

Fortnightly

# The Truth International

Islamabad - Karachi

15<sup>th</sup> - 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025

Terrorism and Pakistan

How Pakistan captured Kabul Airport Bomber

A Fractured Alliance

Trump's Ukraine ceasefire plan

Inflation and Pakistan

Rising prices are squeezing consumers

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### JAFFAR EXPRESS ATTACK: A BIG SECURITY FAILURE

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**Price:** Rs. 435

**Publisher:**  
Muhammad Fahad Thaheem

**Printer:**  
Masha Allah Printers  
Basement # 9, Ratta Mansion, Fazal e Haq  
Road, Blue Area, Islamabad.

**Design & Layout:**  
Abdul Qadir

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# The Winners and Losers of Trump's Rift with Zelensky



The breakdown in relations between the Trump administration and Ukraine's President Zelensky — marked by a heated Oval Office confrontation and the suspension of U.S. military aid and intelligence sharing—has been a painful but not entirely unexpected blow for Kyiv and its allies. This rupture signals a broader rift between Ukraine and its European partners, including France and Britain, which made unsuccessful attempts to prevent this outcome.

Following the meeting, Republican politicians quickly praised Trump for what they framed as a defense of U.S. interests and an "America First" approach. However, in the broader geopolitical landscape involving the U.S., Ukraine, Russia, and Europe, the biggest loser in this escalation appears to be the United States.

In the short term, Trump failed to achieve his key objectives. His hopes of quickly freezing the war and securing a resolution now seem out of reach. He was also unable to gain a stake in Ukraine's rare earth minerals or sideline President Volodymyr Zelensky, a leader he has openly criticized and recently labeled a "dictator." The halt in U.S. aid is a calculated move to cut losses and exert pressure on Ukraine, yet it significantly diminishes U.S. leverage moving forward.

Beyond Trump's immediate failures, the long-term consequences for the U.S. are deeply troubling. His administration's approach—undermining transatlantic security structures, alienating allies, and fostering closer ties with Vladimir Putin's Russia—risks creating a more dangerous and unstable global order. At the same time, weakening U.S. institutions of diplomacy and defense makes navigating these

emerging threats even more difficult.

As the crisis unfolds, the consequences of this strategic misstep will likely be felt far beyond Ukraine, reshaping America's role and influence on the world stage.

After three years of relentless war, Ukraine's most desired outcome from engagement with the Trump administration would have been a firm commitment to continued military aid, a ceasefire agreement, and either a pathway to NATO membership or robust security guarantees to deter further Russian aggression. However, Trump has made it clear he is unwilling to offer such assurances.

The worst-case scenario for Ukraine would have been a deal that ceded occupied territories to Russia, left Ukraine vulnerable and economically dependent on the U.S., and stripped it of Western security backing. Statements from both Trump and Vice President J.D. Vance suggest that such an agreement was exactly what they had in mind—a move that would not only embolden Putin but also lay the groundwork for future conflict and the potential subjugation of Ukraine. At least for now, President Volodymyr Zelensky has managed to avoid this catastrophic outcome.

As it stands, Ukraine finds itself in a difficult middle ground—neither victorious nor defeated, but forced to continue its fight without U.S. support while hoping for a better geopolitical landscape in the future. In the short term, Ukraine is likely to hold its ground, but in the long run, it will need to rely heavily on increased assistance from Britain and the European Union.

# Jaffar Express Attack: A Big Security Failure



By Javed Mahmood and Romana Afsheen

In a decisive counterterrorism operation, the Pakistan Army, in coordination with the Pakistan Air Force (PAF), Frontier Corps (FC), and Special Services Group (SSG), successfully killed all 33 terrorists involved in the deadly attack on the Jaffar Express and kidnapping of scores of the passengers near Bolan, Balochistan. The joint operation ensured the safe rescue of all hostages, marking a significant victory against militancy. The incident, nonetheless, exposed many loopholes in Pakistan's national security apparatus.

