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Official Editorial Credits

Chief Executive Officer (CEO): Mr. Maooz Riaz

Editor-in-Chief: Mr. Maooz Riaz

Compiled & Composed by: Ms. Ayesha Nadeem

Research & Development: Exampen.co Research & Policy Analysis



Maleeha Lodhi Articles

Title	Exam-Relevant Summary	CSS/PMS Themes	Pg.
Age of strategic adjustment	Global realignment of alliances & economics	Geopolitics; Global Economy	5
The elements of power	Strategic resources (energy, minerals) shaping foreign policy	Strategic Studies; IR	6
Frozen relationship	Pakistan–Afghanistan ties and border security challenges	Regional Security	7
Smoke and mirrors	Difference between diplomatic show and substantive peace initiatives	Diplomacy; Peace Studies	8
Pakistan’s Regional Dilemma: Security or Solidarity?	Balance between Pakistan’s security needs & regional partnerships	Foreign Policy; Strategic Choices	9
Trump’s reckless gambit	US–Israel conflict; its global impact	Global Affairs; Conflict Analysis	10

Jawed Naqvi Articles

Title	Exam-Relevant Summary	CSS/PMS Themes	Pg.
Two books and other stories	Deep dive into narratives shaping South Asian politics	International Affairs; Political Narrative	11
Addressing Trump’s curiosity	Analysis of US foreign policy trends and their interpretations	Foreign Policy Trends	12
That longing for regime change	What drives calls for regime change globally & regionally	IR; Political Dynamics	13
Who endures the pain, wins	Iran’s resistance in conflict & implications for world order	Strategic Studies; Middle East	14

Dawn

Title	Exam-Relevant Analytical Summary	CSS/PMS Themes	Pg.
Return to democracy	Analyzes democratic restoration processes, focusing on institutional rebuilding, civil-military balance, political legitimacy, and challenges in sustaining democratic continuity in transitional states.	Political Science; Democratization; Governance	15
Will the BoP assert itself?	Evaluates persistent Balance of Payments pressures, examining structural imbalances, import dependence, debt	Economics; External Sector; Financial Stability	16



Title	Exam-Relevant Analytical Summary	CSS/PMS Themes	Pg.
	cycles, and policy constraints shaping economic sovereignty.		
Absorbing population growth	Explores the socio-economic implications of rapid population growth, emphasizing the need for strategic investment in human capital, employment generation, and sustainable urban planning.	Demography; Development Studies; Human Resource Management	17
A peek into Trump's Iran mindset	Provides a strategic analysis of Donald Trump's Iran policy, focusing on maximum pressure strategy, sanctions regime, and its implications for regional stability and global power politics.	International Relations; US Foreign Policy; Middle East Politics	18
AI in the classroom	Critically assesses the integration of artificial intelligence in education, weighing pedagogical innovation against ethical concerns, digital divide, and the future of learning systems.	Education Policy; Technology; Artificial Intelligence	19

***The Nation* Important Articles — Afghanistan, India, Economy, IMF, China (2026)**

Title	Key Points / CSS Relevance	Pg.
No Winner in Afghanistan- Pakistan War	Pakistan–Afghanistan conflict harms bilateral trust, border closure, war risks deepening tensions; calls for regional diplomatic engagement; highlights lack of legitimate Afghan gov't participation. Regional security and foreign policy analysis.	20
Against Afghanistan's Cross-Border Terror, Pakistan Prevails	Pakistan's counter-terror operations against Taliban/TTP militants across the Afghan border; underscores persistent terrorism threat and sovereignty issues. Critical for <i>Strategic Studies</i> .	21
Pakistan's Action in Afghanistan Rooted in Right to Self-Defence	President Zardari defends cross-border strikes as self-defence against terrorism; reflects Islamabad's policy stance and regional security contention. Useful for IR/security position papers.	22
Pakistan Only Targeting Terrorist Bases in Afghanistan	Government clarification that Pakistani strikes are against militant infrastructure, not civilians; highlights counter-terror narrative. Relevant for <i>security policy and narrative framing</i> .	23
ThinkFest Debate: Pakistan's Position, US & China	Pakistan must balance ties with US and China, focus on internal reform rather than external alignments; CPEC relevance and structural reforms emphasized. Important for <i>foreign policy & economic strategy</i> .	24



Age of Strategic Adjustment

Thematic Overview

"Age of Strategic Adjustment" refers to the current global transition from a US-dominated unipolar order to a multipolar world, where middle powers like Pakistan, India, and others recalibrate alliances amid US-China rivalry and declining Western hegemony. This era demands strategic flexibility as nations navigate economic coercion, supply chain disruptions, and shifting security dynamics in forums like BRICS, SCO, and GCC. It marks a departure from rigid bloc politics toward multi-alignment, reshaping South Asian geopolitics and regional stability.

Strategic Summary

The concept, highlighted in analyses by former diplomat Maleeha Lodhi, describes how middle powers are actively responding to the erosion of US-led rules-based order through pragmatic diplomacy and South-South cooperation. Key drivers include the US pivot to Asia provoking China's assertiveness, Europe's energy crises post-Ukraine war, and the Middle East's diversification away from sole US dependence. For Pakistan, this adjustment involves balancing ties with China (CPEC), Gulf states (investment inflows), and even cautious US engagement to bolster economic recovery and counter India's regional dominance.

Exam-Oriented Notes (CSS / PMS Focus)

Narrative Control: Middle powers craft independent narratives rejecting binary US-China camps, emphasizing sovereignty in CSS essays on multipolarity.

Civil-Military Relations: Strategic adjustment bolsters Pakistan's FSD posture amid India's proactive doctrines, paralleling civil-military consensus on deterrence.

Democratic Double Standards: Critiques Western hypocrisy on democracy promotion while coercing economic dependencies, key for Pakistan's foreign policy analysis.

Border Policy Scrutiny: Aligns with South Asian nuclear stability talks, urging CBMs amid LAC/LoC tensions.

Leadership Image-Making: Leaders like Sharif navigate this era via economic diplomacy, vital for governance and IR papers.

Critical Insight

In this adjustment phase, narrative dominance shifts from Washington to emerging coalitions, where suppressing inconvenient truths—like US unreliability—preserves national agency over blind alignment. Pakistan's multi-alignment exemplifies how "politics of memory" evolves into forward-looking pragmatism, influencing identity and security in South Asia. Democratic health now hinges on equitable global forums, not engineered unipolar dominance.

Full-Length Analysis Capsule

Maleeha Lodhi's framework on the "Age of Strategic Adjustment" dissects multipolarity's rise, where middle powers reject US coercion amid China's ascent and BRICS expansion. Pakistan leverages SCO/GCC ties for economic revival, contrasting India's Quad alignment, reflecting South Asian divergence in a post-Western order. This era erodes binary conflicts, prioritizing multi-alignment; for



CSS/PMS, it underscores power's shift via selective partnerships, advocating reformed discourse for enduring regional stability.

