



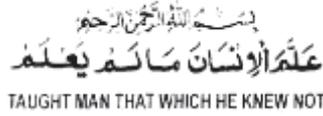
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Editorial Note

The fourth issue of volume 2, 2023 of *Eg Quarterly* in hand contains twelve INSIGHTS written during the fourth quarter of 2023. These INSIGHTS discuss economic, political and security challenges faced to Pakistan while highlighting the importance of strategic alignment, domestic institutions, and economic reforms. Pakistan must strengthen its institutions and implement economic reforms to achieve sustained growth. This issue evaluates various viewpoints and presents analysis of three possible explanations of recent Israel-Palestine conflict in Gaza, hinting at possible strategic plays by global powers.

Besides this, lessons Pakistan can draw from China to attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) with special emphasis on Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and Bilateral Investment Treaties (BITs), Pakistan's technology sector's endeavours to drive the country's economic development through the creation of a new export-oriented engine which holds the promise of significant economic expansion, evolution and prospects of Pakistan's Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Commission (SUPARCO) in pursuit of peaceful utilization of space with international cooperation as a critical component of its space development strategy, necessity of regulating mosques through strong political will, robust local administration, community engagement and a consistent approach and importance of harnessing the potential of Pakistan's youth bulge through education, skill development, vocational training and integration of sports in education and policy changes to transform the youth into a significant asset for Pakistan's growth and stability have also been touched upon in this issue.

This issue further entails Western perspective on reintegration of Afghanistan into world community in terms of arranging diplomatic meetings and supporting Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) with aid or investments and story of China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) and China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) highlighting escalating

contestation between China and USA casting a shadow over these strategic economic initiatives amidst heightened geopolitical tensions.

This issue further explores Pakistan's perspective on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS) emphasizing necessity of international cooperation to prevent unregulated LAWS proliferation in the face of ethical and regulatory challenges, and growing geopolitical influence of middle powers, focusing on their increased autonomy and strategic roles in conflicts like Ukraine and Gaza besides their involvement in regional organizations and its impact on global power dynamics.

Finally, the issue concludes with discussion over the potential of the blue economy as a component of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in driving sustainable development in Pakistan's Baluchistan and Sindh regions and Pakistan's Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) Policy 2018, focusing on its effectiveness in fostering skill development for economic growth.

We hope that this publication will assist readers in keeping up to date with the current strategic landscape. We welcome contributions in the form of short pieces of writing offering insight on national security matters.

Israel-Palestine Conflict in Gaza: A Master Counterstroke or A Grand Strategic Distraction?

Dr M. A. Gul

Abstract

This INSIGHT highlights the way Israel-Palestine conflict has eclipsed the Russo-Ukraine conflict in Western media, hinting at possible strategic plays by global powers. This in-depth examination evaluates various viewpoints and their implications for international peace and stability.

Keywords: Israel-Palestine Conflict, Russo-Ukraine Conflict, State Terrorism, Pro-Palestinian Demonstrations.

It has been more than two months since the fateful attack by the Palestinian Hamas fighters against Israel on 7th October 2023. During this time, the western narrative has seen a few changes. Initially, it termed Hamas' action as an act of terrorism and justified the disproportionate Israeli response.¹ As the reality started setting in, the Western audience learnt about the Israeli state terrorism resulting into some large scale pro-Palestinian demonstrations around major cities of the world.² In contrast, there were few pro-Israeli demonstrations.

As a result of this 'out of the blue' conflict in Gaza; the Western media has almost forgotten the ongoing Russo-Ukraine conflict. For some, it is simply a case where an emerging conflict has attained more media space. For others, it may not be as simple as it appears, since coincidences are not very common in geo-politics. Based upon analysis of open-source information; there are three to four possible explanations for the genesis of recent Israel-Palestine conflict in Gaza.

According to the first explanation, Hamas was preparing for this action for a very long time and on 7th October 2023, it was able to achieve a military surprise. Resultantly, it not only inflicted heavy civilian and military casualties, but also captured hundreds of Israeli hostages.³ In response, Israel unleashed its full military might against the hapless Palestinians in Gaza and did not even spare women and children in its vengeance. The carnage continues even today. Let's analyse this explanation and try to answer a few very basic questions.



What was Hamas thinking while conducting the 7th October attack or what has Hamas gained, in cost benefit analysis, through its actions? One answer could be that Hamas did not think through about the consequences of its actions. Another plausible answer could be that Hamas did not expect Israel to retaliate in such a ferocious manner. Yet another answer could be that despite knowing the scale of Israel's potential retaliation; Hamas went ahead with its attack as it wanted to bring Palestinian issue to the world stage, once again.

All these answers appear logical but probably too simplistic. These answers suggest Hamas to be so naïve that it thought it could get away with its actions without any consequences. Given the history of Israel-Palestine conflict, and especially after Israel-Hezbollah War of 2006;⁴ it would be unrealistic to assume that Hamas underestimated the extent of

possible Israeli reaction against its attack. Hamas launched this attack without any groundwork as nobody even in the West Bank, or Hezbollah in Lebanon or any other country knew anything about this attack beforehand.⁵

According to the second explanation, China played a “Master Counterstroke” against the US backed Israeli-Saudi rapprochement, where it encouraged Iran to utilise Hamas as a proxy to carry out attacks against Israel.⁶ This demonstrates Chinese desire to play a more active role in the Middle East (ME) especially after successfully negotiating Iran-Saudi rapprochement. Moreover, as the US gets embroiled in the ME; it would serve larger geostrategic interests of China and Russia by keeping US’ attention away from Taiwan and Ukraine issues, respectively. In another explanation, Iran may have acted independently with tacit support of China and Russia, for the same ends as given above.⁷ Let’s analyse this explanation and try to answer a few very basic questions.

Whereas the Hamas action has potentially delayed the process of possible Israel-Saudi rapprochement for some time; one of the biggest arguments against second explanation is the improbability of failure of the Israeli Intelligence to detect Hamas’ attack preparations which would have been ongoing for months, if not years. Moreover, given the amount of firsthand intelligence that Israel possesses inside Gaza, West Bank and around the region; it appears incredulous that Israel remained unaware of the impending threat.⁸ Contrarily, now there are media reports suggesting that Israeli Intelligence knew about the impending threat for more than a year but did not give much importance to it.⁹ Secondly, as Palestinians get persecuted in Gaza by the Israeli military; it would potentially dent Iran’s credibility in the eyes of the Palestinians for failing to support Hamas, its so-called proxy.

In past few months, China had initiated its own peace process for the settlement of Israel-Palestine Issue.¹⁰ Moreover, considering Chinese dependence on oil imports from gulf countries and success of its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in the region, it would be in China’s interest to maintain peace and stability in the ME rather than disturbing it, deliberately.

However, if second explanation is true then, in coming days, China along with Russia and Iran is likely to play a bigger role in this geopolitical circus. In this case, the Israel-Palestine conflict in Gaza might get enlarged with the possibility of Iran jumping into the fray. There would be more unity among the Arab and the Muslim world against US-Israel nexus and, by effect, enhancing the prospects of Iran-Saudi rapprochement. Contrarily, chances of US led Israel-Saudi rapprochement would be very bleak. As a result, it would be very difficult for Netanyahu and Republicans to win next elections in Israel and the US, respectively.

According to the third explanation, situation in Gaza is a “Grand Strategic Distraction” masterminded by the US-Israel nexus to deliberately divert attention of the Western public opinion from the Russo-Ukraine conflict as the latter starts moving towards its logical conclusion.

As the winter sets in Europe yet again, as the Russo-Ukraine conflict enters its third year and as the failure of much trumpeted Ukrainian counter-offensive is on cards; it appears that the US led Western stamina to support Ukraine in its fight against Russia, any further, is waning fast.¹¹ By now, it is getting clear that Russia has won the military conflict in Ukraine.

However, at the grand strategic level, perhaps the US finds itself in a much more advantageous position vis-à-vis Russia, considering that now France and Germany have much bigger issues to handle than attempting to redraw European security architecture. It implies that NATO is reborn with a renewed sense of purpose. European economy is in trouble along with birth of political and social polarization due to issues like refugees, migration, islamophobia, inflation, higher energy prices, defence expenditures, etc. China-EU relations have also been dented for the benefit of the US.¹²

Therefore, another major conflict in another part of the world is a classic diversion to take the attention of Western audience away from the ‘military defeat’ in Ukraine to a ‘humanitarian crisis’ in Gaza, which may also explain the unprecedented ‘gory’ images and stories in the Western

media.¹³ Israel is playing havoc with the lives of poor Palestinians with impunity and with full support of the US led West. The US veto in the United Nations Security Council against ceasefire in Gaza is the prime example of this complicity.¹⁴ Under these circumstances, the incredulous failure of CIA-Mossad, for not knowing about the impending Hamas attack, or conversely, reports about their knowledge of the threat for one year suddenly starts making great sense.¹⁵ Similarly, reports of alleged historical connections between Hamas-Qatar-Israel-US may also be seen in the same context.¹⁶

If in coming months, the US led West can downplay its military defeat in Russo-Ukraine conflict behind the cover of Israel-Palestine conflict in Gaza; then it would be safe to assume that the third explanation made more sense. Similarly, if third explanation is true then Israel-Palestine conflict in Gaza would remain restricted and Iran may not jump into it. Interestingly, one can clearly see the mitigating strategy in place as US increases its military presence in the region and refrains from directly implicating Iran into the conflict.¹⁷

Moreover, the third explanation would also make more sense, if in coming days, the 'humanitarian issue' in Gaza takes center stage with US acting as the 'Power Broker' trying to bring Palestinians and Israelis on negotiating table along with, perhaps, the Saudis. In this case, possibility of Israel-Saudi rapprochement in not-so-distant future would also be restored.

Notwithstanding the outcome, the biggest victims of the conflict are the Palestinians in Gaza. The world, especially the West, has witnessed and contributed towards their plight with 'utter insensitivity'. It is perhaps, for the first time in recent history that the powerful nations have also put aside, the so-called façade of morality which they would, otherwise, take great pride in (though, soon they might return to it). But such an attitude and hubris against the weak may lead towards some adverse 'unintended consequences' for the powerful perpetrators of violence as there are always 'unknown unknowns' ready to restore the balance of nature.

