

MP-IDSA *Commentary*

Pakistan on the Sidelines of US Mineral Diplomacy

Imran Khurshid

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S*ummary*

While the US deepens strategic ties with India in critical minerals and advanced technologies, Pakistan finds itself sidelined, confined to tactical engagements.

The first Critical Minerals Ministerial in Washington, D.C., on 4 February 2026, was attended by over 50 countries, including key partners such as India, Japan, South Korea, the European Union, Germany, Australia and Mexico.¹ The summit was hosted by US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and jointly chaired by Vice President J.D. Vance, focusing on reducing vulnerabilities in mineral supply chains and weakening China’s dominant grip over these resources. The US State Department declared that participants “took action to build secure and resilient critical mineral supply chains”, aiming to “build new sources of supply, foster secure and reliable transport and logistics networks, and transform the global market into one that is secure, diversified, and resilient, end-to-end”.²

The summit also proposed a Forum on Resource Geostrategic Engagement (FORGE) to coordinate allied efforts, along with discussions on preferential trading arrangements, coordinated price supports and stockpiling strategies. Vice President Vance highlighted initiatives to strengthen allied cooperation on the extraction, processing and transport of critical minerals, stating, “We want members to form a trading bloc among allies and partners, one that guarantees American access to American industrial might while also expanding production across the entire zone.”³ This signalled the high geopolitical significance of participation and demonstrated trust and long-term strategic alignment.

Tactical Engagements amid Strategic Exclusion

The conference has sparked intense debate in Pakistan, not only because of the theme of the conference but also because of Pakistan’s perceived marginalisation. At a time when critical minerals have become central to global supply chains, national security and technological competition, the conference was widely seen as a major strategic gathering of America’s most reliable partners and allies.

However, Pakistan’s presence at this important conference was very low, represented by Federal Minister for Energy Ali Pervaiz Malik. This reinforced Islamabad’s perception that it was not treated as a central strategic partner in this critical initiative. Reacting to this development, Former Pakistani envoy Abdul Basit highlighted Pakistan’s “shrinking strategic space”, noting that, despite showcasing rare-earth minerals to President Trump, Pakistan was not invited to the Global

¹ Michael Martina, Simon Lewis and Jarrett Renshaw, “[US Proposes Critical Minerals Trade Bloc Aimed at Countering China](#)”, *Reuters*, 4 February 2026.

² “[2026 Critical Minerals Ministerial](#)”, U.S. Department of State, 4 February 2026.

³ “[FULL: Vance, Rubio Open Critical Minerals Trading Bloc With ...](#),” YouTube, 4 February 2026.

Minerals Conference. At the same time, India’s External Affairs Minister was given a seat at the table—a contrast he described as “stark and telling”.⁴

The sidelining is particularly striking given President Donald Trump’s recent overtures towards Pakistan. Over the recent months, Trump repeatedly praised Pakistan’s leadership, including meetings and a luncheon with Army Chief Asim Munir at the White House, and hinted at expanded economic cooperation, including discussions about US exploration of critical minerals and hydrocarbons in Pakistan.⁵ Pakistan had recently actively courted Trump, endorsing his leadership repeatedly, nominating him for the Nobel Peace Prize, and supporting several of his international initiatives, including the Board of Peace.⁶ After Operation Sindoor, Pakistan openly acknowledged and amplified Trump’s role, reinforcing the belief that Islamabad was gaining strategic ground in Washington.

