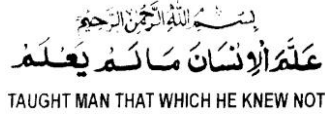




# QUARTERLY

A Periodical of INSIGHTS



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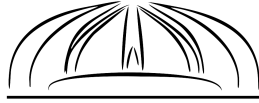
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# ISSRA

INSTITUTE FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES, RESEARCH & ANALYSIS

# E9 QUARTERLY

A Periodical of INSIGHTS



Institute for Strategic Studies, Research and Analysis (ISSRA)  
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# E9 QUARTERLY

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*Haadia Riaz*

## Editorial Note

The third issue of volume 3, 2024, of *Eg Quarterly*, a distinctive compilation of ten insights written during the third quarter of 2024, is now in your hands. These insights delve into Pakistan's economic, political, and security challenges. They emphasise the urgent need for strategic alignment, which refers to the harmonization of national interests with global trends and regional dynamics, domestic institutions' reform, and financial restructuring for sustained growth. This issue provides a comprehensive analysis of the geopolitical and economic implications of Iran's nuclear ambitions amidst regional and global tensions, with a detailed overview of the historical context of Iran's nuclear programme and the impact of international sanctions on Iran. The analysis highlights Iran's resilience against US pressure, its strategic alliances with Russia and China, and the potential tipping points that could lead to a significant escalation in Iran's nuclear capabilities.

Besides this, Pakistan's need for an effective big data governance strategy, such as establishing a central data management system and enacting stringent data protection laws to secure and leverage big data for economic and security advancements and Pakistan's National Security Policy (NSP) 2022-2026 and its geoeconomic vision, a strategic plan that aims to position Pakistan as a hub of interdependence and influence, advocating for a cooperative geoeconomic framework, have been discussed. The influence of the Russia-Ukraine war on global geopolitics, prompting strategic manoeuvres by the US and China to expand their influence in Europe, has also been examined.

This issue also delves into the ideological alignment of Hindutva and Zionism, emphasizing their shared ethno-nationalistic roots and their influence on international politics, demonstrating their contribution to global unrest and intolerance and climate change and the impact of

military presence on the Siachen Glacier threatening water supplies for millions in Pakistan, dependent on glacier-fed rivers for agriculture and daily needs. It underscores the urgent need for immediate international intervention and renewed dialogue between the two countries to mitigate these environmental damages and protect this vital ecological region.

This issue further explores the strategic implications of the Israel-Palestine conflict and the Russia-Ukraine war on US foreign policy, meticulously examining how these conflicts shape US global strategy. It also provides a detailed analysis of the challenges and opportunities within Pakistan's Zakat system, a fundamental practice of Islam for poverty alleviation. It identifies administrative inefficiencies and poor collection rates and proposes the establishment of a National Welfare Foundation (NWF) to centralise and streamline Zakat collection and investment to enhance transparency and effectiveness.

Finally, the issue discusses Pakistan's opportunities and challenges in the context of the US-China semiconductor rivalry. It provides a detailed analysis of Pakistan's potential to become a key player in the chip industry due to its strategic location and cost-effective labour force. The analysis underscores the potential for Pakistan to lead in chip design and testing capabilities, foster international collaborations, and implement a strategic approach to capitalize on the growing global semiconductor market.

With its unique insight into national security matters, we hope this publication will assist our esteemed readers in maintaining a comprehensive understanding of the current strategic landscape. We strongly encourage you to share your expertise through 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 value well-researched and balanced perspectives that can contribute to a deeper understanding of the region.

# Will Iran Cross the Nuclear Threshold?

*Mehwish Kiani*

## Abstract

*This INSIGHT discusses Iran's nuclear ambitions, tracing their intricate historical development and examining their profound geopolitical and economic implications amidst regional and global tensions. It delves into the multifaceted origins of Iran's nuclear programme, its nuanced evolution over time, the impact of international sanctions, and the strategic responses of vital global powers, particularly the United States. The analysis underscores Iran's tenacity against US pressure, its strategic alliances with Russia and China, and the potential tipping points that could lead to a significant escalation in Iran's nuclear capabilities. This development could have profound and far-reaching consequences.*

**Keywords:** Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, P5+1, Iran's Enrichment Programme, Nuclear Programme.

The political demonstrations in Iran since September 2022, when a young Iranian woman, Mahsa Amini, was jailed for not wearing the hijab and died in custody,<sup>1</sup> have confronted Iran's leadership with its greatest challenge as protestors demand individual rights, political reforms, and increasingly, an end to the Islamic Republic.<sup>2</sup> The harsh measures to quell the demonstrations<sup>3</sup> have only encouraged the protests to continue. The United States swiftly expressed support, denouncing Iran's "vicious" response. President Biden has delayed negotiations over the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), signed in 2015<sup>4</sup> after five years of intense negotiations with the P5+1 to restrict Iran's enrichment programme, and levied additional sanctions on Iran to apply maximum pressure and punishment for mishandling of demonstrations.<sup>5</sup> Iran's economy is already reeling under crippling sanctions.



Iran claims that sanctions are aimed at bringing Iran under pressure to suspend its nuclear programme, which is seen as an "excruciating threat" by the US,<sup>6</sup> and to bring about a regime change. However, Iran has demonstrated a high resilience in refusing to capitulate to the US strategy of maximum pressure.<sup>7</sup> The US wants to bring Iran back into its orbit of influence. Iran's location at the Strait of Hormuz, where 30% of world oil is transported, is strategically important.<sup>8</sup> The US wishes to ensure unrestricted navigation through the Straits and preserve its influence in the Middle East. If Iran does not fall in line with the US strategic interests, it will make every effort to prevent Iran from getting closer to either Russia or China.

For Iran, the development of nuclear technology and nuclear programmes is a means to assert its sovereignty and consolidate its position at the international level. It is a signatory to the NPT<sup>9</sup> that allows Iran to develop nuclear technology for peaceful purposes and has adopted the IAEA safeguards.<sup>10</sup> However, the international community suspects that Iran has the expertise for advanced nuclear capabilities.<sup>11</sup> After the US withdrew from JCPOA in 2018, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) reported that Iran's stockpile of enriched uranium had expanded, especially in 2021 and 2022<sup>12</sup> and suspected that Iran possessed sufficient fissile material to develop a nuclear bomb soon.



IAEA also claimed that Iran has increased weapons-grade uranium from 25.2 kg to 87.5kg,<sup>13</sup> and the centrifuges using the IR-2 that is against the JCPOA. Moreover, the US is also suspicious of Iran's ballistic missile programme.<sup>14</sup>

The US is constantly highlighting Iran's nuclear weapons spectre as a threat to global peace to justify its strategy of maximum pressure in the hope that it will abandon its nuclear programme. To counter the US, Iran is exploiting every opportunity to strengthen its relations with Russia and China, which have strategic interests in the region. Russia, being opposed to US hegemony, has signed a 20-year strategic partnership with Iran, primarily focused on energy cooperation.

*Iran's civilizational past shapes its political outlook as a regional power. Hence, its resolve to be recognized and accepted as such acts as a catalyst to develop its nuclear capability.*

Conversely, China signed a 25-year cooperation programme with Iran in 2022, primarily focused on economic and infrastructure development.<sup>15</sup> President Raisi's recent visit to China signals strengthening economic and energy links along the "Belt and Road" initiative.<sup>16</sup> These strategic alliances underscore the geopolitical implications of Iran's nuclear programme and its potential impact on global powers.<sup>17</sup>

Iran's civilisational past shapes its political outlook as a regional power.<sup>18</sup> Hence, its resolve to be recognised and accepted as such acts as a catalyst to develop its nuclear capability. The Abraham Accords 2020 and Negev Summit 2022 which helped mend ties between Israel and Arab countries, have further exacerbated the rivalry between Iran and the Arab world, meaning Saudi Arabia. Iran is convinced that the West would ensure it does not feel secure enough to gain power and presence in the Persian Gulf region. Israel's recent drone attacks, with a tacit US nod,<sup>19</sup> on Iran's nuclear facility have confirmed its apprehensions.<sup>20</sup> Iran has declared it will respond to Western pressures by increasing and improving its nuclear programme.<sup>21</sup>

The question is, what would be the tipping point? The US will keep Iran under maximum pressure but not to the extent that Iran feels insecure enough to declare itself as a nuclear power. It will continue to use ambiguity as a bargaining chip with the European and Middle Eastern

countries to preserve its integrity and prestige and persuade the US to remove sanctions or offer rewards for remaining nuclear-free, as was done by North Korea and Pyongyang in the past.<sup>22</sup> Iran also wants the international world to recognise its nuclear programme as a legitimate one. But if Iran is pushed to the wall, it will very likely further advance its nuclear programme. This prospect should be cautiously approached but may not cross the threshold for now, leaving room for anticipation and uncertainty. The potential consequences of Iran's nuclear programme on the Middle East and global powers, particularly the US, Russia, and China, could be significant, with implications for regional stability and international security that should not be underestimated.

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# Data Revolution: Pakistan's Struggle with Big Data Governance

*Muhammad Umar Farooq Baloch*

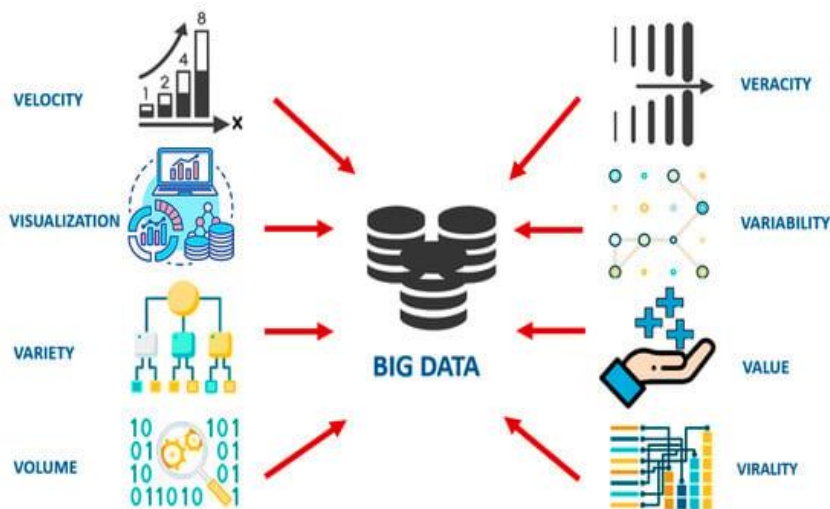
## Abstract

*This INSIGHT underscores Pakistan's need for an effective big data governance strategy, not only to address the current data management and privacy gaps but also to unlock the potential benefits it can bring. By advocating for the establishment of a central data management system and stringent data protection laws, we can secure and leverage big data for economic and security advancements. This, in turn, fosters a sense of hope and optimism for a brighter digital future where Pakistan can harness the power of big data for its development.*

**Keywords:** Data Revolution, Big Data, Internet of Things, Human Action Sensors, Artificial Intelligence, Data Analytics, Cyber Spectrum.

