



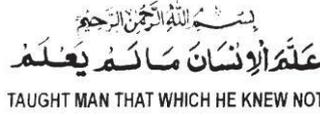
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INSTITUTE FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES, RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS  
NATIONAL DEFENCE UNIVERSITY, ISLAMABAD



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*Umme Laila*

## Editorial Note

The second issue of volume 3, 2024, of *Eg Quarterly*, a distinctive compilation of ten insights written during the second quarter of 2024, is now in your hands. These insights delve into Pakistan's economic, political, and security challenges, emphasising the need for strategic alignment, domestic institutions reform, and economic restructuring for sustained growth. This issue also evaluates the geopolitical and economic implications of IMEC, a strategic initiative responding to China's Belt and Road Initiative, aiming to connect the Arabian Gulf with Europe and India.

Besides this, Pakistan's online gaming industry's economic potential is promising and poised for exceptional growth. Buoyed by a youthful demographic and rapid technological advancements, this sector draws significant governmental and international interest. The challenges of pension reforms in Pakistan's public sector are also discussed, emphasising the unsustainable nature of unfunded annuities and the underperformance of existing funded schemes. A proposal is made to transition to a 401(k)-like model, managed by AML-2 license companies under SECP oversight, to address the projected increase in pension expenditures. The issue also touches on the desecration of Islamic heritage in non-Muslim nations, focusing on the Babri Mosque incident as a significant example reflecting the complex relationship between religion, politics, and the quest for power. It underscores the urgent need to protect minority cultural sites to ensure communal harmony and respect for diverse heritages. The issue also discusses India's disinformation campaigns to undermine Pakistan's reputation, focusing on social media and fake news outlets and Pakistan's resilience in countering these narratives. It underscores the need for legislative measures and public awareness initiatives to combat misinformation effectively.

This issue also delves into Iran's complex geopolitical dynamics and their implications for Pakistan. It discusses the interplay between Iran,

the United States, and Israel, with Pakistan playing a crucial role as a regional power. Pakistan's strategic position, historical ties with Iran, and potential for regional cooperation are highlighted, underscoring the need for timely foreign policy decisions, which are not just about short-term alignments but about navigating towards long-term stability and influence. Besides this, a perspective on Pakistan's TV news media, highlighting its overwhelming focus on politics and the urgent need for diverse and credible reporting by adopting global best practices, such as the BBC's public service model, to improve media quality and diversify content, is also presented in this issue. It advocates for regulatory changes which could balance news coverage, enhance public trust, and align media output with national interests.

This issue further explores the potential of religious tourism in Pakistan, showcasing its rich cultural and religious heritage, including diverse sites for Sikhs, Buddhists, Hindus, and Sufis, with the prospects to attract global visitors if challenges like infrastructure and visa policies are addressed. In addition to this, the need for Pakistan to realign its geoeconomics by diversifying trade partners and enhancing regional connectivity has also been discussed. This strategic approach is not just a suggestion but a necessity that can help Pakistan address its geopolitical challenges and enhance its global influence.

Finally, the issue discusses Pakistan—Afghan relations in the context of the evolving 'New World Order', a term used to describe the geopolitical and economic changes that have occurred since the end of the Cold War. Pakistan's pivotal role in this new order, particularly in terms of its strategic location and potential for economic development, is underscored. A trade-focused approach is proposed to improve security and stability between Pakistan and Afghanistan. This approach leverages economic cooperation to address underlying issues of terrorism and instability. The two countries can create a more stable and secure environment by promoting trade and economic development. This can help address the root causes of terrorism and instability, such as poverty and lack of economic opportunities. The proposed trade-centric strategy shifts from security-driven policies, aiming for enduring peace through economic development and cooperation.

With its unique insights into national security matters, we hope that this publication will assist you, our esteemed readers, in keeping up to date with the current strategic landscape. Your understanding of these complex dynamics is crucial, and we welcome your contributions in the form of short writing pieces. These can include policy analyses, case studies, or thought pieces on current geopolitical and economic issues in Pakistan and its neighbouring regions. We encourage you to provide well-researched and balanced perspectives that can contribute to a deeper understanding of the region. By specifying the type of contributions we seek, such as policy analyses, case studies, or thought pieces, we can ensure that the content aligns with the publication's goals and provides the most value to you.



# India Middle East Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) and Pakistan

*Ayesha Sohail*

## Abstract

*This INSIGHT delves into the geopolitical and economic implications of IMEC, a strategic initiative to link the Arabian Gulf with Europe and India in response to China's Belt and Road Initiative. It explores the potential challenges and opportunities for Pakistan, underlining the country's pivotal geostrategic position and the significance of regional cooperation. The analysis underscores IMEC's aspiration to bolster trade and economic ties and acknowledges the substantial hurdles of regional conflicts and logistical complexities, providing a comprehensive view of the situation.*

**Keywords:** Economic Corridor, Northern Corridor, Eastern Corridor, Geopolitical Implications, Cross-Border Cooperation, Energy Supply, Logistic Efficiency.

**I**ndia Middle East Economic Corridor (IMEC) was made public by the United States of America (US), Italy, Germany, France, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), India, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) to mark a noteworthy breakthrough in worldwide economic and political dynamics on September 10, 2023, in New Delhi.<sup>1</sup>

IMEC, designed as an economic corridor, would consist of two distinct corridors – the northern corridor linking the Arabian Gulf to Europe and the eastern corridor connecting the Arabian Gulf with India. Beyond its extensive geopolitical implications, its primary aim is to fortify the economic landscape by integrating the continents of Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. On October 27th, 2023, US President Joe Biden underscored the commitment to constructing a corridor that would

streamline trade by reducing trade costs and fostering investment opportunities among participating countries. He also stressed that IMEC would enhance transportation infrastructure, cross-border cooperation, energy supply, and logistic efficiency.<sup>2</sup>

Washington is pushing for IMEC as a counterbalance to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which is already a massive infrastructure corridor with considerable economic influence across Europe, Africa and Asia and has given China substantial control along the suggested route of IMEC. The Greek port of Piraeus is IMEC's main entry point into Europe. Since 2016, Cosco, the Chinese shipping company, is major shareholder in the port. It is unclear whether the US and India have disregarded that Cosco has all the authority to control the port terminals or they will try to buy stakes in Piraeus and shift the balance of power away from the Chinese company.<sup>3</sup>



The significant financial links between China and the Arab Gulf limit IMEC's potential to challenge China's influence in this part of the world. Trade between Beijing and Riyadh was more than US\$106 billion in 2022, nearly double the US-Saudi trade volume. China has also acquired 20 per cent of its stakes in the biggest port in KSA, the Red Sea Gateway Terminal.<sup>4</sup>

The IMEC seems to be an initiative by the US-EU alliance to incentivise

India by offering an alternative trade route. Furthermore, IMEC aims to unite states in the Middle East and transform the region into an economic hub. However, this is a daunting task as the states are often in crisis or conflict with each other, particularly Israel. The recent attacks on October 7th and the ongoing Israeli aggression on Palestine present the most immediate challenge to the new project, and the participants were unable to hold a required meeting promptly. Therefore, this conflict is the major obstacle to IMEC, as it is expected to lead to significant delays in the project.

One key challenge is harmonising taxation regulations and customs procedures to ensure all-in-one operations. Also, IMEC's multifaceted nature, including land and sea sectors, creates logistic complexities that require careful planning and coordination.

*IMEC does not diminish Pakistan's strategic position in the region but underscores the urgent need for Pakistan's collaboration in the initiative.*

Additionally, the trade routes that are already established, such as the Suez Canal, will continue to compete with IMEC, necessitating strategic decision-making. Moreover, building a railway network through enormous deserts in the Middle East region in the UAE and KSA will considerably increase project costs. The governments participating in IMEC still need to work.

Developing a plan of action would include setting detailed timelines and objectives and creating principles related to financing and procedures since neither the US nor the European countries have provided inclusive details regarding the initiative's finances.

IMEC has limited direct impact on Pakistan, and it is essential to highlight that BRI and CPEC remain massive projects that further underscore Pakistan's geopolitical importance. Pakistan's strategic geographic location, at the crossroads of South Asia, the Middle East, and Central Asia, is a critical factor in the region's dynamics. Its proximity to China, Iran, India, and Afghanistan makes it a crucial player in trade and connectivity. IMEC does not diminish Pakistan's strategic position in the region but underscores the urgent need for Pakistan's collaboration in the initiative, further solidifying its role as a regional

power. This reiteration of Pakistan's strategic importance reinforces the audience's understanding of its significance in the geopolitical landscape.

Since Iran and Turkey have been left out of the IMEC, Pakistan should focus on the Regional Cooperation for Development (RCD) as a more viable land route and strengthen its ties with Iran and Turkey. The exclusion of these vital regional players from IMEC could have significant geopolitical implications, potentially shifting the balance of power in the region and affecting the dynamics of existing alliances and partnerships.

While IMEC may offer economic benefits and enhanced connectivity, it is crucial to recognise that Pakistan's involvement and collaboration are integral to the corridor's success. By participating in IMEC, Pakistan can gain significant economic advantages and strengthen its regional connectivity. This participation ensures Pakistan's continued strategic importance and presents a unique opportunity to enhance its economic standing and regional influence. Bypassing Pakistan, the corridor would involve extended and costlier routes, making it economically unviable. This underscores the potential for Pakistan to thrive in the new economic landscape.

The multifaceted geopolitical realities in South Asia, including the India-Pakistan rivalry, further highlight Pakistan's importance. Regional stability and cooperation are desirable and essential preconditions for IMEC's success. It would not be possible to fully realise IMEC's potential without resolving longstanding conflicts and addressing security concerns. This underscores the urgent need for all stakeholders to prioritise regional cooperation and peace, emphasising each entity's critical role in this process.

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# Economic Potential of Online Gaming Industry in Pakistan

*Marium Akhtar*

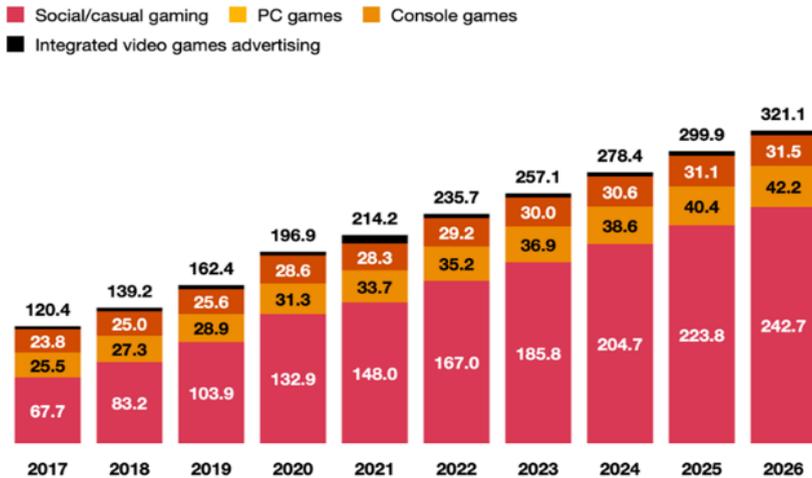
## Abstract

*This INSIGHT discusses that Pakistan's online gaming industry is poised for exceptional growth, buoyed by a youthful demographic and rapid technological advancements. Despite infrastructural and regulatory hurdles, the sector has unique economic potential, drawing significant governmental and international interest. This analysis delves into the distinct opportunities and challenges within Pakistan's burgeoning gaming market, underlining the strategic manoeuvres that are necessary and crucial to maximise its economic impact.*

**Keywords:** Online Gaming Industry, Contribution to Global Economy, Digital Gaming Market, Explotions, GameKey, Virtual Reality, Augmented Reality.

