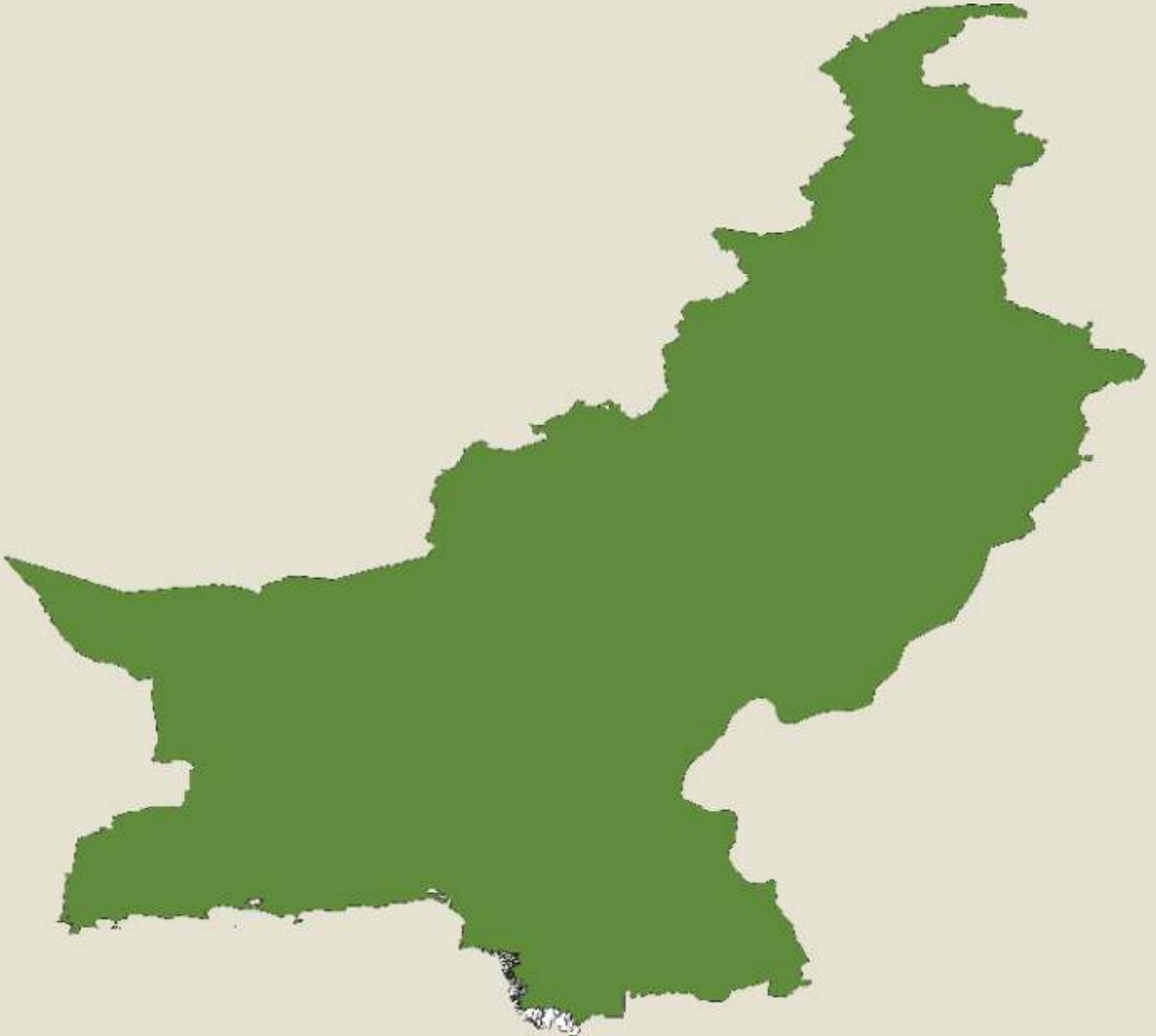


January 2026

PAKISTAN NEWS DIGEST

*Select Excerpts of News, Views and Trends
from the Pakistani Media*



Prepared by
Dr. Zainab Akhter
Dr. Nazir Ahmad Mir
Dr. Afroz Khan
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Edited by
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Coordinator, Pakistan News Digest

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POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Pakistan Resurgent, Editorial, *The Nation*, 01 January

2025 has marked a year of geopolitical ascendancy for Pakistan, the like of which has not been seen for decades. In the span of just twelve months, Pakistan has reseated itself at the table of global powers and, in the process, constructed a diplomatic network that many states would envy. *This resurgence has been shaped above all by two major conflicts on Pakistan's borders, each involving hostile military forces and each fundamentally altering regional perceptions of the country's power. Beyond South Asia, Pakistan re-emerged as a serious actor in Middle Eastern diplomacy from Iraq to Libya, deepened its already robust partnership with its iron brother China, and established new linkages in places where it previously had little presence, including Russia and Belarus.* Regional partners in Iran, Turkey, and Azerbaijan were firmly kept engaged. These were not symbolic gestures but calculated moves that expanded Pakistan's strategic footprint. With the Middle East still ablaze amid Israel's ongoing rampage, and India's unchecked slide into religious fanaticism destabilising the region, the emergence of a confident hard state will be increasingly consequential in 2026. Whatever one's political leanings, there can be little doubt that Pakistan's international posture rose meteorically in 2025, and those who engineered this shift deserve recognition for a year that has reshaped the country's place in the world.