The Elements of Power

Thematic Overview

The "Elements of Power" in international relations encompass the tangible and intangible factors that determine a state's ability to influence others and pursue national interests. Tangible elements include geography, population, natural resources, economic strength, and military capabilities, while intangible ones cover national morale, leadership quality, diplomacy, ideology, and cultural appeal. This framework, rooted in realist theory, explains how nations like Pakistan and India leverage these components amid South Asian strategic rivalries and global multipolarity.

Strategic Summary

Classical IR scholars like Hans Morgenthau classify power elements into natural (fixed, e.g., location) and social (malleable, e.g., governance). For Pakistan, strengths lie in strategic geography (access to Arabian Sea, Afghan border), youthful population (250M+), and nuclear deterrence, offset by economic vulnerabilities and internal divisions. India's advantages include vast resources, tech prowess, and diaspora influence, enabling hard power projection via military spending and soft power through Bollywood and yoga diplomacy. Balancing these elements defines success in an era of US-China competition and regional instability.

Exam-Oriented Notes (CSS / PMS Focus)

Narrative Control: States craft power narratives via ideology and media to amplify intangible strengths, vital for CSS essays on soft power.

Civil-Military Relations: Military as core tangible element intersects with leadership, mirroring Pakistan's hybrid civil-military dynamics.

Democratic Double Standards: Economic/diplomatic elements expose hypocrisies in Western aid conditionalities versus strategic partnerships.

Border Policy Scrutiny: Geography and military preparedness underpin LoC/LAC strategies, demanding balanced power investment.

Leadership Image-Making: Quality leadership multiplies all elements, a recurring theme in governance and IR papers for aspirants.

Critical Insight

Power's true essence lies in the synergy of elements, where tangible bases enable influence but intangibles like national will sustain it against coercion. In South Asia, over-reliance on military power neglects economic/diplomatic levers, fostering instability over enduring strength. Effective statecraft demands holistic development, prioritizing education and morale to convert potential into realized global agency.

Full-Length Analysis Capsule

The "Elements of Power" dissects state capacity in IR, blending tangible (military/economy) and intangible (morale/diplomacy) factors to explain influence hierarchies. Pakistan must fortify economic resilience and leadership coherence to counter India's resource edge, reflecting South Asian paradoxes where nuclear parity coexists with developmental gaps. For CSS/PMS, this underscores multi-dimensional



power-building over zero-sum rivalries, advocating integrated strategies for stability in multipolar dynamics.

Frozen Relationship

Thematic Overview

"Frozen Relationship" describes the stalled India-Pakistan ties, locked in mutual suspicion since the 2019 Pulwama crisis and Article 370 abrogation, with no substantive dialogue despite occasional backchannel contacts. India adopts "strategic indifference," prioritizing China threats over Pakistan engagement, while Pakistan upholds Kashmir as non-negotiable amid economic pressures. This stasis perpetuates LoC tensions, terrorism accusations, and missed economic cooperation, emblematic of South Asian rivalry trumping regional stability.

Strategic Summary

Post-2025 Pahalgam attack and India's Operation Sindoor strikes on terror camps, Modi reinforced the "epicenter of terrorism" narrative in 2026 podcasts, blaming Pakistan for betrayal despite India's peace overtures. Pakistan counters with Balochistan incident blame on India, while Jaishankar declares no return to uninterrupted dialogue, insisting Article 370 resolves Kashmir. Low-level channels persist for ceasefire management, but leadership disengagement—India's indifference, Pakistan's principled stand—ensures bleak normalization prospects into 2026.

Exam-Oriented Notes (CSS / PMS Focus)

Narrative Control: India shapes global discourse via terrorism rhetoric, forcing Pakistan into defensive diplomacy in IR essays.

Civil-Military Relations: Frozen ties amplify Pakistan's military posture on LoC, balancing deterrence with economic diplomacy.

Democratic Double Standards: Western silence on India's Kashmir actions versus Pakistan scrutiny highlights hypocrisy critiques.

Border Policy Scrutiny: Perpetual LoC skirmishes demand CBMs, paralleling LAC dynamics for regional security papers.

Leadership Image-Making: Modi's tough stance bolsters Hindutva domestically, contrasting Pakistan's multi-alignment needs.

Critical Insight

Frozen relations weaponize narratives over resolution, where India's indifference preserves domestic gains at stability's cost, while Pakistan's Kashmir focus sustains identity but hampers growth. This "politics of stasis" erodes South Asian agency amid multipolarity, demanding leadership accommodation for thaw. True progress requires equitable forums, transcending engineered hostilities for pragmatic coexistence.

Full-Length Analysis Capsule

The "Frozen Relationship" encapsulates India-Pakistan deadlock in 2026, marked by post-Pahalgam strikes, Modi's terror accusations, and Jaishankar's dialogue rejection, shifting India to strategic disengagement. Pakistan navigates economic woes without conceding Kashmir, reflecting rivalry's triumph over SAARC revival or trade. For CSS/PMS, it exemplifies narrative-driven geopolitics eroding debate; reforms via neutral mediation are urged to unlock potential in an adjusting strategic age.



Smoke and Mirrors

Thematic Overview

"Smoke and Mirrors" metaphorically critiques the deceptive diplomatic rhetoric between India and Pakistan, where public posturing masks underlying strategic calculations and stalled engagement. Both nations employ fiery accusations—India labeling Pakistan a terrorism hub, Pakistan decrying Indian aggression in Kashmir—to rally domestic support while avoiding substantive dialogue. This illusion of confrontation sustains the frozen relationship, diverting attention from shared economic and security challenges in South Asia.

Strategic Summary

India's leadership, including Modi and Jaishankar, amplifies terror narratives post-Pahalgam and Balakot to justify surgical strikes and Article 370 moves, rejecting mediation as it signals strength amid China focus. Pakistan counters with Balochistan accusations and principled Kashmir stands, leveraging SCO/BRICS for legitimacy while managing economic diplomacy. Backchannel ceasefires persist, but overt rhetoric ensures no thaw, prioritizing image over incremental CBMs like trade resumption.

Exam-Oriented Notes (CSS / PMS Focus)

Narrative Control: Deceptive rhetoric shapes global perceptions, forcing defensive diplomacy in multipolar forums for IR essays.

Civil-Military Relations: Heightened posturing bolsters military postures on LoC, balancing deterrence with civilian economic outreach.

Democratic Double Standards: Mutual hypocrisy critiques—India on minorities, Pakistan on terror—highlight selective Western engagement.

Border Policy Scrutiny: Rhetoric escalates LoC risks without resolution, paralleling LAC amid nuclear shadows.

Leadership Image-Making: Domestic applause from tough talk overshadows pragmatic multi-alignment needs.

Critical Insight

Rhetoric acts as smoke concealing mirrors of self-interest, where narrative battles preserve power but erode trust and regional agency. In South Asia's adjustment age, this deception hampers growth, demanding transparency over engineered hostilities. Genuine power lies in dismantling illusions for equitable dialogue, fostering stability beyond zero-sum games.

