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From Historic Ties to Strategic Pact: Understanding the Pakistan–Saudi Defense Agreement

Nawal Nawaz

Pakistan and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) have signed a strategic mutual defense agreement (SMDA) on September 17, 2025, cementing decade's long security partnership between Islamabad and Riyadh. This new mutual defense pact strengthens previous agreements with Riyadh that date back to the 1960s, further reiterating the principle that "aggression against either country shall be considered aggression against both." Pakistan–Saudi agreements (past or present) are political pledges of solidarity and cooperation, but they do not create a treaty-based, institutionalized collective defense system like NATO. While many analysts argue that this deal covers Pakistan's nuclear weapons, the reality is that this agreement augments the already existing strategic partnership rather than providing Saudi Arabia with a nuclear umbrella. Neither Pakistan's nuclear policy nor its doctrine entails providing extended nuclear deterrence to any other state while Islamabad's deterrence posture remains India-specific and does not extend to providing a nuclear umbrella to any state.

Islamabad and Riyadh have been tied in a mutual defense pact for decades. Pakistani forces which account for 1500-2000 troops, provide operational and technical help to Saudi forces. In regional conflicts, Pakistan has been safeguarding Saudi frontiers under defense protocol of 1967. Over the course of time, Pakistan has trained approximately 8000-10,000 Saudi military personnel and periodically stationed these units in the Kingdom. The recent strategic mutual defense agreement further strengthens the historical deep alliance between Pakistan and KSA, rather than creating a new pact. Even previous defense agreements do not guarantee a "nuclear umbrella." In a similar vein, the recent mutual defense pact between Pakistan and KSA politically serves the purpose of signaling solidarity and strategic cooperation, rather than providing unconditional war guarantee for Saudi Arabia. Pakistan does not seek to assume the role of a regional security guarantor, rather contributes to collective security in line with international law and its national interests. However, Islamabad can be an essential actor in collective security arrangements in the Middle East in accordance with the norms of international law.

As the Israeli air raid on Doha sent shockwaves across globe, Gulf States particularly Saudi Arabia, have realized that the United States is unlikely to go to the defence of its Gulf partners in times of crisis, despite deep ties with the Kingdom. The reliability of the US as a security guarantor to its Arab partners in the Gulf region has diminished after Israel attacked Qatar that harbors Al-Udaid, the largest US military base in the Middle East with 10,000 active troops. Israel's attack against Hamas leadership in Doha also infuriated Gulf countries. However, the lack of action by the US against its ally, Israel, for the airstrikes in Doha has damaged the image of the US as a reliable security partner. Therefore, Arab states are exploring new partners for their security against Israeli aggression. Pakistan, with its battle-tested military and cordial relations with Gulf monarchies, appears to be a natural partner for KSA. Its decades- old alliance with KSA is rooted in deep strategic interests, shared faith and economic

interdependence. Pakistan and Saudi Arabia's partnership is anchored in shared religious affinity, the presence of a 2.7 million-strong Pakistani diaspora contributing over \$6 billion in annual remittances, and Pakistan's reliance on Saudi oil imports for its energy security. These factors deepen mutual trust and economic interdependence. Together, they reinforce the strategic logic behind the Pakistan–Saudi Mutual Defense Pact. Additionally, Pakistan's participation in Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 projects highlights opportunities for long-term economic integration and strategic cooperation.

The cardinal aspect of this new mutual defense pact lies in formalizing a deep alliance which has historical roots. With this agreement, both Islamabad and Riyadh vow joint deterrence against any aggression, institutionalizing their long-standing security cooperation. Both Pakistan and KSA views this pact as an outcome of decades old partnership, not a sudden alliance aimed at any adversary, as Pakistani officials reiterated in their statements. Similar to the previous defense agreements between Islamabad and Riyadh, this agreement does not offer any nuclear guarantee to KSA. Therefore, the idea of a nuclear umbrella remains speculative, and the actual text of this mutual pact, along with Pakistan's stated nuclear doctrine, does not support it. Operational readiness and interoperability of both states' armed forces will be significantly improved under this pact. This pact will foster defense industry collaboration on emerging technologies such as cybersecurity, drone technology and space-based defense systems between both states. It will enable the co-production of conventional military equipment as well, paving the way for a promising future of strategic cooperation between Islamabad and Riyadh. It may also be pointed that Pakistan has not offered a covert "nuclear button" to Riyadh and defense cooperation with Riyadh does not imply an automatic war pledge.