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About Insight and Author

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Attracting FDI into Pakistan - Lessons to be learnt from China

Muhammad Umair Khan

Abstract

This INSIGHT discusses the lessons Pakistan can draw from China to attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) with special emphasis on Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and Bilateral Investment Treaties (BITs). Establishment of SEZs, autonomy in their investment decisions with tax and tariff concessions, preferential income tax treatment and exemptions from import licenses are a few steps to follow which can pave way to massive FDI inflows. It also highlights that China has extensive network of BITs with 145 countries contributing greatly to FDI inflows while Pakistan has signed just 53 BITs. By adapting China's successful policies to own circumstances, Pakistan may not only achieve global competitiveness but also establish a more hospitable climate for FDI, which will eventually lead to economic growth, job creation and general prosperity.

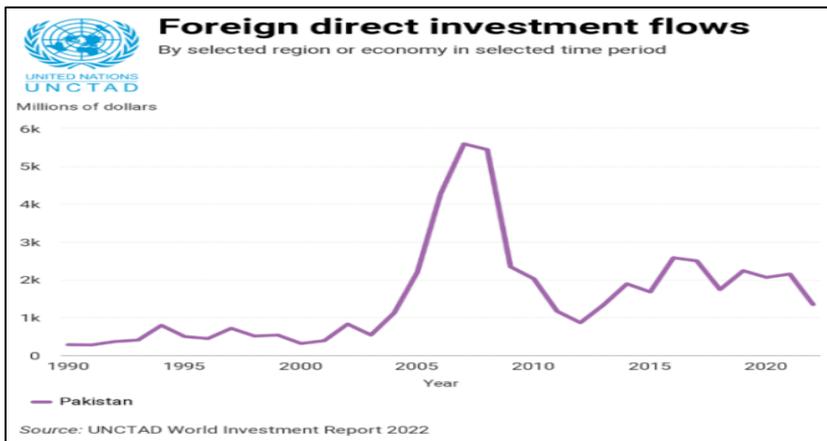
Keywords: Foreign Direct Investment, Capital Inflow, Technology Transfer, Export Expansion.

Foreign direct investment (FDI) is a major source of capital inflow, job creation, technology transfer and export expansion. It yields multiple benefits, which significantly contribute to a country's economic progress. Developing countries actively seek FDI to enhance their industrial and developmental capacities.

Historically, Pakistan's track record in attracting FDI has been far below its potential. According to World Investment Report 2023, Pakistan received US\$ 1.3 billion of FDI in 2022, while neighboring China and India attracted US\$ 189 billion and US\$ 49 billion worth of FDI, respectively. Bangladesh, a country smaller than Pakistan in terms of size and population, was able to secure inflows of US\$ 3.48 billion in 2022.¹

These statistics underscore the need for Pakistan to review its approach towards FDI in which China's experience can serve as an example.

China has emerged as a formidable player in attracting FDI in past three decades. FDI inflows surged from almost negligible in 1970s to US\$ 186 billion in 2022. China's success owes its credit to measures taken for opening up of economy by President Deng Xiaoping, especially to trade and FDI. In later years, China was transformed into second most attractive destination for FDI after United States. Pakistan, being a developing country, can draw many valuable lessons from China. But this insight specifically focuses on Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and Bilateral Investment Treaties (BITs).



After economic reforms in 1978, China established a number of Special Economic Zones (SEZs). These zones were given autonomy in their investment decisions with tax and tariff concessions, preferential income tax treatment and exemptions from import licenses. Besides, China Council for International Investment Promotion (CCIIP) was established which aimed at national investment promotion and giving recommendations to improve investment environment of China. Infrastructure and transportation links to foreign markets offered by SEZs along with special incentives played a pivotal role in attracting foreign investors. These SEZs led to massive FDI inflows and became engines of China's economic growth.

Pakistan, for the first time, established Industrial Estates (IEs) in 1960s. Later, Export Processing Zones (EPZs) were established in 1980s for promoting exports. But these zones could not accrue the desired objectives. In 2012, Pakistan passed SEZs Act and a number of SEZs were established. According to Board of Investment (BOI), Pakistan has 21 approved SEZs at present. 4 SEZs are also under construction under China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) while 5 are in the pipeline. These SEZs offer international investors a specialized location to launch their businesses as well as assurance of consistent regulations and favourable business environment. However, these SEZs didn't prove to be so-special in attracting foreign investment. It is due to the fact that these zones are not insulated from overall business climate of country. Complex approval, registration and licensing processes coupled with bureaucratic hurdles and legal challenges are detrimental to investment in these economic zones as in rest of the country.² Presently, it takes 256 days for a foreign company to establish a set up in Pakistan and complete all processes involving several institutions i.e. Board of Investment (BOI), Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP), Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) and relevant regulatory bodies. This time period is far longer than 24-hour approval time in the international market.³

Secondly, China developed an extensive network of Bilateral Investment Treaties (BITs). It signed its first landmark BIT with Sweden in 1982. Although Beijing declared that its open-door policy is "all-directional" but initially, it prioritized BITs with countries which could become potential source of FDI. So far, China has signed BITs with 145 countries, out of which 107 are in force. These BITs were an important part of China's foreign investment policy which contributed greatly to FDI inflows.

In Pakistan's case, it has signed 53 BITs with 48 countries so far. Out of these 53, presently 29 are in force, 18 are signed but not in force and 6 have already been terminated.⁴ In 2021, Pakistan decided to terminate 23 more BITs to avoid international arbitration due to 10 cases lodged by foreign firms on commercial contracts.⁵ Provisions related to Investor State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) exposed Pakistan to international

arbitration. So far, decision of termination has not been put into action but it reflects alarming state of Pakistan's BITs.

Keeping these lessons in view, Pakistan must insulate its SEZs from overall business environment of the country. Regulatory bodies within SEZs should be given autonomy to run affairs independently. Single window operations for foreign investors must be ensured. In addition, existing SEZs should be operationalized on urgent basis. In this regard, Phase-II of CPEC needs to be completed expeditiously. Moreover, Multinational Corporations (MNCs) from across the world should be invited to invest in SEZs of Pakistan by offering exclusive incentives.

Regarding BITs, a comprehensive policy should be developed with workable solutions in the long term. In light of these solutions, Pakistan should engage partner countries and amend problematic provisions. Besides, new BITs may also be signed with special focus on treaties with developed countries. Finally, SIFC and BOI can also play an important role in policy synchronization across institutions. Policies should be formulated with long term objectives with elaborate inbuilt safety volves against abrupt, frequent and politically motivated changes in policies.

By following China's successful policies with necessary adaptation to its own circumstances, Pakistan may not only achieve global competitiveness but also establish a more hospitable climate for FDI, which will eventually lead to economic growth, job creation and general prosperity.

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Development of Special Technology Zones (STZs) in Pakistan

Marium Akhtar

Abstract

This INSIGHT discusses that Pakistan's technology sector endeavours spearheaded by STZA should be pursued vigorously and insulated from political or economic uncertainties, given their potential to drive the country's economic development through the creation of a new export-oriented engine. The successful establishment of STZs holds the promise of significant economic expansion, contingent upon our ability to address challenges strategically and promptly.

Keywords: Special Technology Zones, Information & Communication Technology, Freelancers, Pakistan Software Export Board.

Software development and IT enabled services (ITeS) for data centers, technical service / call centers, and telecom services make the most of Pakistan's Information & Communication Technology industry. After India, Bangladesh and the USA, Pakistan is currently the fourth largest country in terms of number of freelancers, with gaming software development being the most popular service.¹ The majority of Pakistan's ICT industry is export focused. Over 19,000 ICT businesses are registered with the Pakistan Software Export Board (PSEB).² More than 170 countries are receiving services from Pakistan's IT and IT Enabled Services (ITeS) sectors. USA is the largest market, accounting for 54.50% of Pakistan's IT exports, followed by UK with 7.90%, UAE with 6.90%, Ireland with 6.70% and Singapore with 4.90%.³ According to PSEB, exports of telecommunication, computer, and information services was recorded at US\$ 2.6 billion during FY 2021-22, which had risen from previous figure of US\$ 2.1 billion during FY 2020-21.⁴ However, according

to Pakistan Economic Survey 2022-23, this figure stood at US\$ 1.94 billion during FY2022-23 (July-March) which showed a decline as compared to FY 2022.⁵

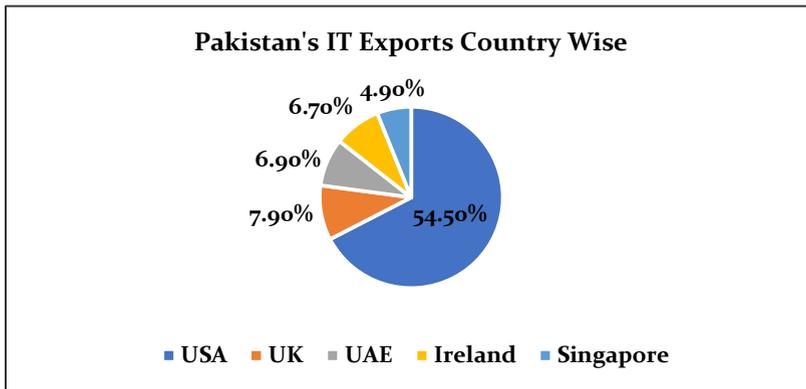
The prospects of Pakistan's ICT sector for generating foreign exchange are bright seeing the trends in recent years. Comparing the IT industry's trade surplus to that of the rest of the services sector with exports to 170 countries, Pakistan's IT industry is the largest net services exporter.⁶ This industry can help the country break free from the Balance of Payments (BoP) crises, provided a conducive, enabling, and efficient ecosystem is in place at the earliest. The establishment of STZs is part of the government's larger scheme of transforming the country into a knowledge-based economy and increasing its worldwide competitiveness in the technology sector. STZs are designated locations in Pakistan that aim to encourage and support technology-based industries and innovation.