Full-Length Analysis Capsule

"Smoke and Mirrors" encapsulates Indo-Pak diplomacy's facade in 2026, with Modi's terror escalations and Pakistan's rebuttals post-Pahalgam sustaining indifference over engagement. Strikes and accusations rally bases while backchannels manage crises, reflecting rivalry's triumph amid multipolarity. For CSS/PMS, it exemplifies narrative deception eroding discourse; reforms via neutral CBMs are essential to unlock cooperation in strategic flux.



Pakistan's Regional Dilemma: Security or Solidarity?

Thematic Overview

"Pakistan's Regional Dilemma: Security or Solidarity?" examines the tension between prioritizing hard security against threats from India, Afghanistan, and militants versus pursuing solidarity with neighbors like Iran, Gulf states, and China for economic and diplomatic gains. Amid US-Israel strikes on Iran and regional escalations, Pakistan faces oil shocks, border militancy spikes, and Gulf base risks, forcing a choice in multi-alignment. This dilemma underscores how security imperatives often trump ideological unity in South Asia's volatile landscape.

Strategic Summary

Maleeha Lodhi highlights Pakistan's crisis post-US-Israel Iran strikes: Iranian retaliation hits Gulf bases, spiking oil prices and disrupting remittances, compounded by Afghan border pressures, India volatility, and TTP/Baloch attacks in KP/Balochistan. Saudi defense pacts offer security buffers but strain Iran ties, while CPEC demands China solidarity amid Uyghur sensitivities. Islamabad balances via SCO/OIC diplomacy, rejecting blocs for pragmatic hedging to safeguard sovereignty and economy.

Exam-Oriented Notes (CSS / PMS Focus)

Narrative Control: Frames security threats to justify multi-alignment, rejecting zero-sum solidarity in IR essays.

Civil-Military Relations: Dilemma amplifies military role in border defense, aligning with civilian economic outreach.

Democratic Double Standards: Western escalations expose hypocrisies, bolstering Pakistan's non-aligned stance.

Border Policy Scrutiny: Afghan/LoC militancy demands robust deterrence alongside regional CBMs.

Leadership Image-Making: Leaders navigate via balanced diplomacy, key for governance in multipolar flux.

Critical Insight

Security trumps solidarity when existential threats loom, as rhetoric of unity masks pragmatic hedging in power politics. Pakistan's dilemma reveals South Asia's fragility, where unresolved disputes erode collective agency. Resolution lies in integrated strategies transcending binaries, fostering genuine cooperation over illusory bonds.

Full-Length Analysis Capsule

Maleeha Lodhi's analysis captures Pakistan's bind amid Iran crisis fallout: security from Gulf pacts versus solidarity with Iran/China, amid militancy and India tensions. Economic vulnerabilities demand hedging, reflecting South Asian paradoxes of rivalry over integration. For CSS/PMS, it exemplifies strategic adjustment's trade-offs; advocating dialogue and defense reforms to harmonize security with solidarity for enduring stability.



Trump's Reckless Gambit

Thematic Overview

Maleeha Lodhi's "Trump's Reckless Gambit" condemns President Trump's March 2026 order for US strikes on Iranian nuclear sites alongside Israel, shattering fragile JCPOA revival talks and igniting regional chaos. This impulsive escalation, despite Iran's concessions, prioritizes military bravado over diplomacy, risking oil shocks, Gulf base attacks, and broader Middle East war. It exposes US unreliability under Trump, forcing middle powers like Pakistan to hedge in the multipolar "age of strategic adjustment."

Strategic Summary

Trump bypassed Senate approval for the assaults, using negotiations as a "facade" amid prior military buildup, despite slim congressional support and public opposition. Iran's retaliation targets US assets in Gulf states, spiking oil prices, disrupting Pakistan's remittances/CPEC, and fueling TTP/Baloch militancy. Pakistan faces solidarity with Iran/China versus security pacts with Saudi/UAE, navigating the fallout through OIC/SCO while condemning the "illegal aggression" to safeguard economic lifelines.

Exam-Oriented Notes (CSS / PMS Focus)

Narrative Control: Trump's war rhetoric masks domestic politics, paralleling Indo-Pak posturing in IR deception critiques.

Civil-Military Relations: Escalation amplifies Pakistan's border threats, reinforcing military-economic balance.

Democratic Double Standards: US "democracy" hypocrisy in bypassing Congress highlights power over principles.

Border Policy Scrutiny: Iran fallout spills into Afghan/Pak militancy, demanding robust FSD and CBMs.

Leadership Image-Making: Reckless gambits boost short-term images but erode long-term credibility regionally.

Critical Insight

Trump's gambit reveals how personal hubris trumps collective security, turning narrative control into self-fulfilling crises that burden allies. For Pakistan, it intensifies the security-solidarity dilemma, underscoring multipolarity's risks.

Sustainable power demands diplomatic restraint over military illusions, prioritizing multilateralism for regional resilience.

Full-Length Analysis Capsule

Lodhi's , Dawn piece dissects Trump's strikes on Iran as a reckless betrayal of JCPOA talks, sparking retaliation, oil volatility, and Pakistan's multi-front pressures. Gulf vulnerabilities expose alliance frailties, mirroring South Asia's frozen ties amid external shocks. For CSS/PMS, it exemplifies leadership's narrative pitfalls eroding stability; Pakistan must leverage non-alignment for hedging, urging global norms to curb such gambits.



Jawed Naqvi Articles

Two Books and Other Stories

Thematic Overview

Jawed Naqvi's column "Two Books and Other Stories" critiques the selective use of narratives in Indian politics, highlighting how ruling powers legitimize texts that bolster their image while suppressing those exposing vulnerabilities. It contrasts Defence Minister Rajnath Singh's acceptance of quotes from ex-diplomat Ajay Bisaria's book—praising the BJP's stance on Pakistan—with his rejection of former army chief Gen Manoj Mukund Naravane's unpublished memoir "Four Stars of Destiny," which reveals leadership indecision during the 2020 China border crisis. This double standard underscores how political storytelling trumps factual discourse in shaping public perception of national security and leadership.

Strategic Summary

The article details Rajnath Singh's fury in parliament when opposition leader Rahul Gandhi cited Naravane's memoir during a 2026 budget debate to question the Modi government's China response, claiming it violated rules for unpublished works. Ironically, Singh had earlier quoted Bisaria's book to criticize Congress's handling of the 2008 Mumbai attacks, aligning with BJP's narrative. Naravane's excerpts describe frantic calls on August 31, 2020, amid advancing Chinese tanks near Rechin La, where leaders like Singh, NSA Ajit Doval, and others offered no clear orders, leaving Modi to vaguely instruct "do whatever you deem appropriate."

Exam-Oriented Notes (CSS / PMS Focus)

Narrative Control: Ruling parties curate parliamentary discourse by endorsing supportive texts while blocking critical ones, mirroring South Asian trends in media and debate management.