While addressing the 80th session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), Iranian President, Masoud Pezeshkian, also praised this defense deal between the two brotherly Muslim states, marking the pact as the beginning of a comprehensive regional security system. Pak-Saudi mutual defense pact enhances Pakistan's strategic depth by reinforcing its defense cooperation with the Muslim world's most influential state, thereby expanding Islamabad's diplomatic leverage beyond South Asia. The pact bolsters Pakistan's deterrence posture vis-à-vis India, as Riyadh's political and strategic backing adds weight to Pakistan's regional standing. Economically, it promises deeper defense collaboration, potential joint production, and technology transfer. In December, KSA loaned Pakistan \$ 3 billion, shoring up its foreign exchange reserves. While politically, it reflects growing confidence in Pakistan's professional military capability and responsible nuclear stewardship. In essence, the agreement strengthens Pakistan's strategic autonomy, broadens its alliances, and projects it as a pivotal player in the evolving security architecture of the Muslim world.

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Link: <https://globalsecurityreview.com/understanding-the-pakistan-saudi-defense-agreement/>

How Understanding History Is Essential to Grasp Russia's Strategy in Ukraine?

Muhammad Kumail Mehdi

After three and a half years of ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine, both sides are engaged in a long, protracted struggle. As the conflict goes on, the crisis in Ukraine is not simply a 21st-century conflict; it is a manifestation of Soviet political, economic, and military logic, which formerly controlled Eastern Europe. Apart from modern elements of warfare, such as drones and cyberwarfare, the campaign echoes an older strategy, one adopted by the Soviet Union. The latter's strategy involved controlling neighbours through a defense-offense duality and combining political manoeuvres. The purpose is to create a buffer zone to halt Western advance and secure Russian security.

It is interesting to note that European powers distrust Russia and consider it an aggressor. However, it is worth noting that the expansion of NATO to Russia's borders is the root cause of the current conflict. In 1997, Russian President Boris Yeltsin approved a text on national security that considered the expansion of NATO to the east a threat to Russian security. The induction of Ukraine into NATO would bring the Western military alliance to Russia's doorstep, disregarding Russia's long-standing desire to have a buffer zone. Besides, Russia has historical ties with Ukraine; losing the latter to the West is a double blow: strategic and symbolic.

Scholars have argued that the current Russian strategy can be traced back to the post-revolutionary period following the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917. The Frunze-Trotsky debate in the early 1920s laid the groundwork for Soviet political and military doctrine. It explains the soviet doctrine of 'Superiority in the Correlation of Forces', which focuses on increasing the quality and quantity of forces to maintain control. In the subsequent years, the Soviet political posture remained defensive, while the military adopted an offensive posture. The total mobilisation of society, industrial might, and the primacy of offense (the concept of operation in depth) in the defense and spread of socialism exhibit this dynamic defense-offense duality. In this duality, the role of strategic patience is vital because it shows Russian confidence in its ability to endure hardships patiently and then utilise the opportunity to achieve its objective. In Putin's Russia, the Marxist-Leninist ideology of the USSR has been replaced by nationalist rhetoric and the defense of Russian civilisation, but the defense-offense duality persists.