<https://www.nation.com.pk/01-Jan-2026/pakistan-resurgent>

Opposition Needed, Editorial, *The Nation*, 14 January

After existing as the opposition largely in name only within parliament, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf on Tuesday formally requested the appointment of Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party chief Mehmood Khan Achakzai as Leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly. It is a necessary step, and one that comes far too late. Whatever disagreements PTI and its allies may have with the government, abandoning the basic responsibilities of a parliamentary opposition is a serious failure that has weakened the functioning of the legislature itself. One may hope that nominating Achakzai signals a belated recognition of these

responsibilities and a willingness to return to parliamentary engagement instead of perpetual confrontation. However, experience offers little reason for optimism. Achakzai may take up the post and fulfil his duties with seriousness, but unless PTI as a whole re-enters parliament in practice rather than rhetoric, the underlying problem will remain. Without a collective commitment to institutional politics, the party risks continuing down a path where protest replaces policy and spectacle substitutes for governance.

<https://www.nation.com.pk/14-Jan-2026/opposition-needed>

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS

Blaming the IMF, Editorial, Dawn, 13 January

The call by a panel, led by the planning and development minister, for “urgent ease of doing business reforms” to more than double export revenues to over \$60bn within three years is familiar rhetoric. The panel was formed by the prime minister to devise a strategy to exit the IMF programme once the current bailout facility ends at the end of next year. Its weeklong consultations with public and private sector stakeholders this month has apparently concluded that the current state of affairs cannot drive the 250m-strong population towards sustained progress due to cross-cutting constraints affecting all 20 priority export products and six export drivers. There is nothing new in the diagnosis of the problems hampering economic and export growth, or the solutions suggested by the panel. If anything, both diagnosis and prescription echo past policy pronouncements that were never followed up. The constraints to economic and export growth high, volatile energy costs, policy unpredictability, distorted taxation, logistics and trade facilitation bottlenecks, institutional fragmentation, regulatory burden, etc. cited by the panel are old hat. These have featured in donor and government reports and in media commentary. The persistence of these structural problems shows that the challenge lies less in their diagnosis or analysis and more in the state’s capacity and willingness to deliver politically tough, rules-based reform. Against this backdrop, the panel’s implicitly holding restrictive IMF financing responsible for the government’s

failure to aggressively implement reforms to return the economy to a sustainable growth path is an attempt to gloss over the state's own dereliction of duty.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1966707/blaming-the-imf>

Clueless on economy, Dr. Niaz Murtaza, Dawn, 20 January

The hybrid leadership prioritized political survival over economic reform by defanging courts and striking deals with old patrons. The author argues that while the government holds autocratic power, it lacks the capacity for genuine economic progress and avoids deep change that could threaten control, potentially leading to economic and security chaos. He adds sadly, the main alternative to our crony capitalism is the free-market neoliberalism pushed by the IMF and like-minded national economists. While crony capitalism can't provide even the first two elements of progress-stability and growth-neoliberalism fails on equity and sustainability. It is naïvely said that to have progress, we need reforms to cut taxes, reduce state size and deregulate across the board. But no major state has progressed based on this mix alone. The world's fastest growing state for decades, China, ranks in the lowest category 'repressed' on the *Index of Economic Freedom*. *The big dreams of the civilians in the set-up are centred on being able to churn up growth before elections and thus shun the economic-political crutches and shackles of the IMF and hidden forces.* But given the inability to crank up our foreign reserves despite the three-pronged strategy of 'beg, borrow and squeeze' from the local market, they may have to continue serving both for long. Meanwhile, the chances of salvation for the masses will remain distant until democracy and civilian sway prevail.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1968005/clueless-on-economy>

Deficit quagmire, Editorial, The Express Tribune, 21 January

A sorry state of affairs is haunting economic recovery. Structural imbalances and ad hoc policies are behind the decay. That was evident as the SBP reported that Pakistan's external financing position had once again taken a plunge in December 2025 due to a rise in imports and a persistent fall in exports. That has inevitably pushed the current account back into deficit. The statistics are quite bothersome as we exported only to a meagre tune of \$2.75 billion, whereas

exorbitantly imported goods worth \$5.74 billion in December. Likewise, the FBR missed the target in the outgoing month by Rs330 billion, and merely survived as remittances accounted for \$3.59 billion at the sunset of last year. With debate underway on whether to enter into a new IMF programme or exit it altogether, the fundamentals of the economy call for 'quality' growth. Only by creating new jobs, as unemployment has risen to a 21-year high of 7.1% in FY25 – a rise in per capita income be assured. Strengthening and expanding the export base is only possible if energy prices remain competitive and are brought down, and the focus shifts to employment-intensive activity. *Moreover, it is a pity that an agrarian economy is compelled to import food grains owing to its failure to adapt and increase per capita yield. The growing services sector, with knowledge-based manpower and opting for genuine austerity, are other essentials for staying afloat.*