For smooth operationalization of the STZs, a special authority called the Special Technology Zones Authority (STZA) has been created which derives its mandate from an act of parliament, namely the Special Technology Zones Authority Act 2021.⁷

The STZA was formed by the Government of Pakistan to serve as the supreme federal agency in charge of fostering Pakistan's economic development based on science and technology. The STZs are supposed

to increase ease of doing business and play a magnet to attract global and local technology players. The strategic objectives include technology exports, import substitution, foreign direct investment in technology, technology transfer, research and development, job creation and human capital development. Companies operating in STZs are provided with a 10-year tax exemption, 10-year tax rebate, a lenient foreign exchange policy, and other incentives under the STZA Act.⁸

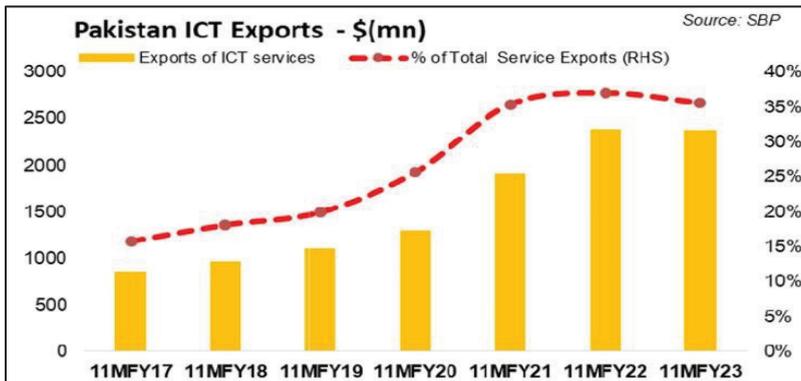


There are currently 115 clusters based on this concept of STZs in USA, 169 in China, 63 in the UK, 23 in Iran, 7 in India, 5 in Malaysia, and 3 in Egypt.^{9,10} The announced technology zones include the Islamabad Techno Polis, The Lahore Techno Polis, Pakistan Digital City in Haripur, and the Pak-Austria Fachhochschule Institute of Applied Sciences and Technology (PAF-IAST) in Haripur.¹¹ These technology zones are envisioned to unlock new technology sectors beyond IT/ITeS, especially emerging tech sectors such as

The successful establishment of STZs would result in establishment of a conducive ecosystem for our IT industry enabling an economic turnover, provided the challenges are properly and timely dealt with.

AgriTech, Aerospace and Defense, Gaming, Deep Tech, Maritime Tech, Advanced Engineering, AI, Machine Learning, High-End Manufacturing, and emerging technologies. Around four hundred companies are currently registered in the Special Technology Zones Authority (STZA), out of which, 63% are Pakistani, while the rest belong to China, USA,

Türkiye and other countries.¹²



Recently, with the focus on IT industry, particularly the software development sector, technology sector has now become a prioritized domain at federal and provincial levels. However, there are few issues being faced by local and international technology companies to do business in Pakistan. These include complex official processes, lack of inter departmental coordination and lengthy approval procedures which are a source of discouragement for the investors to pursue tech business in Pakistan. Presently the public sector entities are operating in scattered government bodies for science, technology, engineering, and innovation. Pakistan has established a "single window" operation under Pakistan Customs to foster business-friendly environment across the borders. Tech industry should also be linked to this mode of operation for smooth and effective implementation of policies and ease of investors and start-ups to operate in Pakistan.¹³ The actualization of the 'Digital One Window' programme by STZA will reduce the processing time for applications and aligning them with global best practices, if implemented in true letter and spirit.¹⁴

The recent efforts of government to speed up the STZA collaboration with the relevant departments to facilitate technology industry growth is also encouraging.¹⁵

Establishment of National Aerospace Science and Technology Park (NASTP) is a step towards gaining momentum in this regard.¹⁶ Several Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with both international and

domestic partners have been signed by STZA both on the national and international level. International collaboration with industry leaders such as Master Card, Galaxy Racer, Shorooq Partners (UAE), and China's SEDA and ZBRA and domestic MoUs with prominent local partners, including SECP, FBR, PEC, NECOP, and IBA-CEE is a positive step in this regard.¹⁷ These partnerships span a wide spectrum of ecosystem requirements, encompassing regulatory compliance, policy formulation, infrastructure development, venture capital investment, cashless transaction zones, advancements in web 3.0 technologies, semiconductor innovation, and the facilitation of high-level executive training and education programmes for technology leaders in Pakistan.

In short, Pakistan's technology sector endeavours spearheaded by STZA should be pursued vigorously and shielded from political or economic uncertainties, given their potential to drive the country's economic development through the creation of a new export-oriented engine. While there have been commendable developments in recent months, there remains room for enhancing the efficiency of policies and practices. To achieve this, learning and drawing insights from well-established tech zones in countries like China and the US having tech exports worth US\$ 67.1 bn and US\$ 33.6 bn till July 2023 respectively and Iran, having national digital economy worth US\$ 45 bn till March 2021 is imperative.^{18, 19, 20} Embracing the strategic economic opportunity that STZs offer is pivotal for Pakistan's economic growth. The successful establishment of STZs holds the promise of significant economic expansion, contingent upon our ability to address challenges strategically and promptly.

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Pakistan's Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Commission (SUPARCO): Evolution and Prospects

Muhammad Hassan

Abstract

This INSIGHT discusses Evolution and Prospects of Pakistan's Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Commission with primary objective of advancing the peaceful utilization of space. It also highlights that SUPARCO pursues international cooperation as a critical component of its space development strategy.

Keywords: Satellite Technology, Space Programme, Space Technology, Aerospace Organization.

Pakistan's Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Commission (SUPARCO) has a long history of triumphs and challenges. Founded in 1961, the Commission is the impetus behind Pakistan's satellite technology and space programme. Over time, SUPARCO evolved into a significant force in the development of the country's space technology for the advancement of society. With a modest yet significant space programme, Pakistan positions itself as an aspiring spacefaring nation owing to its extensive history of space study and exploration. The country's perpetual commitment to using space technology for peaceful purposes has elevated it to the forefront of socioeconomic progress.

From the beginning, SUPARCO's primary goals were to conduct space research and advance the peaceful utilization of space. By performing research and launching sub-orbital rockets, it started this endeavour. In the 1970s, SUPARCO advanced towards satellite technology for surveillance, imagery, telecommunication, atmospheric testing and other scientific research.

It also offered technical education and employment for its ground-based satellite stations nationwide.¹ With support from the US National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and various other Western aerospace organizations, the Commission was able to develop and test the Rehbar Sounding rockets.² To broaden its influence, SUPARCO engaged in collaboration with numerous other foreign space agencies and organizations. This represented a significant turning point for the country's space capabilities and opened many opportunities for scientific and socioeconomic development in Pakistan.



SUPARCO has a remarkable history and boasts several noteworthy achievements. It began its space journey by launching groundbreaking satellites like Badr-1 (1985), Pakistan's first domestically manufactured satellite.³ Subsequently, it launched Badr-B in 2001, Paksat-1R in 2011, and the revolutionary PRSS-1 & PAK TES-1A in 2018. Creating the Pakistan Space Weather Centre (PSWC), one of SUPARCO's most recent initiatives, is evidence of the commission's dedication to cutting-edge technology. PSWC offers invaluable data on solar radiation, geomagnetic weather events, ionosphere conditions, and maritime satellite imagery, thus underscoring SUPARCO's role as a pioneering force on Pakistan's scientific and technological landscape.

In conjunction with its notable accomplishments, SUPARCO has fostered a vital element of international cooperation as a critical component of its space development strategy. The Commission has

consistently participated in joint projects with a spectrum of international organizations and networks, including prestigious entities like The Inter-Islamic Network on Space Sciences and Technology (ISNET) and The Asia-Pacific Space Cooperation Organization (APSCO). By emphasizing on capacity building, SUPARCO aims to promote an atmosphere of international cooperation, expanding the limits of space research and technology globally. This strategic commitment to global partnerships underscores SUPARCO's role as a dynamic player on the international stage and accentuates its pivotal contribution to the broader space community.⁴

As we approach a new era, it is crucial to recognize the enormous potential that SUPARCO has. SUPARCO's prospects show us that the commission is prepared to play a more prominent role as a catalyst for Pakistan's socioeconomic development as it develops and works with local, national, and international collaborators and propels us into a fascinating future.

One of the significant prospects of SUPARCO is its Space Program Vision-2047 commenced in July 2014.⁵ The Program aims to launch five Geostationary orbit (GEO) satellites and six Low Earth orbit (LEO) satellites by 2047. The Program intends to replace SUPARCO's existing satellites in orbit, develop new communication and remote sensing satellites and conduct research in space science and technology. As a part of the program, a significant step forward for Pakistan was the development of remote-sensing satellites. Pakistan now has a priceless resource in the form of remote sensing satellites, which provide the country with a valuable resource harnessing an array of initiatives and projects from socioeconomic development and environmental preservation to disaster mitigation and fostering international collaboration.

The two satellites that Pakistan currently has in orbit, the "Technology Evaluation Satellite (PAKTES-1A)" that was built domestically and the "Pakistan Remote Sensing System (PRSS-1)" that was purchased from China, can effectively resolve the frequent internal water disputes between the provinces regarding the share of water for each province.⁶



It can also help with agriculture by guiding farmers in making good decisions and boosting agricultural output through resource planning. As Pakistan is highly vulnerable to climate change, it can also help disaster management by lessening the consequences of natural calamities.

SUPARCO also has a significant international collaboration component in its space development agenda with continuous cooperation with numerous international and domestic organizations. Recently, the Chairman of SUPARCO visited the Deep Space Exploration Laboratory (DSEL) in southeast China to identify specific roles Pakistan could play in the China-led International Lunar Research Centre (ILRS) and sign a cooperation agreement.⁷

Moreover, SUPARCO representatives have also discussed ways to increase cooperation with Pakistan's Higher Education Department (HED). The two organizations are looking for opportunities of collaborative projects in research and development. Discussions between SUPARCO and HED representatives focused the strengthening of strategic collaboration and improving educational technology to create a cutting-edge higher education management information system.⁸

Furthermore, SUPARCO manages a network of cutting-edge research centers that provides a foundation for its ambitious space program objectives. Institute of Space and Technology (IST), SUPARCO Institute of Technical Training (SITT), Institute of Space and Planetary Astrophysics (ISPA)⁹ are some of those institutes which facilitate Pakistan to expand its space science and technology capabilities and to advance more extensive scientific research and development initiatives.

The contributions of SUPARCO to agricultural and food security, urban planning, resource management, forestry, mangroves, disaster management, support for the 2023 census, water management, and other crucial sectors show its strong commitment to utilizing space technology and making a significant contribution to several sectors of the country.

However, amidst these promising prospects, SUPARCO nevertheless faces some challenges too. The primary hurdle it faces is of inadequate funding as SIPARCO received just US\$ 26 million for 2023. SUPARCO operates with limited financial resources as compared to other significant space agencies such as the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO), which boasts of a yearly budget exceeding US\$ 1.5 billion.¹⁰ This financial disparity underscores the pressing need for increased investment to realize Pakistan's space potential. Furthermore, the political instability disrupts long-term planning and continuity of policies, hindering the agency's ability to carry out sustained and futuristic projects. Addressing these challenges will be crucial for SUPARCO to unlock the full spectrum of opportunities space technology holds for Pakistan's development.