The Internet of Things (IoT) and digital information landscape have emerged as the new lifeblood of society, commonly referred to as 'data,' and have become the fuel of human life in the contemporary world. IoT services, human action sensors, and artificial intelligence (AI) in data analytics further underscore technology's pivotal role in shaping our cyber spectrum.<sup>1</sup> The insight showcases Pakistan's considerable data reliance in the era of surveillance capitalism. Big data manipulation has innovative analytics for the tech-based future of Pakistan, as shown in Figure 1.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, Big tech giants like Google, Meta, and Twitter have excellent access to mass surveillance with the help of big data. However, the increasing significance of Big Data in the surveillance market poses substantial challenges and risks. These include potential breaches of privacy, security vulnerabilities, ethical concerns regarding the use of personal data, and social justice issues related to the unequal distribution of data power.<sup>3</sup>



**Figure 1: Source:** Innovations in Genomics and Big Data Analytics

The power to generate, store, manage, retrieve, and manipulate mass surveillance data has become a digital capital that dictates influence in the cyber and physical world, potentially leading to a loss of individual privacy and control over personal data.<sup>4</sup>

Pakistan is currently grappling with the challenges posed by tech giants in surveillance capitalism, including Google, Facebook, Amazon, Microsoft, and Apple, which wield a monopolistic influence. Despite being the fifth most populous country globally, Pakistan's reliance on third-party platforms for digital data sharing results in significant economic losses. The need to address these challenges is not just important, it's urgent. However, the potential for positive change is within reach. Increased coordination among institutions handling big data at the public and private levels could mitigate these risks and lead to a more secure and prosperous digital future for Pakistan.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, all data from the national spectrum to the end user is being clouded in the spaces of tech giants under their surveillance mechanisms. Predominantly, institutions like the National Database and Regulatory Authority (NADRA), Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA), Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS), Security and Exchange

Commission of Pakistan (SECP), State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), Higher Education Commission (HEC), Ministry of Information Technology & Telecom (MoITT) and Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), etc. are handling the data and information in their domains.

On the other hand, the private sector handles large volumes of data within their respective domains without a standardised method for sharing or safeguarding data dissemination. Unreliable access and misinformation have also been hitting privacy concerns, ultimately linked to Pakistan's National Security. Several legislative initiatives have been taken in the past, including the Pakistan Act of Electronic Crime (2016) and the Personal Data Protection Bill (2023), which have not been approved and only demand the establishment of Data Protection Authorities (DPAs) at the Federal and provincial levels. However, such bills and policies are still awaiting regulation and implementation.<sup>6</sup>

*Data practices must be a National Security priority while setting up and safeguarding critical digital infrastructure in Pakistan.*

Pakistan is unlike some peer countries, such as Vietnam, Malaysia, Korea, and India, in the practical application of big data.

- Vietnam has set up big data industries, including e-governance, healthcare, transportation, tourism, agriculture, etc. It invests in data centres and cloud computing infrastructure, creating a workforce skilled in data science, analytics, and related sectors to cope with future technologies.<sup>7</sup>
- Malaysia has introduced various programmes and regulations to encourage using big data and future technologies. The Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation (MDEC) was instrumental in promoting data analytics, fostering digital transformation, and gaining insights from massive data, particularly in finance, telecommunications, e-commerce, and smart cities initiatives under the national digital framework.<sup>8</sup>

- South Korea is following in the footsteps of China and Japan by utilising big data, the Internet of Things (IoT), and AI to enhance urban living conditions.<sup>9</sup>
- India is on its way to developing the big data industry matrix with a solid foundation to capture future technology and the digital economy. The Indian digital sector has obtained global licenses to build IoT and future technologies in collaboration with Apple, Tesla, IBM, Amazon, and Microsoft on their home ground.<sup>10</sup>

Pakistan's journey towards effective big data governance and surveillance capitalism requires establishing a robust data governance framework, a national data strategy, an ecosystem, and innovative data technologies. These pillars are not just necessary but feasible and can be implemented. They are crucial for Pakistan to navigate the complexities of the digital age and ensure the responsible and ethical use of data. In this regard, the following are recommended: -

- Data proliferation, social media connectivity, and new technologies are redefining national security concerns in the Big Data domain.
- Pakistan should urgently launch a Data Regulatory Governance Framework at the national level with relevant constituent bodies like the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA), the National Centre for Cyber Security (NCCS), the Punjab Information Technology Board (PITB), the Pakistan Space & Upper Atmosphere Research Commission (SUPARCO), etc. This framework is crucial to combine and preserve structured data for futuristic automation, ensuring the efficient and responsible use of big data in Pakistan.
- By establishing a Centralized National Data Management and Surveillance system, Pakistan can significantly enhance the efficiency and ownership of Big Data. This could lead to many benefits, including improved data security, better privacy protection, and more effective data management. Ultimately, this would unlock the full potential of big data for economic and security advancements in the country, paving the way for a more prosperous and secure Pakistan.

- Compliance with data protection legislation and best practices for data security is not just a suggestion; it's a necessity. It's the key to preventing legal issues about data privacy and protection. Rules, regulations, and policies for handling big data at the national level under a central pool must be implemented to ensure the responsible and ethical use of data in Pakistan.
- Comprehensive mechanisms must be deployed to securely share and safeguard the integrity, confidentiality, and availability of massive organisational datasets, with robust encryption protocols, to secure sensitive information and ensure that only authorised entities have access.
- Stringent privacy regulations must be enacted to govern the collection, storage, and use of big data in Pakistan. This will establish clear guidelines for responsible data management entities and advanced threat detection and prevention systems, ensuring that data is handled in a manner that respects individual privacy and societal norms.
- Like the National Incubation Center, a 'Big Data Industry' under a public-private partnership is needed to cope with future emerging technology trends.

In conclusion, the big data governance landscape presents challenges and opportunities for countries like Pakistan. The ability to store, manage, and utilise vast surveillance data has become a pivotal aspect of modern digital capital, exerting influences across cyber and physical domains. As we navigate the complexities of big data governance, we must view data not merely as a commodity but as a traded product with inherent value. Finally, leveraging big data effectively can empower developing nations towards self-sustainability, reducing reliance on donor funding through strategic resource allocation and planning and facilitating improved economic conditions. This, in turn, fosters new markets and trade partnerships, expanding opportunities for trade and investment. By embracing this perspective and adopting forward-thinking strategies, Pakistan can effectively navigate the data revolution, unlocking its full potential for societal advancement and economic prosperity.<sup>11</sup>



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## About Insight and Author

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# Operationalisation of Geoeconomics for Pakistan: Opportunities and Challenges

*Khadija Younus*

## Abstract

*This INSIGHT delves into Pakistan's National Security Policy (NSP) 2022-2026 and scrutinises a report on its geoeconomic vision. It champions a unique cooperative geoeconomic framework, envisioning Pakistan as a distinctive nexus of interdependence. The strategy leverages regional connectivity and development partnerships to set it apart from other nations, fostering economic prosperity while navigating geopolitical challenges. This vision holds immense potential for Pakistan's future, igniting a sense of optimism in the hearts of our esteemed audience.*

**Keywords:** National Security Policy, Geo-Economic Pivot, Cooperative Geoeconomic Framework.

**F**or the first time, Pakistan's National Security Policy (NSP) 2022-2026 articulates a citizen-centric Comprehensive National Security Paradigm, which defines the national purpose as the safety, security, dignity, and prosperity of Pakistan's citizens.

This paper finds it relevant to substantiate the argument by reviewing a report on the NSP's geoeconomic vision, "Pakistan's Geoeconomic Pivot: Strategies, Opportunities and Challenges" by Dr Moeed Yusuf and Dr Rabia Akhtar. The report outlines the meaning and implementation strategies of Pakistan's geoeconomic pivot. This pivot, a strategic shift in Pakistan's economic policy, aims to leverage the country's economic potential to achieve geopolitical goals. It presents a decisively optimistic outlook on Pakistan's economic geography, highlighting the potential benefits of this new approach.

The report, comprising four sections, initiates the debate on geoeconomics in the Introduction. There is a difference in the interpretation of geoeconomics in the West and Pakistan. However, Pakistan advances a 'cooperative geoeconomic framework'. Unlike traditional economic strategies, this framework emphasises collaboration and mutual benefit over competition. It not only puts the country at the centre of becoming a positive hub of interdependence for regional and extra-regional countries but also presents a decisively optimistic outlook on Pakistan's economic geography, promising significant and tangible financial benefits.<sup>1</sup>

Pakistan's historical economic model over the past seventy-five years is based on selling the country's relevance and security strength to gain economic inflows. The problem with this model is that it only works till Pakistan remains relevant, and once that relevance disappears, the economic inflows dry up. The limitations of this model are further exacerbated by Pakistan's inability to redistribute and capitalise on those inflows to create a sustainable financial model at home. Pakistan's

*By leveraging Pakistan's geographic location and through effective economic diplomacy, the country can develop economic interdependence with the world and become prosperous.*

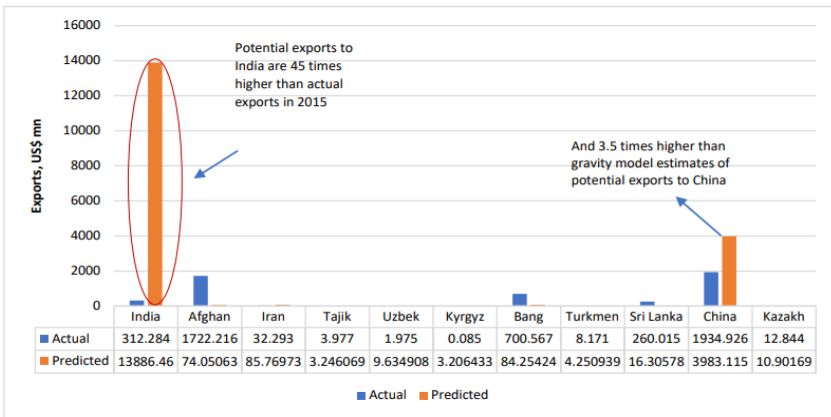
GDP growth rates, especially when it was within the strategic calculus of the world powers, had a correlation, which disappeared when the country did not remain relevant to them. Post-Cold War, Pakistan lost its strategic positive relevance to the US-led West in their competition with China, highlighting the challenges and vulnerabilities of this economic model.

