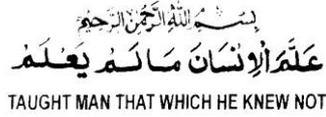




QUARTERLY

A Periodical of INSIGHTS



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E9 QUARTERLY

CONTENTS

Insights	Page No
Editorial Note	i
Pakistan's Economic Ties with ASEAN: Challenges & Way Forward <i>Marium Akhtar</i>	1
Unfolding the Role of the US in Afghanistan's Current Situation <i>Maryam Noor</i>	7
Buddhist Heritage of Pakistan: A Bridge to Peace and Harmony <i>Muhammad Abdur Rehman</i>	13
National Action Plan: A Quantified Analysis <i>Ayesha Sohail</i>	19
Depoliticisation of Bureaucracy in Pakistan <i>Faiza Qureshi</i>	28
Critical Analysis of Five Eyes Alliance <i>Anees Fatima Sherazi</i>	34
Madrassah Education in Pakistan <i>Fatima Saleem</i>	40

Insights

Page No

Silent Casualties: Accountability Gaps in US Drone Warfare 46*Maham Ayaz***US Withdrawal from Afghanistan and Rise of Terrorism in Pakistan** 52*Maryam Noor***Space – An Emerging Battlefield** 59*Adrak Hussain***Book Review****Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides' Trap?** 65*Dr. M.A. Gul*

Editorial Note

The third issue of volume 4, 2025, E9 Quarterly, a distinctive compilation of ten insights written during the third quarter of 2025, is now in your hands. These insights delve into Pakistan's economic, political, and security challenges, underlining the urgent need for strategic alignment. This alignment, crucial for harmonising national interests with global trends and regional dynamics, as well as domestic institutions' reform and financial restructuring for sustained growth, is a matter of immediate concern. This issue comprehensively analyses the economic ties between Pakistan and ASEAN, emphasising trade dynamics, formal agreements, and existing challenges. The research suggests strategies for improving trade mechanisms, regulatory harmonisation, and bilateral cooperation to unlock mutual economic potential.

This issue further examines factors contributing to Afghanistan's ongoing instability following the US withdrawal in 2021, attributing its responsibility to policies of the US-led West during the war on terror, which prioritised military over economic reconstruction, and the potential of Pakistan's Buddhist heritage for promoting Pakistan's cultural ties, peace, harmony, religious tourism, economic growth and cross-cultural connections with Buddhist-majority nations through enhanced preservation of the heritage, marketing strategies, and infrastructure development.

This issue also delves into the evolution of Pakistan's National Action Plan (NAP) against terrorism after the Army Public School Peshawar attack 2014 and the revised 14-point framework post-2021 and the historical context, legal challenges, and reform efforts to depoliticise bureaucracy with recommendations including reinforcing legal safeguards, decentralising financial authority, implementing a merit-based performance evaluation system and structural reforms to restore bureaucratic efficiency and accountability in Pakistan.

This issue further explores the Five Eyes Alliance, a multilateral intelligence-sharing partnership among the United States (US), the United Kingdom (UK), Canada, Australia, and New Zealand and madrassah education in Pakistan, its role in providing religious and academic instruction for students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and Government-led reform efforts, including the Pakistan Madrassah Education Board Ordinance (2001) and the National Action Plan (2014).

Finally, the issue discusses the US drone strikes to combat terrorism in countries such as Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, Libya, and Afghanistan, causing significant civilian casualties, in violation of sovereignty and breach of international legal frameworks, particularly Article 2(4) and Article 51 of the United Nations (UN) Charter, the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021 leading to a surge in terrorism in Pakistan, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan and militarisation and potential weaponisation of space through development of space-based intelligence, surveillance, and advanced weapons systems raising concerns about strategic stability and the risk of conflict calling for urgent need for international cooperation to prevent the militarisation of outer space.

With its unique insight into national security matters, we hope this publication will help our esteemed readers maintain a comprehensive understanding of the current strategic landscape. We strongly urge you to share your expertise through short pieces of writing. These can include policy analyses, case studies, or thought pieces on current geopolitical and economic issues in Pakistan and its neighbouring regions. We value well-researched and balanced perspectives that can contribute to a deeper understanding of the region.

Pakistan's Economic Ties with ASEAN: Challenges & Way Forward

Marium Akhtar

Abstract

This INSIGHT explores the economic ties between Pakistan and ASEAN, emphasising trade dynamics, formal agreements, and existing challenges. While ASEAN represents a significant global economic bloc, Pakistan's trade with the region constitutes approximately 10% of its total trade volume. Despite achievements such as preferential agreements and growing exports, obstacles, including high tariffs, logistical inefficiencies, and geopolitical complexities, hinder deeper integration. The research suggests strategies for improving trade mechanisms, regulatory harmonisation, and bilateral cooperation to unlock mutual economic potential.

Keywords: ASEAN, International Trade, Economic Ties, Marine Biodiversity.

ASEAN region is crucial for international trade, food, energy security, and marine biodiversity. Ten countries, including Brunei Darussalam, Myanmar, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam, comprise the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) founded in 1967.¹ As of 2024, ASEAN ranks as the third-largest regional economy in Asia and the fifth-largest global economy, with an anticipated nominal GDP of US\$3.9 trillion, following the US, China, the EU, and India.² ASEAN's economic standing reflects its dynamic expansion and increasing global significance in trade and industry. The insight reviews present economic relations between Pakistan and ASEAN, highlighting collaboration prospects.

Pakistan's trade volume with ASEAN countries reached an all-time high of US\$10.3 bn in 2022.³ Ninety percent of total Pak—ASEAN trade occurs between five ASEAN countries: Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand, and Indonesia. Pakistan's total trade in 2023 was US\$82.8 billion, of which trade with ASEAN accounted for approximately a 10% share.⁴

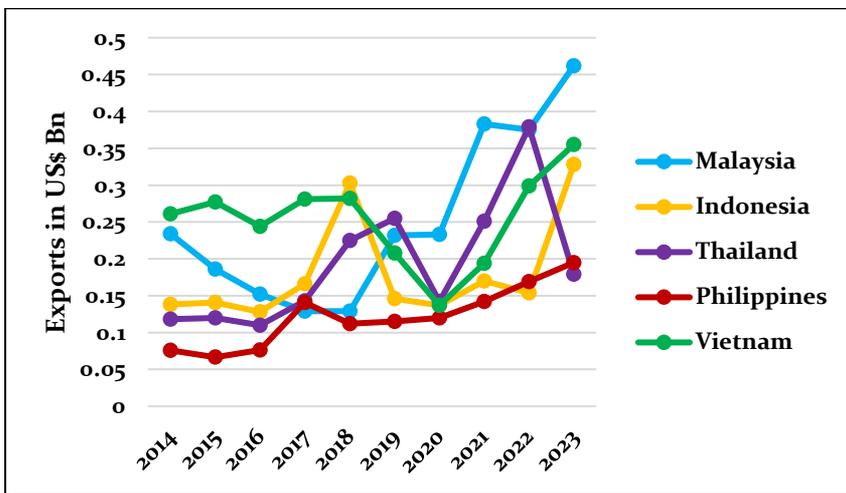
Several formal trade and commerce mechanisms exist between Pakistan and ASEAN, including the Pakistan-ASEAN Framework Agreement on Comprehensive Economic Cooperation (2004), the Pakistan-Malaysia Free Trade Agreement (2007), and the Pakistan-Indonesia Preferential Trade Agreement (2012). The Pakistan-Thailand Free Trade Agreement is currently being negotiated.⁵ Pakistan became a Sectoral Dialogue Partner of ASEAN in 1993 and is also a member of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), which addresses political and security issues but indirectly affects trade by fostering stability and cooperation. Additionally, it has bilateral Joint Economic Commissions (JECs) with several ASEAN countries, including Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand, which promote trade, investment, and technical cooperation.

Pakistan and major ASEAN countries also engage in informal trade and commerce through private sector initiatives, border trade, diaspora networks, trade exhibitions, maritime collaborations, logistics hubs, and small and medium-sized enterprises. Pakistani diaspora contributes to commerce by sending goods and remittances back home.⁶



The past 10 years' export data depict an upward trend in Pakistan's exports to Malaysia, Vietnam, and Indonesia, driven by various factors. The bilateral trade with Malaysia, Indonesia, and Vietnam has gained momentum recently. The trade volume reached US\$1.5 billion with Malaysia and US\$3.34 billion with Indonesia in 2023.⁷ Correspondingly, Pakistan's exports to Vietnam accounted for US\$0.35bn (**Graph**).⁸ The two remaining countries, Thailand and the Philippines, have low trade figures. As for Thailand, the FTA is facing a delay, which should be pursued as a priority to address the trade plunge, as shown by the data. There is no formal Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between Pakistan and the Philippines. They have yet to establish an FTA to enhance trade relations by reducing tariffs and other trade barriers.

Graph: Pakistan- ASEAN Exports in US\$ Bn (10 years)



Source: <https://tradingeconomics.com/>

Pakistan has excellent agricultural sector potential as ASEAN strives for sustainable farming methods and food security. All this data suggests pursuing formal economic mechanisms and agreements between the ASEAN region and Pakistan, which is a significant challenge in creating ease of business for both sides.

The economic ties between Pakistan and the ASEAN region face significant geopolitical challenges, particularly the US-China rivalry and Pakistan's close relations with China, which have influenced the willingness of ASEAN countries to strengthen their ties with Pakistan. This has contributed to delays in granting Pakistan Full Dialogue Partnership (FDP) status within ASEAN. Lack of ease of doing business, tariff and non-tariff barriers, inadequate infrastructure, and logistic hurdles are a few to mention. Pakistan's high tariff rates and sector-specific tariffs hinder its export competitiveness, as ASEAN countries, such as Vietnam and Thailand, benefit from lower intra-ASEAN tariffs, making it harder for non-member countries like Pakistan to compete.⁹ Weak infrastructure and limited direct shipping routes between Pakistan and ASEAN countries impact delivery times, increase transportation costs, and hinder trade, particularly for perishable goods.¹⁰

Granting a Full Dialogue Partnership and pursuing Free Trade Agreements between ASEAN and Pakistan are crucial steps to address challenges and boost economic relations.

The digital trade gap between Pakistan and ASEAN countries is exacerbated by the need for robust e-commerce frameworks and digital trade facilitation mechanisms, particularly in the IT and financial services sectors.¹¹ Moreover, ASEAN countries enforce technical regulations, often acting as non-tariff barriers (NTBs), like Phytosanitary (SPS) and Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) Compliance, which are affecting Pakistan's market penetration and increasing compliance costs for Pakistani exporters.¹² This highlights the importance of trade facilitation agreements and Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRAs) between ASEAN countries and Pakistan.¹³ MRAs are formal agreements between countries to recognise each other's conformity assessments, reducing the need for duplicate testing and certification.

To overcome these challenges, Pakistan may need to invest in trade logistics, negotiate more favourable terms for market access, and strive to harmonize its regulatory standards with those of ASEAN nations to overcome these obstacles. Lowering non-tariff barriers, such as SPS and TBT Compliance expenses, can significantly improve trade flows.

In this regard, Pakistan and ASEAN countries must work together to reach Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRAs) and align their standards for SPS and TBT, simplifying compliance. Trade Facilitation Agreements can streamline procedures, share compliance infrastructure costs, and collaborate with ASEAN regulatory bodies and the private sector to tackle compliance challenges, underscoring the urgency and importance of these measures.

On the diplomatic front, ASEAN plays a significant role in the Asia-Pacific region, which is shaped by the US-China rivalry. Pakistan's relationship with China, a major regional player, affects its engagement with ASEAN countries. Some ASEAN countries have troubled relations with China, which in turn influences their willingness to strengthen ties with Pakistan. Resultantly, efforts to upgrade Pakistan to Full Dialogue Partner status have faced objections, causing delays as it requires approval from all ten member nations.¹⁴

To summarise the argument, Pakistan-ASEAN economic relations have significant potential for growth, diversification, and international market standing. Pursuing these ties can enhance export revenue, reduce trade imbalance, improve the balance of payments, and diversify the economy, inspiring both Pakistan and ASEAN to work towards a mutually beneficial economic future.