An analysis of the conflict in Ukraine that started in 2022 reveals that the initial optimism of the Russians was to take Kyiv in 3 days and subdue Ukraine in 6 weeks. To accomplish this ambitious plan, the Russian military relied on old Soviet deep operations tactics with lightning speed. However, the resistance of Ukrainian forces and civilians subverted the Russian plan for an immediate victory. With the withdrawal from Kyiv, the nature of the conflict shifted to attrition and positional tactics. The long, brutal nature of this defensive warfare is another reminiscence of the Soviet mindset of diluting the will of the enemy, as happened against Nazi Germany in 1942. As the western support to Ukraine comes in, it has launched multiple

counteroffensives, the deadliest of which was the drone attack that damaged Russian bomber fleets in operation Spiderweb.

The conflict shows a clear reminder that, despite the use of 21st-century weapons, Moscow continues to fight with a Soviet mentality. Targeting the enemy's infrastructure far behind the front lines is a contemporary version of deep battle. It resembles the Soviet mindset of using social forces, the population, and civilian infrastructure to create bargaining leverage. Similarly, drone and artillery attacks in Sumy, Donetsk, and Kherson demonstrate Russia's transition to an attritional strategy, which aims to advance gradually rather than quickly. The attacks on civilian and energy infrastructure by Russian forces underscore the soviet ideology of breaking the civilian will to break the state. This is akin to the Soviet philosophy of endurance through devastation, which relies on outlasting the opponent rather than outmanoeuvring them.

The diplomatic efforts to bring a ceasefire continue, but an intrinsic stalemate persists: Ukraine's bid to join NATO and the Russian notion of securing security through a buffer zone. For Russia, diplomacy demands recognition, not reconciliation. It exhibits the Soviet custom of viewing negotiations as instruments to maintain, not relinquish, superiority in correlation of forces. It sounds like the Brezhnev Doctrine, which posits that security emanates from dominance within its sphere of influence. Under Putin, the policy of Near Abroad shares the same principle as a buffer zone, in this case, Ukraine, to ward off Western outreach.

Since the start of the conflict in Ukraine, there has been speculation about the Russian economy. The government injected massive funding into the economy to support its defensive efforts. The industries that used to make civilian goods have been diverted to produce ammunition and drones. Since labour productivity and the employment rate determine economic growth, currently, in Russia, these two indicators are under severe pressure. In short, the civilian needs have been subordinated to military goals. This has been the pattern of the Russian war economy involving centralisation and government interference to support war efforts. To sum up, the Russian-Ukrainian conflict has entered its third year, with no sign of a ceasefire, and the war of attrition continues. Against this backdrop, Moscow's military, political, and economic strategy resembles that of the USSR. The urge to maintain superiority in the correlation of forces in war and diplomacy is visible. The only formidable opposition is the West's support for Ukraine. However, the latter lacks sufficient manpower if the conflict drags on further. In this situation, Putin, like the USSR, is relying on strategic patience to break the Ukrainian resistance.

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How Significant is India's Rail-Based Missile Launching System?

Saad Riaz

Introduction

Since the end of the four-day May 2025 conflict between India and Pakistan, threat of an arms race looms large over South Asia. India is growing its missile inventory, showing a doctrinal shift towards counterforce preemption and seeking punitive military actions under the nuclear hangover. The development and retesting of its missile arsenal demonstrate a predilection towards pushing the region towards an arms race.

One surprising element drawn from the May clash is that the four-day conflict has impacted far beyond operational and tactical levels up to the strategic and technological levels. The escalation went beyond their thinking, and upon Pakistan's response, they requested a ceasefire. So, the missile gap exposed the credibility of their deterrence. The fierce missile expedition is to fill the gap in their nuclear deterrence. Similarly, Agni Prime, which had been tested previously, was retested this time, through a rail-based launching platform. This following analysis outlines the technical specifications of the tested Agni Prime, the technology integrated into the system, and its implications for South Asian stability, given that the missile is deliberately directed at Pakistan due to its limited range.