In conclusion, SUPARCO's unwavering commitment to the peaceful application of space technology serves as a testament to the transformational power of space science in steering Pakistan towards a more promising and sustainable future. Despite the persistent challenges of political instability and economic limitations, SUPARCO has made significant strides in pursuing space science and technology. The commission's accomplishments are indisputable, from launching space satellites to fostering international collaboration, from disaster mitigation to bolstering agriculture and water resources optimization to

providing effective solutions for various socioeconomic issues. They demonstrate its perseverance in the face of hardships, underline the enormous potential for future growth, and kindle optimism for an even more prosperous future.

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Regulation of Mosques – A Choice or a Compulsion?

Dr Abdul Rauf Iqbal

Abstract

This INSIGHT discusses that regulation of mosques is not a matter of choice it is a compulsion. It highlights that regulating the mosques is a long-term project with sensitive social intricacies which require strong political will, robust local administration, and a consistent approach. It further recommends that community engagement is critical to take mosques regulation to its logical end.

Keywords: Mosques Regulation, Social Intricacies, Political Will, Consistent Approach.

The mosque is an important religious and social institution which influences life and views of Muslims. It is a seat of learning and preaching. It is primarily a place of worship, but also serves as educational, dispute resolution, religious, social and welfare center. It also gives socioeconomic, cultural, and political direction to the worshippers. When a state does not regulate such an important institution and leaves it for people who are not obliged to further social or state agenda the likelihood of its use to pursue personal stake cannot be overruled. Extremist elements can manipulate public sentiments to undermine the authority of the state. The situation can be further exploited by external anti-state organisations to create internal unrest. With this premise, both Muslim and Non-Muslim societies tend to regulate mosques as they cannot afford to leave the mosques as a private affair.

Regulation of mosques includes registration with local authorities, appointment and supervision of imams, monetary management and

auditing, oversight over religious literature, weekly sermons, and day-to-day governance etc. Regulating religious places is a sensitive issue, sometimes even leading to a violent backlash. However, states like Azerbaijan, Egypt, Iran, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), Malaysia, Türkiye, and United Arab Emirates (UAE) effectively regulate the mosques. On the other hand, states like Nigeria and Pakistan have loose control over the mosques. In case of Pakistan, there are many challenges associated with the regulation of mosques. Therefore, it is important to understand global practices to draw inferences regarding mosques regulation in Pakistan.

In Azerbaijan, the responsibility of appointment of imams was earlier assigned to the Caucasian Muslim Board which is a state-controlled authority. However, President Ilham Aliyev has further enhanced State's control by approving a new law in March 2023. Now the state committee oversees all Muslim educational establishments, censors religious literature of all faiths and approves or bans the building or renovation of any place of worship along with naming prayer leaders in all mosques.¹

In Egypt, mosques and religious activities are highly regulated. Even though the country has experienced diverse governments but the policy of carefully overseeing mosques, imams and informal religious gatherings has remained constant.²

In Iran, the Ministry of Culture & Islamic Guidance oversees mosques, religious affairs, and the selection of Imams. The Friday Prayer Council is a body that reports to the Supreme Leader. The chief imam nominates imams, and the final selection is carried out by the Supreme Leader. The potential imams are assessed based on their religious knowledge. Moreover, the Friday Prayer Council is responsible for distributing pamphlets to around nine hundred Iranian cities weekly. These pamphlets comprise guidelines for the imams to address Friday's congregational prayers.³

India has also introduced strict laws to regulate mosques. The provincial government of Uttar Pradesh (UP) passed the Regulation of Public Religious Buildings and Places Bill in 2021. In the Muslim concentrated province of UP, mosques cannot be built without the permission of

district magistrate and his decision cannot be challenged in any court of law.

In KSA, the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Dawah, and Guidance, oversees the affairs of mosques, Islamic centers, and the appointment and supervision of imams.

Malaysia's Federal Department of Development of Islam (JAKIM) regulates the mosques, Friday sermons, appointment and supervision of imams and teachers/preachers of Islam.

In Türkiye, the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) regulates the mosques. It is tasked with the appointment and supervision of imams and entrusted with the drafting of a weekly sermon which is delivered in mosques across Türkiye.⁴ In simple words, the state regulates whatsoever is being said in the mosques.

In United Arab Emirates, the General Authority of Islamic Affairs and Endowments (Awqaf) and Islamic Affairs and Charitable Activities Department (IACAD) regulate mosques. IACAD issues licenses to public and private prayer rooms and prohibiting anyone from building, allocating, or modifying a space to be used as a prayer room without prior approval while the Awqaf is entrusted with overseeing Islamic religious affairs across mosques, sermons, imam, and publications.⁵

Countries in Europe consist of Islamic organizations and communities that ensure the religious development and training of Muslim citizens. The Italian Islamic Religious Community (COREIS) is an organization that represents the Muslim community in Italy. It offers training courses to imams and equips them with the theological and legal knowledge necessary to efficiently discharge their duties as imams. COREIS aims to provide the Muslim community of Italy with reliable and insightful individuals who can serve as religious leaders and combine modern methods with classical Islam to disseminate a holistic religious discourse.⁶

Contrarily, mosques in Nigeria are underregulated. There is no central governmental or Islamic authority regulating the establishment and

administration of mosques in the country, which means that there is little or no control over the sermons preached in central mosques.⁷

In Pakistan, the Societies Registration Act of 1860 requires that all mosques should be licensed and registered. Accordingly, a committee led by the District Coordination Officer (DCO) is responsible for issuing a No Objection Certificate (NOC) for the establishment of mosques. The National Action Plan (NAP) of 2014 and the revised NAP 2021 emphasise on registration and regulation of religious institutes across the country. The National Internal Security Policy (NISP) 2014 aims to integrate mosques into national and provincial education frameworks. Punjab Sound Systems (Regulation) Ordinance 2015 is promulgated at the provincial level to control the sound systems of all religious places including mosques.⁸ NISP 2018-23 also proposes wide-ranging reforms to make mosques centers of learning and religious guidance. The government has taken an initiative in this regard and the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training (MFEPT) has established a Directorate General of Religious Education (DGRE) in 2019 with the sole purpose of registering religious institutions in Pakistan. The legal and policy guidelines are clear about the mosques regulation; however, the ground situation is different.

In metropolitan urban centers of Pakistan, there are some major state-run Jamia mosques. The government appoints its imams and issues funds for their salaries and utility expenditures. Badshahi Mosque, Lahore and Faisal Mosque, Islamabad are cases in point. In well-planned housing societies, the location and number of mosques are defined by the society administration. Contrarily, it is different in the towns and villages of the country. Most of the time, it is the will and wish of people or the person donating, irrespective of the number of mosques already existing in the same locality.

In federal capital territory of Islamabad, 89 out of a total 957 mosques are governed by the state while the government has no influence over the remaining 868 mosques.⁹ Another report reveals that in Islamabad, 250 mosques are operating without a license.¹⁰ Even, the mosques have been built in the parking areas (F-10 Markaz) and green belts (7th Avenue) of Islamabad etc. The uncontrolled growth of privately run

mosques poses a serious question on the authority of the state. Inversely, the capital administration seldom acts against such illegally operating mosques. This is due to the sensitive nature of the issue. The authorities fear backlash from religious parties and therefore are hesitant to take any action, issue of Lal Masjid is a case in point.

In view of the above analysis, following policy guidelines are suggested:

- Regulating mosques is a long-term affair which requires strong political will, robust local administration, and a consistent approach.
- The phased policy may be started with selected urban and rural areas and then be implemented throughout the country.
- Community engagement is critical to managing public opinion and avoiding the backlash. Any backlash may be tackled amicably rather than completely backing off from mosque regulation. The implementation process must be taken to its logical end.

The strategy to implement the above-mentioned policy guidelines is also explained. It is suggested that a pilot project be initiated in urban and rural areas to first register all the mosques. Other issues like appointment of imams, auditing of funds, and weekly sermons can be regulated in the second phase. The federal and provincial capitals along with selected villages from each federating unit be taken as the sample to draw lessons for further improvement. The local administration, which is otherwise responsible for the registration of mosques, should be tasked to engage with all the stakeholders rather than taking coercive measures. It cannot be done without engaging the local community, so a public-private partnership is must. There are mosques built on state land and removing them will provoke backlash from the religious pressure groups. To avoid the situation, either state must regularize them, or provide alternate space to relocate those mosques. In some cases where mosques are constructed at awkward places and cause inconvenience or life risk to public at large may have to be demolished. It requires funding and political will. The suggested public-private partnership can create the required funds and political will can help in

mitigating the risks associated with the regularization of mosques. This pilot project will help in drawing pertinent lessons for the regularization of mosques. Periodic evaluation, feedback and accountability mechanisms should also be put in place to find lasting solutions of recurring problems. Based on the success of pilot project, the government should first register / legalize all the mosques in the country. Community engagement with dynamic local administration in a politically enabling environment will pave the way for second phase of regulating imams, funds, and sermons etc.

In sum, regulation of mosques is an accepted global norm. It is a compulsion rather than an option. In Pakistan, a consistent, phased, and long-term approach backed by community engagement can help in regularization of mosques.

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Converting the Young Population of Pakistan into an Asset

Mariam Noor

Abstract

This INSIGHT emphasizes the importance of harnessing the potential of Pakistan's youth bulge. It discusses government initiatives to educate and skill the youth, facing challenges like a fragile economy and high unemployment. The document advocates for vocational training and integration of sports in education, highlighting the need for diverse training opportunities and policy changes to transform the youth into a significant asset for Pakistan's growth and stability.

Keywords: Youth Bulge, Fragile Economy, Unemployment, Growth and Stability, Pragmatic Changes.

Youth, is the most powerful agent of cohesive society with the potential to bring pragmatic changes through innovation and creativity. The term “youth bulge” refers to the relatively large increase in number and proportion of the country’s population of youthful age ranging between 15 and 29 years. According to the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) National Human Development Survey, Pakistan currently has the highest proportion of young people with 64% population of Pakistan below the age of 30 while 29% is between 15 and 29 years.¹

Youth bulge can be both; an asset or a ticking bomb. To make them an asset, it is imperative to provide them with education and skills so that they can contribute to the socio-economic development of the country. To ensure that youth serves as an asset, several initiatives were taken in the recent past to make them productive members of the society. The Government of Pakistan (GoP) is committed to expand educational

opportunities for the youth by establishing university campuses in remote areas with the aim to provide quality education to the underprivileged. The government has also introduced scholarships for students from Baluchistan and newly merged tribal districts (NMDs) of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), ensuring greater access to higher education and various high-tech vocational skills.²

In 2019, Higher Education Commission (HEC) started various scholarship programmes for undergraduates under the 'Ehsaas' Program. For Ph.D., the government is offering scholarships both domestically and abroad, supporting talented students in advanced research. Furthermore, the government has started Pakistan's largest internship program, "Balkhtiyar Naujawan" in March 2023, offering 60,000 paid internships to the graduates. This initiative not only provides work experience but also seeks to boost employable skills, preparing youth for the job market.