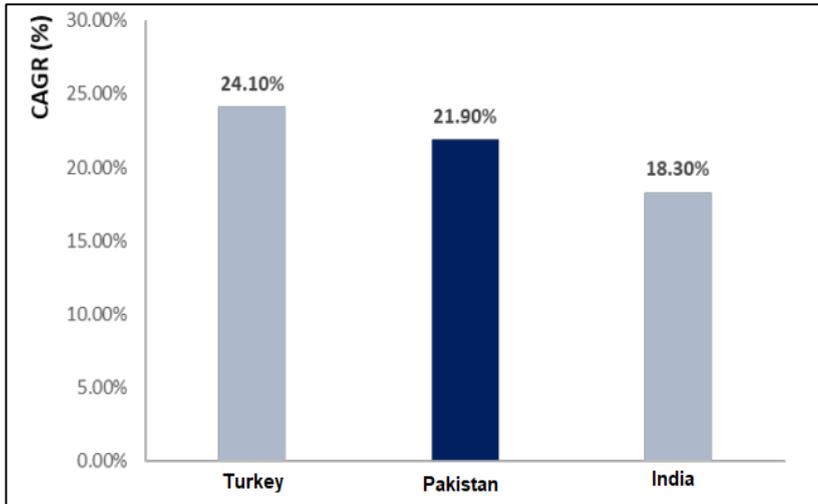
Online gaming has become a profitable business, contributing millions to global economies. During COVID-19, it became the most prominent mobile app category, generating 50% of global app revenue.<sup>1</sup> Technological advancements like Cloud, Virtual Reality (VR), and Augmented Reality (AR) are expanding the gaming market in Asia and emerging economies, creating new opportunities for game developers. The global gaming industry is expected to reach US\$ 321 billion by 2026, driven by innovation, user demand, and the digital landscape (Figure 1).

*The gaming industry in Pakistan can enhance its brand and international image, attract international gamers, and contribute to tourism and hospitality. By 2026, the industry is expected to reach an estimated annual revenue of US\$227.40 million.*

**Figure 1:** Total Global Games Revenue by Segment (US\$ bn)

**Source:** PwC's Global Entertainment & Media Outlook 2022-2026

Asia-Pacific region is expected to remain the world's most significant digital gaming market, as 45% of world online gaming players have an annual growth rate of 3.4 %, making it a target for gaming companies.<sup>2</sup> In global comparison, the highest revenue so far has been recorded by China, amounting to US\$ 42bn in 2023.<sup>3</sup> China and the US have dominated the market in 2021; however, according to recent surveys, future growth could come from less wealthy countries with growing populations.<sup>4</sup> Reports predict that the games market will expand fastest in Turkey, with an average annual growth of 24.1% between 2021 and 2026. It will be followed by Pakistan, an upcoming market, with an expansion of 21.9%, and India at 18.3% (**Figure 2**).<sup>5</sup> & <sup>6</sup>

**Figure 2:** Fastest Growing Video Games Market, CAGR 2021-2026

Pakistan's gaming industry is set to capitalise on its young population, with 64% under 30 and 62% playing video games. Currently, 26.9 million Pakistanis play online games, with an average gamer spending 6 hours per week. The market was projected to reach US\$ 200 m by 2023. However, the combined revenue of the Animation Gaming and Graphics Sector grew from US\$ 108 million in FY 20-21 to US\$ 300 million in FY 22-23, demonstrating a promising growth of 180%.<sup>7</sup> The gaming industry alone is expected to attain an annual growth rate of 9.77% by 2027.<sup>8</sup> It is estimated that by 2026, the number of gamers will rise to 50.9 million.<sup>9</sup>

Pakistan's gaming industry experienced significant growth in 2022, thanks to the establishment of Google's first Gaming Growth Lab and the support of the Pakistan Software Export Board (PSEB) and National Information & Communication Technology & Research and Development (ICT R&D) Fund initiatives. As of 2023, Pakistan has 257 game development companies and 300 gaming studios. The country boasts a talented pool of 8500 game developers and players who have won awards like the Develop Industry Excellence Award in 2014 and the Dota 2 Asian Championship in 2015.<sup>10</sup> Pakistani games like *Lost Twins 2*

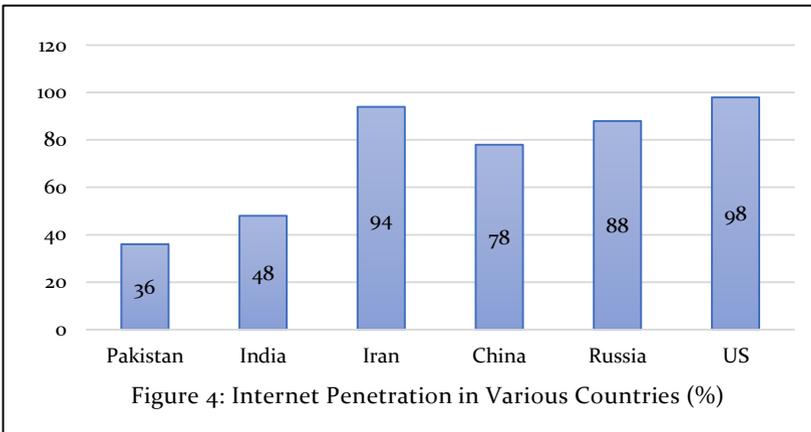
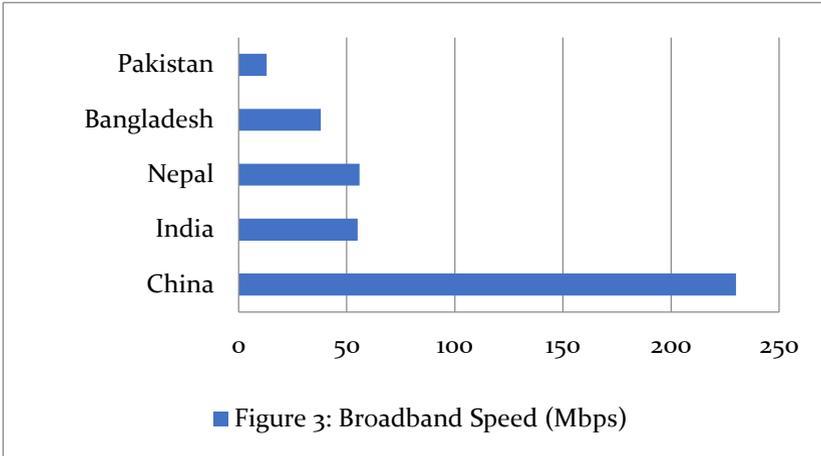
and Explotens have won international awards.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, 'Gamer Pakistan,' a Pakistan-based Esports company, became the first entity listed on the US stock exchange in October 2023.<sup>12</sup>

The game development industry, despite its significant profitability, faces challenges such as (1) academic, (2) infrastructural, (3) regulatory, and (4) social obstacles that hinder its full utilisation. In the academic domain, challenges include outdated curricula, lack of academia-industry linkages, and teaching competencies.<sup>13</sup> Pakistan's higher education system must improve its learning process around Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) to prepare its workforce for IT-related jobs. Regular updates of curricula at universities and the incorporation of industry experts in academia can help students produce high-quality products and compete globally.

Inadequate infrastructure, such as unreliable connectivity, frequent power outages, slow internet speeds, and the rural-urban digital divide, hinders productivity and deters foreign investors. In broadband speed and internet penetration, Pakistan stands at 13 Mbps and 36%, respectively, the lowest in the region, as shown in Figures 3<sup>14</sup> and 4.<sup>15</sup>

Investment in infrastructure to enhance rural internet access, build new cables, and expand networks while subsidising telecom companies to make it more affordable will yield better results for the gaming industry while reducing the digital divide across the country.

IT services and freelancers' income was tax-exempted in the regulatory domain, with 80% remitted to Pakistan as foreign exchange. However, this exemption was withdrawn in July 2022, obligating freelancers and IT service exporters to pay taxes.<sup>16</sup> Limited funding access is a significant challenge Pakistani game developers and companies face, necessitating financial measures like tax redemption and incentives to encourage growth and development.<sup>17</sup> & <sup>18</sup>



Pakistan's Personal Data Protection Bill 2023 is being debated due to potentially stringent data localisation requirements and increasing cybercrime.<sup>19</sup> The bill is awaiting approval from the National Assembly. However, local stakeholders, international organisations, and tech giants like Asia Internet Coalition (AIC), Privacy International, Google, Facebook, and Amazon say the proposed bill will burden businesses and inhibit foreign companies from working in Pakistan.

To guarantee stakeholder acceptance, lawmakers should reevaluate approval and make any required changes transparently, as it will affect the nation's IT ecosystem.<sup>20</sup>

The absence of international payment gateways has been a pressing hurdle in the way of Pakistan's IT industry boost. However, the recent arrival of PayPal's payment gateway via a third-party intermediary will provide a streamlined approach towards efficient remittance solutions, which is a big step in uplifting the IT industry.<sup>21</sup>

Pakistan's growing population demands fiscal resources, necessitating public-private partnerships for procurement and financing.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, International partnerships, with their potential for creativity, exposure, and business ventures, are critical to the local gaming and animation industry's growth strategy. Recently, Ufone 4G has partnered with PUBG Mobile through GameKey for collaborative gaming activities, showcasing the exciting possibilities of these initiatives.<sup>23</sup>

Certain stigmas are attached to game development as a career, as the gaming industry is not mainstream. Pakistan's family values and culture prefer conventional career paths over high-risk and high-economic returns.<sup>24</sup> Increasing awareness about positive aspects of gaming, such as economic contribution, skill development, and exposure, can help parents realise the potential of gaming as a profitable and progressive career path.

The gaming community should be fostered through competitions, game jams, hackathons, boot camps, and conferences, involving all stakeholders and encouraging physical and mental health. Countries with substantial gaming industries, like the US and China, have taken a few steps to cope with the psychological and physical risks posed by online gaming. These include gaming restrictions for minors, anti-addiction mechanisms regulated by the government, education and awareness campaigns, and online safety initiatives for parents.<sup>25</sup> Pakistan can also move in a similar direction as the industry grows to cope with the associated mental and physical risks.

The gaming industry in Pakistan can enhance its brand and international image, attract international gamers, and contribute to tourism and hospitality. The industry is expected to reach an estimated annual revenue of US\$ 227.40 million by 2026.<sup>26</sup> Hence, with a large, young population, skilled developers, and government support, it could export services abroad and significantly contribute to the country's economy and the global gaming industry.