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2588145/deficit-quagmire>

SECURITY SITUATION

Ongoing threat, Editorial, Dawn, 05 January

Violence feels routine in Pakistan. The security situation deteriorated sharply in 2025, marking the fifth consecutive year of rising terrorism. According to the Pakistan Security Report 2025 by PIPS, the country recorded 699 terrorist attacks, a 34pc increase over 2024. These attacks killed 1,034 people and injured 1,366, reflecting a 21pc rise in fatalities. Overall conflict-related violence, including terrorist attacks, counterterrorism operations, border clashes, and abductions, rose to 1,124 incidents, up 43pc from 2024. *These incidents can no longer be viewed as setbacks. They point to a crisis that is expanding in scale and becoming harder to control. The most striking shift is who is being targeted. Security personnel now make up a large share of those martyred in terrorist attacks. Police stations, patrols and checkpoints have come under repeated assault. Military units have also suffered. Terrorists appear focused on exhausting the state, stretching its forces thin and undermining morale.* The return of suicide attacks, after some quieter years, reinforces this assessment. Such attacks

require planning, resources and confidence, all signs of regrouping rather than desperation. The violence is also geographically concentrated. Almost all terrorist attacks took place in KP and Balochistan. In KP's southern districts, attacks on law-enforcement agencies have become common. In Balochistan, insurgents have expanded their tactics beyond hit-and-run attacks to include highway blockades, kidnappings and infrastructure sabotage. It has become clear that the western belt remains the country's main security fault line.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1965225/ongoing-threat>

Terrorism and its epicentre, Editorial, *The Express Tribune*, 08 January

The press conference by the military spokesperson has laid bare the ground realities in terms of terrorism, stating the obvious: Afghanistan is the epicentre of revulsion. *The DG ISPR, in a comprehensive overview of counterterrorism, said that Afghans were involved in "high-impact" terror incidents in Pakistan resulting in more than 1,235 civilian and law-enforcers casualties. He said 75,175 IBOs were conducted in the year 2025, which witnessed 5,397 terror incidents. He also pointed out that while Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa has been the theatre of lawlessness, it owes its genesis to political deficiencies as compared to other regions of the country. The armed forces, being at the vanguard of fighting the terror nexus, deserve commendation.* The need of the hour is to reorient the policy and make it organic and responsive to the core. The K-P government's criticism of the kinetic approach adopted to stem the rising tide of terrorism is unwarranted and must be revisited. High-profile terror activities can only be dealt with militarily, and there can be no blinking in this regard. However, it is also mandated that the policy of counterterrorism must have an across-the-board consensus, and the federal government should lead from the front in taking along the federating units for ensuring that the strategy is tactical and apolitical. Flushing out the sleeper cells and going after the abettors cannot be delayed any further, and it would be a win-win equation if the locals are taken on board.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2585968/terrorism-and-its-epicentre>

Taliban fissures, Editorial, *Dawn*, 19 January

Though reports of fissures within the Afghan Taliban are not new, a recent BBC story has detailed some of the major differences that exist between the so-called Kandahar and Kabul factions of Afghanistan's ruling set-up. The former grouping is seen as loyal to the edicts of Taliban Supreme Leader Mullah Hibatullah Akhundzada, while the faction in the Afghan capital is led by the likes of Sirajuddin Haqqani and Mullah Yaqoob. As per the BBC, a leaked audio recording reportedly of Mullah Akhundzada dating back to January 2025 warned against divisions within Taliban ranks, with the hard-line movement's supremo asserting that differences could lead to the emirate's "collapse". Taliban leaders, however, have downplayed the divisions, describing them as differences of opinion within a family. One incident cited by the official British outlet as evidence of divergences between Kabul and Kandahar was last year's internet shutdown, ordered by Mullah Akhundzada. Within days of the edict, Afghanistan was back online, as the Kabul faction apparently defied their leader and had the internet restored.

Differences among the Taliban are natural; the movement has various power centres. While Mullah Akhundzada may reign supreme, Siraj Haqqani has considerable power, being the scion of veteran Mujahideen commander Jalaluddin Haqqani. Mullah Yaqoob, son of ex-supremo Mullah Omar, also has a significant following, particularly amongst younger Afghans. Whereas Mullah Akhundzada is based in his Kandahar redoubt, living a near medieval life, the Kabul leaders are relatively urbane men, hobnobbing with global leaders in the Gulf, Russia, China, etc. The latter faction knows that Afghanistan cannot prosper without shedding some of the rigid curbs ordered by the supreme leader.

The Kabul leaders are hardly progressive but they do hold relatively more moderate views compared to Mullah Akhundzada and his inner circle. In the current context, this may be the best bet to reintegrate the country with the rest of the world. For example, the Kabul grouping reportedly favours education for girls beyond primary school, and some members of this faction have previously been disciplined for their views.

While major internal strife among the Taliban is unlikely, it is possible that the Kabul leaders may try to further assert themselves to implement more 'pragmatic' policies, without rocking the

boat, thus giving Afghans a little more freedom. They should also revisit the policy of hosting foreign terrorist groups, including the banned TTP, and impress upon Mullah Akhundzada that cross-border attacks by these groups on Pakistan and other neighbours will further isolate Afghanistan. Although a 'Kabul Spring' is hardly in the offing, limited change in Afghanistan could be in the air.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1967814/taliban-fissures>

FOREIGN POLICY

Pak invitation to Gaza board of peace, Muslim Mirani, *Pakistan Observer*, 22 January