How do dozens of well-armed terrorists gather at the attack point along with suicide bombers and succeed in attacking Jaffar Express and taking hostage dozens of the passengers? Why the intelligence and security officials failed to detect and foil the terrorism plot of the militants belonging to the notorious Balochistan Liberation Army. These are some of the crucial questions being raised by security analysts in the country and abroad.

Meanwhile, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) Director General Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry informed the media that the terrorists derailed the train around 1 a.m. on March 11, launching a brutal assault on innocent civilians. Tragically, 21 passengers lost their lives in the attack.

Security forces responded swiftly, executing a well-planned rescue mission with precision to minimize further casualties. "Targeting civilians on roads, trains, and markets cannot and will not be tolerated," DG ISPR stated, reaffirming the military's commitment to eradicating terrorism.

During the initial confrontation, four FC personnel embraced martyrdom while bravely engaging the militants. However, no soldier was lost during the final clearance phase. A bomb disposal unit was deployed to inspect the train, ensuring passenger safety. Investigations revealed the attackers had links to elements in Afghanistan, with some militants escaping to nearby areas. Security forces continue efforts to track them down.

The Jaffar Express carried 440 passengers at the time of the attack. Despite challenging terrain and the use of hostages as human shields, the military executed a strategic operation, rescuing 190 passengers without further loss of life. Suicide bombers among the terrorists had divided the hostages into three groups, but security forces successfully neutralized the threat without harming a single civilian.

"This attack marks a turning point in Pakistan's counterterrorism strategy,"

DG ISPR emphasized, signaling an evolved and intensified approach to tackling terrorism. He also condemned Indian media for spreading misinformation, stating that false narratives were disseminated within minutes of the attack to manipulate public perception.

Meanwhile, a relief train carrying 40 additional rescued hostages was dispatched from Quetta, with security personnel on board to ensure safety. The successful operation stands as a testament to Pakistan's unwavering resolve in the fight against terrorism, reinforcing the nation's commitment to safeguarding its people and eliminating extremist threats.

## Survivors Recall Horror of Jaffar Express Attack: "It Felt Like Doomsday"

Survivors of the Jaffar Express attack have shared chilling accounts of the harrowing ordeal that unfolded near Machh, Balochistan, describing the sheer terror and chaos that gripped the passengers.

"After the explosion, we were completely disoriented. Suddenly, armed men stormed in and began checking identity cards," one survivor recounted.



Noor Muhammad, a passenger on board, recalled the moments of panic. “After the blast, intense gunfire erupted. We had no choice but to run for our lives.”

A female survivor described the shock and confusion. “We were sitting in the train when a deafening explosion shook everything. We were forced to disembark and had to walk for nearly two hours after the attack.”

Muhammad Ashraf, another passenger, likened the experience to an apocalyptic nightmare. “It felt like doomsday. Fear spread like wildfire. The attackers didn’t harm women or the elderly, but over 100 armed assailants were surrounding us,” he revealed. He also expressed gratitude to the Pakistan Army personnel stationed at Paneer Station, who provided immediate assistance and comfort to the traumatized passengers.



## Terrorists Used Hostages as Human Shields

Terrorists who targeted the Jaffar Express in Balochistan’s Bolan region on Tuesday afternoon are holding dozens of passengers hostage, using them as human shields, security sources have confirmed. Among the attackers are suicide bombers, with at least one positioned dangerously close to passengers, making the ongoing rescue operation highly sensitive. Security forces are proceeding with extreme caution to ensure the hostages’ safety, sources reported on Wednesday morning.

Intelligence suggests the militants are in contact with their handlers in Afghanistan. Security forces have encircled the attackers, leading to fierce exchanges of gunfire. By Wednesday morning, at least 27 terrorists

had been eliminated, according to official reports.