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About Insight and Author

This INSIGHT was first published on the ISSRA website in December 2024 and in the Daily Frontier Post on 6 January 2025. It can be accessed at <https://issra.pk/pub/insight/2024/Pakistans-Economic-Ties-with-ASEAN-Challenges-Way-Forward/Insight.html>. The writer is a Research Associate and can be reached at marium.akhtar@gmail.com.

Unfolding the Role of the US in Afghanistan's Current Situation

Maryam Noor

Abstract

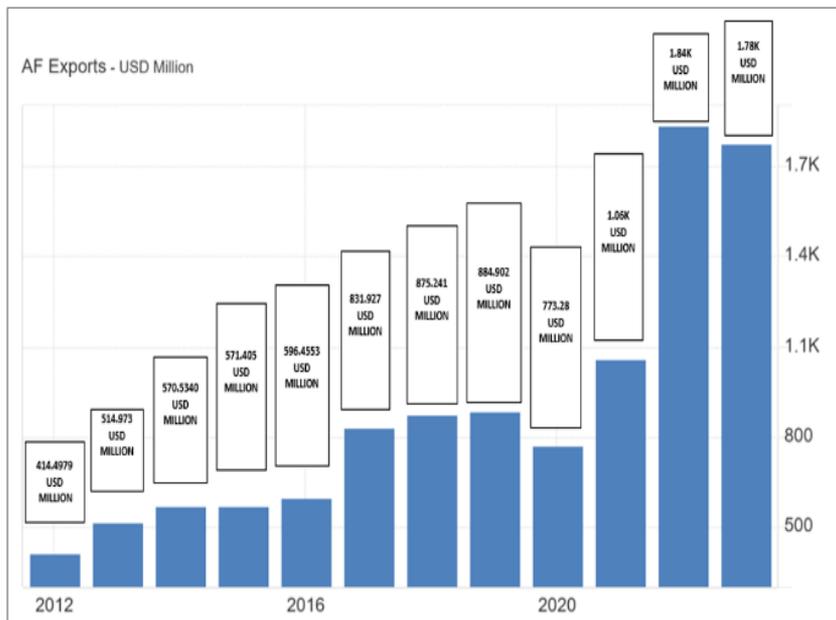
The INSIGHT examines the factors contributing to Afghanistan's ongoing instability following the US withdrawal in 2021. It attributes responsibility to US-led Western policies during the War on Terror, which prioritised military over economic reconstruction, leaving Afghanistan fragile and isolated. Key challenges include economic decline, sanctions, an unrecognised government, and the rise of militant threats. It also highlights the geopolitical implications of these policies, particularly in the context of US-China rivalry, and calls for reassessing international strategies in the region.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Taliban, War on Terror, Instability, Isolation, Diplomatic Ties, Economic Sanctions.

After the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021, the Taliban swiftly regained control of the Afghan government. The country faces profound challenges, including economic decline, humanitarian crisis, governance issues, rising security threats, and global isolation due to sanctions and nonrecognition.¹ Although the Taliban are in power in Afghanistan, all these issues are not their doing. Over the past two decades, the US and NATO have made significant investments in Afghanistan, yet the country's infrastructure and economy are precarious. This insight establishes that the primary responsibility for Afghanistan's ongoing instability lies with the US-led West, whose actions and policies during the War on Terror suggest a lack of commitment to fostering a stable Afghanistan.

One of the main factors contributing to Afghanistan's ongoing instability is the nonrecognition of the Taliban government as a legitimate or sovereign authority by world capitals. This has led to Afghanistan's diplomatic and political isolation, denying Afghan representation in international fora. The UN credential committee has rejected the Taliban regime's request to acquire the assigned seat for Afghanistan's representative at the UN several times.²

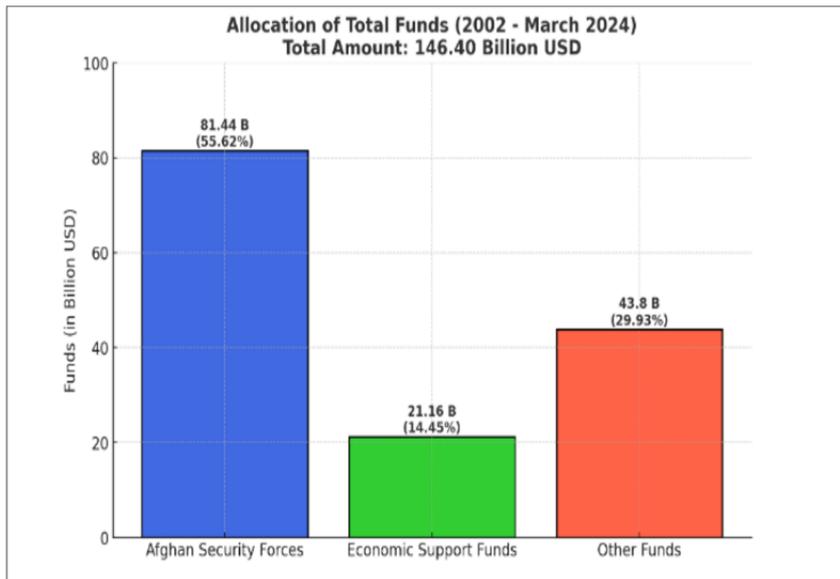
The economic sanctions imposed by the US, UN, and EU have exacerbated Afghanistan's economic woes, restricting its international trade. The US froze nearly US\$9.5 billion of Afghanistan's external reserves, leaving the Afghan central bank, Da Afghanistan Bank (DAB), asset-deprived and cut off from the global financial system. The World Bank estimated that Afghanistan's real GDP declined by approximately 26% in 2021-22. Exports from Afghanistan decreased to US\$ 1,777.90 million in 2023 from US\$ 1,837.56 million in 2022. This persistent economic isolation underscores the US and NATO's lack of interest in transforming Afghanistan's war-stricken economy into a sustainable one despite their two-decade presence and substantial investment.



Source: Tradingeconomics.com | National Statistics and Information Authority (NSIA)

Despite the presence of the US and NATO for two decades, no substantial effort has been made to transform Afghanistan's economy or leverage its strategic potential as a regional trade hub connecting Central Asia to South Asia and the Middle East.

Furthermore, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) quarterly report dated April 30, 2022, states that the total amount appropriated for reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan from 2002 to March 2024 was US\$146.40 billion. US\$81.44 billion, i.e., 55.62% of the total reconstruction funds, was allocated to Afghan security forces, and only US\$21.16 billion, i.e., 14.45% was allocated for the Economic Support Fund.³ This lack of prioritisation and focus during a period of significantly available international resources reflects NATO's disinterest in addressing Afghanistan's structural economic issues, which perpetuate its dependency on a 'War Economy'. It would not be wrong to say that Afghan institutions failed to sustain themselves because a significant portion of US funds was directed toward military spending rather than critical infrastructure development, capacity building, and human resource development, as illustrated in the graph below.



Source: Derived from SIGAR Quarterly Report of Congress, April 30, 2022

The 2020 Doha Agreement, primarily aimed at the smooth US withdrawal, had significant flaws. It excluded the Afghan government from negotiations, undermining the agreement's legitimacy and clear political roadmap for peace.⁴ The rushed US withdrawal left Afghan security forces unprepared, turning the agreement into a tool for the US expedited exit rather than a lasting solution. The

The responsibility for the recent instability in Afghanistan (post 9/11) squarely lies with the US-led West, whose policies and actions were contradictory.

establishment of the Taliban government as a result of the Doha Agreement and US withdrawal paved the way for

Afghanistan to become a haven for terrorist organisations like Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Tehrik-i-Jihad Pakistan (TJP), Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (JuA), Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP), East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), and other militant organisations.

In other words, the US-led West is directly responsible for the presence of terrorist organisations threatening regional peace and stability. These terrorist organisations, besides obstructing the integration of Afghanistan into China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), also threaten CPEC, the flagship project of BRI.⁵

A significant fallout of the instability in Afghanistan has been the unchecked influx of US-made arms and ammunition into Pakistan. As reported by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty in March 2023, a staggering US\$7.2 billion worth of military equipment, including aircrafts, guns, vehicles, night vision goggles, and biometric devices, was left behind in Afghanistan by the US and NATO.⁶ This equipment, previously under the control of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) and supplied initially and managed by the US and NATO, has found its way into the hands of non-state militant groups, including the TTP, BLA, and other terrorist groups, fueling cross-border terrorism.⁷

As a result, TTP attacks have surged by 27% and BLA attacks by 36% since the Taliban's takeover, intensifying Pakistan's national security risks.⁸

This alarming situation underscores how the unregulated transfer of arms and ammunition across the Afghan-Pakistan border has exacerbated the threat posed by non-state actors, highlighting the broader regional repercussions of the US exit.

Afghanistan's history of foreign invasions and the presence of the Taliban have left the nation in a fragile state. Despite two decades of presence and substantial investment, the US failed to prioritise the creation of a stable and sustainable Afghanistan, leading to the recent instability post 9/11.

Therefore, the responsibility for the recent instability in Afghanistan (post 9/11) squarely lies with the US-led West, whose policies and actions were contradictory. It is evident that within the realm of contemporary geopolitics, characterised by the predominant factor of the US-China rivalry, it is in the larger strategic interest of the US to keep Afghanistan destabilised to prevent China from dominating the region in its proximity through trade and connectivity corridors, such as the BRI. What remains to be seen is how China and, to some extent, Russia will respond to this US disruption strategy in the region characterised by the 'constructive chaos' theory.

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About Insight and Author

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Buddhist Heritage of Pakistan: A Bridge to Peace and Harmony

Muhammad Abdur Rehman

Abstract

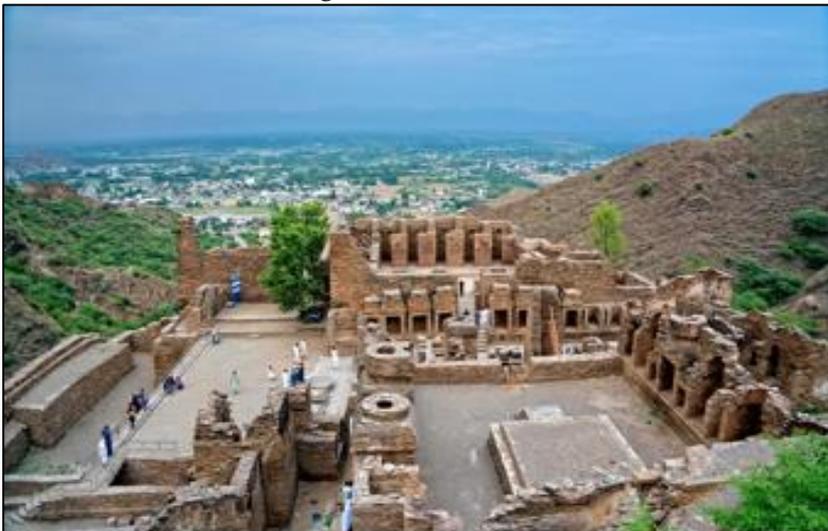
This INSIGHT discusses that Pakistan's Buddhist heritage is a testament to its rich and diverse historical legacy. Significant archaeological sites, including Taxila and Swat, are spread across the Gandhara region. These sites not only highlight Pakistan's cultural ties to Buddhism but also offer immense potential for promoting peace and harmony with Buddhist-majority nations. Leveraging this heritage through enhanced preservation, strategic marketing, and infrastructure development can transform Pakistan into a leading destination for religious tourism, fostering economic growth and fostering cross-cultural connections.

Keywords: Buddhist Heritage, Religious Tourism, Archaeological Sites, Gandhara Region.

Pakistan, predominantly a Muslim country, has a rich history and heritage of many other religions, such as Hinduism, Sikhism, and Buddhism.¹ Among these religions, Buddhism left a rich archaeological and civilisational heritage. Buddha was born in present-day southern Nepal. He travelled through the subcontinent and visited present-day Pakistan during his meditation journey. Consequently, Buddhism flourished in present-day Pakistan, spanning over a millennium. This period left a rich heritage in Pakistan, including philosophy, art, culture, architecture, and stupas. This heritage spreads from northern Pakistan to southern Afghanistan. This insight explores how Pakistan's Buddhist heritage can build peace and harmony between Pakistan and Buddhist nations.