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## About Insight and Author

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# Challenges of Pension Reforms in Pakistan's Public Sector

*Muhammad Ashraf*

## Abstract

*This INSIGHT examines the pressing issues facing Pakistan's public sector pension system, emphasising the unsustainable nature of unfunded annuities and the underperformance of existing funded schemes. To address the projected increase in pension expenditures, it proposes transitioning to a 401(k)- like model managed by AML-2 license companies under SECP oversight. If implemented, these reforms could lead to a more sustainable and secure pension system, ensuring financial stability and adequate retirement benefits and ultimately improving the welfare of future retirees.*

**Keywords:** Pension System, Unfunded Annuities, Funded Pension Schemes, Financial Sustainability, Voluntary Pension System.

Pakistan's public sector pension system relies heavily on state-sourced unfunded annuities, which are unsustainable in the long term. Additionally, existing funded pension schemes, such as the Employees' Old-Age Benefits Institution (EOBI) and the Voluntary Pension System (VPS) in the private sector, have struggled to provide adequate post-retirement income due to a lack of effective policy frameworks and management structures. Despite attempts to align with international best practices, EOBI and VPS have yet to meet expectations, raising concerns about their ability to support public sector pensions.

*The looming pension crisis in Pakistan underscores projections indicating a substantial increase in pension expenditure by 2030, surpassing available state resources.*

Notwithstanding the above, the government plans to shift public sector pensions onto the VPS framework, like 401k in the USA, with AML-2 license companies operating as fund managers and the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) acting as the regulator.

### **Sustainability Concerns**

The looming pension crisis in Pakistan underscores projections indicating a substantial increase in pension expenditure by 2030, surpassing available state resources. The impending strain on public finances necessitates immediate action to address the pension system's sustainability. The challenge facing policymakers is two-fold: mitigating the risk of a pension blowout caused by escalating expenditure on existing and future pensioners and creating fiscal space to accommodate the growing burden of state contributions for new entrants into the system. However, the proposed transition of public sector pensions to the VPS framework, while a step in the right direction, may exacerbate the existing challenges without comprehensive reforms. This is a critical time for our pension system, and your role in this process is crucial.

The SECP rules have been adequate to the extent that none of the 22 VPS Funds in Pakistan have filed for bankruptcy. However, their revenues have been marginal and far below those of the world's pension funds, including the Indian National Pension System (NPS). The low annualised profits of VPS may only lead to sustainable pensions for the public sector if they are restructured through significant reforms that conform to contemporary best practices.

### **The Dilemma**

The challenge, therefore, is threefold: How to avert an imminent pension blowout by taking measures to curtail the rise in pension expenditures due to the existing pensioners and present employees retiring soon, i.e., in the next 15 - 20 years, creating the fiscal space necessary to cater growing additional expenditure on account of state contributions to annuity for future enrollments which are expected to be 15-20% of basic salaries and the investments by the pension funds generating revenues that start meeting pension expenditure partially in the mid-term

perspective of 10-20 years and take pension expenditure off budget in a timeframe of 25-30 years.

### **The Planning Parameters**

**Policy Framework** – The future-funded pension system based on contributions from the state and employees must be aligned with contemporary trends and best practices, which are certainly not our VPS and EOBI.

Pension Funds must be designed for long-term sustainability, high profitability, and provision of adequate benefits for pensioners. In doing so, large-scale investments of pension funds play a leading role in a country's economic growth. This can be seen in 76% ownership of the US Stock Market by the pension funds. Pension funds generate high profits. Usually, it is 3-4 times the interest rates. The annualised revenue growth in the case of Indian NPS during the past decade was 63%. Such high returns are essential for pension funds to be sustainable. Pension funds can only perform with an autonomous and effective regulatory framework for development and oversight. Likewise, an autonomous Investment Board is pivotal in generating high profits. The Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority in India and the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board (CPPIB) are the models worth considering instead of pursuing VPS, which needs more statutory status, autonomy, and authority. These proposed reforms are comprehensive and designed to ensure our pension system's long-term sustainability and profitability.

The challenge of averting the imminent collapse of our public sector pensions while accommodating the additional cost of state contributions for new entrants can only be managed by creating desperately needed fiscal space over the next 15-20 years.

### **The Regulatory and Management Framework**

Pakistan's Central Pension Funds Regulatory and Development Authority (CPFRA) could be pivotal in ensuring pension funds' stability, growth, and protection. Here are some essential functions and roles it could undertake.

**Regulatory Oversight** - The CPFRA regulates pension funds and related activities and ensures compliance with laws, regulations, and standards. This includes setting guidelines for fund management, investment practices, disclosure requirements, and risk management.

**Development of Pension Sector** - It could facilitate the development of the pension sector by promoting initiatives that enhance pension coverage, increase public awareness about pension benefits, and encourage employers to establish pension schemes.

**Investment Guidelines** - CPFRA could establish prudent investment guidelines for pension funds to safeguard pensioners' interests while ensuring optimal returns. These guidelines aim to diversify investments, manage risks effectively, and promote transparency in investment practices.

**Consumer Protection** - It would ensure consumer protection by monitoring pension funds' operations, addressing complaints, and taking appropriate actions against misconduct or malpractices within the pension industry.

**Capacity Building:** CPFRA could conduct training programmes and workshops for pension fund managers, trustees, and other stakeholders to enhance their knowledge and skills in pension fund management, governance, and regulatory compliance.

**Research and Analysis:** The authority could conduct research and analysis on pension-related issues, market trends, and international best practices to inform policymaking and enhance the effectiveness of pension regulations and programmes.

**Promotion of Innovation** - CPFRA could encourage innovation in pension products and services, such as introducing new retirement savings options, annuity products, or technology-driven solutions to improve pension delivery and accessibility.

**Coordination and Collaboration** - It would collaborate with other regulatory bodies, government agencies, industry associations, and international organisations to harmonise regulations, share best

practices, and foster cooperation in the development of the pension sector.

**Monitoring and Evaluation**—CPFRA would monitor pension funds' performance, assess their compliance with regulatory requirements, and evaluate the effectiveness of pension policies and programmes in achieving their objectives.

Overall, the CPFRA would play a crucial role in ensuring the sustainability and effectiveness of pension funds in Pakistan, thereby contributing to the financial security and well-being of retirees and beneficiaries.

### **A Two-tier Pension Fund for the Public Sector**

Adopting a two-tier funded pension system for the public sector in Pakistan, supported by a comprehensive regulatory framework and an independent investment board, will enhance retirement security for employees and ensure the sustainability of pension schemes.

**Tier 1 - Basic Pension Scheme** - The first tier should include a basic pension scheme, providing a minimum guaranteed pension to all public sector employees upon retirement. Mandatory contributions from both employees and the government will fund this scheme. Contributions will be invested in low-risk, fixed-income instruments (annuity) to ensure the security of pension funds. Tier 1 funds are to be managed by the state with such incentives as tax exemptions.

**Tier 2 - Voluntary Pension Fund** - The second tier will comprise a voluntary pension fund, allowing employees from the public and informal sectors to contribute additional funds towards their retirement savings. This tier will offer flexibility and opportunities for higher returns through diversified investment options, including equities, bonds, and other asset classes. Employees will be free to choose their level of contributions and investment strategies based on their risk tolerance and financial goals. Tier 2 will be supplementary funds managed by AML 2-level funds management companies.

**Investment Board** - An independent investment board may be established to manage the assets of the voluntary pension fund. The board will consist of financial experts and professionals with asset management and investment analysis expertise. Its responsibilities will include asset allocation, portfolio diversification, and selection of investment managers to maximise returns while mitigating risks.

## Conclusion

Pakistan's public sector pension system is on the verge of collapse. To avoid such a catastrophic outcome, we need to take a multidimensional approach and implement measures to control the growth of our pension expenditure over the next 10-15 years. In parallel, we must implement an effective contributory-funded pension system that aligns with contemporary best practices for new entrants and current employees with more than ten years of remaining service. We must also establish an effective oversight and investment framework that yields higher profits so that pension funds are partially operational within 10-12 years and take the pension expenditure off budget in 25-30 years. The objectives must be long-term sustainability, creating a solid pivot for economic growth while providing adequate benefits for the community of retirees.

## About Insight and Author

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# Deliberate Acts of Destruction and Desecration of Islamic Cultural and Religious Heritage in Non-Muslim Countries

*Sheherazade Amin*

## Abstract

*This INSIGHT explores the intentional desecration of Islamic heritage in non-Muslim nations, focusing on the Babri Mosque incident as a significant example. It highlights the complex relationship between religion, politics and the quest for power. It underscores the urgent need to protect minority cultural sites to ensure communal harmony and respect for diverse heritages.*

**Keywords:** Desecration of Cultural and Religious Heritage, Babri Mosque, Quest for Power.

**N**o religion is inherently violent.<sup>1</sup> However, religious ideology is a powerful force. States have been built on the backbone of religions; the highest positions of power have been attained in the name of religion. Thus, it comes as no shock when religion inspires horrific acts of viciousness within its followers. It may not have been intentional, but the disconnect between intention and act has existed since the beginning.

Preserving cultural and religious heritage in countries where that ideology is not in the majority has always been contentious. Babri Mosque, which had been a part of the city of Ayodhya since Emperor Babur, the first Mughal Emperor, seemed to face the fate that every heritage or history had to face when it did not represent the majority. Despite standing tall since 1528, the mosque faced incredible acts of violence when, in 1992, an organised mob of at least 75,000 Hindus

stormed it. They used everything at hand, hammers, rods, and shovels, to tear its beautiful architecture to the ground. It must be noted that though Indian authorities were on site, they silently watched. This act of violence was not contained to the mosque itself; several cities witnessed intense Hindu-Muslim riots.<sup>2</sup>

This savagery was not random but a culmination of decades, if not centuries-old, conflict. The mosque was initially constructed in 1528, and there seemed to be no reported instances of discord between 1528 and 1853. The first recorded occurrence of variance was in 1853, ironically the year the British started implementing their “*divide and rule*” policy in full force. A single Hindu sect claimed that a temple was destroyed during Emperor Babur’s reign to make way for the construction of the Babri mosque.<sup>3</sup> Directed by the Allahabad High Court in 2003, an archaeological survey was conducted to determine whether a Hindu temple existed on the site. A team headed by an Indo-Japanese company conducted a surface survey using a ground-penetration radar to answer this question.<sup>4</sup> Their conclusion was a controversial one that seemed to be heavily influenced by the demographics of the then 1 billion population, 85 per cent of which was Hindu and only 12 per cent Muslim. They recorded that their survey concluded that there might be remains of what could be construed as a 16th-century Hindu Temple. This report drafted by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) remains contested. Several key stakeholders, such as the Sunni Waqf Board, a party to the Ayodhya title dispute case, have labelled it “vague and self-contradictory.”<sup>5</sup> Ms. Varma, a professor of archaeology at Jawaharlal Nehru University, in an interview at the time, detailed why little to no evidence had been found to support the claim made. Instead, she states, remnants of “older mosques” have been found beneath Babri Mosque. She further details how this report never mentions the finding of any temple or its remains, and the three key features it identifies are those standards to the design of a mosque, not a temple.

