

Journal of Contemporary Studies

A bi-annual publication of the Faculty of Contemporary Studies

Patron-in-Chief

Lieutenant General Babar Iftikhar, HI (M), President, National Defence University, Islamabad.

Chairperson

Prof. Dr. Arshi Saleem Hashmi, Dean, Faculty of Contemporary Studies, National Defence University, Islamabad.

EDITORIAL BOARD

**Editor-in-Chief
Editor**

Prof. Dr. Shaheen Akhtar
Dr. Sumeera Imran

Assistant Editors

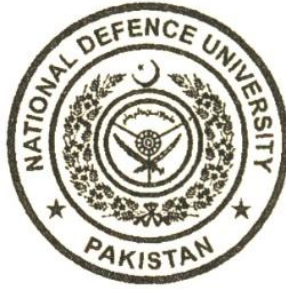
Dr. Asif Iqbal Dawar
Dr. Abdul Rauf
Dr. Bilal Latif

Research Associate

Ms. Hafsah Batool

EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD

- ❖ Prof. Ian Talbot, Professor of Modern British History at the University of Southampton, UK.
- ❖ Prof. Dr. Sally Wallace, Andrew Young School of Policy Studies, Georgia State University, USA.
- ❖ Prof. Dr. Mehmet Asutay, School of Government and International Affairs, Durham University, UK.
- ❖ Prof. Marvin G. Weinbaum, Director for Pakistan Studies at the Middle East Institute, USA.
- ❖ Dr. Andrew Futter, Associate Professor of International Politics at University of Leicester, UK.
- ❖ Dr. Julian Droogan, Department of Security Studies and Criminology, Macquarie University, Australia.
- ❖ Dr. S. Gulden Ayman, Associate Professor, Marmara University Istanbul, Turkey.
- ❖ Dr. Nishchal N. Pandey, Director Centre for South Asian Studies, Kathmandu, Nepal.
- ❖ Dr. Ying Rong, Senior Research Fellow, China Institute of International Studies (CIIS).
- ❖ Prof. Dr. Arshin Adib Moghaddam, Department of Politics and International Studies, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London.
- ❖ Dr. Hasan Askari Rizvi, Political and Defence Analyst, Pakistan.
- ❖ Dr. Moonis Ahmar, Dean Faculty of Arts, University of Karachi, Pakistan.
- ❖ Dr. Rashid Ahmad Khan, Dean Social Sciences, University of Sargodha, Pakistan.
- ❖ Dr. Ejaz Hussain, Professor National Institute of Pakistan Studies, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad.



Winter 2025
Volume XIV, Number 2

JOURNAL OF
CONTEMPORARY STUDIES

Editor-in-Chief
Prof. Dr. Shaheen Akhtar

Editor
Dr. Sumeera Imran

Faculty of Contemporary Studies
National Defence University
Islamabad, Pakistan

Editor's Note

The *Journal of Contemporary Studies* is a flagship publication of the Faculty of Contemporary Studies (FCS), National Defence University (NDU), Islamabad. The journal offers scholarly analyses on contemporary issues related to international relations, traditional and non-traditional security and contributes to policy debates on topics of global governance.

This journal issue comprises five articles providing valuable research information on key developments related to topics of national and international significance. The first article, *Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations: The New Regional Power Play and Security Concerns* by Prof. Dr. Shabnam Gul posits that the 2025 Pakistan–Afghanistan escalation represents a structural shift from historical proxy dynamics to a state of open militarized deterrence within a multipolar regional order. It highlights how the convergence of militant reorganization and border militarization has transformed bilateral tensions into a regionalized security contest.

The second article, *Pakistan's Approach to the Prevention of Arms Race of Outer Space: Gaps in Global Space Governance* by Amna Saqib and Syed Ali Abbas examines the escalating militarization of outer space and the subsequent obsolescence of the 1967 Outer Space Treaty in the face of modern dual-use technologies and ASAT capabilities. It analyzes Pakistan's strategic advocacy for the PAROS initiative and legally binding non-weaponization norms as a response to regional power asymmetries and the inadequacy of current voluntary governance. Ultimately, the article argues for a revised, inclusive legal framework featuring robust verification mechanisms to safeguard the interests of middle powers and maintain strategic stability in a multipolar era.

The third article, *Toward the Next World Order: The US Decline and Alternative Models of World Order* by Muneeb Butt and Dr Mubeen Adnan This study examines the transition from U.S.-led unipolarity to a fragmented, unbalanced multipolar order characterized by competing civilizational and ideological visions from China, Russia, and the Islamic world. Utilizing a neoclassical realist framework, it argues that global politics is currently defined by regional institutional experimentation and legitimacy contestation rather than a singular ideological confrontation. The findings conclude that the future global order will be a negotiated reality among multiple poles, necessitating a reconciliation of divergent normative and strategic models.

The fourth article, *Global South Perspectives on Cyber Governance: Pakistan's Advocacy for a Legally Binding ICT Framework at the UN* by Iraj Abid analyzes Pakistan's advocacy for a legally binding international instrument to govern the dual-use risks of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) within various UN forums. Utilizing a framework that combines constructivism with a Global South perspective, it explores how Islamabad's position reflects both its national security concerns and its broader commitment to multilateral technology governance. The study addresses a scholarly gap by scrutinizing Pakistan's diplomatic interventions as a representative effort by a developing state to shape inclusive, rules-based norms for global cybersecurity.

The last article, *Pakistan's Political History, 5th+ Generation & its Impact on National Socio-Economic Security of Pakistan: A Theoretical Analysis* by Dr Sulman Naeem Mirza analyzes Pakistan's **5th Generation**(post-2000) using Youth Bulge and Political Socialization theories to assess its impact on national security. It argues that while this demographic offers transformative potential, fragile governance risk turning it into a security liability. The paper proposes a conceptual model for reimagining security through formalized state-youth partnerships in youth-majority provinces.

I extend my sincere appreciation to the contributors, peer-reviewers, and the editorial team for their diligent efforts in shaping this issue. The collective work aims to enrich the discourse at national and international levels. As we navigate the complexities of interdisciplinary dialogue, we recognize the significance of fostering connections across fields. This is a humble offering to add to the current discourse.

Editor
Dr Sumeera Imran

CONTENTS

1.	Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations: The New Regional Power Play and Security Concerns Dr Shabnam Gul	1
2.	Pakistan's Approach Towards The Prevention Of Arms Race Of Outer Space (Paros): Gaps In Global Space Governance Amna Saqib & Syed Ali Abbas	22
3.	Toward the Next World Order: The US Decline and Alternative Models of World Order Muneeb Butt & Dr Mubeen Adnan	44
4.	Global South Perspectives on Cyber Governance: Pakistan's Advocacy for a Legally Binding ICT Framework at the UN Iraj Abid	65
5.	Pakistan's Political History, 5th+ Generation & its Impact on National Socio-Economic Security of Pakistan: A Theoretical Analysis Dr Sulman Naeem Mirza	90

PAKISTAN- AFGHANISTAN RELATIONS: THE NEW REGIONAL POWER PLAY AND SECURITY CONCERNS

Dr. Shabnam Gul*

Abstract

This study argues that the 2025 escalation in Pakistan–Afghanistan relations marks a structural turning point in the bilateral security paradigm rather than a continuation of cyclical border tensions. While the US withdrawal in 2021 provided a permissive strategic environment, it was the confluence of three factors, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) reorganisation from Afghan territory, increased militarisation of the border along the Durand Line, and competitive regional repositioning by China, Russia, India, and Iran, that made the relationship a regionalised security contest. The article has two primary assertions. To start with, the exacerbation of the relations in 2021-25 is a shift out of the proxy-buffer expectation to the open militarised deterrence that fundamentally alters the strategic choice of Pakistan towards Afghanistan. Secondly, the Saudi Arabia-Turkiye-Qatar trilateral mediation framework in October 2025 is a new pattern of managing conflicts in the region with Muslim majority states on the lead which heralds the redistribution of diplomatic powers by the western powers to South-Central Asian crises. With a collection of official statements, policy reports, datasets of conflicts, as well as regional diplomatic documents of 2021-2025 in view, this article argues that Afghanistan has shifted into a stage of both great-power military intervention to a research laboratory of regionally controlled politics of security. The 2025 crisis is therefore a turning point that is redefining the relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan in the framework of a multipolar regional order.

Keywords: Diplomacy, Militancy, Border, Conflict, Security

Introduction

A complex interplay of geography, history, culture, and strategic imperatives has long defined the Pakistan-Afghanistan relationship. In South Asia, few bilateral relationships have been as consequential yet as volatile as that between Islamabad and Kabul. Their

* Chairperson, Department of International Relations, Lahore College for Women University, Lahore, Pakistan. Email: shabnam.gul@lcwu.edu.pk

history is anchored in deep-rooted ethnic linkages, intertwined security concerns, and a shared border stretching over 2,600 kilometres.¹ The relationship continues to shape the political and security fabric of the broader region. The developments following the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021 have further intensified these dynamics.² This has introduced a new layer of geopolitical uncertainty and transformed Afghanistan into an arena for evolving regional power contests. It is within this intricate context that Pakistan's contemporary security concerns and diplomatic choices must be understood.

Historically, Pakistan and Afghanistan have shared a relationship marked by trust deficits, strategic anxieties, and divergent political worldviews. Since Pakistan's independence in 1947, Afghanistan was the only country to oppose its entry into the United Nations, rooted primarily in Kabul's refusal to recognise the Durand Line as the official border.³ Furthermore, during the General Ayub Khan era, the question of Pakhtoonistan further strained ties throughout the 1950s and 1960s, laying the groundwork for a relationship characterised by mutual suspicion. Yet, despite political disagreements, the people-to-people connection remained strong due to tribal, cultural, and linguistic affinities along the borderlands.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 marked a turning point. Pakistan emerged as a frontline state supporting the Afghan Mujahideen with the backing of the United States and Saudi Arabia during General Zia-ul-Haq's era.⁴ The decade-long Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan not only reshaped regional politics but also created long-lasting demographic and security consequences. Over 3 million Afghan refugees migrated to Pakistan.⁵ Moreover, during the democratic phase of Pakistan, the civil war of the 1990s and the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan further reshaped perceptions, with Pakistan being one of the few states to recognise Taliban rule before 2001.

Geographically, the Durand Line remains both a bridge and a barrier. It connects communities and trade routes, but also serves as one of the world's most challenging security frontiers due to mountainous terrain, porous crossing points, and a historically weak state writ on both

¹ Muhammad Kashif Irshad, "Border Management and National Security in Pakistan: A Strategic Case Study of the Durand Line," *Advance Social Science Archive Journal* 4, no. 01 (2025): 1465–74.

² Al Jazeera, "Pakistani, Afghan Forces Exchange Deadly Border Fire: What's Next?" *Al Jazeera*, October 12, 2025.

³ Lutfur Rehman, *Revisiting the Durand Line: Historical and Legal Perspectives* (Islamabad: IPS Press, 2023), 45

⁴ Al Jazeera, "How Pakistan Misread the Taliban and Lost Peace on the Frontier," *Al Jazeera*, October 1, 2025.

⁵ Research, Sat. "Afghan Refugees in Pakistan." *South Asia Times*, August 21, 2025. <https://southasiatimes.org/afghan-refugees-in-pakistan/>.

sides. This geographical reality has enabled cross-border tribal interaction but has also facilitated militant movements, smuggling networks, and illicit trade. Thus, the very geography that links the two states also amplifies their security vulnerabilities.⁶

After the Incident of 9/11, Afghanistan occupied a critical position. Pakistan became part of the US War on Terror under the leadership of President General Pervaiz Musharraf. This had direct implications for regional security, trade, energy corridors, and counterterrorism efforts. For Pakistan, Afghanistan is more than a neighbour. It is a strategic buffer state. A peaceful Afghanistan promises secure borders, improved trade through transit corridors, and reduced militant activity. Conversely, an unstable Afghanistan translates into refugee influxes, cross-border terrorism, and heightened involvement of hostile intelligence networks, most notably those emanating from India.⁷

The Pakistani-Afghan relationship has fluctuated historically between wariness and suspicion, and was organised around border contestation, sanctuary for militants, flows of refugees, and rival regional alignments. Yet the years between the withdrawal of United States forces from Afghanistan in August 2021 and the October 2025 violent escalation at the border are more than another episodic downturn. It represents a structural shift in the bilateral security equation and a restructuring of regional crisis management mechanisms. This article addresses a crucial question: Was the 2025 Pakistan-Afghan escalation merely another cycle of border tension, or is there a structural shift in bilateral security relations and regional conflict management in the post-U.S. withdrawal environment? This study advances two interrelated arguments. First, the escalation of 2025 represents a shift from earlier Pakistani expectations of strategic depth during the rule of a Taliban regime to a doctrine of overt deterrence and fortified border control. The revival of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) from Afghan territory, and the reluctance of Kabul to take concrete action has heightened Pakistan's threat perception towards its neighbour.

Second the Saudi Arabia-Turkiye-Qatar coordinated intervention in October 2025 is an emerging precedent of the intra-regional Islamic mediation model, and it is evident that there is a growing trend in how Pakistan-Afghanistan crisis management is being transformed from Western-led to regionally anchored diplomatic mechanisms. While existing literature on Pakistan-Afghanistan relations has minutely discussed repeatedly the disputes over the Durand Line, strategic depth doctrine and post-9/11 counterterrorism alignments, this article

⁶ "The Durand Line - A Razor's Edge between Afghanistan & Pakistan," n.d. <https://www.efsas.org/publications/study-papers/the-durand-line-a-razors-edge-between-afghanistan-and-pakistan/>

⁷ Nazir Ahmad Mir, "Pakistan's TTP Challenge and Afghanistan-Pakistan Relations." *The Diplomat*, February 8, 2024.

contributes three analytical innovations: It marks the year 2025 as a critical juncture, not merely as a continuation of post-2021 instability, It conceptualises trilateral Gulf-Turkish mediation as a regional conflict management model, not as ad hoc diplomatic engagement. It places the Pakistan-Afghanistan tensions in the context of the broader multipolar rearrangements of the geopolitical environment of Afghanistan in which China, Russia, Iran and India recalibrated their influence after U.S withdrawal. Thus, instead of a descriptive timeframe, 2021-2025 in the article is conceptualised as a period of systemic transition in regional security ordering.

Objective of Study

1. To identify 2025 as a critical juncture, not simply a continuation of post-2021 instability.
2. To conceptualise trilateral Gulf-Turkish mediation as a regional conflict-management model, rather than ad hoc diplomatic engagement.
3. To situate Pakistan-Afghanistan tensions within the broader multipolar restructuring of Afghanistan's geopolitical environment, where China, Russia, Iran, and India recalibrated their influence following U.S. withdrawal.

Research Methodology

In this research, there is a qualitative approach to the analytical process that is based on a piece of evidence. It is based on official policy statements of Pakistan and Afghanistan, Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) briefings, United Nations humanitarian reporting, South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP) datasets, Congressional Research Service reports, Regional diplomatic communiques (2021-2025), Peer-reviewed scholarship on post-withdrawal security dynamics. The research draws on triangulation of casualty claims, infiltration data, and records of mediation in order to avoid relying upon single-source attributions. Where any figures are in dispute (e.g. October 2025 clashes) claims are presented comparatively and explicitly attributed.

US-Afghanistan Relations Post-Withdrawal

The United States' withdrawal from Afghanistan on 30 August 2021 marked the end of a twenty-year military presence that began after the 9/11 incident in 2001, when America was attacked by Al Qaida. Although the withdrawal formally ended America's longest war but it did not conclude U.S. strategic involvement. Instead, Washington shifted toward a recalibrated posture aimed at counterterrorism, humanitarian

support, and strategic competition in a rapidly changing regional environment.⁸

Over-the-Horizon Counterterrorism Strategy -after the withdrawal, the Biden Administration adopted an “over-the-horizon” strategy emphasising remote surveillance, intelligence partnerships, and targeted drone operations. With no military bases or troops inside Afghanistan, the U.S. relies primarily on regional airspace access, satellite intelligence, and cooperation with friendly states for counterterrorism operations.⁹

This shift is controversial. Intelligence analysts note that although the United States maintains global ISR (Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance) capabilities, the absence of physical presence limits situational awareness and rapid response.¹⁰ Some assessments caution that the over-the-horizon model may reduce the U.S. capacity to detect terrorist plots at early stages, allowing extremist groups more operational space.¹¹

Absence of Formal Recognition of the Taliban Government

Despite the Taliban establishing the *Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan* in August 2021, the United States has not extended formal diplomatic recognition. Washington argues that recognition is conditional upon Taliban commitments to counterterrorism, inclusive governance, and women’s rights.¹²

In contrast, geopolitical rivals have adopted a divergent approach. In July 2025, Russia became the first major power to formally recognise the Taliban government by accepting the credentials of a Taliban ambassador in Moscow (Gul Hassan), a move widely seen as an attempt to increase Russian influence in Central and South Asia.¹³

Conditional Engagement

The United States adopted a conditional engagement approach that distinguishes between humanitarian assistance and political recognition. U.S. aid is routed through the UN, the World Food Programme, and international NGOs—ensuring that resources do not directly legitimize Taliban rule. Humanitarian assistance remains substantial, with

⁸ Congressional Research Service, *Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy* (2022).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Modern Diplomacy, “The U.S.–Taliban Talks: A Strategic Shift in Counterterrorism,” October 18, 2025.

¹² CRS, *Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy*.

¹³ Reuters, “Russia Becomes First Country to Recognise Taliban Government,” July 3, 2025.

the U.S. being one of the largest donors to Afghan relief efforts from 2021 to 2025.¹⁴

A central condition for deeper engagement revolves around women's rights. Washington criticizes the Taliban's restrictions on female education, workforce participation, and freedom of movement. U.S. policymakers have repeatedly stated that any movement toward normalization depends on verifiable improvements in women's rights and governance transparency.

Counterterrorism conditionality remains equally critical. The U.S. insists that the Taliban must sever operational links with al-Qaeda and prevent groups such as Islamic State–Khorasan (IS-K) from using Afghan territory. Although the Taliban claims compliance, U.S. intelligence reports continue to highlight the persistence of ties between the Taliban and elements of al-Qaeda.

Reliance on Qatar as Diplomatic Intermediary

In the absence of direct diplomatic ties, the United States asked Qatar to play the role of its primary intermediary. Doha hosted the U.S. political office for Afghanistan and facilitated indirect dialogue on counterterrorism, humanitarian coordination, and detainee issues.¹⁵ In January 2025, Qatar brokered a significant prisoner exchange between the U.S. and the Taliban.¹⁶ The episode underscored Qatar's continued relevance as a neutral facilitator and demonstrated Washington's pragmatic approach: engaging the Taliban where necessary while withholding diplomatic recognition.

U.S. Strategic Concerns

Re-Emergence of Extremist Safe Havens

A principal American concern is that Afghanistan may once again become a hub for extremist groups. The absence of U.S. forces complicates real-time monitoring, and the fragmentation of Taliban factions may enable certain regions, particularly in eastern and southern Afghanistan, to harbour militants more freely.¹⁷

Taliban–al-Qaeda Ties

Despite Taliban assurances under the Doha Agreement signed on February 29, 2020 intelligence assessments indicate that Taliban–al-Qaeda ties persist at ideological and operational levels.¹⁸ These ties raise

¹⁴ United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Afghanistan Assistance Reports, 2021–2024.

¹⁵ Modern Diplomacy, "The U.S.–Taliban Talks," 2025.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ CRS, Terrorism and Security Assessments in Afghanistan, 2023.

¹⁸ Ibid.

alarm in Washington, particularly regarding the possibility that Afghanistan could again serve as a platform for global terrorism planning.

Strategic Penetration by China, Russia, and Iran

The U.S. is increasingly concerned about the growing influence of **China, Russia, and Iran**, each of which seeks to capitalize on the post-withdrawal vacuum:

China is pursuing investment in Afghanistan's untapped mineral reserves and exploring integration of Afghanistan into the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI¹⁹).

Russia, after recognising the Taliban government on July 3, 2025, is deepening security and economic ties with Kabul, including discussions on counter-narcotics and regional trade.²⁰

Iran maintains a pragmatic relationship, balancing ideological tensions with a need for border stability and expanded energy trade with Afghanistan.²¹

The growing footprint of these powers challenges U.S. influence in a region previously shaped by American military and diplomatic presence. The U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan has warned that this geopolitical shift could erode Western leverage in counterterrorism and regional stability discussions.²²

Future Trajectory

The post-U.S. withdrawal strategy reveals a complex balance: deterrence without deployment, engagement without recognition, and aid without empowerment of the Taliban regime. Analysts noted a gradual evolution in U.S. policy, from initial confidence in over-the-horizon capabilities to a more cautious, multi-layered approach combining intelligence operations, conditional diplomacy, and cooperation with regional actors like Qatar.²³

Ultimately, the sustainability of U.S.-Afghanistan relations depends on whether the Taliban fulfil commitments on counterterrorism and human rights, and on how effectively Washington navigates the rising influence of China, Russia, and Iran in Afghanistan.

¹⁹ ASC Central Asia Studies Journal, "China's Expanding Influence in Post-Withdrawal Afghanistan," 2024.

²⁰ Reuters, "Russia Recognises Taliban Government," 2025.

²¹ Eurasia Review, "Iran's Policy Toward Afghanistan After U.S. Withdrawal," 2024.

²² Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), "Power Shifts in Afghanistan After U.S. Withdrawal," 2022.

²³ Eurasia Review, "Iran's Policy Toward Afghanistan After U.S. Withdrawal," 2024.

Consequences to the Pakistan-Afghanistan Security Dynamics

The transition of the U.S. to an over-the-horizon posture indirectly heightened the level of tension between Pakistan and Afghanistan by diminishing international control at the expense of increasing strategic rivalry among the powers in the region. The lack of long-term Western military presence restricted the deterrence of militant regrouping and gave more responsibility to Pakistan in the fight against cross-border threats. As a result, the vacuum that was left after a withdrawal spurred the bilateral mistrust and led to Pakistani adoption of unilateral security in the Durand Line.

India's Strategic Use of Afghanistan's Land

India's Diplomatic and Development Footprint Before 2021

India's engagement with Afghanistan has historically been shaped by its ambition to establish political goodwill, economic linkages, and long-term strategic presence in the region. After the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001, India emerged as one of Afghanistan's most active development partners. New Delhi invested more than US\$3 billion across infrastructure, education, governance, and humanitarian programs, making it the largest regional donor in Afghanistan between 2002 and 2021.²⁴

One of India's landmark projects was the construction of the Zaranj-Delaram Highway, completed in 2009, which provided Afghanistan strategic access to the Iranian port of Chabahar, bypassing Pakistan entirely. This road became symbolic of India's intention to create alternate connectivity routes for Afghanistan and reduce Kabul's reliance on Islamabad for trade and transit.²⁵

India also built the Afghan Parliament Building in Kabul, inaugurated in December 2015²⁶, which became a key symbol of Indo-Afghan friendship. Additionally, the Salma Dam (also known as the India-Afghanistan Friendship Dam), completed in 2016 in Herat Province²⁷, provided major hydroelectric and irrigation benefits. These projects strengthened India's soft image and entrenched its presence within Afghan political and administrative structures. For Pakistan, this expanding footprint was strategically concerning, as it signalled New Delhi's growing influence in a region traditionally linked to Pakistan's strategic depth.

²⁴ Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, India-Afghanistan Development Partnership, 2020.

²⁵ "India Builds Key Afghan Road," BBC News, January 22, 2009.

²⁶ "PM Modi Inaugurates Afghan Parliament Building," The Hindu, December 25, 2015.

²⁷ "India Hands over Salma Dam to Afghanistan," Hindustan Times, June 4, 2016.

India's Re-Engagement with the Taliban After 2021

The Taliban's takeover of Kabul on 15 August 2021 forced India to reassess its Afghan policy. Having historically supported anti-Taliban factions, particularly the Northern Alliance led by figures like Ahmad Shah Massoud and Abdul Rashid Dostum, New Delhi initially adopted a cautious approach. However, by mid-2022, India began recalibrating its strategy to avoid a complete vacuum in Kabul.²⁸

India reopened its technical mission in Kabul in June 2022, marking the first official step toward limited engagement with the Taliban government. Although New Delhi stopped short of granting diplomatic recognition²⁹, it initiated high-level meetings with Taliban officials to maintain channels for dialogue. The Indian government, during the Modi era, justified this engagement as necessary for security, humanitarian assistance, and regional monitoring.

India's post-2021 approach has been less about large-scale development projects and more about political signalling, intelligence gathering, and discreet diplomacy.³⁰ Unlike its previous high-visibility projects, India now operates with a low-profile but highly strategic presence aimed at sustaining influence without provoking Taliban sensitivities.

India's Strategic Objectives in Afghanistan

India's contemporary engagement with Afghanistan is driven by three major strategic objectives. First, India seeks to counter Pakistan's influence in Kabul. Historically, Afghanistan's political alignment has significantly impacted Pakistan's internal security and border stability. By maintaining active engagement with Afghan authorities, India attempts to prevent Afghanistan from aligning exclusively with Pakistan or facilitating Pakistan's strategic depth doctrine. Second, India aims to cultivate political or non-state networks that can indirectly pressure Pakistan's western frontier. Indian policymakers have long viewed Afghanistan as a potential space to monitor Pakistan's security behavior. The post-2021 environment, with weak state institutions in Kabul and multiple contesting militant actors, provides opportunities for India to strengthen informal contacts and intelligence networks. Third, India has focused on establishing intelligence monitoring capabilities along areas close to Pakistan's borders. Prior to 2021, India operated consulates in Kandahar, Jalalabad, Herat, and Mazar-e-Sharif, which Pakistan often accused of being used for intelligence operations against its western region. While

²⁸ Ministry of External Affairs (India), "Reopening of the Indian Technical Mission in Kabul," Press Release, June 23, 2022.

²⁹ Rezaul H. Laskar, "India Holds First Official Meeting with Taliban in Doha," *Hindustan Times*, June 2, 2023.

³⁰ arsh V. Pant and Shashank Mattoo, "India's Strategic Recalibration in Afghanistan," Observer Research Foundation, Policy Brief, 2023.

these consulates were closed in the aftermath of the Taliban's takeover, India has reportedly shifted to more covert monitoring mechanisms through diplomatic channels, humanitarian offices, and partner networks within Afghanistan.

Pakistan's Concerns and Security Implications

For Pakistan, India's evolving role in Afghanistan presents critical security challenges. Islamabad has repeatedly alleged that Delhi has supported, either directly or indirectly, anti-Pakistan militant elements, particularly the **Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)**.³¹

"From 13 to 15 October 2025, thirty-four Khwarij belonging to the Indian proxy Fitna al-Khwarij were killed in multiple engagements in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, according to the Inter-Services Public Relations."³²

Several captured militants in Pakistan have claimed to have received logistical or financial support from actors linked to Indian intelligence networks operating out of Afghanistan during the previous Kabul administration.³³

Post-2021, Pakistan believed that India continuously attempted at influence through covert means, especially as TTP attacks inside Pakistan surged between 2022 and 2024. The presence of hostile intelligence networks in Afghanistan threatens Pakistan's counterterrorism operations and intensifies its perception of encirclement from both eastern and western borders.³⁴

Recalibrated interaction by India, be it developmental, diplomatic, intelligence-based, contributes to the narrative of encirclement that has existed in Pakistan for years. Also in places where evidence is still disputed, the view of the Indian presence informs Islamabad's security calculations. Therefore, the presence of India is not an active military component and rather a psychological and strategic multiplier of mistrust in Pakistan-Afghanistan.

Pakistan-Afghanistan Conflict Dynamics (2021)

TTP militant networks operating from Afghan soil

The post-2021 environment has produced an increasingly tense phase in Pakistan-Afghanistan relations, shaped largely by the activities of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) under the leadership of Noor Wali

³¹ "Pakistan Accuses India of Supporting TTP," Al Jazeera, November 14, 2020.

³² Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), "Press Release on Counterterrorism Operations, 13-15 October 2025," Pakistan Army, 2025.

³³ Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS), Security Report 2023, Islamabad, 2024.

³⁴ Ayesha Siddiq, "Pakistan's Western Security Dilemma," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, September 2023.

Mehsud, operating from Afghan soil.³⁵ After the Taliban's takeover in August 2021, Pakistan expected that the new government in Kabul would restrict the mobility and operational space of TTP militants. However, the ideological alignment, tribal linkages, and historical cooperation between the Afghan Taliban and TTP produced reluctance in Kabul to take decisive action. This hesitation created a security vacuum that TTP exploited to reorganise its cadres, recruit fighters, and launch coordinated attacks inside Pakistan.³⁶

Cross-border attacks in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan

The presence of TTP leadership in provinces such as Kunar, Nangarhar, and Paktika has been repeatedly documented by Pakistani intelligence agencies.³⁷ For example, TTP commander Abdul Wali (alias Omar Khalid Khorasani) was reported operating from Kunar before he died in 2022, while senior leaders such as Noor Wali Mehsud and Hafiz Gul Bahadur have been traced to safe houses in Nangarhar and Paktika.³⁸ The militants began launching high-intensity assaults targeting security check-posts, military convoys, and police installations in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and parts of northern Balochistan. Notable incidents include the 2023 Lakki Marwat convoy attack, the January 2023 Police Lines Peshawar suicide bombing, and repeated ambushes on security posts in North and South Waziristan throughout 2022–24. These attacks increased significantly between 2022 and 2024, compelling Pakistan to raise its security alert level along the western frontier. The Afghan Taliban, meanwhile, insisted that Afghan soil would not be used against Pakistan but avoided concrete action, creating diplomatic friction. For instance, Pakistan's repeated requests for the handover of TTP leaders in 2023–24 received assurances but no operational follow-up, further straining bilateral ties.