Technical Parameters

On September 24, 2025, the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), in collaboration with the Strategic Forces Command (SFC), launched Agni Prime from a rail-based mobile launching system. It is nuclear-capable and has a range of up to 2000 km, equipped with advanced technologies and a guidance system. The range suggests that it can be classified as a Medium Range Ballistic Missile (MRBM). However, the official press release referred it as an Intermediate Range Ballistic Missile (IRBM). The missile testing validated all technical parameters and fulfilled the operational requirements. Furthermore, it is a two-staged rocket equipped with solid propellant, and both stages are fitted with composite rocket motors and guidance systems for midcourse and terminal guidance. Similarly, the missile is equipped with a Ring Laser Gyroscope-Inertial Navigation System (RLG-INS), enabling the terminal navigation. Thus, reducing the Circular Probable Error (CEP) to only 10 meters.

According to the Ministry of Defence (MoD), the missile is canisterised and a rail-based mobile launcher system, putting India in the elite list of using a train as a launching platform. This makes India the fifth nation after the US, Russia, China, and North Korea to deploy such a system. The rail-based launch system would not require any pre-launch conditions. It is ready to launch and has mobility to ensure survivability through rail networks. As the DRDO's press release says, "It provides for cross-country mobility and can launch within a short reaction time with reduced visibility". Regarding its range, it is too short to target mainland China. The shorter range means that the missile is specifically designed to target Pakistan and can easily cover its entire territory.

Strategic Rationale Behind Testing

Survivability is crucial when adversaries can inflict damage, which could eventually lead to a decapitation strike. This can be possible through two ways: procurement of nuclear-powered submarines (SSBNs), which ensures a high level of survivability due to their stealth capabilities. The second is to ensure survivability through a mobile launching system, such as utilizing a TELV (Transporter Erector Launcher Vehicle) or a Rail-Based Missile Launching System (RBMLS). The SSBNs ensure a high level of survivability and provide the assured second-strike capability. Whereas the rail-based system drastically increases survivability through dispersal of missile arsenals in a vast network of railway tracks.

The survivability of using a rail-based missile system is ensured through concealment using tunnels and blending into civilian traffic, thus reducing the visibility and vulnerability from preemptive striking. The railway networks in India stretch to around 70,000 km with extensive tunnels, especially in the Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir Region. Currently, it consists of three long tunnels. One is Pir Panjal, which is 11.22 km, and the second is the Sangaldan, which is 8.6 km. However, the T-49 is under construction, which is expected to be around 12.7 km long and likely to be open for traffic in the upcoming years. These tunnels would serve the purpose of stealth and evade detection, ensuring the survivability of the Agni Prime missile.

Therefore, a highly canisterized and rail-mobile force increases strategic ambiguity while further complicating the adversary's targeting calculus. High mobility, low CEP, and high readiness level raise doubts about an adversary's ability to detect and preclude launch, thereby strengthening the perceptual threat through an element of surprise and precision strike. Beyond the technical parameters, the missile system also has a doctrinal impact. Survivability and accuracy can be perceived as enhancing counterforce and preemptive options. This could place the adversary into a "use-it or lose-it" dilemma, despite the other side's pledges to the No-first-use doctrine. This is India's so-called "compellence through coercion", while considering the nuclear deterrence irrelevant.

Regional Implications for South Asia

Despite rail-based systems having immense capability to strike into the adversary's heartland, they also present several destabilizing factors, such as issues related to command authorization and the 'use it or lose it' doctrine for an adversary, which could pressure them into launching a first strike. Additionally, this could further incite an arms race in the region, as Pakistan is pushed to respond to such developments.

In terms of command and control, during peacetime, the missile may be concealed within tunnels and communicate via electronic links. However, during a crisis, amidst potential spoofing, jamming, and electronic warfare. If the commander loses the signals, who would ensure the security and authorization protocols of that particular missile system, when considering the precedent such as the BrahMos misfire in 2022.