The NSP suggests regional connectivity and development partnerships as solutions. However, it is crucial to underline that these strategies must be implemented while addressing Pakistan's geopolitical realities and security issues. This dual approach is urgent and should be a key takeaway for our audience.

Moreover, it will likely fall on Pakistan unless the country develops shields to guard against those.

The second section offers three fundamental suggestions to avoid being a playball of great powers. One is looking at Pakistan’s neighbourhood, which can provide several opportunities to connect with multiple regions. Through the Karachi-Kabul-Termez route, Pakistan’s North-South connectivity is gaining momentum through the successful Transports Internationaux Routiers’ (TIR) shipments to Uzbekistan. Besides, road and train corridors have become operational for consignments to China and CARs. However, East-West connectivity is still at a halt due to Indian hostility. Moreover, in pursuance of the economic cooperation model, Pakistan must strive to bring different regional initiatives, like the Trans-Afghan Railway Project, Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline, Central Asia-South Asia 1000 Project (CASA-1000), and Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline etc., to a logical conclusion.

Pakistan’s regional connectivity cannot gain momentum unless East-West and North-South connectivity work simultaneously.<sup>2</sup> The report subtly hints at this aspect when citing the intra-regional trade figures of different regions. 60 % of European trade is within Europe, 35% of East Asian trade is within East Asia, and South Asia stands at less than 5%. To liberalise Pakistan’s intra-regional trade, specifically East-West connectivity, the World Bank report shows significant trajectories, as shown in the following chart.<sup>3</sup>



Pakistan’s Potential Exports to the Region in Comparison to Exports from 2015<sup>4</sup>

The report underlines the importance of moving from assistance-based to development-based partnerships in section three. Pakistan is trying to expand its resource pie of foreign inflows through equal / mutually beneficial development partnerships. Pakistan is part of many frameworks of cooperation like the Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO), Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC), etc. To fully benefit from such frameworks and other trade groupings, it must be proactive to have non-debt-raising revenue, specifically through exports, FDI, and workforce export.

In response to labelling the economy with security, the report opines that the NSP does not deal with the nitty-gritty of the economy but underpins the strategic thinking that economic security leads to comprehensive national security. For this purpose, economic diplomacy plays a crucial role. Pakistan has to create structure even with the meagre productivity and financial problems to create an economic dividend for other countries. This approach will make Pakistan more stable and generate interdependence with other countries, thereby raising the cost of undermining Pakistan for all those inducements aimed at the government.

Economic diplomacy without compromising Pakistan's national security interests is a challenge. Overcoming the mental constraint of how Pakistan's geostrategy might be affected when pursuing the geoeconomic paradigm is crucial. The report underscores the necessity of developing a political consensus for policy continuity among all stakeholders. It also acknowledges the resistance to change inherent in the status quo, particularly from those benefiting from the current system, as a stumbling block. This emphasis on policy continuity instils confidence in Pakistan's ability to navigate change and maintain its strategic course.

The report's major takeaway is the concept of geoeconomics, which genuinely explores the prospects of leveraging Pakistan's economic geography to overcome its geostrategic challenges via regional connectivity and development partnerships. Pakistan's geostrategic location near the three geopolitical theatres of global power contestation does not let it escape the obstacles. At the same time, the same economic

geography grants it with opportunities. Here, the report creatively discusses the strategies of regional connectivity and development partnerships to cash on the opportunities. It poignantly emphasises that by leveraging Pakistan's geographic location and through effective economic diplomacy, the country can develop economic interdependence with the world and become prosperous.

Would geoeconomics work without first addressing Pakistan's geopolitical realities vis-a-vis its hardcore security issues? Keeping the potential economic gains unharvested until the country progresses on the geopolitical and security agenda would not be practical. It would not deliver the hardcore security solutions that Pakistan is looking for. Besides, Pakistan's geoeconomics convincingly navigates to address the security challenges vis-à-vis its neighbours, specifically the eastern ones.

The report's fresh thinking and geoeconomic approach to tapping into the opportunities arising from the geopolitical challenges will benefit Pakistan economically and build international stakes in a stable and prosperous country. Regional connectivity and trade are the ways to open up a whole new world for Pakistan.

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## About Insight and Author

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# Russia-Ukraine War: Shaping US and China's Relationships with EU

*Sidra Khan*

## Abstract

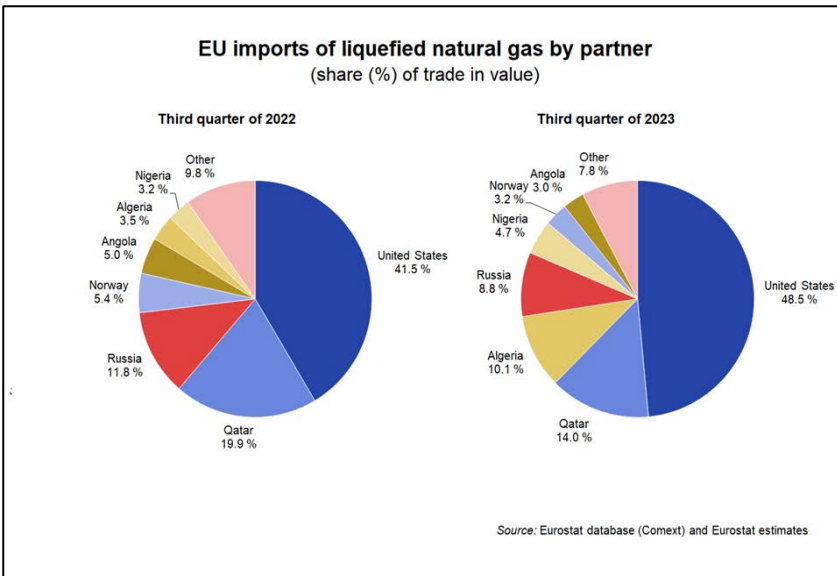
*This INSIGHT highlights the strategic responses of the US and China to the protracted Russia-Ukraine war, which significantly shaped global geopolitics. The US, reinforcing its role as Europe's security guarantor, and China, capitalizing on the shifting landscape through economic initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative, are key players in this geopolitical tension. This dynamic has led to increased US exports to Europe and a decline in Chinese trade with the EU, clearly indicating the reshaping of global power dynamics and the strategic manoeuvres of these significant powers.*

**Keywords:** Russia-Ukraine War, Global Geopolitics, Security Guarantor, Transatlantic Ties, Indo-Pacific Economic Framework.

The prolonged conflict in Ukraine has reshaped global geopolitics, prompting major powers to seek new opportunities and enhance their influence. Russia has demonstrated remarkable strategic agility in navigating the complex geopolitical landscape despite international sanctions. Since the Ukraine crisis began, the US and China have intensified efforts to gain influence in Europe, resulting in unexpected alliances and placing Russia at the center of a struggle between the two superpowers. President Putin's statement on February 29, 2024, suggests that Russia sees its actions in Ukraine as a preemptive move to safeguard its European interests from a perceived threat from the West. This hints at a potential alignment with China against US influence, which could reshape global power dynamics.

Recognizing Russia's strategic importance, the US has reaffirmed its historic role as Europe's security guarantor. President Biden's administration has made a clear and unwavering commitment to strengthening transatlantic ties and positioning the US as pivotal to Europe's defence. This commitment, demonstrated through significant aid to Ukraine and coordinated sanctions with European allies, underscores the strength of the US-Europe relationship.

The US is vigorously fortifying its relationships with European allies. The Biden Administration has committed to supplying the EU with an additional 15 billion cubic meters (bcm<sub>5</sub>) of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG), opting for collaboration with the EU as a whole rather than engaging bilaterally with individual member states. To further illustrate this point, it is noteworthy that in 2022, Europe's LNG imports from the US constituted 41.5% of its total imports. However, in 2023, this figure escalated to 48.5%, primarily due to Europe ceasing its LNG imports from Russia in response to the Ukraine conflict, as shown in the figure.<sup>1</sup>



Washington is also discussing new comprehensive trade deals with the EU to curb steel and aluminium imports from China. Meanwhile, the



proposed Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) seeks to establish high-standard rules on digital trade, clean energy, supply chain resilience and other areas to shape the road rules for emerging industries.<sup>2</sup>

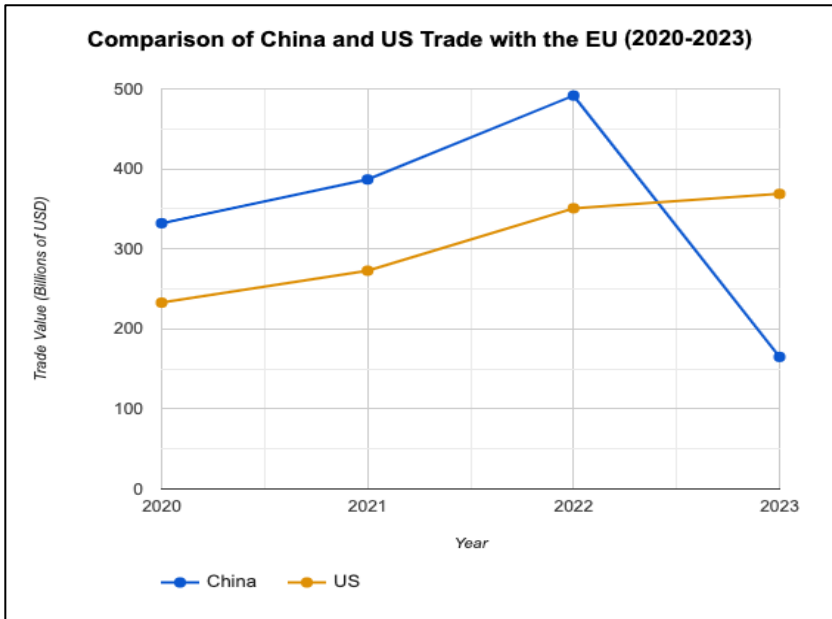
On the defence front, the US is deepening cooperation with Eastern NATO members near Russia through increased weapons sales, joint training exercises and intelligence sharing.<sup>3</sup> Washington is also lobbying EU countries to limit or ban Huawei's involvement in strategically critical 5G network infrastructure over espionage concerns, reducing China's access to sensitive data and technology.<sup>4</sup>

While the US maintains solid military and economic ties with its European allies, it faces challenges in entirely replacing Russian energy dependencies and addressing European concerns around trade issues. However, the US, undeterred, has proactively enhanced trade collaboration, leveraging its economic ties with the EU. This is evident in the persistent growth of exports from 2020 to 2023. The US has strategically stepped in to fill the void left by other players, solidifying its position as a critical trading partner for the EU and demonstrating its unwavering determination to maintain its influence.