Despite a highly controversial report, in 2010, a bench of the Allahabad High Court ruled that both communities should share the site. The judgment read that “two-thirds of the 2.77-acre (1.12-hectare) site belongs to Hindu Groups – Nirmohi Akhara sect and Ramlila Virajman – and

the rest to the Muslim group (Sunni Central Wakf Board, UP).”<sup>6</sup> This solution seemed to be plucked out of the history books as this was precisely what the British did in 1859, which led to the closed site, and several civil suits were filed between 1950 and 1961.<sup>7</sup>

Understanding the legal history behind this conflict is pertinent because it illustrates that it could have quickly been resolved by properly implementing judicial procedures. However, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) saw an opportunity after Hindu far-right groups formed a committee in 1984 to spearhead the construction of a temple. In 1990, BJP leader Lal Krishna Advani led a nationwide campaign to build a temple in the place of the mosque. Though Lal Krishna Advani was arrested, this was the beginning of a deep seethed divide between both communities that exist today.

It must be noted that both these communities seemed to live relatively peacefully pre-colonisation, and even post-1947, the gulf of the divide did not seem so vast.<sup>8</sup> However, it appeared, as is in most cases, that power, not religion, was a driver in the deliberate acts of destruction and desecration of Islamic cultural and religious heritage in India. The BJP capitalised on the simmering tensions between both communities left behind by the British in their attempt to establish control in the sub-continent and campaigned heavily for the building of the temple as a symbol of Hindu heritage. The sentiment was so strong that although Indian authorities were present on site, they did not bat an eye during the entire affair. Though several prominent, high-ranking leaders were arrested in 1992, in subsequent years, they were acquitted as the power of the BJP was on the rise. In 2020, Lal Krishna Advani was acquitted of all charges due to lack of evidence.<sup>9</sup> He was a former mentor to then Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

There is a huge difference between people-centric and state-centric acts of violence, especially against vulnerable minority groups in society. People-centric violence can be curbed and treated with good governance, policymaking, public campaigns, etc. State-centric violence is when the apple is rotten from within, and unless there is a massive overhaul of change, it is proven to be destructive. The Babri Mosque incident is just a case study of an epidemic that has already consumed most of the

Republic of India that still, despite various such incidents, claims to be secular. Instead, it is yet another state suffering from the emergence of the far right. Inflaming communities against one another has been a time-old tradition, especially in post-colonial states. The maintenance of power structures seems to hinge on such tactics, whether it is the Babri Mosque or the Gujrat Massacre. In 2020, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid the foundation stone of the Ram Temple, he signalled that for him, such state-centric violence was a necessity and that he inadvertently endorsed it (in the name of Hindutva) as it helped maintain his position of power.<sup>10</sup>

*In 2020, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid the foundation stone of the Ram Temple, he signalled that for him, such state-centric violence was a necessity and that he inadvertently endorsed it (in the name of Hindutva) as it helped maintain his position of power.*

Thus, one should condemn all deliberate acts of destruction and cultural and religious heritage desecration. One should especially note and try to correct instances where the state endorses such acts because the people of a state can be appealed to and taught. However, correcting a state and its ideology and mechanisms is nearly impossible.

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## About Insight and Author

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# Indian Disinformation Campaign Against Pakistan

*Maryam Noor*

## Abstract

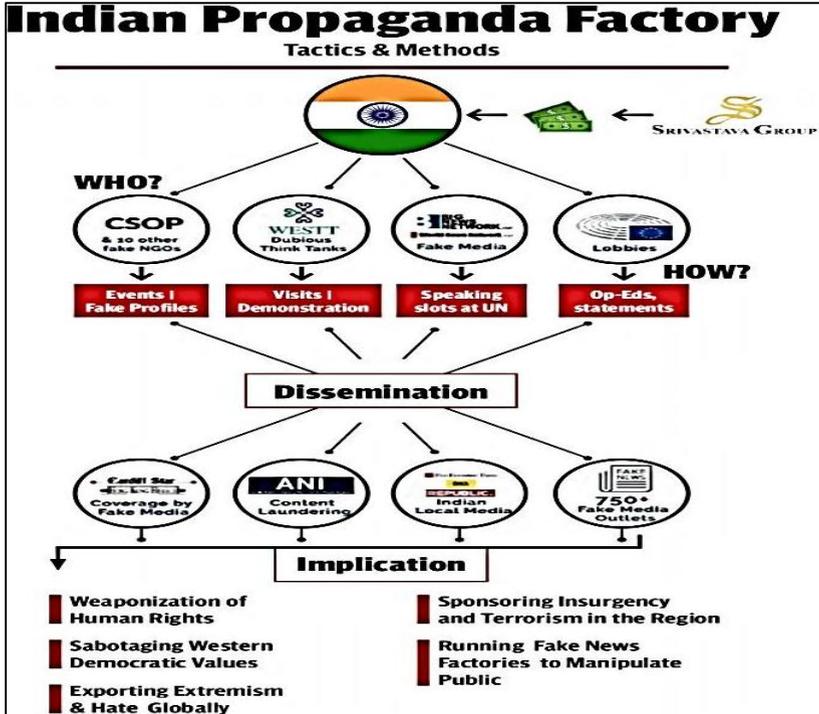
*This INSIGHT explores India's alleged use of disinformation campaigns to undermine Pakistan's reputation, focusing on social media and fake news outlets. Despite India's efforts, Pakistan has shown resilience in countering these narratives. The analysis underscores the need for legislative measures and public awareness initiatives to combat misinformation effectively.*

**Keywords:** Digital Media, Disinformation, Misinformation, Propaganda, Narrative Building.

In today's age of digital media, disinformation and propaganda have become effective instruments for achieving ideological, military, and political goals. When it comes to Pakistan's contemporary scenario of geopolitical tensions with India, there have been deliberate and targeted disinformation campaigns and propaganda. This insight is an attempt to highlight India's propaganda and disinformation campaigns against Pakistan through covert support from external entities to defame the country in the international community and explore options for Pakistan to counter such narratives effectively.

India's disinformation campaign, mainly through social media, poses a serious threat to Pakistan's political and social stability. However, despite these challenges, Pakistan has shown remarkable resilience in countering these narratives effectively. The intended propagation of false information has two purposes: first, it incites instability within Pakistan; second, it undermines Pakistan's reputation internationally, hurting its diplomatic and economic interests. Nevertheless, Pakistan's

steadfastness in the face of such propaganda is a testament to its strength and determination.



(The Express Tribune Magazine, December 26, 2021)

India has persistently attempted to tarnish Pakistan's image across the world through disinformation and propaganda and consistently accusing Pakistan of allegedly supporting terrorism. India has been actively spreading false narratives to undermine Pakistan and the reputation of its armed forces by

*India has been actively spreading false narratives to undermine Pakistan and the reputation of its armed forces by facilitating various separatist groups in Baluchistan.*

facilitating various separatist groups in Baluchistan.<sup>1</sup> Reportedly, India backs Tehreek-e-Taliban-Pakistan (TTP), a terrorist group antagonistic to Pakistan.<sup>2</sup> This is evident from India's providing a digital platform to

abscinding TTP leader Ehsan Ullah Ehsan to propagate the anti-Pakistan narrative.<sup>3</sup>

Another instance of India maligning Pakistan on the international stage is "Srivastava Group", which has its headquarters in New Delhi. It runs a website of fake news outlets, including "EP Today", a magazine claiming to be published by the European Parliament, Brussels. It promotes Indian interests and discredits Pakistan. Similarly, in May 2020, the advent of the "EU Chronicle" brought forth a slew of fake media outlets, prominent among them were "Times of Geneva" and "4 News Agency".<sup>4</sup> The discernible lack of journalistic integrity, coupled with an apparent absence of transparency within the EU Chronicle's operations, suggests its function as a propaganda apparatus serving Indian objectives, primarily focused on disseminating misinformation against Pakistan.<sup>5</sup>

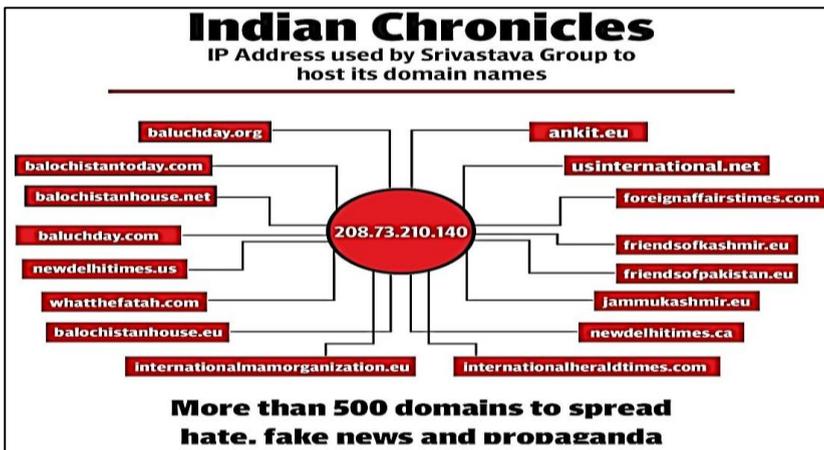
In 2020, the EU DisinfoLab uncovered extensive evidence in their "Indian Chronicles" report, revealing the operation of over 750 counterfeit media outlets across 116 countries for 15 years. These outlets utilising dubious networks, such as **Big News Network** and the **World News Network**, were instrumental in propagating an anti-Pakistan narrative. The investigation traced the origins of these outlets' protocol addresses to New Delhi. Notable domains associated with this operation, including [baluchistantoday.com](http://baluchistantoday.com), [baluchday.com](http://baluchday.com), [JammuKashmir.eu](http://JammuKashmir.eu), [friendsofKashmir.eu](http://friendsofKashmir.eu), and [foreignaffairs.times.com](http://foreignaffairs.times.com), were identified as originating from the Indian IP address 208.73.210.140.<sup>6</sup> This IP address has been utilised to disseminate hate speech, propagate false information, and advance propaganda objectives.

India continues to use misinformation through social media, TV networks, and Intergovernmental Organizations (INGOs) as an instrument for political manipulation. During the Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan rallies in Lahore in April 2021, controversial Twitter trends such as #CivilWarinPak and similar hashtags acquired considerable popularity. They remained significant regional trends for an extended period. Subsequent analysis revealed that 61% of all tweets containing these hashtags originated from Indian sources, underscoring the planning that went into these disinformation campaigns.

One of the major avenues for Indians to conspire against Pakistan is Bollywood.<sup>7</sup> These productions are tailored to damage Pakistan's reputation abroad and tarnish its image in international organisations, particularly the UN.<sup>8</sup>

Pakistan faces significant obstacles in effectively countering false information and managing its public image. The government has provided detailed information about India's deceptive political strategies to the international community. However, the UN Security Council and its members have yet to take any substantial action to address this issue.<sup>9</sup> India's strong alliances with powerful countries and its strategic importance in the region also contribute to the lack of action against it.<sup>10</sup>

On January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2021, Senator Rahman Malik moved a bill in a senate committee meeting asking the government to engage Interpol against Indian Chronicles. The Senate Committee passed the resolution, but there has yet to be a follow-up regarding this bill.<sup>11</sup> However, there are some initiatives at the private level, such as the AFP fact-checking and the Soch initiative.<sup>12</sup> The government recently proposed a draft to the national assembly to adopt the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) Amendment Bill 2023 to counter disinformation and misinformation.<sup>13</sup>



(The Express Tribune Magazine, December 26, 2021)

On the other hand, there is also a need for public awareness about disinformation campaigns. The population is vulnerable to disinformation campaigns on social media platforms. Countering disinformation is quite a challenge, but this challenge can be managed by strengthening the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA)-2016 and creating a comprehensive National Information Operations Policy with public guidelines from the National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA), Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA), and Ministry of Information Technology.