Checkpoints and Border Fencing Skirmishes

The Durand Line remains the most contentious issue underlying the broader conflict dynamics. Pakistan considers the border an internationally recognised boundary, while successive governments in Afghanistan, including the Taliban, view it as an artificial division imposed by the colonial powers. As Pakistan continued fencing the border to establish regulated crossings, Afghanistan objected, for instance, on 18

³⁵ Ali Yawar Adil, "The Taliban's Relationship with the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 33, no. 2 (2022): 425–444.

³⁶ Zahid Hussain, *Frontline Pakistan: The Struggle with Militant Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2022), 156–160.

³⁷ Pakistan Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), *TTP Network Assessments, 2023* (classified report, cited in open sources).

³⁸ "Death of Omar Khalid Khorasani: Impact on TTP," *South Asia Terrorism Portal*, December 2022.

December 2021, Taliban fighters disrupted Pakistani forces erecting fencing, seizing spools of barbed wire. The two sides later agreed, on 25 December 2021, that further fencing would proceed only through “mutual agreement.”³⁹ Skirmishes emerged at several points, including Torkham, Chaman, and Angoor Adda. In particular, on 12 October 2025, Pakistani and Afghan forces exchanged fire, leading to the closure of Torkham, Chaman, Kharlachi, and Angoor Adda crossings. These clashes intensified mistrust and reduced the prospects for structured dialogue.⁴⁰

Smuggling and Unregulated Trade Routes

In addition to militant activities, unregulated trade routes and smuggling networks created serious economic and security challenges for Pakistan. The Afghan Transit Trade Route has historically been misused for dumping goods in Pakistani markets without duties, causing economic loss. After 2022, Pakistan attempted to tighten monitoring and impose stricter documentation requirements. Kabul viewed these measures as restrictive and politically motivated.⁴¹ Smugglers, many operating under militant protection, continued to exploit mountainous routes through Ghulam Khan, Angoor Adda, Badini, Chaman, and Torkham, where Customs and FC seized major fuel and arms consignments in 2023–24, to transport fuel, food, arms, and other contraband items.⁴²

Limited Diplomacy

Diplomatic engagement between Pakistan and Afghanistan during this period remained limited and increasingly overshadowed by security narratives. Although both sides maintained formal communication channels, these interactions produced few practical outcomes. Statements from Islamabad emphasized that counterterrorism cooperation was non-negotiable, while Kabul accused Pakistan of exaggerating threats and using economic pressure. The lack of structured negotiations led both countries to rely more on force posture, intelligence warnings, and public messaging rather than institutional dialogue. Consequently, conflict dynamics became more militarized, shaped by border clashes, militant incursions, and competing narratives over sovereignty and security obligations. The result has been a cycle of mistrust that continues to define the current phase of bilateral relations.⁴³ The institutionalization of frictions between Kabul and Islamabad was due to the presence of TTP

³⁹ Dawn, “Taliban Stop Pakistani Troops From Fencing Border.” Dawn, December 23, 2021. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1665245>.

⁴⁰ Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), “Border Clashes Report,” October 2025.

⁴¹ “Pakistan Tightens Afghan Transit Trade Rules,” The News International, April 2023.

⁴² Pakistan Customs and Frontier Corps, Annual Seizure Report, 2024.

⁴³ International Crisis Group, Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations and Security Dynamics, Report No. 298, 2024.

sanctuaries, a disputed border legitimacy and unchecked economic flows. The lack of an enforceable common enforcement system turned tactical incidents to become strategic mistrust. These accrued tensions provided the structural conditions of mass escalation instead of sporadic skirmishes by 2025.

Pakistan's Security and Military Response

Strengthening Western Border Defence

Pakistan's security response to threats emerging from Afghanistan has evolved into a comprehensive strategy combining border fortification, counterterrorism operations, intelligence coordination, and regional diplomacy. Pakistan significantly strengthened its defences along the Durand Line. By 2023, more than ninety per cent of the border fencing had been completed, covering rugged mountainous terrains previously exploited by militants. The fence, alongside new surveillance systems, border posts, and patrol routes, reduced infiltration pathways and provided Pakistani forces with greater monitoring capacity.⁴⁴

Increased deployment of Frontier Corps and Pakistan Army units

The Pakistan Army and Frontier Corps increased deployments across sensitive regions such as North Waziristan, South Waziristan, Bajaur, and Kurram. These deployments were essential to deter cross-border attacks and prevent militant hideouts from resurfacing in areas cleared during past operations. The military's approach focused on mobility, rapid response capability, and integration of ground forces with aerial reconnaissance. This restructuring helped Pakistan react quickly to infiltration attempts and provide security to civilian populations in border districts.⁴⁵

Intelligence Coordination & Counterterrorism Operations

Counterterrorism initiatives remained central to Pakistan's security posture. Building on earlier major operations such as Zarb-e-Azb in 2014 and Radd-ul-Fasaad launched in 2017, Pakistan continued conducting intelligence-based operations (IBOs) targeting TTP cells in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. These operations sought to dismantle networks responsible for bombings, targeted killings, and cross-border attacks. Coordination between the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI),

⁴⁴ Pakistan Ministry of Defence, Annual Border Security Report 2023, Islamabad, 2024.

⁴⁵ Ibid.; "Military Deployment Increases on Western Border," Dawn, August 2023.

Military Intelligence, Counterterrorism Departments, and provincial police forces further enhanced Pakistan's counterterrorism architecture.⁴⁶

Zero Tolerance for Cross-Border Militant Sanctuaries

In response to Kabul's lack of action against TTP sanctuaries, Pakistan adopted a zero-tolerance stance toward militant infiltration. Statements from the Foreign Office and military leadership repeatedly underscored that Pakistan would not allow Afghan-based militants to threaten its internal stability. Pakistan applied diplomatic and economic pressure on Afghanistan, including restricting border crossings, reducing trade privileges, and imposing stricter visa and documentation controls. These measures aimed to push Kabul toward cooperation while safeguarding Pakistan's interests.⁴⁷

Regional Balancing

Regionally, Pakistan deepened coordination with China, Iran, and Central Asian states to create a broader cooperative security framework. China, concerned about militant infiltration into Xinjiang, supported Pakistan's counterterrorism efforts and strengthened intelligence cooperation. Iran increased coordination along the Balochistan border, especially regarding anti-state militant groups. Central Asian states, facing their own concerns about extremist movement through Afghanistan, also engaged in dialogue with Pakistan on border security. This regional balancing helped Pakistan counter threats more effectively by aligning with states that shared similar security concerns.⁴⁸

Closer Ties for Border Security Cooperation

Overall, Pakistan's military and policy responses demonstrate a shift toward proactive defence and strategic realignment. The combination of border fortification, intelligence-driven operations, diplomatic pressure, and regional partnerships reflects Pakistan's effort to neutralise threats emerging from Afghan territory and preserve internal stability in an increasingly volatile regional environment.⁴⁹ The move towards fortified deterrence in Pakistan is a pointer to the loss of faith in negotiated enforcement. Although the border fencing and intelligence-based actions

⁴⁶ Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), Counterterrorism Operations Review, 2024 (classified); Zahid Hussain, *Frontline Pakistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2022), 230–250.

⁴⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Pakistan, Statement on Afghan Militant Sanctuaries, Islamabad, 2024.

⁴⁸ "China-Pakistan Security Cooperation Strengthens," *China Daily*, March 2024; "Iran and Pakistan Border Security Ties," *Tehran Times*, November 2024; Central Asia Regional Security Forum, Report on Afghanistan Border Security, 2025.

⁴⁹ Ali Raza, "Pakistan's Strategic Realignment in the Western Border Region," *Asian Security Journal* 15, no. 2 (2025): 110–126.

minimised the infiltration channels, they also intensified the feeling that Kabul had of being pressured into unilateralism. Therefore, defensive militarisation can stabilise the frontier in the short run and institutionalise the political distrust lasting.

Regional Power Politics and Strategic Alignments

The post-2021 landscape of Pakistan–Afghanistan relations cannot be fully understood without examining the shifting regional power play surrounding Afghanistan. After the U.S. military withdrawal on 30 August 2021, the vacuum created in Kabul prompted significant geopolitical recalibrations among regional actors, including China, Russia, Iran, India, the Gulf states, and Türkiye. Afghanistan once again became a critical arena for influence, where competing interests, security considerations, and strategic alignments are reshaping South and Central Asian politics.

China's Strategic Engagement

China has maintained a high-profile engagement in Afghanistan primarily through economic investments and regional security initiatives. Beijing views Afghanistan as crucial for the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and for securing the western borders of Xinjiang against extremist spillover. In May 2023, China pledged \$300 million in reconstruction aid for Afghan infrastructure, emphasizing roads, healthcare facilities, and educational institutions. Chinese authorities have also maintained counterterrorism dialogues with Taliban officials to prevent the infiltration of East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) militants into Xinjiang.⁵⁰

Russia's Regional Policy

Russia has reasserted itself through the Moscow Format and bilateral engagements with the Taliban. By July 2025, Moscow formally recognised the Taliban government, framing it as a strategic necessity to prevent instability spilling into Central Asia. Russian engagement includes technical security cooperation, trade agreements valued at \$250 million, and periodic military consultations aimed at ensuring border security with Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Moscow's objectives are to curb ISIS-K activity and maintain influence without direct intervention.⁵¹

Iran's Pragmatic Strategy

Iran's approach balances ideological affinity with Shia communities in Afghanistan against strategic security concerns. Tehran

⁵⁰ "China Pledges \$300 Million for Afghan Reconstruction," China Daily, May 2023; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, Annual Report on Regional Security Cooperation, 2023.

⁵¹ "Russia Recognizes Taliban Government," Reuters, July 2025; Russian Ministry of Defense, Security Cooperation Agreements, 2025.

has opened multiple border posts in Herat and Nimroz provinces to regulate trade and monitor cross-border movement. In August 2024, Iran signed a \$50 million security cooperation framework with Afghanistan to jointly address smuggling and militant infiltration. Iran's influence in Western Afghanistan serves both to protect Shia populations and to project power vis-à-vis Sunni extremist groups.⁵² The increasing participation of China, Russia, Iran, and Gulf states, reduced the bilateral tensions into the elements of a larger multipolar conflict. The Pakistan-Afghanistan relations are no longer independent and they exist in a regional grid where economic linkage, sharing of intelligence and ideological legitimacy overlap. The 2025 crisis thus indicated bilateral confrontation and regional force redistribution.

The Geopolitical Trajectory of 2025 Pakistan-Afghanistan Conflict

In October 2025, heavy border clashes erupted between Pakistani forces and Afghan Taliban troops along the Durand Line, marking one of the most intense bouts of violence between the two states in recent times.

According to Pakistan's Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), 23 Pakistani soldiers were killed and 29 were wounded in the fighting.⁵³ In retaliation, Islamabad claims it "neutralised" over 200 Taliban and affiliated militants, destroyed multiple training camps, and physically captured 21 hostile posts on the Afghan side. Afghanistan, for its part, counters with its own claim that 58 Pakistani soldiers were killed, 30 wounded, and 25 Pakistani army posts captured during the exchanges.⁵⁴

Beyond military losses, the conflict inflicted a serious toll on civilians. According to UN-backed reporting, at least 17 civilians died and 346 were injured, many of them women and children.⁵⁵ The fighting also triggered a temporary but sharp border closure, including key crossings like Torkham, severely disrupting trade and leaving thousands of trucks stranded.

Among the military manoeuvres, Pakistan carried out airstrikes inside Afghan territory, reported in cities such as Kabul, Khost, Jalalabad and Paktika, which Islamabad said targeted TTP (Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan) hideouts.⁵⁶ In response, Afghan forces deployed tanks and heavy weapons in border provinces like Kunar.⁵⁷

⁵² Tehran Diplomatic Press Release, Iran-Afghanistan Security Framework Agreement, August 2024; Tehran Times, September 2024.

⁵³ Pakistan Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), Press Release on October 2025 Border Clashes, October 20, 2025.

⁵⁴ Afghanistan Ministry of Defense, Statement on Border Conflict, October 22, 2025.

⁵⁵ United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Civilian Casualties Report, October 2025.

⁵⁶ ISPR, Airstrike Report, April 2025.

⁵⁷ Afghanistan Ministry of Defense, Military Deployment Brief, April 2025.

In that operation (25–28 April 2025), Pakistani forces targeted the Bibak Ghar area in the Hassan Khel tehsil, North Waziristan, along the Pakistan–Afghanistan border, killing 71 militants who were allegedly trying to infiltrate from Afghanistan.⁵⁸ The Pakistani military also reported that on 5–6 April, its border guards killed 16 militants as they attempted to cross from Afghanistan.⁵⁹

Diplomatic pressure mounted quickly. Under mediation by Qatar and Turkey, Pakistan and Afghanistan announced a 48-hour ceasefire in Doha on 18–19 October 2025.⁶⁰ But the truce was fragile: on 25 October 2025, Pakistan’s Defence Minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif, speaking from Sialkot, warned that failure to enforce the ceasefire could pave the way for a new open war.⁶¹

In parallel with the fighting, there were growing voices calling for restraint. The United Nations urged a more permanent ceasefire after receiving “credible reports of significant civilian casualties.”⁶²

Analysts have pointed out that part of the escalation is related to cross-border infiltration attempts. According to South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP) data, there were 17 infiltration attempts documented in the first ten months of 2025, resulting in 202 fatalities, mostly militants in Pakistani counter-operations.⁶³ Pakistan attributes much of its military response to these incursions, arguing they originate from Afghanistan and are part of larger militant networks.⁶⁴

Saudi Arabia’s Mediation Role

Saudi Arabia emerged as a key diplomatic mediator in 2025, facilitating the Doha-mediated ceasefire between Pakistan and Afghanistan in October. Riyadh’s involvement included hosting high-level discussions, coordinating with Qatar and Türkiye, and promoting the Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement with Pakistan. The Kingdom leveraged its religious and political influence to encourage the Taliban to adhere to counterterrorism commitments and avoid cross-border conflicts.⁶⁵

⁵⁸ ISPR, Operation Bibak Ghar Summary, April 2025.

⁵⁹ ISPR, Border Guard Report, April 2025.

⁶⁰ Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ceasefire Agreement Document, October 2025.

⁶¹ Khawaja Muhammad Asif, speech, Sialkot, October 25, 2025.

⁶² United Nations, Statement on Ceasefire Urgency, October 2025.

⁶³ South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP), Infiltration Attempts Database, 2025.

⁶⁴ ISPR, Official Military Response Statement, 2025.

⁶⁵ Al Arabiya, “Saudi Arabia Mediates Pakistan-Afghanistan Ceasefire,” October 2025.

Türkiye's Mediation and Intelligence Engagement

Türkiye has actively mediated between Islamabad and Kabul, co-hosting negotiations in Doha on 18–19 October 2025, followed by Istanbul sessions from 25–30 October 2025. The Turkish National Intelligence Organisation (MIT) provided backchannel communications and monitoring systems for ceasefire compliance. Türkiye's strategy combines soft power, intelligence facilitation, and regional leadership, presenting Ankara as a credible neutral mediator in the Islamic world.⁶⁶

Qatar's Role

Qatar's mediation has been largely logistical and humanitarian, hosting informal consultations and coordinating with the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to ensure safe engagement with Taliban authorities. Doha has helped facilitate trust-building measures, humanitarian aid channels, and follow-up discussions for maintaining cross-border peace.⁶⁷

Comparative Summary of Mediators

The combined involvement of Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, and Qatar illustrates a multi-dimensional, intra-Islamic mediation framework. Saudi Arabia offers diplomatic legitimacy, Türkiye provides intelligence verification and negotiation capacity, and Qatar ensures humanitarian and logistical support. This trilateral approach signifies a shift toward regional conflict management led by Muslim-majority states, reducing dependency on Western mediation frameworks.⁶⁸

Table 1: Comparative Summary of Mediators

Country	Role	Key Initiatives 2025	Strategic Objective	Impact
Saudi Arabia	Diplomatic mediation	Doha ceasefire; Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement	Promote Islamic solidarity; stabilize borders	Enhanced legitimacy for Pakistan; pressure on Taliban
Türkiye	Intelligence & mediation	Doha & Istanbul talks;	Regional leadership;	Improved compliance

⁶⁶ Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Doha and Istanbul Mediation Reports, October 2025.

⁶⁷ Turkish National Intelligence Organisation (MIT), Ceasefire Monitoring Summary, October 2025.

⁶⁸ Al Jazeera, "Qatar Facilitates Dialogue Between Pakistan and Afghanistan Amid Border Tensions," October 2025.

		monitoring systems	neutral verification	and trust between parties
Qatar	Logistical & humanitarian	Informal consultations; OIC coordination	Neutral engagement; humanitarian facilitation	Ensured continuity of dialogue and aid delivery

Phase-Based Repatriation of Afghan Nationals With the intensifying border confrontation, Pakistan significantly expanded its campaign to repatriate undocumented Afghan refugees in late 2025, adding a humanitarian and political layer to the already volatile bilateral environment. Islamabad justified the policy by citing heightened security concerns, cross-border militant infiltration, and the need to regulate unregistered populations. Official figures indicate that more than 400,000 Afghan nationals were directed to leave under a phased deportation plan, prompting large-scale movement through the Torkham and Chaman crossings.⁶⁹ International humanitarian agencies cautioned that the abrupt returns placed severe pressure on Afghanistan's already fragile socio-economic system, noting shortages in shelter, basic health services, and administrative support for returnees.⁷⁰ Kabul, in turn, denounced the policy as coercive and destabilising, arguing that the forced returns exacerbated humanitarian vulnerabilities and impeded local governance efforts in the provinces absorbing displaced populations.⁷¹ As the refugee issue became increasingly entangled with diplomatic tensions, it further eroded trust between Islamabad and Kabul and complicated efforts to stabilise the border. The repatriation campaign thus evolved from a domestic security measure into a broader geopolitical flashpoint, shaping perceptions of coercion, strategic pressure, and asymmetry in Pakistan-Afghanistan relations.

Overall, the developments of 2025 demonstrate that Pakistan-Afghanistan tensions cannot be understood solely through military incidents but must be viewed within a broader matrix of humanitarian pressures, cross-border militancy, and competing regional mediation efforts. The combination of intensified clashes, refugee repatriations, and trilateral diplomatic engagement by Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, and Qatar highlights an environment where security, diplomacy, and human welfare

⁶⁹ Pips, "Pakistan Security Report 2025," Pak Institute For Peace Studies Pvt Ltd. (PIPS) January 21, 2026, <https://www.pakpips.com/article/8744>.

⁷⁰ "Afghanistan Situation." n.d. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/afghanistan>.

⁷¹ International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, "DREF Operational Update: Afghan Nationals Return From Pakistan - April 2025 (MDRPK027)." ReliefWeb. <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/dref-operational-update-afghan-nationals-return-pakistan-april-2025-mdrpk027>.

are closely intertwined. As the year closed, it became evident that any sustainable de-escalation would require coordinated regional mechanisms, improved bilateral communication, and a balanced approach that addresses both immediate security concerns and the long-term social and political challenges shaping relations on both sides of the Durand Line.

The 2025 deescalation indicates that military stand-off now exists alongside high-speed mediation of the regions. The Saudi Arabia-Turkiye-Qatar intervention represents a novel stabilization paradigm where deterrence gets matched by domestic diplomatic contention on a regional level. Such a hybrid model of crisis-management can characterize further outbursts of tension in bilateral relations.

Conclusion

This paper has contended that the 2025 Pakistan-Afghanistan escalation is also a structural turning point but not a repetition of border tension. The above facts indicate that the instability in 2021 has turned into a doctrinal change in the security stance of Pakistan where the Taliban regime was seen as strategic depth to be expected a change to stronger deterrence and coercive border control. The reemergence of the Tehreek-e-Taliban in Pakistan (TTP) in Afghanistan coupled with the inability of the Taliban to dismantle militant sanctuaries by Kabul and its inability to effectively implement its power in doing so essentially transformed the perception of threats in Pakistan.

The initial central conclusion of the research is that between 2021 and 2025, the relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan changed the ambiguous and strategically-waiting relations to open military-based stabilization. The fencing of the Durand Line, the heightened intelligence-based actions, the retaliatory airstrikes, the use of economic instruments of pressure as well as the refugee repatriation policies, all spell out to the change to enforcement-based security doctrine. Afghanistan in the strategic calculus of Pakistan is no longer serving as a buffer space but a source of proximate asymmetric threat.

The second significant discovery is that of transformation of the regional order. The October 2025 mediation by Saudi Arabia, Turkiye, and Qatar was evidence that crisis management power in the South-Central Asia region is moving towards the regionally-aligned diplomatic system. The trilateral model was based on the religious legitimacy, intelligence verification systems, and consensus building in the region as opposed to the past stabilization efforts led by the West. This trend implies the possibility of a Muslim-dominated conflict-management framework that is able to defuse bilateral crises without the involvement of Western countries.

The wider meaning is that Afghanistan has become not a theatre of the military intervention of external forces but a laboratory of multipolar regional security politics. The economic pragmatism of China, the formal diplomatic presence of Russia, border stabilization attempts by Iran and

the calculated presence of India all lead to competitive, yet regionally controlled, security environment. The 2025 crisis therefore emphasizes the new balance: border deterrence and mediation by regional Islamic forces.

Sustainable stability, in its turn, will rely on institutionalized cross-border counterterrorism mechanisms, enforceable against non-state actors, and depoliticized control of the flow of refugees. Devoid of formal security dialogue and joint commitment to enforcement, periodic ceasefires are in danger of returning to militarized relations. It is this transformation that has been discovered in this study, which does not imply a resolution, but a new arrangement in the way instability is dealt with in the Pakistan-Afghanistan dyad.

PAKISTAN'S APPROACH TOWARDS THE PREVENTION OF ARMS RACE OF OUTER SPACE (PAROS): GAPS IN GLOBAL SPACE GOVERNANCE

Amna Saqib* & Syed Ali Abbas**

Abstract

Outer space, long regarded as a domain for peaceful exploration, has increasingly become entangled in geopolitical competition and emerging military doctrines. The growing integration of dual-use technologies, anti-satellite (ASAT) capabilities, and space-based defense systems has undermined the civilian-military distinction, exposing critical shortcomings in the existing legal architecture, particularly the 1967 Outer Space Treaty (OST). These developments threaten strategic stability, especially in regions like South Asia, where power asymmetries and a lack of transparency exacerbate risks. This paper examines Pakistan's legal and strategic position on the weaponization of space, highlights its consistent advocacy for binding norms, equitable access, and non-militarization through multilateral forums such as the UN and the PAROS initiative. It argues that current voluntary regimes are insufficient to manage the complexity of modern space threats and calls for a revised governance framework that includes verification mechanisms, addresses legal gaps, and reflects the concerns of emerging spacefaring nations. Moreover, the study contributes to a broader understanding of how middle powers can shape inclusive, rules-based space governance in an era of intensifying competition.

Keywords: Space Arms Control, Outer Space Treaty, Strategic Stability, Anti-Satellite Weapons, Space Governance

* Research Officer & Assistant Editor at the Center for International Strategic Studies (CISS), Islamabad, Pakistan. Email: aamansaqib89@gmail.com

** Research Officer at the Center for International Strategic Studies (CISS), Islamabad, Pakistan. Email: smalinaqvi05@gmail.com

Introduction

The importance of outer space has shifted in the last few decades; it has been a peaceful sphere of scientific research and satellite communications, as well as being increasingly used as a field of military operations, geopolitical rivalry, and strategic communication. The shift can be attributed to the launch of the Sputnik-1 in 1957, that not only marked the start of the space age but also resulted in the establishment of military space programs of the major powers and the incorporation of space technologies into the national defense policies.¹ Space-based technologies have since grown exponentially in size and complexity. Satellites and orbital systems have become deeply embedded into the military infrastructure and are being used to carry out functions that are vital to the military, such as intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR),² precise targeting, early warning, and secure communication. These capabilities have made outer space crucial to the command and control (C2) systems of major powers such as the United States (US), China, and Russia.³ As a result, fears regarding the weaponization of space have been compounded, especially as states seek to develop more advanced counterspace options, which heighten the dangers of conflict escalation and undermine global strategic stability.

Technological innovations, security, as well as strategic imperatives, and unresolved legal uncertainties are contributing to this transition. Space capabilities are systematically unified into integrated deterrence postures and are increasingly focused on anti-satellite (ASAT) weapons, kinetic and non-kinetic counterspace systems, space-based missile defense platforms, and dual-use satellite constellations with both commercial and military purposes.⁴ These trends have not only changed the nature of contemporary conflicts but also challenged the principles of peaceful use of outer space. Emerging and developing spacefaring countries are at a disadvantage because asymmetric progress by more

¹ US Department of State, *Archive January 20, 2001–January 20, 2009*, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/ho/time/lw/103729.htm>

² North Atlantic Treaty Organization. *Joint Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance*. June 19, 2025. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_111830.htm

³ Tekla Gabrichidze, *The Militarization of Space: China and Russia vs. the United States* (Tbilisi: Rondeli Foundation, n.d.), <https://gfsis.org/en/the-militarization-of-space-china-and-russia-vs-the-united-states/>

⁴ Sidra Rehman, "The International Law for Outer Space Security: A Critical Overview Viewing ASATs," *IPRI Journal* 24, no. 2 (December 30, 2024): 73–94, <https://journal.ipripak.org/wp-content/uploads/>

powerful states limits their strategic options and endangers the viability of space as a common resource.

When international legal architecture, most notably the 1967 Outer Space Treaty (OST), was created, outer space was an unpopulated frontier dominated by the superpowers focused on scientific exploration.⁵ Although the OST is part of space law, it mainly forbids weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) in space, and formulates general principles of peaceful use as well as non-appropriation of celestial bodies.⁶ However, it lacks control of the use of conventional weapons in space, along with the development and testing of ASAT capabilities. The Treaty also lacks a binding enforcement and verification mechanism, which significantly limits its applicability in the contemporary environment. This is further complicated by the fact that the role of the private sector is exponentially increasing, with companies like SpaceX, Blue Origin, and OneWeb launching enormous satellite constellations with dual-use capabilities.⁷ These commercial actors are more likely to operate outside the traditional arms control regimes, creating new issues of transparency, accountability, and strategic predictability.

This study critically analyzes the changing militarization of space and the governance issues it poses. It follows the path of the superpower rivalry of the Cold War period to the modern multipolar space order, which is marked by the intersection of state and non-state actors. It also notes that regional actors like India and private commercial actors are adding to a crowded and contested orbital environment hence increasing the likelihood of misperception, miscalculation, and escalation. It also assesses the major developments, such as the establishment of the US Space Force,⁸ counterspace tests by China, and deployment of electronic

⁵ United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs, Resolution Adopted By The General Assembly 2222 (XXI). Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies. <https://www.unoosa.org/oosa/en/ourwork/spacelaw/treaties/introouterspacetreaty.html>

⁶ Humanitarian Law & Policy, Space Law revisited (2/3): Are Weapons of Mass Destruction Prohibited in Space? December 21, 2016, Analysis / Law and Conflict / New Technologies / Weapons

⁷ Caleb Henry, "Space X, One Web Detail Constellation Plans to Congress," *SpaceNews*, October 26, 2017, <https://spacenews.com/spacex-oneweb-detail-constellation-plans-to-congress/>

⁸ United States Space Force, *US Space Force*, <https://www.spaceforces-space.mil/>

warfare systems and co-orbital technologies by Russia.⁹ Pakistan has always highlighted the importance of maintaining outer space devoid of conflict and weaponization. Islamabad has been in favor of the resolution on PAROS in multilateral fora such as the Conference on Disarmament (CD), the UN General Assembly (UNGA), and the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) and has supported the PPWT proposal of China and Russia.¹⁰

One of the main issues is the insufficiency of the current legal and institutional frameworks in reducing the risks associated with weaponization trends. Although efforts like the Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space (PAROS)¹¹ and the Treaty on Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space (PPWT)¹² have been on the table for a long time by both China and Russia, there is still no significant progress. The unwillingness of the leading space powers, especially the US, to become parties to binding legal instruments has hindered meaningful diplomatic progress in space governance.¹³ At the same time, the differences over definitions, verification regimes, and accountability continue to exist, which further adds to the diplomatic deadlock. Despite the occasional introduction of transparency and confidence-building measures (TCBMs),¹⁴ neither of these are adequate to build a rule-based order in space.

⁹ Tim Zadorozhnyy, "Russia Deploys Additional Electronic Warfare Systems near Estonian Border," *The Kyiv Independent*, July 24, 2025, <https://kyivindependent.com/>

¹⁰ Ahmad Khan, Tanzeela Khalil, and Irteza Imam, "Pakistan's Space Activities," in *Handbook of Space Security: Policies, Applications and Programs*, ed. Kai-Uwe Schrogl et al. (Cham: Springer, 2023), 1455–1473, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-22786-9>

¹¹ United Nations General Assembly, *Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space*, Resolution 39/59, adopted December 13, 1984, https://www.unoosa.org/pdf/gares/ARES_39_59E.pdf

¹² Erin Pobjie and Almudena Azcárate Ortega, *Outer Space & Use of Force, Space Security Legal Primer 1* (Geneva: United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, September 2024), <https://unidir.org/wp-content>

¹³ Erin Pobjie and Almudena Azcárate Ortega, *Outer Space & Use of Force, Space Security Legal Primer 1* (Geneva: UNIDIR, 2024), <https://unidir.org/wp-content>

¹⁴ Project Ploughshares, *Incorporating Transparency and Confidence-Building Measures (TCBMs) into Legal Approaches to the Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space (PAROS)*, working paper submitted to the Group of Governmental Experts on Further Practical Measures for the Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space, second session, Geneva, 5–16 August 2024, April 11, 2024, https://docs.library.unoda.org/Group_of_governmental

The current development of emerging technologies, namely hypersonic glide vehicles, directed energy weapons (DEWs),¹⁵ AI-based satellite systems, and electronic warfare capabilities, has developed faster and outpaced the capacity of international governance regimes.¹⁶ The existence of such capabilities makes traditional accountability mechanisms more complicated and, at the same time, reduces the response time during a crisis situation, increasing the risk of accidental escalation. The increasing overlap of civil, military, and commercial domains further blurs the difference between peaceful space activities and possibly hostile intent. Such dynamics are especially dangerous in regions like South Asia, where historical rivalries and doctrinal ambiguity increase the possibility of conflict spillover into space.¹⁷

This paper, therefore, suggests a broader arms control agenda which would encompass revised legal instruments, technically enforceable verification regimes, and regulatory measures that would also apply to the private and commercial sectors. It highlights the need to have a hybrid model, which is the combination of binding international norms and adaptive, technology-based monitoring systems. The framework must also be structured to provide inclusive governance where there is equitable accessibility, capacity-building, and representation of emerging space actors in the decisions to determine future regulatory standards.