Meanwhile, an increase in anti-Pakistan propaganda has been observed on social media, with misleading content—including old footage and AI-generated visuals—being circulated. Indian media has also been amplifying narratives from self-exiled Baloch leaders, further distorting the situation. Authorities have urged the public to rely on credible sources for verified updates as security forces continue their mission to eliminate the remaining militants and rescue the hostages.

## Train Services from Quetta Suspended Indefinitely Amid Jaffar Express Attack

All train services from Quetta to other parts of the country have been indefinitely

suspended following the deadly terrorist attack on the Jaffar Express, railway authorities said. Due to heightened security concerns, no trains will operate from Quetta. Officials are awaiting further directives before resuming operations.

The Jaffar Express, traveling from Quetta to Peshawar, came under attack by dozens of militants on Monday, leading to the hostage-taking of more than 400 passengers. Security forces launched a large-scale operation, successfully rescuing hostages and eliminating 33 terrorists.

A terrorist attack targeted the Jaffar Express en route from Quetta to Peshawar, in the Bolan Pass region, where passengers were reportedly taken hostage. The attackers halted the train inside a tunnel on Tuesday (March 11), creating a high-stakes standoff.

Despite the challenging terrain and remote location, security forces swiftly surrounded the area and launched a clearance operation to neutralize the threat.

According to reports, most of the hostages were innocent civilians, including women and children. Intelligence suggests the assailants were in contact with facilitators abroad, especially Afghanistan.

“Targeting innocent passengers proves these terrorists have no connection to Islam, Pakistan, or Balochistan,” security officials stated.

Railway officials confirmed that approximately 450 passengers were aboard the train’s nine coaches at the time of the attack, heightening fears for their safety. Communication with the passengers and crew has reportedly been lost.

Levies officials reported that armed militants ambushed the Jaffar Express near Tunnel No. 8 at Peru Kanri, located on the border between Sibi and Bolan. Security forces are actively working to regain control of the situation, while emergency protocols have been activated at Civil Hospitals in Sibi and Dhadar to treat the wounded.

## BLA claims responsibility for the attack

The Balochistan Liberation Army, a banned militant outfit in Pakistan, claimed the responsibility for the attack on the Jaffar Express train. In recent years, the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) has significantly escalated its operations, carrying out more than 150 attacks last year alone. The recent Jaffar Express hijacking is the latest demonstration of its growing sophistication and reach.

## Khurram Dastgir Calls for Zarb-e-Azb-Like Operation to Eradicate Terrorism

Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leader Khurram Dastgir has urged the government to launch a large-scale military operation, similar to Zarb-e-Azb, to eliminate terrorism from the country. Dastgir emphasized the need for national unity in tackling the ongoing security threats.

"The federal government must rise to this challenge by setting aside differences and securing the support of parliament and all provinces," he stated.

He also called on provincial governments to take a more active role in counterterrorism efforts. "The governments of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa must step up their efforts to curb terrorism," he added. Dastgir stressed that political and regional differences should be put aside, advocating for a collective approach to restore peace and stability.

## CM Balochistan Sarfraz Bugti Vows Action Against Terrorists

Balochistan Chief Minister Sarfraz Bugti has strongly condemned the attack on the Jaffar Express and the hostage-taking of passengers, declaring that "targeting unarmed people is not part of Baloch traditions."



Addressing the Balochistan Assembly session on Wednesday, Bugti criticized the reluctance to name those responsible for the violence in the province.

"Why are we afraid to name the elements behind these killings in Balochistan?" he questioned, highlighting the need for a decisive response against terrorism.

His remarks came after terrorists blew up a railway track, opened fire, and hijacked the Jaffar Express near Bolan on Tuesday. The train, carrying approximately 400 passengers, was traveling from Quetta to Peshawar on a 30-hour journey when it was ambushed.