*The Russia-Ukraine conflict has significantly reshaped Europe's security and economic landscape. This geopolitical shift has created opportunities for China to expand its infrastructure development, trade, and investment in Europe.*

From 2020 to 2023, exports from the US to the EU persistently increased. Beginning at US\$232.85 billion in 2020, the trade volume ascended to US\$272.78 billion in 2021, surged further to US\$350 billion in 2022, and culminated at an impressive US\$368 billion by 2023, underscoring significant advancements in their trade collaboration.<sup>5</sup>

This consistent growth pattern in US exports to the EU reflects the US' concerted efforts to bolster its influence within the EU's trade framework, as illustrated in the figure below. The US has effectively capitalised on the geopolitical situation, stepping in to fill the void left by other players and solidifying its position as a critical trading partner for the EU.



Meanwhile, China has taken a cautious stance, refraining from condemning Russia's military actions while calling for negotiations and restraint on all sides. This subtle approach is part of its larger strategy to challenge the dominant US-led global order. By subtly positioning itself as a mediator in the conflict, China presents itself as a credible alternative in trade and development enterprises.

By leveraging the Ukraine conflict, China has expanded its economic footprint in Europe, positioning itself as a neutral mediator. This is evident through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which includes investments in critical infrastructure like new rail links between Serbia and Hungary and provides economic assistance to conflict-affected nations facing sanctions.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, China is advancing its financial interests by advocating for an investment agreement with the EU and promoting cooperation through forums such as the China-Central and Eastern European Countries (CEEC) summits.

From 2020 to 2022, Chinese trade with the EU steadily increased, from US\$332.1 billion 2020 to US\$386.8 billion in 2021, peaking at US\$491.6

billion in 2022.<sup>7</sup> However, in 2023, there was a sharp decline to US\$165 billion, as displayed in the figure above. This drop coincides with the ongoing Russo-Ukraine conflict and China's tilt towards Russia, which has been met with disapproval by EU countries.<sup>8</sup> The significant decrease in trade volume in 2023 suggests that the EU has been shifting its trade focus away from China and towards other partners, notably the US. The US has emerged as a beneficiary, with its exports to the EU showing a consistent upward trend, with the US gaining more influence at the expense of China.

The Russia-Ukraine conflict has significantly reshaped the security and economic landscape of Europe. This has been evidenced by the expansion of NATO, which has grown to include 31 member countries, with Finland joining the alliance (April 2023). Concurrently, the cessation of energy supplies from Russia has increased Europe's reliance on the US for economic and military support.

This geopolitical shift in Europe has created opportunities for China to expand its infrastructure development, trade, and investment in Europe. However, the ongoing global rivalry between the US and China and a decline in Chinese trade with Europe in 2023 suggests that this will be challenging. It is now incumbent upon China to devise alternative strategies to capitalise on these economic opportunities in Europe. However, the terms and conditions under which this will occur remain uncertain.

In conclusion, the future of Europe, at least for the foreseeable future, appears to be marked by economic, political, and military instability. These dynamics underscore the need for a nuanced understanding of the situation and strategic responses from global powers.

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# Hindutva and Zionism: A Marriage of Convenience

*Fatima Saleem*

## Abstract

*This INSIGHT explores the ideological alignment of Hindutva and Zionism, emphasising their shared ethno-nationalistic roots and their influence on international politics. It delves into both ideologies' historical backgrounds and aggressive policies, demonstrating their contribution to global unrest and intolerance. Moreover, it highlights the urgent need for international intervention to address the human rights abuses resulting from their actions, underlining the consequences for global peace and coexistence.*

**Keywords:** Hindutva, Zionism, Fascism, Ultrnationalism, Racism, Islamophobia, Intolerance, Authoritarian Societies.

The resurgence of fascism in global politics has led to an uptick in incidents of ultranationalism, racism, Islamophobia and intolerance. The emergence of authoritarian societies is a direct reflection of that. Both Zionism and Hindutva are premised on similar beliefs and are deeply embedded in the teachings of the ethno-nationalist far-right. The two have joined hands to form an ideological bond directly impacting domestic, regional, and global politics. This insight, therefore, aims to trace the historical roots of the two ideologies, understand their similarities and give context to the Indo-Israel nexus in the giant mosaic of the US-China rivalry.

According to orthodox Jewish traditions, Jews are forbidden from forming a state until the arrival of their Messiah, and doing otherwise is considered sinful. However, this has not stopped the Zionists from pursuing their agenda. Historically, Zionism emerged in 1897 as a result

of political developments in Eastern Europe, where Jews were facing mass persecution. Its founder, Theodor Herzl, advocated forming a separate Jewish state in Palestine. The Jerusalem program is the guiding principle of Zionism and states the following:-

- Promote the Jewish people's unity, its bond to its historic homeland, Eretz Yisrael, and the centrality of the State of Israel and Jerusalem.
- Promote Jewish migration (Aliyah) to Israel and ensure integration of immigrants.
- Strengthening Israel as a Jewish, Zionist, and democratic state.
- Promote Jewish culture, Hebrew language, and Zionist education.
- Fighting anti-Semitism and defending the rights of Jews.
- Settling the country as an expression of practical Zionism.



The programme was adopted in 1951 at the 23<sup>rd</sup> World Zionist Congress and has undergone multiple revisions. The left-wing Zionists are more secular, while the right-wing Zionists promote the occupation of

Palestine and prefer a government centred on Jewish religious traditions. According to Henry Kissinger, Israel never had a foreign policy, only domestic politics.<sup>1</sup> If this is to be believed, then its actions are an extension of its domestic Zionist agenda. Promoting illegal settlements, restricting access to Al-Aqsa Mosque, declaring Jerusalem as its unequivocal capital, the ongoing Israel-Gaza war and calling Palestinians “animals” are some of the practical manifestations of it.

Hindutva is the ideology of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and is heavily influenced by Mussolini’s Italy, the rise of Nazism and the Third Reich in Germany.<sup>2</sup> The term was first coined by V.D. Savarkar in 1923 and promotes Hindu nationalism and supremacy. *Savarkar’s work*, ‘The Essentials of Hindutva,’ states that India belongs exclusively to the Hindus and advocates a Hindu majoritarian state, the “Hindu Rashtra,” for the “protection of its “cultural citizenship”<sup>3</sup>. Unlike Islam and Christianity, Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism originated in India. Premised on this, Savarkar termed these religions as variations of Hinduism while rejecting the Abrahamic texts altogether. This has been a decisive factor in today’s ongoing religious tensions in India<sup>4</sup>.

***Hindutva and Zionism are deeply entrenched in fascism and pose a grave threat to multiculturalism and peaceful coexistence.***

The amendments to India’s Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) 2019, the abrogation of articles 370 and 35a in the state of Jammu and Kashmir and increased incidents of mob lynching against minorities are some of the practical examples of Hindutva ideology.

Premised on hyper-nationalistic beliefs, both ideologies of Zionism and Hindutva hold astounding similarities. India and Israel are ruled by ethno-racially driven regimes, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the coalition of right-wing Likud party and Religious Zionism, respectively.

Aiming to keep their lands racially pure, Hindutva propagates the creation of a Hindu Rashtra and Akhand Bharat, encompassing Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Thailand. At the same time, Zionists strive to create a Greater Israel encompassing Palestine, parts of Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, and Iraq.

Both ideologies have a legacy of colonisation (illegal occupation of Kashmir and Palestine) and are actively engaged in genocidal practices. The Gujarat massacre of 2002 and the ongoing Israel's war in Gaza are glaring examples of it.

Proponents of the two ideologies are engaged in distorting history. "Saffronisation" of the curriculum to paint Muslims as oppressors and labelling Jews as natives and Arabs as colonisers is a practical manifestation of it. The desecration of religious sites in India and Israel has also become a common occurrence. According to a report of the People's Union for Human Rights, in Gujarat alone, five hundred mosques and shrines have been demolished to date.<sup>5</sup>

Historically, India-Israel ties were weak. After independence, India supported the cause of Palestine, and in 1974, it became the first non-Arab country to give legitimacy to the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). However, in a bid to develop stronger ties with the US, in 1992, India established formal diplomatic relations with Israel. With time, relations have grown stronger, encompassing economic, political, military, and cultural domains.

In the contemporary geopolitical scenario where India and Israel function as net security providers for their respective regions, having similar political ideologies is convenient. The growing Indo-Israel nexus can also be explained in the larger context of the US-China rivalry. India's US strategic partner status has further augmented New Delhi-Tel Aviv relations. The deepening bond can further be explained by India's ambition to obtain regional dominance, which is actively pursuing a policy to remain close to countries with advanced military and technological capabilities.

India is Israel's largest buyer of military equipment and its second-largest trade partner in Asia.<sup>6</sup> Ties have been further strengthened by cooperation in cybersecurity, the energy sector, air transport agreements, film co-production, investment in India and investment in Israel deals and MoUs in medicine and space science.



Amidst the current Israel-Palestine conflict in Gaza, thousands of Indian labourers have migrated to Israel in a bid to replace Palestinians. Israel is also actively assisting the Indian army in Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir through information sharing, providing surveillance software and supplying weapons.