Buddhism thrived in the Gandhara region, the present-day Peshawar, Swat, and Taxila, from the 2nd century BC to the 8th century AD. This era saw the birth of a remarkable cultural legacy, evident in its architecture and a unique blend of Buddhist and Greek elements. The ruins of Takht-i-Bahi in Swat, dating back to the 1st century (Figure 1), and the Buddhist statues at the Lahore Fort, which contain Buddhist carvings and inscriptions, are testament to this fascinating blend. The archaeological sites at Taxila further enrich this cultural tapestry.²

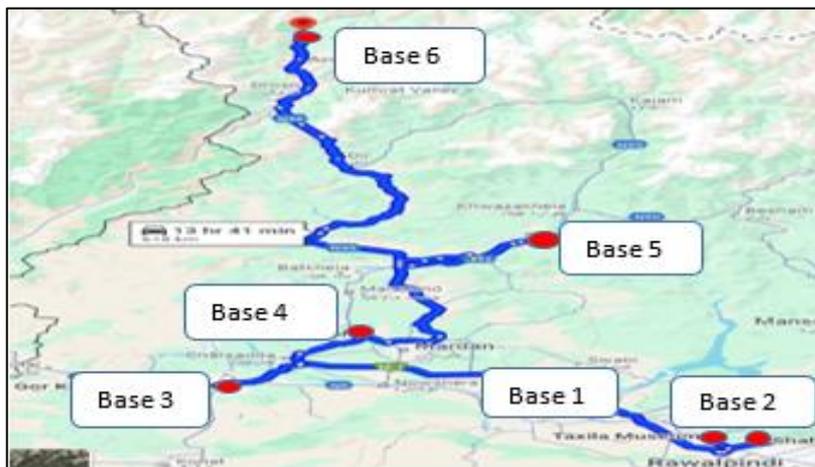
Figure 1: Takht-i-Bahi



Source: World Heritage Sites

The Buddhist Trail in Pakistan, a 618 km route stretching from Taxila through Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to Swat and Chitral, is a significant cultural and historical asset. It encompasses over 150 significant Buddhist sites, including UNESCO World Heritage Sites like Taxila's ancient settlements and monasteries. This trail offers visitors access to South Asia's remarkable Buddhist heritage, making it a potential hotspot for cultural heritage tourism. Figure 2 shows the Buddhist trail in Pakistan in a sequence.

Figure 2: The Buddhist Trail in Pakistan to Explore in a Sequence



Source: Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation

In addition to the marking on the map, the chart below shows the cities along the Buddhist Trail, including important sites and the distances to the next stop.

Base No. on Map (Figure 2)	City	Important Sites	Distance to Next Stop
Base 1	Taxila Valley Complex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dharmarajika Stupa • Jaulian Monastery • Sirkap & Sirsukh 	40 km
Base 2	Islamabad/Rawalpindi Region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shah Allah Ditta Caves • Mankiala Stupa 	150 km
Base 3	Peshawar Valley	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peshawar Museum • Shahji-ki-Dheri • Gor Khatri 	50 km
Base 4	Mardan Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Takht-i-Bahi • Sahri Bahlol 	160 km
Base 5	Swat Valley	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mutkara Sites • Mingora Complex 	250 km
Base 6	Chitral Region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bhamala Stupa • Buddhist Caves 	End of Trail

Buddhism is the fourth-largest religion worldwide and a dominant religion in at least eight countries. Seven countries have a Buddhist population of more than 50%, which include Cambodia (96%), Thailand (92%), Myanmar (79.8%), Bhutan (75%), Sri Lanka (70%), Laos (66.8%), and Mongolia (53%). According to a 2016 Gallup survey, approximately 58 million Buddhist pilgrims wish to visit religious sites. Out of these 58 million, i.e., five percent, want to visit Pakistan, which is almost 2.9 million people who want to visit Pakistan.³ However, according to the Foreign Ministry, only 1,500 people visit Buddhist sites in Pakistan annually.

The economic potential of these heritage sites is substantial. In 2022, the World Bank reported that Pakistan attracted US\$16 billion in tourist spending, which is projected to reach US\$30 billion by 2033.⁴ It generated a revenue of US\$3.7 billion in 2024, and US\$5.533 billion in revenue is expected by 2029.⁵ According to Business Recorder, only these Buddhist pilgrims have the potential to generate US\$900 million to US\$1.3 billion annually. Figure 3 illustrates the projected annual revenue growth in the tourism industry of Pakistan, encompassing religious tourism.

Business Recorder has also claimed that Pakistan can almost double its revenue from tourism. Tourism contributes approximately 10% to the global GDP and generates employment opportunities for one in ten people worldwide. However, in 2022, the travel and tourism sector contributed 5.9% to Pakistan's GDP.

The restoration of damaged sites and infrastructure development are necessary to attract tourism. In this regard, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) Government has taken many initiatives, like the restoration of the Landi Kotal Stupa and a master plan to restore and preserve Takht-i-Bahi. The government is also working on digitally preserving these stupas and sites in 3D virtual form in collaboration with the Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS).

However, these efforts only preserve the heritage; its marketing to attract tourists must be further enhanced. Promoting Pakistan's religious tourism sites has been largely absent from the country's social and electronic media due to a focus on content creation in more commercially viable niches that generate engagement and advertising revenue.

It needs a comprehensive strategy. Uxi Mufti observes that religious tourism sites often fail to attract influencers' attention due to their perceived limited monetary potential despite their cultural and historical significance. To attract more tourists, Pakistan needs to follow a comprehensive strategy.

- Pakistan can leverage social media influencers from Buddhist-majority countries to promote its Buddhist heritage by collaborating with content creators in their native languages, such as Chinese influencers sharing in Mandarin clips.
- Pakistan can also collaborate with domestic and international television and film industries by incorporating Buddhist stories and showcasing archaeological sites and present-day locations.
- The Government needs to develop modern accommodation facilities near these sites, install multilingual signage and information boards to cater to diverse tourists, and train local guides.

Pakistan can develop a comprehensive public-private partnership approach to promote Buddhist heritage tourism. By integrating government resources with private sector innovations, such as digital mapping, augmented reality, venture capital investments, cross-border tourism strategies, and multimedia storytelling, the country can transform historical sites into economically viable destinations that attract diverse audiences through sophisticated technological and marketing approaches.

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National Action Plan: A Quantified Analysis

Ayesha Sohail

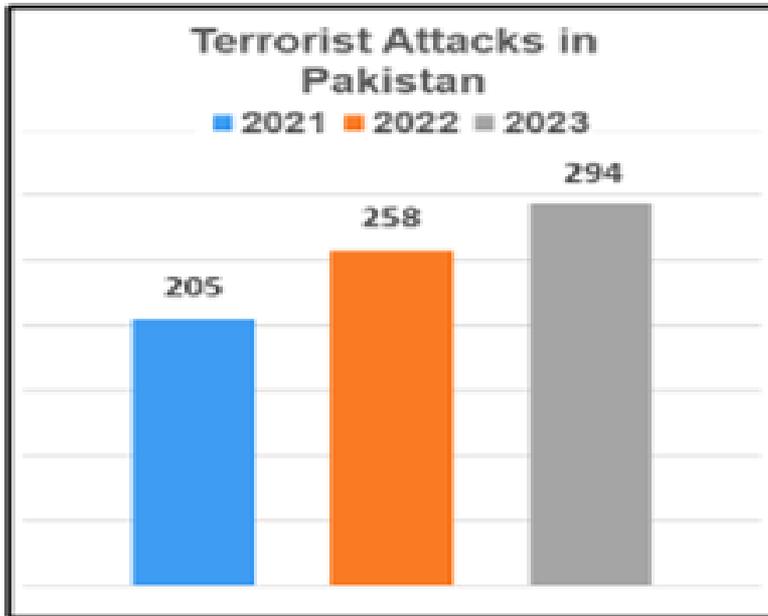
Abstract

This INSIGHT analyses the evolution of Pakistan's National Action Plan (NAP) against terrorism, initiated after the 2014 Army Public School attack. It details the revised 14-point framework post-2021, addressing kinetic and non-kinetic measures. Progress is quantified across various sectors, including countering terrorist financing, regulating madrasas, and socioeconomic reforms, highlighting successes and persistent challenges in judicial efficiency and sociopolitical integration. Key initiatives, such as Operation Azm-e-Istehkam, and collaboration with regulatory authorities signify significant strides but underscore the need for sustained efforts to achieve stability.

Keywords: National Action Plan, Kinetic Operations, Terrorism.

Pakistan has been a victim of terrorism since 2001, and it has deeply impacted Pakistan's sociopolitical landscape, resulting in 70,000 deaths and an estimated economic loss of US\$130 billion by 2024.¹ However, the Army Public School Peshawar attack on 16th December 2014 was a turning point. It led to a nationwide focus on the fight against terrorism. Hence, a 20-point National Action Plan (NAP) was made.²

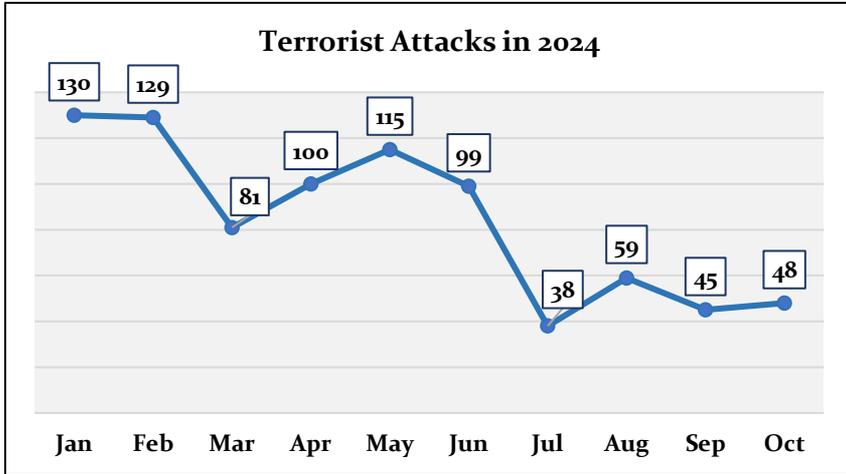
In 2021, after the withdrawal of US-led NATO forces from Afghanistan and the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan, Pakistan's security landscape changed significantly. In response, a revised 14-point NAP was made. It provided a detailed framework for countering terrorism consisting of five kinetic and nine non-kinetic domains. This insight provides a brief overview of all 14 points of NAP and their progress since 2021.

Figure 1: Terrorist Attacks in Pakistan

Source: Extracted from Various Sources

Point#1 of NAP is intolerance for militancy. There was an increase in terrorist attacks in Pakistan from 2021, coinciding with the Taliban's ascent to power in Afghanistan.³ Thus, to eradicate terrorism from the country, Pakistan's Apex Committee on NAP approved the initiation of Operation Azm-e-Istehkam in June 2024, with a budget of Rs. 60 billion to reinforce the implementation of NAP.⁴ The operation initially led to a 62% reduction in terrorist attacks by July 2024. However, fluctuations from August to October highlight that the situation remains unstable, requiring sustained efforts to prevent resurgence, and hence, it is categorised as unsatisfactory progress.

Figure 2: Terrorist Attacks in 2024



Source: Extracted from Various Sources

Point#2 of NAP concerns action against the spread of terrorism through media and cyber networks, which includes close cooperation with the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA). The PTA monitors websites and social media platforms for content that incites terrorism, violence, and hate speech. As of 2023, approximately 1.3 million URLs had been blocked, which is satisfactory progress.