Strategic Evolution of Outer Space

The evolution of outer space from a field of passive scientific study and monitoring to an active military competition arena has been influenced by a combination of several technological innovations, geopolitical competition, and doctrinal development. During the first decades of the space age, outer space was largely regarded as a continuation of the Cold War rivalry between the US and the erstwhile

¹⁵ Itfa Khurshid, *Role of Directed Energy Weapons (DEWs) in Shaping the Future of Warfare in South Asia*, Strategic Perspectives, January 2025, <https://strategicperspectives.cissajk.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/>

¹⁶ Saqiba Mengal, *Emerging Technologies and Its Impacts on Air Power*, ed. Malik Qasim Mustafa (Islamabad: Arms Control & Disarmament Centre, Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad, September 7, 2024), https://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/IB_Saqiba_Mengal_Sept_7_2024.pdf

¹⁷ Abu Hurairah Abbasi and Saher Liaqat, *India's Evolving Space Militarization and the Security Implications for Pakistan*, Strategic Perspectives, January 2025, <https://strategicperspectives.cissajk.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Indias-Evolving-Space-Militarization-and-the-Security-Implications-for-Pakistan.pdf>

Soviet Union.¹⁸ The successful launch of Sputnik-1 in 1957 was a significant technological achievement of the Soviet Union and also the precursor to the Soviet military space programs, which led to the creation of satellite reconnaissance, early missile warning systems, and a space-based intelligence network.¹⁹

Space militarization gained pace in the 1980s when the US Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) was introduced that sought to implement a multilayered missile defense system that would involve the deployment of space-based interceptors.²⁰ SDI was not created in the form that was conceived. It is now defined as a new concept of outer space as a potential warfighting domain, and has created a precedent of military space doctrines of denial and deterrence.²¹ This vision was slowly realized in the post-Cold War era as satellite technologies were placed at the center of precision strike capabilities, C2 operations, and power projection on a global scale. Space resources ceased to be an enabler of land-based warfare and became a part of the national defensive strategies of major powers.²²

These trends have gained momentum in the 21st century.²³ These ASAT systems are broadly categorized as destructive, which physically destroy the target satellite and generate debris. Whereas the non-destructive systems involve jamming, dazzling, or close-proximity maneuvers without physical destruction. The US was the first to conduct a destructive ASAT test in 1985 using an air-launched missile to destroy a

¹⁸ Wawrzyniec Muszyński-Sulima, "Cold War in Space: Reconnaissance Satellites and US-Soviet Security Competition," *European Journal of American Studies* 18, no. 2 (2023), published online July 3, 2023, July 10, 2023, <http://journals.openedition.org/ejas/20427>, <https://doi.org/10.4000/ejas.20427>

¹⁹ Office of the Historian, US Department of State, "The Launch of Sputnik, 1957," *Milestones in the History of U.S. Foreign Relations*, July 24, 2025, <https://history.state.gov/milestones>

²⁰ US Department of State, *Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), 1983*, Office of the Historian, US Department of State (2001–2009 archive), <https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/ho/time/rd/104253.htm>.

²¹ Natalia Shahruckh, "The Space Race Re-imagined: Outer Space Technology and Its Impact on Cross-Domain Deterrence," *Journal of Security & Strategic Analyses* 11, no. 1 (2024)

²² James Clay Moltz, *The Politics of Space Security: Strategic Restraint and the Pursuit of National Interests*, 3rd ed. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019)

²³ Fernando Del Canto Viterale, "Transitioning to a New Space Age in the 21st Century: A Systemic-Level Approach," *Systems* 11, no. 5 (2023): 232, <https://doi.org/10.3390/systems11050232>

satellite. The Soviet Union had tested non-destructive co-orbital ASAT systems extensively during the 1960s and 1970s. Later, China demonstrated its ASAT capability in 2007, followed by India in 2019 under Mission Shakti, where the international community expressed its concern over the normalization of destructive counterspace activity.²⁴ Other P5 members have not officially tested destructive ASAT weapons to date. In the meantime, the creation of the US Space Force in 2019 institutionalized space as a separate military domain in the national defense structure.²⁵

The rationale of such developments is that space superiority is now regarded as a key to contemporary deterrence, particularly in regions characterized by strategic instability and crisis-prone relations.²⁶ Advanced powers are no longer restricting the use of space to ISR or navigation support; they are planning to deny or degrade the space capabilities of the adversary in the event of conflict. This change can be further depicted by the emergence of co-orbital systems, proximity operations, and electronic warfare devices, which provide non-kinetic methods to neutralize or interfere with space assets while leaving no physical wreckage behind, and thus attribution and response become even harder.

In parallel, the privatization of space has created new opportunities and challenges. Commercial actors like SpaceX, OneWeb, and Blue Origin have revolutionized launch access and satellite deployment through reusable rockets and low-cost mega-constellations.²⁷ However, these same systems now feature prominently in military logistics and communications. The use of Starlink in the Russia-Ukraine conflict demonstrated how commercial networks could turn into strategic assets in times of war, where it is harder to define civilian infrastructure

²⁴ Kelsey Davenport, "Indian ASAT Test Raises Space Risks," *Arms Control Today*, May 2019, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2019-05/news/indian-asat-test-raises-space-risks>.

²⁵ Taha Ali, "The US Space Force: Pioneering America's Military Dominance in the Final Frontier," *Modern Diplomacy*, July 20, 2024, <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2024/07/20/the-u-s-space-force-pioneering-america-military-dominance-in-the-final-frontier/>

²⁶ Sardar Jahanzaib Ghalib, *The Weaponization of Space: Global Trends, National Perspectives, and Legal Implications* (Islamabad: Arms Control & Disarmament Centre, Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad, August 13, 2024), https://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/IB_Jahanzaib_Aug_13_2024.pdf

²⁷ G.K.S. Amruta, "The Role of Private Entities in Outer Space Activities," *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research (IJFMR)* 7, no. 2 (March-April 2025), <https://www.ijfmr.com/papers/2025/2/41334.pdf>

or military targets.²⁸ The most alarming is the lack of legally binding limits to such usage. The OST, and later international agreements, do not adequately cover such obligations of states in relation to the military use of commercial space systems.²⁹

Security Dynamics of the Outer Space

The increasingly competitive nature of the global powers is redefining the strategic environment outside of Earth. Outer space has become a sphere of vital military significance to countries such as the US, China, and Russia. Instead of considering space as a scientific or commercial domain, these states are incorporating the space domain into their defense architectures by creating specialized commands, building anti-satellite systems, and integrating space-based capabilities into their military planning.³⁰ As a result, outer space is no longer an area of scientific cooperation; it has turned into a domain of potential first-strike superiority, coercive diplomacy, and escalation processes.

The US has led this shift by embracing the concept of space dominance. The establishment of the US Space Force in 2019 was not only a bureaucratic reorganization, but it was the formal recognition of space as a warfighting domain. The American doctrine focuses on the necessity to prevent aggression and guarantee the freedom of operation in space.³¹ Space-Based Infrared System (SBIRS),³² missile warning satellites³³ and

²⁸ Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, *Starlink and the Russia-Ukraine War: A Case of Commercial Technology and Public Purpose?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Kennedy School, 2023), <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication>

²⁹ US Department of Defense, *Governing in a Crowded Space: The OST and Development of the Legal Regime for Space* (Washington, DC: Defense Technical Information Center, April 2018), <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/tr/pdf/AD1095009.pdf>.

³⁰ Sher Ali Kakar, "Outer Space: A Growing Military Domain," *The Express Tribune*, February 18, 2023.

³¹ Ghazala Yasmin Jalil, *Issue Brief on "US Space Force: Is Competition in Space Inevitable?"* (Islamabad: Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad, April 6, 2020), <https://issi.org.pk/issue-brief-on-us-space-force-is-competition-in-space-inevitable/>.

³² Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Missile Defense Project, *Space-Based Infrared System (SBIRS)*, July 26, 2021, <https://missilethreat.csis.org/defsys/sbirs/>.

³³ Lockheed Martin, *Early Missile Warning: Space Based-Infrared System (SBIRS) and Next Gen OPIR GEO*, July 24, 2025, <https://www.lockheedmartin.com/en-us/products/sbirs.html>

the conceptual Golden Dome shield³⁴ reflect a strategic desire to attain full-spectrum superiority. To the less technologically advanced states, this posture is destabilizing, since it promotes competitive buildup instead of cooperative restraint.

In recent years, Chinese strategic thinking has been focusing more on the space aspect in its overall military modernization objectives, especially in what has been termed as the informationized warfare.³⁵ Advances in technology, including satellite navigation (especially with the BeiDou system), co-orbital operations, and directed energy platforms, indicate an interest in improving the resilience and performance of national space infrastructure.³⁶ Such developments seem to be directed at information superiority and protection of vital interests in possible high-technology conflicts. Although China's emerging counterspace capabilities have drawn the attention of the international community- e.g., the ASAT test in 2007- China has maintained that the development is defensive in nature and in line with the concept of strategic deterrence.³⁷ In addition, Beijing has remained committed to multilateralism in the governance of outer space, as it has jointly proposed the PPWT, demonstrating its interest in avoiding the arms race in space and facilitating peaceful exploration of the cosmos.³⁸

Faced with evolving strategic challenges and resource limitations, Russia has emphasized cost-effective and asymmetric approaches to maintain its position in the space domain. The development of capabilities such as electronic warfare systems, satellite interference tools, and proximity operations appears to be shaped by a doctrinal emphasis on strategic ambiguity and deterrence through controlled escalation. Such

³⁴ Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation, *Golden Dome Fact Sheet*, June 2025, <https://armscontrolcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Golden-Dome-Fact-Sheet.pdf>.

³⁵ Anthony H. Cordesman and Joseph Kendall, "Chinese Space Strategy and Developments," in *Chinese Strategy and Military Modernization in 2016: A Comparative Analysis* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2016), 427–454, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep23376.15>.

³⁶ Rui Li et al., "Advances in BeiDou Navigation Satellite System (BDS) and Satellite Navigation Augmentation Technologies," *Satellite Navigation* 1, no. 12 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1186/s43020-020-00010-2>.

³⁷ *Arms Control Today*, "Chinese Proud, Defensive About ASAT Test," March 2007, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2007-03/news/chinese-proud-defensive-about-asat-test>.

³⁸ United Nations General Assembly, *Further Practical Measures for the Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space: Report of the Secretary-General*, A/77/80 (New York: United Nations, June 24, 2022), <https://docs.un.org/en/A/77/80>.

endeavors are an indication of a wider aim to maintain national security and strategic balance in a more contested environment.³⁹ Russia has also been a long-term supporter of preventing an arms race in outer space at the diplomatic level, including proposing a legally binding instrument.⁴⁰ However, some operational trends like close-proximity satellite activity and sophisticated electronic interference are commonly viewed externally as reflecting a posture that aims to exploit the ambiguities of the current legal regimes in the furtherance of national interest.

India, in its turn, is a more ambitious regional player with militarized space interests.⁴¹ The ASAT test under the Mission Shakti in 2019 marked a doctrinal change towards abandoning restraint and declaring India a space-competent military force. More importantly, the incorporation of space-based assets into the Indian defense system, such as RISAT-2B, EMISAT, Cartosat-2C, and missile-tracking systems, and the increased collaboration with the US via the Quad and Artemis Accords, amounts to a convergence of forces that threatens to tip the regional balance. Such developments present serious concerns to Pakistan.⁴² When the enhanced ISR and early warning capabilities of India are combined with its nuclear posture and ballistic missile infrastructure, they reduce the time available to make decisions and increase the risk of inadvertent escalation in time of crisis.⁴³ The reduction of decision-making increases the likelihood of misperception, pre-emptive action, and accelerated transit to the nuclear thresholds.

³⁹ Nicole J. Jackson, *Outer Space in Russia's Security Strategy*, Simons Papers in Security and Development, No. 64/2018 (Vancouver: School for International Studies, Simon Fraser University, 2018), https://summit.sfu.ca/_flysystem/fedora/sfu_migrate/18164/SimonsWorkingPaper64.pdf

⁴⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, *China and Russia Jointly Submitted the Draft Treaty on PPWT to the Conference on Disarmament*, updated February 12, 2008, July 24, 2025.

⁴¹ *Indian Aerospace and Defence Bulletin*, "Harmonizing Military Space Ambitions With India's National Space Strategy: A Comprehensive Analysis," April 14, 2024.

⁴² Muhammad Zeeshan, "India's Space-Based ISR Capabilities and Regional Deterrence," *BUIITEMS Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 2, no. 1 (2023): 36–52, <https://bjssh.buitms.edu.pk/index.php/content/article/download/44/25/48>

⁴³ Ahmed Abbas, "Indian Ambitions for Aerospace Supremacy: Options for Pakistan," *Strategic Studies* 23, no. 1 (2003): 167–199, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45242228>

Structural Inequalities and Asymmetries

Structural inequalities, which are inherent in the global space governance, pose the most persistent challenge to the emerging space actors more than doctrinal assertiveness. The Global South,⁴⁴ especially Pakistan, faces a significant impediment to accessing the critical strategic infrastructure, such as space situational awareness (SSA) networks, high-frequency spectrum, secure launch sites, and orbital slots. This is due to the past dominance by the early spacefaring states, the cost of developing and operating launch-vehicles, and exclusion in international forums that influence space-policy agendas have resulted in high levels of strategic dependence and socio-economic inequality among states involved in space activities. These imbalances are not merely technological: they are institutionalized in access regimes and institutions that systematically favor the interests of the established powers. They do it with exclusive rule-making opportunities, preferential financing, and export control alliances. In addition, the norm-setting activities such as the Artemis Accords,⁴⁵ Hague Code of Conduct,⁴⁶ or International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR) regimes⁴⁷ exclude or marginalize the participation of new actors in such a way that they are not able to shape the establishment of the norms that regulate their own security interests in space.

The issue is also complicated by the doctrinal ambiguity of key spacefaring nations. It is not clear what will be considered as aggression in space, either cyberattacks on satellites, electromagnetic interference, or proximity operations. The absence of any declared redlines or confidence-building measures (CBMs) suggests that even routine satellite maneuvers may be mistakenly interpreted as an act of aggression, particularly in areas such as South Asia that are experiencing long-term rivalries. This ambiguity is an unnecessary strategic burden and a threat of unacceptable escalation to states like Pakistan, which have long been advocate with peaceful use of space through civil agencies like SUPARCO.⁴⁸ Therefore, the

⁴⁴ United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), *The Importance of Space Security for the Global South*, February 26, 2025, <https://unidir.org/the-importance-of-space-security-for-the-global-south/>

⁴⁵ National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), *The Artemis Accords*, <https://www.nasa.gov/artemis-accords/>.

⁴⁶ Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI), *Hague Code of Conduct Against Ballistic Missile Proliferation (HCOC)*, <https://www.nti.org/education-center/treaties-and-regimes/hague-code-conduct-against-ballistic-missile-proliferation-hcoc/>.

⁴⁷ US Department of State, *Directorate of Defense Trade Controls*, <https://www.pmddtc.state.gov/>

⁴⁸ Space & Upper Atmosphere Research Commission (SUPARCO), *Pakistan Space & Upper Atmosphere Research Commission*, <https://suparco.gov.pk/>

emerging strategic competition in outer space must be perceived not only through the lens of technological capability and the principles of deterrence, but also through the lens of global structural inequality. The absence of equitable access to SSA, spectrum, orbital slots, and decision-making forums renders the emerging spacefaring states strategically dependent and politically marginalized.⁴⁹ These distortions validate Pakistan's consistent position that outer space is to be regarded as a global common – regulated neither by control and exclusion but by fairness, inclusive, and enforceable multilateral safeguards.⁵⁰

South Asia and the Risk of Escalation in Space

Although the process of militarization of space is triggered by the interests of the major powers, its regional ramifications are especially pronounced in South Asia, which is one of the most dangerous nuclear flashpoints in the world. The integration of space-based technologies in the military doctrines of regional actors, particularly India, will lead to a destabilizing arms race that will not only destabilize regional security, but also undermine the very principle of peaceful use of outer space. Moreover, the lack of arms control mechanisms in South Asia, along with long-standing rivalries, intensifies the risks of space weaponization in an already volatile region.

The ASAT demonstration by India⁵¹ in March 2019 brought a fundamental change in the regional strategic balance. The interception and kinetic destruction of a satellite with the help of a ballistic missile was celebrated domestically as a sign of technological strength and strategic autonomy. However, it has set a dangerous precedent as this test produced a significant amount of orbital debris, which was a breach of the spirit of the OST. It also indicated that New Delhi was prepared to use military force to exercise space power.

More worryingly, Indian acquisition of dual-use capabilities, including surveillance satellites, early warning systems, and missile tracking systems, has posed a great threat to the crisis stability of the

⁴⁹ Raja Qaiser Ahmed, Muhammad Shoaib, and Ramsha Ashraf, "India's Space Pursuit and the Changing Matrix of South Asian Security," *Space Policy* 65 (2023): 101564, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.spacepol.2023.101564>.

⁵⁰ Sardar Jahanzaib Ghalib, *The Weaponization of Space: Global Trends, National Perspectives, and Legal Implications* (Islamabad: Arms Control & Disarmament Centre, ISSI, August 13, 2024), https://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/IB_Jahanzaib_Aug_13_2024.pdf.

⁵¹ European Space Policy Institute (ESPI), *India's ASAT Test Amidst Global Ambiguity*, ESPI Briefs No. 31 (Vienna: European Space Policy Institute, 2019), <https://www.espi.or.at/wp-content/uploads/espidocs/>

region. These assets, especially when embedded into India's nuclear command and control (NC2) infrastructure,⁵² are at risk of diminishing decision-making timeframes during crises. The capability to detect, interpret, and possibly act on early satellite data brings instability to what would otherwise be well-calibrated strategic postures. These developments raise the threat of pre-emption, misperception, or unintended escalation.

In contrast, Pakistan maintains a peaceful posture in its space program. Using its civil space agency, SUPARCO, Pakistan has been working on applications that aid in national development: disaster management, agriculture, telecommunications, education, and environmental monitoring. The recent launch of earth observation satellites such as PRSS-1 and the communication satellite PAKSAT-1R, in partnership with China, is an indication of its commitment to using space in furthering socio-economic development rather than militarizing space.

Despite the growing trend of regional provocations, Pakistan has not developed or tested ASAT systems, continuing with its policy of strategic restraint and maintaining crisis stability. This asymmetry in doctrine is further aggravated by the fact that India is increasingly becoming aligned with the US and other Western powers in space-related initiatives. The establishment of frameworks like the Quad space working group and the Indian support of the Artemis Accords can be seen to be drifting towards US-led ideas of space governance, which are frequently dictated by its strategic and commercial interests instead of multilateral agreements. Pakistan is wary of such alliances, fearing that it will further entrench the military-technological advantage of India into a larger framework of preferential cooperation, further isolating other actors in the region. Pakistan has always emphasized the importance of maintaining the outer space devoid of conflict and weaponization. Islamabad has been in favor of the resolution on PAROS in multilateral fora like the Conference on Disarmament (CD), the UN General Assembly (UNGA), and the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) and has supported the PPWT proposal of China and Russia. These diplomatic efforts reflect Pakistan's conviction that a regional space arms race would erode nuclear deterrence stability and disrupt the fragile strategic balance in South Asia.⁵³

⁵² Lauren J. Borja and M.V. Ramana, "Command and Control of India's Nuclear Arsenal," *Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament* 3, no. 1 (2020): 1-20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/25751654.2020.1760021>

⁵³ Ghazala Yasmin Jalil, *UNSC Resolution on Outer Space: The Challenge of Regulation* (Islamabad: Arms Control & Disarmament Centre, ISSI, June 13,

To minimize the risk of space-based conflict, Pakistan has always been supportive of international initiatives within the PAROS framework and has shown an interest in the actions that may involve regional transparency, prior notice of launches, and legally-binding codes of conduct. Pakistan has been advocating Transparency and Confidence-Building Measures (TCBMs) in outer space to enhance responsible behavior and reduce the dangers of misperception and escalation. The country has been actively participating in the discussions of the UN Group of Governmental Experts (GGEs) on the Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space (PAROS) and on TCBMs, supporting the ideas aimed at increasing predictability, information-sharing, and building mutual understanding among space actors. Islamabad sees TCBMs as supplementary to, not alternatives to, legal requirements; some of the measures it has endorsed in this regard include prior notice of space launching, sharing of information on national space policies, and cooperative arrangements to avert hostile applications of space technologies. The advocacy of Pakistan is a part of its larger interest in maintaining the outer space as a peaceful and equitable development sphere.⁵⁴ Such measures are not merely idealistic; they are strategic necessities. Without institutional safeguards, South Asia risks replicating its terrestrial rivalries in orbit, with consequences that could prove irreversible. Given the region's history of crisis instability, limited warning times, and doctrinal opacity, even a minor orbital incident could spiral into a broader confrontation.⁵⁵

To Pakistan, it is a matter of principle and strategic necessity to maintain outer space as a peaceful and development-oriented area. Regional asymmetry in space capabilities should not imply strategic coercion or marginalization of the peaceful spacefaring states. Islamabad has been calling on the international community to take note of the distinct dangers that space militarization presents in South Asia and to make sure that mechanisms of global governance take into account the voices, concerns, and rights of all states.

2024), https://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/IB_Ghazala_June_13_2024.pdf.

⁵⁴ Pakistan Mission to the United Nations Geneva, *Statement by Pakistan on Thematic Debate on Outer Space (Disarmament Aspects)*, Statement by Mr. Muhammad Omer, October 26, 2022, <https://pakungeneva.pk/statement-by-pakistan-on-thematic-debate-on-outer-space-disarmament-aspects/>.

⁵⁵ Irfan Mahmood Bokhari, *Statement by Pakistan at the Plenary Meeting of the Conference on Disarmament Devoted to Discussions on Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space (PAROS)* (Geneva: Permanent Mission of Pakistan to the United Nations, 2015), [https://docs-library.unoda.org/Conference_on_Disarmament_\(2015\)/1349%2BPakistan.pdf](https://docs-library.unoda.org/Conference_on_Disarmament_(2015)/1349%2BPakistan.pdf).

Legal Frameworks and Pakistan's Position

Outer Space Treaty

The 1967 OST is still the cornerstone of modern international space law, as it established the normative basis of peaceful exploration of space. It introduced important legal norms which include the use of outer space in the interest of all humankind (Article I), non-appropriation of celestial bodies (Article II), prohibition of weapons of mass destruction in outer space (Article IV), and the responsibility of states in governmental and non-governmental space activities (Article VI). Although it is the backbone, the OST has not been able to keep up with the fast development of strategic technologies and the changing geopolitical environment in space.⁵⁶

Pakistan considers the OST as not sufficient to cope with the emerging threats of militarization and possible weaponization of space. The treaty does not clearly prohibit the deployment of conventional weapons in orbit and does not restrict the research, testing, or deployment of ASAT systems. This legal ambiguity provides an opportunity for states to develop counterspace capabilities in the name of treaty compliance. One such case is the 2019 ASAT test conducted by India, which did not technically break the OST, but did evidently contradict its spirit of peaceful utilization of space.

The second major weakness of the OST is the absence of verification and enforcement measures. Contrary to nuclear arms treaties like the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) or the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), which are supported by inspection systems and international monitoring, the OST is only based on voluntary compliance. This strategy is inadequate in the current congested and competitive space environment. Another problem is the increasing role of the participation of private companies, and particularly those running large satellite constellations with dual-use capabilities. The treaty does not provide any effective enforcement or liability tools, although it places responsibility on states regarding the conduct of their commercial actors. Islamabad has supported and co-sponsored initiatives under the PAROS agenda at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), the Conference on Disarmament (CD), and the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS). It has also endorsed the Treaty on the Prevention of the

⁵⁶ United Nations General Assembly, *Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies*, Resolution 2222 (XXI), adopted December 19, 1966, <https://www.unoosa.org/oosa/en/ourwork/spacelaw/treaties/introouterspacetreaty.html>.

Placement of Weapons in Outer Space (PPWT), jointly proposed by China and Russia. While acknowledging the limitations of the PPWT, such as the absence of a verification mechanism, Pakistan views it as a constructive foundation for further negotiation.⁵⁷

Moreover, the legal ambiguity surrounding the term “peaceful purposes” remains a persistent problem. While some countries interpret it to mean non-military, others argue it allows military use if it is non-aggressive. This ambiguity has allowed dominant spacefaring states to develop military capabilities while remaining nominally compliant. Islamabad has continuously demanded that such terminologies be clarified to avoid exploitative interpretations that can erode collective security.⁵⁸

Another important aspect that needs to be reformed is the legal approach to the extraction of space resources. On the one hand, the OST does not allow national appropriation of celestial bodies; on the other hand, it does not indicate whether or not private actors can extract and own resources on the Moon or asteroids. The US Commercial Space Launch Competitiveness Act (2015)⁵⁹ and other national regulations in the UAE, Luxembourg, and Japan have unilaterally legalized space mining. Pakistan views such activities as being incompatible with the concept of the global commons and has called upon the creation of a multilateral system of equitable sharing of benefits and environmental management of extraterrestrial resources.

In addition, Article XVI of the OST permits any party to leave the treaty with just one year of notice, without justification or consultation. Such permissiveness is dangerous in the existing strategic environment. A major power could leave the OST and go ahead to militarize space with minimal international redress. Pakistan has favored the strengthening of withdrawal measures, including the introduction of obligatory review mechanisms and formal diplomatic consultations to prevent weakening of the treaty. In light of such deficiencies, Pakistan proposes that the international community conduct a Space Law Review Conference, which will proceed to develop an additional protocol to the OST.⁶⁰ This protocol

⁵⁷ *Pakistan Today*, “Pakistan Pushes for Preventing Weaponization of Outer-Space to Avert Threats to Peace,” May 7, 2024.

⁵⁸ Betty Wehtje, “Increased Militarisation of Space – A New Realm of Security,” *Beyond the Horizon*, June 6, 2023, <https://behorizon.org/increased-militarisation-of-space-a-new-realm-of-security/>

⁵⁹ Space Foundation Editorial Team, *US Space Law*, Space Foundation, https://www.spacefoundation.org/space_brief/us-space-law/.

⁶⁰ Ghazala Yasmin Jalil, *Pakistan's Space Policy: Tapping into the Space Potential* (Islamabad: Arms Control & Disarmament Centre, ISSI, December 29, 2023), https://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/IB_Ghazala_Dec_29_2023.pdf

should not only close the existing legal gaps but also reflect the realities of the new technologies and interests of the players involved. This type of framework must not be on a voluntary basis but on binding commitments so that space can remain a domain of cooperation and not conflict.

Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space (PAROS)

PAROS has been a center of multilateral disarmament diplomacy, especially for states such as Pakistan that want to maintain outer space as a realm of peaceful collaboration and fair development.⁶¹ Initially proposed in the early 1980s, the PAROS initiative reflects the awareness of the international community that current legal regimes, primarily the OST, are inadequate to forestall the increasing militarization of space. Although there is near-universal rhetorical support, there has been little practical progress on PAROS because of deep-seated strategic interests, particularly those of the powerful spacefaring nations.

PAROS is not only a political desire, but a legal and strategic necessity. The lack of binding multilateral commitments regarding the deployment of conventional weapons in space, testing of ASAT systems, or control of non-kinetic counterspace capabilities has led to unregulated space that is prone to coercion, miscalculation, and technological imbalance. To new spacefaring countries, this vacuum increases structural asymmetries and poses a long-term risk to secure orbital resources.

One of the most important barriers to PAROS has been the refusal of the US and its allies to accept the proposed PPWT. Although the PPWT has been denounced as having weak verification procedures and not covering ground-based ASAT systems, it still provides a starting point of discussion. Pakistan has supported the PPWT and has urged its revision and extension, suggesting that future versions should include enforceable verification mechanisms, monitoring of dual-use systems, and incorporation of the private commercial sector into its scope.

Additionally, Islamabad has stressed that any future space arms control regime should be legally binding, inclusive, and sensitive to changing technological realities. Pakistan has urged the thorough ban of all weapons in outer space (not just WMDs) at multilateral forums and raised an alarm on the destabilizing effects of ASAT tests and counterspace capabilities. It promotes the creation of verification mechanisms and transparency measures, and it urges fair access to space technologies and orbits by the developing world. For Pakistan, PAROS is not simply about

⁶¹ Shamil Abdullah, "Outer Space Weaponization and Potential Gaps within PAROS," *Strategic Vision Institute (SVI)*, December 19, 2024, <https://thesvi.org/outer-space-weaponization-and-potential-gaps-within-paros/>.

preventing a future arms race; it is about preventing the normalization of existing military behavior in space. The 2019 ASAT test by India, the weaponization of satellite constellations of commercial satellites, and the emergence of proximity operations are early warning signs of such systemic drifts to hostility. Unless there is a strong diplomatic effort, such tendencies can become the new status quo.⁶²

Pakistan has been a firm supporter of the PAROS and has continued to advocate the application of legally binding instruments through multilateral forums, particularly the CD and the UNGA, to ensure that the peaceful use of outer space is guaranteed. Islamabad has voiced concern on several occasions about the destabilizing effects of ASAT weapons, on the inadequacy of voluntary or non-binding space governance regimes, and on the necessity of space security arrangements that are inclusive and based on consensus. Although Pakistan has never presented official suggestions on CBMs, it has been a strong advocate of the idea to increase transparency, accountability, and verification, especially in the face of the proliferation of dual-use technologies, the danger of unregulated proximity operations, and the growing involvement of commercial activities in strategic space.⁶³ Its stance is part of a wider demand to have fair access to space governance and an enforceable international norm to avert weaponization and ensure long-term sustainability. These measures are particularly vital for regions like South Asia, where high-alert postures and compressed decision-making timelines elevate the risk of conflict escalation. The replication of terrestrial rivalries in space would severely undermine nuclear deterrence stability and compound existing security dilemmas by reducing the effectiveness of early warning and communications systems and increasing the risks of miscalculation and unintentional escalation.⁶⁴

For Pakistan, the success of PAROS depends on two simultaneous tracks: (1) norm development through voluntary and politically binding

⁶² Permanent Mission of Pakistan to the United Nations, *Statement by the Delegation of Pakistan on Agenda Item 51: International Cooperation in the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (Fourth Committee)*, United Nations General Assembly, 2022, https://www.un.org/en/ga/fourth/pdf/PakistanEN_item_51.pdf.

