue mobilisation, structural energy liabilities and continuing dependence upon external financing. Saudi Arabia remains an important financial and economic partner. The strategic relationship should instead be understood more broadly. Pakistan potentially gains the following:



- Enhanced regional diplomatic weight
- Deeper defence-industrial cooperation
- Access to Turkish technology
- Saudi investment and energy cooperation
- Greater strategic relevance
- Opportunities for joint defence production
- The possibility of becoming a central participant in a new regional security architecture

These are substantial gains. But they will materialise only if Pakistan itself possesses the economic and institutional capacity to exploit them. The Pakistani dilemma remains: a country cannot exercise sustained strategic influence abroad while remaining institutionally weak at home. Pakistan has made some progress in stabilising its macroeconomic position – even though some feel it is playing with statistics. It would therefore be inaccurate to outright describe the economy as having collapsed. But still, stabilisation is not transformation.

The country still carries substantial debt, large financing requirements, energy-sector liabilities and a narrow fiscal base. The challenge is therefore to convert macroeconomic stabilisation into sustained economic growth, institutional strength and national resilience. The Makkah Agreement cannot substitute for this. Indeed, it makes it even more important for Pakistan to become an effective regional power. For this, Pakistan needs the following:

- Economic growth
- Fiscal capacity
- Energy security
- Institutional stability
- Internal security
- Social development
- Technological capability
- Defence-industrial autonomy

Without these, Pakistan risks becoming a participant in somebody else's regional architecture rather than a country helping to design it. Pakistan now must focus on ensuring that the agreement becomes politically and militarily functional and it itself remains relevant to the process. The agreement has been signed; it should therefore be made to work. The following are strongly recommended for consideration:

### **Make the Text Public**

The complete agreement should be placed before Parliament and the public so that its objectives, obligations and limitations can be understood.

## Define the Threat

The Agreement should specify what constitutes an armed attack and what constitutes an act of war against the coalition.

## Define Geography

Does collective defence apply only to sovereign territory or also to armed forces, diplomatic missions and commercial shipping outside national territory?

## Establish Permanent Institutions

A permanent political-military council, secretariat, planning staff and appropriate joint headquarters should be developed.

## Build Interoperability

Joint exercises should progress from symbolic exercises towards integrated command-and-control, intelligence, air defence, maritime security, cyber and electronic-warfare exercises.



## **Create an Independent Communications and Intelligence Ecosystem**

The long-term objective should be secure regional communications, satellite observation and intelligence-sharing mechanisms that reduce excessive dependence upon external powers.

## **Integrate Maritime Security**

The Makkah mechanism should be coordinated with the emerging Red Sea maritime-security architecture and clearly define responsibilities in the Red Sea, Bab el-Mandeb, Arabian Sea and Gulf.

## **Bring Egypt Into the Core**

Egypt would provide a geographical bridge between the Gulf, the Red Sea and the Mediterranean.

## **Engage Iran**

Iran should not be treated as a permanent enemy of the architecture. The ultimate objective should be an inclusive regional security mechanism in which Iran has a place.

## **Eventually Accommodate the UAE and Other Regional States**

The architecture should be sufficiently flexible to accommodate states that have different relationships with the United States, China, India, Israel and other powers.

## **Reduce External Interference Gradually**

The objective should not be immediate strategic separation from global powers such as the US and EU. Rather, the region should progressively develop the autonomous capacity to determine its own security priorities independently.

## Conclusion

The Makkah Defence Agreement is neither inconsequential nor yet a fully functioning military alliance. It is a beginning. Its significance lies less in the declaration that an attack upon one will be regarded as an attack upon all than in what the three countries now do with that declaration. The Agreement can become a political symbol, or it can become the nucleus of something much more consequential. It can become another regional arrangement dependent upon external powers for intelligence, communications, logistics and strategic direction, or it can gradually develop into an autonomous regional security architecture. The choice will depend upon what happens next.

For the United States, the Agreement may provide an opportunity to transfer greater responsibility to regional partners while retaining influence without bearing the entire military and financial burden of regional security. For Saudi Arabia, it offers additional strategic depth. For Türkiye, it offers greater regional reach and an opportunity to extend its defence-industrial and military influence. For Pakistan, it offers perhaps the greatest opportunity—and potentially the greatest danger.

Pakistan can use the agreement to expand its regional influence, deepen its bilateral relationships and establish itself as a central participant in a new security architecture. But this will require Pakistan to bring economic strength, institutional credibility and strategic autonomy to the table. We cannot expect a defence agreement to create the national power and stability that the agreement itself requires to exist.

A country cannot plan a banquet while dying of hunger itself. But neither should a country that has survived crisis, stabilised itself and been given a new opportunity spend all its energy describing its own illness, wailing over its own misery.