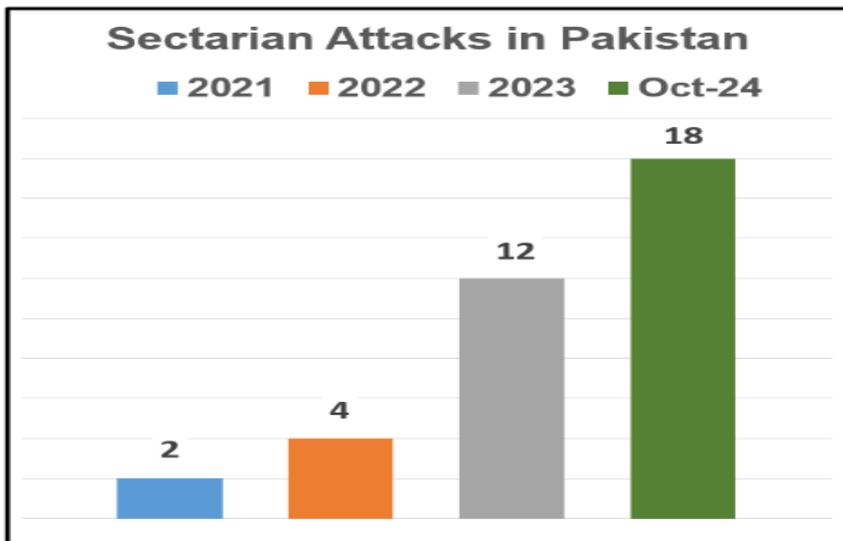
Figure 3: Complaints related to Unlawful Content
Complaints Related to Unlawful Content/URLs

Category	2021-2022	2022-2023
Contempt of Court	8,709	137
Defence of Pakistan	36,900	22,496
Glory of Islam	78,119	11,332
Defamation/ Impersonation	7,713	5,946
Miscellaneous	6,464	2,771
Decency and Morality	905,009	27,901
Proxy	10,219	32
Sectarian/ Hate Speech	40,536	4,778
Total	1,191,050	75,393

Source: PTA Annual Reports 2021-22 & 2022-23

Point#3 of NAP emphasises effective measures against religious/sectarian terrorism. However, the violent sectarian groups' influence continues to grow, with 18 sectarian violence incidents reported in Pakistan by October 2024, compared to 12 in 2023.⁵ NAP emphasised disbanding sectarian militant groups, yet no group was banned between 2021 and 2023. However, three new entries have been added to NACTA's list of banned organisations in 2024: Zainbiyoun Brigade, Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group, and Majeed Brigade.⁶ Overall progress remains unsatisfactory.

Figure 4: Sectarian Attacks in Pakistan



Source: Extracted from Various Sources

Point#4 of NAP is choking terror financing and proscribed organisations. Under the NAP, Pakistan has created a National Task Force. Owing to this, Pakistan was removed from the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) list in Oct 2022. According to NACTA, the number of proscribed persons on the list under Schedule IV increased from 2,646 in 2021 to 8,374 in 2024.⁷ The State Bank of Pakistan has blocked around 5,089 accounts, freezing over Rs. 157 million in 2024 compared to 5,489 accounts and Rs. 169.55 million in 2021.⁸ This represents good progress.

Point#5 of NAP is curbing the increasing trend of illegal spectrum. According to the Ministry of Narcotics Control, the number of convictions rose from 530 in 2021-22 to 627 in 2022-23. According to a report, the number of trafficking cases investigated increased from 992 in 2021 to 1,936 in 2023, indicating satisfactory progress.⁹

Point#6 of NAP is a follow-up on counterterrorism cases in courts to a conclusion. NAP facilitated the establishment of special trial courts to accelerate the processing of terrorism-related cases. However, the total number of death sentences and executions saw a considerable decline. Between 2019 and 2022, 657 individuals were sentenced to death, yet no executions took place during that period. As of November 2024, 2,273 antiterrorism cases are currently pending in Pakistan.¹⁰ Overall, the progress is unsatisfactory.

Point#7 of the NAP concerns strengthening Counterterrorism Departments (CTDs). The NAP has supported the acquisition of advanced technology and equipment for intelligence gathering and surveillance. CTDs operate under their respective provincial police forces, and the increased funding has strengthened their operational capacity; hence, it is considered good progress.

NAP has achieved notable successes in countering terror financing, regulating madaris, and implementing security reforms. However, challenges persist in the socio-economic and inefficient judicial procedures.

Figure 5: Provincial Police Budget

Overall Budget for Provincial Police under which CTDs Operate		
Province	2021-2022	2024-25
Punjab	Rs. 128.28 billion	Rs. 220 billion
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	Rs. 60.25 billion	Rs. 67 billion
Balochistan	Rs. 44.7 billion	Rs. 74 billion
Sindh	Rs. 106.91 billion	Rs. 135 billion

Source: Extracted from Various Sources

Point#8 of NAP concerns formulating, institutionalisation & implementation of the Counter Violence Extremism (CVE) Policy. The CVE initiatives in Pakistan primarily offer the masses an account against extremist ideologies and revive public confidence in the state, fostering community resilience and raising awareness of religious education. To support this, point#9 of NAP, i.e., regulation & registration of madaris, NAP established a mechanism to involve madaris in fighting extremism. Twenty-six thousand one hundred sixty madaris were registered till 2022 and approximately 30,000 till 2023 under Ittehad-e-Tanzeem-ul-Madaris Pakistan.¹¹ NAP further proposed registering Madaris in the Department of Education. Figure 6 provides the details of the registered madaris across Pakistan. Overall, this is good progress.

Figure 6: Registered Madaris

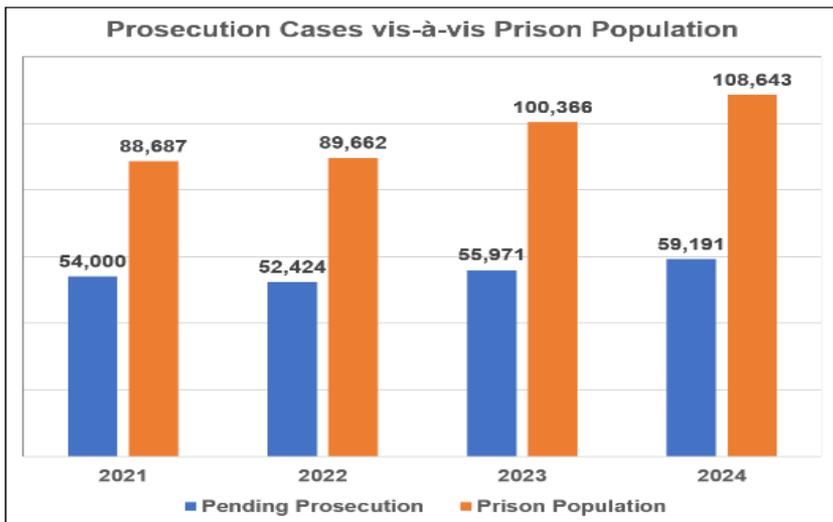
List of Registered Madaris with the Directorate of Religious Education	
Islamabad	227
Azad Jammu & Kashmir	430
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	3782
Gilgit Baltistan	71
Sindh	2415
Punjab	2236
Balochistan	506

Source: Directorate General of Religious Education

Point#10 of the NAP concerns the Reconciliation Process in Balochistan. Some segments of the Baloch population have political and economic grievances; hence, this was included as a clause in the NAP. The Balochistan government announced the 'Peaceful Balochistan National Reconciliation Policy'. Since its execution, over 3,500 militants have surrendered and joined the country's mainstream.¹² To efficiently address Balochistan's apprehensions and curb violence, the government announced a Rs. 600 billion development package for the province in 2021.¹³ However, it remains unsatisfactory progress.

Point #11 of the NAP discusses the merged areas of KP reforms, particularly the National Finance Commission (NFC). It has highlighted the importance of fair resource allocation to these areas, although complete integration into the NFC framework remains a work in progress.¹⁴ NAP has led to significant investments in capacity building for law enforcement agencies in the merged areas, including the establishment of new police stations. Overall, this represents satisfactory progress.

Figure 7: Criminal Justice System



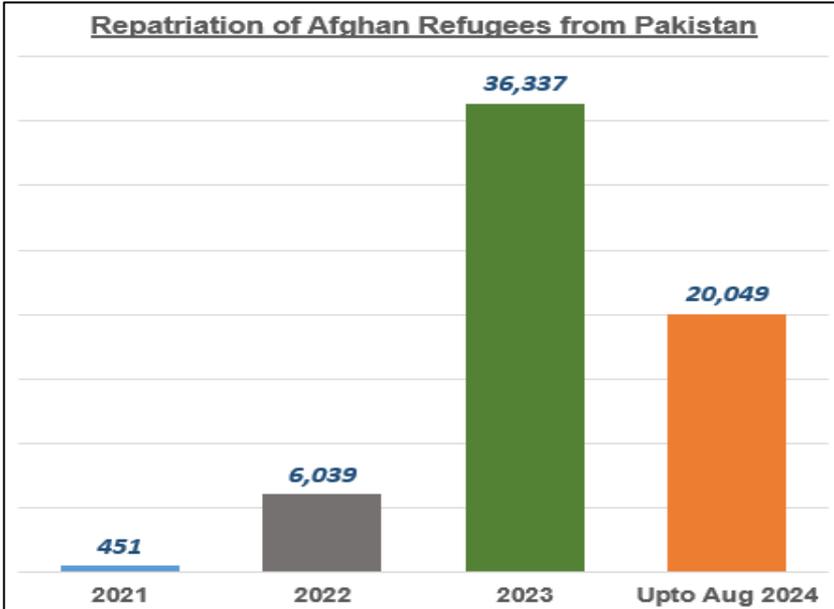
Source: Extracted from Various Sources

Point#12 of the NAP concerns Criminal Justice System (CJS) reforms. Over the years, pendency has risen manifold in the Supreme Court of Pakistan. Pakistan's prisons face overcrowding and a shortage of officials to handle detainees. Meaningful reforms are yet to follow, resulting in unsatisfactory progress.

Point #13 of the NAP calls for strengthening the legal framework to address espionage related to national security and intelligence operations effectively. The 'Official Secrets Act 1923' stays in force in Pakistan, regulating the management of classified information and defining espionage-related offenses.

However, it must be updated to clarify definitions and penalties while protecting national security. Therefore, this represents unsatisfactory progress.

Figure 8: Repatriation of Afghan Refugees



Source: UNHCR

Point #14 of the NAP is the repatriation of Afghan refugees. NAP emphasised the importance of a structured approach, resulting in efforts to ensure the proper registration and documentation of Afghan refugees. Pakistan has maintained collaboration with UNHCR to support the repatriation process and initiated a repatriation programme targeting millions of Afghans, irrespective of their legal status. Overall, this represents satisfactory progress.

The evolving security landscape demands a balanced approach prioritising preventive measures, community resilience, and kinetic operations. Pakistan must bridge the gaps between policy formulation and on-ground implementation to ensure sustainable peace and stability.

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Depoliticisation of Bureaucracy in Pakistan

Faiza Qureshi

Abstract

This INSIGHT discusses that Pakistan's governance structure heavily relies on bureaucracy to maintain impartiality and neutrality. However, persistent political interference has eroded bureaucratic effectiveness, reducing governance standards. This insight examines the historical context, legal challenges, and reform efforts to depoliticise bureaucracy. Through expert discussions, key recommendations include reinforcing legal safeguards, decentralising financial authority, and implementing a merit-based performance evaluation system. The study highlights the need for structural reforms to restore bureaucratic efficiency and accountability in Pakistan.

Keywords: Politicisation of Bureaucracy, Governance, Politics.

With its three fundamental pillars of politics, policy, and administration, the governance structure relies heavily on the bureaucracy to uphold the Weberian Principles of Impartiality and Neutrality. This is crucial for effective governance. However, political interference often disrupts this equilibrium in many developing countries, including Pakistan.¹ Instead of prioritising efficient service delivery, the bureaucratic system frequently succumbs to self-interest, undermining its core purpose.

Over the past 20 years, governance in Pakistan has seen a significant decline in effectiveness, with its ranking dropping from 37.84 to 29.25 percentile. This decline can be attributed to factors like law and order, economic conditions, corruption, lack of meritocracy, and, above all, the deviation from political neutrality. Despite the government's approximately 40 reform commissions and committees, the problem of ineffective governance persists.²

On 18 September 2024, the Institute for Strategic Studies, Research and Analysis (ISSRA) at National Defence University (NDU) organised a focused group discussion with subject matter experts, including former and serving bureaucrats and experts from academia, media, and the legal fraternity to find root causes of bureaucratic inefficacy and propose a pathway towards responsive governance in Pakistan.

The bureaucratic system in Pakistan has a rich historical context. This system was inherited from the British Colonial Administration, which established the Indian Civil Service (ICS) to ensure that administrative leadership remained institutionally disconnected from the masses and continued to serve the interests of the Crown alone. Although Pakistan attempted to indigenise the bureaucratic system after its independence, the spirit of rigidity and class structure persisted. Understanding this historical context is crucial to comprehending the current state of bureaucracy.