As Indo-Israel relation grows, the Hindutva Bhakts continue to hold Zionists in high esteem. This unholy alliance poses a dire threat to the values of multiculturalism and peaceful co-existence. The mastermind of the Norway 2011 attack, Anders Behring Breivik, who killed sixty-nine individuals, released a manifesto, "A European Declaration of Independence", in which he glorified the Hindutva ideology. This is a dangerous precedence and shows that in today's deeply interconnected world, these fascist ideologies are influencing individuals and, therefore, pose an imminent risk to global peace. As the sphere of influence of Zionism and Hindutva expands, the world silently watches them conduct gross human rights violations in Gaza and Kashmir, respectively. It has, therefore, become incumbent upon the international community to hold these fascist governments to account before it gets too late.

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# Climate Change and the Impact of Military Presence on Siachen Glacier

*Maham Ayaz*

## Abstract

*This INSIGHT examines the environmental impact of military presence on the Siachen Glacier. Once a pristine area, the glacier has suffered significant degradation due to ongoing military activities by India and Pakistan. These activities have accelerated the glacier's melting, threatening water supplies for millions in Pakistan dependent on glacier-fed rivers for agriculture and daily needs. Immediate international intervention and renewed dialogue between the two countries are essential to mitigate these environmental damages and protect this vital ecological region.*

**Keywords:** Climate Change, Siachen Glacier, Karakoram Range, Operation Meghdoot.

The Siachen Glacier, once a vibrant valley of roses, has now transformed into a frozen expanse. Spanning over 76 kilometres and perched at an altitude of 5000 meters above sea level, it stands as the longest glacier in the Karakoram range and the second-longest in the world, excluding the polar regions. Its unique geographical location and size make it a vital component of the global climate system, a fact that cannot be overlooked.

*Given the environmental concerns associated with military forces on Siachen Glacier, the International Community must take collective action. This underscores our shared responsibility to resolve the issue of vacating Siachen Glacier.*



Once uninhabited, the icy wilderness of the Siachen Glacier is now home to armies of two neighbouring nuclear states. The conflict over Siachen began in April 1984 when India launched Operation Meghdoot, a military operation to capture most of the Siachen Glacier. This operation was launched under the pretext that the Line of Control (LOC) runs from NJ9842 along the watersheds formed by the Salto Ridge, which places the entire Siachen Glacier within Indian territory. India relied on the Karachi Agreement (1949), where beyond NJ9842, the LOC was to run “thence north to the glaciers”. Since then, it has been the world’s highest and coldest battleground. However, before 1984, Pakistan exercised authority over the terrain of the Siachen Glacier, issuing mountaineering expedition licenses for the area and allowing travellers with Pakistani visas to visit the site.<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, India, before 1984, never contested Pakistan’s administrative control over the Siachen Glacier. This historical context is crucial to understanding the complexity and urgency of the Siachen conflict and its environmental impact, which demands immediate attention and action.<sup>2</sup>

Siachen conflict is expensive and full of extreme weather hazards for troops. Another tragedy beneath the surface is the environmental impact

of military presence on the glacier as it threatens the natural topography. The intense activity directly on the glacier's surface increases the danger to the environment manifold. For instance, heavy machinery and explosives have led to the destruction of vegetation and wildlife habitats, accelerating climate change. Additionally, large quantities of waste, including non-biodegradable material, produced by troops on the glacier severely affect the region's delicate ecosystem. These examples highlight the issue's severity and the urgent need for action.

For Pakistan, the environmental degradation of the Siachen Glacier is not just an ecological concern but a forewarning of the human toll this military buildup may take. The Nubra River flows from the glacier through the remote valleys of Laddakh before joining the Shyok River. The water of these rivers is not just a matter of sustenance but a source of life for millions in Pakistan, whose livelihoods and well-being are at stake. The mighty Indus River provides water for agriculture, industry, and domestic use in south Pakistan. The potential water scarcity due to the melting of the Siachen Glacier could lead to a humanitarian crisis, with millions of people struggling to survive without adequate water resources. This situation demands immediate attention and action from the international community, as the implications are dire.

People in Pakistan's Gilgit-Baltistan region are already facing the consequences of these changing runoff patterns.<sup>3</sup> Aisha Khan, CEO of the Mountain and Glacier Protection Organisation in Islamabad, personally observed the impact of snow melting on local farmers. The emerging geographical change from snow melting has affected the water supply for irrigation and agriculture, forcing men to leave their fields and move towards the overpopulated cities for work.

Environmentalists warn that if the melting of Siachen Glacier continues at its current rate, it could lead to disastrous floods, droughts, and food shortages in Pakistan. According to a study by the Pakistani Meteorological Department, the glacier size has reduced considerably by about 35% and is currently decreasing at an alarming rate of 110 meters annually. These changes are not only endangering the lives of millions of South Asians but also potentially leading to water scarcity and mass displacements. The urgency of this situation cannot be overstated,

demanding immediate attention and action from the international community.<sup>4</sup>

Presently, climate change is one of humanity's most pressing challenges. Problems such as melting glaciers, rising sea levels, extreme weather conditions, and declining biodiversity are causing grave environmental concerns.<sup>5</sup> The world is struggling with the complexity of climate change and is trying to address its adverse effects through various initiatives. The international community must urgently address conflicts surrounding Siachen Glacier to mitigate climate change.

From the international law perspective, the Siachen Glacier's degradation raises essential questions regarding environmental protection and preserving fragile ecosystems. Stockholm Declaration 1972 and the Rio Declaration 1992 provide the general principles of global environmental protection laws.<sup>6</sup> Some of these principles are also emerging as customary international law.<sup>7</sup> According to these principles, states are responsible for preventing environmental hazards, especially in regions with ecological significance, such as Siachen Glacier. Numerous international agreements and conventions dictate action to address climate change so that vulnerable ecosystems and humanity can be protected.<sup>8</sup> Henceforth, it is an international obligation of both states to prevent harm to the environment.

Military activities significantly impact greenhouse gas emissions. Studies have shown that the military sector is responsible for approximately 5.5% of global greenhouse gas emissions because it relies on fossil fuels for infrastructure, operations, and transportation. The Indian army's offensive on the Siachen Glacier is accelerating the melting of the glaciers and worsening the environment.

Given the environmental concerns associated with military forces on Siachen Glacier, the International Community must take collective action. This underscores our shared responsibility to resolve the issue of vacating Siachen Glacier. Initiating a dialogue between India and Pakistan to explore alternative strategies for managing the region is crucial. Despite inconclusive agreements in the past, resuming dialogue is essential to find a solution that can help protect the region's

environment. International organisations such as the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) can play a role by facilitating negotiations and conducting on-ground research to highlight the military's impact on the region's climate change. Through initiatives such as the 'Green Alliance', countries like the US can use their diplomatic influence to make India fulfil its responsibility for environmental issues in the region and support efforts to mitigate the impact of militarisation. This collective action is essential to resolving the Siachen conflict and protecting the environment.

With concerted efforts, the International Community can transform the Siachen Glacier from a battleground to a 'mountain of peace', ensuring the protection of the environment and regional stability. This potential for a peaceful resolution is not just a distant dream but a tangible possibility. Proactive and meaningful engagement can pave the way for a more sustainable and peaceful future for the Siachen Glacier and its surrounding regions. This positive future vision is a powerful motivator for the audience to support the idea and take action.

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# Referendum and Renaissance of Khalistan Movement

*Abdul Basit Khan*

## Abstract

*This INSIGHT argues that the re-emergence of the Khalistan movement stems from unresolved historical grievances and the ongoing human rights abuses by Indian authorities under the BJP, which continue to fuel a desire for autonomy.*

**Keywords:** Khalistan Movement, Freedom Struggle, Self-Determination, Sovereign State, Referendums.

**T**he reemergence of the Khalistan movement stems from unresolved historical grievances and the ongoing human rights abuses by Indian state authorities under the BJP, which continue to fuel a desire for autonomy.

The Khalistan movement is a freedom struggle and a self-determination movement to create a separate, independent homeland for the Sikh community. Since 1947, demands for a sovereign state for the Sikh community emerged within Indian Punjab.<sup>1</sup> However, this did not gain momentum amid the chaos of the newly independent India. The Sikh community does not feel safe within the current status quo and feels oppressed by its historical, cultural, and religious identity. Thus, along with the armed struggle, several referendums have revealed that most community members want an independent homeland. India has moved from a secular state to a state that is only secular in the name of minorities within its borders feeling oppressed.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the Khalistan movement re-emerged, with a head-on marginalisation of Sikhs. This friction ultimately led to the

infamous *Operation Blue Star*, launched against the Sikh Khalistan freedom fighters.<sup>2</sup> The result of this operation was devastating as hundreds of innocent worshippers, along with Mr. Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, a prominent Khalistan leader, were killed by the Indian Army. This angered not only the community but also the violation of crossing into the holiest Golden Temple, only to be slaughtered by the Indian Army, causing deep-seethed resentment. It is no wonder that the culmination of this was the assassination of the then-prime minister, Ms. Indira Gandhi. This was followed by yearlong violent riots all through 1984 by Sikhs.

The riots of 1984 became the reason for the migration of Sikh families from India to countries like Canada, the US, the UK, Australia, etc. An investigation report was drafted after Operation Blue Star, titled “Oppression in Punjab,” to understand better what was fuelling the movement.<sup>3</sup> However, this report has not yet been published. The report contains several eyewitness statements of the brutality of the Indian Army against its Sikh community.

*India acts as a flag bearer of democracy but fails to accept the reality of a referendum and continually discriminates against the Sikh community.*

The human rights violations in the Khalistan movement have been evident ever since its inception. These violations include torture, extrajudicial killings, and disappearances by the Indian security forces.<sup>4</sup> Since 1986, the Indian press has carried out reports that the police have used undercover agents with criminal records to accompany former and on-duty police officers to abduct Khalistan supporters and empathisers. In an interview, former Director General of Police J.F Ribeiro admitted that undercover agents were operating in the state and used weapons provided by the state to abduct Khalistan supporters.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, in August 1989, a Director-General of the Punjab Police issued a notice to all police district superintendents of a financial reward for the killing of Khalistan supporters and labelled them as terrorists.<sup>6</sup> The Khalistan supporters were considered creating chaos and unrest in the country. The Sikh community is one of the many vulnerable minority



groups in India that is demanding a separate homeland by legitimate means.