The recent invitation from US President Donald Trump to join the Gaza Board of Peace is not merely a ceremonial gesture—it is an opportunity for Pakistan to translate decades of principled support for the Palestinian cause into tangible action. The Foreign Office has confirmed receipt of the invitation by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, signaling Islamabad's intent to remain engaged in international efforts for peace and stability in Gaza, in line with United Nations resolutions. To make its role effective, Pakistan should champion three key solutions: **First**, immediate humanitarian relief. Pakistan must insist on unobstructed access to Gaza for essential aid—medical supplies, food, water and shelter—ensuring civilians are protected from the secondary suffering of bureaucratic delays. **Second**, civilian-centred reconstruction. Post-conflict governance plans must focus on rebuilding lives, schools, hospitals and infrastructure—not on militarization or external control. Pakistan should advocate for Palestinian ownership and autonomy in reconstruction decisions. **Third**, a clear political pathway. Beyond aid, Pakistan must push for a renewed commitment to internationally recognized solutions, including a timeline toward Palestinian statehood and negotiations grounded in UN resolutions, preventing temporary fixes from replacing durable justice. Some may question whether participation in a US-led initiative risks diluting Pakistan's traditional stance. On the contrary, diplomacy is about leveraging influence without compromising

principles. Pakistan's engagement can serve as a bridge between global powers and the Muslim world, amplifying Palestinian voices and ensuring accountability in the reconstruction and political process.

<https://pakobserver.net/pak-invitation-to-gaza-board-of-peace/>

Overlooked Diplomacy, Editorial, *The Nation*, 27 January

Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar's visit to Myanmar to meet his counterpart and hold comprehensive discussions aimed at revitalising bilateral ties is a welcome and necessary step. *With Pakistan now re-engaging the Bay of Bengal region, Myanmar assumes renewed strategic importance. The infrequency of high-level contact is telling. The last visit by Myanmar's leadership to Pakistan took place in 2015, while the last Pakistani visit to Myanmar was in 2012. This prolonged diplomatic silence represents a clear oversight that now requires deliberate correction. From a geopolitical standpoint, deeper engagement makes clear sense. Myanmar is a country grappling with internal conflict, yet it sits firmly within a China-aligned strategic sphere.* Along with Pakistan, it hosts a major economic corridor designed to link China to the waters of the Indian Ocean. This shared strategic geography opens natural avenues for cooperation across economic, industrial, cultural, and defence domains, all of which deserve priority attention. At the same time, Pakistan's strengthening relations with China and Bangladesh further elevate Myanmar's relevance. As Bangladesh moves more decisively into a China-aligned orbit and shares a border with Myanmar, engagement with Naypyidaw becomes an essential component of regional diplomacy. With violence and insurgencies intensifying across India's northeastern "seven sister" states, particularly in Manipur, coordination among neighbouring countries is increasingly important. This is especially so given India's recent unilateral military action inside Myanmar, reportedly carried out without prior communication.

<https://www.nation.com.pk/27-Jan-2026/overlooked-diplomacy>

Bangladesh: May the “Love” Never Dry-Up, Arif Bihar, *Jasarat*, 05 January

When Bangladesh was on the verge of its creation, the renowned journalist Altaf Hassan Qureshi published a cover story in Urdu Digest after visiting Dhaka, titled “The Zamzam of Love Is Flowing.” The central argument of the article was that feelings of affection for West Pakistan, or a united Pakistan, were emerging in East Pakistan at the time.

Following the end of Sheikh Hasina Wajid’s long rule, a new set of possibilities for Pakistan is once again emerging in Bangladesh. During her tenure, Hasina Wajid had effectively eliminated Pakistan’s space in Bangladesh by aligning closely with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, making the political landscape appear entirely different. Otherwise, despite the painful and violent separation, a significant segment of Bangladeshi society has historically retained positive sentiments toward Pakistan, sentiments that were actively suppressed through force under Hasina Wajid’s government.

While recent developments can be viewed as a diplomatic, commercial, and even touristic success for Pakistan after many years, this does not mean that all historical wounds will heal or that past decisions should be reversed. The recent student-led revolution in Bangladesh was primarily a revolt against a stagnant system. The younger generation prioritised freedom, dignity, and national sovereignty over mere economic improvement, demonstrating a heightened awareness of identity and self-respect. This sensitivity within Bangladeshi society offers an important lesson for all.

The problem, however, is that Pakistan’s ruling elite has repeatedly failed to capitalise on such strategic opportunities. Present-day Afghanistan is a clear example. Despite Pakistan’s long-standing support for the Taliban, India is now enjoying diplomatic space and engagement in Kabul. Pakistan, meanwhile, finds itself constrained and isolated on its side of the Durand Line, compelled to watch this situation unfold.

For this reason, Pakistan must proceed with caution in Bangladesh. India is increasingly viewed there as an outsider and, in many circles, as an adversary. This is not an unfamiliar situation for India. Only a few years ago, during its withdrawal from Kabul, India faced a similar atmosphere of fear and uncertainty. Yet Pakistan was unable to take advantage of that moment, and today India has once again re-established its presence in Kabul with relative ease.

<https://jasarat.com/2026/01/05/260105-03-5/>

New Dimensions of Pakistan's Relations with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, Editorial, *Nawa-i-Waqt*, 01 January

Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Muhammad Ishaq Dar held a telephone conversation with Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan, during which they exchanged New Year greetings and best wishes. The Deputy Prime Minister expressed satisfaction with the current state of bilateral relations, while the Saudi Foreign Minister reiterated his commitment to further strengthening and expanding cooperation between the two countries.

Meanwhile, *Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif met with the President of the United Arab Emirates and Ruler of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, at the Sheikh Zayed Palace in Rahim Yar Khan.* Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Muhammad Ishaq Dar, Federal Minister for Information Attaullah Tarar, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister Tariq Fatemi, and other senior officials were also present at the meeting. During the discussions, the leadership of Pakistan and the UAE explored opportunities to enhance cooperation across various sectors, including information technology, energy, mining and minerals, and defence.

Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar's conversation with Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan once again underscored the reality that Pakistan–Saudi Arabia relations have moved beyond formal diplomacy and evolved into a strong, comprehensive partnership rooted in mutual trust, continuous engagement, and shared strategic interests. The reaffirmation by both Foreign

Ministers of their satisfaction with bilateral ties and their resolve to further strengthen them reflects the fact that Islamabad and Riyadh regard each other as reliable and indispensable partners in an increasingly complex regional and global environment.

<https://www.nawaiwaqt.com.pk/01-Jan-2026/1957107>

This is Pakistan's War, Editorial, Roznama Jasarat, 08 January

The DG ISPR has rightly pointed out in its press conference that the ongoing war against terrorism is not merely the army's war; rather, it is the war of Pakistan and the Pakistani state. Dealing with or confronting this war is a collective responsibility of all stakeholders, including the government. What we are witnessing is that the entire burden of this war has either been taken on by the army itself or has been placed solely on its shoulders. The ruling classes are often seen saying in private gatherings that this is not their war but the war of the Pakistan Armed Forces. This is why the role of Parliament and political leadership in this war appears limited. We also see divisions among the Federal Government, the Establishment, and the PTI-led Provincial Government over the ongoing anti-terrorism operation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Two months ago, the Provincial Government convened a joint jirga to address the war against terrorism. Representatives of the government and the opposition, political parties outside Parliament, tribal elders, and members of the media were invited. In the joint declaration of the jirga, the Provincial Government demanded that the Federal Government ensure decision-making by taking the Provincial Government and all parties and stakeholders into confidence regarding the counter-terrorism strategy and military operations. Unfortunately, so far we have not seen any cooperation or consensus among the Federal Government, the Establishment, and the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Provincial Government on these matters. *The DG ISPR also raised the question that terrorists do not attack a specific political party; rather, they target ordinary people. It also accused certain parties of facilitating terrorists. Such rhetoric or blame game in an ongoing war against terrorism is not a good thing; it will certainly further intensify the already existing bitterness.* There is no doubt

that at present terrorism is a serious issue in two provinces of Pakistan, Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa...

<https://jasarat.news/islamabad/2026/01/08/islamabad/2>

Pak-Saudi-Turkiye Alliance? Dr. Furkan Hameed, *Jang*, 14 January

The attention of global defence and diplomatic circles has been drawn to reports of a possible trilateral defence alliance between Pakistan, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia. According to a report by the American news agency Bloomberg, Turkey is holding high-level talks to join the defence framework already established between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. So far, no official confirmation or denial has been issued by any of the three countries.

According to Bloomberg, the proposed alliance aims to strengthen collective defence capabilities amid growing regional security uncertainty. Under such an arrangement, an attack on any one member country would be considered an attack on all three. Analysts believe that Saudi Arabia's defence investment capacity, Pakistan's military experience, including its missile and nuclear programmes, and Turkey's large, experienced armed forces and rapidly developing defence industry could transform this proposed alliance into a multidimensional strategic platform.

Defence cooperation between Pakistan and Turkey is not new. Turkey has built modern warships for the Pakistan Navy and has assisted in upgrading the Pakistan Air Force's F-16 fighter fleet. In addition, discussions are underway regarding drone technology and advanced air projects, including Turkey's fifth-generation fighter programme.

Analysts note that security concerns in South Asia and the Middle East, recent tensions between Pakistan and India, and instability related to Afghanistan are compelling these countries to consider a new defence framework. Israel and India are reportedly concerned about this potential alliance, particularly because Pakistan is a nuclear power. This nuclear capability is not merely symbolic but is supported by a fully developed, organised, and credible nuclear deterrence system.

Pakistan's nuclear programme not only maintains a strategic balance but is also considered a key factor in preventing large-scale war in the region. Pakistan's conventional military strength is also significant... This context explains why Saudi Arabia and other Muslim countries are increasingly inclined toward deeper defence cooperation with Pakistan.

A potential alliance partner, Turkey has made revolutionary advances in its defence industry over the past two decades, progress rarely seen in modern history. Turkey now produces its own drones, fighter aircraft, missiles, naval vessels, and electronic warfare systems. Turkish-made drones, particularly the Bayraktar TB2 and Akinci, have reshaped modern warfare in conflicts such as Libya, Syria, Azerbaijan, and Ukraine. Turkey's fifth-generation fighter jet, KAAN, features cutting-edge aeronautical technologies. Similarly, the unmanned combat aircraft Kizilelma has drawn attention for its speed, stealth, and autonomous decision-making capabilities.

The foundations of Pakistan–Turkey relations lie in strong public sentiment, shared challenges, and a common strategic vision. Joint military exercises, technology exchanges, and collaboration in defence production between the two countries' armed forces demonstrate that this relationship is not temporary but a long-term strategic partnership. *In 21st-century global politics, the balance of power is no longer determined solely by weapons and manpower, but by capital, technology, and strategic alliances. In this context, if Pakistan's military capability, Turkey's defence-industrial strength, and Saudi Arabia's financial power were to come together under a single strategic umbrella, the result could be not merely an alliance but the emergence of a new centre of global power. Saudi Arabia, one of the wealthiest countries in the world, wields influence far beyond its oil reserves, which now underpin its role in the global financial system. When financial power is aligned with a coherent defence strategy, the outcomes can be extraordinary. This combination has the potential to place a trilateral alliance among the most influential defence partnerships in the world.*

Following the recent Pakistan–India conflict, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia signed a major defence cooperation agreement in September, which is now reportedly being expanded, with Turkey expected to join. This development could transform bilateral cooperation into a trilateral defence alliance encompassing military collaboration, joint training, defence production, and strategic coordination. One of the most significant and lasting

impacts of such an alliance could be felt across the Islamic world. For decades, Muslim countries have remained militarily fragmented. For the first time, a realistic possibility is emerging in which power, technology, and capital could be unified toward a common strategic purpose. If this alliance materialises, it could become a symbol not only of enhanced defence security for the Muslim world but also of confidence, strategic autonomy, and collective strength.