⁶³ Permanent Mission of Pakistan to the United Nations, *Statement of the Pakistan Delegation at the 67th Session of the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS)* (Vienna: United Nations, June 19–28, 2024), https://www.unoosa.org/documents/pdf/copuos/2024/statements/5_Pakistan.pdf.

⁶⁴ *Statement by the Delegation of Pakistan on Agenda Item 51: International Cooperation in the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (Fourth Committee)*

confidence-building efforts, and (2) legal codification through a revised and enforceable treaty framework. These tracks should be followed in an inclusive manner where emerging space actors, who are usually left out in high-level negotiations, have meaningful inputs.

Pakistan points out that outer space is a global commons and cannot be governed by only the powerful states. A rules-based order in space that protects peaceful use, discourages weaponization, and promotes fair and equitable access is not only in the national interest of Pakistan, but in keeping outer space an arena of mutual progress and collective security.

Challenges in Space Arms Control

The development of an effective arms control regime in outer space is faced with technological, legal, political, and institutional barriers. These issues are not hypothetical, and they have severe consequences for states such as Pakistan that subscribe to the peaceful uses of space but are progressively facing asymmetries as the powerful states are militarizing space. The obstacles to effective arms control are more multifaceted because space is institutionalized in the military doctrines and the commercial sphere.⁶⁵

Among the most urgent concerns is the dual-use character of space technologies. Numerous systems, including remote sensing satellites, proximity operation vehicles, or satellite servicing platforms, have legitimate civilian or commercial purposes and can also be used militarily. This overlap makes it difficult to define space weapons in international law. To emerging space actors such as Pakistan, the proliferation of ambiguous, multi-purpose systems by the major powers establishes a norm of strategic opacity, undermining trust and raising the likelihood of misperception or miscalculation in a crisis.⁶⁶

The second issue is that there are no universally agreed definitions of hostile behavior in space. No legal agreement exists on what an act of aggression is: is it the intentional jamming of a satellite? The obscuring of sensors? Satellite ground stations cyber attacks? Or the launching of a co-orbital satellite which casts a shadow over an asset of another state? Such a gap in definition gives spacefaring powers the opportunity to engage in

⁶⁵ *Second to None*, "National Space Legislation: A Necessity for Pakistan," July 23, 2023, <https://secondtonone.com.pk/2023/07/23/national-space-legislation-a-necessity-for-pakistan/>

⁶⁶ Space Generation Advisory Council, *The Challenges of Dual-Use Space Technologies: The Non-Peaceful Use of Satellites*, <https://spacegeneration.org/the-challenges-of-dual-use-space-technologies-the-non-peaceful-use-of-satellites>

provocative behavior without facing responsibility. This legal ambiguity promotes a culture of impunity, particularly in areas where deterrence relationships are weak.

Another dilemma is verification. Conventional arms control treaties are based on physical inspection, exchange of telemetry, or treaty-monitoring agencies. These mechanisms are hard to apply in space because of the problem of attribution, orbital dynamics, and jurisdiction. Despite the promising verification tools provided by the development of SSA through the application of AI, commercial tracking data, and ground-based radars, their application is disjointed and restricted to those countries with strong space surveillance capabilities. Pakistan has advocated for multilateral inclusion of SSA capabilities, such as equal access to tracking information and joint verification procedures.

The growing role of commercial and private actors poses a special regulatory problem. Companies such as SpaceX, Amazon Kuiper, and India IN-SPACe are launching huge constellations with both civilian and strategic purposes. The involvement of Starlink satellite networks in military communication during the Russia-Ukraine conflict showed the direct participation of commercial systems in active warfare.⁶⁷ However, there is no apparent enforcement mechanism in international law instruments such as the OST to govern or penalize such use. This unregulated privatization of strategic capabilities erodes not only the sovereignty of states but also establishes an unequal playing field in access, influence and security.

Technological disparity is another problem associated with it. Spacefaring powers have first-mover advantages in orbital positioning, spectrum allocation, and launch infrastructure. This privileged position enables them to shape the meaning of responsible behavior in space in their own way, at the expense of or without regard to the developmental interests of less-capable states. Unless negotiations are inclusive, the future arms control norms are likely to be biased in favor of a small number of powerful players. Consequently, this paper recommends that arms control in space should have provisions of technology sharing, access to orbital slots, and financial and institutional assistance to emerging space programs.

In addition, space cybersecurity risks are not well understood and addressed. Satellite systems are very susceptible to cyber intrusions, spoofing, and data corruption but there are no legally binding agreements

⁶⁷ Akash Shah, "Commercial Space Assets in Modern Warfare: Lessons from Russia-Ukraine Conflict," *Strategic Vision Institute (SVI)*, October 23, 2023, <https://thesvi.org/commercial-space-assets-in-modern-warfare-lessons-from-russia-ukraine-conflict/>

on cyber behavior in outer space. Such vulnerabilities pose operational and sovereignty risks to countries such as Pakistan that depend on foreign collaborations in the development of satellites and telemetry. The integration of cyber arms control into broader space governance is therefore essential to any credible regime.

Lastly, the absence of a dedicated institutional architecture for space arms control like the IAEA for nuclear verification or the OPCW for chemical weapons, has left regulatory responsibilities fragmented. While COPUOS, the CD, and the UN First Committee all engage with space issues, none possess enforcement authority. A UN-led body with the mandate to monitor military space activity should be established to facilitate CBMs and enforce compliance with future legal frameworks.

To address these challenges, this study proposes a hybrid arms control model that combines:

- Legally binding agreements prohibiting specific classes of weapons and behaviors;
- Technically enforceable verification regimes, including AI-supported SSA and third-party tracking data;
- Regulation of commercial actors through international registration, licensing, and end-use restrictions;
- Transparency frameworks, including launch notifications and orbital proximity declarations;
- Multistakeholder governance structures that include emerging spacefaring nations, private industry, and civil society.

In the absence of such reforms, outer space risks becoming an unregulated battlespace where first-mover advantage, not legal obligation, dictates behavior. For states like Pakistan, this would mean increased vulnerability, diminished strategic autonomy, and reduced opportunities for peaceful development through space technology. A just and effective space arms control regime must therefore confront these challenges through legal innovation, political will, and global cooperation.

Conclusion

Weaponization of outer space can no longer be considered a hypothetical issue; it is a rapidly developing fact, with severe consequences to global security, strategic stability, and fair development of emerging spacefaring nations. The once scientific field of collaboration and exploration has quickly turned into a field of contention where military superiority, technological dominance, and strategic denial inform policy decisions. To the developing space actors, including Pakistan, this change is not only a challenge to national sovereignty but also a threat to the principle of space as a global common. Early agreements like the 1967 OST were important at the time, but not adequate in covering the issues of

space security in the contemporary world. Their non-action on conventional weapons, dual-use technologies, and privatization of the military sector has left legal loopholes that are being systematically used by the powerful space nations. The failure to implement transparency, verifications, or accountability in this regard has created a situation where activities like ASAT testing, proximity operations, and cyber interference activities have become normalized, which is a threat to regional and global stability. These developments are especially destabilizing in South Asia. The ASAT test conducted by India, its incorporation of space capabilities into the strategic command and control, and its increasing technological connections to world powers run the risk of initiating a space arms race in the region. Pakistan, although it has credible strategic deterrence, has chosen to avoid counter-escalation in space. Rather, it has taken the path of principled diplomacy, supporting international norms such as PAROS and the PPWT, endorsing transparency and confidence-building activities, and developing the peaceful use of space technology through the development-oriented mandate of SUPARCO.

These risks are further aggravated by a lack of inclusive governance mechanisms. Technologically advanced states and commercial giants continue to dominate the current discourse on space policy by silencing the voices of the emerging space actors. This exclusion does not only increase structural inequalities in access to space but also compromises the legitimacy and sustainability of any possible future space governance regime. As Pakistan has always maintained, the realm of outer space should be democratized to accommodate the interests, rights, and responsibilities of all spacefaring nations, irrespective of their capability. It is time to act now, before the last frontier is turned irreversibly into the next battlefield. A shared interest in peace, equity, and responsibility in space governance is not only desirable, but it is necessary to ensure that outer space continues to be a frontier of opportunity to all and not an instrument of the few.

TOWARD THE NEXT WORLD ORDER: THE US DECLINE AND ALTERNATIVE MODELS OF WORLD ORDER

Muneeb Butt* & Dr Mubeen Adnan**

Abstract

Every nation and civilization has held a distinct view of just arrangements and the distribution of power in world politics. The post-1945 liberal international order, construed under U.S. leadership, is now in relative decline and increasingly contested by alternative models. This study examines the transition from U.S.-led unipolarity to an unbalanced multipolar world order characterized by competing civilizational and ideological visions. Grounded in a neoclassical realist framework, it analyzes the world order models articulated by China, Russia, and diverse Islamic political traditions. The findings reveal that contemporary global politics is shaped by fragmented legitimacy contestation, domestic constraints, and regional institutional experimentation rather than simple ideological confrontation. China advances a civilizational model institutionalized through the Belt and Road Initiative, while Russia articulates a revisionist multipolar vision, though domestic political constraints limit its constructive capacity. Islamic political traditions provide normative critiques of the liberal order but remain fragmented across state and non-state actors. The study concludes that the emerging world order will be negotiated among multiple competing poles, underscoring the urgent need for reconciliation across divergent visions.

Keywords: *New World Order, Alternative Models, Leaderless Europe, Chinese Resurgence, Russian Revanchism*

* Research and content lead, Graduate in Diplomacy and Strategic Studies, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan. Email: mb.butt34603@gmail.com

** Senior Associate Professor at Department of Political Science, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan. Email: mubeenadnan.polsc@pu.edu.pk

Introduction

In international relations theory, world order is generally understood as the structured arrangement of power, norms, and institutions that regulate interaction among global actors. Since 1945, this order has been organized around rules and institutions established by the victors of the Second World War, particularly the United States, which assumed a leading role in shaping the post-war system. Consequently, it is widely described as a U.S.-led or Western-dominated international order. At the same time, world order is an ideational construct, as different regions and civilizations hold distinct views on the just distribution of power and authority in global politics. The twentieth century is often described as the “American century,” although global politics during the Cold War was structured around bipolar competition between the United States and the Soviet Union. The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the USSR in 1991 left the United States as the dominant global power, producing what many scholars described as a unipolar moment. To deal with the systemic anarchy of the international system, after 1991, many states aligned themselves with the United States and its institutions, reinforcing the consolidation of a US-led liberal international order.

However, the contemporary order faces a growing crisis of legitimacy. Its rules and institutions are increasingly perceived by rising powers such as China and Russia, as well as segments of the Muslim world, as selectively applied and disproportionately reflective of Western interests. As a result, these institutions are viewed as uneven and unjust, prompting calls for reform and greater inclusivity. The emerging system is neither unipolar nor strictly bipolar, but increasingly multipolar, with several states possessing the capability to shape global outcomes. This study focuses on the post-Cold War period (1991–2025), with particular attention to developments following the 2008 global financial crisis, which accelerated the redistribution of economic and political influence. Accordingly, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. How does the transition from U.S.-led unipolarity to an unbalanced multipolar world order reshape competing civilizational and ideological visions of global order?
2. What are the implications of fragmented legitimacy contestation for systemic stability, and under what conditions might reconciliation among competing world order visions occur?

This article argues that the contemporary international system is best conceptualized as an Unbalanced Multipolar order, in which multiple major powers coexist with significant asymmetries in material

capabilities¹ and without a shared normative framework capable of stabilizing the system. The relative primacy of the United States has increasingly been questioned, and the diffusion of power has generated systemic uncertainty, fragmented leadership, and competing visions of international order rather than stable patterns of alliance and restraint.² The study contributes to the literature by emphasizing that global order transition is driven not only by shifts in material capabilities but also by how states interpret and respond to these shifts within their domestic and strategic contexts.

Scholars have identified multiple causes behind the decline of the current liberal order. One strain of scholarship attributes the weakening of the liberal order to economic stagnation in the United States and Europe as a whole, alongside the rise of Nationalism, a surge of populism and the return of tribalism in the west.³ Other scholars argue that the United States has become increasingly reluctant to sustain the costs of global leadership, particularly when core national interests are perceived to be at stake, giving a huge blow to its legitimacy.⁴

The evolution of the liberal order since 1991 can broadly be understood in three phases. The first phase followed the end of the Cold War and is often described as a "hyper-liberal era," characterized by the expansion of free markets, deregulation, increased transparency, and the promotion of liberal democracy.⁵ The second phase witnessed growing tensions within this order as new powers began to rise. The current phase reflects the gradual erosion of the liberal order due to the diffusion of power beyond the Western core, the rise of revisionist states such as China and Russia, and growing domestic backlash within Western societies. Ikenberry argues that the liberal order is resilient but undergoing

¹ Randall L. Schweller, *Deadly Imbalances: Tripolarity and Hitler's Strategy of World Conquest* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998)

² Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979).

³ Kagan, Robert. The Twilight of the Liberal World Order. Brookings, January 24, 2017. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-twilight-of-the-liberal-world-order>

⁴ Pevehouse, Jon C. W., et al. "The Future of Global Governance and World Order." *International Organization* 79, no. 4 (2025). <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818325000013>.

⁵ Richard H. Steinberg, "The Rise and Decline of a Liberal International Order," in *Is the International Legal Order Unraveling?*, ed. David L. Sloss (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming 2022)

structural transformation rather than collapse, emphasizing that it remains contested rather than obsolete.⁶

With the perceived decline of the US-led liberal order, several powers and civilizations have begun articulating alternative visions of world order. Acharya argues that the contemporary world order is not simply unipolar or strictly multipolar. Instead, it is **Multiplex**, similar to a multiplex cinema with many screens showing different narratives simultaneously.⁷ China's unique culture, history and booming economy have made China confident enough to bolster its version of the world order.⁸ Russia's vision of world order stems from its long-standing aspiration to remain a major power, rooted in its historical identity, geopolitical position, and substantial military capabilities and resources.⁹ The Islamic world is complex and heterogeneous with conflicting views on key concepts like justice, equality and jihad. The discontent that the Islam and the Muslim world have with the western system of politics and the world order is deeply rooted in history, culture, traditions and conflicts.¹⁰

The article proceeds as follows. Section I outlines the theoretical framework and defines the key concepts. Section II examines China's world order vision. Section III explores Russia's revisionist conception of multipolarity. Section IV analyzes the fragmented Islamic critiques of the liberal order through classical and contemporary political thought. Section V discusses the emergence of a leaderless Europe and its implications for the liberal international order. The article concludes with policy recommendations and reflects on the prospects for reconciliation in a plural global order.

Theoretical Framework and Conceptual Approach

This paper adopts a neoclassical realist approach to understand this shift in the international order. Neoclassical realism is an appropriate framework to examine the shift from a U.S.-centred liberal international

⁶ G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 2–5.

⁷ Amitav Acharya, *The End of American World Order* (Cambridge: Polity, 2014).

⁸ Mansoor, Sheikh Inam Ul. "China's Geopolitical Strategy: Crafting a New World Order." *China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies* 09, no. 01–04 (January 1, 2023): 337–59. <https://doi.org/10.1142/s2377740023500161>.

⁹ Gerrits, André. "Russia in the Changing Global Order: Multipolarity, Multilateralism, and Sovereignty." In *United Nations University Series on Regionalism*, 85–107, 2019. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-21603-0_5.

¹⁰ Ahmad, Mushtaq, *The Notions of Dar Al-Harb and Dar Al-Islam in Islamic Jurisprudence with Special Reference to the Hanafi School* (2008). *Islamic Studies*, 47:1 (2008), 5–37, Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2238446>

system to an emerging Unbalanced Multipolar system because it brings together systemic power dynamics, domestic political variables and leadership perceptions. At the systemic level, the study applies power transition theory to account for the relative decline of U.S. leadership and the redistribution of material capabilities towards emerging foes, such as China and Russia. This diffuse distribution of economic and military capabilities has weakened the ability of the United States to unilaterally implement and lead the institutional and normative framework of the liberal international order. In turn, the redistribution of power has led to the emergence of multiple poles in the global system. But according to neoclassical realism, the impact of systemic pressures do not determine state behavior only, but rather it is mediated by the domestic political structure, elite decision-making processes and strategic culture. China's political and economic reforms are driven by state control over economic activity and state building, which shapes its foreign policy and institutional behaviour. Similarly, regime type, elite fear and the preservation of great power status play a role in Russian foreign policy. Within the Muslim world, mixed political systems, ideological perspectives, and elite interests result in fragmented approaches toward the liberal international system.

This approach also permits the inclusion of ideational factors such as legitimacy, identity, and civilization narratives, not as distinct variables, but through the prism of state structures and elite views. Alternative concepts of international order, therefore represent responses to strategic realities underpinned by both material and domestic political factors as opposed to normative or ideological pursuits in and of themselves. This research describes the present configuration as unbalanced multipolarity. Multipolar world or Multipolarity is defined as a global power configuration in which multiple states possess significant capabilities and influence, resulting in several poles within the international system rather than dominance by one or two actors. A multipolar world will no longer be ruled by a single dominant political power acting as a global hegemon. Rather there are new poles of power like Russia, China and a few middle powers like Brazil, Turkey, Pakistan and India which can not be influenced by a single power to follow its bidding. Classical balance-of-power theory suggests multipolarity may promote stability under certain conditions.¹¹ The emerging configuration differs from classical multipolar systems observed in earlier historical periods. Historical examples include the European balance-of-power system following the Congress of Vienna in 1815. Unlike the relatively institutionalized balance-of-power

¹¹ Deutsch, Karl W., and J. David Singer. "Multipolar Power Systems and International Stability." *World Politics* 16, no. 3 (1964): 390-406. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2009578>.

arrangements of the nineteenth century, the contemporary system lacks clear strategic rules and shared normative foundations among major powers. Scholars are familiar with the strategic dynamics of unipolar systems i.e. Bandwagoning which is of course a strategy that is no more feasible in the Multipolar world as no state is ready to opt for it at all.¹² The world is also familiar with the rules and strategies of the bipolar system, that was witnessed throughout the Cold War i.e. the balance of power and alliance system. Unlike classical multipolar systems such as the post-Vienna order, unbalanced multipolarity lacks institutionalized strategic rules governing great power behavior.

The unbalanced world order implies that the historical role that was played by the US as a 'balancer', mediating conflicts abroad no longer holds. The primacy of the US in the global politics has declined. The decline of a power in international system refers to *the* relative loss of a leading actor's material capabilities and institutional influence within the international system, reducing its ability to dictate or sustain the prevailing world order. Decline does not imply absolute collapse, rather a *loss* of relative power and normative authority that it once enjoyed in the past relative to other rising states. Fareed Zakaria attributes this decline as global power diffusing away from U.S. hegemony toward rising powers (the "rise of the rest"), producing a *post-American* era. While not predicting a complete collapse, he sees the relative decline of U.S. influence.¹³ Thus in the case of the US, it has been experiencing a relative decline in its power as now there are too many dynamics and constraints for any state to easily be compelled by a single power to follow its strategic preferences. Many states no longer accept decisions formulated in Washington without contestation, rather sharp criticism and opposition is heard from states of all tiers i.e. major, middle and minor powers. As a result, the system is characterized by heightened uncertainty, fragmented leadership, and competing visions of international order, rather than clear patterns of alliance and restraint.

This article contributes to the existing literature by examining different versions of world order within a single analytical framework and by conceptualizing the current transition as unbalanced multipolarity rather than classical multipolarity. This study relies primarily on qualitative analysis of historical sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, policy documents, and official strategic statements. The data based on figures and statistics have also been included from the official websites of the concerned states and global institutions. The Quran, hadith

¹² Darwin, John. *After Tamerlane: The Global History of Empire Since 1405* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2007).

¹³ Fareed Zakaria, *The Post-American World* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008).

and medieval Islamic scholars are also referred wherever it was required in the study.

China's Economic Reassurance and Political Resurgence Setting New Rules For The Old Game

China's clearest articulation of its alternative world order vision is embedded in its Belt and Road Initiative. The 2023 State Council White Paper frames the BRI not merely as an infrastructure project but as a foundational pillar of what Beijing calls a "community of shared future for mankind"¹⁴, a normative framework built on mutual benefit, shared development, and non-interference. The White Paper presents BRI as China's practical contribution to reforming global governance from within, by building parallel institutions and connectivity networks that reduce dependence on Western-controlled financial systems like the IMF and World Bank.

With the rise of Chinese primacy in the economic sphere as compared to the stagnated economies of Europe and the Global financial crash of 2008, China experienced what's known as the 'economic Reassurance'. It led to resurgence of the Chinese values and norms in the world economy, challenging the established world order.¹⁵ The Opium Wars are often interpreted as foundational to Chinese historical grievances toward Western imperialism.¹⁶ These experiences shaped China's long-standing skepticism toward Western-dominated international institutions and contributed to its cautious engagement with the global economy during earlier periods.¹⁷ As James Carville (1993) said, 'It's economy, stupid' which is the base of the world politics.¹⁸

"Socialism with Chinese characteristics" represents China's distinct political and economic model, combining centralized political authority with market-oriented economic reforms. China doesn't endorse the

¹⁴ People's Republic of China, State Council Information Office. *The Belt and Road Initiative: A Key Pillar of the Global Community of Shared Future*. Beijing: State Council Information Office, October 2023. https://english.www.gov.cn/news/202310/11/content_WS6526994fc6d0868f4e8e024a.html.

¹⁵ Huntington, Samuel P. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996.

¹⁶ Bowlby, Chris. "The Palace of Shame That Makes China Angry." BBC News, February 2, 2015. <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-30810596>.

¹⁷ "China's Economic Rise: History, Trends, Challenges, and Implications for the United States." CRS Reports, June 25, 2019. <https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/RL33534.html>.

¹⁸ Cataneo, Julia. "It's the Economy, Stupid." American Enterprise Institute - AEI, April 22, 2024. <https://www.aei.org/economics/its-the-economy-stupid/>.

Western ideals of Liberal democracy but rather Communism with Chinese attributes as its hard-core ideology. In his landmark 2017 address at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Xi Jinping delivered what many scholars regard as one of China's clearest articulations of a challenge to the US-led world order. Positioning China as a defender of globalization at a moment when the US was retreating into economic nationalism under Trump administration. He called for greater representation of emerging economies in international institutions, framing China's rise not as a threat but as an opportunity for shared prosperity. The speech marked a decisive moment in which China openly claimed the mantle of global leadership that the US appeared to be abandoning.¹⁹

The ideological foundations of China's world order vision are most authoritatively laid out in Xi Jinping's collected works spanning 2014 to 2022, Xi outlines a comprehensive philosophy of international relations rooted in the concept of a "community of shared future for mankind. Xi repeatedly emphasizes the principles of sovereignty, non-interference, and civilizational diversity as the correct basis for a reformed international system, directly challenging the liberal emphasis on human rights and democratic governance as a prerequisite for full participation in global institutions. This vision of Xi is taken from the centuries old Chinese political philosophy of *Tianxia*²⁰ which means 'All under heaven' or 'a heavenly mandate world order'. A brief summary of this world order suggests that:

1. All states under heaven shall benefit more than what they achieve independently
2. All the states that have come under this heavenly mandate order shall have interdependency, coexistence and reciprocity.
3. All will have a shared ideal based on commitments and interest and an oath to protect the same.²¹

All under heaven order is different from the western world order and puts more emphasis on economic growth, seeking to make the world free, equal and democratic. The most important thing in *Tianxia* is participation, which is not compulsory and states can choose to remain

¹⁹ Xi Jinping. "Keynote Speech at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting." World Economic Forum, Davos, January 17, 2017. <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2017/01/full-text-of-xi-jinping-keynote-at-the-world-economic-forum/>.

²⁰ Zhao, Tingyang. *Redefining A Philosophy for World Governance*. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.

²¹ Rui Yang, "The Concept of *Tianxia* and Its Impact on Chinese Discourses on the West," in *Asia Literate Schooling in the Asian Century*, ed. C. Halse (Routledge, 2015), 44-55

out, if they opt to do so. Thus, a Chinese world order will put more emphasis on the economic growth of China and its allies; where there will be clash of its interests, China will use its political and military power as it finds suitable. A significant indicator of China's growing institutional influence is the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 2344 in March 2017, which explicitly endorsed regional economic cooperation along the lines of the Belt and Road Initiative.²² China selectively engages with liberal economic norms based on strategic national interests. Chinese industrial policy has been criticized by some economists as creating asymmetric competition.²³

The best example is Germany's automobile industry. Germany initially saw China as a vast market for its vehicles, particularly Volkswagen. But the tide has dramatically turned. According to official data released by the China Passenger Car Association (CPCA)²⁴, Volkswagen's joint ventures in China held a combined market share of only 10.9% in 2025, down from over 19% in 2019, having sold a million fewer cars in China in 2023 than it did in 2018, a decline of 25% in just five years²⁵. According to the recent trade data, the Chinese automobile industry in the recent years has given a strong competition to the world's most sophisticated automobile industry.²⁶ Volkswagen's own Annual Report confirms its China deliveries have forced the company to plan factory closures in Germany itself.²⁷

Another example of Chinese economic influence is Europe's pharmaceutical industry. Over recent decades, the production of active

²² United Nations Security Council. *Resolution 2344 (2017)*. S/RES/2344. March 17, 2017. [https://undocs.org/S/RES/2344\(2017\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/2344(2017))

²³ Welle, Deutsche. "Chinese Subsidies Endanger World Economy, Says US' Yellen." Dw.Com, April 5, 2024. <https://www.dw.com/en/chinese-subsidies-endanger-world-economy-says-us-yellen/a-68745960>.

²⁴ China Passenger Car Association (CPCA). *Passenger Car Retail Sales Data, Full Year 2024*. Beijing: CPCA, January 2025. <https://www.cpcaauto.com>.

²⁵ MERICS (Mercator Institute for China Studies) — Policy Research: Brown, Alexander, and Andreas Mischer. "German Carmakers Are Placing a Risky Bet on China." *MERICS*, 2024, <https://merics.org/en/comment/german-carmakers-are-placing-risky-bet-china>

²⁶ Bangkok Post, "BYD to Overtake Volkswagen Ventures as China's Top Producer," <https://www.bangkokpost.com/business/motoring/2904757/byd-to-overtake-volkswagen-ventures-as-chinas-top-producer-amid-surge-in-ev-deliveries>.

²⁷ Kraftfahrt-Bundesamt (KBA), *Neuzulassungen von Personenkraftwagen nach Marken und Modellreihen: Jahr 2024* [New Registrations of Passenger Cars by Brand, 2024] Flensburg: KBA, January 2025. https://www.kba.de/DE/Statistik/Fahrzeuge/Neuzulassungen/Marken/marken_node.html.

pharmaceutical ingredients (API) for generic medicines has progressively shifted outside the EU, primarily to China and India, leading to risk concentration and heightened vulnerability during global disruptions.²⁸ A 2021 European Commission study warned that 80% of imported pharmaceutical ingredients into Europe come from only five countries, with China alone accounting for 45% of the total.²⁹ In the specific case of antibiotics, China contributes to 80–90% of antibiotic API production globally. Europe's increasing reliance on Chinese suppliers has been further accelerated by the closure of European factories unable to compete with Chinese price competition, a key European supplier of APIs recently announced the closure of two factories and the reduction of production of 13 medical ingredients, with market share expected to pass to Chinese pharmaceutical companies.³⁰ This dependency is no longer a theoretical risk but a policy emergency: the European Commission's Critical Medicines Act, proposed by President von der Leyen in 2024, was explicitly designed to tackle drug shortages and reduce dependence on medicines and ingredients sourced from outside the region.³¹

Another deviance that political scientist attribute to China is that it defies the nation state principle- a deviance from the Westphalian model of nation state. Rather China is something else, not a simple nation state. Rather some political scientists argue that China represents a civilizational state, operating within a nation-state institutional framework.³² Westphalian concept is a western concept of modern nation state that China finds to be unworkable for itself. Rather China is a hybrid state, its history makes it a civilizational state but it had to adapt itself to the current international order and become a nation state.³³ The nation state is part of its identity and not the whole and some scholars speculate that

²⁸ European Commission Official Study (2021) — *Strategic Dependencies and Capacities: A Study on Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients*. Brussels: European Commission, 2021. <https://ec.europa.eu/docsroom/documents/45412>.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Fleischmann, Laura. "This Is How Dependent Germany Is on Chinese Medicines." Euronews, October 29, 2025. <https://www.euronews.com/2025/10/29/this-is-how-dependent-germany-is-on-chinese-medicines>.

³¹ Council of the European Union. *New Rules for Critical Medicines in the EU*. Brussels: Council of the EU, December 2, 2025. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/critical-medicines-act/>.