The Makkah Defence Agreement has given Pakistan an opportunity. The responsibility now is to make it work—not for Saudi Arabia, not for Türkiye, not for the United States, and not against Iran or any other country, but as the beginning of a regional security architecture owned and shaped by the countries of the region themselves.

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# Is Pakistan Closer To Spain Than We Think? A Regional Power in South Asia

## About the Author



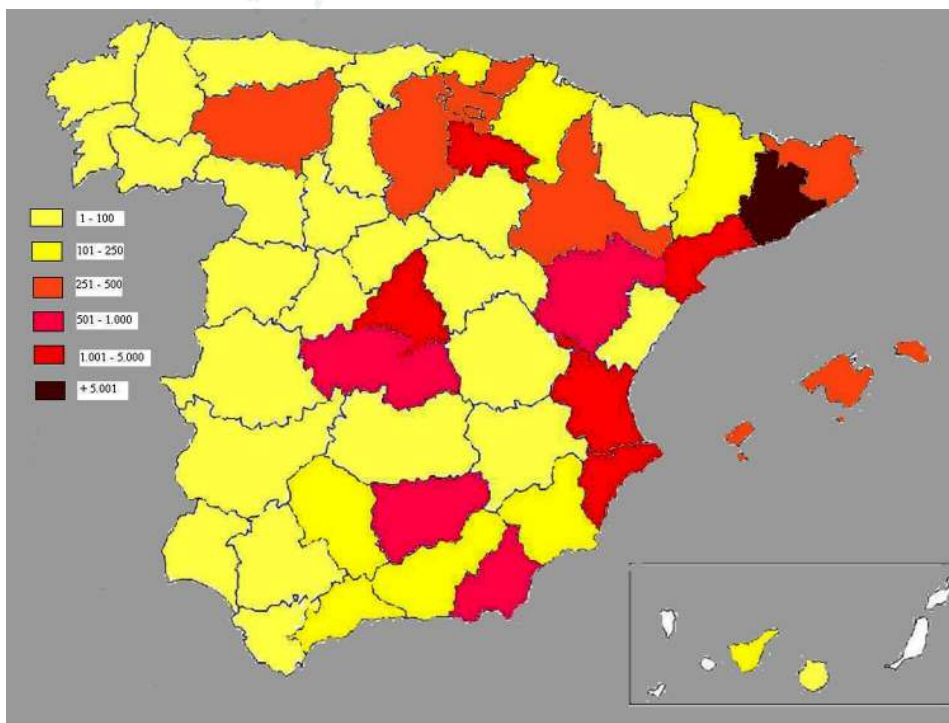
Carlos Uriarte Sánchez is a Professor of Law at the International University of La Rioja (UNIR), CEU-Fernando III University of Seville, Pristina, and the Society for International Studies (SEI)

On August 14, Pakistan celebrates the 79th anniversary of its independence from the British Raj in 1947. A new state was born, led by Mohammed Ali Jinnah, known as Quaid-e-Azam ("Great Leader"), who is regarded as the founding father of Pakistan. Today, it is a country situated between India and Afghanistan that is once again becoming key to understanding Asia.

Trade relations between Pakistan and Spain have enormous potential. There is good cooperation in the fields of policing and migration. There is also a curious cultural connection: the cities of Córdoba and Lahore, the historic capital of Punjab, have been sister cities since 1968. This link is due to the Pakistani national poet Muhammad Iqbal, who greatly admired Al-Andalus.

**Large Pakistani communities have settled among us: they are our neighbours, entrepreneurs, students... many of them are already Spanish citizens.**

Pakistan is a country that seems quite far away from Spain, when in reality we are much closer than we think. Large Pakistani communities have settled in our country, particularly in Barcelona, Valencia and Logroño. More than 117,000 Pakistani citizens live in Spain and are well integrated, with many already belonging to the second generation (25,000 of them residing in Barcelona).



Spain and Pakistan are strengthening cooperation on migration, returns and the fight against human-trafficking networks. There is an Afghan route used by people attempting to reach Spain through Pakistan. Both countries can cooperate in preventing Islamist radicalisation and terrorism. Pakistan is a nation paying the price of the Afghan crisis five years after the Taliban returned to power. Islamabad is expelling Afghan citizens. Since 2023, more than 2.6 million Afghans have returned to Afghanistan. Islamabad accuses various armed groups, including the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), of using Afghan territory as a sanctuary for terrorists from which they launch attacks against Pakistan. The problem therefore has both a humanitarian and a military dimension.

Pakistan is a country of great contrasts: a nuclear power (the only Muslim-majority country possessing nuclear weapons), with 240 million inhabitants (the fifth most populous nation in the world), and with major geopolitical importance as a key actor between China, India, Afghanistan and Iran; but at the same time, it faces major economic, social and structural problems (high debt and inflation and energy problems aggravated by the crisis in the Strait of Hormuz), as well as border disputes with its neighbours Afghanistan and India. The paradox is extraordinary: a country capable of building and maintaining a nuclear arsenal while simultaneously having to turn to the IMF to stabilise its economy. This forces Islamabad to strike a difficult balance between China (its major strategic partner), the Gulf states, Europe, the United States and international financial institutions.