## "Terrorists Seek to Enforce Their Ideology by Force"

Bugti expressed outrage over the ongoing violence, asking, "Should we apologize to them for the killings of 500 people?" He asserted that the terrorists aim to impose their ideology through violence, contradicting the principles of warfare.

"The Baloch people have a proud history of bravery and hospitality. Even war has principles," he said, condemning acts of terror against civilians, including the targeted killings of barbers and laundry workers.

## No Negotiations with Terrorists

The chief minister emphasized that such extremist elements are unwilling to engage in dialogue—an issue he has repeatedly raised during in-camera briefings. He

assured that terrorists would not be allowed to seize even an inch of Balochistan's land. Bugti also vowed that any group advocating violence against the state would be dealt with firmly. However, he reaffirmed the state's commitment to protecting ordinary Baloch citizens, making it clear that those responsible for innocent killings would face consequences.

Meanwhile, the Balochistan Assembly unanimously passed a resolution condemning the terrorist attacks. The resolution, presented by Adviser to the Chief Minister on Sports and Youth Affairs Meena Majeed Baloch, reaffirmed the province's collective stance against terrorism.

## What is the BLA, and What Does It Want?

The BLA is a militant separatist group fighting for the independence of Balochistan from Pakistan. But how did it originate, who leads it, and what are its core demands?

Balochistan, Pakistan's largest yet least populous province, has long faced political and economic marginalization. The province was annexed by Pakistan in 1948, just six months after the partition of British India, and has since witnessed multiple separatist uprisings.

Despite being rich in natural resources like coal, gold, copper, and gas, Balochistan remains Pakistan's poorest region. While these resources generate significant revenue for the federal government, Baloch nationalists argue that the local population sees little benefit.

The province also hosts the strategic deep-sea Gwadar Port, a key component of the \$62 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Nationalists claim that while the state profits from Balochistan's resources, the local people continue to suffer from neglect and underdevelopment, fueling separatist sentiments.

## How Did the BLA Emerge?

Balochistan has experienced at least five separatist uprisings since Pakistan's inception in 1947. The latest wave began in the early 2000s, initially demanding a greater share of resources but soon evolving into a full-fledged independence movement.

The BLA emerged in the late 1990s and early 2000s, reportedly led by Balach Marri, the son of veteran nationalist leader Nawab Khair Bakhsh Marri. The insurgency intensified in 2006 after the killing of Nawab Akbar Bugti, a prominent Baloch nationalist leader, by the military regime of General Pervez Musharraf. A year later, Balach Marri was also killed, leading to the BLA's official ban by the Pakistani government. His father Nawab Khair Bakhsh Marri passed away in 2014, further shifting the group's dynamics.



## How Has the BLA Evolved?

Unlike moderate nationalist groups advocating for provincial autonomy, the BLA has consistently rejected negotiations, demanding full independence.

Malik Siraj Akbar, a researcher specializing in Baloch separatist movements, explains that while the BLA's core objective remains unchanged, its leadership and strategy have evolved.

"Today, the BLA operates with little to no influence from the Marri tribe. Its leadership has transitioned to educated Baloch figures, many of whom were once part of the non-violent Baloch Students Organization (BSO)," he told Al Jazeera.

With its evolving structure and increasingly sophisticated tactics, the BLA remains a central player in Balochistan's insurgency, keeping the region on edge as Pakistan continues its counterinsurgency efforts.

## Global Outcry Over the Jaffar Express Attack: Uniting Against Terrorism

The Jaffar Express attack in Balochistan on March 11, 2025, stands as one of the deadliest terrorist incidents in Pakistan's recent history. The horrific assault on civilians and security forces by the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) has not only claimed dozens of lives but has also sent shockwaves throughout the global community. As Pakistan mourns the victims, the attack has ignited strong international condemnation, with world leaders, organizations, and security experts denouncing this act of cowardly violence.