³² Xia, Guang. "China as a 'Civilization-State': A Historical and Comparative Interpretation." *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 140 (August 1, 2014): 43–47. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.04.384>.

³³ Jacques, Martin. "To Understand China's Success, First Understand Chinese Civilization." In *The East West Dialogue*, 9–14, 2023. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-8057-2_2.

sustained Chinese economic and political influence could gradually reshape Westphalian norms of state sovereignty.

The Revanchist Russian Model: Keeping Russia Relevant in Global Politics

"Russia is never as strong as she looks; Russia is never as weak as she looks".³⁴ Russia's 2023 Foreign Policy Concept³⁵, a 42-page document approved by Presidential Executive Order and published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, explicitly frames multipolarity as the central framework for all areas of Russian foreign policy. The document declares what it calls an era of revolutionary change in the world order, and commits Russia to the elimination of what it describes as the vestiges of US dominance in world affairs as a strategic priority. Russia's vision calls for:

1. Polycentricity
2. Sovereign equality of states
3. The right of states to choose their own development models
4. The upholding of cultural and civilizational diversity

These principles are explicitly positioned as alternatives to the Western liberal order. Russia styles itself in this document as a unique country-civilization and a vast Eurasian and Euro-Pacific power, identifying itself as a distinct civilizational pole in the multipolar world, it is striving to construct. It simultaneously advances a repudiation of the US-led Western order. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has been widely interpreted as violating international law and the UN Charter it claims to uphold. This contradiction suggests that Russia's alternative world order vision is better understood as a disruptive rather than constructive project, capable of undermining existing norms but unable to construct its own with any legitimate authority.

The words, i.e, expansionism and insecurity are synonymous with Russia. Moscow has historically exhibited **a strong sense of geopolitical insecurity**. It believes that when a state stops expanding its boundaries, it starts declining and this sense of decline or fall makes Russia more insecure. Geographically, majority of the Russian landmass is in Asia, but

³⁴ Olsen, John David. "Churchill – Supervillain of Russian Propaganda." International Churchill Society, February 26, 2023. <https://winstonchurchill.org/publications/finest-hour-extras/churchill-supervillain-of-russian-propaganda/>.

³⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. *The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation*. Approved by Presidential Executive Order No. 229, March 31, 2023. Moscow: MFA RF, 2023. https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/fundamental_documents/1860586/

its insecurities always originate from Europe.³⁶ Russian strategic culture has historically been shaped by security anxieties. The vast unprotected plains in the eastern Ukraine allured many invaders like Napoleon's Grande Armée and Hitler's Nazi Army into Russia throughout its history. These insecurities from Europe forced Russia multiple times to forge European security order in compliance with the Russian strategic self-interests. During the Cold War, the Russians, to a great extent remained successful in creating balance of power in Europe by taking the entire eastern Europe under their sphere of influence. But, the threat of the expansion of NATO kept lurking over, throughout the Cold War. From an offensive realist perspective, NATO expansion can be interpreted as altering regional power balance calculations.³⁷ The disintegration of the USSR did not end the hostilities between Russia and the West. The divergent visions of the post-Cold War European security order further escalated the crisis. NATO's eastward expansion after the Cold War has been interpreted by Russian policymakers as a strategic threat to their security environment.

Russia's revisionist behaviour is not only driven by its insecurities, but also its domestic constraints and political system shape its foreign policy behaviour; centralized authority, elite driven decision making and regime survival makes its policy more assertive to gain domestic legitimacy. Some scholars argue that elements of imperial legacy continue to shape Russia's strategic culture and foreign policy behavior and it has emerged on the international politics too with what the Political scientists are calling 'Neo-Imperialism'. Russian strategic culture emphasizes security depth and sphere-of-influence stability and it is bound to appear on the international stage.³⁸

The rise of populism in the United States and Europe, including the election of Donald Trump and the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union, has contributed to broader uncertainty with the liberal international order and Russia also seems to be attacking the same.³⁹ Its Crimean annexation in 2014, invasion of Ukraine to claim the Donbas

³⁶ Murphy, David. "A Short History of Russia's Long Standing Paranoia About the West." RTE.Ie, February 27, 2022. <https://www.rte.ie/brainstorm/2022/0226/1283182-russia-europe-paranoia-suspicion-insecurity-history/>.

³⁷ Mearsheimer, John J. "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault: The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin." *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 5 (September/October 2014): 77–89.

³⁸ van Herpen, Marcel H. "Putin's Wars: The Rise of Russia's New Imperialism." *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 2015. doi:10.1080/09592318.2015.1009526.

³⁹ Götz, Elias, and Camille-Renaud Merlen. "Russia and the Question of World Order." *European Politics and Society* 20, no. 2 (November 15, 2018): 133–53. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23745118.2018.1545181>.

region back, the alleged involvement in the Project Alamo in the 2016 US election, Eurasian Economic Union and BRICS imitative suggest that Russia is either trying to create a space for itself in the Liberal world order or will entirely root it out for something more 'Russian'. The Russia president, Vladimir Putin has repeatedly criticized unipolarity, arguing that the model is both unacceptable and unworkable in contemporary international politics. The only grand strategy that Putin is trying is to undo the post-Cold War settlement to re-establish Russia as a dominant power in Eurasia.⁴⁰ It tends to interfere with what the current Liberal order is based on; it doesn't recognize the territorial sovereignty of the bordering states like Georgia, Ukraine etc. and meddle in their domestic affairs ⁴¹. Russia is exploiting the defects of liberalism and democracy, including its open-ness, information system and political plurality. The western democracy's financing of elections, its lobby system has been exploited by Russia. Russia is engaging with other autocracies and authoritarian regimes to challenge the current rule-based order like Belarus, Venezuela, Iran and Syria. Most important of all is Russia-China nexus that has emerged as a big threat to the Liberal world order today. However, domestic and international constraints limit Russia's ability to construct an alternative institutional order, making its role largely disruptive rather than transformative.

The Desire of an Islamic World Order

This article argues that Islamic visions of world order are not unified civilizational alternatives to the liberal international order but rather fragmented political responses shaped by regime interests, ideological diversity, and geopolitical concerns. The relationship between Islamic conceptions of order and the Western-led international system is complex.⁴² It is not a simple unified civilization confrontation but a fragmented and pragmatic engagement shaped by regime interest, domestic political economy and regional power dynamics. It is due to the fact that, the Islamic world does not constitute a monolithic, homogeneous

⁴⁰ Stephen Fidler, "Putin's Endgame: Unravel the Post-Cold War Agreements That Humiliated Russia," *Wall Street Journal*, February 22, 2022, <https://www.wsj.com/world/russia/putins-endgame-unravel-the-post-cold-war-agreements-that-humiliated-russia-11645482412>

⁴¹ "The Russian War's Impact on Global Order – Near East South Asia for Strategic Studies (NESA)," n.d. <https://nesa-center.org/the-russian-wars-impact-on-global-order/>.

⁴⁶ Hanna Pfeifer, *Islamists and the Global Order*. Edinburgh University Press eBooks, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781399515870>.

actor like the west.⁴³ Rather, distinct from European nation-state formation, Islamic civilization comprise historically governed pluralistic, multi-ethnic societies through flexible administrative and legal arrangements rather than ethnic nationalism, offering a model of political integration.⁴⁴

Thus Muslim majority states⁴⁵ and the nonstate actors or transnational organizations vary significantly in their foreign policy orientations and behaviour. Nevertheless, there is shared sense of marginalization and normative discontent with the existing international system which has created a spectrum of alternative imaginaries of order rooted in Islamic political thought. Classical Islamic political thought offers diverse and sophisticated perspectives. Al-Farabi envisioned a universal political community governed by reason and justice⁴⁶, transcending tribal and national boundaries. Al-Mawardi presents the Caliphate as a legitimate institution for governing inter-communal relations, while importantly legitimizing diplomatic engagement and treaty-making⁴⁷ with non-Muslim states. Ibn Khaldun's theory of *Asabiyyah* — the rise and decline of civilizations through cycles of social solidarity and internal decay, offers perhaps the earliest systematic theory of power transition in world history⁴⁸, remarkably anticipating contemporary debates about the decline of the US-led order. Allama Muhammad Iqbal envisioned an Islamic political community not as a theocratic state but as a spiritual democracy rooted in *ijtihad*, arguing that Muslim-majority societies must reconstruct political thought on their own terms rather than simply adopting or rejecting Western liberal frameworks wholly.⁴⁹ Maududi articulated the most systematic modern challenge to the Westphalian

47 Mohammed Ayoob, *The Many Faces of Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Muslim World* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008)

44 Jurji Zaydan. *History of Islamic Civilization*. Translated by D.S. Margoliouth. Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2009.

45 Sohail H., ed. *Islamic Political Ethics: Civil Society, Pluralism, and Conflict*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002.

46 Al-Farabi. *Al-Madina al-Fadila* (The Virtuous City). Translated by Richard Walzer. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985 pp.(229–233) (197–201)

47 Al-Mawardi, Abu al-Hasan. *Al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyya: The Laws of Islamic Governance*. Translated by Asadullah Yate. London: Ta-Ha Publishers, 1996. pp. (1-15) (60–75)

48 Ibn Khaldun. *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*. Translated by Franz Rosenthal. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967. Vol. 1, pp. (249–310) (353–390) Vol. 2, pp. (117–136)

49 Muhammad Iqbal. *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013.

order, arguing that divine sovereignty (hakimiyya) renders all human political authority conditional and delegated.⁵⁰

The contemporary Islamic scholarship treats the concepts such as jihad, Darul Islam and Darul harb historically contingent and subject to interpretation.⁵¹ For example, the term jihad has a very complex and wide spectrum of meaning⁵² ranging from self discipline and social reform to armed struggle against an enemy under strict legal constraints.⁵³

Despite this intellectual diversity in the Islamic scholarship, many have adopted a radical interpretation of these core concepts to justify violent resistance. Radical non-state actors and transnational jihadist organizations in the Muslim world don't recognize this world order as legitimate because according to them, it is created on the western values and traditions often against what Islam believes in. The notion of the nation state itself is questioned, as they recognize the state only as a means to an end and not the end in itself.⁵⁴ The modern nation state system based on Westphalia treaty is considered an obstacle and a colonial tool used by the west to keep the Islamic states and the Muslim ummah or the Muslim nation divided between borders, ethnicities and languages.⁵⁵ According to these elements, Islamic states need to be united into a single political entity to assume its long-lost status in the world politics. These extremist and radical transnational militant organizations see the world in black and white i.e. Darul Harb- the war zones and Darul ul Islam- the peaceful zone.

Hassan al-Banna, founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, argued that secular nation-states cannot serve as the legitimate foundation of an Islamic international order.⁵⁶ The non-interference norm of the present world order is also an anomaly to these hard core scholars, as they believe it is the 'duty' of those living in the *Darul Islam* to change every Darul harb

⁵⁰ Abul A'la Maududi. *The Islamic Law and Constitution*. Translated by Khurshid Ahmad. Lahore: Islamic Publications, 1955.

⁵¹ John L Esposito, and John Obert Voll. *Makers of Contemporary Islam*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

⁵² Joel Hayward. "Justice, Jihad and Duty: The Qur'anic Concept of Armed Conflict." *Islam and Civilisational Renewal* 9, no. 3 (July 2018): 267–303. <https://doi.org/10.52282/icr.v9i3.101>

⁵³ Michael Bonner, *Jihad in Islamic History: Doctrines and Practice* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

⁵⁴ Muhammad Ibn Isma'il Al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Book of Government (Book 20)

⁵⁵ ICIT Digital Library. "Nation-States as Obstacles to the Total Transformation of the Ummah," n.d. <https://www.icit-digital.org/articles/nation-states-as-obstacles-to-the-total-transformation-of-the-ummah>.

⁵⁶ Hasan al-Banna, *Majmu'at Rasā'il al-Imām al-Shahīd Hasan al-Banna* (2002).

into *Darul Islam*. These radical actors like ISIS, Al-Qaeda etc. believe in this binary classification of the world where the Darul-Islam are in constant war with the Darul-harb.⁵⁷ They justify all the terrorist activities, suicide bombing and killing and targeting of civilians and innocent minorities as a jihad to establish the Darul Islam.⁵⁸

Many of these scholars also use the term “paper states”⁵⁹ for many of the Islamic states of the current time, created for the convenience of the western power to maintain their influence after they have vacated the region.⁶⁰ For Abdullah Azzam, the fragmentation of the Muslim world into Westphalian states was itself a colonial imposition⁶¹, and the restoration of a unified Islamic order required armed struggle that transcended national borders.

At the state level, most Muslim majority states operate pragmatically within the existing framework of international system even while expressing their dissatisfaction. States like Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan have articulated differing version of Islamic Governance and international engagement. States like Saudi Arabia and the Gulf monarchies largely support the existing international order due to their integration into global oil market and security dependence on the US even while they contest some of aspects related to culture, religion and sovereignty.⁶² Iran represents a more revisionist actor, articulating critique of the western dominance while simultaneously engaging itself in a realist power politics through regional alliances, proxy conflicts and strategic bargaining.⁶³ Turkey illustrates a hybrid pragmatic model combining participation in western institutions with selective invocation of the Islamic identity and values to advance regional influence and keep

⁵⁷ RSIS_NTU. “CO07001 | “Revisiting Dar Al-Islam (Land of Islam) and Dar Al-Harb (Land of War)” Accessed October 7, 2025.

⁵⁸ Thomas Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism since 1979* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁵⁹ Oasis. “From ‘Paper State’ to ‘Islamic State.’” Fondazione Internazionale Oasis, July 26, 2016. <https://www.oasiscenter.eu/en/paper-state-islamic-state>.

⁶⁰ Asim Qureshi. “Book Review of ‘The Caravan: Natilah Azzam And The Rise Of Global Jihad.’” *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 13, no. 3 (July 2, 2020): 506–8. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2020.1780768>.

⁶¹ Abdullah Azzam. *Defence of the Muslim Lands: The First Obligation After Iman*. Translated by Brothers in Ribatt. London: Azzam Publications, 2002.

⁶² F. Gregory Gause, III, “Beyond Sectarianism: The New Middle East Cold War,” *Brookings Doha Center Analysis Paper* No. 11 (The Brookings Institution, July 22, 2014)

⁶³ Michael Axworthy, *Revolutionary Iran: A History of the Islamic Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

its strategic autonomy.⁶⁴ Most importantly, most majority muslim states do not reject the Westphalian nation state system. Although classical Islamic political theory prioritizes the unity of ummah, modern Islamic states have largely reconciled core Islamic principles with modern concepts of sovereignty, diplomacy and International law. The OIC, although with limited effectiveness, is manifestation of the fact that Islamic solidarity⁶⁵ at the state level operates within and not against the existing international order.⁶⁶ This divergence underscores that the Islamic challenge to the Liberal order is fragmented rather than unified, oscillating between reformist engagement and radical rejection.⁶⁷

The lack of political unity and existence of diversity of interpretation of core concepts, leaves Islamic world divided; with states pursuing a different path from the trans-national and non-state actors. The aspiration for an Islamic world order remains fragmented in practice, limiting its ability to present a unified and widely accepted alternative to the existing international system.

The Defense-less Defenders of the Liberal World Order: The Emergence of a Leader-less Europe

Europe currently faces a significant leadership vacuum within the liberal international order.⁶⁸ The three pillars of the European power i.e. Germany, France and the UK appear increasingly constrained in their ability to uphold their weight of the Western International order. Following the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union through Brexit, the burden of European leadership has largely shifted to France and Germany. French strategic autonomy debates under President Macron reflect broader European concerns about strategic sovereignty i.e. Europe to grow autonomous in diplomatic, economic and military spheres, reducing dependence on the United States and enhancing Europe's independent global role. But now Macron's popularity has declined to its

⁶⁴ Ziya Öniş, "Turkey's Two Elections: The AKP Comes Back," *Journal of Democracy* 27, no. 2 (April 2016): 141-154, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2016.0021>

⁶⁵ Organisation of Islamic Cooperation. *Charter of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation*. Revised edition. Jeddah: OIC General Secretariat, 2008. https://www.oic-oci.org/page/?p_id=53&p_ref=27&lan=en.

⁶⁶ James Piscatori, *Islam in a World of Nation-States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986)

⁶⁷ Mohammed Ayoob, *The Many Faces of Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Muslim World*, 2008.

⁶⁸ Emma Ashford, "Leaderless Europe," Stimson Center, January 14, 2025, <https://www.stimson.org/2025/leaderless-europe/>.

lowest and the parliament seems to be in a stretch between three different blocs with different and opposing philosophical differences. The tripartite parliament will leave little room for Macron to make politically bold moves and lead Europe.⁶⁹

Germany faces complex domestic economic and political challenges that limit its capacity to assume broader leadership within Europe. Germany's economy, the largest in Europe, has experienced significant slowdown in recent years. Germany's economic decline further illustrates the fragility of the liberal order's leading defenders. According to official Eurostat GDP data, Germany recorded negative quarterly growth rates throughout 2023 and 2024, oscillating between -0.4% and +0.2%⁷⁰, reflecting a sustained pattern of economic contraction rather than mere stagnation. This makes Germany the worst performing major European economy in the period, a stark reversal for the continent's largest economy and the principal financier of European liberal order institutions. After sixteen years of leadership under Angela Merkel, Germany entered a new political phase under Chancellor Olaf Scholz. The coalition in the Bundestag, called 'Traffic light coalition' because of different colors of the parties flags. The coalition has broken down and Germany's chancellor has recently lost a vote of confidence leaving Germany with an uncertain and unstable political system.⁷¹

The current international environment is marked by considerable uncertainty. The Leadership in US seems to be consolidated but the same is seen weakened, fragmented and even struggling by allies of the US and more evidently Europe like France, Germany and now Trudeau in Canada.⁷² With a populist Trump in the heartland of the Liberal Democracy, Europe seems to be the first to raise the cry of the breaking world order, the order that has failed to supply with the popular demands with problems like immigration, identity based violence, extremism, Economic recession in almost all of Europe and unemployment etc. being prevalent in every European state. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has further exposed the limitations of Western security guarantees and

⁶⁹ Coface. "France: Hung Parliament Raises Uncertainty." September 7, 2024. <https://www.coface.com/news-economy-and-insights/france-hung-parliament-raises-uncertainty>.

⁷⁰ Eurostat. *GDP and Main Aggregates — Growth Rates, Quarterly Data: Germany*. Luxembourg: Statistical Office of the European Union, 2025. Dataset code: namq_10_gdp. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/namq_10_gdp

⁷¹ "German Chancellor Olaf Scholz Loses Confidence Vote," BBC News, December 16, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/ckg36pp6dpyo>.

⁷² "Europe is Leaderless," *Newsweek*, 2024, <https://www.newsweek.com/europe-leaderless-opinion-1924078>.

highlighted divisions within the liberal international order. The architects and traditional defenders of the liberal international order, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom, are increasingly preoccupied with domestic political and economic challenges. As a result, their capacity to collectively provide strategic leadership for the Western alliance has diminished. This leadership gap contributes to the growing uncertainty surrounding the future of the liberal international order.

Recommendations

Historically, great power competition has shaped global order transitions, and the current multipolar moment is no exception. The winner-takes-all approach that characterized both the Cold War and the unipolar era is no longer viable. What follows are policy recommendations directed at the principal actors in this transition:

The United States must recognize and formally accommodate the multipolarity of the contemporary world. US primacy and unipolarity defined global politics for nearly three decades following the Cold War. However, the diffusion of power across multiple regional and global actors has fundamentally altered the strategic landscape. A recalibrated US grand strategy, one that leads through coalition-building and institutional reform rather than unilateral assertion, would better serve the long-term sustainability of a rules-based international system.

Russia must recognize that imperial overstretch is not a viable path to great power status. Russia's military adventurism, while temporarily disruptive, has deepened its economic isolation and undermined its credibility as a responsible stakeholder in the international system. A sustainable Russian return to great power relevance requires prioritizing economic modernization and domestic institutional development over territorial revisionism.

Europe must urgently address its leadership vacuum and emerge as an autonomous pole of power. Years of strategic dependence on American security guarantees have left Europe ill-equipped to lead independently at precisely the moment when collective Western resolve is most needed. The strategic autonomy agenda, articulated most clearly by President Macron, remains the correct diagnosis, but it requires the political will and institutional coherence.

China needs to recalibrate its Tianxia model with transparent rules, enforceable norms, and multilateral accountability mechanisms if it wishes its vision to achieve genuine global legitimacy. The Belt and Road Initiative and associated institutions offer real development benefits, but their long-term credibility requires China to address legitimate concerns about debt sustainability, conditionality, and asymmetric dependency. A Chinese world order vision that incorporates genuine reciprocity and

institutional transparency would find considerably broader acceptance among the Global South and middle powers alike. Otherwise, it would be difficult for other states to follow the course.

The Islamic world has to offer more than ideology. Translating its principles into concrete political and institutional form requires greater unity, organization, and pragmatic engagement at both regional and global levels, whether independently or through a reformed and more effective Organisation of Islamic Cooperation.

Middle powers, including Brazil, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, India, and Pakistan, should take on a more proactive role in bridging the gap between competing world order visions. The concept of middle power diplomacy is not new, but it finds its most natural expression in a multipolar world. These states are not powerful enough to redirect global politics unilaterally, but they are influential enough to mediate, convene, and construct the institutional foundations of a more inclusive order. Their geographic, cultural, and civilizational diversity uniquely positions them to serve as interlocutors between the major poles of power.

Ultimately, the transition to a stable multipolar order will not be achieved through the dominance of any single vision but through the difficult, incremental work of building shared foundations across divergent civilizational and political traditions. Reconciliation is not only possible, it is a necessity.

This study is limited by its reliance on secondary sources and qualitative historical analysis, which precludes quantitative testing of causal claims and limits empirical generalizability. The broad comparative scope across multiple civilizational and geopolitical models also limits deeper case-specific analysis. The study's temporal scope, covering the post-Cold War period from 1991 to 2025, means that findings reflect a specific transitional moment and may require revision as the multipolar configuration continues to evolve. Additionally, interpretations of Islamic political thought are based on selected scholarly works, and alternative interpretations may exist. Future research could strengthen the study by incorporating primary data, mixed-method approaches, and more focused country-level case studies.

Conclusion

The world order is only effective and stable when it is based on the premises of balance of power. The current configuration is an unbalanced multipolar order that lacks both hegemonic leadership and a shared normative framework capable of stabilizing the system. In the past, the alliance system and buck-passing worked for most of the Cold War until 1991, when the world lost the other pole of world politics, the USSR. From there on, the world witnessed more identity-based violence, particularly in

the Muslim world, with Iraq's Kuwait invasion, the US invasion of Iraq, the Afghan war, the War on Terror, the Syrian war, and recurring conflict in the Middle East. This study has demonstrated that the transition to unbalanced multipolarity has not produced convergence around a single alternative vision but rather intensified legitimacy contestation among competing civilizational models, each insufficiently cohesive to replace the declining liberal order.

China has emerged as one of the leading economic powers, and economic power usually translates into political and military influence. But China operates by its own rules. It will not protect the Western liberal order in whose creation it had no part. Rather, through the Belt and Road Initiative, the Tianxia framework, and its Global Initiatives, China is actively reshaping the rules of international engagement to reflect its own civilizational values and strategic interests. Russia, as always, remains caught between two impulses, to revise the world order entirely or to secure a central place within it. Russian leaders do not consider a weak Russia to be an acceptable outcome. Due to its history, geography, culture, and deep-seated insecurities, Russia has to remain at the center of world politics. However, its invasion of Ukraine has exposed a fundamental contradiction: Russia claims to champion sovereignty and multipolarity while simultaneously violating the very norms it invokes. The brutal violence in Gaza and the Western world's inconsistent application of the very values it claims to defend, human rights, international law, and equality has deepened the Muslim world's normative discontent with the existing order. Yet the Islamic challenge remains fragmented, divided between pragmatic state-level actors and radical non-state organizations, making a unified Islamic world order vision unlikely in the near term. Europe is no longer a potent defender of the Western order but rather the manifestation of the first serious crack within it. France, Germany, and the United Kingdom are preoccupied with domestic political and economic challenges, leaving a leadership vacuum at a moment when collective Western resolve is most needed. The new world order will not be ruled by a single state or civilization. Rather, it will reflect arrangements that are mutually acceptable to the major poles of power. Reconciliation is not only possible but a dire necessity for a stable and peaceful world. Middle powers like Brazil, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, India, and Pakistan will play a vital role in bridging the gap between competing visions. Until that reconciliation is achieved, clashes remain inevitable, as witnessed in the Indo-Pakistani tensions, the Israel-Iran confrontation, the Ukraine-Russia war, and recurring violence across the Middle East.

GLOBAL SOUTH PERSPECTIVES ON CYBER GOVERNANCE: PAKISTAN'S ADVOCACY FOR A LEGALLY BINDING ICT FRAMEWORK AT THE UN

Iraj Abid*

Abstract

This paper examines Pakistan's position at the United Nations (UN) for the responsible use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). While ICTs have become a powerful driver of socio-economic development, their dual-use poses significant risks to national and international security. The governance of ICTs and broader questions of cybersecurity have been on the UN agenda since 1998. The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), held in two phases in Geneva (2003) and Tunis (2005), was the first global UN platform where states collectively debated the political, economic, and developmental implications of ICTs. The issue holds significance for all the member states; however, as with other security-related matters, states have diverse and often conflicting positions on the governance of ICTs. Pakistan's stance has been articulated through its interventions at and position papers submitted to various UN forums, including the WSIS, the UN General Assembly, the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on ICTs, and the Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) on ICTs. However, there is a lack of scholarly analysis of Islamabad's position on the governance of these crucial technologies. This study analyzes Pakistan's advocacy under the theoretical framework that combines constructivism with a Global South perspective. This approach highlights how developing states shape their stance and advocacy regarding technology governance. The study is qualitative in nature and relies on secondary data sources for analysis.

Keywords: Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), Cybersecurity, Pakistan, United Nations, Global South, National Security

* Research Officer at the Center for International Strategic Studies Sindh (CISSS), Karachi, Pakistan. Email : irajabid@ciass.org.pk

Introduction

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have become ubiquitous in today's world. From individual life to governance, economy, and even security, every aspect of human life involves ICT tools. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), ICTs are defined as "diverse set of technological tools and resources used to transmit, store, create, share or exchange information. These technological tools and resources include computers, the Internet (websites, blogs, emails), live broadcasting technologies (radio, television, and webcasting), recorded broadcasting technologies (podcasting, audio and video players and storage devices), and telephony (fixed or mobile, satellite, video-conferencing)".¹ The UN recognizes ICTs as pivotal in driving social, economic, and political development and facilitating the implementation of global initiatives, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).²

However, as ICTs become increasingly integrated into critical infrastructure, their dual-use nature has raised concerns about their potential misuse, particularly in the context of cyber threats for both national and international security. The governance of ICTs and their security implications have been central to discussions at the UN since 1998. Despite the growing acknowledgment of their role in national and international security, the global community remains divided on how best to regulate and secure cyberspace. The issue gained formal attention during the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in Geneva (2003) and Tunis (2005), where global discussions began to coalesce around issues of ICT governance, digital access, and cybersecurity. Since then, Pakistan has consistently advocated for the establishment of a legally binding international instrument to govern ICTs. Pakistan's advocacy reflects both its national security concerns and broader principles of multilateral governance in the digital age.

This paper argues that Pakistan's advocacy for a legally binding international cybersecurity framework reflects broader Global South concerns regarding sovereignty, strategic inequality, and exclusion from norm-making processes dominated by technologically advanced states.

¹ UNESCO Institute for Statistics, "Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)," *UNESCO UIS Global Education Glossary*, <https://uis.unesco.org/en/glossary-term/information-and-communication-technologies-ic>

² Phillippa Biggs (editor), "Fast-Forward Progress: Leveraging Tech to Achieve the Global Goals," *International Telecommunication Union*, 122, https://www.itu.int/en/sustainable-world/Documents/Fast-forward_progress_report_414709%20FINAL.pdf.

Through a constructivist Global South lens, the paper demonstrates that Pakistan's position is not merely a national security response, but a normative challenge to the prevailing voluntary and non-binding cyber governance model promoted within existing UN processes. Through an analysis of Pakistan's interventions in various UN forums including the WSIS, the UN General Assembly, the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE), and the Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG), this study explores how Pakistan's stance aligns with the broader interests of the Global South. By employing a theoretical framework that combines constructivism with a Global South perspective, this study seeks to understand how Pakistan, as a developing state, shapes its position on ICT governance and the need for a legally binding cybersecurity framework. The study is qualitative in nature, drawing on primary and secondary sources to analyze Pakistan's advocacy for a treaty-like international cybersecurity regime, its implications for global cyber governance and potential impact on the future of international cyber law.

The central questions in this study are:

1. How does Pakistan's position on ICT governance reflect the broader concerns of the Global South?
2. How can Pakistan's position inform the broader debate on the regulation of cyberspace?

In addressing these questions, the paper also explores the significance of a legally binding framework for international cyber governance and its potential to create a more secure and equitable cyberspace for all nations.

The significance of this study lies in its examination of Pakistan's call for a legally binding treaty on ICT governance, which highlights the challenges of ensuring both security and sovereignty in cyberspace. Given the increasing militarization and weaponization of ICTs, Pakistan's stance provides valuable insight into the demands of the Global South for a more equitable and inclusive cyber governance framework. The paper argues that Pakistan's position reflects broader Global South concerns regarding sovereignty, equity, and the need for a legally binding framework.

Cyberspace and ICTs

Cyberspace and ICTs are two different yet closely related concepts. Cyberspace is the global domain within the information environment consisting of an interdependent network of information systems infrastructure, including the internet, telecommunications networks,

computer systems, and embedded processors and controllers.³ Cyberspace operates through the function of ICTs. According to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), 5.5 billion people, about 68 percent of humanity, were online or connected with cyberspace in 2024.⁴ The omnipresence of cyberspace poses opportunities as well as threats.