Secondly, the “use it or lose it” dilemma becomes particularly evident as India prepares for counterforce preemption strategies and develops an ambitious defence project like “Sudarshan Chakra”, a multilayered defence system. This may instill a false sense of security, encouraging the logic of striking first under the belief that one is protected against any retaliation. Thirdly, the induction of Agni Prime risks further instigating an arms race in the region. As India attempts to create a “new normal” in the region and enforce nuclear brinkmanship, it aims to punish Pakistan in case of any terror attacks. However, Pakistan aims to restore strategic stability in the region through its quid pro quo plus strategy and an interplay of full-spectrum deterrence.

Conclusion

The Agni-Prime test risks destabilizing the region by driving Pakistan to an unwanted arms race. Islamabad could respond in two principal ways: first, by enhancing space-based surveillance, launching or tasking satellites to improve tracking, locating, and precision targeting; or second, by enhancing the survivability of its nuclear forces through sea-based assets such as SSBNs. Prioritizing a survivable sea-based deterrent is sensible because SSBNs provide an assured second-strike capability: even after a devastating first strike, a secure and concealed submarine force can deliver a retaliatory response. Strengthening second-strike forces thus preserves deterrence and reduces incentives for a disarming first strike.

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Link: <https://cscr.pk/explore/themes/defense-security/how-significant-is-indias-rail-based-missile-launching-system/>

Mapping the Geopolitics of the Saudi–Pakistan Strategic Defence Pact

Dr. Rahat Iqbal

In September this year, Pakistan and Saudi-Arabia signed a Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement (SMDA), stating that ‘any aggression against either country shall be considered as an act of aggression against both.’ It is said that the ‘agreement, which reflects the shared commitment of both nations to enhance their security and to achieve security and peace in the region and the world, aims to develop aspects of defense cooperation between the two countries and strengthen joint deterrence against any aggression.’ This defence pact is the formalization of the long-held informal defence collaboration between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. The agreement does not include the provision of nuclear umbrella to Saudi Arabia by Pakistan, as often discussed these days, but states that the security threats to each country would be mutually addressed.

Notably, the agreement was concluded after the Israeli strikes on Doha on September 9, intended to target the Hamas senior leader and the members of the Palestinian delegation that have been visiting for negotiation aimed at securing a ceasefire in Gaza, facilitated by the Qatari leadership. This act of Israel has raised concerns of Israel’s unprovoked attacks on any of the Gulf countries. In this context Saudi Arabia, being the leading country in the region, has determined that the defence pact between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia would serve as a deterrence against the perceived threat. The United States (US) previously maintained close cooperation with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and other Gulf states on border security, maritime security, military preparedness, cybersecurity, and counterterrorism. However, US cooperation in these areas has been weakening in recent years due to Israel’s contentious policies and actions across the Middle East and Gulf, and also to protect its strategic partnership with Tel Aviv.

Interestingly, the agreement between Saudi Arabia-Pakistan was based on their historic cooperation and solidarity. This defence cooperation dates back to the 1960s, when Pakistan on the request of King Faisal, provided training and advisory support to the Saudi Air Force. Hence, a formal cooperation agreement was signed in 1967. However, this agreement encompassed the exchange of military personnel and training only. Prior to this agreement, hundreds of Pakistanis were assigned to Saudi Arabia as trainers, engineers and advisers to train Saudi soldiers in defence-related matters. With the passage of time, Pakistan extended its technical cooperation to civil aviation and also supported the establishment of Saudi defence fortifications along the Yemen border. Furthermore, during the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, the scale and scope of bilateral ties led to the formalization of this agreement through a protocol agreement signed in 1982. Under this protocol, a Saudi Arabia – Pakistan bilateral security cooperation was established, authorizing the huge deployment of Pakistani forces in different parts of Saudi Arabia for training and operational matters. Islamabad has also been steadfast in reassuring the protection of the holy places in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) during the Gulf War in 1990-1990 by stationing its forces in key strategic positions in the country.