Civil-Military Relations: Memoirs like Naravane's expose tensions when military accounts challenge official histories, relevant to Pakistan's own army-chief narratives.

Democratic Double Standards: Selective rule enforcement stifles opposition critiques on security, questioning free speech in legislatures.

Border Policy Scrutiny: Highlights ambiguity in India-China standoffs (e.g., Ladakh 2020), paralleling Pakistan's LAC/LoC challenges.

Leadership Image-Making: Governments prioritize perception over accountability, a key theme in CSS essays on governance.

Critical Insight

Naqvi argues that narrative dominance is a core power tool in modern democracies, where suppressing "inconvenient truths" like Naravane's account preserves leadership myths over empirical policy debate. This "politics of memory" influences national identity and security perceptions, evident in India's China handling and broader South Asian contexts like Pakistan's Balakot or Article 370 narratives. True democratic health demands equal treatment of texts, fostering reasoned discourse rather than engineered stories.

Full-Length Analysis Capsule

Jawed Naqvi's column uses the parliamentary clash over two books to dissect



narrative weaponization in Indian politics under Modi. Bisaria's supportive text is embraced for anti-Congress points, while Naravane's revelations of top-level hesitation during the 2020 Ladakh crisis—Chinese tanks advancing without orders—are censored, blocking Rahul Gandhi's critique. This reflects South Asian patterns where narrative control rivals policy efficacy, eroding debate; for CSS/PMS, it exemplifies how power shapes "reality" via selective history, urging reforms for transparent civil-military discourse.

Addressing Trump's curiosity

Thematic Overview

"Addressing Trump's Curiosity" from Dawn critiques US President Trump's public musings on mediating the Kashmir dispute amid escalating US-Israel strikes on Iran in March 2026. While Trump floats Kashmir mediation as a diplomatic carrot—recalling his 2019 offer to Modi—it diverts attention from his reckless Iran war, which has spiked oil prices and destabilized Pakistan's economy. This feigned interest exposes US inconsistency, prioritizing Middle East chaos over South Asian stability.

Strategic Summary

Trump's shifting Iran rhetoric—from "last best chance" strikes killing Ayatollah Khamenei to vague regime change goals—coincides with offhand Kashmir remarks, possibly pressuring Pakistan amid its security-solidarity dilemma. Iran retaliation hits Gulf bases, disrupting remittances and CPEC, while Pakistan condemns aggression via OIC/SCO. Islamabad wisely sidesteps Trump's "curiosity," focusing multi-alignment over unreliable US overtures that mask broader hegemonic gambits.

Exam-Oriented Notes (CSS / PMS Focus)

Narrative Control: Trump's Kashmir bait distracts from Iran folly, mirroring Indo-Pak rhetoric in IR deception analyses.

Civil-Military Relations: External shocks reinforce Pakistan's FSD posture amid border threats.

Democratic Double Standards: US mediation offers clash with unilateral strikes, highlighting hypocrisy.

Border Policy Scrutiny: Kashmir ploy ignores LoC realities, paralleling LAC amid regional flux.

Leadership Image-Making: Curiosity signals domestic posturing over substantive diplomacy.

Critical Insight

Trump's curiosity weaponizes distraction, sustaining US centrality while middle powers like Pakistan hedge against fallout. Narrative feints preserve illusions over accountability, eroding trust in multipolar forums. Regional agency demands ignoring such gambits for principled non-alignment and solidarity.

Full-Length Analysis Capsule

Dawn's piece dissects Trump's Kashmir mediation curiosity amid Iran war chaos—strikes killing leaders, oil shocks hitting Pakistan—revealing diversionary tactics over genuine peacemaking. Pakistan navigates via SCO/OIC, rejecting unreliable US bait



in strategic adjustment era. For CSS/PMS, it exemplifies great-power inconsistencies eroding discourse; urging robust multi-alignment for South Asian resilience.

That longing for regime change

Thematic Overview

"That Longing for Regime Change" critiques the persistent US desire—exemplified by Trump's 2026 Iran strikes—to topple adversarial governments, despite his campaign vows against Middle East nation-building. This contradiction reveals a neoconservative impulse masquerading as pragmatism, risking power vacuums like post-Saddam Iraq while destabilizing global energy markets. For Pakistan, it intensifies the security-solidarity dilemma amid Iranian retaliation threats to Gulf allies and CPEC vulnerabilities.

Strategic Summary

Trump's aerial campaign, killing Iranian leaders including Khamenei, shifts from nuclear containment to vague regime-change goals, urging Iranians to "take over your government" without US boots. Lacking clear endgames, it spikes oil prices, fuels TTP/Baloch militancy, and strains Pakistan's Saudi pacts versus Iran/China ties. Islamabad condemns via OIC/SCO, hedging multi-alignment to shield economy from fallout.

Exam-Oriented Notes (CSS / PMS Focus)

Narrative Control: US regime-change rhetoric masks strategic voids, paralleling Indo-Pak posturing in IR critiques.

Civil-Military Relations: External wars amplify Pakistan's border defenses and FSD needs.

Democratic Double Standards: Trump's anti-war promises clash with escalations, exposing hypocrisy.

Border Policy Scrutiny: Iran chaos spills into Afghan militancy, demanding robust CBMs.

Leadership Image-Making: Gambits boost domestic appeal but erode global credibility.

Critical Insight

Regime-change longing reflects power's hubris, prioritizing disruption over stability and burdening neighbors like Pakistan. Narrative illusions sustain folly, eroding multipolar trust. True statecraft favors weakening threats without ownership vacuums, urging non-alignment over entanglement.

Full-Length Analysis Capsule

The piece dissects Trump's Iran war as regime-change relapse—strikes decapitating leadership, vague "liberation" calls—contradicting his no-boots pledge amid oil shocks hitting Pakistan. Gulf/Iran tensions mirror South Asia's rifts, reflecting adjustment-age perils. For CSS/PMS, it warns against great-power follies; Pakistan must prioritize hedging for resilience beyond illusory overthrows.



Who endures the pain, wins

Thematic Overview

"Who Endures the Pain, Wins" analyzes Pakistan's economic resilience test amid the 2026 US-Israel strikes on Iran, where surging oil prices (Brent up 17%, LNG 68%), remittance risks, and export disruptions threaten fragile recovery under IMF programs. This attrition war—prolonged Hormuz blockades and retaliatory strikes—pits national endurance against imported inflation, exposing vulnerabilities in energy dependence and balance-of-payments. It frames geopolitics as economic warfare, where weaker states suffer most in great-power gambits.

Strategic Summary

Prime Minister Sharif's austerity measures—fuel rationing, salary cuts, rail cargo shifts—counter \$1.15/liter petrol spikes and \$16B reserve pressures, as Iran war disrupts 80% imported oil needs. Business warns of \$1B export losses from 10-day shipping halts, while currency depreciation amplifies inflation beyond 7%. Islamabad hedges via contingency energy plans and OIC/SCO diplomacy, balancing Gulf security pacts against Iran solidarity to outlast the pain.