Weaponization of ICTs

The inherent dual-use nature of ICTs makes them susceptible to weaponization. Weaponization of cyberspace refers to the deliberate use of digital networks, data, and information systems as instruments of conflict to achieve strategic, military, or political objectives. These include espionage, critical infrastructure disruption, information warfare, and employment of destructive malware or cyber weapons. With exponential growth in computing power and the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) in the past few years, the involvement of ICTs has increased manifold both as civilian conveniences as well as critical components of warfare. Modern armies increasingly rely on integrated data links, satellite communication, unmanned systems, and cyber weapons as vital components of their command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, information surveillance, and reconnaissance (C4I2SR) operations.⁵

The growing interdependence between ICTs and military operations has become a global concern, as ICTs are being increasingly employed by states for offensive purposes as a tool of hybrid warfare. The increasing weaponization of ICTs has prompted a global debate on regulating ICTs to make cyberspace safer.⁶

Owing to rapid technological advancements in ICTs and their implications for national security, the subject has gained increasing scholarly and policy relevance. However, Pakistan's position on the regulation of these technologies, particularly within multilateral forums,

³ National Institute of Standards and Technology, "cyberspace," *NIST Computer Security Resource Center Glossary*, <https://csrc.nist.gov/glossary/term/cyberspace>. accessed on 12 November 2025

⁴ ITU-D Statistics, *International Telecommunication Union*, <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx>. accessed on 18 November 2025

⁵ Evan Beebe, "C4ISR & JADC2: Navigating the Next Frontier in Military Command and Control," *IDGA C4ISR & Command-and-Control*, August 9, 2024, <https://www.idga.org/command-and-control/articles/c4isr-jadc2-the-next-frontier-in-military-command-and-control>.

⁶ YIRIS/YIRA, "The Weaponization of Data: International Legal Responses to Digital Espionage and State-Sponsored Cyber Warfare," *YIRIS Column*, May 15 2025, <https://yris.yira.org/column/the-weaponization-of-data-international-legal-responses-to-digital-espionage-and-state-sponsored-cyber-warfare/>.

remains relatively underexplored in existing literature. This paper seeks to address this gap by examining Pakistan's contributions to ongoing international debates on ICT governance. This paper aims to bridge this research gap by examining Pakistan's advocacy for a treaty-like international cybersecurity regime under the auspices of the UN. While Pakistan has engaged in other multilateral and regional forums, including the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)⁷ and International Telecommunication Union (ITU),⁸ its most detailed and consistent articulation of positions on international cyber governance has taken place within UN processes, which remain the primary focus of this study. This study analyzes Pakistan's advocacy under the theoretical framework that combines constructivism with a Global South perspective. This approach highlights how developing states shape their perception and advocacy on technology governance. The study is qualitative in nature and relies on primary and secondary data sources for analysis.

Theoretical Framework

The Global South constructivist lens offers a useful framework for understanding how states such as Pakistan articulate their positions on ICT governance in terms of norms, identity, and equity. Rooted in constructivist insights that international behavior is shaped by shared ideas and social interactions, this approach highlights how developing states seek to reshape dominant narratives in global governance. Scholars such as Amitav Acharya,⁹ Arlene Tickner, and David Blaney¹⁰ emphasize the need to incorporate non-Western experiences and perspectives, challenging the historical dominance of Western-centric international relations theory. In the context of cyberspace, this perspective is reflected in calls for more inclusive, rules-based, and development-oriented governance frameworks.

André Barrinha and Arindrajit Basu discuss a concurrent "rise of the Global South" in world politics as cyber diplomacy matures. They argue that countries outside the "Western core" now contest cyberspace governance previously dominated by the US-led liberal order. In this view,

⁸ Pakistan Ranks Among Top Countries in Global Cybersecurity," *Islamabad Post*, September 14, 2024, <https://islamabadpost.com.pk/pakistan-ranks-among-top-countries-in-global-cybersecurity/>.

⁹ Amitav Acharya, "Global International Relations (IR) and Regional Worlds: A New Agenda for International Studies." *International Studies Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (2014): 647–659. <https://doi.org/10.1111/isqu.12171>.

¹⁰ Tickner, Arlene B., and David L. Blaney, eds. *Thinking International Relations Differently: Worlding Beyond the West*. (London: Routledge, 2012), 255.

cyberspace is no longer an uncontested global common but a domain where emerging powers exert influence.¹¹ At the same time, the persistence of disagreements over a legally binding cybersecurity framework cannot be explained by normative perspectives alone. Competing interests among major powers, asymmetries in technological capabilities, and divergent preferences over governance models contribute to ongoing contestation in cyber diplomacy.¹² As cyberspace governance evolves, states outside the Western core increasingly challenge existing norms and institutional arrangements, yet these efforts often encounter resistance within UN-led processes. In this regard, Pakistan's advocacy reflects a normative alignment with broader Global South concerns that continues to shape the prospects for consensus on binding international regulation.

Multilateral Initiatives for Cyber Governance

International cyber law is a rapidly evolving field that seeks to regulate state and non-state behavior in cyberspace. One of the earliest treaties is the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime that was adopted by the Council of Europe in 2001. The Convention was the first legally binding international instrument on cybercrime, designed to harmonize national laws, enhance investigative techniques, and foster international cooperation. The Convention covers nine core offenses. These include: (i) Illegal Access (Hacking); (ii) Illegal Interception; (iii) Data Interference; (iv) System Interference; (v) Misuse of Devices; (vi) Computer-related Forgery; (vii) Computer-related Fraud; (viii) Offenses Related to Child Pornography; and (ix) Infringement of Copyright and Related Rights.¹³ The Convention does not cover the broader category of cyber-enabled crimes, which are traditional crimes facilitated or increased in scale by the use of ICTs but do not constitute the core computer offenses. This limitation has been widely noted as a gap.¹⁴ Pakistan has consistently opposed joining

¹¹ André Barrinha and Arindrajit Basu, "Cyber Diplomacy and the Rise of the 'Global South,'" *E-International Relations*, June 10, 2025, <https://www.e-ir.info/2025/06/10/cyber-diplomacy-and-the-rise-of-the-global-south/>.

¹² Jill Stoddard, interview with Jim Lewis, "Cybercrime, Global Policy, and the New UN Treaty," *The Global Observatory*, 12 March 2025, <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2025/03/cybercrime-global-policy-and-the-uns-new-treaty-interview-with-jim-lewis/>

¹³ Council of Europe, "Convention on Cybercrime", *European Treaty Series No. 185*, Budapest, 23 November 2001, accessed September 23, 2025, <https://rm.coe.int/1680081561>.

¹⁴ Digital Watch, "Comparative Analysis: The Budapest Convention vs. the UN Convention against Cybercrime," accessed September 23, 2025,

the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime, arguing that it is a highly intrusive instrument that would compromise national data sovereignty. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Convention grants external jurisdiction significant authority over data access and transfer, raising concerns about the protection of domestic information systems. Islamabad also highlights that many non-European states, including China, Russia, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore, share the view that the Budapest Convention is essentially a regional initiative of the European Union rather than a universally negotiated treaty.¹⁵ The Global South Constructivist lens shapes Pakistan's perspective that this Eurocentric and externally imposed arrangement undermines its legitimacy as a global framework, particularly when it comes to sensitive issues of jurisdiction and cross-border data exchange. Consequently, Pakistan has favored UN-led negotiations for an inclusive international convention on cybercrime that respects the sovereignty and legal traditions of all states.

While these concerns reflect broader Global South anxieties regarding unequal control over cross-border data flows and exclusion from norm-setting processes, they also point to an inherent tension between sovereignty and the operational requirements of international cybercrime cooperation.

An analysis by the Stimson Center (2025) highlights Pakistan's principled and measured approach to international cyber norms. The report notes that Pakistan has "refrained from acceding to the Budapest Convention... citing concerns over external jurisdiction and data sovereignty," thereby aligning with a broader group of states that seek to safeguard national prerogatives in cyberspace. The analysis underscores Pakistan's consistent view that any legal instruments on state conduct in the cyber domain must be inclusive, equitable, and respectful of sovereignty. This position reinforces Islamabad's preference for UN-led multilateral processes, which provide a universal and consensus-driven platform, over regional or externally driven frameworks that may not reflect the interests of all states equally.¹⁶

Another notable instrument is the Tallinn Manual (2013; expanded in 2017), a non-binding academic study led by the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defense Centre of Excellence that interprets how existing

<https://dig.watch/updates/comparative-analysis-the-budapest-convention-vs-the-un-convention-against-cybercrime>.

¹⁵ "Why Pakistan Is Not Joining Global Forum on Cybercrime," *Dawn*, 1 February 2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1531734>.

¹⁶ Gulraiz Iqbal, "How Does International Law Byte into Pakistan's Cyber Governance?" *Stimson Center*, 2025, <https://www.stimson.org/2025/how-does-international-law-byte-into-pakistans-cyber-governance>

international law, particularly *jus ad bellum* and international humanitarian law (IHL), applies to cyber operations.¹⁷ Pakistan recognizes the value of initiatives such as the Tallinn Manual and the Cyber Law Toolkit, describing them as academic, non-binding studies that examine the applicability of international law and IHL to cyberspace. Islamabad acknowledges that the Tallinn Manual provides important guidance, particularly in clarifying how traditional legal principles may extend to the digital domain. However, Pakistan emphasizes that despite its utility, the Manual does not resolve several key legal uncertainties. In its interventions, Pakistan has highlighted that fundamental questions remain unsettled, such as the definition of the threshold for an “armed conflict” in cyberspace, the status of actors engaged in cyber operations, and the challenge of attribution, given the anonymity and technical complexity inherent in cyber activities.¹⁸ From Pakistan’s perspective, these unresolved issues demonstrate the limitations of relying solely on non-binding academic studies and reinforce the need for a universally negotiated, legally binding framework under UN auspices.

Issue of ICTs at the UN

The UN first formally acknowledged the security implications of information and communications technologies (ICTs) in 1998, when the Russian Federation introduced a resolution (A/RES/53/70) in the General Assembly titled *Developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security*. The resolution reflected growing concern that state and non-state actors could exploit cyberspace to compromise national and international security. The resolution was adopted without a vote, marking the beginning of the UN’s involvement in global cyber governance.¹⁹ Thereafter, the General Assembly’s First Committee which deals with disarmament treated ICTs security as an emerging domain of international peace and security.

¹⁷ “Tallinn Manual”, *The Nato Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence Research*, accessed on 18 October 2025, <https://ccdcoe.org/research/tallinn-manual/>

¹⁸ United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, Open-Ended Working Group on security of and in the use of information and communications technologies 2021–2025, Open-Ended Working Group documents (UNODA), [https://docs-library.unoda.org/Open-Ended_Working_Group_on_Information_and_Communication_Technologies_-_\[\(2021\)/UNODA.pdf](https://docs-library.unoda.org/Open-Ended_Working_Group_on_Information_and_Communication_Technologies_-_[(2021)/UNODA.pdf)

¹⁹ United Nations General Assembly, *Resolution 53/70*, A/RES/53/70, 4 January 1999, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/53/70>

The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)

The WSIS was endorsed by UN General Assembly Resolution 56/183 on 21 December 2001. The resolution recognized “the urgent need to harness the potential of knowledge and technology for promoting the goals of the UN Millennium Declaration” and called for a two-phase summit in Geneva (2003) and Tunis (2005) to forge a common vision and understanding of the emerging global information society. The Resolution tasked the ITU with leading preparations, in coordination with other UN bodies, through an open-ended intergovernmental preparatory committee, and emphasized broad stakeholder participation, including governments, civil society, the private sector, and UN agencies.²⁰

The WSIS program was built around the Geneva Plan of Action and the Tunis Agenda, which turned its vision into concrete Action Lines. They covered areas such as infrastructure, access to information, capacity building, e-governance, and security. The Action Lines set key priorities including expanding broadband networks, ensuring universal access for marginalized communities, improving digital literacy, developing inclusive policies for public information, and addressing security concerns such as resilience, privacy, and trust.²¹ It also established the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) as a permanent platform for dialogue. Crucially, WSIS institutionalized the principle of multistakeholder governance of ICTs.²² It laid foundational norms ‘to build a people-centered, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society.’ It was based on sovereign equality and stakeholder engagement, serving as a precursor to later UN processes on ICT security and governance.²³

For countries in the Global South, WSIS emphasized that ICTs development is integral to advancing sustainable development while addressing broader challenges related to security, capacity building, and equitable access to technology. The G77 underscored that ICTs must be

²⁰ United Nations General Assembly, *Resolution 56/183 (World Summit on the Information Society)*, A/RES/56/183, 21 December 2001, https://www.itu.int/net/wsis/docs/background/resolutions/56_183_unga_2002.pdf

²¹ International Telecommunication Union, “*The Geneva Plan of Action*, adopted at the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)”, (Geneva 2003), <https://www.itu.int/net/wsis/docs/geneva/official/poa.html>

²² Global Partners Digital, “Everything You Need to Know About the WSIS+20 Review,” *GP-Digital* blog, 18 February 2025, <https://www.gp-digital.org/everything-you-need-to-know-about-the-wsis20-review/>

²³ “United Nations Conference on Trade and Development”, **UNCTAD/TCS/DTL/INF/2025/D2**, https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/tcsdtlinf2025d2_en.pdf.

shaped by principles favoring an inclusive, people-centered, and development-oriented information society. The outcome of WSIS, particularly the Tunis Agenda and Geneva Declaration of Principles, provided foundational guidance for digital cooperation rooted in sovereign equality and multilateralism.²⁴ It paved the way for subsequent UN processes such as the establishment of the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) and the Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) on ICTs.

Pakistan viewed the WSIS as a crucial platform recognizing the transformative impact of ICTs on all aspects of human life and development. In the statement delivered by Prime Minister Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali at the WSIS held in Geneva in 2003, Pakistan emphasized the need to bridge the vast digital divide that separated people within and across countries. The statement underscored the goal of creating an inclusive information society that provides equal opportunities for all, especially in developing countries, and called for international cooperation to develop ICT infrastructure, ensure information system security, and protect universal moral and spiritual values.²⁵ From a Global South constructivist perspective, WSIS represented an important moment where developing states sought to frame ICT governance not merely as a technical issue, but as a question of equity, sovereign equality, and inclusive participation. Pakistan's support for these principles reflects its broader normative preference for multilateral and development-oriented cyber governance.

While these UN-led processes established important normative foundations and institutional platforms for ICT governance, they have not resulted in a legally binding international framework. This outcome reflects persistent divergences among states over the nature of cyberspace governance. Major powers differ on issues such as sovereignty, the applicability of international law, and the balance between state control and the open, multistakeholder model promoted through processes such as WSIS. These disagreements have led to a preference for voluntary

²⁴ Group of 77 and China, "Statement on Behalf of the Group of 77 and China by the South African Minister of Telecommunications and Postal Services, H.E. Minister Siyabonga Cwele, at the UN General Assembly High-Level Meeting on the Overall Review of the Implementation of the Outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society (New York, 15 December 2015)," G-77 (website), accessed September 23, 2025, <https://www.g77.org/statement/getstatement.php?id=151215c>.

²⁵ International Telecommunication Union, "Statement of the Pakistan Delegation to the World Summit on the Information Society (Geneva Phase, December 10–12, 2003)," accessed September 23, 2025, <https://www.itu.int/net/wsis/geneva/coverage/statements/pakistan/pk.pdf>.

norms and confidence-building measures rather than binding commitments. Additionally, asymmetries in technological capabilities and institutional capacity have further complicated consensus, as developing states seek greater equity and safeguards against external control, while technologically advanced states prioritize flexibility and operational freedom.

In this context, Pakistan's position can be understood as a response to both structural and normative concerns within the existing framework. The absence of a binding instrument reinforces Pakistan's emphasis on a treaty-based approach that ensures sovereign equality, legal clarity, and capacity-building for developing states. Thus, Pakistan's advocacy is not merely rhetorical but emerges from the limitations of current multilateral processes, which, despite their inclusivity, have struggled to reconcile competing interests and produce enforceable outcomes.

Group of Governmental Experts (GGE)

In 2004, the UN General Assembly established the first GGE to explore threats in cyberspace and consider cooperative measures.²⁶ Although the 2004-2005 GGE failed to produce a consensus report, subsequent GGEs made significant progress. The 2009-2010 GGE (A/65/201) produced the first consensus report acknowledging that international law and the UN Charter apply to cyberspace.²⁷ This was a turning point, setting the legal and normative foundation for future work.

The 2012-2013 GGE further solidified this position in its report (A/68/98), which explicitly affirmed that international law applies to the behavior of states in cyberspace.²⁸ The 2014-2015 GGE (A/70/174) advanced the discussion by articulating eleven voluntary norms of responsible state behavior in cyberspace. These include: (i) Cooperation for international stability and security; (ii) Contextual assessment of ICT incidents; (iii) Prohibition of wrongful acts from national territory; (iv)

²⁶ United Nations General Assembly, "Group of Governmental Experts on Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security," A/59/116, 2 July 2004, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/59/116>.

²⁷ United Nations General Assembly, "Report of the Group of Governmental Experts on Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security" A/65/201, 30 July 2010, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/65/201>.

²⁸ United Nations General Assembly, "Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security," UN Doc A/68/98 (24 June 2013), <https://docs.un.org/en/A/68/98>.

International cooperation against criminal and terrorist use of ICTs; (v) Respect for human rights and privacy in cyberspace; (vi) Prohibition of attacks on critical infrastructure; (vii) Protection of national critical infrastructure; (viii) Assistance to states facing malicious ICT acts; (ix) Integrity and security of ICT supply chains; (x) Responsible disclosure of ICT vulnerabilities; and (xi) Protection and non-misuse of emergency response teams.²⁹ These norms formed a “voluntary framework” and were endorsed by UN General Assembly Resolution 70/237.³⁰

Progress on the issue of ICTs stalled in the 2016-2017 GGE due to disagreement over the interpretation of international law and proposals by Russia and China for a legally binding code of conduct.³¹ Western states, particularly the US and its allies, opposed the idea of a binding treaty, preferring voluntary norms and Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) in the field of regulating ICTs.³² Six GGEs have been convened so far.

The GGE’s emphasis on voluntary norms reflects the preference of major powers for strategic flexibility, whereas developing states such as Pakistan view the absence of binding obligations as reinforcing structural inequalities in cyberspace governance. This divergence highlights how Global South states contest norm-making processes dominated by technologically advanced powers.

Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) on ICTs

In response to growing demands for inclusive dialogue, the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution 73/27 in 2018, which established the first **OEWG** on ICTs. Unlike the GGE, which was composed of 25 experts, the OEWG was open to all member states, allowing for broader participation, especially from developing countries.³³

²⁹ United Nations, “*Report of the Group of Governmental Experts on Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security*” UN Doc. A/70/174 (22 July 2015), <https://docs.un.org/en/A/70/174>.

³⁰ United Nations General Assembly, “Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security” UN Doc. A/RES/70/237, 30 December 2015, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/res/70/237>.

³¹ Elaine Korzak, “Cyber Norm Emergence at the United Nations-An Analysis of the UN’s Activities Regarding Cyber-security,” *Stanford University Center for International Security and Cooperation discussion paper (2016)*, <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/cyber-norm-emergence-united-nations-analysis-uns-activities-regarding-cyber-security>.

³² Elaine Korzak, *Cyber Norm Emergence at the United Nations*, 2016

³³ United Nations General Assembly, “*Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security*,” UN Doc.

The **first OEWG (2019-2021)** conducted inclusive consultations and released a consensus report in March 2021 (A/75/816). The report reaffirmed the applicability of international law, endorsed previously agreed norms, and emphasized CBMs and capacity-building. Notably, it recommended the creation of Points of Contact (PoC) directories and increased technical assistance to developing countries.³⁴ Simultaneously, the **sixth GGE (2019-2021)** released its consensus report (A/76/135), echoing the OEWG findings and stressing the importance of continued dialogue.³⁵ The convergence of GGE and OEWG outcomes reflected a growing consensus on the normative framework for state behavior in cyberspace, despite continuing disagreements over legal interpretations and enforcement mechanisms.

The UN General Assembly, through Resolution 75/240, created a **second OEWG (2021-2025)** to build on previous progress.³⁶ Over multiple sessions, member states engaged in discussions on threats, legal applicability, CBMs, and capacity development. The second OEWG also integrated perspectives from regional organizations, civil society, and the private sector. In its Final Report adopted in July 2025, the second OEWG officially reaffirmed the eleven voluntary, non-binding norms of responsible state behavior in cyberspace, originally agreed in the 2015 GGE report and endorsed unanimously under UNGA Resolution 70/237. It also recommended the establishment of a **“Permanent UN Cyber Programme,”** also referred to as the “Global Mechanism,” to institutionalize discussions beyond 2025.³⁷ The OEWG’s inclusive

A/RES/73/27, 5 December 2018, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N18/431/74/PDF/N1843174.pdf>.

³⁴ United Nations General Assembly, “*Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security*” UN Doc. A/75/816, 18 March 2021, <https://disarmament.unoda.org/en/our-work/emerging-challenges/developments-field-information-and-telecommunications-context>.

³⁵ United Nations General Assembly, “*Report of the Group of Governmental Experts on Advancing Responsible State Behaviour in Cyberspace in the Context of International Security*” UN Doc. A/76/135, 14 July 2021, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/76/135>.

³⁶ United Nations General Assembly, “*Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security*” UN Doc. A/RES/75/240, 31 December 2020, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/75/240>.

³⁷ United Nations General Assembly, “*Final Report of the Open-Ended Working Group on Security of and in the Use of Information and Communications Technologies 2021–2025*,” UN Doc. A/AC.292/2025/CRP.1, 11 July 2025, <https://undocs.org/A/AC.292/2025/CRP.1>.

structure aligned more closely with Global South demands for broader participation in international cyber governance.

All the GGEs and OEWGs have focused on a consistent set of themes that have recurred in each resolution and report.³⁸ They include:

- i. **Threats:** States have catalogued cyber espionage, cybercrime, attacks on infrastructure and disinformation campaigns as risks to international peace.
- ii. **Application of international law:** From the outset, experts have discussed how the UN Charter, law of state responsibility, and law of armed conflict govern cyber operations.
- iii. **Norms of responsible state behavior:** All of the GGEs and OEWGs have proposed non-binding norms, such as not to target critical infrastructure, not to use ICTs to impede elections, and to provide assistance to states.
- iv. **CBMs:** Member States have suggested mechanisms like contact points, incident notification, and expert exchanges to increase transparency.
- v. **Capacity-building and development:** All processes stress technical assistance and training for less-developed states, recognizing that equitable cybersecurity capacity is essential for international stability.

In parallel, the UN General Assembly has adopted annual resolutions tracking the discussions in GGEs and OEWGs. For example, the Resolutions A/RES/76/19 (2021)³⁹ and A/RES/77/36–37 (2022)⁴⁰ reflected OEWG consensus. In 2022, the General Assembly for the first time adopted a separate Programme of Action (PoA) on responsible state behavior in ICTs (A/RES/77/37). The PoA called for regular, inclusive dialogues and requested the Secretary-General's report⁴¹ on

³⁸ United Nations General Assembly, "Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security," *UN Doc. A/75/816*, 18 March 2021, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/75/816>

³⁹ United Nations General Assembly, "Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security," *UN Doc. A/RES/76/19*, 8 December 2021, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/76/19>

⁴⁰ United Nations General Assembly, "Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security," *UN Doc. A/RES/77/36*, 12 December 2022, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/77/36>

⁴¹ United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, "Towards a Regular Institutional Dialogue on International ICT Security: Review of Current Proposals and Considerations for Effective Dialogue" (Geneva: UNIDIR, 29 November 2024), https://unidir.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/UNIDIR_Towards_Regular_Institutional_Dialogue_web.pdf

implementation, which was submitted as A/78/76 in 2023.⁴² In December 2023, the GA passed the resolution A/RES/78/237 on “Developments in ICT”, which reaffirmed earlier commitments and invited further work on the issue.⁴³ These resolutions signal an agreement to entrench the GGE/OEWG consensus into more enduring UN processes.

The UN has advanced its engagement with ICTs through the General Assembly’s Third Committee and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 74/247 (2019), an Ad Hoc Committee was established to elaborate a comprehensive international convention on countering the use of ICTs for criminal purposes. This process culminated in the General Assembly’s adoption of the UN Convention on Countering the Use of Information and Communications Technologies for Criminal Purposes on 24 December 2024, under resolution 79/243. The Convention opened for signature in Hanoi, Viet Nam on 25 - 26 October 2025 and will remain open at the UN Headquarters in New York until 31 December 2026. At the opening ceremony, 65 nations signed the treaty. The instrument seeks to enhance international cooperation, criminalize specific cyber and ICT-related offences, and facilitate cross-border access to electronic evidence while upholding human rights and fundamental freedoms.⁴⁴

The UN Secretary-General has advanced broader initiatives on ICT governance, notably the High-Level Panel on Digital Cooperation (2018-2019), which in its report *The Age of Digital Interdependence* emphasized that digital technologies underpin all aspects of modern life and therefore require strengthened international cooperation grounded in inclusivity, transparency, and human rights.⁴⁵ Building on these recommendations, the Secretary-General’s *Roadmap for Digital Cooperation* (2020) outlined action areas such as digital connectivity, human rights online, global digital commons, and capacity-building, thereby linking cybersecurity to

⁴² United Nations General Assembly, “Programme of Action to Advance Responsible State Behaviour in the Use of Information and Communications Technologies in the Context of International Security” *UN Doc. A/RES/77/37* (12 December 2022), <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/77/37>

⁴³ United Nations, General Assembly, “Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security” *A/RES/78/237* (adopted 2023), <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/78/237>

⁴⁴ “Sixty-Five Nations Sign First UN Treaty to Fight Cybercrime, in Milestone for Digital Cooperation,” *UN News*, October 25, 2025, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/10/1166182>.

⁴⁵ United Nations Secretary-General’s High-Level Panel on Digital Cooperation, “*The Age of Digital Interdependence: Report of the High-Level Panel on Digital Cooperation*”, June 2019, <https://www.un.org/en/pdfs/DigitalCooperation-report-for%20web.pdf>.

sustainable development and digital trust.⁴⁶ These efforts directly inform the proposed Global Digital Compact, which was adopted as an annex to the “Pact for the Future” at the United Nations Summit of the Future on 22 September 2024, during the 79th session of the General Assembly in New York. The Compact commits member states to upholding international law and human rights online, promoting connectivity and data governance, countering fragmentation, enhancing AI governance through initiatives such as an Independent International Scientific Panel on AI and global dialogue, and accelerating progress towards the SDGs by 2030.⁴⁷

The UN Security Council addresses ICTs issues related to peace and security in discussions on terrorism and the protection of critical infrastructure, but it has not yet adopted a standalone cyber resolution.⁴⁸ This also reflects a significant gap in advancing concrete measures for the governance of ICTs.

Overall, the UN ICTs security regime has converged on several key points. All member states agree that cybersecurity intersects with peace and security, and that UN Charter principles apply to the cyber domain. All major powers have endorsed a set of voluntary norms for peacetime conduct, and the latest GGE and OEWG reports capture a shared “normative framework” for responsible state behavior. Agreements on transparency measures such as PoC, threat information exchange and assisting developing countries in improving cyber resilience are also relatively uncontroversial.

Despite these institutional advancements, major disagreements remain. Russia and China continue to advocate for a legally binding treaty and a greater role for state sovereignty in cyberspace.⁴⁹ Western states emphasize the voluntary nature of norms, multi-stakeholder involvement, and the primacy of human rights online. Contentious issues also include defining thresholds for cyberattacks, verifying compliance, and the role of

⁴⁶ United Nations Secretary-General, “Roadmap for Digital Cooperation,” *UN General Assembly, A/74/821*, 29 May 2020, <https://www.un.org/en/content/digital-cooperation-roadmap/>.

⁴⁷ “Global Digital Compact-Office for Digital and Emerging Technologies,” *United Nations*, <https://www.un.org/en/summit-of-the-future/global-digital-compact>.

⁴⁸ “Information and Communications Technologies,” *United Nations Security Council, Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC)*, <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/ctc/content/information-and-communications-technologies>.

⁴⁹ Russian Federation, “Proposal for an International Code of Conduct for Information Security,” letter dated 9 January 2015, *submitted to the UN Secretary-General (A/69/723)*, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/69/723>

non-state actors.⁵⁰ Debates also persist over how much responsibility wealthy states should bear for assisting poorer states with cybersecurity and how to measure compliance with the norms.

Despite these institutional developments, the UN has not produced a comprehensive, legally binding ICT framework. There remains persistent norm contestation among states over cyberspace governance. While some favor a sovereignty-based, treaty-driven approach, others prioritize voluntary norms and multistakeholder models. These competing preferences, along with asymmetries in capabilities and interests, have limited consensus to non-binding measures. As a result, UN processes exhibit a degree of institutional paralysis, where agreement exists on principles but not on enforceable rules. This deadlock explains both the absence of a binding treaty and the continued push by states such as Pakistan for a more formalized legal framework.

Pakistan's Position

Pakistan considers cyberspace as the “common heritage of mankind” and an essential domain for socio-economic development, governance, and the delivery of critical public services. At the same time, Islamabad expresses growing alarm over the militarization of ICTs, the weaponization of the cyber domain, and the malicious exploitation of digital technologies by both state and non-state actors. It warns that such trends threaten international peace and security, heighten mistrust among states, and risk turning cyberspace into a theatre of conflict.⁵¹ Pakistan links cyber threats to national and regional security challenges, especially terrorism. It argues that terrorist groups and extremists exploit the Internet to plan attacks, recruit militants, and spread propaganda.