Analysis of governance reforms in Pakistan since independence shows that commitment was the hallmark of the bureaucracy during the initial years, despite resource constraints. Experts cited the 1973 constitution's removal of constitutional protection for the bureaucracy, as enshrined in the 1956 and 1962 constitutions, with a special provision of a 'show cause notice' that allowed for the removal and termination of service, thereby creating a gateway to political interference in the bureaucracy. The 1973 reforms removed that provision, leaving the bureaucracy vulnerable to political pressures.³

The key to effective governance in Pakistan lies in depoliticizing the bureaucratic system, where the security of tenure is a fundamental prerequisite for ensuring stability. Reinforcing legal safeguards, implementing a merit-based evaluation system, and decentralizing power and financial authority are key steps in achieving this goal.

The reforms also introduced a notorious 'lateral entry system', opening doors for political recruitment, thereby declining the quality of recruits and general trust in the system.

The literature presents lateral entry as a consolidating agent in politicising Pakistan's bureaucracy.

Although the 1993 Civil Service Ordinance restored legal protection through the Presidential Ordinance, it proved to be very short-lived and lapsed after its term was completed.

Although there is general criticism of government officials being paid low salaries, a 2022 report presented that wage premiums for civil servants might be relatively low. Still, non-monetary benefits are 13% higher than those in the private sector. The government's salary expenditure for FY 2018-2019 was 242 billion rupees, while non-salary expenditure was 226 billion rupees.⁴ This shows that the perception that non-salary perks are the primary motivation for the political patronisation of bureaucracy is incorrect.

Politicisation is also seen in postings, transfers, and promotions. The experts extensively deliberated on this aspect and concluded that the drive to secure desirable postings, transfers, and tenure security lay the basis for the politicisation of bureaucracy. Clause 21 of the Rules of Business 1973 has set the term for regular posting at a station as 3 years. Still, it does not often materialise due to politically motivated pre-term postings. The most infamous case of this politicisation is 'Anita Turab versus Federation of Pakistan,' where the Supreme Court ruled that security of tenure must be ensured, except for compelling reasons, which should be recorded in writing and would be subject to judicial review.⁵

While deliberating on solutions, the experts agreed that the bureaucracy must develop an internal system to ensure the security of tenure. A senior bureaucrat cited a relatively higher degree of political interference at the provincial level compared to the federal level, where political leaders often overstep into the allotments and intra-office matters of civil servants.⁶ Here, decentralisation of power and delinking of the financial authority of politicians and bureaucracy would be fruitful.

A senior bureaucrat asserted that the financial responsibility needs to be shifted to local bodies, ensuring direct accountability through closer proximity between the public and their decision-makers. In this regard, the experts presented a two-pronged strategy:

- Strengthening the office of the Chief Secretary to contain intervention at the very first level and
- Consolidation of the intra-bureaucracy buffer to assist their fraternity.

Furthermore, reports on civil service reforms reflect a disconnect between performance evaluation and promotion systems in Pakistan's bureaucracy. In a survey conducted among bureaucrats, 84% of respondents confirmed that there is no link between efficiency and better postings.⁷ The bureaucracy in Pakistan is said to operate in an ill-conceived Annual Confidential Reports (ACR) system centered on the officer's personal qualities rather than measurable targets. This disproportionate evaluation and reward system has amplified the politicisation of bureaucracy. Therefore, experts advocated for a KPI-based evaluation system that discourages linear career growth and promotes a hierarchical progression in service, ultimately reducing political influence.

In addition to those above, the experts also argued that political interference and victimisation under the garb of accountability have impaired bureaucratic efficacy. The discussion also took stock of the monopolisation of administrative services and emphasised debunking the narrative of monopoly through the resettlement of the apportionment formula of 1993.

In conclusion, the solution to depoliticise bureaucracy is not new but straightforward. It is high time to tackle the issue using a well-structured, multitiered plan that balances the three pillars of governance. Although multiple reform efforts have been made, none have brought the intended success.

Therefore, it is high time to create a comprehensive plan for depoliticising bureaucracy, focusing on aligning principles, strategies, and tools across all levels of governance. A concise summary of key findings is presented below.

Action Matrix	
Issues	Solutions
Constitutional Protection	Reevaluate the constitutional basis for security in service by reintroducing constitutional protection under Article 240 of the Constitution of Pakistan.
Monopoly of PAS	Address the grievances over the 1993 Apportionment Formula between the provincial and federal services and ensure continuous career progression. Moreover, such reforms will contribute to positively debunking the narrative of Pakistan Administrative Services (PAS) monopolisation at the secretariat level.
Performance Evaluation	The performance evaluation system is ambiguous and effectively non-relevant to the promotion system. Therefore, it may be revised to enumerate measurable KPI systems.
Financial Control	Decentralisation of power and delinking the financial authority of politicians and bureaucracy
Security of Tenure	The establishment division must ensure the security of tenure, and senior bureaucracy may buffer political intervention at lower levels.

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Critical Analysis of Five Eyes Alliance

Anees Fatima Sherazi

Abstract

This INSIGHT discusses that the Five Eyes Alliance, a multilateral intelligence-sharing partnership among the United States (US), the United Kingdom (UK), Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, plays a critical role in global security and geopolitical dynamics. Originating from the BRUSA and UKUSA Agreements, the alliance has evolved from wartime cryptographic collaboration to a modern intelligence network with significant influence in cyber warfare, counterterrorism, and geopolitical strategy. Its operations span SIGINT collection, regional intelligence distribution, and collaborative security measures, making it a cornerstone of Western intelligence cooperation. The Five Eyes' role in the US-China competition, the Russia-Ukraine conflict, and technological security, including actions against Huawei and cybersecurity threats, demonstrates its strategic significance.

Keywords: Five Eyes Alliance, Global Security, Geopolitical Dynamics.

This insight examines the Five Eyes Alliance, highlighting its strategic significance, various domains in which it operates, and its key responsibilities. It also analyses the geopolitical role of Five Eyes amidst the ongoing US-China competition. The Five Eyes originated with the signing of the BRUSA Agreement between the US and the UK in May 1943 and evolved into the UKUSA Agreement in 1946.¹

Over the next decade, it expanded as an intelligence alliance between Anglo-Saxon countries through additional agreements, including Canada in 1949 and Australia and New Zealand in 1956. Its primary purpose was to facilitate the exchange of signals intelligence (SIGINT), cryptoanalysis techniques, decryption, translation of information, and analysis of various capabilities, practices, procedures, and equipment.²

It played a critical role during World War II and the Cold War.³ In post-9/11 era, the scope of the alliance includes counterterrorism and geopolitical intelligence.

The US National Security Agency (NSA), the UK's Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ), Canada's Communications Security Establishment (CSE), the Australian Signals Directorate (ASD), and New Zealand's Government Communications Security Bureau (GCSB) are key intelligence agencies involved in Five Eyes.⁴

Map of Five Eyes Alliance States



Source: Reddit

Five Eyes operates through the coordinated efforts of its member states, which monitor each other's populations and safeguard shared geopolitical interests in four ways. First, they gather information through SIGINT, intercept communications, and engage in code cracking. Second, they offer each other specialised technical expertise. Third, each country focuses on specific regions for intelligence gathering.

For instance, Europe and Western Russia are monitored by the UK, Pacific and Southeast Asia by New Zealand, South and East Asia by Australia, the Caribbean, China, Russia, the Middle East, and Africa by the US, and Latin America, the North Atlantic, and the North Pacific Oceans by Canada.⁵ Fourth, they collaborate through shared and integrated intelligence systems, which include access to databases, processing systems, and the ability to decode data across cyber and maritime domains.

This coordination mechanism relies on regular meetings to align strategies and enhance the use of intelligence-based data. It operates through secure communications and collaborative operations. For instance, SIGINT played a crucial role during the Battle of the Atlantic from 1939 to 1945 and was essential in the West's efforts to contain communism. The three-dimensional intelligence approach integrates signals, human intelligence, and military operations, with locations such as Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Cyprus serving as offshore stations for the Five Eyes Alliance.⁶

At present, in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the US and UK shared declassified information publicly in January 2022, before events unfolded, aiming to counteract the so-called Russian propaganda. For instance, they publicly asserted that Russia might carry out a false flag attack under the guise of protecting ethnic groups in Ukraine.⁷ Additionally, the US and NATO allies provided Ukraine with crucial information about the location and routine of Russian Generals. Ukrainian officials confirmed that they targeted twelve Russian Generals. The US also supplied Ukraine with advanced technology, including automated Switchblade drones, which facilitated intelligence sharing about the alleged Russian attack on Hostomel Airport in 2022. The same year, Ukraine successfully sank Russia's heavy assault ship Moskva in the Black Sea using US intelligence.⁸

Moreover, Five Eyes is significant for the US-led West's efforts to contain China. For instance, it criticised China's 2021 regulations that allowed for the disqualification of legislators in Hong Kong. In response, the Chinese Foreign Ministry's spokesperson stated, "China never creates trouble but is not afraid of it. It doesn't matter if there are five or ten eyes".⁹

In 2021, Five Eyes, the European Union (EU), and NATO publicly condemned China for its so-called involvement in the Microsoft Exchange (MSE) hack.

Five Eyes is strategically significant for what some refer to as Cold War 2.0. The US National Security Strategy (NSS) 2022 identified China and Russia as threats to US interests while viewing India as a new partner. This is occurring alongside the formation of alliances like AUKUS, between Australia, the UK, and the US —a military maritime coalition aimed at countering China's influence in the region. The second pillar of AUKUS focuses on advanced technological cooperation, including quantum technology, biotechnology, and artificial intelligence (AI).¹⁰

The Five Eyes alliance's role in shaping global security architecture ensures its relevance in the modern geopolitical landscape. Pooling resources, expertise, and intelligence enhances the ability of member countries to address complex, transnational challenges. Five Eyes is a cornerstone of Western intelligence and security cooperation.

With Five Eyes' help, the Chief Financial Officer of Chinese company Huawei, Meng Wanzhou, was arrested in 2020 by US authorities in Canada over alleged national security violations. Subsequently, four of the Five Eyes nations banned Huawei and its 5G technology. This escalated the US-China rivalry in the Asia-Pacific region to another level.¹¹ In October 2023, Five Eyes leaders jointly and publicly criticised China, warning the country about spying and the theft of intellectual property rights after a meeting with private companies in Silicon Valley.¹² China dismissed these claims.

Furthermore, Canada also decided to ban Chinese tech giants Huawei and ZTE, along with their 5G services, in 2024.¹³ Nonetheless, the US-China rivalry over data, including issues related to subsea cables, is likely to become a significant aspect of geopolitics, where intelligence gathering by Five Eyes could play a crucial role.

In a recent geopolitical spin, the Five Eyes shared information with the Canadian government regarding the killing of Sikh separatist leader Hardeep Singh on Canadian soil by India's intelligence agency, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW).¹⁴ Canada also received similar information from the US and Australia.¹⁵ In October 2024, Canada expelled Indian diplomats, while the US urged India to cooperate with Canada.

During the US-led North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's (NATO) operations in Afghanistan after 9/11, Five Eyes members coordinated with Pakistan to address cross-border terrorism and insurgent activities. Pakistan's cooperation in logistics, intelligence, and counterinsurgency efforts was instrumental. However, Five Eyes members, especially the US, now often tilt towards India in their strategic partnerships, including intelligence sharing. This preference is perceived as a challenge to Pakistan's security interests.

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Madrassah Education in Pakistan

Fatima Saleem

Abstract

This INSIGHT discusses that madrassah education in Pakistan has historically played a vital role in providing religious and academic instruction, particularly for students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. However, post-9/11 scrutiny has intensified debates surrounding their regulation, curriculum standardisation, and financial transparency. Pakistan's madrassahs operate alongside government and private schools, with many institutions unregistered and relying on foreign funding. Government-led reform efforts, including the Pakistan Madrassah Education Board Ordinance (2001) and the National Action Plan (2014), have faced resistance due to concerns over autonomy and politicisation.

Keywords: Madrassah Education, Education System, Dars-e-Nizami.

Islamic seminaries, with their roots tracing back to the early years of Islam, have been revered for imparting knowledge of law, sciences, and philosophy. With their rich historical significance, these institutions have played a vital role in Pakistan's educational landscape, particularly in regions with limited outreach. However, post-9/11, madaris came under intense national and international scrutiny. This analysis delves into the role of these institutions in Pakistan's educational system and the challenges they currently face.