The significant aspect of SMDA stems from its timing and the development in the Gulf region. It comes at a time when the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states have given consent to reinvigorate their joint defense agreement formally made in 2000. That agreement states that attack on one state would be considered as an attack against all. Considering this context, the SMDA logically aligns with the GCC framework. This security pact, in fact, integrates Pakistan's security calculus within the Middle East security framework, which is structured around joint Military Cooperation Committees with Qatar, Oman, the UAE, Kuwait, and Bahrain.

Hence, the recent defence pact can benefit both Saudi Arabia and Pakistan in multiple ways. First, keeping in view the contemporary regional as well as the global security environment, it is essential for both Saudi Arabia and Pakistan to enhance their defence ties. Secondly, this agreement can play a critical role in making Saudi Arabia a self-reliant and self-sufficient state through joint drills, advanced training and co-production facilities in the military domain, aligned with Riyadh's vision on 2030.

In the meantime, Pakistan has strengthened its political, security and economic relation with other countries including Azerbaijan and Türkiye. During the recent United Nations Security Council (UNSC) meeting, Pakistan, as a responsible state, has also supported the peaceful resolution of disputes and remained active in UN High-Level Conference on Two-State Solution co-chaired by France and Saudi Arabia. Together, these cooperation and responsible behaviour have inspired Riyadh, demonstrating the path for defence agreement. Amid the evolving regional and global security challenges, the SMDA as a whole represents both the revival of the partnership that has been built in decades and also in reshaping and strengthening the relationship for a security calculus in the future.

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Link: <https://ipi.org.pk/mapping-the-geopolitics-of-the-saudi-pakistan-strategic-defence-pact/>

Pakistan at the Crossroads of the US–China Strategic Minerals Rivalry

Muhammad Kumail Mehdi

Recently, the President of the United States (US), Donald Trump, and the President of China, Xi Jinping, met in South Korea to step back from the brink of a global trade war. After the meeting, Beijing agreed to suspend export controls on rare earth minerals and to purchase agricultural products, including soybeans, from the United States. In return, Washington reduced the fentanyl tariff from 20% to 10% and paused the expansion of the export control list that had previously penalized Chinese companies. The Seoul meeting exemplifies a shift in US-China competition from tariff diplomacy to resource security. The US-China race to secure critical resources will increasingly determine global power dynamics, as both states aim to control key technologies, supply chains, and trade flows. As strategic rivalry at the international level intensifies, Pakistan faces challenges that require it to balance between the two great powers.

Resource security refers to access to vital resources that dictate global power dynamics and national stability. It increases one side's leverage and reduces vulnerability in its competition with rival states. Due to African vast natural resources, particularly in the latter part of the 19th century, European powers scrambled for control of Africa. The purpose was to expand territories and secure resources to enhance leverage, which determined relative power. Likewise, the oil embargo following the Arab-Israeli War of 1973 highlighted the US's foreign oil dependence. As a result, the Nixon administration signed a Petrodollar cycling deal with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which reduced vulnerability and brought critical resource security to the US.

The current US-China rivalry is also driven by resource scarcity. As put by Edward Luttwak's understanding of the horizontal dimension of strategy, the cycle of action, reaction, culmination, overextension, and reversal explains when one side tries to overpower or secure vital resources, the other side responds with a countermove that shifts the leverage balance. Beijing tightened its rare earth export in response to Washington's efforts to limit China's access to cutting-edge technologies. As the Atlantic Council warned that the mineral supply chain is becoming brittle, largely concentrated in China, causing overstretching of advanced economies. It automatically compelled the US to explore other options for secure supply chains.

Beijing's recent trade moves have, as one analyst noted, brought China much closer to operating as a true peer to the United States. When President Trump initiated the trade war with China in 2018, Beijing fortified the economic supply chain to withstand US pressure. Through comprehensive planning and long-term vision, China managed to secure stable supply chains. For instance, in the wake of tariffs on soybeans, Beijing turned to Brazil and Argentina. Since China was the largest importer of soybeans, the exports in the US plummeted by 75%, from \$12 billion in 2017 to just \$3 billion in the following year.