Exam-Oriented Notes (CSS / PMS Focus)

Narrative Control: Government frames endurance as victory, shaping public resolve amid external shocks for economic essays.

Civil-Military Relations: Crisis reinforces FSD-economic synergy, prioritizing reserves over spending.

Democratic Double Standards: Western wars impose pain on Global South, critiquing IMF conditionalities.

Border Policy Scrutiny: Afghan spillover militancy compounds economic woes, demanding integrated responses.

Leadership Image-Making: Sharif's address bolsters resilience narrative, key for governance resilience papers.

Critical Insight

Endurance tests reveal power's true metric: economic depth over military might, where prolonged pain favors the resilient. Pakistan's dilemma underscores multipolarity's inequities, turning solidarity rhetoric into survival math. Victory demands diversification beyond imports, forging self-reliance over imported vulnerabilities.

Full-Length Analysis Capsule

Dawn's analysis captures Iran war's toll on Pakistan—oil shocks, \$10B+ import bills, austerity amid Hormuz chaos—testing IMF-backed recovery's limits.

Export/remittance hits mirror South Asia's exposure, reflecting strategic adjustment's harsh economics. For CSS/PMS, it exemplifies external gambits burdening internals; advocating energy independence and hedging for enduring wins beyond mere survival.



Dawn

Return to democracy

Thematic Overview

"Return to Democracy" examines Pakistan's faltering democratic trajectory into 2026, marked by military dominance over elections, constitutional manipulations like the 27th Amendment granting presidential and military immunities, and suppressed opposition amid Imran Khan's imprisonment. Despite multiparty contests, rankings plummet—Economist Intelligence Unit lists Pakistan among 2024's "top 10 worst performers," Freedom House deems it "partly free" at 35/100—highlighting hybrid governance where civilian facades mask establishment control. This regression stalls reforms amid economic crises and Iran war shocks.

Strategic Summary

Post-2024 polls marred by rigging allegations, 2025's 27th Amendment restructures courts and executive powers, boycotted by opposition as authoritarian consolidation. PTI faces mass arrests (108 jailed for 2023 protests), Khan sentenced to 14 years, while military influences policy, media intimidation, and impunity persist. Parliament enacts women's rights laws via caucuses, yet polarization and distrust undermine participatory governance in South Asia's fragile democratic landscape.

Exam-Oriented Notes (CSS / PMS Focus)

Narrative Control: Establishment crafts "stability" discourse to legitimize interventions, key for democracy essays.

Civil-Military Relations: Hybrid model amplifies military veto over elected governments.

Democratic Double Standards: Global indices expose electoral facades versus rights erosion.

Border Policy Scrutiny: Instability hampers security consensus amid Afghan spillover.

Leadership Image-Making: Immunity amendments preserve elite accountability evasion.

Critical Insight

Pakistan's "return" inverts to democratic backsliding, where institutional capture prioritizes control over representation, eroding public trust amid economic pain. This hybridity sustains short-term order but breeds long-term fragility, demanding genuine power-sharing. True democracy thrives on accountability, not engineered majoritarianism.

Full-Length Analysis Capsule

Pakistan's democratic paradox in 2026—polarized politics, military sway, Khan's incarceration, and immunity-laden amendments—reflects stalled progress despite legislative facades. Global downgrades signal hybrid governance's limits amid Iran fallout and debt woes, mirroring South Asian authoritarian drifts. For CSS/PMS, it critiques establishment overreach eroding institutions; reforms via judicial independence and electoral transparency are urged for resilient democracy.



Will the BoP Assert Itself

Thematic Overview

"Will the BoP Assert Itself?" questions whether Pakistan's Balance of Payments (BoP) crisis—exacerbated by 2026 Iran war oil shocks—will force the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) to prioritize monetary autonomy over government pressures. Amid IMF-mandated reforms granting SBP board independence and limiting fiscal dominance, surging imports and remittance risks test if the central bank can enforce discipline on deficit spending. This tension pits technocratic stability against political expediency in Pakistan's fragile economic recovery.

Strategic Summary

SBP's February 2026 Monetary Policy Report projects contained current account deficits (0-1% GDP) via remittances and reserves buildup to \$18B, but Iran conflict's \$5-6B oil bill threatens this. IMF pushes finance secretary's board removal and inspection curbs for SBP autonomy, clashing with austerity demands like fuel rationing. Governor Jameel Ahmad navigates rate cuts (CRR from 6% to 5%) for growth while signaling inflation vigilance, balancing external shocks with internal fiscal lapses.

Exam-Oriented Notes (CSS / PMS Focus)

Narrative Control: SBP crafts "stability" discourse to legitimize tough policies amid political pushback.

Civil-Military Relations: BoP pressures reinforce economic security consensus over populist spending.

Democratic Double Standards: IMF autonomy demands expose sovereign policy constraints on aid recipients.

Border Policy Scrutiny: External account resilience underpins defense funding amid regional volatility.

Leadership Image-Making: Central bank independence signals reform credibility to investors.

Critical Insight

BoP assertion demands SBP transcending de jure to de facto autonomy, enforcing discipline over electoral cycles. Pakistan's dilemma reveals hybrid economics where political imperatives undermine technocratic gains, breeding volatility. True stability fuses central bank resolve with fiscal restraint, rejecting imported shocks' dominance.

Full-Length Analysis Capsule

The query probes SBP's potential assertion amid 2026 Iran war's BoP assault—oil surges eroding reserves, IMF autonomy reforms testing resolve. Political pressures clash with monetary discipline, mirroring South Asia's adjustment-era tensions between growth and stability. For CSS/PMS, it underscores institutional autonomy's



role in weathering externals; genuine assertion requires parliamentary economic targets over ad-hoc interventions.

Absorbing population growth

Thematic Overview

"Absorbing Population Growth" addresses Pakistan's demographic challenge as it enters 2026 as the world's fifth-most populous nation, surpassing 250 million with a 2.1% annual growth rate adding over 5 million yearly. UNFPA warns rapid fertility (3.6 children/woman), youth bulge (64% under 30), and urbanization strain health, education, jobs amid climate risks and Iran war economics. The crisis demands shifting population from "burden" to "dividend" via planning reforms, particularly NFC formula allocation.

Strategic Summary

UNFPA projects 253 million by 2027, with urban population tripling since 1981 to 75M+, fueling housing shortages, 40% youth unemployment, and \$1,484 per capita strain. Gender disparities and 22% stunting compound pressures, while IMF austerity limits social spending amid oil shocks. Government eyes family planning revival, skill programs, and provincial resource shares to harness 1.5M annual workforce entrants for growth.

Exam-Oriented Notes (CSS / PMS Focus)

Narrative Control: Reframe population as strategic asset via youth dividend discourse for development essays.

Civil-Military Relations: Demographic pressures demand security-economic synergy beyond defense spending.

Democratic Double Standards: Global climate funds ignore population-vulnerable states like Pakistan.