Pakistan participated in the 2014-2015 GGE⁵², the 2019-2021 OEWG, and remained an active member of the 2021-2025 UN OEWG On the Security of and in the Use of ICTs.” It engaged in deliberations across all six agenda items of the OEWG: (i) examining existing and potential

⁵⁰ James A. Lewis, “Multilateral Agreements and Cybersecurity Norms,” *Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)*, 2022, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/multilateral-agreements-and-cybersecurity-norms>

⁵¹ United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), *Open-Ended Working Group on Information and Communication Technologies (2021)*, [https://docs-library.unoda.org/Open-Ended_Working_Group_on_Information_and_Communication_Technologies_-__\(2021\)/UNODA.pdf](https://docs-library.unoda.org/Open-Ended_Working_Group_on_Information_and_Communication_Technologies_-__(2021)/UNODA.pdf)

⁵² United Nations, “*Report of the Group of Governmental Experts on Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security*,” UN Doc. A/70/174, 22 July 2015, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/70/174>

threats in the information security domain; (ii) clarifying the application of international law in cyberspace; (iii) developing norms, rules, and principles of responsible state behavior; (iv) advancing CBMs; (v) promoting capacity-building; and (vi) maintaining regular institutional dialogue. Pakistan presented a Working Paper⁵³ and made interventions in Substantive Sessions of the OEWG,⁵⁴ and provided written inputs on General Assembly initiatives, including its views on Resolution 78/237.⁵⁵ A formal Position Paper on the Application of International Law in Cyberspace was also submitted by Islamabad in March 2023.⁵⁶

Over time, Pakistan's position on security of ICTs has remained consistent. As a developing country, Pakistan aligns with many states of the Global South in advocating for a legally binding UN framework on "conduct of states" in cyberspace.⁵⁷ From a constructivist perspective,

⁵³ Pakistan Mission to the United Nations, *"Working Paper by Pakistan to the Open-Ended Working Group on Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security"* (2023), <https://ceipfiles.s3.amazonaws.com/pdf/CyberNorms/UNGGE/Working+Paper+by+Pakistan+to+the+Open-Ended+Working+Group+on+Developments+in+the+Field+of+Information+and+Telecommunications+in+the+Context+of+International+Security+.pdf>

⁵⁴ Pakistan Mission to the United Nations, *"Statement Delivered by Pakistan at the Fourth Substantive Session of the Open-Ended Working Group on Information and Communication Technologies (2021–2025)"*, Fourth substantive session, UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), https://docs-library.unoda.org/Open-Ended_Working_Group_on_Information_and_Communication_Technologies_-_2021%29/Satements_Delivered_by_Pakistan-_4th_substantive_session.pdf

⁵⁵ Pakistan Mission to the United Nations (via UNODA), *"Pakistan's Views on the Resolution 78/237: 'Developments in the Field of Information and Communication Technologies in the Context of International Security' First Committee, 79th UN General Assembly session, 2024"*, https://docs-library.unoda.org/General_Assembly_First_Committee_-_Seventy-Ninth_session_2024/78-237-Pakistan-EN.pdf

⁵⁶ United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), *"Open-Ended Working Group on Information and Communication Technologies (2021)" established by General Assembly resolution 75/240, 31 December 2020*, https://docs-library.unoda.org/Open-Ended_Working_Group_on_Information_and_Communication_Technologies_-_2021%29/UNODA.pdf

⁵⁷ *"Cybercrime, Global Policy, and the New UN Treaty: Interview with Jim Lewis," The Global Observatory, March 12, 2025*, <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2025/03/cybercrime-global-policy-and-the-uns-new-treaty-interview-with-jim-lewis/>

Pakistan's diplomacy on the issue reflects an identity as a steward of the "common heritage of mankind," framing cyberspace as a shared global common that demands rules-based governance. Central to Pakistan's advocacy is the categorical prohibition of offensive cyber capabilities, particularly those capable of degrading, disrupting, or destroying critical civilian infrastructure. Pakistan argues that such capabilities not only present unacceptable risks of escalation and converting cyberspace into an arena of conflict but also undermine the foundational principles of the UN Charter. It has therefore called for an outright ban on the development of offensive cyber weapons.⁵⁸

While supporting CBMs such as a UN PoC directory as useful instruments for trust-building, Pakistan emphasizes that these should complement, rather than replace, binding legal obligations. Consequently, it has participated constructively in CBM discussions while reserving its position on certain institutional proposals, pending assurances that any new mechanism will safeguard inclusivity, consensus-based decision-making, and a credible pathway toward formal, legally binding commitments.⁵⁹

Pakistan's discourse on ICT security centers on three main pillars: (i) protecting state sovereignty; (ii) establishing binding international arrangements; and (iii) capacity-building in developing countries. Islamabad stresses that states must retain jurisdictional authority over ICT infrastructure in their territory and that cyber operations that interfere in domestic affairs, including state-sponsored disinformation, constitute violations of the UN Charter.⁶⁰ For Islamabad, the integrity of its digital infrastructure is as inviolable as its territorial borders. The National Cyber Security Policy 2021 of Pakistan clearly states that it "will regard a cyber-attack on Pakistan's Critical Infrastructure (CI) and Critical Information Infrastructure (CII) as an act of aggression against national sovereignty and will defend itself with appropriate response measures." This reflects a stance equating cyber-attacks to violation of its sovereignty, akin to

⁵⁸ Pakistan Mission to the UN, "Statement Delivered by Pakistan at the Fifth Substantive Session of the Open-Ended Working Group on Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs 2021–2025)," March 2023, https://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/other/icts/oewg-II/documents/Pakistan_2023.pdf

⁵⁹ Pakistan Mission to the UN, "Statement at the Fifth OEWG Session on ICTs," March 2023.

⁶⁰ Pakistan Mission to the UN, "Views on Res. 78/237," **First Committee (79th UNGA session, 2024)**, https://docs-library.unoda.org/General_Assembly_First_Committee_Seventy-Ninth_session_%282024%29/78-237-Pakistan-EN.pdf

physical attacks on its territorial borders.⁶¹ This underscores Pakistan's viewpoint that international law must explicitly recognize states' sovereign rights over ICTs within their territory.

Pakistan anchors its position on the primacy of international law (UN Charter) and International IHL in cyberspace, insisting that core principles such as non-use of force, sovereign equality, non-intervention, and peaceful settlement are also applicable online. Pakistan recognizes that the distinctive attributes of cyberspace and the transnational nature of cyber technologies complicate the application of international law. It therefore advocates structured deliberations among UN member states to clarify how principles such as sovereignty, self-defense, non-use of force, peaceful dispute settlement, and attribution should be operationalized in the cyber domain.⁶²

As militaries increasingly rely on the same Internet backbone and transmission lines that support civilian CI, attempts to target an adversary's military networks in armed conflicts risk causing severe civilian harm, including both human casualties and financial losses. This interconnectedness of systems, combined with the technical complexity of cyber operations, makes it especially difficult to apply the three fundamental principles of IHL, including distinction, proportionality, and precaution, in the cyber domain. In cyber conflicts, civilian populations and CI must remain protected, and the use of cyber weapons that can cause indiscriminate damage is prohibited under IHL. Pakistan therefore emphasizes that the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols (APs) continue to apply in cyberspace, especially the rule of distinction requiring parties to differentiate between civilians and combatants, and between civilian and military targets. Pakistan recognizes that the application of IHL is not possible without the resolution of issues of attribution. In this regard, it proposes attribution mechanisms with the support and coordination of member states. Islamabad also presses for agreed legal definitions of cyber-attack, cyber-terrorism, CI and CII for predictable legal applications and state responsibility.⁶³

⁶¹ Ministry of Information Technology & Telecommunication (Pakistan), *National Cyber Security Policy 2021*, approved by the Federal Cabinet in July 2021, <https://moitt.gov.pk/SiteImage/Misc/files/National%20Cyber%20Security%20Policy%202021%20Final.pdf>

⁶² United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), "*Open-Ended Working Group on Information and Communication Technologies (2021)*" established by General Assembly resolution 75/240, 31 December 2020, https://docs-library.unoda.org/Open-Ended_Working_Group_on_Information_and_Communication_Technologies_-_2021/UNODA.pdf

⁶³ UNODA, *Open-Ended Working Group on ICTs (2021)*.

Pakistan is in favor of development of global regulatory frameworks on data security and the cross-border exchange of data. In particular, it advocates the establishment of an international mechanism to ensure the protection of data integral to CI and calls for the criminalization of acts involving the theft, deletion, destruction, or manipulation of such data. Pakistan underscores that capacity building for all states on an equal footing is indispensable for a secure and stable cyberspace and for the effective implementation of international law in the cyber domain. From a Global South perspective, Islamabad stresses that existing digital divide and structural inequities must be addressed through fair, equitable, and non-discriminatory access to cyber technologies and products to ensure that developing states are not marginalized in global cyber governance.⁶⁴

Islamabad argues that the current legal architecture contains gaps such as thresholds for the use of force, attribution rules, and IHL application. Therefore, it favors a legally binding instrument, such as a treaty or convention, rather than merely voluntary norms. Pakistan's call for a legally binding treaty reflects more than a security concern; it represents a normative challenge to the existing cyber order shaped largely by powerful states. Through a Global South constructivist lens, this advocacy seeks to redefine cyberspace governance around sovereignty, legal equality, and distributive justice rather than voluntary compliance alone.

Pakistan's Advocacy for a Legally Binding International Cybersecurity Framework

While Western states have generally prioritized non-binding norms, CBMs, and the reaffirmation that existing international law including the UN Charter governs state activity in cyberspace, Pakistan, alongside many Global South states, contends that voluntary guidelines alone are inadequate to deter the increasingly militarized and weaponized use of ICTs. Drawing on its OEWG submissions, Pakistan advances several arguments in support. First is enforceability. Pakistan states that legally binding obligations would create clear legal duties, enable the invocation of state responsibility, and furnish predictable dispute-settlement and remedial pathways when violations occur. On the other hand, non-binding norms, by their nature, lack a compulsory enforcement mechanism and risk being disregarded in times of crisis.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ UNODA, Open-Ended Working Group on ICTs (2021).

⁶⁵ Pakistan Mission to the United Nations, *Working Paper by Pakistan to the Open-Ended Working Group on Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security* (March 2023),

The second argument is comprehensiveness. According to Pakistan, a convention could close both practical and doctrinal gaps in the existing body of international law by specifying how thresholds such as “use of force” and “armed attack” apply in cyber operations. It could also clarify attribution standards and evidentiary procedures, while detailing how IHL principles of distinction, proportionality, and precaution should be operationalized in hostilities involving cyberspace.⁶⁶

The third issue is equity and capacity. A multilateral treaty can and should embed obligations for technical assistance, technology access, and sustained capacity-building financing so that developing states are not left unable to comply with or benefit from new rules, thereby narrowing the digital divide that otherwise would leave less-resourced countries exposed and marginalized. In Pakistan’s view, therefore, voluntary norms and CBMs remain useful confidence-building tools in peacetime but are insufficient substitutes for legally binding instruments capable of delivering clarity, accountability, and distributive justice in a geopolitically fraught cyber environment.⁶⁷

Pakistan’s official texts and oral statements at the UN identify concrete components it believes a legally binding framework should contain, including the recognition of cyber sovereignty and jurisdictional rights, whereby states have enforceable authority over ICTs and data located within their territory, and cyber intrusions impairing essential services are treated as violations of sovereignty.

While Pakistan’s advocacy presents a coherent normative case for a binding framework, important analytical questions remain. Why have such proposals failed to gain universal acceptance, and under what

<https://ceipfiles.s3.amazonaws.com/pdf/CyberNorms/UNGGE/Working+Paper+by+Pakistan+to+the+Open-Ended+Working+Group+on+Developments+in+the+Field+of+Information+and+Telecommunications+in+the+Context+of+International+Security+.pdf>

⁶⁶ Usman Jadoon, “Remarks by APR Ambassador Usman Jadoon: Formulation of Position on the Application of International Law in Cyberspace – Pakistan’s Experience” (July 11, 2024), *United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research*, July 11, 2024, https://pakun.org/uploads/07112024_01_8801ac2dd2.pdf

⁶⁷ Pakistan Mission to the United Nations, “*Working Paper by Pakistan to the Open-Ended Working Group on Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security*” (March 2023), <https://ceipfiles.s3.amazonaws.com/pdf/CyberNorms/UNGGE/Working+Paper+by+Pakistan+to+the+Open-Ended+Working+Group+on+Developments+in+the+Field+of+Information+and+Telecommunications+in+the+Context+of+International+Security+.pdf>

conditions could they become viable? The persistence of divergent state preferences—particularly between sovereignty-driven and multistakeholder approaches—suggests that resistance is rooted not only in legal disagreement but also in strategic and technological asymmetries. At the same time, it remains unclear how a binding regime would address challenges of enforcement, attribution, and compliance in a contested cyber environment. These questions highlight the need to assess both the strengths and limitations of Pakistan's position within the broader dynamics of global cyber governance.

Pakistan's Framework Proposal

Overall, Pakistan seeks a comprehensive multilateral agreement addressing cybercrime, cyberterrorism, and cyber warfare under the umbrella of international law. Pakistan's model for a "legally binding cybersecurity framework" can be summarized as follows:

1. **National Sovereignty and Jurisdiction:** Pakistan insists that any framework recognize states' sovereign rights over ICTs infrastructure within their borders. In practice, this means each country could regulate content and data flows on its networks without external interference. Pakistan's position is that cyberattacks on a state's networks violate sovereignty and thus breach international law. The framework should affirm that principle and hold attacking states accountable.
2. **Combating Cyberterrorism:** Islamabad argues that the framework must criminalize and facilitate the prosecution of cyber terrorism, extremism, and other malicious uses of ICTs. This includes mandating cooperation on law enforcement (e.g. evidence-sharing, extradition of hackers) and obliging states to prevent their territory from being used by terrorists online. A binding convention, Pakistan believes, should require all states to enact laws against such abuse and to assist each other under clear legal rules.
3. **International Law and Accountability:** Pakistan supports codifying these obligations into international law. Rather than relying on voluntary confidence-building, Pakistan advocates a treaty or UN convention. Under such a pact, there would be defined rules for example, outlawing attacks on critical infrastructure, and possibly a mechanism to review compliance. This would give countries legal standing to demand action or sanctions if another state violates its cyber commitments. Pakistan's UN statements have similarly stressed the need for binding language, not just soft norms.

4. **Development Support:** Pakistan emphasizes that all countries, big or small, should have equal rights in governing cyberspace. It calls for capacity-building assistance so that developing states can meet the treaty's requirements. In practice, this may involve technology transfer, training, and financial assistance to enforce cybersecurity laws. Pakistan frames this as a fairness issue. Many developing countries fear being held to standards they lack the resources to implement. Thus, Islamabad insists that the international framework include provisions for mutual assistance and technology sharing.

Malicious Use of ICTs: Indian Misinformation and Propaganda Warfare Against Pakistan

Misinformation and propaganda remain potent tools of hybrid warfare. Throughout the years, Pakistan has been a victim of a malicious Indian disinformation campaign. In its 2019-20 report, a Brussels-based non-governmental organization (NGO), the EU DisinfoLab, uncovered a malicious Indian propaganda campaign against Pakistan. According to it, over ten NGOs, approximately 750 fabricated media outlets, and around 550 counterfeit websites, including some registered under the names of deceased individuals, were employed to disseminate disinformation against Pakistan. By weaponizing both technology and narrative, such campaign actions undermine international legal norms and destabilize South Asia's security environment. As a continuing victim of Indian cyber warfare, Pakistan has raised the issue on various multilateral forums, including the UN Security Council high-level debate on evolving threats in cyberspace.⁶⁸ Pakistan calls for addressing such non-kinetic attacks including state-sponsored disinformation and information operations and recognizes them as a violation of the principle of non-intervention and the UN Charter.

Conclusion

Pakistan's advocacy for a legally binding international cybersecurity framework reveals a deeper structural divide in global cyber governance between technologically advanced states that favor flexible voluntary norms and developing countries that seek enforceable legal protections rooted in sovereignty, equity, and multilateralism.

⁶⁸ "Pakistan pushes for global protocol on cyberwarfare amid Indian disinformation allegations," *The Express Tribune (APP)*, June 21, 2024, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2472770/pakistan-pushes-for-global-protocol-on-cyberwarfare-amid-indian-disinformation-allegations>

Despite the absence of a global treaty, Pakistan continues to encourage dialogue at the UN, urging sustained momentum toward a formal accord. Pakistan's position reflects broader Global South concerns regarding unequal participation in cyber norm-making, asymmetries in technological power, and the risks of governance models shaped primarily by major powers. Through its interventions at the UN, Pakistan consistently argues that cyberspace should be governed through universally negotiated legal obligations rather than voluntary commitments alone. This stance resonates with many developing countries, particularly across Africa and the Arab world, that support stronger international legal mechanisms against cyber threats. Pakistan has co-sponsored and supported initiatives calling for a global cybercrime convention, arguing that international law must evolve to address ICT-related challenges and violations of sovereignty.⁶⁹

In its diplomatic efforts, Pakistan has been consistently advocating that cyberspace should be governed by law and should not be left to unilateral measures. Rooted in its domestic view that cyber defense is a key aspect of national security, Pakistan envisions a UN-led framework in which member states commit to securing ICT systems, refraining from malicious activities, sharing information, and assisting developing countries to bridge the digital divide. While a binding global instrument has yet to materialize, Pakistan's advocacy reflects and reinforces ongoing efforts to maintain the relevance of a rule-based approach to cyberspace governance within UN processes.

⁶⁹ Aftab Ahmad Khokher, "Pakistan–United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC): A Lasting Partnership," Special Guest Article, *Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI)*, 18 August 2023, <https://>

PAKISTAN'S POLITICAL HISTORY, 5TH+ GENERATION & ITS IMPACT ON NATIONAL SOCIO-ECONOMIC SECURITY OF PAKISTAN: A THEORETICAL ANALYSIS

Sulman Naeem Mirza*

Abstract

The convergence of Pakistan's political history and "5th+ Generation" of its citizens in context of socio-economic security of the country, the 5th generation born after 2000 and highlights how shift in demography influences Pakistan's national security. Present study adopted theoretical perspectives based on; (a) Youth Bulge Theory, (b) Political Socialisation Theory; and (c) Critical Security Studies, to scrutinize structural, historical, and socio-political dynamics critically shaping the youth-state relations. Thus, paper emphasises that the 5th+ generation holds possible potential to become a transformative combination for socio-economic governance and development of the country. However, existing political legacies and fragile governance practices risk turning this asset into a security liability. Hence, a conceptual model is presented in this paper that correlate political evolution, demographic pressures and security outcomes offering a framework for reimagining national security policy through the mechanism/s of state-youth partnership/s in youth majority provinces of Pakistan.

Keywords: *Pakistan Youth Bulge, 5th Generation, Political Socialization, Critical Security Studies, Socio-Economic Governance*

Introduction

Generational shift in demographic structure is not merely a statistical reality for any developing nation but a fundamental constituent of national security related to socio-political and economic development.

* Ph.D from Cardiff Metropolitan University, UK, an academician and researcher in Governance and Public Administration/Management. Email: salmirza@outlook.com

Pakistan comprises more than 64% of citizens under the age of 30¹, situating youth as a driving force in shaping the future trajectories of the country. However, "5th+ Generation" of Pakistan born in 2000 or 21st century is emerging in a context of political disillusionment. *The 5th+ generation refers to the generation born after the year 2000, currently aged 15–35, who are the first digital natives in Pakistan's history.*" At the very same time Pakistan's political history has been marked by recurring patterns of centralised governance, episodic institutional effectiveness, and uneven socio-economic development.

This study integrates these major theoretical perspectives; (a) Youth Bulge Theory, (b) Political Socialisation Theory, and (c) Critical Security Studies. Current paper develops a multidimensional analytical lens to examine how Pakistan's political history and demographic changes intersect with questions of national socio-economic security of the country. Significance of this current study lies in its argument that convergence of rapidly expanding youth population with legacies of fragile institutions, conflicting policies with local needs, politicisation of national development, underperforming bureaucratic governance and electoral deficit generates both substantial risks as well as unprecedented opportunities for the country's stability and resilience.

Earlier scholarship has extensively paid attention to relationship between youth demographics and societal stability. One of the most influential contributions in this discipline is the work of Heinsohn's Youth Bulge Theory, which theorises that societies with large youth population predominantly young males are more prone to societal instability when economic and political structures fail to integrate them into productive roles.² The surplus youth left without opportunities for employment, education, civic participation are more likely to be drawn into unrest, violence, and radical movements. Building on this foundation, Guner examined the link between 5th generations and rise of terrorism emphasizing that the unmet aspirations among young males can heightens the risk of radicalisation.³ Moreover, Urdal offered empirical support by

¹ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Pakistan National Human Development Report 2017: Unleashing the Potential of a Young Pakistan* (Islamabad: UNDP Pakistan, 2018), 3-15.

² Madiha Afzal, *Pakistan Under Siege: Extremism, Society, and the State* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2018).

³ Zahid Shahab Ahmed, "Youth and Democratic Citizenship in Pakistan: Examining the Civic-Education Divide," *Journal of Youth Studies* 23, no. 3 (2020): 344–62.

examining the relationship between large sample of 5th generation and political unrest in diverse contexts.⁴

Goldstone augmented discussion by combining 5th generation with poor economic performance and weak institutes.⁵ Cincotta's research focused on the connection between structure of adolescent population and the frequency of civic conflicts.⁶ In a different but synergistic manner, Arnett suggested theory of emerging adulthood, stressing on social dynamics of youth identity realisation.⁷

Despite these important contributions to the field, the current paper identified a critical gap that no scholarship has yet combined frameworks to examine Pakistan's 5^{th+} generation specifically within the country's national security discussion. Therefore, there is absence of integrated approach in context of Pakistan's 5th generation and emphasises on the need for a more comprehensive analysis that links demographic shift, political, and national security dimensions of the country.

In order to address existing gap, current study critically reviews and integrates existing literature, case examples, and theoretical contributions to develop a conceptual framework for youth - state interaction in Pakistan. This current study widens the scope of security studies and establishes how youth marginalization, governance breakdowns, shifts in demography, systemic governance failures should be viewed as interrelated challenges rather than an isolated issue/s.

The framework offered in this study is applicable for scholars, policy analysts and decision makers aiming to re-conceptualise the state's national security beyond traditional security paradigms. It accentuates how youth involvement in participatory governance and responsive institutions are not merely a development concerns however foundational to enduring national resilience. Hence, theoretical ground-work can guide future research and inform inclusive policy dialogues in youth-majority state such as in Pakistan.

⁴ Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963).

⁵ Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, "Emerging Adulthood: A Theory of Development from the Late Teens through the Twenties," *American Psychologist* 55, no. 5 (2000): 469–80.

⁶ Masooda Bano, *The Rational Believer: Choices and Decisions in the Madrassas of Pakistan* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012)

⁷ Pinar Bilgin, "The Politics of Studying Securitization? The Copenhagen School in Turkey," *Security Dialogue* 42, no. 4–5 (2011): 399–412.

Research Questions

To address the identified gap in the existing literature regarding the 5th+generation's role in Pakistan's security framework, this study investigates the following questions: How has Pakistan's political history shaped the political socialization and institutional trust of the 5th+ generation? To what extent does the current "5th generation" in Pakistan serve as either a driver of socio-economic development or a potential threat to national security? How can a youth-responsive security governance framework mitigate risks of radicalization and promote national resilience?

Pakistan's Generations and Historic Political Continuity

Pakistan has one of the world's youngest youth population emerged within a context of political legacies such as; institutional fragility, politicised socio-economic and security environment linking demography with national stability in Pakistan's governance framework. In this context, study argues that Pakistan's political history shapes the experiences, expectations, and democratic trajectories of its fifth+ generation, with direct implications for governing national security.

Therefore, it is necessary to recognise the rise of Pakistan's fifth+ generation and subsequent ones that requires a careful and historically grounded exploration of prior political cohorts. Since each generational shift occurred in a distinctively exceptional political, social, and economic contexts. However, certain institutional patterns persisted predominantly those related to the public sector governance.

(1947-1971) 1st generation of Pakistan came of age in the outcome of subcontinent's partition⁸ in august 1947. Partition marked by traumatic legacies, freedom struggles, mass human displacement, communal violence and earlier inter-generational sufferings that resulted from British-Colonial governance rule in the region.⁹ The nascent Pakistan faced challenges of state development efforts, as well as issues of building institutional legitimacy.¹⁰ This era was characterised by both hope and described with generational trauma, as political leadership struggled to

⁸ iet Nguyen and Susan Wolcott, "Anticipating Independence, No Premonition of Partition. The Lessons of Bank Branch Expansion on the Indian Subcontinent, 1939 to 1946," Yale Economics, accessed November 30, 2025, https://economics.yale.edu/sites/default/files/premonition_yale_ada-ns.pdf.

⁹ Harjyot Kaur and Pooja Jaggi, "Intergenerational Trauma in the Context of the 1947 India-Pakistan Partition," *Indian Journal of Psychological Medicine* [Corrected Journal Title] 68, no. 10 (2023).

¹⁰ J. I. Wani, "Public Order and Popular Protest in Colonial India: Remembering Jallianwala Bagh Massacre after a Century," *Cambridge Open Engage* (2020).

consolidate authority amid regional disintegration and refugee crises.¹¹ However, early centralized practices and deficiency to integrate diverse voices set a pattern for exclusionary governance model in nascent Pakistan.

(1971-1988) the 2nd generation matured under the influential political administration of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto as well as sixth head of state president Zia-ul-Haq¹² and within this duration the government promoted a robust ideological framework focused on national and Islamic unity. These policies were aimed to enhance civic cohesion, but often limited dissent, and introduced changes in public and legal institutional systems that narrowed the participation in development decision making¹³. Thus, tendencies towards politicization were reinforced and left a significant influence on youth's political socialization.

(1988-1999) the 3rd generation witnessed a revolving-door democratic period characterized by alternating governments and electoral competition between Benazir Bhutto (1988 - 1999 & 1993 - 1996) and Nawaz Sharif (1990 - 1993 & 1997 - 1999) each led Pakistan to transitional democratic governance. Even with this formal return to democracy issues of institutional conflicts¹⁴, political instability, and incompetent political leadership as well as inept bureaucratic structures continued to be major problems for third generational youth. As frequent power struggle, corruption allegations, ineffective governance hindered the public services and civic inclusion in citizen development processes thus went through period of democratic decline and weakened the faith on democratic processes.

(1999-2008) the 4th generation was raised during hybrid regimes and rapidly changing media landscapes. During this period President Pervez Musharraf placed a strong emphasis on state-led modernization and economic-liberalisation, yet also restricted youth inclusion in broader decision making of national development plan. However, due to the evolution in digital technologies and expansion of private media outlets created greater political awareness, yet accompanied by increased

¹¹ Ken Booth, *Theory of World Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007)

¹² Shahid Javed Burki, "Politics of Economic Decision making during the Bhutto Period," *Asian Survey* 14, no. 12 (1974): 1126-40.

¹³ Shahid Javed Burki, "Politics of Economic Decisionmaking during the Bhutto Period."

¹⁴ M. A. Sajid, "View of Institutional Confrontation and Political Instability," *Journal of Emerging Trends in Social Sciences and Humanities* 2, no. 1 (2025): 34-42.

surveillance and monitoring¹⁵. The youth of this age often had to balance being more articulate and knowledgeable within a constricted civic spaces.

And (2000-2025) the 5th+ generation born and grew up after 2000 inherited these complex legacies as this cohort are digital natives, exposed to trends globally as well as locally to Pakistan and becoming increasingly aware of their national diversity and values, development rights, as well as economic demands. However, this cohort face growing structural challenges i.e., rising economic inequality, unemployment, environmental degradation, and limited opportunities in participatory development, quality education and employment, peace and security etc. Despite having potential, many young people encounter structural hurdles in country's socio-economic development, and governance related decision-making. These constraints are particularly acute in under-resourced regions and among marginalized communities in various parts of the country.¹⁶

Notably, this 5th generation is not isolated, it's domestic, economic, political and development needs are shaped by accumulated effects of previous generation's 'experiences' and continuing institutional determinants that constitute the state-youth (citizen) relationship hence, it includes, centralised decision making, weak local governance, out dated bureaucratic structures and socio-economically weak mechanisms of representation of youth. Consequently, the 5th generation future outlook of civil infrastructure is likely to be shaped by complex interplay of aspirations and disillusionment, and these include demands for improved socio-economic development, enhanced peace and security, expanded employment opportunities, and structural forms of national participatory processes that remain responsive to the evolving needs of future generations.¹⁷

State-Youth Relations and National Security of Pakistan – Governance Gap

In context of national political history of Pakistan the political legacies acts as a deeply embedded influence, continuously shaping the

¹⁵ Fareeha Faisal and Ahmad Raza Jafri, "Corruption as a Source of Failure of Good Governance and Management in Pakistan: Proposed Remedial Measures," *Journal of the Punjab University Historical Society* 30, no. 1 (2017): 44–54.

¹⁶ Jack A. Goldstone, "Population and Security: How Demographic Change can Lead to Violent Conflict," *Journal of International Affairs* 56, no. 1 (2002): 3–21.

¹⁷ S. Akbar Zaidi and Matthew McCartney, eds., *New Perspectives on Pakistan's Political Economy: State, Class and Social Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 15–28.

modes of state – citizen governance, civic expectations, and youth engagement as these historical legacies intersect deeply with national security of Pakistan when viewed through the evolving relationship between the state and its 5th generation. National security in Pakistan has traditionally been framed through a militaristic and state-centric lens which often side-lines dimensions of youth security i.e., secure and peaceful national environment, secure job opportunities, unified social and economic development, access to modern development and education, provision of 5^{th+} generational services infrastructure, financial empowerment of citizens and increase in buying power, ease of access to citizen's basic needs. However, the lived experiences of the 5th generation marked by exclusion and absence of participatory processes, economic uncertainty, and social marginalization require a rethinking of what constitutes security in the contemporary context of Pakistan's development future? ¹⁸

5th generation of 15-35 socially excluded from institutional politics, development, decision making, and disproportionately victimized by economic stagnation, unresponsive bureaucracy find it difficult to see their aspirations reflected in existing citizen's governance frameworks. As this sense of distancing deepens it catalyses alternative forms of mobilisation. For instance, ethnic campaigns suggest 5th generation is active socio-political cohort grounded in demands for dignity and seeking meaningful participation in their own socio-economic reforms and development within existing civic order.¹⁹ Such behavioural demonstration extend beyond generational characteristics and instead originates from established out dated public sector governance approaches and political cultural contexts that are losing influence on 5th generations.