The world changed after 9/11 with the global war on terror, which provided India with a chance to label the Khalistan movement as a terrorist movement and suppress it for the time being. The movement did not raise its head till 2012, when a young leader, Amritpal Singh, gained popularity.<sup>7</sup>

To give worldwide credibility to its struggle, the Khalistan movement undertook referendums to know about the Sikh sentiments about a separate homeland for the Sikh community. The Khalistan referendum is a global undertaking and has the potential to achieve its purpose. In this connection, the first referendum was held on 31st October 2021 in the UK with the participation of 30,000 members of the Sikh community, showing their willingness to gain a sovereign state through peaceful and democratic ways of a referendum. Multiple referendums have been held since then in Geneva in 2021, Brescia in 2022, Melbourne in 2023, and twice in Vancouver in 2023.<sup>8</sup> The most recent referenda were held in San Francisco (Jan 28) and California (March 31).<sup>9</sup> The organisers aim to conduct referendums in South Africa and Malaysia in 2025. These referendums aim to raise awareness and pressurise India to hold an official referendum.

Due to the re-emergence of the Khalistan movement, India, as a strategy to curb the movement, initiated a planned series of murders of various leaders of the movement. Paramjit Singh Panwar, a Khalistan Commando Force (KCF) member, was killed in Lahore, Pakistan.<sup>10</sup> These events took place after Mr Amritpal Singh was arrested. Even those remotely connected to the Khalistan movement were under attack. Khalistan empathiser Sidhu Moosewala, a prominent Indian rapper, was killed in May 2022 as he used pro-Khalistan lyrics in his songs and visuals of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale.

In 2023, Hardeep Singh Nijjar, a prominent Khalistan activist, was murdered in Vancouver, Canada.<sup>11</sup> The death of Nijjar caused Indian and Canadian diplomatic relations to plummet as both India and Canada expelled their top diplomats.

The same year, India orchestrated a murder attempt on Gurpatwant Singh Pannun in the US due to his organising and holding referendums for Khalistan.<sup>12</sup> In response to this attempt, the US issued a warning to India.

India has a history of supporting genocide and violence to suppress its minorities. This has increased under the extremist BJP government, which heavily supports the Hindutva nationalist ideology of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)<sup>13</sup>. The lack of recognition of minorities in India was solidified when, during the G20 summit in 2023, Prime Minister Modi used the term “*Bharat*” instead of India when describing the state he was Prime Minister of, promoting Hindu nationalism internationally and eradicating the fact that the state of India was home to other ethnic and religious communities as well.

Given such persecutions, it is no surprise that India, along with the freedom struggle in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu & Kashmir (IIOJK), is also facing multiple separatist movements. All these movements have been demanding a separate homeland based on their cultural, social, and religious identity. These include but are not limited to the Manipur, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, and the Naxel-Moiset movement.<sup>14</sup>

Ironically, India acts as a flag bearer of democracy but fails to accept the reality of a referendum and continually discriminates against the Sikh community. India has failed to protect its minorities, which are now speaking out due to constantly facing state-centric violence.

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# Israel-Palestine Conflict and Russia-Ukraine War: Implications for the US

*Dr Abdul Rauf Iqbal*

## Abstract

*This INSIGHT delves into the strategic implications of the Israel-Palestine conflict and the Russia-Ukraine war on US foreign policy. It meticulously examines how these conflicts, including military and economic engagements, shape US global strategy. The document underscores the geopolitical and geoeconomic outcomes, emphasising the pivotal role of the US in not just adapting to but also shaping global power shifts and regional instabilities.*

**Keywords:** Russo-Ukraine War, Israel-Palestine Conflict, Regional Security Environment.

The Russo-Ukraine war and the Israel-Palestine conflicts are distinct due to their peculiar economic, historical, political, and strategic contexts. However, due to globalisation, conflict in a region has spillover and spill-out effects on the other areas. When the US-led Europe was busy supporting Ukraine against Russia, Hamas attacked Israel. The timing of this event has significant implications for both Ukraine and Israel as both states are dependent on the US for their defence. Meanwhile, the Israeli attack on the Iranian Embassy in Syria and Iranian counterattacks further complicated the regional security environment. In this background, it is essential to understand the implications of the Israel-Palestine conflict and the Russo-Ukraine war on the US.

Israel-Palestine conflict is a longstanding issue in the Middle East and has been affecting regional geopolitics for decades. The US-led Europe is supporting Israel, while China and Russia are increasing their diplomatic engagements with the Muslim countries. There is an arms race in the

Middle East and Europe due to the global contestation between the major powers. The increase in the defence budget of both regions indicates this.

The Russo-Ukraine war and the Israel-Palestine conflict are not just regional issues. They have global implications, reshaping the strategic trajectories and alignments of significant powers, and impacting food and energy security. Some argue that Ukraine is a geopolitical tool of the West to weaken Russia, while others suggest that Russia is covertly supporting Hamas to pressure the US. Whatever the case, both conflict zones have become arenas for geopolitical contestation between the US and Russia, underscoring the US's crucial role in these conflicts.

Defence statistics reveal the extent of Ukraine and Israel's reliance on the US. According to the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), the US has allocated a staggering \$75 billion to Ukraine since the start of the Russo-Ukraine war in February 2022. Most of this aid, 62 per cent (\$46 billion), is for the defence sector, including \$23.5 billion for weapons and equipment, \$18.3 billion for security assistance, and \$4.5 billion for grants and loans through the Foreign Military Finance Programme. This figure does not even include the EU's defence support to Ukraine.

*It is in the strategic interest of the US to avoid any diplomatic or military breakthroughs in the Middle East and Europe as it has successfully entangled Russia and Iran. To further enhance its influence, the US may ignite any other conflict to engage China, in Taiwan, leading to an explosive global contestation.*

Similarly, Israel, since its inception in 1948, has received about \$300 billion (\$81 billion in economic and \$216 billion in military) assistance from the US.<sup>1</sup> Without any mutual defence pact like Japan and NATO, Israel is privileged to get the most advanced American military hardware and technologies. According to the Washington Post, the US has approved more than one hundred weapons sales to Israel post-7 October 2023; the exact amount of these weapons has not been released.<sup>2</sup>

The increased US military support may not seem sustainable; however, these conflicts have increased the revenue of military-industrial complexes (MICs) of the US. According to Reuters, the income of General Dynamics' Combat Systems increased by 25%, Raytheon Technologies Corporation got extra orders of \$3 billion, and Northrop Grumman's orders increased by 6%.<sup>3</sup> To sum up, the continuation of conflicts is in the interest of MICs or the corporate US. Geoeconomically, these conflicts benefit the US rather than hurting it, as perceived.

The geostrategic positioning of the US versus Russia is also interesting to note. Despite its massive military support to Ukraine and Israel, US forces are not directly fighting in both regions; however, Russia is directly facing Ukraine. In the recent Iran-Israel standoff, President Biden reiterated that the US would support Israel without participating in any "offensive operations against Iran."<sup>4</sup>

The information domain also presents a fascinating insight into how global public opinion is shaped or manipulated. Western media and academic discourse allege Russia is an "aggressor" to justify American support to Ukraine in the name of "territorial integrity" and protection of "sovereignty" while ignoring the threats to Russian security.<sup>5</sup> Likewise, Hamas' attacks are juxtaposed as "terrorism" to rationalise Israel's attacks on Palestine. That is the reason that according to the Pew Research Centre, 74% of Americans view the Russo-Ukraine war, and 75% view the Israel-Palestine conflict as essential to US national interests.<sup>6</sup> These figures indicate the use of information warfare in both conflicts. A few media houses like CGTN and RT project a balanced view of the conflicts, but their outreach is not comparable with that of famous Western media platforms.

The Russo-Ukraine war and the Iran-Israel standoff have implications that extend far beyond their immediate regions. They also pose a threat to global energy security. In this context, OPEC countries like China and Russia have a vested interest in maintaining peace and security in the broader region. The growing Chinese and Russian engagements with Saudi Arabia and Iran, and the Chinese-backed Saudi-Iran rapprochement, are clear examples. Contrary to the US political rhetoric of regional stability, its continued military support to Israel and Ukraine

could escalate the conflict and chaos, further impacting global energy security.

To sum up, these conflicts have benefited the US at two levels. First, the US has successfully engaged the opposing countries in one way or another. Second, the dependency of its allies has increased on the US. In Europe, despite 'military setbacks' as the 'Ukrainian counteroffensive' could not defeat Russia, the US has succeeded in entangling Russia for the last three years. Moreover, European security dependence on the US has increased drastically, benefiting the US economy. Similarly, in the Middle East, not only Israel's dependence on the US has enhanced, but it has also successfully involved Iran. The situation indicates that it is in the strategic interest of the US to avoid finding any diplomatic or military breakthroughs in these conflicts. This will have negative implications for the current global order. The US may ignite any other conflict to engage China in Taiwan to enhance its influence further, leading to an explosive global contestation. The effects of this confrontation will not be limited to the conflict zones and will also affect other countries, including Pakistan. Our policymakers should remain cognisant of the environment.

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# Zakat Collection and Distribution System in Pakistan

*Asfa Azam*

## Abstract

*This INSIGHT delves into the challenges and opportunities within Pakistan's Zakat system, a fundamental Islamic practice aimed at poverty alleviation. Despite its potential, the system faces administrative inefficiencies and poor collection rates. The proposal for the establishment of a National Welfare Foundation (NWF) is not just a suggestion, but a potential game-changer. This model aims to enhance transparency and effectiveness and holds the promise of transforming Zakat recipients into contributors. The potential impact on poverty reduction and social development is significant, instilling a sense of hope and optimism in the potential of the Zakat system.*

**Keywords:** Zakat, Charity, Poverty Alleviation, Nisab, Masarif, National Welfare Foundation.

In a world grappling with inequality, charity, a shared precept across diverse faiths, alleviates the miseries of marginalised segments of different societies and reduces disparities. Zakat, a religion-based financial system that eliminates poverty and promotes social well-being, is one of the five pillars of Islamic practice. This insight delves explicitly into Zakat's collection and disbursement system in Pakistan, highlighting the challenges and offering recommendations for better utilisation of funds.