Border Policy Scrutiny: Afghan refugee influx compounds resource strain on eastern borders.

Leadership Image-Making: Planning reforms signal governance maturity amid crises.

Critical Insight

Pakistan's growth tests absorption capacity, where unmanaged bulge breeds instability over dividends. Amid multipolar shocks, population becomes power multiplier only through education, skills, and equity. True statecraft converts numbers to human capital, transcending Malthusian traps via inclusive planning.

Full-Length Analysis Capsule

Pakistan's 2026 population milestone—250M+, 2% growth—strains systems amid urbanization, youth joblessness, and external shocks, per UNFPA. NFC reforms and family planning revival offer pathways to dividend, countering climate/gender vulnerabilities. For CSS/PMS, it exemplifies demographic security; integrated policies harnessing youth potential are crucial for strategic adjustment-era resilience.



A Peek into Trump's Iran Mindset

Thematic Overview

"A Peek into Trump's Iran Mindset" (Dawn, Feb 21, 2026) analyzes President Trump's military buildup in the Gulf—dubbed an "armada"—as preparation for offensive action against Iran, driven by Israeli pressure and domestic election timing ahead of November midterms. Despite US technical superiority, the piece questions rapid victory feasibility given Iran's missile retaliation capacity targeting Gulf oil infrastructure and US bases. For Pakistan, escalation risks severe economic fallout from disrupted energy supplies and heightened regional instability.

Strategic Summary

Trump faces Israeli lobbies (post-campaign funding) pushing Iran confrontation, while Iran's strategists plan asymmetric costs via missiles on GCC assets despite conventional inferiority. US public opposes ground wars; miscalculation risks Republican House losses. Tehran cannot win outright but aims to make aggression prohibitively expensive through Hormuz disruptions. Pakistan watches anxiously as Gulf retaliation threatens CPEC, remittances, and oil imports.

Exam-Oriented Notes (CSS / PMS Focus)

Narrative Control: Trump frames buildup as deterrence while Iran emphasizes retaliation costs.

Civil-Military Relations: External threats amplify Pakistan's security consensus requirements.

Democratic Double Standards: US election timing drives Iran risks, exposing intervention contradictions.

Border Policy Scrutiny: Iran chaos risks Afghan militancy spillover to western frontiers.

Leadership Image-Making: Pre-midterm bravado prioritizes domestic politics over strategic clarity.

Critical Insight

Trump's mindset reveals election-driven risk-taking where Israeli pressures override US war weariness, treating Iran as solvable via airpower despite historical failures. Iran's cost-imposition strategy exploits this domestic vulnerability. Pakistan's hedging between Gulf security ties and Iran solidarity becomes acute, demanding non-alignment over entanglement in great-power miscalculations.

Full-Length Analysis Capsule

Dawn dissects Trump's Gulf armada as offensive preparation amid Israeli pressure and midterm calculations, questioning rapid victory against Iran's missile retaliation capacity targeting oil infrastructure. Domestic US war fatigue constrains escalation while Tehran plans asymmetric costs. For CSS/PMS, it exemplifies election-cycle foreign policy risks burdening neighbors; Pakistan requires SCO/OIC multi-alignment to navigate resultant energy/economic shocks in strategic adjustment era.



AI in the Classroom

Thematic Overview

"AI in the Classroom" explores artificial intelligence's 2026 integration into Pakistani education, from personalized tutoring and automated grading to adaptive lesson planning amid population growth pressures (250M+ youth bulge). Tools like ChatGPT, Khanmigo, and local platforms address teacher shortages, urban-rural gaps, and CSS/PMS exam prep through real-time feedback and content generation. This shift promises equity but raises equity, job displacement, and digital divide concerns in resource-constrained systems.

Strategic Summary

AI platforms enable individualized learning paths, reducing cognitive load via simplified explanations, speech tutors for math reasoning, and SEL check-ins gauging student readiness. Pakistani schools deploy AI for assessment automation (cutting marking time 70%), multilingual content (Urdu/Pashto support), and hybrid classrooms bridging remote areas. Amid IMF austerity and Iran oil shocks, low-cost AI scales interventions without expanding staff, targeting 40% youth unemployment via skill modules.

Exam-Oriented Notes (CSS / PMS Focus)

Narrative Control: AI democratizes quality education, reshaping "human capital" discourse for development essays.

Civil-Military Relations: Tech literacy bolsters FSD via STEM workforce readiness.

Democratic Double Standards: Global AI access gaps mirror vaccine inequities affecting Global South.

Border Policy Scrutiny: Digital platforms enable remote education in FATA/KP conflict zones.

Leadership Image-Making: EdTech adoption signals modern governance amid population crisis.

Critical Insight

AI transforms classrooms from teacher-centric to hybrid ecosystems, amplifying human educators through data insights while preserving emotional intelligence.

Pakistan's demographic dividend hinges on scaling these tools equitably, converting population pressure into skilled manpower. Success demands infrastructure investment over fears of replacement.

Full-Length Analysis Capsule

2026 sees AI revolutionizing Pakistani classrooms—personalized tutoring, auto-grading, adaptive planning—addressing 64% youth population amid economic shocks. Platforms bridge urban-rural gaps, prepare CSS aspirants via mock exams/AI mentors, but require digital equity to avoid elite capture. For CSS/PMS, it exemplifies Fourth Industrial Revolution's education pivot; strategic adoption converts demographic challenge into global competitive edge.third space learning



The Nation

No Winner in Afghanistan-Pakistan War

Thematic Overview

"No Winner in Afghanistan-Pakistan War" analyzes the February 2026 border conflict sparked by Pakistani airstrikes on TTP/ISIS-K camps in Nangarhar, Paktika, and Khost, triggering Taliban retaliation and Defense Minister Khawaja Asif's "open war" declaration. Cross-border exchanges in Kabul, Kandahar, and frontier provinces yield mutual casualties without strategic gains, perpetuating Durand Line disputes amid shared militant threats. This zero-sum escalation drains resources from both economically strained neighbors during Iran war fallout.

Strategic Summary

Pakistan targeted seven militant hideouts after Islamabad/Bannu attacks, claiming 133 Taliban killed; Afghanistan reported civilian deaths and launched Operation Ghazab counterstrikes on 28 Pakistani posts. Clashes persist in Paktia/Kunar with drones, artillery, and ground engagements, as both sides inflate enemy losses while minimizing own. UNAMA calls for de-escalation amid refugee flows, but nationalist pressures lock leaders into prolonged attrition benefiting neither.

Exam-Oriented Notes (CSS / PMS Focus)

Narrative Control: Mutual "aggressor" framing sustains domestic support despite shared TTP threats.

Civil-Military Relations: Conflict reinforces Pakistan's FSD primacy over diplomatic solutions.

Democratic Double Standards: Global silence on Durand Line violence versus Kashmir amplification.

Border Policy Scrutiny: Exposes fencing failures and militant sanctuaries on both sides.

Leadership Image-Making: War rhetoric bolsters nationalist credentials amid economic pain.