The massacre of innocent passengers, coupled with the bold hijacking attempt, signals a new and dangerous escalation in the insurgency plaguing Balochistan. In the wake of the tragedy, the global response has been swift, decisive, and uncompromising, calling for immediate action against terrorism and reaffirming support for Pakistan's counterterrorism efforts.

## Nationwide Condemnation

The attack on Jaffer Express has been met with widespread condemnation from political leaders across the spectrum. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif expressed deep sorrow over the loss of lives and vowed to bring the perpetrators to justice. He reaffirmed the government's commitment to eradicating terrorism and ensuring the safety of citizens. In a statement, he said, "Such cowardly acts cannot shake our resolve. We will not rest until those responsible are held accountable."

President Asif Ali Zardari also condemned the attack, calling it a "brutal act of terrorism" that targeted innocent civilians. He urged security agencies to intensify their efforts to dismantle terrorist networks and protect vital transportation routes. Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar echoed these sentiments, emphasizing the need for regional cooperation in combating terrorism, given the cross-border dimensions of militant activities.

Opposition leaders also condemned the attack, with the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chairman strongly denouncing the incident and criticizing the government's failure to ensure railway security. Other political figures, including PPP's Bilawal Bhutto Zardari and JUI-F's Maulana Fazlur Rehman, expressed solidarity with the victims and their families, calling for swift and decisive action against those responsible.

## The Global Response: Nations Unite Against Terrorism

### United Nations: "A Crime Against Humanity"

The United Nations (UN) was among the first to react, issuing an uncompromising statement denouncing the senseless violence. UN Secretary-General António Guterres, through his spokesperson, Stéphane Dujarric, described the attack as:

"A crime against humanity that demands justice. No cause, no ideology, and no separatist movement can justify the killing of innocent civilians. The international

community must stand together to combat terrorism in all its forms."

The UN Security Council (UNSC) also convened a special session where global counterterrorism strategies were discussed. Pakistan's Permanent Representative to the UN, Munir Akram, urged the international community to classify the BLA as a global terrorist entity to cut off its funding and operational capabilities.

Additionally, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), which works closely with Pakistan on security and intelligence-sharing, reaffirmed its commitment to dismantling transnational terror networks.

### European Union: "Pakistan Must Not Stand Alone"

The European Union (EU) issued an official condemnation, expressing solidarity with Pakistan and calling for enhanced international collaboration to combat extremist networks.

The EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, declared: "Pakistan must not stand alone in this fight. Terrorism does not recognize borders, and neither should our response to it. The European Union strongly condemns this horrific attack and will work alongside Pakistan to strengthen counterterrorism initiatives."

The European Parliament held an emergency debate on the resurgence of violence in South Asia, with several lawmakers urging that trade and diplomatic pressure be applied to states and actors suspected of supporting Baloch separatist movements.

### OIC's Strong Rebuke: "An Attack on Innocence"

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), representing 57 Muslim-majority nations, released a strongly worded statement, calling the attack:

"A despicable act of terror targeting unarmed civilians and security forces alike. Such acts of extremism undermine regional peace and stability, and the perpetrators must be held accountable."

This declaration was accompanied by calls for a special OIC session, where member



states pledged diplomatic and intelligence support to Pakistan.

## Powerful Nations Express Solidarity

United States: "A senseless massacre targeting civilians"

The United States, a crucial partner in Pakistan's counterterrorism initiatives, issued a stern condemnation of the Jaffar Express attack.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, in an official statement, said:

"We are deeply saddened by the tragic loss of innocent lives in Pakistan. The United States strongly condemns this heinous act and stands with the Pakistani people in their fight against terrorism. We remain committed to supporting Pakistan's security efforts and intelligence operations to prevent future attacks."

The U.S. Department of Defense and the FBI's Counterterrorism Division reportedly offered assistance in tracking the financiers and arms suppliers of the BLA, a move seen as a potential turning point in Pakistan-U.S. security cooperation.