Pakistan has three streams of education: madrassahs, government schools, and private schools. There are 43,613 (14%) madaris teaching the Dars-e-Nizami curriculum out of 313,418 educational institutions nationwide. Amongst these, 78% are run by private entities, while 22% fall under the public sector.

The total enrolment of students between 5 and 25 years in these institutions stands at 4.6 million (8.5% of the total enrolment), of which 2.7 million are male and 1.9 million are female.¹ Most madrassah students hail from rural areas, with more than 60% belonging to families with a monthly household income of less than Rs. 30,000, which is below the national average.² Therefore, madrassah education is vital in imparting free education to impoverished people.

Different sects run these madaris. Every sect has its organisation, i.e., wafaq, tanzeem, or rabita, for curriculum development, examinations, and certification under the supervision of the Directorate General of Religious Education (DGRE). DGRE works under the Ministry of Federal Education & Professional Training (MoFE&PT) to help Madaris register. Ten of the fifteen boards are registered with DGRE. At the same time, the remaining five converge under Ittehad-e-Tanzeemat-Madaris Pakistan (ITMP) to register their affiliated Madaris under the Societies Registration Act 1860. An overview of the registered and unregistered wafaqs in the country is given below:-

Table 1: Madrassah Boards

Registered Wafaqs	Unregistered Wafaqs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ittehad ul Madaris Al Arabia (Deoband) • Ittehad ul Madaris Al Islamia (Ahle Hadith) • Nizamul Madaris (Barelvi) • Wafaqul Madaris Al-Islamia Al-Rizvia (Barelvi) • Majmaul Madaris Taleemul Kitab Wal Hikmat (Ahle Tashee) • Wafaq ul Madaris Wal Jamiaat Al-Deeniya • Majma ul uloom Al-Islamia • Wahdat ul Madaris Al-Islamia • Board of Islamic Education • Kanz ul Madaris 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rabita-al-Madaris Islamia (Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam) • Rabita-al-Madaris Islamia (Ahl-e-Hadith) • Tanzeem-ul-Madaris-Ahle-Sunnat (Barelvi) • Wafaq-ul-Madaris-al-Shia (Ahle Tashee) • Wafaq-ul-Madaris-al-Arabia (Deobandi)

Source: DGRE

DGRE, in coordination with the wafaqs, has been working towards implementing a uniform curriculum and standardising exams. It also engages in dialogue with the government on various issues and addresses policy matters related to madrassah education. Similar to the contemporary schooling system, the madaris are divided into distinct educational levels, as outlined in the table below.

Table 2: Educational Levels of Madaris

Level	Modules	Certification
Ibtidai Education	Recitation and Memorisation of the Holy Quran	-
Mutawasta	Fiqh, Hadith, and Arabic Grammar	Primary
Sanwiah Aama (Matric)	Higher Studies in Islamic Jurisprudence, Theology, and Hadith	Matric
Sanvia Khasa	Higher Studies of Hadith, Tafseer, Arabic Grammar, and Sciences	Intermediate
Shahadat-ul-Aaliah	Further study of Islamic Laws, Fiqh, Philosophy, and Arabic	Bachelors
Shahadatul Aalamia	Research in Fiqh, Theology, and Philosophy of Islam	Masters (Ulema)

Source: Author

Despite their significant role in Pakistan's educational system, madrassahs have struggled to meet modern academic standards. The lack of well-trained teachers and failure to provide skill education have reduced the job prospects of madrassah graduates. This quality gap has resulted in 86% of madrassah graduates being reemployed in madrassahs, mosques, and low-wage occupations, underscoring the urgent need for modernisation in madrassah education.³

Taking cognizance of this, the government has made multiple attempts to streamline and reform madrassah education, synchronizing the curriculum with contemporary socioeconomic needs, registering madaris, and ensuring financial transparency. The most prominent of these attempts were:

- Pakistan Madrassah Education Board Ordinance 2001
- National Action Plan (NAP) 2014
- National Internal Security Policy (NISP) 2018
- Madrassah Reform Agreement 2019

Various sects run these madaris, each with its priorities and curricula, so efforts to standardise the curriculum have always faced resistance.

It is estimated that almost 18,068 (41.4%) of the total institutions are now registered. The debate surrounding the Madrassah Registration Bill 2024 highlights the politicisation of these institutions. The registration of madaris under different laws (DGRE and the Societies Registration Act, 1860) reflects the monopolization of the system by the selected few. It would further weaken the government's ability to regulate these institutions.

Due to the system's monopolisation, reforms in Madrassah education have been resisted and require a strong political will.

The madaris' funding comes from local and foreign donors (mainly from Gulf Countries), including charitable organisations and the states. During 2013-14, it was estimated that 80 different madaris received Rs. 300 million in funding from foreign countries. This is alarming as some of these institutions are under external influence.⁴ However, no consolidated data on the local and foreign annual financing of the madaris in Pakistan is available.

Unfortunately, the government's approach to madrassah reforms has consistently been reactionary, addressing issues only during crises. Additionally, several other challenges have hindered progress, particularly in the unregistered madaris. These challenges are:-

- Lack of Transparency in Financial Dealings
- Trust Deficit Between the State and Religious Figures
- Politicisation of Institutions
- Fear of Losing Autonomy

Given the challenges, the authorities have endeavoured to break the monopoly to ensure inclusive representation of various segments. The DGRE has successfully implemented the National Curriculum of Pakistan in 1162 (2.6%) of the institutions.⁵

Although efforts have been made to integrate madrassah education into the mainstream at different times, much more needs to be done. For meaningful reforms, the government may need to demonstrate political will and provide clear guidelines and incentives, including financial support, to drive their implementation within a supportive policy framework that addresses educational and sociocultural challenges.

Moreover, a holistic and inclusive approach is necessary, where collaboration between religious figures, academics, policymakers, and local communities is promoted, so that the system can be overhauled into a more cohesive, contemporary educational model that can ultimately be integrated into the country's mainstream.

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Silent Casualties: Accountability Gaps in US Drone Warfare

Maham Ayaz

Abstract

This INSIGHT discusses that since 9/11, the United States (US) has extensively used drone strikes to combat terrorism in countries such as Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, Libya, and Afghanistan. Despite claims of precision and minimal collateral damage, these strikes have resulted in significant civilian casualties, raising serious concerns about accountability and legal justification. Between 2004 and 2018, US drone operations in Pakistan alone resulted in approximately 4,026 deaths, including 969 civilians and 207 children. These strikes violate Pakistan's sovereignty and breach international legal frameworks, particularly Article 2(4) and Article 51 of the United Nations (UN) Charter. The lack of transparency and legal recourse for victims exacerbates these violations, as neither Pakistan nor the US recognises the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court or the International Court of Justice on this matter.

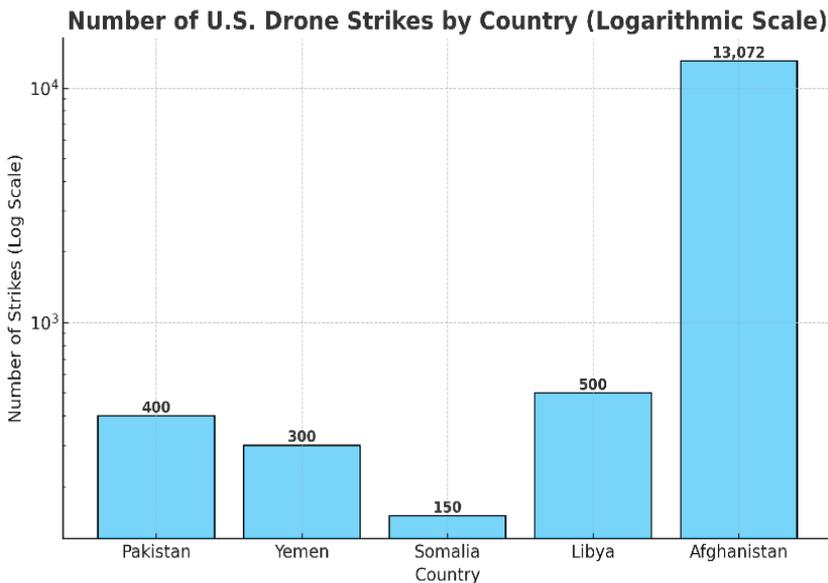
Keywords: Drone Strike, Sovereignty, International Law, Reparations.

Since 9/11, the United States (US) has relied on unmanned drone strikes to counter so-called terrorism in Yemen, Somalia, Pakistan, Libya, and Afghanistan.¹ Initiated under George W. Bush and continued during Barack Obama's presidency,² these strikes were touted as precise and minimally disruptive.³ However, reality is the opposite.

Between 2004 and 2018, there were about 439 US drone strikes in Pakistan, causing approximately 4026 deaths, including 969 civilians and 207 children, according to the Bureau of Investigative Journalism.⁴ These figures expose the US claims of precision and underscore the lack of transparency in the drone programme.⁵

These drone strikes violated Pakistan's sovereignty and breached several international laws. Despite the devastating impact of these strikes on Pakistani civilians and sovereignty, Pakistan has no viable legal forum to seek reparations or challenge these actions.

This insight explores the violations of international law by US drone strikes, the systemic challenges Pakistan faces in seeking legal recourse, and the potential avenues available for victims to pursue justice and reparations.



Source: *The Bureau of Investigative Journalism*

Under Article 2(4) of the UN Charter, states are prohibited from using force against another state's territorial integrity or political independence. The US drone strikes in Pakistan are a clear violation of this principle. However, the US has argued that Pakistan's earlier perceived tacit approval of these operations negates claims of sovereignty violations.⁶ Yet, these claims of tacit approval are not substantiated and remain speculative, further diluting their credibility.⁷

Moreover, the US invokes the doctrine of self-defence against non-state actors to justify these operations. However, this claim fails to meet the stringent criteria of Article 51 of the UN Charter, which requires an armed attack of sufficient scale and urgency.⁸ Furthermore, even if the justification is based on preemptive self-defense, as per the Caroline incident, the threat must be instant, overwhelming, and leave no choice of means, with no moment for deliberation, which was not the case in the present scenario.⁹ Therefore, the justifications of the US are not grounded in law.

Even if the legality of the strikes under *jus ad bellum* was arguable, their execution violates International Humanitarian Law (IHL) principles. Signature and double-tap strikes fail to distinguish between combatants and civilians,¹⁰ as these strikes target individuals whose behaviour is like that of any terrorist.¹¹ The approach has been criticised as it can target any military-aged man and violates the principles of distinction and proportionality under the IHL.¹²

However, addressing these violations is fraught with significant legal challenges. Pakistan and the US have neither consented to the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice nor signed the Rome Statute.¹³ Moreover, the formation of the UN Security Council (UNSC) complicates matters, as the US will likely block any resolution condemning US actions as a permanent member.

This accountability void extends beyond Pakistan. In Yemen, 453 drone strikes between 2002 and 2018 caused approximately 225 civilian casualties. Somalia experienced 261 strikes, causing approximately 143 civilian casualties.¹⁴ In Libya, drone operations escalated during and after NATO's 2011 intervention, causing unintended civilian harm. Afghanistan witnessed thousands of strikes in its territory. At the same time, many were carried out with the government's consent. Civilian casualties from these strikes remain a significant issue.

However, despite the formidable challenges, there are avenues for victims of US drone strikes in Pakistan to pursue justice and reparations. While jurisdiction and political hurdles often block direct legal action against the US, victims can still explore alternative strategies to seek accountability.

One promising option is leveraging domestic courts in Pakistan to compel the government to act on behalf of its citizens. Building on the precedent set by the *Al Noor Khan* case in the Peshawar High Court in 2013, where the court ruled that US drone strikes violated Pakistan's sovereignty and international law, victims can file further constitutional petitions. These efforts can press the Pakistani government to implement reparative measures. Additionally, domestic litigation can prompt the government to engage actively with the US on behalf of its citizens.

‘Victims can leverage national courts and legal systems to bridge these gaps, while affected states may unite to establish a joint forum to address these violations.’