In recent years, the GoP initiated the Prime Minister's Youth Laptop Program with the aim to bridge the technology gap by distributing laptops to deserving students, enabling access to online education resources and freelance opportunities. In 2022, HEC continued its commitment to empower Pakistani youth for future job opportunities by launching third phase of the Digital Learning and Skills Enrichment Initiative (DLSEI) in partnership with 'Coursera', following the previous two phases initiated in 2018, which collectively facilitated 0.25 million

hours of online training for 12,000 learners, with popular courses in project management, data analytics, programming, social media marketing, as well as soft skills such as negotiation, communication, public speaking, and presentation.³

Moreover, the GoP has established vocational and technical skills institutions such as National Vocational and Technical Training Commission (NAVTTTC) and Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority (TEVTA), which have contributed a lot in upskilling the youth and providing them with employment opportunities. More than 1 million youth got training in 930 institutes of Pakistan because of NAVTTTC initiatives during 2022-23.⁴ Additionally, in March 2023, the government announced a talent hunt youth sports programme and plans to construct 250 mini sports complexes nationwide.⁵ This will encourage youth to engage in sports and recreational activities, nurturing their athletic talents. Despite these initiatives designed for the youth, the limited capacity of the above-mentioned programmes hinders achievement of desired impact on Pakistan's overall youthful population.⁶

Presently, there exist a few challenges which require holistic policy and practice intervention at the State level. Firstly, Pakistan possesses a very fragile economy that is particularly not capable of accommodating such a huge youth bulge. Secondly, all the initiatives exclusively target youth already enrolled in tertiary education out of which 0.43 million are enrolled in technical and vocational institutes and 1.95 millions in universities; thus, overlooking those not currently enrolled in any educational institution.⁷ Another

Pakistan has abundant young talent and innovative potential. With the right guidance and opportunities, this potential can be transformed into an asset.

underlying challenge is that many young people in Pakistan experience unemployment due to limited access, awareness, and lack of interest in vocational fields such as fashion, arts, electronics, cooking, culinary arts, and professional chef courses, etc. To further exacerbate the situation, lack of policy implementation measures to expedite the implementation of technical and vocational education modules in the curriculum of

Secondary School Certificate (SSC) and Higher Secondary School Certificate (HSSC) levels, has also been a major impediment.

Another challenge faced by young people in Pakistan is the absence of effective policies concerning extra-curricular activities. Despite ongoing initiatives, the realm of sports remains particularly neglected. Consequently, the lack of platforms and opportunities remain a significant obstacle for those aspiring to build careers in sports.

Finally, the Labour Force Survey (LFS) 2020-21 indicates that Pakistan has the world's ninth-largest labour force, which is growing every year. Statistics show that the country's youth unemployment rate for 2022 was 11.31%, a 0.28% increase from 2021.⁸ These figures clearly indicate that despite producing numerous graduates annually, the students face difficulty in finding jobs compatible to the job market due to lack of requisite skills.

To address above challenges HEC is looking forward to the German-style two-track education, which evaluates students' aptitude and talents after high school in order to counsel and encourage them to choose either a university degree or vocational training based on their abilities and the labour market.⁹ For the implementation of this initiative, the government should facilitate HEC and ensure that this concept is executed at the SSC and HSSC levels as well.

Pakistan can implement various effective strategies like Australia, US, and UK by focusing on community sports programmes, fostering a vibrant sports culture, providing diverse avenues for youth participation, through sports scholarships and partnerships between educational institutions and sports organizations, creating a conducive environment for the development of young athletes and integrating sports education into school curricula respectively.

It is essential to utilize various platforms such as social media, the entertainment industry, and educational institutions to change societal attitudes towards domestic and vocational skills. These efforts can be bolstered through the implementation of policies that provide diverse training opportunities, ranging from culinary, food, gardening, and

leather crafting to advanced technological skills like telecommunication, engineering and data sciences. The provision of such opportunities will also deliver our youth with avenues to be a potential skill-based or qualified workforce ready to be exported from Pakistan.

Hence, Pakistan has abundant young talent and innovative potential. With the right guidance and opportunities, this potential can be transformed into an asset that contributes significantly to Pakistan's growth and stability.

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Reintegration of Afghanistan into the World Community: A Western Perspective

Jens Vesterlund Mathiesen

Abstract

This INSIGHT discusses reintegration of Afghanistan into world community from Western perspective. It highlights that the west is reluctant to recognize Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) because it is affecting not only the foreign and security policy of many Western states today, rather it often comes down to domestic politics and dominates public opinion. Large parts of the Western population cannot accept politicians stating that they are willing to cooperate with the former enemy, and thus further engagement with Afghanistan is very difficult to defend politically. This is both in terms of arranging diplomatic meetings and in supporting the IEA with aid or investments. Thus, from a Western perspective, the integration of Afghanistan and the IEA into the world community will be slow and gradual and requires outspoken pragmatism from all sides.

Keywords: Reintegration into World Community, Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Foreign Policy, Domestic Politics.

International politics often walks the tightrope between normative ideals and strategic realities. In the present situation, the international engagement with Afghanistan serves as a perfect example of this dichotomy. So far, no state in the world has officially recognized the Taliban's Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA). However, the IEA has slowly and gradually expanded its relations internationally since it gained power in August 2021. To many observers, it has been puzzling to observe how Western countries have been hesitant, if not outrightly refusing, to engage with the IEA. This insight attempts to describe the current trends

in international engagement with Afghanistan and discuss the reluctance of Western states.

Like today, the former Islamic Emirate ruling from 1996 to 2001, was also looking for international cooperation and recognition. The first Islamic Emirate led by Mullah Omar immediately received international recognition from Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the UAE (these were later rescinded after the September 11, 2001 attacks). However, while it has been argued that the first Emirate largely pursued a policy of non-interference or even isolationism, the second Emirate understands that the world has changed.

Globalisation and the worldwide spread of information through internet, smartphones and social media have connected and integrated the world. The IEA has partly adapted to this development and has seemingly concluded that establishing relations with the international community is unavoidable, as all states need foreign investments and international trade to have a functioning economy. As argued by the Interim Foreign Minister of the IEA, Moulvi Amir Khan Muttaqi; the IEA understands the “globalised nature of modern relations”.¹ To succeed in such a quest, the IEA needs diverse diplomatic relations, to have a sustainable functioning and legitimate government.

As of August 2023, the IEA has officially participated in diplomatic engagements with more than seventy-two countries across the world. However, looking closely at these numbers, the Western approach, particularly of European nations is in stark contrast with that of regional states. We can observe this in terms of official diplomatic representation (embassies and consulates) as well as in terms of diplomatic meetings and other engagements. As of September 2023, 15 different nations and one multinational organisation (the EU), have functioning embassies in Kabul.² Examining this list, no Western state is directly represented in Afghanistan.³ Instead, the US is utilizing Qatar as a third-party facilitator, and European countries are being indirectly represented by the EU External Action Service (EEAS). On the other hand, the neighbouring states of Afghanistan are all represented in Kabul. Notably, five regional countries; China, Russia, Iran, Pakistan and India, kept their embassies open during the power transition in Afghanistan in August 2021.

Furthermore, close neighbours, such as Pakistan, Iran and Turkmenistan also have consulates in other major cities of Afghanistan. The same pattern emerges when looking at the number of diplomatic meetings held by the IEA from August 2021 to August 2023. Aaron Y. Zelin at the Washington Institute has done the impressive work of mapping all diplomatic engagements with the IEA during this period.⁴ The data show, how regional countries; Turkey (150), China (141), Iran (99), Qatar (92) and Pakistan (82) top the list with the highest number of meetings. At the same time, the most actively engaged of the Western actors; the EU (36), United Kingdom (23), Norway (22) and the US (18) are significantly down the list. In the first two years of the IEA rule, they held 378 meetings the first year, and 566 meetings the second year. Not only does this signify that the IEA is not isolated from the world as some analysts argue; but it also indicates that the international relations of the IEA are consistently expanding in scope and frequency.

While we observe the IEA's active pursuit of international relations, it becomes necessary to explore the underlying factors contributing to Western reluctance in engaging with the IEA, providing a clearer picture of the geopolitical dynamics at play.

Some would argue that after more than 20 years of military, diplomatic, development and humanitarian engagement in Afghanistan, many Western countries would remain committed to some form of engagement with Afghanistan despite the incumbency of the Taliban whom the Western countries fought for nearly two decades. However, as the data presented suggest, Western states have been reluctant in their engagement with Afghanistan. The reason for the Western reluctance is the defeat of US-led invasion of 2001 in Afghanistan by August 2021. The protracted conflict in Afghanistan, spanning over two decades, has left an indelible mark on the Western mindset. The West, after investing heavily in terms of both personnel and resources, now witnesses the 'enemy' they fought in power in Afghanistan (a scenario reminiscent of pre-2001). For Western populations and decisionmakers, this is not merely a strategic setback, but an affront to the very core of Western identity that has historically prided itself on idealism in the form of promoting human rights, fostering democracy and ensuring global stability.

When this is affecting the foreign and security policy of many Western states today, it often comes down to domestic politics and dominates public opinion. Large parts of the Western population cannot accept politicians stating that they are willing to cooperate with the former enemy, and thus further engagement with Afghanistan is very difficult to defend politically. This is both in terms of arranging diplomatic meetings, but also in supporting the IEA with aid or investments.

This is but one analysis of the Western stance. Let us turn our focus to the future, analysing the evolving trends in Western pragmatism and the challenges and opportunities that may arise in the changing landscape of international relations with Afghanistan.

Western states can learn from regional states and adopt more pragmatic approach when engaging with the IEA. Emerging signs of Western pragmatism are already visible and have been gradually increasing since August 2021. The US, for instance, initiated constructive dialogue with the IEA in July 2023,⁵ and even appointed two special representatives to facilitate diverse aspects of these engagements. These discussions are not limited to issues such as women's rights, which have so far been Western key points; they also encompass other areas, such as drug trafficking and anti-corruption measures.