To address disinformation campaigns on social media platforms, the government should develop Media Information Literacy (MIL) programmes that educate the public on the positive use of the internet and how to respond to disinformation. Initiatives at the government level are needed to designate those entities as “foreign agents” that are working on anti-state or anti-government agendas centred toward Pakistan. Think tanks, media, and universities must be guided to conduct international conferences, seminars, and webinars to raise awareness on an international level about the nefarious designs of India against Pakistan, especially targeting audiences of renowned global scholars and the Pakistani diaspora.

In conclusion, we as a nation must be educated enough to differentiate between truth and unjustified propaganda perpetuated through online spaces, especially when it comes to Pakistan's security and political dynamics.

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# Iran's Geopolitical Landscape: Implications for Pakistan

*Dr. Muhammad Shabbir*

## Abstract

*This INSIGHT explores Iran's complex geopolitical dynamics and their implications for Pakistan. It discusses the interplay between Iran, the United States, and Israel, highlighting Pakistan's strategic position and the potential for regional cooperation. The analysis underscores the importance of Pakistan's foreign policy decisions in navigating short-term alignments versus long-term stability.*

**Keywords:** Geopolitical Chessboard, Alliances, Rivalries, Strategic Interests, Instruments of Coercion, Sanctions, Diplomatic Isolation.

The geopolitical chessboard on which Iran stands may be characterised as a volatile tapestry of alliances, rivalries, and strategic interests. Its nuclear aspirations and support for regional groups in Middle Eastern countries have been the centre of debate lately. The United States of America (US) and Israel have used all instruments of coercion like sanctions, assassinations, and diplomatic isolation against Iran, but it stands resilient. Alongside those, they have allegedly made efforts for years to destabilise Iran and reshape its political trajectory.<sup>1</sup> Pakistan, as the immediate neighbour, will have direct implications for any instability in Iran. Therefore, as tensions escalate and geopolitical manoeuvres unfold, Pakistan must delve into the intricate dynamics, understanding the motivations behind these efforts and their potential implications.

Shared civilisational experience, faith system, geographic proximity, common aspirations, and ultimate interests are the factors that help define the contours of the relationship between Iran and Pakistan. From

the start, both neighbours cooperated in the economic domain, with both countries reciprocally granting each other the most-favoured nation status and military cooperation, particularly in addressing internal security challenges such as the issues in Baluchistan on both sides.<sup>2</sup> However, the establishment of an ideologically driven Shia state as a result of the transformation brought about by the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, which was committed to the propagation of its revolutionary ethos, disrupted the status quo and introduced complexities into Pakistan's engagement with Iran.<sup>3</sup> This abrupt shift coincided with a deterioration in Tehran's relations with Riyadh, further influencing the dynamics of Pak-Iran relations. Concurrently, the deepening ties between Islamabad and Riyadh reshaped the regional balance of power, adding another layer of complexity to the evolving relationship between Pakistan and Iran.<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, the trajectory of US-Iran relations has been marred by discord since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, marked by seminal events such as the hostage crisis, the Iran-Iraq war, and Iran's nuclear programme. Conversely, Israel's perception of Iran as a regional adversary stems from the latter's backing of militant factions like Hezbollah and its purported pursuit of nuclear capabilities, exacerbating bilateral animosity between the two nations.

*Amidst the complex dynamics of Iran's geopolitical landscape, Pakistan's dilemma is short-term US alignment versus long-term stability.*

Thus, the US and Israel's motivations to contain Iran often translate into policies aimed at destabilising the Iranian regime. It is also noteworthy that the US and Israel have a long history of meddling in sovereign countries' domestic affairs.<sup>5</sup> They believe regime change could curb Iran's influence and limit its ability to support these groups. Notably, the desired outcome might not be a pro-Western government but rather a regime that is not actively antagonistic towards the US and its allies.

The Iranian regime is under pressure due to several international and domestic factors. These include the US withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and subsequent economic sanctions on Iran, the assassination of Iranian scientists and generals in

recent years, and the aftermath of mass protests triggered by the death of Mahsa Amini, mounting economic difficulties at the domestic level, and simmering tensions that resulted in the low voter turnout in the 2024 parliamentary elections. Moreover, the resurgence of conflict in Gaza has galvanised armed groups across the region, prompting displays of solidarity with Palestine.<sup>6</sup> Armed factions in Yemen, Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq have escalated tensions through various means, including attacks on Israeli and US interests.<sup>7</sup> Iran's backing of armed groups in the region underscores its role as a vanguard of resistance against Israel in the Middle East and the broader Islamic world.

For Iran, two primary scenarios emerge - a period of extreme political instability or a regime change, which would bring in a non-anti-US/West regime.

The first scenario has graver consequences for Pakistan and the region. Imagine a situation where an already volatile region with Pakistan and Afghanistan grappling with their issues is further destabilised by an imploding Iran. This would create a security vacuum with far-reaching repercussions. With Iran out of the picture, the US would have more room to manoeuvre regionally, potentially undermining Chinese interests. Notably, India, with its existing ties to Iran (tacitly supported by the US), could emerge as a regional player advancing US interests. It also raises concerns about a potential "three-front" scenario for Pakistan - an unstable Afghanistan in the West, a hostile India in the East, and now, an unpredictable Iran on the Southwest border.

The second scenario, while seemingly positive, presents its challenges. A less confrontational Iran towards the West weakens the power dynamics, favouring Pakistan's strategic partnership with China. Additionally, the US could exploit such a shift to gain a stronger foothold in the region, potentially curtailing China's influence. It might also pave the way for India, with tacit US support, to become a regional leader in Iran's affairs. This would serve both US and Indian interests. Considering that the India-US nexus is targeting Pakistan, where the US allows India waivers under the Countering American Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CATSA) and threatens Pakistan with it, the implications of any

instability or even 'not anti-West/US regime' in Iran for Pakistan, could be significant, including the opening of a third front on its borders.

In this precarious situation, Pakistan holds a strategic trump card. It can leverage its geographical proximity and historical ties with Iran and Afghanistan to chart an alternative future. This path prioritises regional cooperation and economic integration through platforms like the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), focusing on intraregional trade between Pakistan, Iran, Afghanistan and beyond.

Pakistan's foreign policy choices are the key to unlocking this alternative future. Both Iran and the Taliban have made their stances vis-à-vis the US abundantly clear. It is Pakistan that lacks a definitive strategy. A clear-eyed assessment of national interests is crucial. Does Pakistan want to be caught in the crossfire of a US-China rivalry, or can it forge a path towards regional stability and economic prosperity? The potential benefits of regional cooperation outweigh short-term geopolitical considerations.

In summary, amidst the complex dynamics of Iran's geopolitical landscape, Pakistan's dilemma is short-term US alignment versus long-term stability. Iran's future casts a long shadow on the region's stability. Pakistan stands at a crossroads. Aligning with the US vision might seem reasonable in the short term due to Pakistan's politico-economic vulnerabilities, but it risks compromising long-term regional stability and economic growth. Pakistan's true strength lies in its ability to foster intraregional trade and cooperation. This path, however challenging, holds the promise of a more secure and prosperous future for Pakistan and the entire region. In this effort, Pakistan needs to manage the US interest in the region through a regional approach.

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## About Insight and Author

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# Pakistan's TV News Media vis-a-vis International Models

*Faiza Qureshi*

## Abstract

*This INSIGHT provides a unique perspective on Pakistan's TV news media, highlighting its overwhelming focus on politics and the need for diverse and credible reporting. It proposes adopting global best practices, such as the BBC's public service model, to improve media quality and diversify content. The research also advocates for regulatory changes, which could balance news coverage, enhance public trust, and align media output with national interests, thereby fostering a more transparent and accountable media landscape. By stressing the urgency of the proposed improvements, we can make our audience feel the need for quick and decisive action.*

**Keywords:** Information Crisis, Public Opinion, Social Perception, Digital Media, Social Media, Public Discourse.

In the contemporary world, societies find themselves amid information crisis. The crisis is exacerbated by the media's role in constructing public opinion and steering social perceptions. Globally, the media landscape comprises print, electronic, and digital media, as well as informal sources of information. In Pakistan, despite the vast outreach of Social Media Networks (SMNs), TV is still a preferred medium of information for the general masses, with an estimated market of more than 150 million viewers.<sup>1</sup> However, it is often criticised for its lopsided focus on politics. The overwhelming inclination of Pakistan's TV news

*The overwhelming inclination of Pakistan's TV news media towards politics has led to a public discourse distortion and undermined the media's credibility as a source of information.*

media towards politics has led to a public discourse distortion and undermined the media's credibility as a source of information. Due to the magnitude of TV viewership, this insight attempts to dissect the perceptions and realities of Pakistan's TV news media in the light of international models and navigate the path through balanced coverage.

Despite the substantial viewership, the average TV viewership per person has been declining by 14% annually and currently stands at less than 120 minutes per day. This decline can be attributed to the rise of new media platforms, such as digital and social media, offering a more comprehensive range of content and interactive experiences. The quality of TV content has also played a role in this decline, signalling the need for adaptation and improvement.

Today, Pakistan hosts 114 satellite TV channels and the Pakistan Television Network (PTV). In addition to national channels, 43 foreign channels are licensed through Landing Right Permission (LRP). The licensed channels are a balanced mix of health, sports, and education. However, due to Pakistan's limited capacity of the analogue cable system, only 70 channels can be aired through cable networks.

1. News & Current Affairs:	31
2. Entertainment:	42
3. Regional Languages:	23
4. Health:	03
5. Sports:	03
6. Education:	07
7. Specialized Subject Channel:	05
<b>Total</b>	<b>114</b>

Consequently, this limits viewers' choice of news, where 42.8% of the available content is news.<sup>2</sup>

The channel mix is misleading due to the disconnect between viewership and broadcasters' preferences. Despite 70% entertainment and 19% news viewership,<sup>3</sup> the channel mix (Figure 1) shows 31 private news TV

channels and 42 entertainment channels.<sup>4</sup> Currently, the entertainment-to-news ratio is 4:3, which preferably should be 7:2.