Critical Insight

No victor emerges when neighbors fight common foes across artificial lines—escalation serves TTP/ISIS-K more than states. Pakistan-Afghanistan's tragedy reveals security dilemmas where tactical wins yield strategic losses, draining economies amid oil shocks. Sustainable peace demands CBMs transcending Durand, prioritizing anti-terror cooperation over territorial posturing.

Full-Length Analysis Capsule

February 2026 Pak-Afghan war—Pakistan's TTP strikes provoking Taliban retaliation, Asif's "open war" call—yields stalemate with mutual border devastation sans decisive gains. Shared militant threats mock zero-sum logic as Iran economics compound costs. For CSS/PMS, it exemplifies neighborhood security paradoxes; Track-II diplomacy and joint counter-terror ops offer escape from mutually assured drain in multipolar flux.



Against Afghanistan's Cross-Border Terror, Pakistan Prevails

Thematic Overview

"Against Afghanistan's Cross-Border Terror, Pakistan Prevails" frames Pakistan's aggressive 2026 military response to TTP/ISIS-K attacks from Afghan soil as strategic success, with Operation Ghazab lil Haq airstrikes destroying 46 Taliban positions in Kabul, Kandahar, and border provinces. Unlike mutual-destruction narratives, this perspective highlights degraded militant capabilities, territorial gains (32 sq km Ghudwana enclave), and forced Taliban recalibration despite civilian casualty controversies. It positions escalation as necessary deterrence restoring border security amid Iran war distractions.

Strategic Summary

Post-Islamabad/Bannu bombings, Pakistan's February strikes eliminated seven TTP camps, prompting Taliban Operation Ghazab retaliation on 28 posts. Pakistan countered with overwhelming air superiority, capturing outposts and repulsing attacks while claiming 133+ Taliban killed versus minimal own losses. Defense Minister Asif's "open war" declaration and ground incursions signal sustained pressure, degrading cross-border terror infrastructure despite UNAMA displacement concerns and 66,000 Afghan refugees.

Exam-Oriented Notes (CSS / PMS Focus)

Narrative Control: Success framing legitimizes escalation, countering "no winner" critiques in security essays.

Civil-Military Relations: Demonstrates FSD efficacy against hybrid threats, reinforcing military primacy.

Democratic Double Standards: Western silence on Afghan terror sanctuaries versus Pakistan scrutiny.

Border Policy Scrutiny: Validates proactive doctrine over failed fencing/diplomacy approaches.

Leadership Image-Making: Decisive action bolsters establishment credibility amid economic crises.

Critical Insight

Pakistan's prevailing approach rejects endless attrition for decisive degradation of terror sanctuaries, recognizing mutual vulnerability demands offensive deterrence. Taliban recalcitrance post-strikes validates coercion over dialogue. Strategic clarity—eliminating cross-border capacity—trumps humanitarian optics when national survival hangs in balance amid multipolar distractions.

Full-Length Analysis Capsule

Pakistan's Operation Ghazab lil Haq transforms defensive posture into offensive dominance, destroying TTP/ISIS-K infrastructure across 46 Afghan sites and securing strategic enclaves despite Taliban retaliation. This contrasts "no winner" fatalism with demonstrated militant degradation amid Iran economics. For CSS/PMS, it exemplifies credible deterrence doctrine; sustained pressure compels terrorist recalculation where diplomacy failed, securing western frontier in adjustment era.



Pakistan's Action in Afghanistan Rooted in Right to Self-Defence

Thematic Overview

"Pakistan's Action in Afghanistan Rooted in Right to Self-Defence" justifies Pakistan's February 2026 Operation Ghazab lil Haq airstrikes on TTP camps in Khost, Paktia, and Nangarhar as legitimate UN Charter Article 51 responses to over 600 cross-border attacks since 2015, killing thousands. Citing the "unwilling or unable" doctrine, Islamabad invokes international law against Kabul's failure to dismantle terror sanctuaries despite Doha commitments. US State Department endorsement reinforces legal standing amid Taliban sovereignty violation claims.

Strategic Summary

Post-Islamabad mosque bombing (87 dead), Pakistan destroyed seven TTP command nodes, killing 133 militants including leadership, prompting Taliban Operation Ghazab retaliation on 28 border posts. Pakistan's air superiority neutralized threats, securing 32 sq km Ghudwana enclave while MOFA affirms "precise operations" targeting Fitna al-Khawarij infrastructure. US recognition validates actions as proportionate self-defense against non-state actors attributable to state negligence.

Exam-Oriented Notes (CSS / PMS Focus)

Narrative Control: Self-defense framing legitimizes strikes globally, countering sovereignty violation accusations.

Civil-Military Relations: Demonstrates FSD constitutional role against existential hybrid threats.

Democratic Double Standards: Western support exposes selective terrorism definitions versus Afghan sanctuaries.

Border Policy Scrutiny: Validates transborder operations where fencing/diplomacy failed.

Leadership Image-Making: Decisive response restores deterrence credibility post-economic shocks.

Critical Insight

Pakistan exercises inherent Article 51 rights against TTP aggression attributable to Afghan negligence, transcending restrictive ICJ state-centric interpretations via post-9/11 unwilling/unable doctrine evolution. Proportionality maintained through precision strikes preserves legal legitimacy while compelling Taliban recalibration. Strategic clarity prioritizes citizen security over border sanctity when regimes harbor attackers.

Full-Length Analysis Capsule

Pakistan's 2026 Afghan strikes embody lawful self-defense against TTP's 600+ attacks, invoking UN Charter Article 51 and unwilling/unable doctrine amid Kabul's Doha violations. US backing validates precision operations destroying terror infrastructure despite sovereignty protests. For CSS/PMS, it exemplifies evolving jus ad bellum norms; sustained pressure secures western frontier where diplomacy failed, balancing legal legitimacy with security imperatives in multipolar flux.



Pakistan Only Targeting Terrorist Bases in Afghanistan

Thematic Overview

"Pakistan Only Targeting Terrorist Bases in Afghanistan" defends Operation Ghazab lil Haq's precision strikes on TTP/ISIS-K infrastructure—logistics hubs, training camps, oil depots in Kabul, Kandahar, Paktia—as exclusively counter-terror operations, not state aggression. Pakistan rejects Taliban claims of civilian/military targets, emphasizing verified militant facilities per satellite intel despite unverifiable casualty figures. This precision narrative counters sovereignty violation accusations amid 2026 border war escalation.

Strategic Summary

PAF hit 46+ sites including Tarawo/Sherinaw camps, 313 Corps logistics, Kam Air oil depot, and underground tunnels supporting cross-border attacks post-Islamabad/Bannu bombings. Claims of 684 Taliban militants killed, 252 posts destroyed maintain operational focus on Fitna al-Khawarij infrastructure. Taliban Operation Ghazab retaliation on Pakistani posts met with overwhelming air superiority securing Ghudwana enclave, reinforcing limited liability strikes versus indiscriminate warfare.