For the West, expanding pragmatic engagements could potentially pave the way for diplomatic recognition. While this remains unlikely in the near future, it is more likely that it could establish a "new normal" in international relations with Afghanistan and IEA. A "normal" situation where diplomatic meetings take place, trade agreements are negotiated and agreed upon, and common security threats are handled through joint efforts, while any official diplomatic recognition remains off the table. This would of course not be a complete solution to Afghanistan's problems, but it would provide a framework for Western and regional countries to start managing them in a constructive, and potentially sustainable way.

In conclusion, from a Western perspective, the integration of Afghanistan and the IEA into the world community will be slow and gradual and require outspoken pragmatism from all sides. Whether this

will lead to official diplomatic recognition remains uncertain. However, this is not just a matter of the conduct of the IEA, but also a matter of domestic politics in Western states, as well as accepting a “new normal” of international relations towards Afghanistan.

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Story of Two Corridors: China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) and China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)

Rafia Ashar

Abstract

This INSIGHT discusses two corridors: China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) and China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). It highlights that in today's intricate web of global geopolitics, the escalating contestation between China and USA has cast a shadow over strategic economic initiatives like CPEC and CMEC, testing the resilience of Chinese investments amidst heightened geopolitical tensions. It further says that there is a need to understand the future of CPEC and CMEC from the lens of US-China rivalry in the region and the solution to the problem lies in addressing the bigger questions first rather than getting bogged down in tactical complexities.

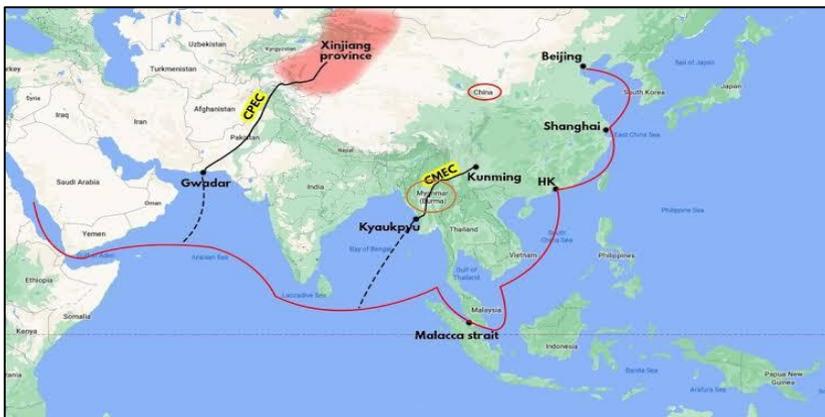
Keywords: China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, China-Myanmar Economic Corridor, Belt and Road Initiative, Power Contestation.

China-Myanmar bilateral relations gained momentum, particularly, when Beijing decided to develop China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) under the ambit of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The project, primarily aimed at building physical infrastructure to link East Asia and Europe, focusing to expand politico-economic influence, and economic growth at large.¹

CMEC begins from Kunming in Yunnan province of China to Mandalay in Central Myanmar and extends in the east to Yangon and in the west to Kyaukphyu Special Economic Zone (SEZ) that China helped Myanmar to establish. From Kyaukphyu port begin the strategic 1060 km gas and oil pipelines that China built across Myanmar to link Kunming at an

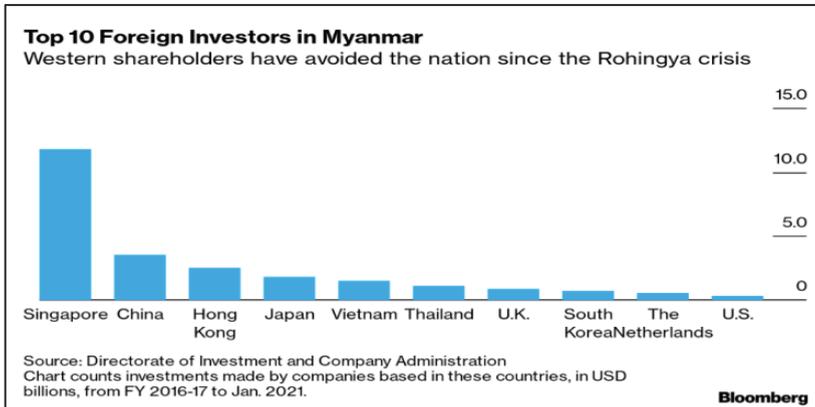
investment of US\$ 7.5 billion and commissioned during 2013-15.² These pipelines are likely to play an instrumental role in facilitating the transportation of oil and gas to China. Chinese markets are also broadly dependent on the strategic outreach and CMEC can accomplish such objectives.

CMEC aims to connect China's landlocked south to Myanmar's western Rakhine State which would serve as Beijing's long-awaited gateway to the Indian Ocean. CMEC's strategic depth encompasses infrastructure development, construction of new railway link, development of Special Economic Zones (SEZs), and other development projects located along the 1700 km long corridor to strengthen Myanmar's economy and upsurge China's strategic investment in the region.³ In October 2022, a 135 megawatt power project valued at US\$ 180 million was inaugurated by the Kyaukphyu SEZ.



However, to achieve such substantial objectives, it is imperative for China to address the challenges that emerge as pronounced hurdles, causing an uncertainty on the progress of CMEC. In 2017, Myanmar's military conducted a campaign that resulted in the forced displacement of the Rohingya, an ethnic minority group in Rakhine state.⁴ As a consequence, Rohingya sought refuge into Bangladesh, India, Malaysia, Indonesia, Cambodia, Thailand and Laos. The crisis had a significant impact on the diplomatic relations between Myanmar and other neighbouring nations besides generating a persistent state of insecurity in the Rakhine State.

Rohingya crisis has distracted the Myanmar's government attention and resources away from the CMEC projects. Funds that could have been used for infrastructure projects are being diverted towards managing the humanitarian crisis. Additionally, the adverse image associated with Myanmar due to this crisis also dissuades the foreign investors from partaking in CMEC initiatives, as depicted in the figure.



On 27 October 2023, an alliance of ethnic armed groups launched a coordinated offensive against Myanmar military in the north of Myanmar's Shan State, seizing several towns, several important overland trade routes to China and overrunning dozens of military outposts. Dubbed as "Operation 1027" after the date they began, these attacks involved several thousand experienced, and well-armed fighters attacking multiple locations simultaneously. They pose the biggest battlefield challenge to the military since February 2021 coup.⁵ Instability and security concerns create a challenging environment for potential investments besides leading to strained relations especially with some Western nations, that may result into diplomatic isolation and sanctions for Myanmar and ultimately slowdown the CMEC progress.⁶

In the intricate web of global geopolitics, the burgeoning contention between China and USA has cast a shadow over strategic economic initiatives like China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and CMEC, testing the resilience of Chinese investments amidst heightened geopolitical tensions. Just like CMEC, CPEC is another project under BRI

that faces almost similar challenges. CPEC traverses from Gilgit-Baltistan region in northern Pakistan to Gwadar in southern Balochistan. Both corridors are situated along the coastal belt near the Indian Ocean and both confront instability in the respective regions along the corridors. This is not merely a coincidence that entry and exit points of both corridors are facing multifaceted challenges rather it's a reflection of geopolitical complexities. Despite economic advantages that these corridors bring, the persistent threat of terrorism, and politico-economic instability in these countries remain a significant concern for both the corridors.

It is no wonder that timing of rise of Rohingya crisis in Myanmar (2016-17) coincides with the potential operationalization of the CMEC. Owing to Rohingya crisis (exit point of CMEC) and recent unrest in the northern parts of the country (entry point of CMEC) there is a deep political and economic instability in Myanmar which has raised serious concerns about the future of CMEC.

Interestingly, the situation of Pakistan and CPEC is no different. The growing unrest in Baluchistan especially its Southern part (exit point of CPEC) and some signs of recent unrest in Gilgit-Baltistan in the Northern Pakistan (entry point of CPEC), alongwith politico-economic instability of Pakistan do not augur well for the future of CPEC. Hence, the biggest beneficiary of this politico-economic instability in both Pakistan and Myanmar are US and its partners, especially India, in the region and not China.

In this backdrop, the future of CPEC and CMEC needs to be seen from the lens of US-China rivalry in the region. As a corollary of the same, the socio-political and economic instability of both Pakistan and Myanmar may also be seen in the same context. Although, it would always be important to bring about peace and stability in both the countries by addressing the problems of people of Baluchistan, Gilgit-Baltistan, Rohingya and Shan provinces. It must be understood that these problems are merely the symptoms of a bigger strategic conundrum which can be conveniently understood through the prism of US-China rivalry. Therefore, the solution to the problems lies in addressing the bigger questions first rather than getting bogged down in tactical complexities.

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Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems: The Pakistani Approach

Ms Ayesha Malik

Abstract

This INSIGHT discusses Pakistan's perspective on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS), highlighting ethical and regulatory challenges. It underscores Pakistan's support for a global LAWS ban at the UN and the significance of strategically adopting AI in non-lethal areas. Additionally, it emphasizes the necessity of international cooperation to prevent unregulated LAWS proliferation.

Keywords: Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems, Ethical and Regulatory Challenges, Proliferation.

They don't get hungry. They're not afraid. They don't forget orders. They don't care if the guy next to them has just been shot. Will they do a better job than humans? Yes." These words were spoken by Gordon Johnson, a member of the now-defunct Pentagon Joint Forces Command, regarding the benefits of autonomous weapons systems. It seems that the introduction of autonomous weapons to the battlefield is inevitable. In fact they were already used in the Libyan civil war in March 2020, though their mainstream use may be incremental. We can see this in Israel's current military operation in Gaza. The "Habsora" (which translates to The Gospel) is an AI system which is generating targets for the IDF. It has done so, at such a high rate though (leading to Israel attacking 15,000 targets in Gaza in 35 days of Operation Swords of Iron) that it has been described as a 'mass assassination factory'. When machines engage in the business of war, they make wars much worse.

LAWS are weapons systems which think for themselves, in that they select and engage targets without further human intervention. Many AI-

enabled weapons systems have humans in the loop to oversee them when they are deployed, however, their involvement and oversight will diminish over time. While many states favour prohibitions and regulations on their use in battle (Pakistan included), others (especially the US, Russia and India) are against it. Instead, they argue that the rules of war are enough to regulate AI in armed conflict. The US, Russia, China, Iran, India and Israel are all currently undertaking development of LAWS technologies. Many perceive it as a new international arms race. Most worrying for Pakistan is the fact that India has also acquired its first swarming drone system which is AI-enabled and can attack targets up to 50 kilometres away.



The UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres tweeted in March 2019, that “Autonomous machines with the power and discretion to select targets and take lives without human involvement are politically unacceptable, morally repugnant and should be prohibited by international law.” A key issue under the laws of war is that as software becomes more complicated, it becomes less predictable. Programmers do not understand or know the entire piece of software, leading to what is called a ‘black box’ effect in which interactions within it become unpredictable as well. This could lead to situations where LAWS apply force indiscriminately because of a software error and we may not even know

whether it was a software error or improved programming. Moreover, it would be difficult for machines to apply complex principles such as proportionality and precaution which are complicated for even humans to undertake.

Some argue that even if we equip machines with the ability to tell the difference between civilians and combatants, they will not have a human level of common sense necessary to correctly apply this requirement to distinguish.

In 2017, Russian President Vladimir Putin declared that whoever mastered the field of artificial intelligence “will become ruler of the world”. Some predict that AI technology will be a game-changer in terms of state war-fighting power and military domination, analogous to the change brought about by nuclear weapons and before that by gunpowder. The major powers have already committed significant funding and research efforts into AI development, believing it will be highly influential in future military conflicts. It is unlikely that they will stop this funding especially as negotiations to draft laws to prohibit or regulate LAWS have been ongoing for 10 years at the UN Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) meetings and remain unfruitful.

States remain reluctant to regulate LAWS because of the benefits of removing humans from the loop; chief among them is how cheap it is to have robots in battle compared to people. For the US, a soldier costs the state an average of 4 million USD across their lifetime whereas a robot would cost 10 percent of that and can be thrown out when it becomes obsolete. In Iraq and Afghanistan, they were used to conduct dirty, boring or dangerous tasks like disrupting IEDs or surveillance in threatening circumstances like in caves. They also have faster response times which are indispensable in battle, when used in a simulated dogfight, the AI fighter pilot beat a human pilot 15 times to 1.

Pakistan has adopted a forceful stance at the GGE in favour of the prohibition and regulation of LAWS. Such a strong approach may have been a bit premature, especially given the inevitability of India’s development of these weapons systems. However, It may be better for Pakistan to continue on its current trajectory and work together with

states towards a resolution at the United Nations General Assembly. States against LAWS are now considering how to capture any form of policy coherence in a forum that can progress the global normative and operational framework on LAWS, and build momentum towards an international legally binding instrument. Moving to the General Assembly may guarantee more success than the last ten years in the GGE. Thirty countries currently developing these weapons systems are against their regulation. They will have less power here in stymying a legal framework.

In the meanwhile though, Pakistan should also keep a close eye on the states which are building up their capacity in these weapons systems while maintaining its legal stance. The use of AI systems by Israel in Gaza is emblematic of what the future of warfare may look like - data-driven targeting where algorithms become assassination factories. Pakistan should also make it clear that failure at the General Assembly or ongoing frustration with the GGE may lead us changing our approach. Given India is likely to get more AI-enabled drones for surveillance and perhaps more lethal purposes, it is in Pakistan's best interests to also ensure that it has access to such technology while maintaining that it is for non-lethal and non-military purposes. Pakistan can then better weigh its options while laying the groundwork now by emphasising that a lack of prohibitions and regulations will lead to future proliferation (which will not of course be unlawful).

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Role of Middle Powers in Major Power Competition

Sobia Kafayat

Abstract

This INSIGHT discusses growing geopolitical influence of middle powers, focusing on their increased autonomy and strategic roles in conflicts like Ukraine and Gaza. It highlights their involvement in regional organizations and the impact this has on global power dynamics. Additionally, it emphasizes these nations' nuanced strategies in international affairs, reflecting a shift towards prioritizing national interests.

Keywords: Middle Powers, Major Powers, Geo-political Conflicts, Power Blocs, Major Powers Competition.

Major powers' engagement in contemporary geopolitical conflicts has traditionally fostered a global environment that led to power blocs. Middle and small countries are either persuaded or coerced to choose sides, as in the case of Afghanistan, Syria, Ukraine, Taiwan, and now Gaza etc. The middle powers, either sided with one or the other major powers and felt comfortable opting for the same side of the bloc in various conflicts. However, the Ukraine war and Israel's indiscriminate revenge punishment of the Palestinian people in Gaza, have brought about a significant change in the way, the middle powers view these conflicts. The role of the middle powers who were once part of the global core e.g. India, Saudi Arabia, Turkiye, Iran, South Africa, and Pakistan has grown.¹ They are now enjoying a much stronger impact and playing a bigger role in international affairs. They are emboldened to make somewhat independent decisions as to which side to play on. The purpose of this insight is to view the significant role of middle powers within the ambit of major powers competition.

John Mearsheimer defines major powers “as states that are acknowledged as having a large impact on international politics and that have considerable economic, military, and diplomatic strength”.² This definition identifies the United States, Russia, and China as the major powers with the ability to affect world politics and global political order.



There is no universal definition of middle powers, some scholars define middle powers as possessing enough strength and authority to support themselves without external assistance. Such states have significant military and economic might in comparison to their neighbours, as well as perpetual regional presence and geographic importance. In addition, a large group of countries in the southern hemisphere of the globe have benefitted from a globalized economy, achieved impressive development indicators,³ and have gained the ability to influence the balance of power in their regions. These countries are dissimilar in their political outlook, spread over various continents (Asia, Africa, and Latin America), and have been termed as the Global South in international politics.⁴ Leading middle-power countries in the Global South include Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Brazil, India, Indonesia, and Türkiye.⁵ They have avoided being aligned completely with any of the major powers and sought to pursue independent foreign policies that advance their national interests. The rise of middle powers in the Global South has thus increased their

significance in international affairs.⁶ As members of various political and economic groups like the G20, G77, and BRICS possess vital resources that together give them greater clout.⁷

In the contemporary global geopolitical environment, where the US and Russia are fighting a proxy war in the Ukraine. The US and China are jostling for global economic and political outreach. The US is likely to get more deeply engaged in the Middle East (from where it was beginning to disengage). The role of the middle powers has assumed greater significance.⁸

Many experts believe that middle powers will be crucial in determining the direction of contemporary international politics. These middle powers are becoming active in both geopolitics and geo-economics.⁹ They all are part of regional organizations such as BRICS, SCO, G20, G77 etc. which foster the south-south cooperation. They collectively own critical minerals and natural resources that are important for major powers to sustain their status or order.

Major Powers may not, in the future, be able to depend on automatic support from middle powers as in the past. Countries that focus on their internal strengths, both political and economic, would enjoy the right to exercise the freedom to decide in favor of their national interests.

If one looks at the conflict theatres in the recent past, it is evident which major powers are on the opposing sides, be it the Afghanistan crisis, the Syrian war, the Iranian issue, the Ukraine war, or Israel's war on the Gaza Strip. It is also obvious that all the middle powers have not extended their political support to the US as they used to do in the past. The US resolution in the UN Security Council on the Russian invasion of Ukraine reflected this reality. While Russia vetoed the UNSC resolution 2623,¹⁰ middle powers including India, Brazil, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Pakistan, and others abstained.¹¹ The most of the middle powers thus showed a nuanced strategy in the Ukraine war reflecting their aim to balance their interests with the expectations of large countries.¹²

The UNSC adopted resolution 2712 allowing aid delivery and evacuation from Gaza received a majority vote but was abstained by the US, the UK, and Russia.¹³ India, which had previously supported the Palestine issue, has taken a 180-degree turn in support of Israel as India seems to have aligned itself with the US and Israel keeping its strategic interests in mind.¹⁴ Turkiye was the first Muslim country to recognize Israel in 1949 and having billions of dollars of trade with Israel has been one of the strongest voices against Israel's indiscriminate killing of women and children in Gaza. At the same time, Turkiye has not banned the passage of oil supply to Israel, 40% of which passes through Turkey.¹⁵

Pakistan, a country in the Global South, has the geographic location, economic potential, and regional clout to be regarded as a middle power.¹⁶ Pakistan has played a significant role in the geopolitical and geostrategic context, particularly during more than four decades of the Afghan crises. In its first National Security Policy 2022-2026, Pakistan's emphasis has shifted from geostrategic to geo-economics. As a consequence of economic and political challenges, Pakistan has come under increasing pressure. Pakistan has been able to ward off various coercive tactics such as the FATF and IMF. In any future theater of major powers' contest, be it in the Asia Pacific region, Iran or Afghanistan, Pakistan's geostrategic position places the country in the eye of the storm. Thus, Pakistan's role as a middle power assumes greater significance, demanding focus on Pakistan's geo-economic development.

Major Powers may not take support from middle powers for granted in future, as in the past. Countries that focus on their internal strengths, both political and economic, would enjoy the right to exercise the freedom to decide in their national interests.

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Capitalizing Blue Economy and CPEC to Leverage Sustainable Development in Baluchistan and Sindh

Dr. Ahsan Abbas and Dr. Zubair Nawaz

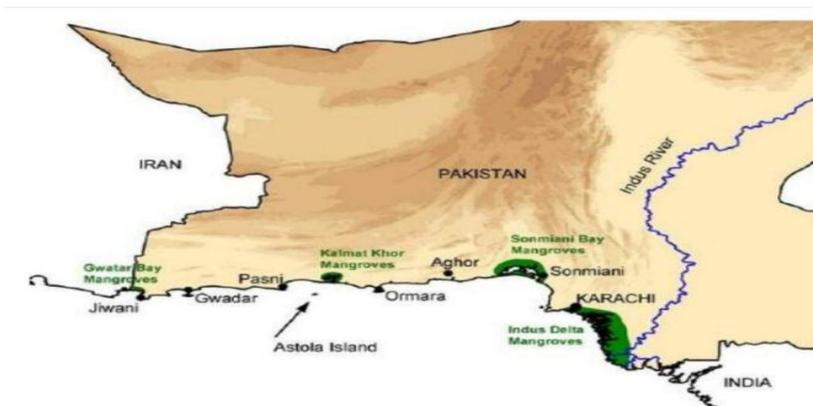
Abstract

The insight examines the potential of the blue economy and the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in driving sustainable development in Pakistan's Baluchistan and Sindh regions. It underscores the importance of marine resources, fisheries and coastal tourism, while addressing challenges like inadequate infrastructure and policy coordination. It advocates for strategic approaches to spur economic growth and environmental sustainability, emphasizing the need for government prioritization and integrated policy execution.

Keywords: Blue Economy, Marine Resources, Ocean Ecosystem, Seafood, Aquaculture, Coastal Tourism.