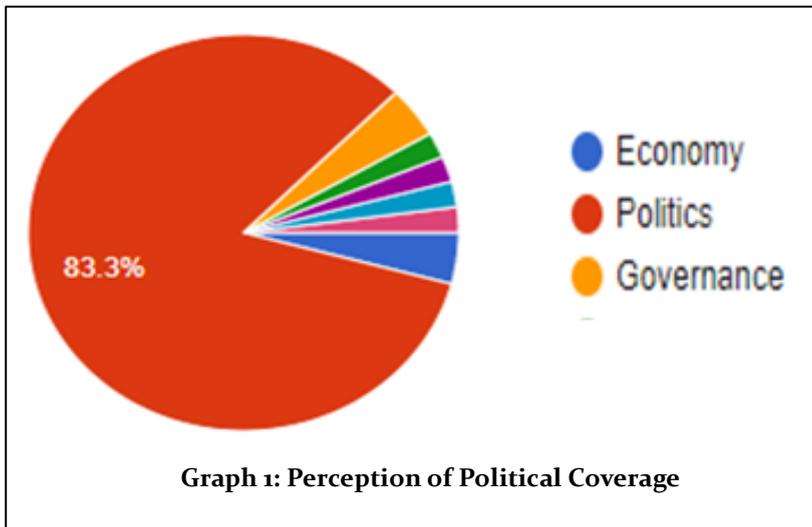
Furthermore, in terms of content, the news media in Pakistan is highly inward-looking. According to the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) report of 2021, approximately three hundred forty current affairs programmes were aired weekly, with politics occupying 58% of the debate focus.<sup>5</sup> Even issues like economy, governance, law and order, and sports are discussed with a political overtone. For instance, discussions on the economy often revolve around political parties' economic policies rather than the actual state of the economy. This saturation of political content has negatively impacted the national discourse, where the discourse on other vital walks of life is found missing or disproportionately low. Data from the past year presents a minuscule focus on international issues. It would not be wrong to say that our media indulged in political scandals when the world discussed the global energy crisis, low-orbit satellites, market downturn, and US-China semiconductor rivalry.

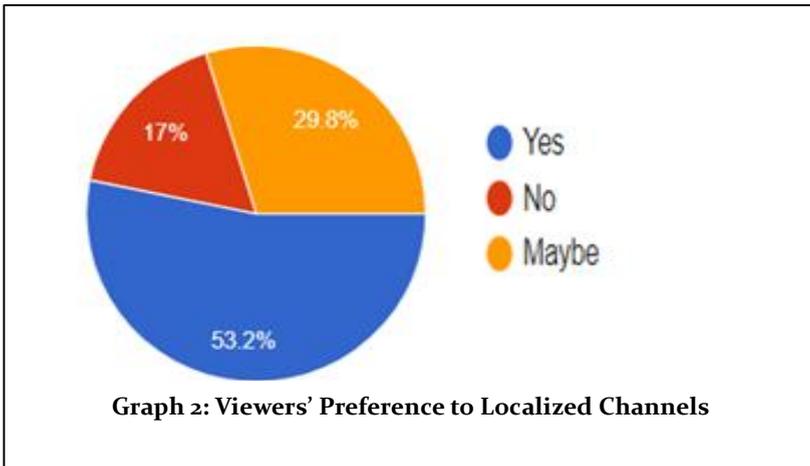
Moreover, private news channels broadcast many infotainment programmes, but those also mirror politics. The PEMRA framework needs explicit definitions for this content category, resulting in a lack of regulation.<sup>6</sup> Initial investigation revealed an overwhelming perception that 83.3% of the broadcast content revolves around politics, often accompanied by misinformation.<sup>7</sup>

The prevailing media fervour in the country is attributed to managerial, structural, and value-related issues. Firstly, the 'advertisement-based revenue model fuels a perpetual competition for higher ratings by emphasising "exclusives" and "breaking news". Currently, 4 of the top 10 highly rated channels are news channels (BOL News, ARY News, Geo News, Samaa News), indicating the heightened political hysteria fostered by sensationalised news content.<sup>8</sup> Secondly, the 'lack of digitisation' has led to interest groups manipulating Television Rating Points (TRP), distorting actual sentiments and viewership preferences.<sup>9</sup> Thirdly, an ownership crisis in the media industry has compromised professionalism and responsibility. Cross-ownership has empowered influential stakeholders with commercial interests and often overshadowed public

interests. The top 3 news channels are owned by large business conglomerates (Jang Group, ARY Group, Vision Group), raising concerns about the potential serving of shadow interests.<sup>10</sup> Finally, there is a '**content production crisis**' as the industry has prioritised vertical expansion over-diversification, often aggrandising non-issue into 'the issue'.

The media industry resorts to sensationalism to keep the business alive, but international practices present some successful models to align media practices and national interests. The 'BBC public service remit' can be considered in this regard. BBC is a public service broadcaster, and its remit demands programs on topics of public interest, including arts, science, technology, education, household, and religion, with sensitivity and responsibility. Although PTV holds a similar remit for private channels, a gap in implementing a similar remit would be the business model. BBC and PTV are public entities, while private news channels in Pakistan are purely profit-driven. Therefore, there is a need to find sustainable business models for private news channels to serve Pakistan's interests effectively. There is a potential to align Pakistani media practices with national interests, fostering a more balanced and responsible media landscape by leveraging global best practices.





Another international model is the promotion of local news channels. In countries like the US, UK, France, and Australia, the number of local news channels is higher than that of national news channels, but in Pakistan, there is seemingly less focus on this. The private media in Pakistan is primarily focused on national news, where market preferences often overshadow the voices at the regional level. Therefore, promoting localised news channels, especially in larger cities, can diversify the content and bring meaningful news to the audience. This can lead to a more informed public, a stronger sense of regional identity, and a more balanced media landscape. In this regard, the study has gained the support of 53.2% of the population.<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, Pakistani media must establish an international HD English news channel to present the country's perspective effectively. Currently, BBC, Aljazeera, and CNN correspondents present Pakistan's case, which credibly should come from Pakistan directly. This is supported by the fact that despite being in English, these international news channels have a significant viewership in Pakistan, indicating a demand for international news.

Likewise, *reviving specialised programs* on news channels can also enhance content balance. Previously, dedicated time slots were allocated for business, religion, entrepreneurship, and international news.

However, disproportionate over-reporting on politics led to the discontinuation of this practice.

	CURRENT STATUS	RECOMMENDED
Channel Balance (Ent: News)	4:3	7:2
Channel Mix (News)	42.8% News	27% News
Content Mix on News Channel	58% politics & 32% indirect politics	Balanced
Local News Channels	PTV Channels	53.2% Viewer preference
International News Channel	Only PTV World	Need HD Channel
Foreign Air Time	BBC, VOA, DW	Reciprocity of content

Figure 2: Recommendations

Additionally, reciprocity of content landing rights needs to be maintained at regulatory and broadcaster levels to enhance the industry’s efficacy and responsibility. Some channels have specified airtime for programs from international news channels, like Urdu VOA, BBC Urdu Sairbeen, and DW. However, Pakistani content does not find space in the principle of reciprocity on these international platforms.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, PEMRA must devise a reciprocity plan to foster a more equitable and responsible broadcasting environment. To conclude, news media must balance information, education, and entertainment. News should not be synonymous with political coverage; instead, there should be a fair balance of subjects. The prime time (6 PM to 11 PM) content needs a regulatory overhaul, where PEMRA must prescribe a percentage for balanced content. In this regard, political tenor should be limited to not more than 30% of the aired content, as recommended in Figure 2. Hence, public confidence in news is restored only through diversification of aired content, not sensationalism.

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# Religious Tourism and its Potential in Pakistan

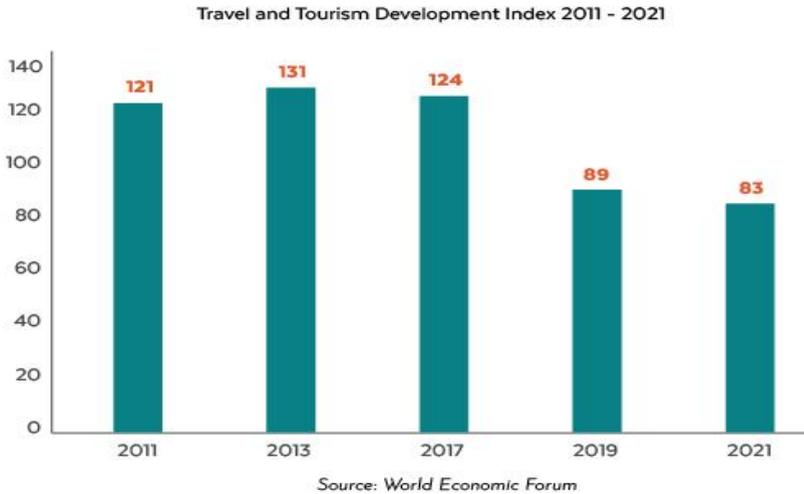
*Hadia Ibrar*

## Abstract

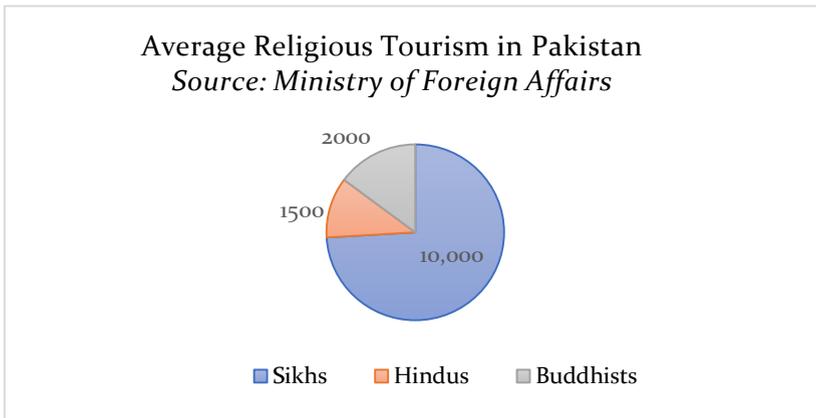
*This INSIGHT explores Pakistan's vast potential for religious tourism, showcasing its rich cultural and religious heritage. With diverse sites for Sikhs, Buddhists, Hindus, and Sufis, Pakistan can attract global visitors. However, challenges like infrastructure and visa policies need addressing. Pakistan needs a comprehensive tourism policy and more vital public-private collaboration to maximise this potential. Public-private collaboration is crucial, as it can bring in the necessary investments, expertise, and resources to develop and promote religious tourism in Pakistan.*

**Keywords:** Religious Tourism, Global Industry, Holy Sites, Cultural and Religious Heritage, Tourist Destinations, International Travel and Tourism Development Index.

Religious tourism is a significant global industry, with massive potential for visitors to holy sites and places of religious importance on different occasions. Pakistan, a diverse society, hosts a rich cultural and religious heritage of religions like Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, and Christianity. After independence in 1947, the Hindus and Sikhs left their sacred places behind, presenting significant untapped potential in religious tourism.<sup>1</sup> According to the Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC), there are 480 tourist destinations in the country, 120 of which are religious sites.<sup>2</sup> Pakistan is currently ranked in "Category-C" in the international travel rankings for tourism. Pakistan's ranking on the International Travel and Tourism Development Index has risen from 89th in 2019 to 83rd in 2021, making it the Asia Pacific Region's most improved country since 2019.<sup>3</sup>



Pakistan is home to 80% of the Sikh religion's most sacred sites, including Nankana Sahib, the birthplace of Guru Nanak Dev. The country hosts 195 Gurdwaras, with the five most significant being Kartarpur Sahib, Gurdwara Panja Sahib Hasan Abdal, Gurdwara Dera Sahib Lahore, Nankana Sahib, and Samadhi of Ranjit Singh Lahore. Each year, approximately 7,500 Sikhs from India and 2,000 from across the world make the journey to Pakistan, a testament to the accessibility and convenience of these religious sites.<sup>4</sup>



Pakistan is actively preserving and restoring sites for the Sikh pilgrimage, including the Kartarpur Corridor, a testament to the country's commitment to religious tourism. This corridor has not only eased border crossings but also provided visa-free services, further enhancing the accessibility of these sites. With over 83% of Pakistan's 26 million Sikh population expressing interest in religious pilgrimages, the tourism potential is immense, with an estimated 44,000 annual tourists and a projected revenue of Rs. 18 billion.<sup>5</sup>

The Gandhara region of Pakistan, including Mardan, Taxila, and Swat, is a popular destination for Buddhist tourists due to its rich heritage of Stupas of Gautam Buddha.