Exam-Oriented Notes (CSS / PMS Focus)

Narrative Control: Precision targeting reframes sovereignty breach as legitimate counter-terror.

Civil-Military Relations: Demonstrates FSD technical superiority in hybrid warfare domains.

Democratic Double Standards: Global acceptance of precision strikes versus Taliban propaganda.

Border Policy Scrutiny: Validates transborder ops targeting non-state threats with attribution.

Leadership Image-Making: Surgical operations preserve deterrence without occupation optics.

Critical Insight

Pakistan's discriminate targeting upholds jus in bello principles, destroying terror logistics while minimizing collateral through ISR precision. Taliban conflation of militants with civilians undermines their legitimacy. Strategic restraint—striking infrastructure sans ground occupation—compels recalculation while preserving legal/moral high ground amid multipolar scrutiny.

Full-Length Analysis Capsule

Operation Ghazab lil Haq's precision campaign systematically dismantles TTP support networks across 46 Afghan sites, from Kabul Corps logistics to Kandahar oil depots, decisively degrading cross-border terror capacity. This contrasts Taliban indiscriminate retaliation, validating Pakistan's counter-terror monopoly. For CSS/PMS, it exemplifies modern jus ad bellum evolution; calibrated force restores deterrence where diplomacy failed, securing western approaches amid Iran distractions.



ThinkFest Debate: Pakistan's Position, US & China

Thematic Overview

ThinkFest Debate on "Pakistan's Position, US & China" examines Islamabad's delicate balancing act amid 2026 Afghanistan border war, with China actively mediating via shuttle diplomacy and Xi Jinping's direct appeals for ceasefire, while US endorses Pakistan's self-defense strikes against TTP sanctuaries. Beijing prioritizes CPEC security and regional stability to protect \$60B+ investments, urging restraint through backchannels despite Pakistan's security imperatives. Washington offers rhetorical support but limited material aid, reflecting strategic disinterest post-Afghan withdrawal.

Strategic Summary

China's Special Envoy Yue Xiaoyong facilitates Islamabad-Kabul talks post-Operation Ghazab lil Haq, leveraging economic leverage over both combatants—Pakistan via CPEC Phase II, Afghanistan via promised BRI inclusion. US State Department affirms Pakistan's Article 51 rights but avoids entanglement, prioritizing Iran war. Pakistan welcomes Chinese mediation while pressing military degradation of TTP infrastructure, threading security necessities through great-power diplomacy amid oil shocks.

Exam-Oriented Notes (CSS / PMS Focus)

Narrative Control: China frames mediation as "win-win stability," US as "self-defense rights."

Civil-Military Relations: External backing validates FSD operations against hybrid threats.

Democratic Double Standards: US selective support versus China's pragmatic neutrality.

Border Policy Scrutiny: Great-power positions shape Durand Line operational freedom.

Leadership Image-Making: Multi-alignment diplomacy enhances Pakistan's strategic autonomy.

Critical Insight

Pakistan navigates US tactical endorsement with Chinese strategic depth, rejecting binary alignments for calibrated multi-alignment. Beijing's mediation preserves CPEC while validating security concerns; Washington's distance exposes post-2021 disengagement. This hedging exemplifies middle-power agency in great-power contestation, prioritizing national security over bloc disciplines.

Full-Length Analysis Capsule

ThinkFest dissects Pakistan's 2026 balancing—China's active mediation securing CPEC amid Afghan strikes, US rhetorical self-defense backing sans commitments. Beijing leverages economic carrots, Washington offers legal cover, enabling Islamabad's degradation of TTP sanctuaries. For CSS/PMS, it exemplifies strategic adjustment mastery; multi-alignment converts neighborhood crises into enhanced maneuverability between competing hegemon.



Overall Analysis: February–March 2026

The period of February–March 2026 represents a critical phase in Pakistan’s macroeconomic trajectory, characterized by a fragile balance between stabilization efforts and emerging structural pressures. February reflected a relatively controlled economic environment, with inflation contained near 7 percent, exchange rate stability around

PKR 280 per dollar, and continued adherence to IMF-supported policy discipline. This phase suggested that earlier stabilization measures were beginning to yield limited results. However, the developments in March disrupted this trajectory, as a sharp increase in fuel prices—exceeding 20 percent—reintroduced inflationary pressures and exposed the underlying vulnerabilities of the economy.

The inflation dynamics during this period indicate a clear shift from demand moderation to cost-push escalation. The rise in energy prices acted as a transmission mechanism, increasing costs across transportation, food supply chains, and industrial production. This demonstrates that inflation in early 2026 is no longer cyclical or temporary but increasingly structural and imported in nature. Consequently, the effectiveness of conventional monetary policy tools remains constrained, as interest rate adjustments cannot fully address supply-side and external cost shocks.

The policy response during these months further highlights the limitations of the current economic framework. The State Bank maintained a cautious and restrictive stance, keeping the policy rate around 10.5 percent in order to contain inflation and manage external risks. However, fiscal policy continued to exhibit weaknesses, particularly in tax collection and revenue mobilization. The absence of deep structural reforms suggests that economic management remains focused on short-term stabilization rather than long-term transformation. This reactive approach limits the country’s ability to achieve sustainable growth and resilience.

The external sector presents a similar pattern of surface-level stability combined with embedded risk. Foreign exchange reserves remained in the range of 8 to 9 billion dollars, providing only limited import cover, while the exchange rate appeared relatively stable. However, this stability is largely supported by external inflows and IMF engagement rather than strong domestic fundamentals. The economy therefore operates within a managed stability framework that remains highly vulnerable to external shocks, particularly fluctuations in global oil prices.

The developments of March 2026 underscore the centrality of the energy sector as a structural constraint on economic stability. The significant increase in fuel prices illustrates how external energy dependence directly translates into domestic inflation, fiscal strain, and external imbalance. Energy, therefore, functions not merely as an economic variable but as a critical determinant of overall macroeconomic stability.

At the global level, geopolitical tensions, particularly in the Middle East, have contributed to oil price volatility and heightened economic uncertainty. For Pakistan, this environment amplifies existing vulnerabilities by increasing the import bill and



constraining policy choices. The interaction between geopolitical instability and economic fragility places Pakistan in a particularly exposed position within the evolving global order.

Despite short-term stabilization efforts, the persistence of structural challenges remains evident. Weak fiscal capacity, a narrow tax base, rapid population growth, low productivity, and climate-related pressures continue to limit the country's development potential. These factors indicate that the current economic difficulties are not temporary disruptions but manifestations of deeper systemic issues.

In conclusion, the February–March 2026 period demonstrates that Pakistan's economy is experiencing stabilization without structural transformation. While short-term indicators suggest a degree of balance, the underlying economic architecture remains fragile and highly susceptible to external and internal shocks. The fundamental challenge, therefore, lies not in maintaining temporary stability but in undertaking comprehensive structural reforms to achieve long-term resilience and economic sovereignty.



Message from Exampen.co
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