<https://e.jang.com.pk/detail/1018496>

Defence Industry, Dr. Syed Ilahi, *Roznama Jang*, 19 January

Today, Pakistan is one of the few countries that not only meets its own defence requirements but also manufactures and exports modern military equipment. Pakistan began developing its defence industry from almost zero in 1947. However, through consistent effort and sustained development, the country has emerged as an independent defence-industrial power with credible air, land, and naval capabilities.

The main pillar of Pakistan's air power is the JF-17 Thunder, a joint project of the Pakistan Air Force and China. This fighter aircraft has been widely referred to as the "fighter king of the skies" in newspapers, magazines, journals, and in social media worldwide. It is a high-end, multi-role fighter equipped with a modern Active Electronically Scanned Array (AESA) radar, advanced missile systems, and diverse combat capabilities.

In 2025, the JF-17 demonstrated its operational capability... As a result, many countries expressed interest in acquiring the aircraft. At the Dubai Airshow 2025, Pakistan signed Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with several countries. In the largest export deal in Pakistan's history, Pakistan and Azerbaijan confirmed an agreement for 40 JF-17 Block III fighter jets, valued at approximately US \$4.6 billion. This deal has been declared a milestone for Pakistan's defence exports. In addition, Myanmar, Nigeria, Indonesia, Australia, and several other countries have also shown interest in purchasing the JF-17. Moreover, Pakistan's defence industry has not been limited to aviation systems alone. It has also developed advanced missile technologies, including hypersonic and cruise missile systems such as Taimoor, Babur and Harbah, which are effective against both land and naval targets.

Under Pakistan's missile programme, various types of ballistic, cruise, and tactical missiles have been developed... In the naval domain, Pakistan has developed or acquired several warships, frigates, and submarines. The Hangor-class submarines, being developed in cooperation with China, have added a new dimension to Pakistan's maritime defence capabilities. The total cost of this submarine programme is estimated at US \$4–5 billion, with the first batch expected to join the fleet in 2026.

Pakistan's defence exports reached a new record in 2025, with defence contracts worth nearly US \$10 billion signed, a significant and unprecedented milestone for the national economy. These contracts extend beyond fighter aircraft and include training aircraft, missile systems, ammunition, electronic warfare equipment, and other military hardware. Technology transfer, participation of local industries, and the development of skilled manpower have positioned Pakistan on the global map as a reliable defence supplier. Beyond economic benefits, defence exports also strengthen regional and international strategic relationships. Contracts involving the JF-17 and other defence assets have added a new dimension to Pakistan's relations with countries in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, enhancing both trade and diplomatic cooperation. Recently, Saudi Arabia has also allowed the establishment of an arms manufacturing industry, creating further opportunities for collaboration.

At present, much of Pakistan's industrial and business sectors face instability. Therefore, the need of the hour is to promote the defence industry not only at the government level but also through public investment, public-private partnerships, and shareholding models. This approach will strengthen national defence while generating valuable foreign exchange.

The stock market should be utilised to enable public and private investment in defence projects. Such investment would create employment opportunities for youth, encourage technological advancement, promote industrial innovation, and contribute to national development, while making Pakistan's defence capabilities even more robust.

<https://e.jang.com.pk/detail/1021095>

Can Imran Khan be Released from Jail on Parole? Jirga with Saleem Safi, Geo News, 05 January

In this episode of *Jirga*, Saleem Safi discussed the latest political situation in the country and invited the Prime Minister's current Special Assistant on political affairs to share his views on the matter. The discussion focused on recent developments in talks with Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and the opposition.

Guest: Rana Sanaullah, Special Assistant to Prime Minister on political affairs.

Rana Sanaullah emphasised that the leadership of the Pakistan Muslim League–Nawaz (PML-N) has consistently advocated dialogue and negotiations, even when it was in opposition during Imran Khan's tenure as Prime Minister. He stated that the main obstacle to dialogue has been Imran Khan's negative approach, noting that Khan has repeatedly rejected talks in the past as well as in the current political situation. He added that while PTI's senior leadership at the second tier is willing to sit at the table and resolve outstanding issues through dialogue, Imran Khan has not changed his stance and remains unwilling to engage in talks. *When asked whether the government would consider releasing Imran Khan on parole if he agreed to participate in negotiations, Rana Sanaullah responded that such a step would require PTI to change its narrative. He said the party must withdraw what he described as an anti-Pakistan stance and put an end to all forms of street protests.*

Commenting on Imran Khan's meetings with his family and party leaders, Rana Sanaullah stated that there are no restrictions on these interactions. He claimed that Imran Khan has actively continued political engagement from within jail through such meetings. He further highlighted that the senior leadership of the PML-N has worked diligently to improve Pakistan's foreign relations, particularly noting Nawaz Sharif's key role in reviving ties with Saudi Arabia. Referring to Imran Khan's attitude and social media campaigns against the Establishment and the Chief of Army Staff (COAS), he argued that such actions are unjustified and that any grievances should be addressed through dialogue with the government.