The concept of “blue economy” gained much prominence in the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development,¹ where sustainable use of marine resources was streamlined. The World Bank defines blue economy as a “sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods, and jobs while preserving the health of ocean ecosystem”.² The scope of blue economy encompasses different sectors and activities including seafood, fisheries, aquaculture, maritime / coastal tourism, renewable energy, and marine biotechnology. Fisheries and aquaculture are the leading sectors that contribute significantly. These sectors have great economic value and provide livelihood to millions of people across the world. Moreover, seafood and fish products are among the leading trading food items.

Pakistan is blessed with pristine landscape, lakes, coastal areas, and many culturally rich historical sites. The country has a long coastal line of 1120 kilometres (km) surrounded by bare desert with a variety of landforms such as mostly virgin sand beaches, tombolo, rock cliffs, lagoons, headlands, shelf bays, deltas and mud flats with mangrove vegetation. Specifically, the Indus Delta provides an ideal environment for marine resources. Pakistan's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) extends over 200 nautical miles (nm) or 370 km and includes biodiversity, seafood, minerals and hydrocarbon resources. These resources give impetus to realization about the significance of blue economy and its development on modern lines.³



Fishery is the most promising component of blue economy. According to Pakistan Economic Survey, fishery sector contributed 1.39 percent in agriculture produce, and 0.32 percent in the overall GDP in 2022-23⁴ and it grew at 1.44 percent as compared to 0.35 percent last year. The total fishing area is estimated around 300,270 square km. The major fishing harbours in the country include Karachi Fish Harbour (manages 90% fish catch and 95% fish exports), Korangi Fish Harbour, Pasni Fish Harbour and Gwadar Fish Harbour.⁵

Gwadar and Makran coast hold great prospects for blue economy. Gwadar sea area is abundant with variety of the best fish including tuna, mackerel, croaker besides other marine resources. Shrimp farming is another profitable business in Gwadar. The Jiwani coastal wetland is rich

in *Avicennia Marina* mangroves, nursery and spawning habitat for shrimps. Notably, Oceanic Whitetip fish species found in Gwadar has big international market and demand. Tuna especially yellowfin tuna is commercial and high-value fish which has significant export potential to the USA, EU, Japan and China. Moreover, Indian mackerel, Sardine fish

Ribbon fish and Parfrey fish are major exportable fish species. The region's immense potential can not be fully realised due to inappropriate fish handling, poor management, inadequate infrastructure and hygiene problems that severely undermine fish produce and quality control. As far as maritime / coastal tourism is concerned, Kund Malir (Golden Beach), Hangol National Park, remarkable Princess of Hope, Hindu Temple, and Astola Island are the attractive sites but inadequate infrastructure and hospitality facilities are serious challenges.

Despite endowed potential and inherent comparative advantage, the true potential of the blue economy could not be realised, because of poor regulatory framework, fragile institutional setup, limited maritime infrastructure, security concerns, technological backwardness, untrained human resource, economic uncertainty and political instability. Pakistan desperately needs to develop a comprehensive and coordinated strategy to realise the untapped potential of blue economy especially fisheries and maritime tourism sector.

Blue economy in policy domain is administered by the Ministry of Maritime Affairs (MoMA), Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives (MoPDSI), and respective provincial departments of Planning & Development (P&D). Although there is no consolidated policy framework, however, there are a few policies related to fragments of blue economy, such as Pakistan Merchant Marine Shipping Policy which is mainly about fiscal measures and regulations of shipping industry. Owing to lack of coordination among the institutions, policies are fragmented and ineffective to deliver. Further, due to the 18th constitutional amendment, there is a disconnect between federal and provincial government organisations which is hindering the coordinated and comprehensive national policy framework.

Notably the development of blue economy is envisaged in the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) too, and authorities may consider following recommendations to yield benefits from untapped potential of the blue economy.

- Coastal tourism on five important sites like Jiwani, Ormara, Jhaljao, Sonmiani and Keti Bundar requires deliberate facilitation and marketing through collaboration of Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC) and Chinese counterparts. Favourable government policies and improved security will boost coastal tourism. The tourist sites can be developed through diversified investment and financing mechanisms including built, operate and transfer (BOT), public-private partnership (PPP) and concessional loans to indigenous population.
- The special investment packages can be offered to local and foreign investors with relevant expertise. Pertinently soft or interest free loans could be provided to local talented youth for tourism and hospitality services. To develop entrepreneurial ventures in the tourism and hospitality sector, Youth Entrepreneurship Fund, capacity building and tailor-made training programs need to be executed with the support of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)/ CPEC partner countries.
- Government should train local farmers about export standards of aquaculture. Moreover, quality checks and certifications could be introduced to uplift exports of tuna and other aquaculture products in EU markets. Various viable projects including cold storage, supply chain, processing & value-addition of seafood products, feed mills, hatcheries and hospitality services can be initiated. Moreover, requisite measures should be taken to preserve the national heritage and nature by engaging indigenous population.

In short, blue economy offers promising avenues for sustainable economic development. Pakistan can secure its future prosperity while safeguarding its marine ecosystems through a coordinated and comprehensive plan of action along with targeted interventions to reap the benefits, especially for the inhabitants of Baluchistan and Sindh. First

and foremost, blue economy should be strategically prioritised and harmonised among all tiers of government.

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Bridging the Skill Gap: An Analysis of Technical and Vocational Education & Training (TVET) Policy 2018

Tehreem Talat

Abstract

This INSIGHT discusses Pakistan's Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) Policy 2018, focusing on its effectiveness in fostering skill development for economic growth. It explores the policy's objectives and challenges in implementation, proposing strategic recommendations to bridge the skill gap and align technical education with industry needs for sustainable economic development.

Keywords: Skill Development, Skilled Workforce, Human Resource, Economic Growth, Technical Training.

Skill development is one of the most essential factors for economic growth. The availability of a highly skilled labour force has transformed Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, and Korea into Asian Tigers. Countries try to improve the quality of their skilled labour by focusing on their technical institutions. In Pakistan, Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) sector is dedicated to transforming human resource through skill development. It is governed both at provincial and federal level. At the federal level, the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training (MoFEPT) sets broader policies and strategies while the National Vocational and Technical Training Commission (NAVTTTC) acts as a regulatory body. In provinces, the Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority (TEVTA) is responsible for implementing these policies. Pakistan has 3,740 technical institutions, of which 56% are private and 44% are public.

According to NAVTTC, Pakistan produces 0.45 million of skilled workforce annually. This number is far smaller than the actual demand, which is one million, at present. These statistics show a huge gap of 0.55 million in demand and supply of skilled workforce.¹ This supply gap hinders economic growth. The same has been substantiated by the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) which suggests that the rising unemployment in Pakistan leads to slow economic growth because of a structural mismatch in the labour market.² Keeping in view, the importance of technical education, Pakistan introduced a TVET Policy in 2018 namely "Skill for Growth and Development," based on eight objectives for skill development. Five years have passed since the introduction of the policy. So, it is the right time to analyse how far this policy has been implemented vis-à-vis its set objectives.

Skill development for sustainable economic growth. Given the first objective, NAVTTC is focusing on the National Skill Strategy (NSS), an action plan that provides the roadmap for skill development and plays a vital role in improving the performance of technical institutions.

Increase the number and quality of training so that at least one million people are trained annually. The number of enrolments in technical institutions in 2018 was 4,33,000, which failed to increase in 2022-2023.³ Furthermore, the total annual supply of technical institutions is 4,19,732, which is far below one million.

Standard-based assessments and certificate systems. Considering the policy report "that technical institutions should focus on NQF (National Qualification Framework)", or the assessment strategy document that was published in year 2017. NQF provides the basis for comparison of qualification at the national and international level, while NAVTTC moderately focuses on that objective.

Competency-based education. Technical institutions have adopted competency-based training and assessment (CBT&A). The TVET reforms project incorporates the demand driven training programme through CBT&A.

Public-private partnership. Some industrial groups like Sitara Group and Pakistan Steel have started their technical colleges, while some public technical institutions have also collaborated with industry. Although, in some cases, industrial representatives are part of advisory committees in different institutions. German Agency for International Cooperation has also collaborated with institutions.

Expansion of labour exports. Institutional authorities focus on standardizing training programmes by launching a national qualification framework and through the Qualification Awarding Board (QABs).

The linkage between informal skilled workforce with formal training. NAVTTC initiated a programme called Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), which helps skilled workers to get certification after passing the necessary tests.

Reforming the public sector technical institutions. The Government of Pakistan has allocated Rs. 1500 million in 2023-24, and the Asian Development Bank has given US\$ 100 million loan for reforming the technical institutions,⁴ the result of which will trickle down slowly and show in the long term. Given the above analysis of policy objectives, three problems have been identified:

Firstly, the availability of databases about technical institutions and the labour market on their websites is a matter of grave concern because the information is outdated, and it is challenging to find skilled labour.⁵

Secondly, the mismatch between industrial requirements and the supply of skilled workforce due to ineffective partnerships between the TVET sector and the industrial sector of Pakistan is yet another challenge. Industries and technical institutions are not taking joint initiatives based on mutual commitments.

Thirdly, a lack of adequate training procedures and staff for delivering quality education is very disturbing. Proper training standards are not available in technical institutions. It has been reported that these institutions lack a quality curriculum, and courses are not aligned with the required skills in the job market.⁶ Similarly, the outdated curriculum

is an issue linked to the inadequate infrastructure of institutions and a lack of skilled trainers in technical and vocational institutions.⁷

Following are the recommendations based on the problems mentioned above: A national database of skilled workforce should be developed. At the same time, a platform should be created under the supervision of Pakistan Single Window (PSW), to link industries with technical training institutions.

Industries should be encouraged to run short duration training programmes. Technical institutions should involve industries in the design and delivery of programmes. The focus should be on adequately evaluating courses / programmes to ensure that they will positively impact the job market.

For skill development and sustainable economic growth of the country, technical institutions must focus on quality and adaptability to the changing labour market needs. Teachers of technical and vocational institutions should be trained under the "Train the Trainer" programme in close collaboration with industries.

A lack of alignment between the TVET sector and industries will directly impact the economic viability and indirectly impact the national security of Pakistan. Policies should be developed for the alignment of technical institutions and industries. China has invested heavily in its technical institutions for industrial transformation. New Zealand and China have created a strong linkages for developing the capabilities of their teaching staff. Thus, Pakistan should explore opportunities in the international market for developing demand-driven training programmes like New Zealand and China. Despite that, Pakistan can improve the performance of its technical institutions and the efficiency of the skilled workers based on a long-standing relationship and mutual interest with China.

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