Moreover, in an era, of digital realm political engagement and digital empowerment has emerged as a central space as it simultaneously enables political expressions and social creativity while exposing youth to misinformation, online extremism, and digital surveillance. These dynamics add further complexity to the national security environment,

¹⁸ M. A. Ahmed, M. A. Nawaz, and M. S. Iqbal, "Political Socialization and Voting Behavior: The Mediating Role of Political Participation," *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences* 40, no. 1 (2020): 49-63.

¹⁹ S. Akbar Zaidi and Matthew McCartney, eds., *New Perspectives on Pakistan's Political Economy: State, Class and Social Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 1-25.

underscoring dual nature of platforms as both are instruments of participation and mechanism of oversight.²⁰

It is imperative for scholars, policy or decision makers to recognise youth-sensitive needs within national security governance framework with a focus on sustainable and equitable service provision, civic empowerment. A secure national future may likely to emerge when state actively engages its 5th generation as active contributors to stability and national development by recognising socio-economic concerns.

Theoretical Framework

Youth Bulge Theory

This theory argues that nation-states with youth-dominated demographics, if marginalised within economic and political structures are increasingly vulnerable to face social instability and political volatility. It also suggests that when the demographic weight of young people in a society exceeds 20% of the adult population particularly young males who are unemployed and economically marginalised the risk of internal instability and probability of social unrest increases significantly.²¹

Scholars such as Urdal have reinforced this idea by empirically linking large youth cohorts with increased risk of political violence, particularly in societies with weak institutions and limited economic opportunities.²² Goldstone argues that 5th generations increase the likelihood of political upheaval, especially when paired with stagnant job markets and poor educational infrastructure.²³ Additionally, Cincotta et al. extended the theory by arguing that high proportions of youth are correlated with poor governance indicators and fragile state institutions, reinforcing the argument that demographic pressures can stress political systems that are already vulnerable.²⁴

²⁰ M. Malik and S. Malik, "Digital Propaganda and Political Manipulation: An Analysis of Social Media's Role in Pakistani Politics," *Annals of Human and Social Sciences* 1, no. 2 (2020): 112–125.

²¹ Madiha Afzal, *Pakistan Under Siege: Extremism, Society, and the State* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2018)

²² Zahid Shahab Ahmed, "Youth and Democratic Citizenship in Pakistan: Examining the Civic-Education Divide," *Journal of Youth Studies* 23, no. 3 (2020): 344–62.

²³ Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, "Emerging Adulthood: A Theory of Development from the Late Teens through the Twenties," *American Psychologist* 55, no. 5 (2000): 469–80.

²⁴ Masooda Bano, *The Rational Believer: Choices and Decisions in the Madrassas of Pakistan* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012)

In the context of Pakistan, where more than 64% of the population is under the age of 30 is especially prominent and in this vein this paper argues that in Pakistan, the country's public governing organisations have historically struggled at times failed to develop/provide inclusive, transparent, and efficient governing institutions capable of address the socio economic needs of its youth cohorts.

The governing apparatus laden by inefficiencies of civil services, malpractices, and elite patronage networks, have hindered the state's ability to ensure, equitable access to public services such as community development, education, health, and employment opportunities for the critical 5th generation. Public service institutions are often underfunded or highly politicised and reliant on outdated development approaches²⁵ while weak labour market linkages have failed to generate sufficient opportunities for rapidly urbanizing youth population.

Civic representation for 5th generation remains limited and often symbolic with policy making structures lacking genuine participation mechanisms. Platforms for 5th generational youth empowerment such as; vocational training centres are highly politicised whereas; civic innovation hubs, socio-economic incubations centres for developing youth behaviour are not even conceptualised deepening young people's perception of social exclusion in existing citizen governance practices.

As several studies have noted disillusionment with state structures, coupled with unemployment and poor governance has led to youth's mobilisation in protests, extremism as well as oppositional movements.²⁶ This reality illustrates how Pakistan exemplifies the risks outlined by Youth Bulge Theory. The demographic challenge is not merely a matter of numbers but of public institute's civic capacity to govern the 5th generational youth to create meaningful 5th generational civic opportunities and pathways required to escalate national development. Moreover, without sustained investments in youth cohort's skill development, education, welfare, security and peace, and societal engagement the youth dissatisfaction may continue to threaten long term social development, and national peace and security.

In Pakistan, the disillusionment of young people with governing structures, high unemployment rates, and poor governance, incompetent civil services have been cited as contributing factors to youth involvement

²⁵ Sulman Naeem Mirza, "Stakeholder Participation in Local Healthcare Governance and Development under UN SDG-3: Strategies for Decentralized Coordination, and Role Definition: Lessons from Pakistan," *Pakistan Social Sciences Review* 9, no. 1 (2025): 70-86.

²⁶ Ken Booth, *Theory of World Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007)

in protests, extremism, as well as other alternative to political/non-political mobilization.²⁷ Moreover, in this vein, the phenomenon of educated but underemployed and socially excluded youth turning to ideological movements, as this paper observed in various regions of the country, illustrates how demographic and political variables interact to create societal insecurity within a country.

In addition, the psychological impact of social exclusion and unemployment on youth identity should not be underestimated. The 5th generation becomes not only a material issue of numbers and jobs but a deeply social and emotional matter. Researcher noted in emerging adulthood, that age group is shaped by identity exploration and instability²⁸ where institutions fail to allow this exploratory construct the outcome maybe exclusion, resentment, and extremism. For Pakistan 5th generational youth, the gap between expectations from public sector governance infrastructure is fuelled by global digital connectivity whereas; awareness and local lived experience amplifies dissatisfaction within a given contextual settings.

Thus, Youth Bulge Theory offers a structural explanation for the sources of instability but also highlights the pressing need for inclusive responsive practical modalities and policy designs. Addressing 5th generation related challenges and calls for sustained, long term, investment in health, education, skill development, civic empowerment across social, economic, political and security domains. Hence, Pakistan's demographic challenge is not merely about numbers but revolves around the socio-political capacity of governance to channelize volatile cohort of population into a transformative source of country's development, resilience, and innovation, by investing in youth development, creating innovative participatory processes, country can mitigate the risks outlined by Youth Bulge Theory and effectively integrate its demographic advantage toward national cohesion, stability and long term development.

Political Socialization Theory

Youth inherit political attitudes, beliefs, and behavioural norms through primary and secondary socializing agents such as family, educational institutions, religious authorities, peer groups, mass media, and increasingly, digital and social platforms²⁹ Political learning begins in

²⁷ Adnan Khan, "The Political Habitus of Pakistani Youth: State, Education and the Imagination of Citizenship," *Asian Affairs* 51, no. 1 (2020): 57–75.

²⁸ Pinar Bilgin, "The Politics of Studying Securitization? The Copenhagen School in Turkey," *Security Dialogue* 42, no. 4–5 (2011): 399–412.

²⁹ A. Khan et al., "Infrastructure Project Governance: An Analysis of Public Sector Project in Northern Pakistan," *Journal of Governance and Innovation* (2018); T.

early childhood and continues throughout adolescence and early adulthood, shaping civic orientations, institutional trust, and political participation. Scholars have emphasised that effectiveness and coherence of socializing agents are often influenced by legacies of political instability, centralization of governing power, and institutional weaknesses.³⁰

Political socialization is influenced by both formal and informal institutional networks reflecting complex political history. Public institutions may serve as vibrant incubations of national development and unified politics in hatching the civic leadership. And as a result such avenues offer constructive civic learning of given context. Simultaneously the internet and social media emerged as a leading informal political socialisation arena exposing youth of 5th generation to varied realities, political viewpoints hence, cultivating engagement in alternative civic discussions.

However, the national governing ambivalence toward youth cohort's participation between symbolic inclusion and surveillance contributes to mixed political messages and uneven socio-political progress among the youth generation. This theory assists in explaining how Pakistan's generational cohorts of youth internalise, negotiates, and reinterprets democratic/political and development norms in a fragmented and often contradictory contexts. For instance, official curricula from primary through secondary promote a state-centric, country-first narrative, whereas; alternative spaces such as; university academic curriculum/platforms and online activism offer avenues for ethnic contestation and articulation of pluralistic identities within Pakistan.

Furthermore, the absence of structured civic education and student incubation unions under redefined parameters, and practices across national to local levels may impair democratic leadership habitus formation. And in terms of political socialisation this gap weakens institutional channels through which 5th generations develop civic norms, leadership capacities, participatory governance skills to address scarcity of national leadership at multiple levels of the country i.e. (local, provincial, and national) as a result may transform democratic leadership and renew the participatory processes governing country's 5th generation's skilfully, as such practices have positive impact on societal development as well as reactionary politics in others.

H. Khan, H. A. Khan, and M. A. Wariach, "Governance Challenges in Public Sector: An Analysis of Governance and Efficiency Issues in Public Sector Institutions in Pakistan," *Journal of Governance* (2014)

³⁰ Kofi Annan Foundation, *Youth, Climate, and Peace: Case Study from Balochistan, Pakistan* (Geneva: Kofi Annan Foundation, 2024)

For Pakistan, this theory underscores how structural limitations such as inconsistencies in political messaging, underinvestment in citizen development, civic education, and restrictive civic space can weaken development and democratic culture and reduce youth engagement in formal governance processes i.e. (leadership, politics, socio-economic development) etc.³¹ In sum, Political Socialization Theory provides critical insight into how the political attitudes of Pakistan's youth are formed, challenged, and reimaged within a contested and evolving civic landscape.

Critical Security Studies

CSS offers a paradigm shift to rethink security by moving beyond conventional military focused definitions and instead emphasising on a more extensive, multi-dimensional comprehensive conceptualisation of threats, encompassing societal, economic, environmental, and political insecurities.³² Fundamentally this approach highlights the process of "securitization" a discursive act where political actors frame certain issues as existential threats and thus legitimise extra-ordinary measures.³³ Instead of viewing security as entirely state survival and control of territory, the Critical Security Studies (CSS) bring to fore the need for the human security, contending that threats to identity, social fabric and economic order are equally central.³⁴ Therefore, this study offers intersection of marginalization of 5th generation. CSS can serve as a lens to interrogate how contemporary threats are shaped not just by external forces, but by internal social dynamics, inequalities, and exclusionary practices of multi-tiered formal governance i.e. (National, Provincial, and Local) failures.

Moreover, a UNDP and UNICEF-backed report shows that Pakistani youth, when empowered through innovation programs and inclusion

³¹ A. R. Malik and N. Malik, "Digital Youth and Political Expression in Pakistan: Social media and Democratic Practices," *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences* 40, no. 2 (2020): 89–104. ; S. Naeem, "UN SDG 3 and Context-specific Effects of Stakeholder Engagement on Health Care Service Delivery and Policy Implementation: A Local Government Health Sector Case Study in Pakistan's Complex Governing Structure," *International Journal of Science and Research Archive* 13, no. 2 (2024): 757–76.

³² Columba Peoples and Nick Vaughan-Williams, *Critical Security Studies: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2015).

³³ "Pakistan's National Internal Security Policies from 2014 to 2022: Gaps, Challenges, and Prospects," ResearchGate, accessed July 21, 2025, <https://www.researchgate.net>.

³⁴ A. Z. Shaikh and U. L. Shah, "Public Service Delivery and E-governance: The Case of Pakistan," *International Journal for Infonomics* (2016)

strategies, contribute constructively to social resilience and development. In the context of Pakistan, CSS serves as a powerful analytical tool for examining the treatment of youth issues. As analysis of Pakistan Internal Security Policy II (2018-2023) reveals implementation gaps.³⁵ In this analytical context, youth are not only defined as demographic category but are recognized as a politically consequential and socially vulnerable population.

The lack of 5th generation institutional capacity encompassing security and peace building mechanisms, equitable access to essential public services i.e., health, water and sanitation infrastructure, meaningful political inclusion, and comprehensive youth development policies reflects a deeper structural neglect, highlighting the need to integrate youth security in the national development and security discourses, rather viewing youth-related concerns as secondary issues in socio - economic development.

Therefore, the realities of youth unemployment pressures, limited political inclusion, educational and development disparities remain unaddressed by conventional security paradigms, which continue to prioritize external security challenges over domestic governance vulnerabilities. This marginalisation not only undermines and diminishes public trust on the institutions, but also reinforces patterns of exclusion, civic disengagement, and social fragmentation, especially among the 5th generation as this constitutes a substantial share of Pakistan's demographic profile.

Pakistan's security discourse continues to be dominated by concerns over geopolitical threats and internal militancy, thus leaving minimal governance capacity and policy space to address growing socio-economic inequalities and development grievances of its young citizen's that underpin sustainable solutions to problems facing the nation. As CSS theorists contend, that such narrow security framing can overlook the snowballing effects of structural inequality, societal exclusion, and disengagement, especially amongst demographic youth cohorts. Studies emphasise that unless human insecurities are addressed states cannot sustainably achieve sustainable order.³⁶

In the context of Pakistan, CSS underscores the need for a multidimensional security framework one that encapsulates the social experiences of peripheral groups and disadvantaged communities,

³⁵ Aqil Shah, *The Army and Democracy: Military Politics in Pakistan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2021)

³⁶ S. K. A. Shah, N. Ali, and Z. Ali, "Declining Employee Performance in Public Sector Organizations: An Etiological Study of Public Sector Organizations in Pakistan," *Journal for Studies in Management and Planning* (2015);

particularly the 5th generation into policy development as it advocates for a participatory governance. In doing so, CSS offers not just a critical assessment of prevailing security narratives, but a framework for developing a more equitable, youth responsive approach to collective resilience. This approach emphasises on the security of young communities over narrow interests, and advocates for distributive justice, and people-centred development strategies. By recognising youth critical to nations socio-economic and security cohesion, CSS scholars and policymakers can reconceptualise security framework around the social realities of youth cohort.

Theoretical Synthesis and Conceptual Model

Current study introduces a “Youth - Responsive Security Governance Framework” embedding Pakistan’s 5th+ cohort within the intersection of inherited political legacies and structures, shift in demographic pressure, and dynamically evolving security discourse. Proposed framework integrates three conceptual components i.e. Pakistan’s political legacies, 5th generation and security outcomes analysed in light of Critical Security studies perspective.

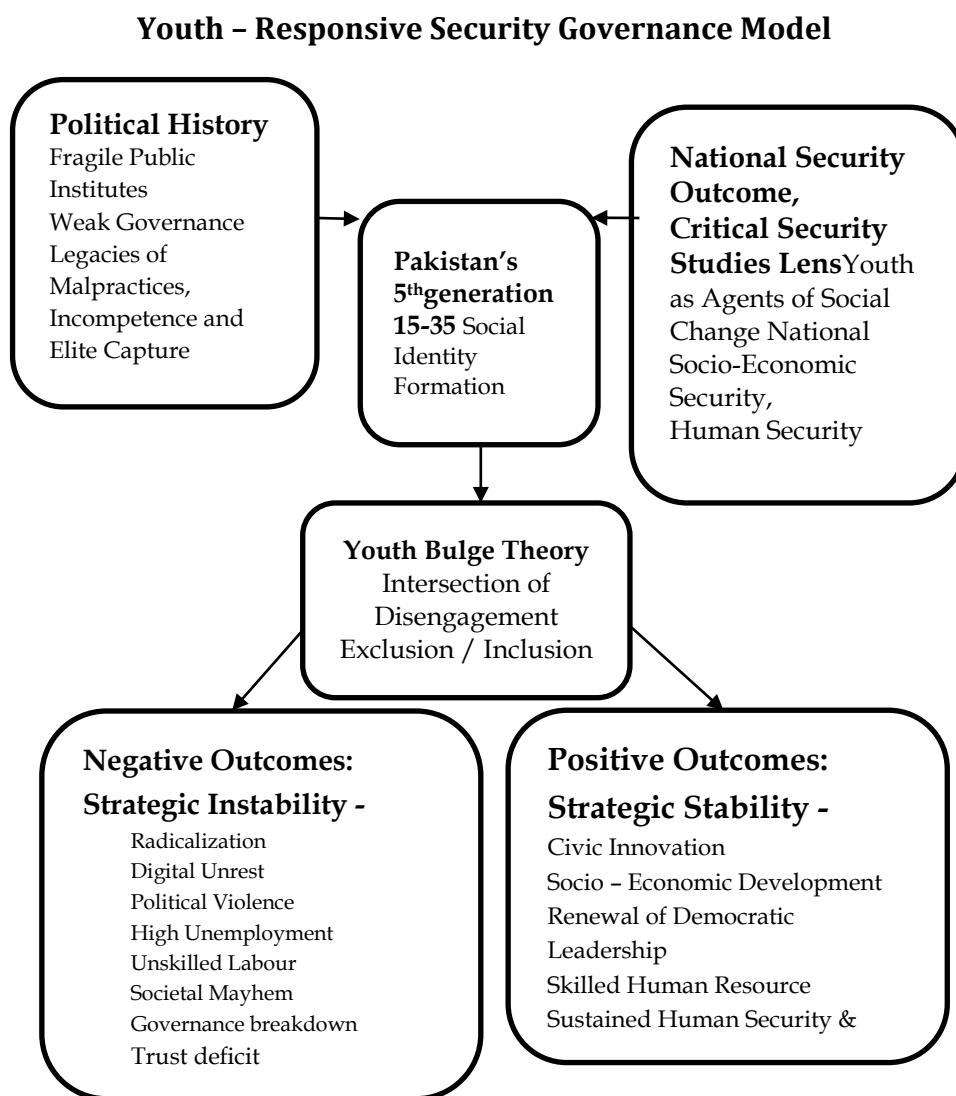
The below depiction illustrates patterns of historical traumas and authoritarianism, elite capture, and weak public sector development have profoundly shaped youth political socialization and these legacies have contributed to alienation, mistrust, and a sense of exclusion among younger generations from citizen governance rather than fostering participatory and inclusive norms. Political socialization under conditions of elite dominance reproduces a cycle leading to youth marginalization from formal political processes, limiting citizen’s stakes in continuity of national development.

Scholars³⁷ have validated that the large youth cohorts particularly, unemployed, economically marginalised and politically divided under weaker citizen governance can become volatile actors, and susceptible to political radicalisation. It occurs when political alienation intersects with structural dynamics described by ‘Youth Bulge Theory,’ hence risks of insatiability intensify. In Pakistan, the inability of state institutions to provide equitable opportunities for employment, education and civic participation heightens the potential for civic unrest, ranging from street

³⁷ Madiha Afzal, *Pakistan Under Siege: Extremism, Society, and the State* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2018) ; Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963) ; Masooda Bano, *The Rational Believer: Choices and Decisions in the Madrassas of Pakistan* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012)

protests to more organised forms of criminal or oppositional mobilisation especially where two-thirds of the population is under the age of 30, the demographic pressures becomes even more critical.

Figure 1: Amalgamation of Political History, 5th generation and Critical Security Study: An Integrative Youth - Security Model



Source: (S.N, Mirza, 2026)

The aforementioned proposed “Youth-Responsive Security Governance Model” treats critical security studies as a subset in a contemporary setting of Pakistan in a post “Hybrid Warfare”. As existing

conception is insufficient for a state whose demographic structure is overwhelmingly youthful and long term strategic stability is intertwined with social, economic, political and psychological conditions of its younger population. Therefore, current paper also reconceptualises national security governance through human-centred governance based approach where 5th generations are viewed as active stakeholders in peace building, social resilience, development and national integration. This means that governance structure consisting government ministries, labour markets, educational institutions, digital regulators and local governance structures all become relevant actors in the broader success of national security governance.

From this perspective, this paper conceptualise security as “an integrative institutional framework in which state secures long term stability, resilience, sovereignty by safeguarding, empowering and productively engaging 5th generations as a core pillar of national cohesion, social order and strategic continuity”. It recognises addressing of internal vulnerabilities rooted in demographic pressure, governance deficit, and development disparities within a regional context.

Furthermore, proposed model outlines spectrum of possible outcomes; at one end youth exclusion and marginalisation may fuel political radicalisation, digital unrest, and violence, high unemployment and unskilled labour can create societal mayhem. And at the other end youth engagement/inclusion in development or decision making can stimulate empowerment, civic innovation, an economic progress and consolidate democratic breakdowns. Fill public leadership gaps and provide skilled human resources contributing in sustained security and peace.

The 5th generation of Pakistan thus stands at a pivotal crossroads whether this demographic transition evolves into an asset or a liability may depends on state response to youth aspirations. Therefore, current synthesis redefines security into creation of opportunities, participatory developments that transform 5th generations from a perceived risk of instability into a national resource.

State Response and Generational Outcomes

The ultimate security trajectory of Pakistan is not determined by the sheer size of the 5th generation, but by the qualitative nature of the state's interaction with this cohort. By synthesizing the historical data and theoretical insights presented, this study argues that national security now exists at a crossroads, where the outcome is strictly contingent upon whether governance adapts to youth-centric expectations or remains tethered to legacy structures.

The Path towards Strategic Stability

Achieving stability requires a fundamental pivot toward the tenets of Critical Security Studies. In this scenario, the state views the demographic weight of the 5th generation as a primary strategic asset rather than a management problem.

- **Institutional Reciprocity:** When the youth's expectations for digital autonomy and legislative inclusion are met with decentralized, participatory governance, the result is a reconstruction of institutional trust.
- **Empirical Indicators of Success:** This path is marked by high civic engagement, a reduction in the "brain drain" phenomenon, and the actualization of the demographic dividend through youth-responsive economic policies.
- **Security Implication:** The state builds internal resilience, creating a social contract that is robust enough to withstand both domestic polarization and external hybrid threats.

The Risk of Strategic Instability

Conversely, a reliance on outdated bureaucratic structures and exclusionary political legacies, remnants of the "Elite Capture" identified in earlier periods, will almost certainly drive the 5th generation toward alienation.

Response Gap: When structural demands for transparency and employment are met with state-centric control or institutional indifference, it creates a vacuum filled by disillusionment.

Empirical Indicators of Failure: This trajectory is measured by systemic unemployment, a surge in digital radicalization, and the fracturing of political socialization.

Security Implication: The "Youth Bulge" shifts from a potential dividend to a catalyst for systemic instability, where unmet aspirations fuel civil unrest and internal security vacuums.

Conclusion

This paper explores evolving dynamics between Pakistan's 5th generation and the country's national security architecture through theoretically grounded lens. In contemporary settings of Pakistan, this study proposed a 'youth - responsive security governance model' and attempted to reconceptualise governing of national security not merely as a function of territorial sovereignty and external defence but it is a multi-dimensional process intrinsically linked with internal and external strategic depth. Hence, drawing on 'Youth Bulge Theory, Political Socialisation Theory, and Critical Security Studies', study provides layered

understanding of how youth demographics, political history and state structures interact in shaping strategic stability.

Study also categorically highlights Pakistan's traditional political landscape of security rooted in elite-centric governance narratives have largely undermine the socio-economic and development aspirations of its youth cohorts i.e., 1st generation to 5th generation of Pakistan. This oversight is not merely a developmental shortfall but it also constitutes a critical vulnerability exposing a governance gap within the national security governance framework as the 5th generation is coming of age in a context marked by rising regional instability, socio-economic - development inequality.

In a political sphere constricted or absence of civic spaces for social learning and communal understanding as competing political narratives often heightens channels of expressions which can either reinforce or destabilise the social order depending on the degree of their inclusion hence, making youth subjects of coercive security policy. As historically centralised political legacies of authoritarianism continued to shape how 5th generation perceive the state and their role within it. This has produced a generation that is simultaneously globally aware rich in civic potential and burdened by systemic pressures and barriers to participate in socio-economic development of the state.

Critical Security Studies lens strongly emphasises on sustainable security, as it requires more than cultivation of trust, and demands the creation of equitable access to participation and development and strategically incorporate marginalised voices in decision making. Hence, the contribution of this study lies in its integration of demographic and political theories to construct a aforementioned conceptual model for analysing state youth relations in Pakistan by situating 5th generation as an active demographic statistic that encapsulate transformative force with the potential to redefine state – society relations. And in realising the potential it requires fundamental shift in policy and discourse one that views youth not as a risk to be managed, but establish state – youth partnership in building a demographically secure, and socio - economically resilient Pakistan.

In sum, Pakistan national security defence depends on not only strategic policies but on how effectively state engages with its most populous and dynamic cohorts. A security paradigm that falls short to centre youth inclusion in participatory development. The road to national resilience lies in reimagining security through the eyes of those who will inherit and shape its future direction. Therefore, there is a requirement of youth development paradigm for sustainable outcomes.

Future Research Gaps and Directions

Current study advances a theoretical framework to understand underlying logical relationship between youth demographics and national security contextual to Pakistan. However, several promising avenues remain for future research. And such identified directions are critical not only for validating and refining of the theoretical insights provided in this study but also for bridging the governance gap between conceptual discourse and application of practical policy:

Empirical Validation of Theoretical Frameworks

The proposed integration of Youth Bulge Theory, Political Socialization, and Critical Security Studies lens, can empirically test using qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Surveys, interviews, and focus groups with 5th generation across urban and rural Pakistan could help determine validity of assumptions regarding alienation, agency, and identity construction in context of Pakistan.

Youth Political Behaviour and Digital Spaces

Given 5th generation's immersion in digital ecosystems, future research studies could explore how social media platforms are instrumentally shaping political attitudes, fostering mobilization, and influencing youth engagement. Future research studies might examine digital echo chambers, the role of influencers, misinformation, and surveillance practices within Pakistan's online spaces.

Regional and Local Case Studies

In-depth case studies on youth-led political movements or activism on regional/provincial dynamics in light of 5th generations can provide context-specific insights. Such studies would also allow for intersectional analyses of youth-state relations.

Comparative Studies across States

Comparative research between Pakistan and similar legacies, demographic pressures, or governance structures could help determine youth oriented security discourse.

Youth in National Security Policymaking

Little is known about role of 5th generation in formal policymaking bodies related to security or national development. Future research could analyse and identify inclusion mechanisms such as; youth councils or advisory groups from national to local level and their effectiveness.

Institutional Responsiveness and Trust

Studies could examine the impact of state institutions (education, law enforcement, employment programs) on shaping youth trust and legitimacy perceptions? How do failures in public service delivery affect youth allegiance to the state institutions? And what institutional interventions can strengthen civic trust and resilience.

Youth and Migration Aspirations

Given the rising brain drain and youth migration trends observed in Pakistan, future work could analyse how the desire to leave Pakistan reflects a form of disengagement from the national or domestic order? This line of inquiry could explore migration as a national developmental issue.

Guidelines for Contributors

Journal of Contemporary Studies is a **HEC-HJRS** awarded **Y** category bi-annual publication, of the Faculty of Contemporary Studies, NDU. Research Scholars should contribute their original, unpublished articles and book reviews to the Journal.

Follow the given guidelines:

1. Papers/articles should not be longer than 7000 words or less than 5500 words, with an abstract of about 120-150 words. Provide Author details on the first page of doc (designation, institutional affiliation, email). Article pages should also be numbered.
2. Once the submission has been peer reviewed, the author cannot withdraw the article.
3. Single authored contributions will be given preference. (collaborative submissions should not exceed 2 authors)
4. Similarity Index must not exceed 18 percent overall and less than 4 percent from a single source. Any use of AI tools in drafting editing or preparing manuscript should be acknowledged in detail in methods section.
5. Standard structure of a research article must be followed with: Article Title, Abstract, Keywords, Introduction, Methodology, Main body/Analysis, and Conclusion.
6. Keywords should not be more than five.
7. Footnotes should be according to Chicago manual 17th edition. Follow the link : https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html
8. For further details you may visit the JCS: <https://jcs.ndu.edu.pk/site/>
9. For Author's submission visit the manual: Submitting an Article | Open Journal Systems
10. Articles must be submitted along with **Originality Declaration Form** available on the website.
11. Authors are required to **submit soft copies**, along with their brief bio, in **MS Word format on the OJS link as well as the email** given below:

OJS <https://jcs.ndu.edu.pk/site/about/submissions>

Email editorjcs@ndu.edu.pk

Call for Papers Throughout the year

Publishing/Printing Summer Issue: Aug 30th
Winter Issue: Feb 28th

Writing Style:

1. British spellings should be used.
2. Date should be written as December 7, 2026.
3. Abbreviations should be written in brackets after writing within bracket after spelling the acronym in full at first use, e.g., the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). Subsequently only SAARC should be used without bracket.
4. Word "per cent" should be used instead of sign "%."
5. Submissions not based on **Guidelines for Contributors** will not be accepted.

Journal of Contemporary Studies

The Journal of Contemporary Studies is a double blind peer reviewed, bi-annual, and refereed publication.

Disclaimer: Opinions expressed in the articles published in the *Journal of Contemporary Studies* are those of authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the FCS, NDU. The responsibility for accuracy of the statements made therein rests with the authors.

Journal of Contemporary Studies (JCS)		
Subscription Order Form		
Printing Cost of a Single Copy Pakistan:	PKR 500.00 US\$ 15.00	
Subscription	1 Year	2 Year
Pakistan		
Overseas		
I wish to receive each copy by air mail		
Contact Details:		
Name:		
Email:		
Telephone:		
Address:		

©Copyright, National Defence University (NDU)

All rights are reserved.

No part of the contents of this publication may be reproduced, adapted, transmitted, or stored in any form by any process without the written permission of the National Defence University.

Journal of Contemporary Studies

Faculty of Contemporary Studies, National Defence University, Islamabad.

Tel: +92-51-9262066, Email: editorjcs@ndu.edu.pk,

Website: <https://jcs.ndu.edu.pk/site/>