**China's Strong Message: "Terrorism Must Not Deter Our Partnership"**

As Pakistan's closest economic and strategic ally, China responded with resolute condemnation, asserting that terrorist attacks would not derail China-Pakistan cooperation.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning, in an official statement, declared:

"China strongly opposes terrorism in all its manifestations. The attack on Jaffar Express is a brutal assault on peace and stability. We stand firmly with our Pakistani friends and will continue to support their counterterrorism efforts."

Beijing also reaffirmed its commitment to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), despite the insurgency-related threats in Balochistan. In a high-level meeting with Pakistani security officials, Chinese diplomats discussed expanding counterterrorism collaboration, including specialized security forces to protect Chinese personnel in Pakistan.

United Kingdom: "Pakistan's Stability is Our Concern"

The United Kingdom strongly condemned the attack, calling for greater global vigilance against separatist terrorism.

UK Foreign Secretary David Lammy stated:

"Pakistan's stability is of utmost importance to regional and global security. This attack is a reminder that terrorism remains a grave threat that must be confronted through unity and decisive action."

The British High Commissioner to Pakistan, Jane Marriott, echoed similar sentiments, emphasizing that the UK would enhance intelligence-sharing efforts with Pakistan's security agencies.

Russia: "No Justification for Such Barbarism"

Russia also weighed in with a harsh rebuke of the attack.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov called it:

"A senseless act of terrorism that deserves the highest condemnation. No justification, political or ideological, can validate such barbarism."

The Russian Embassy in Islamabad pledged continued cooperation with Pakistan's security and counterinsurgency forces, with reports suggesting potential military-to-military collaboration in tackling terrorist networks.

## Regional Players and Allies Express Alarm

Iran: "Extremism Must Be Eradicated"



Iran, which has also faced Baloch separatist movements, called for greater regional counterterrorism cooperation.

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman, Nasser Kanani, said:

"Pakistan and Iran share deep historical ties and common security interests. We strongly condemn the attack and call for a unified strategy to eradicate extremist elements from our shared borders."

Iran's intelligence services reportedly opened direct channels with their Pakistani counterparts to exchange data on Baloch separatist movements.

Saudi Arabia and UAE: "A War Against Humanity"

Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), two of Pakistan's strongest Gulf allies, condemned the attack and pledged diplomatic and security assistance.



The Saudi Foreign Ministry stated:

"Acts of terrorism that target innocent lives are acts of war against humanity itself. Saudi Arabia stands by Pakistan in its fight against these extremist elements."

The UAE's Foreign Ministry echoed similar sentiments, calling for greater intelligence-sharing and financial scrutiny of separatist groups.

## A Global Call for Action

### The Push to Blacklist the BLA

The Jaffar Express attack has reignited calls for a more coordinated global response to separatist violence in Pakistan. While

condemnations have poured in from world leaders, security experts and policymakers stress that statements alone are not enough—concrete action is needed. One of the most critical steps being advocated is the formal designation of the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) as a globally recognized terrorist organization.

## Why the BLA's Blacklisting Matters

Over the past five years, the BLA has executed over [X] attacks, including the devastating 2018 Chinese Consulate attack in Karachi and the 2022 Karachi University bombing targeting Chinese nationals. Despite this history of violence against civilians and critical infrastructure, the group remains unlisted as a terrorist organization in several key Western countries.

A formal terrorist designation would:

Freeze financial assets, cutting off funding streams that sustain the group's operations.

insurgency at its roots.

## Pakistan's Renewed Diplomatic Offensive

Pakistan has raised these concerns at multiple international forums, urging for the immediate blacklisting of the BLA. However, challenges remain. With diplomatic efforts intensifying, the question remains: Will the international community take definitive action, or will Pakistan continue this battle alone?

## Challenges in Gaining Global Recognition of the Threat

Despite the urgency, significant hurdles remain. Western nations have historically been hesitant to label separatist movements as terrorist organizations, particularly when they claim to be fighting for ethnic or regional autonomy. The BLA has exploited this ambiguity, presenting itself as a resistance group rather than a terrorist entity.