**The connection between the two countries is not limited to migration.**

Despite everything mentioned above, which is certainly real, there is also another Pakistan that is often overlooked by the Spanish media: its enormous textile industry, agriculture, technology, startups, universities, cinema and music, cricket, and a huge urban population in cities such as Lahore, its cultural centre; Islamabad, its administrative and political capital; and Karachi, its major cosmopolitan, commercial and port city. Spain has commercial interests, particularly in the agri-food sector (Spanish exports to Pakistan increased by 75% in 2024 compared with 2023, starting from relatively small figures).

The European Union is one of Pakistan's main economic partners. Trade in goods between the EU and Pakistan reached €12.2 billion in 2025. For Pakistan, the Union accounted for 14.1% of its total trade, whereas Pakistan represents only 0.2% of European trade in goods. This is therefore an asymmetric relationship, meaning that from a trade perspective Pakistan needs Europe more than Europe needs Pakistan. Nevertheless, this does not mean that Pakistan is irrelevant to Europeans. Quite the opposite. Its geographical position makes it a central chess piece on a board occupied by other players such as India, China, Afghanistan, Iran and the Gulf.

**Its leadership within the Muslim world is highly significant: nuclear capability, a major non-Arab Muslim state in South Asia, a mediating role, and membership of the new defence alliance formed with Saudi Arabia and Turkey.**

Pakistan stands out as a Muslim military power because it is the only Muslim-majority country possessing nuclear weapons. Its armed forces, in addition to their enormous size (660,000 active-duty personnel, making it the fourth-largest army in Asia by number of troops after China, India and North Korea), have extensive military experience. It also holds an **important political position as a founding member of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)**, which comprises 57 Muslim-majority states. Furthermore, its influence extends beyond the Arab world, and it is the major non-Arab Muslim power in South Asia, maintaining good relations with countries such as Turkey, Azerbaijan, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the countries of Central Asia. Pakistan does not have Saudi Arabia's wealth or religious influence, nor Indonesia's population, but it possesses something none of them do: nuclear weapons and an army of 660,000 personnel.

On August 7, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Turkey signed the **Makkah Joint Defence Agreement**, establishing a principle of mutual defence, military exercises, political and military coordination, intelligence sharing and cooperation in the defence industry. The emerging defence alliance would be open to the accession of additional states, including Egypt. The agreement strengthens the one already concluded in Riyadh on September 17, 2025, between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. We should also remember that Turkey is a member of NATO. Pakistan is likewise playing an important mediating role between the United States and Iran.

About China, Pakistan maintains a strategic partnership thanks to its geographical position in southern Asia, along the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean, particularly through the Pakistani port of Gwadar, which forms part of the **China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)**, one of the major projects of China's Belt and Road Initiative. Gwadar could also become an important pearl in what some analysts refer to as the "String of Pearls" strategy (a strategy that China does not officially recognise).

If understanding Spain requires understanding football, understanding Pakistan requires understanding cricket.



In conclusion, Pakistan today seeks to maintain relations simultaneously with China, the United States, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Europe (through trade and immigration). At the same time, it continues to regard India unequivocally and as a priority as its rival. This rivalry dates back to the independence and founding of both nations in 1947 and their struggle for control of the historic regions of the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, located in the mountainous Himalayan region, whose sovereignty is disputed primarily by India and Pakistan, although China also controls part of the territory. It is therefore a rivalry that goes far beyond the one witnessed at the Cricket World Cup.

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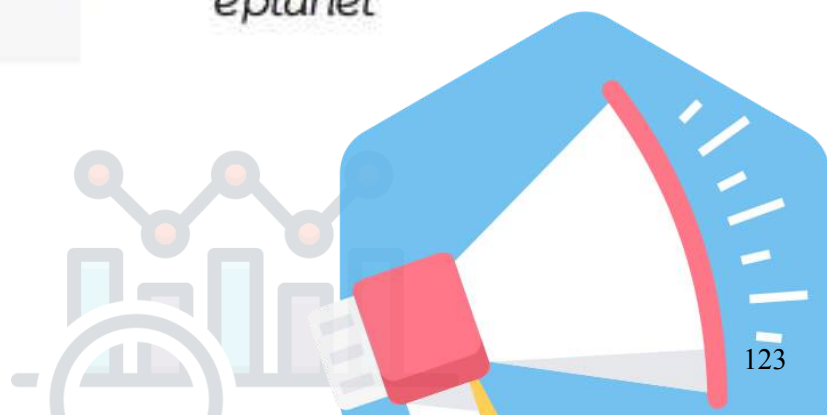


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