Pakistan's most visited and holiest Buddhist places include the Dharma Rajika Stupa, Sleeping Buddha, Takht-i-Bai, and Stupa of Mankiala. The country's Buddhist heritage sites attract tourists from Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, China, and Sri Lanka. Takht-i-Bai, a small town near Islamabad, is the most visited site by Buddhists.<sup>6</sup> According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Pakistan attracts approximately 2000 Buddhist monks annually for religious tourism. The global Buddhist tourism market, involving 500 million Buddhists, could contribute Rs. 16 billion to Pakistan's GDP and create employment opportunities for 30,772 individuals.

Hindus are 1.6% of Pakistan's population and the largest minority group. Major Hindu temples in Pakistan include the Shri Hinglaj Mata Temple in Baluchistan, the Shiv Mandir in Umarkot, the Katas Raj Temple Complex in Chakwal, and the Shri Panchmukhi Hanuman Mandir in Karachi.<sup>7</sup> In 2022, the Pakistani High Commission granted over 400 visas to Indian Hindus to visit Pakistan's historic Hindu shrines under the 1974 Pakistan-India Protocol on Visits to Religious Shrines.<sup>8</sup>

The Chitral region in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) is home to a diverse population of Kalash, descendants of ancient Dardic people.<sup>9</sup> With around 3,000 members, they practice an animistic religion originating from Hinduism and pre-Islamic Nuristan beliefs. The Kalash community celebrates festivals like Chilam Joshi, Uchal, and Chawmos, attracting over 2.5 million domestic and 1000 foreign visitors to its cultural and historical events.<sup>10</sup>

Pakistan is renowned for its Sufi culture, which significantly contributed to the spread of Islam throughout the Indian subcontinent. Pakistan possesses several shrines dedicated to religious figures, including Hazrat Data Ganj Bakhsh, Hazrat Baba Farid Ganj Shakar, Baba Bhullay Shah, Hazrat Shah Rukn-e-Alam, and Hazrat Lal Shahbaz Qalandar. Millions of individuals set out on spiritual pilgrimages to the shrines every year.<sup>11</sup>

The government of Pakistan manages religious sites, including their conservation and custody. The Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB) manages the properties and land left over by Sikhs and Hindus. PTDC, owned by the government, operates motels and promotes tourism. The National Tourism Coordination Board (NTCB) was established to develop strategic guidelines and policies for the growth of the tourism sector, with PTDC as its implementation body. The private sector manages services like hotels, restaurants, travel agencies, and tour operators. The tourism sector has been devolved into provincial subject under the 18th constitutional amendment, but the federal government still manages international conventions and agreements. The Auqaf and Religious Affairs department manages Shrines, Dargahs, and Mosques, ensuring proper facilities and cleanliness for religious activities.<sup>12</sup>

Religious tourism in Pakistan is a growing sector with significant economic potential, fostering job creation, infrastructure development, and enhanced connectivity. The World Travel and Tourism Council predicts that Sikh tourism alone can contribute an estimated Rs. 18 billion annually to Pakistan's economy, creating approximately 82,000 jobs. Moreover, domestic visits to revered sites like Gurdwaras of Nankana Sahib and Buddhist archaeological sites could potentially contribute over Rs. 16 billion to the GDP and employment of 30,772 people in Pakistan. Based on current trends and visitor numbers, these figures highlight the substantial economic benefits that could be realised with the right policies and investments in religious tourism.<sup>13</sup>

*The World Travel and Tourism Council predicts that Sikh tourism alone can contribute an estimated Rs. 18 billion annually to Pakistan's economy, creating approximately 82,000 jobs.*

Pakistan's tourism sector has improved significantly over the years. Successive governments have focused on reviving it through a national task force and a new visa policy. PTDC has developed a five-year plan for 2024-2029 to enhance the sector by boosting employment, growth, investment, international tourism, domestic tourism, and Sikh and Buddhist religious tourism, thereby increasing revenues.

Despite some efforts, the sector faces several issues. Pakistan lacks a comprehensive national tourism policy because of a lack of coordination between federal and provincial governments in legislation and strategies. The current infrastructure, including roads, transportation, and accommodation, is not fully equipped to handle the potential influx of religious tourists. Additionally, there are no accurate statistics on religious tourism. Furthermore, the visa policies for Sikhs and Buddhists, who form a significant portion of religious tourists, are not as streamlined and accessible as they could be. Additionally, the stringent land lease policy for tourism projects, security, and poor infrastructure hinders progress.<sup>14</sup>

There is a need to formulate a comprehensive National Tourism Policy to pave the way forward in unlocking the country's untapped potential in religious tourism and generating substantial financial revenue. Pakistan should improve its World Tourism Index ranking from 83<sup>rd</sup> to a position within the top 70 and from Category "C" to "B" within the next five years. Pakistan should aim to develop its religious tourism sector, generating approximately US\$ 500 million in revenue<sup>15</sup> and 15,000 jobs annually, to surpass US\$ 2-3 billion and create over 70,000 jobs in the next five years.

Pakistan should establish a clear supervisory structure and update laws to involve the private sector in tourism development. The government should focus on facilitation and regulation, attracting private investment for sustainable growth. The government should ensure proper management and preservation of religious sites through public-private partnerships, while the private sector should focus on improving service standards in hotels and restaurants. Modern technologies like virtual reality can enhance the tourist experience and appeal to domestic and foreign travellers.

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# Realignment of Geoeconomics of Pakistan to meet its Geopolitical Challenges

*Rafia Ashar*

## Abstract

*This INSIGHT delves into the interplay between Geopolitics (GP) and Geoeconomics (GE) and its impact on Pakistan. Geoeconomics, a term coined by Edward Luttwak, refers to using economic power to achieve geopolitical goals. It emphasises the need for Pakistan to realign its GE policies to match evolving GP dynamics, focusing on diversifying trade partners and enhancing regional connectivity for more significant global influence.*

**Keywords:** Geopolitics, Geoeconomics, Trade Partnerships, Regional Connectivity, Global Influence, Strategic Interactions.

In the complex realm of international relations, geopolitics (GP) and geoeconomics (GE) are the twin pillars that shape the global landscape. GP dictates the strategic interactions, while GE forms the economic foundations among nations. Understanding these concepts is crucial for comprehending power dynamics and global influence. In this context, countries like Pakistan are at a critical juncture where aligning their GP with their GE requires careful consideration.<sup>1</sup> This insight aims to evaluate and potentially realign Pakistan's GE policies to effectively respond to the challenges posed by its evolving GP context.

Strategic needs primarily drove Pakistan's alignment with the US-led Western bloc during the Cold War, significantly influencing its political, economic, and ideological trajectory.<sup>2</sup> However, in the post-Cold War era, Pakistan's GP interests have gradually shifted towards China, while its GE interests remain anchored with the US-led West. This shift was

necessitated as the US-led West chose India, not Pakistan, as a strategic partner in the larger context of potential US-China Rivalry. Consequently, India was designated as the net security provider in the US Indo-Pacific strategy. Pakistan had to turn to China for its economic and security needs.

To further illustrate this argument, let us examine Pakistan's trade relations with various regions over the past two decades. Analysing trends in trade with ASEAN, China, the Middle East, Africa, Europe, Central Asia and North America can provide insight into Pakistan's GE alignment in post-Cold War.<sup>3</sup>

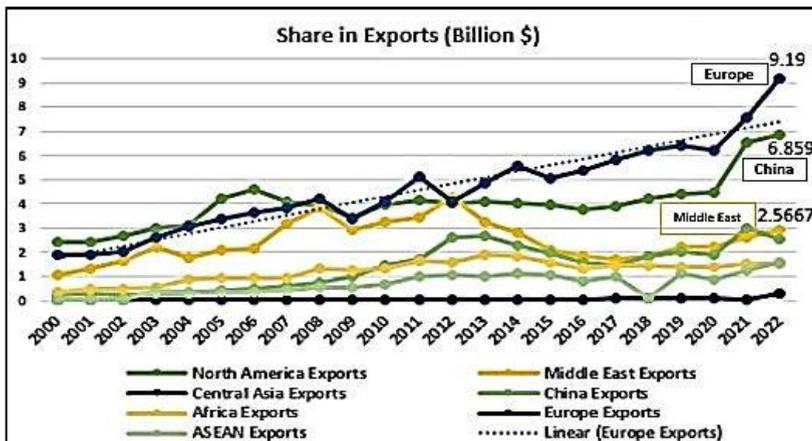
Regions	Value of Exports Over Last Two Decades (Billion \$)	% Share in Exports	Value of Imports in the Previous Two Decades (Billion \$)	% Share in Imports
North America	92.4377	27.94%	54.293	7.51%
Middle East	56.668	17.13%	274.64	38.02%
Central Asia	0.9431	0.28%	2.8337	0.39%
China	31.4964	9.52%	172.7677	23.92%
Africa	28.0646	8.48%	37.46	5.18%
Europe	105.4168	31.86%	83.442	11.55%
ASEAN	15.764	4.76%	96.80805	13.4%
<b>Total Trade Volume</b>	<b>330.7906</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>722.24445</b>	<b>100</b>

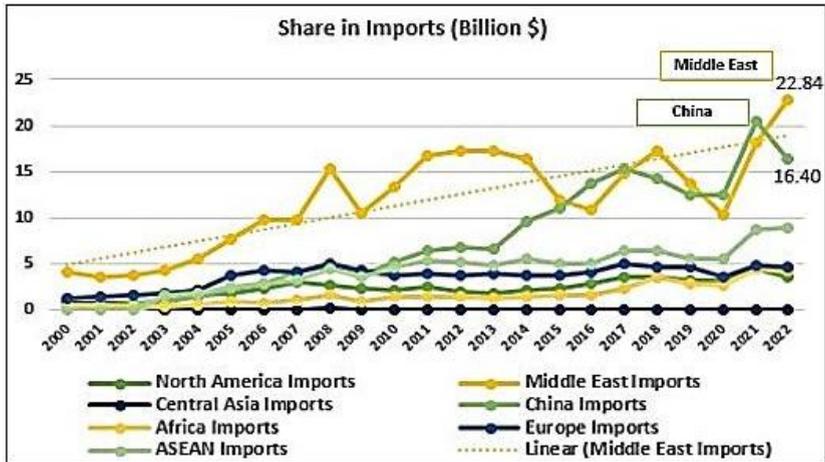
Source: Direction of Trade Statistics, IMF Data<sup>3</sup>

The data analysis in this study is based on a comprehensive review of trade statistics and trends over the past two decades. This review includes an examination of Pakistan's export dynamics with various global regions, such as North America, ASEAN, China, the Middle East, and Central Asia. The analysis reveals a distinct pattern in Pakistan's export

dynamics, particularly in comparison with these regions. Notably, a substantial portion, approximately 27.9%, of Pakistan’s total exports during this period have been directed towards North America. In contrast, exports to other regions such as ASEAN, China, the Middle East, and Central Asia have remained relatively minimal. On the other hand, it is interesting to identify that Pakistan has experienced a significant 31% share in its exports to Europe. Preferential trade agreements such as GSP+ and strategic engagements like the EU-Pakistan Strategic Plan (SEP) have significantly contributed to regional trade growth.