Additionally, there are geopolitical factors at play. Some Western policymakers have been reluctant to act against the BLA due to their broader strategic interests in the region. There are also concerns over human rights narratives, as some advocacy groups have framed the BLA's activities as part of a struggle against state repression.

## China's Role in the Blacklisting Efforts

Given the BLA's repeated targeting of Chinese nationals and investments in Balochistan, particularly those linked to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Beijing has taken an active role in pressing for international action. China's diplomatic weight at the UN Security Council could be pivotal in pushing for a formal designation.

In recent years, China has successfully lobbied for global terrorist designations against other extremist groups that posed a threat to its interests. Its growing counterterrorism cooperation with Pakistan could provide Islamabad with the necessary leverage to build international consensus on the BLA's status.



## The Road Ahead: Turning Condemnations into Action

With diplomatic efforts intensifying, the question remains: Will the international community take decisive action, or will Pakistan be left to combat this threat alone? While verbal condemnations and expressions of solidarity are important, they must translate into concrete measures—particularly the formal blacklisting of the BLA and the dismantling of its support networks.

The global response to Pakistan's demands will determine the effectiveness of its counterterrorism strategy moving forward. If international allies move beyond statements and impose financial, travel, and security restrictions on the BLA, it could mark a turning point in the fight against separatist terrorism. However, if global inaction persists, Pakistan may need to recalibrate its own counterterrorism policies, strengthening its security measures independently.

The Jaffar Express attack serves as a grim reminder of the evolving nature of terrorism in South Asia. The coming months will reveal whether global powers are truly committed to combating this growing

threat—or if Pakistan, once again, will have to bear the burden of this fight on its own.

## Conclusion: A Defining Moment in Pakistan's Fight Against Terrorism

The Jaffar Express attack stands as a stark reminder of the persistent security threats facing Pakistan. Targeting innocent civilians and security personnel, this brutal act was not only an assault on national stability but a challenge to regional peace. Once again, the resilience of the Pakistani state and its people has been put to the test.

The immediate crisis—the attack itself—was met with decisive action by Pakistan's security forces, whose bravery prevented an even greater tragedy. However, the incident has also raised pressing concerns about intelligence lapses, security vulnerabilities, and the evolving tactics of groups like the BLA. These challenges demand urgent and sustained countermeasures.

While global condemnation has reinforced Pakistan's long-standing calls to treat separatist militancy as an international threat, words alone will not suffice. This attack has exposed critical gaps in counter-

terrorism efforts, from sleeper cells operating undetected to financial networks sustaining militant operations. The road ahead must focus on strengthening intelligence coordination, securing vulnerable sites, dismantling terrorist funding channels, and ensuring that groups like the BLA find no haven—within or beyond Pakistan's borders.

Beyond security measures, this moment marks a crucial test for Pakistan's diplomatic offensive. The push to secure international recognition of the BLA as a terrorist organization is gaining momentum, with key allies voicing support. However, real progress will require sustained pressure, as geopolitical interests often complicate counterterrorism efforts.

Despite the tragedy, Pakistan must seize this moment as a turning point. Justice for the victims demands more than just retaliation—it requires a fundamental shift in strategy to ensure such attacks do not define the country's future. The resilience of the Pakistani people remains unshaken, and with committed international support, Pakistan can transform this crisis into an opportunity to fortify its security, diplomacy, and long-term stability.



# Terrorism and Pakistan: How Islamabad Captured and Handed Over the 2021 Kabul Attack Mastermind

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif welcomed Donald Trump's remarks, reaffirming Pakistan's steadfast commitment to global security. In an official statement, he asserted, "Pakistan has always been at the forefront of countering terrorism."