China's control over rare earth minerals has been pivotal in shifting the balance of negotiating leverage. During the trade war, Beijing announced that companies worldwide would need approval of the Chinese government to export goods containing their rare-earth minerals. This is not to say that Earth lacks these minerals, but their processing and extraction remain concentrated in Beijing, which controls 70% of rare earth minerals. It holds effective leverage over the export and procurement of these minerals, which are used in smartphones, fighter jets, and electric cars. Simultaneously, the US turned to Australia, Pakistan, Africa, and Ukraine to satisfy its rare earth mineral needs; however, it will take time to form a secure and new supply chain to replace China. It shows that the current competition is not primarily about trade deficits, but rather about securing the foundation of military and technological power.

Pakistan and China have been enjoying cordial geopolitical relations. Since Xi Jinping became the president in 2013, strategic and economic integration between the two has intensified. For instance, the inauguration of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the joint production of defense equipment are a few examples of the strength of this relationship. Despite collaboration against the erstwhile Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), now Russia, in the Afghan war and terrorism, Islamabad and Washington had hiccups in their bilateral ties. The US, in its bid to counter China, put its weight behind India, providing the latter with economic and military assistance. However, since President Donald Trump assumed the second term of his US presidency in 2025, the relations between Washington and Islamabad have strengthened. Whether this deepening of ties is a short-term US strategy or not, it remains to be seen.

In contemporary US-China competition, Pakistan sits at a critical juncture. On the one hand, it is playing a vital role in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) through the CPEC. Simultaneously, the US is also working to secure Islamabad's stock of critical minerals. On 31 October, the chairman of the US Critical Minerals Forum met with Pakistani authorities to deepen the collaboration. The logic of maintaining leverage with China is driving the US strategy of forming a stable supply chain from Pakistan to address resource scarcity. So, Islamabad faces two options: accommodate US interests and keep its cordial ties with China.

Against this backdrop, Pakistan should guard its economic and strategic interests. Islamabad should craft a foreign policy strategy that maintains relations with both Washington and Beijing, without succumbing to either of the great power's influence. It should communicate to both powers that it does not want to be a party in their rivalry. Undoubtedly, the US investments are lucrative, yet Islamabad should maintain its strategic maneuvering by not compromising its foreign policy choices, especially with Beijing. Similarly, Islamabad should convey to Beijing that the minerals deal with Washington is for economic dividends only. To sum up, the Seoul meeting signals the intent to secure vital resources to maintain leverage.

Although China has a sustainable supply chain of rare earth minerals, the US is forming new supply chains. Washington's growing ties with Pakistan to secure rare earth minerals are an economic imperative, while simultaneously Islamabad's ties with Beijing have been cordial and sustainable in economic and strategic aspects. In this situation, Pakistan should watch its

economic and strategic interests by keeping its independent foreign policy and avoiding being a part of the US-China rivalry.

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Link: <https://ipi.org.pk/pakistan-at-the-crossroads-of-the-us-china-strategic-minerals-rivalry/>

Congress, Public Opinion, and the Domestic Foundations of US Strategy

Muhammad Kumail Mehdi

In addition to the international geopolitical environment, the United States (US) grand strategy is influenced by domestic political incentives, congressional preferences, and interest-group pressures. In the aftermath of 9/11, the US grand strategy experienced fundamental changes. The optimism of the 1990s gave way to competition and confrontation with major powers. Against this backdrop, the rise of China as a major challenger pushed the US to invest in its relationship with India. In Washington, there is bipartisan agreement that a strong defense partnership with New Delhi is vital for its Asia-Pacific strategy and for containing China. The development of long-term strategies in the Asia-Pacific by the consecutive US presidents has been influenced by Congress's framing of China as a strategic danger and India as a partner.