On the issue of an All Parties Conference (APC), Rana Sanaullah stated that the opposition is neither willing to invite the government to its proposed APC nor ready to participate in a government-led APC. He questioned how such a gathering could be described as a national conference under these circumstances. Discussing the formation of a Parliamentary Commission, he said the government is prepared to establish one and initiate an inquiry, but emphasised that consensus among all members on its terms and conclusions is essential. Regarding civil-military relations, Rana Sanaullah stated that the Government and the Military are on the same page this year and have acted prudently on key issues while maintaining balance among all stakeholders. He expressed confidence that Pakistan is on the right path and predicted significant economic improvement in the coming year. He concluded by noting that television debates tend to focus excessively on PTI and Imran Khan's politics, while issues such as the economy and foreign policy often receive insufficient attention.

<https://www.geo.tv/shows/jirga/643102-can-imran-khan-be-released-from-jail-on-parole>

Are Government-Opposition Talks Delayed? Capital Talk with Hamid Mir, *Geo News*, 08 January

Discussing the possibility of talks between the government and the opposition, it was stated that the path to dialogue currently appears to be filled with significant hurdles. Reference was made to a speech by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Suhail Afridi in which he told university students that counterterrorism operations have taken place in KP in the past, but claimed that the current situation suggests the Establishment and the Government are jointly attempting to weaken Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) as a political party and sideline Imran Khan from politics (*Imran Khan ko khatam karne ki baatein ho rahi hain*). The question was raised about where such a course of action could ultimately lead.

Guests: Dr. Musadik Malik, Federal Minister for Climate Change (Pakistan Muslim League-N), and Showkat Yusufzai (PTI).

Dr. Musadik Malik stated that in the past, Imran Khan had spoken about protecting and glorifying the Taliban and bringing them into the political mainstream. He argued that

Suhail Afridi's remarks imply that any action against the Taliban, the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), or their supporters is being portrayed as an attack on PTI itself. He emphasised that the government has taken decisive action against terrorism by targeting terror financing and dismantling militant networks through operations such as *Zarb-e-Azb* and *Radd-ul-Fasaad* in KP. ***He further asserted that national security and foreign policy fall under the jurisdiction of the Federal Government, a reality that PTI and the KP Government are unwilling to accept.*** He criticised the KP Government for seeking to send its own delegations to Afghanistan and for attempting to organize jirgas with the Taliban authorities. According to him, the KP Government opposes military operations and repeatedly calls for negotiations, but the key question remains why the state should negotiate with groups that continue to use violence. Dr. Malik clarified that the government is open to political and security-related dialogue with PTI; however, it will not entertain demands related to the release of Imran Khan as part of such talks.

Showkat Yusufzai responded by stating that the trust deficit between PTI and the government is deepening with each passing day. Regarding security operations in KP, he acknowledged that numerous operations have been conducted against terrorist networks but argued that terrorism has not been eliminated from its roots. He stressed that unless local communities in KP are actively involved in intelligence gathering, militant groups will continue to operate.

He rejected allegations that PTI supports the Taliban or any terrorist organisation, emphasising that PTI is a political party and does not endorse militancy. He questioned why the Defence Minister rarely visits KP despite it being central to national security concerns, and argued that PTI should be included in formulating counterterrorism policies. Yusufzai said that KP desires peace but disagrees with the methods currently being employed by the Federal Government. On the issue of dialogue, he claimed that the government invites PTI for talks only through media statements and is unwilling to engage in genuine negotiations. He added that television debates have become incomplete without repeatedly targeting Imran Khan, and noted that even the DG ISPR has publicly singled out PTI and Khan. He concluded by stating that if the government is truly serious

about dialogue, it should send a delegation to Adiala Jail to hold direct talks with Imran Khan.

<https://www.geo.tv/shows/capital-talk/643834-are-government-opposition-talks-delayed>

Pakistan Caught between US and Iran: Strategic Dilemma Explained, Report Card,
Geo News, 13 January

In this episode, the host discussed the current situation in Iran and the escalating tensions between Iran and the United States. She noted that Pakistan finds itself in a complex and delicate position amid the fluctuating relationship between Iran and the US. US President Donald Trump has taken a hardline stance on Iran, indicating support for protesters and warning that any aggression from Iran would be met with force. Iran has taken notice of these statements and has formally raised the issue at the United Nations. The host emphasised that Pakistan shares a border with Iran and has recently improved bilateral relations. She raised key questions about how these developments might affect future Pakistan–Iran relations, what Pakistan’s position should be, and whether the United States could pursue a Venezuela-style intervention in Iran.

Guests: Fakr Durrani, Benazir Shah, Mazar Abbas, and Mohammad Ali.

Fakr Durrani stated that the Iranian Embassy in Pakistan had issued a press release explaining that the protests initially began in border regions near Iraq due to currency devaluation. However, *he added that the situation has since deteriorated and now appears to be moving toward a broader regime-change narrative.* He warned of a strong possibility of US involvement, which could have serious implications for Pakistan. Given the religious and ideological affiliation of Pakistan’s Shia population with Iran, he said Pakistan would face significant diplomatic challenges. He suggested that Pakistan should activate back-channel diplomacy with Iran and other key actors, such as China, and encourage reconciliation with protesting groups.