Victims can collaborate with human rights organisations to document and advocate for their cases on the international stage. These organisations have a history of raising awareness and putting pressure on the US to address civilian harm caused by drone operations. For example, in *Ahmed Salem bin Ali Jaber vs United States* in US courts in 2015, Yemeni victims, through advocacy and legal support, brought international attention to a drone strike that killed civilians, including a local imam. Although the case was dismissed in US courts due to the political question doctrine, it demonstrated the potential of international advocacy to highlight such injustices.

Furthermore, victims can seek reparations through diplomatic and nonjudicial mechanisms. There is precedent for the US offering financial compensation in certain cases. For instance, in 2015, the US publicly acknowledged and compensated the families of two hostages—an American and an Italian—who were killed in a drone strike in Pakistan.¹⁵

While the US has not acknowledged civilian harm caused by drone strikes as warranting reparations, historical examples from other contexts reinforce the principle of state accountability. For instance, Libya paid US\$170 million to victims of the 1989 UTA Flight 772 bombing¹⁶ and US\$2.7 billion for the 1988 Lockerbie bombing.¹⁷ Though the circumstances differ, this case illustrates that reparations can serve as a mechanism to address grievances and promote accountability.

The legal and institutional gaps in addressing the repercussions of US drone strikes are undeniable. From Pakistan to Yemen, Somalia, Libya, and Afghanistan, affected nations and their citizens face immense challenges in seeking justice for civilian harm and sovereignty violations. Victims can leverage national courts and legal systems to bridge these gaps, while affected states may unite to establish a joint forum to address these violations. Such collective action is not merely about seeking justice and reparations but about creating a framework for accountability and safeguarding civilian rights. As drone warfare continues to expand, these measures are essential to uphold international law, prevent future violations, and ensure that the voices of the harmed are neither ignored nor forgotten.

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US Withdrawal from Afghanistan and Rise of Terrorism in Pakistan

Maryam Noor

Abstract

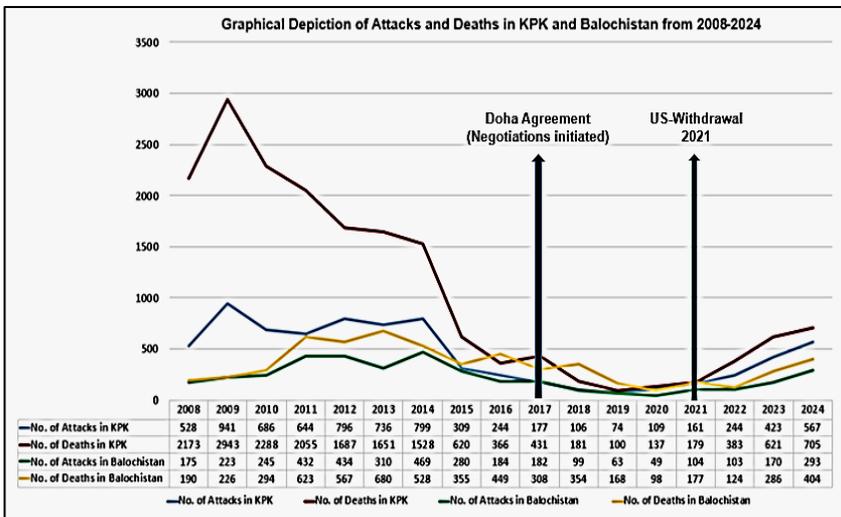
This INSIGHT discusses the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021, which reshaped South Asia's security dynamics, leading to a surge in terrorism in Pakistan, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. The resurgence of Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and other militant groups has been linked to external support, including advanced weaponry and funding. These developments pose a threat to regional stability, with implications for Pakistan's internal security and economic projects, such as CPEC. The study highlights how geopolitical rivalries and internal vulnerabilities are being exploited, necessitating a strategic response to counter emerging security threats.

Keywords: Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan, Islamic State of Khorasan Province, Terrorism.

The US withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021 significantly altered the geopolitical landscape of South and Central Asia. This abrupt shift ended two decades of US military presence, creating a vacuum that has exacerbated regional instability, particularly impacting Pakistan. There has been an alarming resurgence of terrorism since 2021, with the number of violent incidents increasing exponentially in Pakistan's provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Balochistan. Intensified actions of Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Baloch Separatists, and the Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISKP) raise serious concerns about the actors and objectives driving these developments.

The insight argues that the rise of terrorism in Pakistan following the US withdrawal from Afghanistan stems from global powers leveraging terrorist organisations and exploiting internal fault lines to advance their conflicting geopolitical interests.

Post-US withdrawal, Pakistan has witnessed a sharp increase in attacks targeting security forces, law enforcement agencies, and security checkpoints, particularly in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). These attacks escalated after the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) broke a fragile ceasefire agreement with the government in 2022 and vowed to target security forces.¹ The graph below depicts the total number of attacks in Pakistan, particularly in KP and Balochistan, from 2008 to 2024, highlighting a renewed surge in terrorism following the US withdrawal, with a noticeable increase in attacks across the country.



Source: Data taken from Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS)

The rise of terrorism in Pakistan after the US withdrawal is contingent upon specific external as well as internal factors. The Interior Ministry cautioned that terrorist groups posed a significant threat to Chinese development projects such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), as evidenced by the attacks perpetrated against Chinese individuals.²

The data in the table highlights a significant increase in attacks targeting Chinese nationals in Pakistan following the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. Only three incidents were reported from 2014 to 2020, and the frequency of such attacks exponentially increased from 2021 to 2024, indicating a considerable escalation in frequency. These attacks reveal the terrorists' intention to disrupt state-to-state relations by targeting the interests of one country within the territory of another.

Date	Province	Location	Incident Details	Perpetrator
8 Jun 2014	Sindh	Karachi (Jinnah Airport)	Attack by TTP and ETIM targeted the airport; a Chinese cargo worker was killed.	TTP and ETIM
14 May 2017	Balochistan	Quetta	Two Chinese nationals were abducted and killed.	Likely Baloch militants
11 Aug 2018	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	Dera Ismail Khan	Attack on Chinese engineers near a CPEC project; injuries were reported.	TTP
14 Jul 2021	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	Dasu (Kohistan District)	A bus carrying Chinese engineers to the Dasu hydropower project was bombed; 9 Chinese nationals were killed.	TTP
20 Aug 2021	Balochistan	Gwadar	A suicide bomber targeted a convoy carrying Chinese nationals; 2 children were killed, several Chinese injured.	Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA)
26 Apr 2022	Sindh	Karachi	A female suicide bomber attacked a van near the Confucius Institute, killing 3 Chinese teachers.	BLA
12 Jun 2023	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	Swat	An IED blast targeted Chinese engineers working on a highway project; injuries were reported.	TTP
26 May 2024	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	Shangla	A bus carrying Chinese workers to the Dasu dam was bombed; 5 Chinese engineers were killed.	BLA
7 Oct 2024	Sindh	Karachi	A suicide bomber attacked a convoy near Jinnah International Airport, killing 2 Chinese nationals.	BLA

Source: Self-Compiled Data

Additionally, China's economic and strategic investments in Pakistan, mainly through CPEC, have made the country a key node in Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Destabilising Pakistan disrupts these plans, hindering China's regional and global ambitions. Allegations of US support for anti-China movements globally provide a backdrop for speculation regarding its role in Pakistan.³

According to the report of Foreign Policy magazine, the TTP and other groups are receiving external assistance, as indicated by their use of US-made weapons and advanced communication systems, which have notably strengthened their tactical capabilities and resources.⁴ Despite the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021, the Office of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) reports that the US remains the country's largest donor, having allocated or made available US\$20.71 billion in assistance since then.⁵ Additionally, reports indicate that the US and other international donors send approximately US\$80 million in cash to Afghanistan every two weeks to support the so-called "humanitarian efforts".⁶

Historical patterns of proxy warfare, targeted attacks on Chinese interests, and evidence of external funding collectively suggest a nuanced yet troubling scenario.

Pakistani intelligence agencies have also reported that militant groups such as the TTP and Baloch Separatists receive external support, including funding and advanced weaponry. Recent seizures of US military equipment further highlight the involvement of external forces in the region's terrorist activities.⁷ Pakistani security forces have recovered various US-made weapons during operations targeting terrorist groups. These include M-32 grenade launchers, night vision devices, M-4 carbines, M-16/A4 rifles, and AK-47s. Incidents such as these, coupled with the use of advanced military equipment in attacks on locations like Gwadar Port, Miran Shah, and Mianwali Airbase, underscore the prevalence of foreign arms in regional terrorist activities.⁸

Although the US has consistently denied allegations of supporting terrorism in Pakistan, emphasising its focus on global counterterrorism efforts, the opaque nature of proxy warfare makes direct attribution challenging without whistleblowers or leaked documents.

Furthermore, there is substantial evidence suggesting India's involvement in supporting terrorist activities in Pakistan's Balochistan province through financial aid, weapons, and training. In December 2023, Baloch National Army (BNA) commander Sarfraz Ahmed Bungulzai, after surrendering to Pakistani authorities, revealed at a press conference in Quetta that India has been financing separatist forces and orchestrating conspiracies in the region.⁹

However, these external factors exploit the internal challenges of the state, including religious extremism, political instability, economic hardships, and weak governance, which are significant contributors to terrorism. The character of TTP has changed from a religious to an ethnonationalist organisation targeting security forces while seeking support through nationalism after the establishment of the Taliban government in Afghanistan.

Political instability in the country has further diverted the government's attention from counterterrorism, allowing extremist groups to regroup and operate with greater freedom.¹⁰ Similarly, the economic crisis of 2022, marked by soaring inflation and unemployment, created conditions in which impoverished individuals became more vulnerable to recruitment by militant organizations.¹¹ Additionally, the Center for Research and Security Studies (CRSS) reported that the youth in Pakistan were hit hard by massive unemployment, further increasing their susceptibility to extremist recruitment.¹² Weak governance, exemplified by the delayed implementation of the National Action Plan (NAP) and the inability to secure the Pak-Afghan border, facilitated militant infiltration and escalated attacks across the country. Together, these factors demonstrate how external forces leverage internal vulnerabilities to exacerbate terrorism in Pakistan.

The US withdrawal from Afghanistan has undeniably reshaped South Asia's security dynamics, with Pakistan bearing the brunt of heightened instability. While various factors contribute to the resurgence of terrorism, the possibility of external actors leveraging these groups for strategic purposes cannot be dismissed. Destabilising Pakistan aligns with broader efforts to counter China's influence in the region, raising complex questions about the intersection of local and global politics. Historical patterns of proxy warfare, targeted attacks on Chinese interests, and evidence of external funding collectively suggest a nuanced yet troubling scenario. A balanced, evidence-based approach is essential to address these challenges, ensuring Pakistan's stability and regional security in the face of evolving threats.

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About Insight and Author

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Space – An Emerging Battlefield

Adrak Hussain

Abstract

Space is rapidly evolving from a domain of peaceful scientific exploration to a contested battlefield driven by military and strategic rivalries. Major powers, including the US, China, Russia, and India, are expanding their space capabilities, focusing on militarisation and potential weaponisation. The development of space-based intelligence, surveillance, and advanced weapons systems raises concerns about strategic stability and the risk of conflict. This study examines geopolitical competition in space, the implications of emerging technologies, and the urgent need for international cooperation to prevent the militarisation of outer space.

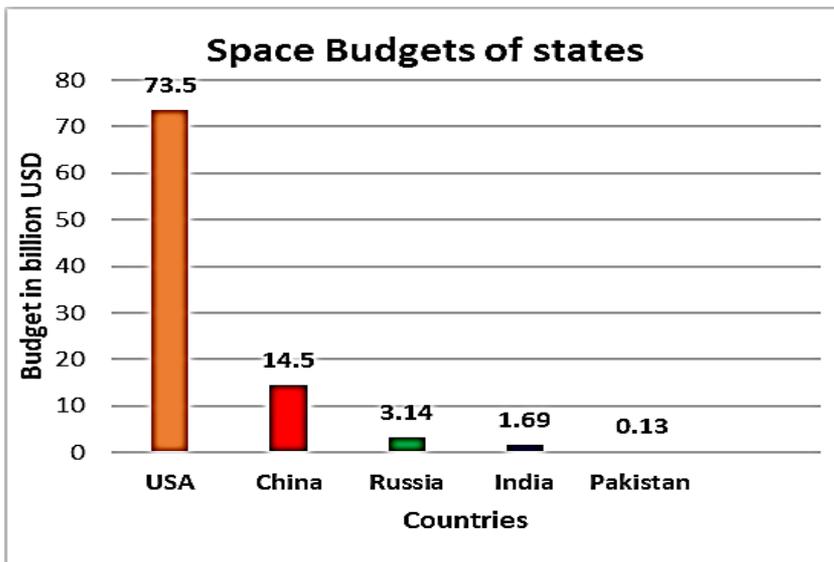
Keywords: Space, Contested Battlefield, Space Capabilities, Strategic Stability.