Scholars claim that the head of state in any political system is driven by two objectives: maintaining political authority and forming sustainable policy alliances. To achieve these objectives, he must navigate institutional constraints, public opinion, and pressure from interest groups. In the US political system, the balance of power between the institutions has a significant impact on the country's national strategy. For example, the US Congress is primarily concerned with formation of the state's domestic policy, but through its legislative, funding, and oversight powers, it plays a pivotal role in shaping the US strategy abroad. It constrains the tools that the executive branch can use.

Following 9/11, the US strategy underwent a major shift, changing from a cautious, state-oriented approach to an expansive doctrine focused on counterterrorism and pre-emptive action. Domestic politics largely caused this change; before 9/11, congressional discussions focused on budgetary goals, humanitarian intervention, and prudence, which limited the scope of foreign policy. After the attacks, Congress came together in favor of expanded executive authority, approving the Patriot Act and authorizing the use of military force (AUMF) with resounding approval. The resultant political consensus in Washington pre-emptively confronts the national security threat.

Much of the US-China relations is determined not only by geopolitics but also by domestic political dynamics. Being "tough on China" has become one of the few bipartisan stances amid growing party divisions between Democrats and Republicans, which has forced politicians in both parties to compete over who can adopt the toughest stance. According to the Pew Research Center, Republicans are about twice as likely as Democrats to describe China as an enemy.

Congress has been powerful in pushing legislation on human rights sanctions, supply-chain diversity, technological regulations, and defence cooperation with allies, often more quickly than the executive branch. At the same time, interest groups, especially those linked to technology and national security, advocate for limitations on Chinese access to American investment and innovation. These domestic constraints produce economic, military, and technological policies that offer limited incentives for defusing tension.

Globally, Washington considers Beijing a formidable threat. The Director of National Intelligence, Tulsi Gabbard, described Beijing as Washington's "most capable strategic competitor" and told the Senate Intelligence Committee, "China's military is fielding advanced capabilities, including hypersonic weapons, stealth aircraft, advanced submarines, stronger space and cyberwarfare assets, and a larger arsenal of nuclear weapons." As both the Trump and Biden administrations' defence budgets and national strategy show, the primary threats to the US and its strategic partners are states, like China, Russia, North Korea, and Iran. To neutralise this threat, mainly in the Asia-Pacific region, Washington has been establishing defence and strategic ties with New Delhi.

Scholars argue that, apart from the China factor, the Indo-US partnership is built on a shared vision of democracy and human rights. However, in strengthening this vision, the role of the India Caucus, Indian American political organisations, and lobbyists is crucial. One sign of a significant shift in Congress's perspective on India is the establishment of the India Caucus in the House of Representatives and in the Senate. It is widely accepted that the India caucus's effective lobbying has improved New Delhi's standing in the US Congress and should be examined more closely. Notably, Democrats are somewhat more likely to have a positive opinion of India than their Republican counterparts (56% vs. 48%).

The Indo-US partnership, signed in 2006, greatly strengthened cooperation in all significant strategic domains, including nuclear trade and defense cooperation. The agreements included conducting joint military exercises, basing and refuelling aircraft, and exchanging and protecting military intelligence. It enhanced military interoperability and made it possible to sell and transfer advanced technologies by establishing common standards. By July 2005, earlier stages of this program had already been finished. After that, Washington and New Delhi agreed on the New Framework for their defense partnership in 2005, which aimed to strengthen connections between the countries' armed forces and defense trade. Later in 2015 and 2025, this framework was extended for successive ten-year periods. The 2006 partnership and the broader defence framework depended on Congress approving defence sales, technology transfers, and nuclear cooperation. To sum up, domestic politics play a significant role in shaping the US strategy.

In this regard, the perception of either a competitor or a partner is important to understand. In the 21st century, China is considered a challenger to the US in military, economic, and technological spheres. Beijing is regarded as a national threat by both major political parties in Washington, and India, which has been spending and working to strengthen its image by lobbying in Congress, is now viewed as a partner by both as well. Against this backdrop, and in response to the imagined Chinese threat, Washington is bolstering economic, military, and technological ties with New Delhi.

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