However, the Critical Minerals Ministerial exposed the limits of this perceived closeness. Commentators in Pakistan note that Islamabad was used as a bargaining tool in trade negotiations against India—valued tactically until agreements were signed, but consistently excluded strategically.⁷ This perception was further reinforced after President Trump announced tariff reductions and a trade deal with India on 3 February 2026, capping Indian tariffs at around 18 per cent, while Pakistan continues to face higher barriers.⁸ The move deepened anxieties in Pakistan, particularly in the textile and garment sectors, which rely heavily on access to the US market for foreign exchange. Exporters in Pakistan note that India’s lower tariffs give it a competitive edge, raising fears that Indian exporters will capture market share at Pakistan’s expense, further weakening Pakistan’s already strained economy.⁹

The sense of betrayal in Islamabad is also linked to broader strategic calculations. In recent months, Pakistan has made a geopolitical misstep that has significantly dented China’s trust. It has moved away from its traditional balancing act in its

⁴ **“Big Embarrassment for Shehbaz and Munir: Pakistan, Which Gifted Minerals Box to Trump, Left Out of Minerals Conference; India Gets Invite”**, *News24 Online*, 1 February 2026.

⁵ **“As Donald Trump Hosts Pak Army Chief for Lunch, What the White House Said”**, *NDTV*, 18 June 2025.

⁶ Islamuddin Sajid, **“Pakistan Recommends US President Trump for 2026 Nobel Peace Prize”**, *Anadolu Agency*, 21 June 2025.

⁷ **“Pak Analyst Rips Munir Over Trump Minerals Pitch and IMF Loans After US Snubs Pakistan on Pax Silica”**, *The Times of India*, 2 February 2026.

⁸ Shweta Sharma, **“Trump Claims He Has a Trade Deal With India – But What Has Really Been Agreed?”**, *The Independent*, 3 February 2026.

⁹ **“Pakistan Seeks Tariff Parity With India, Bangladesh in Talks With US: Report”**, Profit by *Pakistan Today*, 21 February 2026.

foreign policy. Under Army Chief Asim Munir and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Islamabad has leaned more openly towards Washington, even at the cost of straining relations with long-standing ally China. China has now stopped funding key CPEC projects, including the Main Line-1 railway upgrade, reinforcing the perception that Pakistan’s tilt towards the US has not gone unnoticed in Beijing.¹⁰ It has alienated an important strategic partner without yielding equivalent strategic dividends from Washington.

Pakistan has also tried to position itself as an emerging minerals partner. Pakistan signed a US\$ 500 million framework agreement with US Strategic Metals in September 2025. It dispatched its first shipment of rare earth and critical minerals to the United States on 2 October 2025, including antimony, copper concentrate, and rare earths such as neodymium and praseodymium.¹¹ Symbolic gestures, including presenting mineral samples to Trump, reflected Islamabad’s belief it would be integrated into US-led initiatives. However, it has been systematically and strategically excluded from this initiative.

This incident reveals an uncomfortable reality for Pakistan: for long-term initiatives such as critical minerals, advanced technologies and supply-chain security, the US sees India as an indispensable and critical partner. The contrast becomes even clearer when examining the broader US strategy. In December 2025, Washington launched Pax Silica to secure supply chains for silicon and advanced technologies, covering semiconductors, AI infrastructure, critical minerals, advanced manufacturing and logistics.¹²

The initiative began with trusted partners, including Japan, South Korea, Singapore, the Netherlands, the UK, Israel, the UAE and Australia. India, initially outside the founding group, has now joined as the framework expands. Pakistan, however, has not been included, nor is there credible reporting of Islamabad being considered part of this high-trust coalition. The episode underscores a sobering conclusion gaining traction in Pakistan: when the United States defines its core strategic partnerships, India remains central, while Pakistan remains expendable.

¹⁰ **“China Exits Its Biggest Pakistan Project: What’s Happening?”**, *The Economic Times*, 4 September 2025.

¹¹ **“Pakistan, US Sign Landmark MOUs on Critical Minerals and Logistics Investment”**, *Energy Update*, 9 September 2025.

¹² **“US to Launch ‘Pax Silica’ Coalition to Secure AI and Critical Mineral Supply Chains Amid China Rivalry”**, *Anadolu Agency*, 12 December 2025.

About the Author

Dr. Imran Khurshid is an Associate Research Fellow at the International Centre of Peace Studies (ICPS), New Delhi.

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