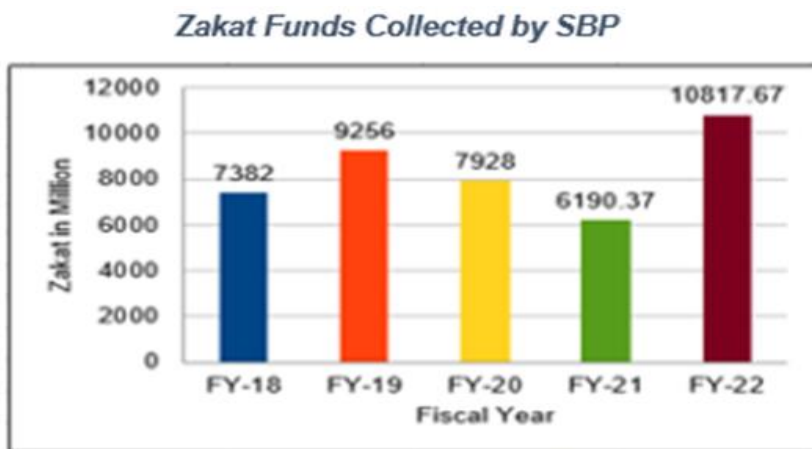
'Nisab' refers to the minimum wealth that makes someone liable to pay Zakat. It is 2.5% of the wealth liable to Zakat. According to the Quran, there are eight recipients (Masarif) of Zakat, including the poor, the needy, debt-ridden, slaves, new Muslims, wayfarers, and those in the



cause of God.<sup>1</sup> Zakat administrators are crucial in ensuring the funds reach the intended recipients.

Article 31(c) of the 1973 Constitution of Pakistan and Zakat and Ushr Ordinance 1980 serve as the legal frameworks for the formal Zakat collection system. The Central Zakat Fund (CZF) was established at the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) for centralised collection. The Zakat and Ushr Division, under the Ministry of Finance, managed the Zakat collection system until the 18th Amendment in 2010. This amendment led to a complete restructuring of the system. The management was handed over to the provinces. Provincial Zakat Funds (PZFs) headed by Chief Zakat Administrators were established. District Zakat Committees (DZC) and Local Zakat Committees (LZC) were also formed. The Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA) oversees the Zakat collection and distribution by these Zakat Councils.

The Zakat collection system involves both formal and informal mechanisms. Formally, banks deduct Zakat on the first of Ramadan each year, with exemptions for Fiqh-Jafria.<sup>2</sup> The government annually fixes a new Nisab to deduct Zakat from bank accounts. The collected amount is credited to the CZF in the SBP. Funds from the CZF are then transferred to PZFs and disbursed to districts. Figure 1 displays data about Zakat collected by SBP from 2018 to 2022.<sup>3</sup>



*Figure 1 Source: State Bank of Pakistan*

The table displays data about the disbursement of Zakat to Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT), provinces, and Gilgit Baltistan. Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) has its own Zakat and Ushr department, responsible for collection and distribution.

<b>Disbursement of Zakat through Formal Collection</b>		
<b>Federal Areas/ Provinces</b>	<b>Disbursement FY-2021</b>	<b>Disbursement FY-2022</b>
<b>Federal Areas</b>		
ICT	152.271	1,171.73
GB	80.469	730.45
FATA	200.587	-
<b>Provincial Share after Deduction of Federal Payments</b>		
Punjab	3,302.240	5,782.24
Sindh	1,364.995	738.95
KPK	795.623	994.94
Baluchistan	294.185	1,399.35
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>6190.37</b>	<b>10,817.67</b>

**Source:** Economic Survey 2021-2022 and 2022- 2023

Informally, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Welfare Foundations, Trusts, and Hospitals also collect Zakat. The funds collected are used for programmes like interest-free loans for the youth, education, skill development, and healthcare, and they enjoy widespread confidence among the people. These are now under government oversight due to FATF regulations.<sup>4</sup> However, the data on their Zakat collection are not available.

Additionally, there is a concurrent decentralised Zakat collection system where people preferably dispense Zakat directly to needy relatives. A survey conducted by the Institute of Business Administration (IBA) Centre for Excellence in Islamic Finance (CEIF) revealed that 95% of Muslims in Pakistan prefer to donate to Shariah-compliant private organisations.<sup>5</sup>

The Zakat system in Pakistan faces several administrative issues, which result in low collection. One of the critical challenges is the omission of

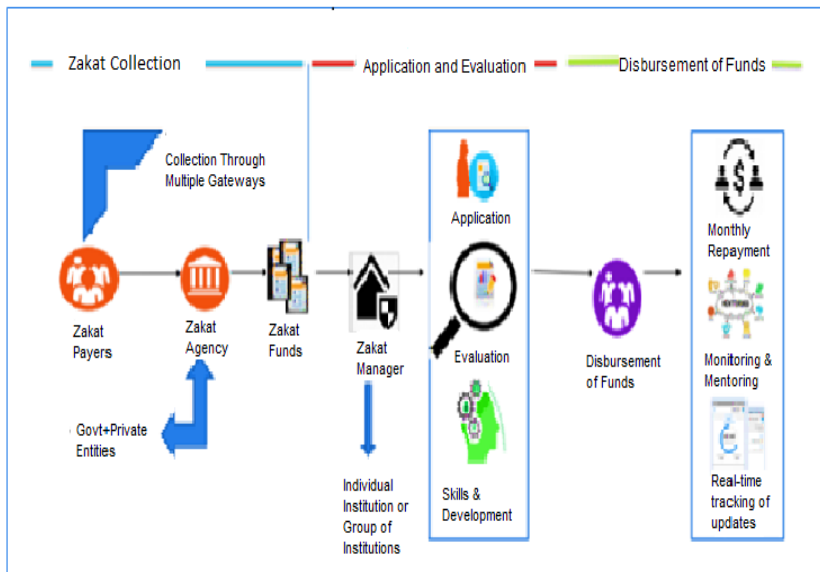
modern forms of wealth, such as industrial production and the service sector, for Zakat collection. This may be addressed through ijtehad, if possible. Another challenge is people's reluctance to institutional collection, as they prefer withdrawing money before the 1st of Ramadan. To address these challenges, banks may devise mechanisms to discourage withdrawals in collaboration with the government and Ulema. These challenges underscore the need for the proposed recommendations to improve the efficiency and transparency of the Zakat system.

Estimates reveal a promising potential for Pakistan to collect a significant amount through the Zakat system, potentially up to 4% of its GDP. This could translate into a substantial boost in resources for poverty alleviation efforts. However, as per FY-2022, only a fraction of this potential was realised, indicating a significant system efficiency gap. According to the World Bank's statistics for 2023, more than 37% of Pakistan's population lives under the poverty line. This stark reality underscores the urgent need for an efficient Zakat system that can play a pivotal role in reducing poverty. With 96% of the Muslim population in Pakistan, an efficient Zakat system holds the promise of a transformative impact on poverty alleviation, instilling hope for a brighter future.<sup>6</sup>

*Investing Zakat funds collected through National Welfare Foundation (NWF) and utilizing the generated revenue to fund institutions can maximize the benefits of Zakat, ensuring sustainable support throughout the year.*

The distribution is also inefficient. Transparency, the absence of clear SOPs for the recipients, and weak management undermine Zakat's potential. Despite all these challenges, funds are utilised in social welfare programmes, educational stipends, and healthcare allowances. However, such initiatives only offer short-term benefits to recipients and the economy. This underscores the urgent need for a concrete long-term plan, a plan that can truly transform the Zakat system and its impact on poverty alleviation.

## Zakat Management Model



**Figure 2. Source:** *Book: Zakat and Microfinance*<sup>7</sup>

As Dr. Hussain Qadri proposed, the figure above presents a seemingly feasible model for Zakat to alleviate Pakistan's poverty. Despite being a comprehensive way forward for the Zakat System, it lacks sustainability. However, another prominent model is the Fauji Foundation, one of the most successful models in Pakistan. It has created employment opportunities and provided financial stability to its beneficiaries, aligning with the objectives of Zakat. These models, when integrated, can form a sustainable Zakat system in Pakistan, instilling confidence in the feasibility and effectiveness of the proposed recommendations. This integration holds the promise of a brighter future for poverty alleviation in Pakistan.

Both models can be integrated to achieve a sustainable Zakat system in Pakistan. Therefore, it is imperative for all stakeholders, including the audience, to support the establishment of a National Welfare Foundation (NWF) using capital collected through Zakat. For centralised Zakat collection, funds from Zakat payers and private entities should be

credited to the foundation, which invests in profitable sectors. Informal collection should also be integrated into this centralised system. Revenue generated from investments can be divided into non-refundable and refundable funds. Non-refundable funds should sustain institutions in education, food, shelter, healthcare, skill development, nursing homes, and madrassas nationwide, which has also been affirmed by Islamic jurists.<sup>8</sup> Madrassa students may also be equipped with skills alongside religious studies for integration into the job market.

The refundable revenue will fund interest-free loans for small-scale businesses and enterprises, which will be repaid to the centralised fund in easy instalments and reinvested. This should be aligned with Islamic Banking practices, where banks can be integrated into the recollection of funds. This cycle will operate year-round for continuous support. Technology integration and Shariah compliance will ensure transparency and accountability, providing a sense of reassurance and confidence in the system. The digitisation of the system will maximise efficiency. Redirecting funds from Financial Support to Poverty Alleviation Programmes can create a sustainable impact.

This model may encounter concerns from different fiqh perspectives. Therefore, the government should facilitate an Ijtihad among moderate ulema from all schools of thought to reach a consensus, enabling the implementation of the model to help turn Zakat recipients into Zakat payers.

Hence, establishing NWF can help establish a robust system of collecting and distributing Zakat and achieve its true essence: poverty alleviation and social well-being. While Zakat is obligatory in Islam, its effectiveness entirely hinges upon adhering to Shariah principles and addressing the challenges.