On the other hand, an analysis of the import trends presents a more nuanced picture. By examining Pakistan’s trade dynamics, it is apparent that the country’s import portfolio showcases a diverse array of sourcing regions, with significant contributions from North America, the Middle East and China. Imports from North America signify a modest portion of Pakistan’s total trade, standing at 7.51%, which indicates a diversified strategy to minimise reliance on any single region. In stark contrast, the Middle East is a crucial trading partner, contributing 38% to Pakistan’s total trade. Oil imports primarily drive this substantial percentage, underlining its vital role in Pakistan’s energy needs. Conversely, imports from China have also seen notable growth over the last two decades, accounting for 23% of Pakistan’s total trade.





Data also show a discernible increase in Pakistan’s exports to European markets, inferring a strategic diversification effort and a subtle GE tilt towards Europe, as shown in the graph. However, Pakistan’s import portfolio has highlighted a strategic pivot towards the Middle East and China as Pakistan’s most significant import destinations, as depicted in the graph. For the remaining regions, there has been a consistent pattern over the years that merits the attention of the policymakers.

The following table compares trade among the regions to assess Pakistan's GE trajectory during the Cold War and post-Cold War eras.

Time Period	North America	Middle East	Central Asia	China	Africa	Europe	ASEAN
<b>Cold War</b>							
1990 (Exports)	\$0.79 bn (22.00%)	\$0.48 bn (13%)	\$0.0 bn (0%)	\$0.06 bn (1.88%)	\$0.23 bn (6%)	\$1.69 bn (47%)	\$0.29 bn (8.20%)
(Imports)	\$1.05 bn (20%)	\$1.4 bn (27%)	\$0.0 bn (0%)	\$0.33 bn (6.6%)	\$0.19 bn (3.77%)	\$1.49 bn (29%)	\$0.60 bn (11%)
<b>Post- Cold War</b>							
2000 (Exports)	\$2.44 bn (40%)	\$1.9 bn (17%)	\$0.02 bn (0.04%)	\$0.23 bn (3.90%)	\$0.37 bn (6.10%)	\$1.89 bn (31%)	\$0.03 bn (0.56%)
(Imports)	\$0.74 bn (9.52%)	\$4.1 bn (52%)	\$0.76 bn (9.80%)	\$0.53 bn (6.90%)	\$0.31 bn (4.06%)	\$1.31 bn (16%)	\$0.01 bn (0.01%)
2010 (Exports)	\$3.98 bn (26%)	\$3.24 bn (21%)	\$0.12 bn (0.08%)	\$1.43 bn (9.69%)	\$1.33 bn (8.98%)	\$4.10 bn (27.7%)	\$0.70 bn (4.75%)
(Imports)	\$2.21 bn (6.90%)	\$13.3 bn (43%)	\$0.09 bn (0.03%)	\$5.25 bn (17.10%)	\$1.36 bn (4.45%)	\$3.68 bn (12%)	\$4.6 bn (15.3%)
<b>Current (2022)</b>							
2022 (Exports)	\$6.8 bn (27%)	\$2.90 bn (11%)	\$0.26 bn (1.04%)	\$2.56 bn (10%)	\$1.49 bn (5.99%)	\$9.19 bn (36.9%)	\$1.58 bn (6.30%)
(Imports)	\$3.58 bn (5.89%)	\$22.8 bn (37.5%)	\$0.08 bn (0.13%)	\$16.4 bn (26%)	\$4.32 bn (7.10%)	\$4.57 bn (7.50%)	\$8.9 bn (14.7%)

The data reveal that Pakistan's GP trajectory has significantly evolved; however, its GE landscape remains unchanged, albeit with some improved statistics with China. Despite strong GP ties, the relatively low volume of Pakistan-China bilateral trade, which is significantly tilted in favour of China, highlights a notable gap in accessing untapped GE potential between the two nations.

It is high time we understood that GP and GE are interlinked. The GP environment has transformed into a multipolar world, and new potential markets are now available to explore. Against this backdrop, Pakistan needs to recognise the inevitability of diversifying its GE focus further, including strengthening ties with emerging markets in Africa and capitalising on opportunities within the dynamic Chinese, ASEAN, Middle East, and Central Asian markets. This strategic pivot aims to enrich Pakistan's role as a regional connectivity hub and underscores the urgency and significance of robust economic engagement across diverse geographic spectrums. This role should resonate with international relations, trade, and economics stakeholders.

*For Pakistan to enjoy greater liberty of action in the geopolitical arena, it must diversify its geoeconomic profile by adding new export destinations in addition to the US and Europe.*

For Pakistan to enjoy greater liberty of action in the GP arena, it must diversify its GE profile by adding new export destinations to the US and Europe.

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# Pakistan - Afghanistan Relations in the New World Order: Way Forward

*Umme Laila*

## Abstract

This INSIGHT argues for a trade-focused approach to improving security and stability between Pakistan and Afghanistan. It discusses leveraging economic cooperation to address underlying issues of terrorism and instability, suggesting a shift from security-driven policies to trade-centric strategies for enduring peace.

**Keywords:** Trade, Security, Economic Prosperity, Causes of Instability, Economic Hardships, Lack of Opportunities.

**T**his insight advocates prioritising trade to enhance security and foster economic prosperity as a way forward for Pakistan-Afghanistan relations. Prioritising trade to improve security focuses on tackling the core causes of instability, such as terrorism, economic hardships, and lack of opportunities. Trade can create employment opportunities, steady economic growth, and alleviate poverty, addressing the root causes of insecurity.

Security, a shared challenge for Pakistan and Afghanistan, requires a comprehensive solution.

Trade, as a potential tool, can pave the way for security. This strategy aligns with the belief that economic growth and cooperation can catalyse long-term stability, bolstering

*Rather than being part of great power competition, Pakistan and other regional countries have the potential to develop their own alternative paradigm for regional trade and connectivity.*

Afghanistan's resilience and security. Afghanistan's security and stability would gradually extend to the region, fostering peace and stability.

The limitations of the 'security for trade' approach have become increasingly evident over time. Despite substantial investments in security initiatives, Afghanistan continues to grapple with persistent violence, insurgency, and socio-economic challenges. In contrast, the 'trade for security' approach prioritises trade and economic development as central pillars of stability and recognises the interdependence of economic prosperity and security. This approach does not diminish the importance of security issues but reframes them as challenges to overcome. It aligns with Pakistan's National Security Policy 2022-26, which underscores the role of geoeconomics in the country's national policy.<sup>1</sup>

Notwithstanding the benefits of trade for security approach and the potential of transnational trade and connectivity, the relationship between the two neighbouring countries, Pakistan and Afghanistan, has been marred by numerous challenges stemming from a complex interplay of historical, cultural, and political factors.

Terrorism is the major hurdle in Pakistan-Afghanistan relations. Terrorist attacks have surged in Pakistan since the Taliban came into power. These attacks rose to 28% in 2022 and 79% in 2023.<sup>2</sup> Most of the attacks were conducted by TTP, whose most of leaders are based in Afghanistan. According to the UN Security Council report, the TTP benefited more than any foreign group in Afghanistan from the Taliban takeover. The surge in terrorist activities in 2023 led to a significant number of casualties of security personnel in Pakistan, making it a record eight-year high.<sup>3</sup> Pakistan has also expressed serious concerns about the safe havens and liberty of action for TTP in Afghanistan. In the given situation, Pakistan has no other option but to manage its borders strictly for security.

In these circumstances, the expulsion of Afghan refugees also posed a serious challenge to Pakistan and Afghanistan's bilateral ties.

Pakistan has hosted millions of Afghan refugees for several decades because of the instability in Afghanistan. The current state of peace in Afghanistan warrants a fair and equitable approach towards the repatriation of Afghan refugees to their homeland. Pakistan is still

hosting around 2.7 million Afghans. Pakistan's security concerns are the main reason behind the expulsion of illegal immigrants.

These discountenances between the two neighbours would be sorted out effectively by employing trade as an instrument. Pakistan is among Afghanistan's top trading partners. Afghanistan's exports to Pakistan in 2022 were about US\$ 957.99 Million, making 57.6% of total exports.<sup>4</sup> Pakistan's share in imports was 13.1%, making it Afghanistan's third largest import partner after Iran and UAE in 2022. Both countries had almost bilateral trade of US\$ 2 Billion despite the United States of America (US) sanctions and other regional issues. Illegal trade or smuggling is another reason behind the low volume of legal trade between the two countries.

Another challenge in establishing economic ties with Kabul is the absence of a banking system. Afghan companies have established representative offices in countries such as Dubai or Istanbul, which implies that imports into Afghanistan are facilitated through these countries.<sup>5</sup> The issue of the banking system can be resolved by introducing a barter system and the use of local currencies.

<b>Afghanistan Transit Trade through Pakistan</b>	
<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>Assessed Value in Million Dollars</b>
2019-20	5648.0
2020-21	4740.2
2021-22	4471.0
2022-23	7244.0
2023-24 (July-Dec)	2040.92

Afghanistan's transit trade with Pakistan is mandatory under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT 1947) and United Nations (UN) laws.

Pakistan signed the TIR (Transports Internationaux and Routiers) treaty in 2015 and made it operational in 2018, potentially enhancing bilateral transit trade.<sup>6</sup>

The TIR treaty simplifies cross-border product trade by streamlining administrative and customs processes. By implementing the TIR agreement, Pakistan and Afghanistan may accelerate and streamline their transit trade procedures, saving border crossing waits and expenses. This can enhance efficiency and dependability in trade operations, ultimately creating a more conducive environment for bilateral transit trade.

Afghanistan's war-torn economy requires a viable transition from an import-substitute to an export-oriented economy for sustained economic growth.

Rather than being part of great power competition, Pakistan and other regional countries have the potential to develop their alternative paradigm for regional trade and connectivity.<sup>7</sup> Afghanistan's economic development relies heavily on trade with neighbouring countries, including Pakistan, China, Russia, Central Asian Republics (CARs), and Iran, with critical projects like CASA-1000 (Central Asia-South Asia), the Uzbekistan railway, and the TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India) pipeline project. In this context, the Economic Cooperation Organization's (ECO) support for Afghanistan transit trade and infrastructure investments can boost regional connectivity, growth, and stability, fostering cooperation among its members like Pakistan, Afghanistan, CARs, Turkey, and Iran.

This 'trade for security approach' can help to deal with the misperceptions that Afghans have about Pakistan. Considering the current economic issues of Afghanistan, such as high poverty rates, food insecurity, and dependency on foreign aid, Pakistan has the potential to participate in economic cooperation through bilateral trade and transit trade.

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## About Insight and Author

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