Benazir Shah described the unrest as an internal matter for Iran but stressed that Pakistan must remain vigilant from a security perspective. She recommended a “wait and see”

approach before adopting any firm stance. *She described the protests as symbolically significant, noting that, as in the 1979 revolution, they began with traders.* She highlighted widespread public grievances and observed that Iran is currently at its weakest both economically and politically. She warned that Israel could exploit the situation, given its long-standing interest in regime change in Iran. She added that despite the absence of a major government crackdown or large-scale defections, the protests remain substantial and could lead to fundamental regional changes. However, she noted that in the event of external aggression, the Iranian public would likely rally behind the government.

Mazar Abbas argued that *both the United States and Israel seek regime change in Iran and suggested that the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) may be involved in fuelling the unrest.* He stated that the US has realised that direct military action against Iran is not a viable option, as demonstrated by developments in 2025. However, he warned that internal unrest could still be exploited by external actors. He advised that Pakistan should refrain from taking any active role unless the situation escalates into open conflict, noting that Pakistan has little leverage over US decision-making.

Mohammad Ali noted that US policy toward Iran has consistently aimed at regime change since 1979, though without success. He emphasised that US economic sanctions have severely weakened Iran economically and politically, and that this long-term geopolitical strategy must be understood in context. *He stressed that Pakistan already faces hostile borders with India and Afghanistan and cannot afford another adversarial relationship with Iran. Therefore, he argued, Pakistan should prioritise reconciliation and maintain a balanced, neutral position without interfering in Iran's internal affairs.* He added that the protest movement in Iran lacks a clear leadership structure and largely reflects public frustration. While Iran has an established ideological leadership, he said, Iranian nationalism runs deep, and any internal or external military intervention would likely unite the population once again.

<https://www.geo.tv/shows/report-card/644401-pakistan-caught-between-us-and-iran-strategic-dilemma-explained>

Trump's Approach toward Pakistan: A Strategic Shift amid the Shifting Geopolitical Dynamic? Jirga with Saleem Safi, *Geo News*, 19 January

In the latest episode of *Jirga*, former *Ambassador Husain Haqqani* discussed how a potential second Trump Presidency could affect U.S. interests globally, with particular implications for Pakistan. Haqqani argued that the United States would likely continue to pursue a transactional foreign policy focused on immediate benefits. In this context, Pakistan's relationship with Washington would remain fragile and largely shaped by U.S. priorities such as countering Iran and strengthening its partnership with India.

The discussion centred on three main themes. *First*, Haqqani examined U.S. interests and the question of isolationism, analysing whether Trump's "America First" agenda signals a shift toward a new era of American isolationism. *Second*, he addressed transatlantic tensions, highlighting growing friction between the United States and its European allies. He explained how these strains could weaken the Western alliance and undermine NATO's long-term stability. The *third* and most important theme focused on the impact of these developments on Pakistan and the broader region.

As a prominent analyst of Pakistan–U.S. relations, Haqqani assessed Pakistan's place on Trump's list of priorities. *He suggested that while Pakistan is unlikely to be a top-tier priority, Trump's transactional approach to diplomacy could create both unpredictable risks and limited opportunities.* Haqqani emphasised that Trump views foreign policy through a transactional rather than a strategic lens. *He noted that Pakistan's decision to publicly credit Trump for de-escalating the May 2025 conflict with India, credit that Prime Minister Modi refused to give, has temporarily placed Pakistan in Trump's good graces.* Haqqani also pointed to the lack of clear rules regarding conflicts of interest in the current U.S. administration, noting that Trump's advisors and family members are reportedly exploring trade and business opportunities directly in Pakistan.

Additionally, Haqqani discussed Trump's approach to balancing relations with both China and Pakistan. He observed that, for now, both Washington and Beijing appear comfortable with Pakistan's dual role. The U.S. is unwilling to bear the high costs of a full strategic partnership with Pakistan and is content allowing China to shoulder much of that burden.

China, meanwhile, values Pakistan as a military counterweight to India. Haqqani explained that if Pakistan and India were at peace, India could redeploy hundreds of thousands of troops from its western border to the Chinese border, an outcome China seeks to avoid. Haqqani warned that Trump is highly mercurial and that relying on personal praise from him is risky. He noted that Trump can quickly turn against a country over minor slights, citing his sudden shift away from Modi after nearly a decade of close ties.

Finally, while Trump has not imposed high tariffs on Pakistan, *Haqqani stressed that Pakistan must increase its exports to the United States to gain real economic benefits. Simply being favoured by Trump, he argued, is insufficient for long-term economic stability.* He also warned that although India is currently pursuing a policy of ignoring Pakistan, a major terrorist incident inside India could compel Modi to take military action to protect his political standing, despite the serious risks such escalation would entail.

<https://www.geo.tv/shows/jirga/645866-hussain-haqqani-weighs-trumps-impact-on-us-interests>

BOMBINGS, SHOOTINGS AND DISAPPEARANCES

(Select incidents culled out from the Pakistan media)

Place	Date	Description	Killed	Injured
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa				
N. Waziristan & Kurram ¹	10/01/2026	11 terrorists killed in two intelligence-based operations in KP	11	00
Tank & Lakki Marwat ²	12/01/2026	7 Police personnel died & 3 were injured in IEDs blast	7	3

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¹ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1966179>

² <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2586710/six-cops-martyred-in-ied-attack-in-k-p-as-violence-intensifies>