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## About Insight and Author

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# Pakistan Amidst US-China Chip Competition: Navigating Technological Opportunities

*Haadia Riaz*

## Abstract

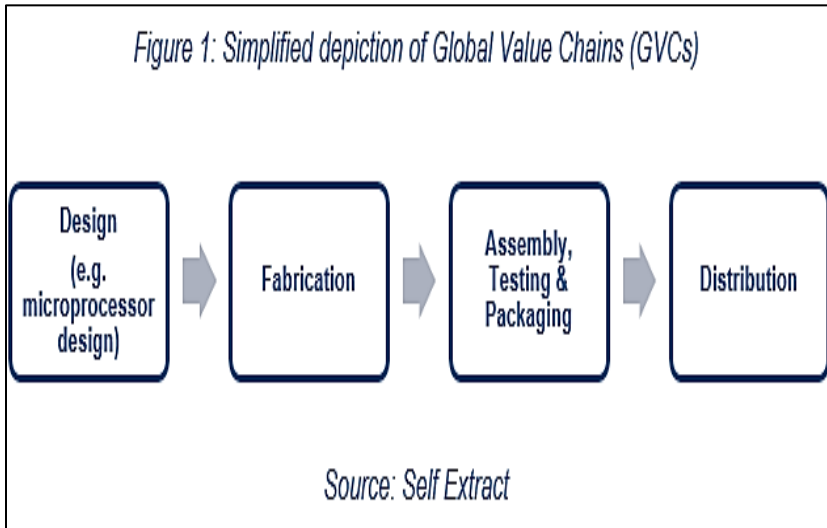
*This INSIGHT explores Pakistan's opportunities and challenges in the context of the US-China semiconductor rivalry. It discusses Pakistan's potential to become a key player in the chip industry due to its strategic location and cost-effective labour force. The analysis strongly emphasises the urgency of developing chip design and testing capabilities in Pakistan, fostering international collaborations, and implementing a strategic approach to capitalise on the growing global semiconductor market.*

**Keywords:** Microchips, Semiconductors, Global Value Chains, Technological Competition.

The 21st century has witnessed a shift in dominance from oil to microchips. Today, political, economic, and military power is intricately tied to these semiconductors. Mastery over semiconductor Global Value Chains (GVCs) has become a bone of contention between the United States (US) and China in technological competition. This US-China chip rivalry, which can become a blessing in disguise for Pakistan, presents significant opportunities for the country. Pakistan's cheap labour positions it as a key player within the chip industry, particularly in

*Though fabrication remains a challenge, Pakistan's emphasis on chip design, testing, and packaging, coupled with its lower labour cost, offers promising technological prospects for Pakistan amidst the US-China chip competition.*

collaboration with these global leaders. This underscores the potential benefits for Pakistan in the US-China chip rivalry.

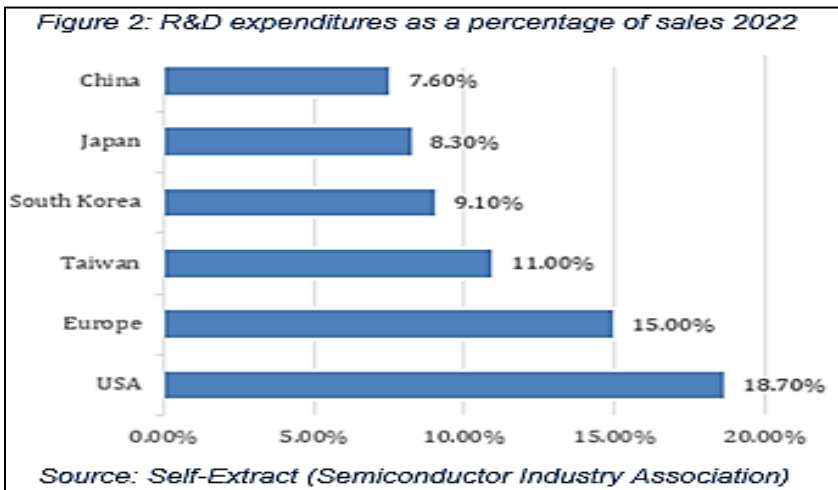


Chips are produced through GVCs, and the stages of the production process are spread among firms in different states. The supply chain begins with “fabless” chip makers in the US, who design the architecture of chips using “Electronic Design Automation” software. Its chip designers then outsource fabrication to “foundries” in Taiwan, South Korea, or Japan.<sup>1</sup>

The Chinese semiconductor industry still lags far behind the other global chip competitors. According to Chris Miller in his book *Chip War: The Fight for the World's Most Critical Technology*, China spends more money importing microchips than oil.<sup>2</sup> 95% of the chips China uses are designed by the US. Hence, it has been identified as a significant vulnerability of China's long-term ambitions. Amidst this context, President Xi launched an inward-looking state capitalism strategy prioritising Chinese firms over foreign firms to achieve self-sufficiency under the “Made in China 2025” plan and the 14th five-year plan for technology independence.<sup>3</sup>

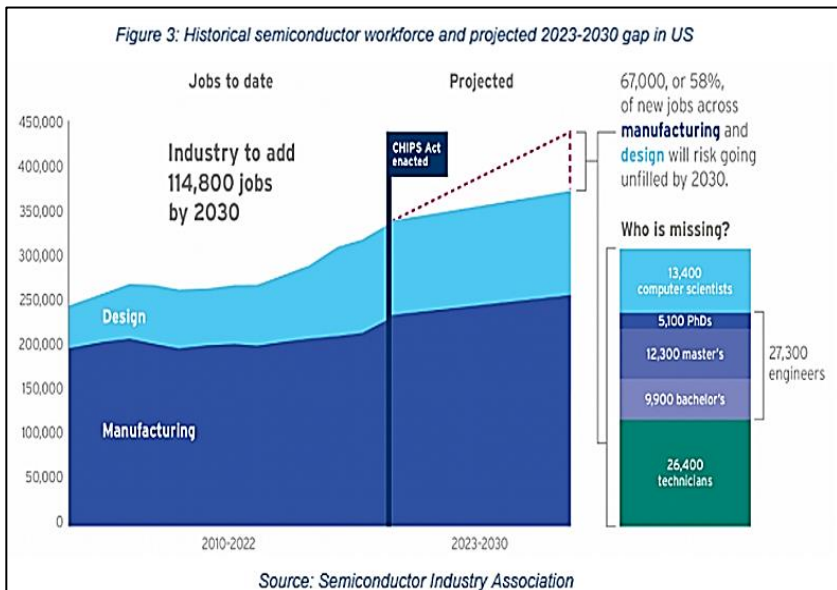


The US has intensified its competition with China in the chip industry by signing the “CHIPS and Science Act of 2022,” a comprehensive legislation to boost domestic chip production and research. The act includes provisions for a US\$52.7 billion investment over five years to revitalise semiconductor production in the US, thereby reducing its dependence on foreign chip manufacturers. This significant move can reshape the global chip industry and directly affect the US-China chip rivalry. Furthermore, the US Department of Commerce issued new export controls to prevent China from accessing chips made with US equipment, areas where US technology is critical and irreplaceable, to slow down China’s military and technological advances. This competition was further intensified when Biden broadened the scope from bilateral to multilateral by proposing the “Chip-4 Alliance” to integrate the chip-related policies among chip-producing states against China. Beijing retaliated by banning the export of crucial rare elements for manufacturing chips, namely germanium and gallium. China produces 60% of the world’s germanium and 98% of the world’s gallium.<sup>4</sup>



While the US and China are pouring billions into achieving self-reliance in the chip industry, the looming challenge of insufficient skilled labour is projected to be a significant hurdle in the coming years. The Semiconductor Industry Association anticipates that the US is expected to witness a growth in the semiconductor workforce from 345,000 jobs to

an estimated 460,000 by 2030, marking a 30% increase. However, 58% of these expected new positions are at risk of remaining unfilled with the current degree completion rates. Similarly, the China Center for Information Industry Development think tank and the China Semiconductor Industry Association jointly published a white paper that projected a workforce deficit of 200,000 professionals in the chip industry. This is a particularly significant opportunity given Pakistan's nascent stage in the semiconductor space.



With its abundant, low-cost labour, Pakistan holds immense potential to emerge as a critical player in the chip industry. Drawing parallels, it's crucial to note that South Korea's ascent as a chip-producing state was mainly due to its low-cost and skilled labour, which played a pivotal role in its chip industry. However, the question arises whether Pakistan possesses skilled labour in the chip sector.

Local universities in Pakistan need more highly trained faculty and academic resources in specialised domains such as micro and nano-electronics IC design. The chip sector in Pakistan comprises only a dozen

companies, employing less than a thousand specialised engineers. Though Pakistan has surplus human capital, with 25,000 engineers graduating annually and further training, these engineers have the potential to become integral contributors to US and Chinese firms, filling the critical workforce void.

Pakistan has a minimal history in the chip industry due to its capital-intensive nature. Establishing a state-of-the-art semiconductor fabrication facility necessitates significant investment, ranging from US\$2-20 billion - typically taking 6-8 years per industry estimates to achieve profitability. Therefore, the financial investment required at the fabrication stage is a formidable challenge for Pakistan.

Chip design requires software development and engineering proficiency, which could be more financially viable. In this context, emphasising chip design with outsourcing manufacturing would prove beneficial in the long run.

Although Pakistan does have a few companies that design chips (Table 01), they are in their early stages. The support of expat-led initiatives, such as Aql-Tech Solutions, which closely collaborates with a leading-edge RISC-V-based processor core IP provider company in the US, is significant in igniting progress. Pakistan needs to enhance such efforts by leveraging the expertise of expats to provide training and facilitate business development within the country.<sup>5</sup>

Utilising the triple helix model, the Special Technology Zones Authority (STZA) is instrumental in

fostering a conducive ecosystem for the chip industry, promoting collaboration among academia, industry, and government. Additionally, STZA, leveraging government-to-government partnerships, is collaborating with China to devise a multi-pronged strategy for chip design services.<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, through the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC), Pakistan needs to incentivise foreign firms, particularly from China, to establish chip design centres. China's move to replace Western chips with its own RISC-V architecture presents an opportunity for

Pakistan, akin to India's role in Y2K, that wouldn't require much physical facility but skilled human resources.

Beyond chip design services, Captain (Retd.) Muhammad Mahmood, Additional Secretary of the IT and Telecommunication Division, said that considering Pakistan's economic constraints and limited trained engineers, an incremental approach could be more viable, beginning with testing and packaging.<sup>7</sup>

Recognising that only some countries can independently perform all roles in the semiconductor GVCs, China would need to collaborate with friendly nations to achieve competitiveness. Pakistan stands as a promising potential partner. During PM Imran Khan's official visit to China, meetings with China's leading technological companies were held. By leveraging Pakistan's low-cost workforce, China could focus on higher-value segments of GVCs, underscoring the strategic importance of this collaboration.

In conclusion, to capitalise on the US-China chip competition, Pakistan needs to amplify its efforts in workforce training and specialised programmes, support entrepreneurship and startups, and, most importantly, collaborate with global chip leaders. The global chip market is projected to grow from \$600 billion in 2023 to over \$1 trillion by 2030 – Pakistan should aim to secure approximately US\$5 billion by 2030.

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