Space is transitioning from a domain of peaceful collaboration for scientific exploration to a contested arena for military and strategic rivalry. Rapid technological advancements and increasing dependence on space-based assets have enhanced the significance of space for defence strategies. Driven by strategic and geopolitical ambitions, the US, China, Russia, and India are actively increasing their space capabilities in terms of militarisation and potential weaponisation, threatening strategic stability among major powers. This insight aims to analyse the current status of space vis-à-vis its future as an emerging battlefield, highlighting the need to maintain stability and peace.

Space is of paramount importance to economic development and military strategy. Space technologies serve dual purposes, including navigation systems and Earth observation satellites in Low Earth Orbit (LEO) equipped with high-resolution cameras.

The integration of these systems into defence strategies strengthens operational capabilities, enabling intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), positioning, navigation, and timing (PNT), command and control (C₂), as well as early warning, communication, and precise targeting.¹ Space-based systems are, hence, central to modern warfare. Considering the strategic importance of space, the US, China, Russia, India, and others are allocating substantial budgets, as shown in the graph.²

Graph



Source: Data Extracted from Statista

As the power struggle intensifies, major powers are increasing their space capabilities for both defensive and offensive purposes. According to the Space Foundation, the global military space budget was US\$57 billion, i.e., 56% of government space spending in 2023.³ The comparison of space military capabilities in the table shows that the US is the dominant force in space, followed by Russia, China, and India. The new space competition began in the early 21st century. It intensified recently with the establishment of space forces and the development of new technologies, including Anti-Satellite (ASAT) weapons.

Table: Space Capabilities of States Under Study

Ser	Country/ Org	Total Satellites	Military Satellites	Navigation Systems	ASAT Capabilities Tested Date
1.	US	8530	247	GPS	Yes, 1985, 2008
2.	China	628	157	Beidou	Yes, 2007
3.	Russia	291	110	GLONASS	Yes, 2021
4.	India	53	0	IRNSS or NavIC	Yes, 2009
5.	Pakistan	6	0	Nil	No

Source: Self-Compiled with Data Extracted from Statista,^{4&5} EUSPA⁶, SUPARCO,⁷ and ISRO⁸

The US Strategy aims to maintain space superiority to secure vital national interests by supporting combined operations and ensuring space stability. Establishing the US Space Force in 2019 and the highest space defence budget of US\$29.4 billion in 2024 underscores the US commitment to its strategy.⁹ To counter ASAT threats, the US aims to develop electronic warfare systems and cyberspace capabilities for offensive and defensive operations in space while expanding satellite constellations in LEO to ensure operational redundancy.¹⁰

China considers space a critical domain for strategic competition in the security field, emphasising the protection of space assets and ensuring information dominance.¹¹ China aims to achieve strategic parity with the US in space, with the PLA Aerospace Force overseeing space operations and spending an estimated US\$10 billion annually.¹² It also plans to establish a “Belt and Road Space Information Corridor” to advance its global interests.¹³

Once a leading space power, Russia seeks to maintain its status in parity with the US and China.¹⁴ Russia operates its Global Navigation Satellite System (GLONASS) for dual purposes, in addition to its military satellites. The 2021 ASAT test ensured its position as a space power aimed at counterbalancing the US and NATO in the strategic domain.¹⁵

Despite economic challenges, Russia has strategic ambitions, as indicated by its veto of the 2024 UN resolution sponsored by the US on arms control in space.¹⁶

As an emerging space power, the Indian Space Programme emphasises dual-use technologies such as Geosynchronous Satellites (GSAT), Cartosat Earth Observation Satellites, and the Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS), seeking strategic autonomy. It also leverages its partnership with the US to obtain geospatial intelligence and enhance its capabilities. The 2019 ASAT missile test aimed to demonstrate its capabilities as a space power.¹⁷

Pakistan's first-ever space policy, made in 2023, aims to address the economic and security challenges by deploying Earth-Observing Satellites at LEO in cooperation with friendly states, particularly China. However, Pakistan's space programme is nascent compared to the US, Russia, China, India, etc.

The study of the space strategies of leading contenders, technological advancements, and space discourse suggests that the trend is shifting from space militarisation to space weaponisation. There are four major concerns regarding the future of space. The first is the potential violation of the Outer Space Treaty of 1967, banning the deployment of weapons in LEO and celestial bodies. The major powers have vetoed the UN resolution on "The Prevention of Arms Race in Outer Space" since the 1980s.¹⁸ They could not agree on the latest resolution in April 2024 regarding the ban on weaponising outer space. It reflects the distrust among major powers and their intentions to weaponise space in the future.¹⁹

The study of the space strategies of leading contenders, technological advancements, and space discourse indicates that the trend is shifting from space militarization to space weaponisation.

Second, the development of sophisticated ASAT missiles by the US, Russia, China, and India indicates a space arms race. Although it does not violate the Outer Space Treaty, it will likely lead to its weaponisation and increase the risk of unintended escalation.

It would thereby lower the threshold for conflict between rivals.²⁰ Developing and deploying co-orbital ASAT weapons, space-to-earth missiles, cyber threats, and electronic interference could further complicate the situation, thus undermining strategic stability.²¹

Third, the deployment of nuclear weapons in space is another primary concern. There are two opposing arguments: the first is to establish a successful first-strike capability, and the second advocates enhancing deterrence by establishing a second-strike capability. However, the race for the deployment of nuclear weapons will undermine deterrence stability among states by influencing strategic calculations and lowering the threshold for a nuclear war, with serious consequences for global security.

The fourth concern regarding the future of space is the emergence of private space companies, which could be decisive in shaping conflict dynamics by providing states with ISR and communication services in times of war. SpaceX offers its Starlink satellite constellation to support Ukraine in its conflict with Russia. According to a CNN report, Ukraine is using Starlink services for drone attacks against Russia.²² The role of Starlink, owned by Elon Musk, suggests that individuals or non-state actors may influence future wars on Earth and in space with access to space capabilities.

To conclude, the strategic rivalries among major powers and technological advancements have undeniably shifted space from a peaceful domain to an emerging frontier for war. Taking note of the developments regarding space, Pakistan should consider it a national security issue and develop its capabilities to avoid a situation where it is taken by surprise. The international community needs to intensify its efforts to prevent strategic instability, strengthen the Outer Space Treaty, and establish effective conflict resolution mechanisms. It is essential to ensure this vital domain remains a realm of peaceful cooperation and exploration.

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About Insight and Author

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BOOK REVIEW

Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides' Trap?

Review by: Dr. M. A. Gul

ISBN: 978-0544935273

Author: Graham Allison

In “Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides’ Trap?” Graham Allison explores one of our time’s most pressing geopolitical dilemmas: the growing rivalry between the United States (US) and China and the increasing likelihood of conflict. Using a blend of history, international relations theory, and contemporary analysis, Allison argues that the two global powers are heading toward the “Thucydides Trap.”

Named after the ancient Greek historian Thucydides, this concept refers to the dangerous dynamic that arises when a rising power threatens to displace an established one, often leading to war. Allison’s work is not merely a historical examination but a clarion call for awareness and proactive diplomacy, as he warns that avoiding such a catastrophic outcome will require extraordinary efforts from both Washington and Beijing.

Allison’s book is deeply rooted in historical analysis, particularly his reliance on Thucydides’ famous observation regarding the Peloponnesian War: “It was the rise of Athens and the fear that this instilled in Sparta that made war inevitable.” This thesis serves as the framework for Allison’s exploration of the current US-China rivalry. He examines 16 historical cases from the past 500 years in which a rising power challenged an existing dominant power. Alarmingly, in 12 of these cases, war was the outcome.

Allison demonstrates that fear, misunderstanding, and escalation can lead even well-meaning states into destructive conflict, suggesting that the US and China may be heading down a similarly dangerous path.

One of the book's strengths is how it emphasises that the Thucydides Trap is not deterministic. Allison doesn't claim that war between the US and China is inevitable, but he argues that the historical record shows a clear pattern of heightened risk. What makes Allison's analysis especially compelling is his nuanced approach to history. He acknowledges that not every situation is identical, but the core dynamic—fear and insecurity driving nations toward conflict—is universal.

Allison skillfully draws parallels between past power transitions and the current geopolitical situation between the US and China. The most striking contemporary analogy is the Cold War between the US and the Soviet Union. Like the US and the Soviet Union, America and China are locked in an ideological, economic, and military rivalry with global implications. However, Allison argues that the US-China rivalry is more dangerous in some respects because of the level of economic interdependence between the two nations. Despite its dangers, the Cold War occurred in a bifurcated world where the financial systems of the US and the Soviet Union were relatively isolated. In contrast, the US and China are deeply intertwined economically, creating a buffer against and a potential accelerant for conflict.

Allison's assessment of China's rise is particularly insightful. He traces the country's rapid economic ascent from the late 20th century and notes that China's leadership has long sought to restore what they view as their rightful place at the top of the global hierarchy.

Allison emphasises that Chinese President Xi Jinping has overseen a dramatic consolidation of power, positioning himself as the most powerful Chinese leader since Mao Zedong. Under Xi, China has expanded its global influence through the Belt and Road Initiative, military modernisation, and assertive territorial claims in the South China Sea. For Allison, these moves signal China's increasing willingness to challenge the existing US-led global order.

The book also highlights the fear and anxiety felt by the US in response to China's rise. From Washington's perspective, China's growing economic and military power poses a threat to American preeminence. This is exacerbated by the ideological differences between the two countries, with the US championing liberal democracy and China pursuing authoritarianism. Allison argues that this mix of strategic, economic, and ideological competition creates a volatile situation, with the potential for even minor misunderstandings to spiral into more significant conflicts.

While the historical record of rising powers is bleak, Allison offers hope by examining the cases where conflict was avoided. He points to instances such as the peaceful transition of power between the United Kingdom and the US in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries, which provides a model for how the US and China could navigate their current rivalry without resorting to war.

Allison suggests several lessons that can be drawn from these peaceful transitions. First, leadership on both sides must recognise the risks and commit to managing them. Diplomatic channels must remain open at all costs, and both countries must be willing to make difficult compromises to prevent escalating tensions. Recognising mutual vulnerability and potentially catastrophic consequences should drive both powers to seek creative solutions to their differences.

Second, Allison advocates for the importance of strategic patience. The US and China need to avoid zero-sum thinking and understand that a period of rivalry does not have to end in conflict. The two powers can build trust and cooperation while maintaining their competitive posture by focusing on areas of mutual interest, such as trade, climate change, and regional security.

Despite its many strengths, 'Destined for War' is not without its criticisms. Some readers may find Allison's historical analogies overly deterministic, even as he cautions that history is not fate. The Thucydides Trap, while a powerful lens through which to view US-China relations, may not fully account for the complexities of the modern international system, including the role of nuclear deterrence, economic globalisation, and multilateral institutions.

Some argue that these factors could significantly reduce the likelihood of a full-scale war between the two superpowers.

Additionally, while Allison does well in describing the potential pathways to peace, his solutions often feel vague and aspirational. The recommendations for how the US and China can avoid conflict rely heavily on political will and leadership, which can be challenging to predict or ensure. Given the increasingly nationalistic rhetoric from both Beijing and Washington, the prospects for mutual understanding and compromise seem dim.

Destined for War is a thought-provoking and timely analysis of the US-China relationship and the dangers of the Thucydides Trap. Graham Allison provides a sobering reminder that history is filled with examples of rising powers clashing with established ones, often with catastrophic consequences. However, he also offers a glimmer of hope, arguing that war is not inevitable if both sides recognise the risks and commit to finding peaceful solutions. For policymakers, scholars, and citizens concerned about the future of global order, this book serves as both a warning and a guide to navigating one of the most consequential relationships of the 21st Century.

About Insight and Author

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