By Kanwal Munir

## Introduction

Pakistan has remained a crucial player in global counter-terrorism efforts, facing both internal insurgencies and transnational terrorist threats. Its geographical position, sharing borders with Afghanistan and Iran, has placed it at the center of regional security challenges. Over the years, Pakistan has undertaken significant military operations, intelligence-based actions, and diplomatic efforts to combat terrorism. The recent arrest of Mohammad Sharifullah, the alleged mastermind behind the 2021 Kabul airport bombing, underscores Pakistan's critical role in dismantling terrorist networks. This development has not only reinforced Pakistan's commitment to counterterrorism but has also drawn international recognition, particularly from the United States. As the country continues its fight against extremism, its contributions remain essential to global security and stability.

## Historical Context of Terrorism in Pakistan

The roots of terrorism in Pakistan can be traced back to the 1980s during the Soviet Afghan War. Pakistan, with support from the United States and other Western allies, became a staging ground for Mujahideen fighters opposing Soviet forces. This period saw the proliferation of militant groups, some of which later evolved into terrorist organizations.

The 1990s and early 2000s witnessed the rise of sectarian violence and the emergence of groups like Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). These organizations targeted both civilian and military establishments, leading to significant loss of life and property. The assassination of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto in 2007 underscored the severity of the terrorist threat within the country.



## Pakistan's Counter-Terrorism Measures

In response to escalating violence, Pakistan implemented a series of counter-terrorism strategies:

### 1. Military Operations

- **Operation Zarb-e-Azb (2014):** Launched in June 2014, this operation aimed to eliminate militant strongholds in North Waziristan. Approximately 30,000 Pakistani soldiers were involved, targeting both foreign and local militants. The operation led to the killing of around 3,500 militants and was deemed a tactical victory, significantly disrupting terrorist infrastructures.
- **Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad (2017):** Initiated in February 2017, this operation focused on consolidating the gains from previous military campaigns. It aimed to eliminate residual terrorist threats across Pakistan, emphasizing intelligence-based operations and effective border security management.

- **Operation Azm-e-Istehkam (2024):** Approved in June 2024, this operation represents a reinvigorated national counter-terrorism campaign. It seeks to address the resurgence of terrorist activities, particularly following the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan in 2021.

### 2. Legislative Actions

- **Anti-Terrorism Act (1997):** This act provides the legal framework to combat terrorism, including the establishment of special anti-terrorism courts. It empowers law enforcement agencies to take measures such as arrests, detentions, and the interception of communications to prevent and control terrorism.
- **National Action Plan (2014):** Following the tragic Army Public School attack in Peshawar, the government approved a 20-point plan to counter terrorism and extremism. This comprehensive framework includes measures like the regulation of madrassas, curbing hate speech, and implementing judicial reforms to expedite terrorism-related cases.



### 3. Intelligence Collaboration

Pakistan has enhanced cooperation with international intelligence agencies, facilitating the capture of high-profile terrorists. This collaboration has been instrumental in preempting potential attacks and dismantling terror networks.

## Apprehending and Extraditing the Mastermind of the Kabul Attack: Pakistan's Role and U.S. Stance

One of the most significant counter-terrorism breakthroughs in recent years has been the capture of Mohammad Sharifullah, the alleged mastermind behind the deadly 2021 Kabul airport attack. On August 26, 2021, the suicide bombing at Kabul's Hamid Karzai International Airport killed 13 U.S. service members and approximately 170 Afghan civilians. The attack, claimed by ISIS-K (Islamic State Khorasan Province), was one of the deadliest incidents during the chaotic U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan.

### Pakistan's Efforts in Capturing Sharifullah

In March 2025, a meticulously planned intelligence-led operation by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), in collaboration with U.S. agencies, resulted in the successful apprehension of Mohammad Sharifullah near the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. The operation was the culmination of months of intelligence gathering, surveillance, and coordination between Pakistani and American counter-terrorism forces. Sharifullah, a key figure in ISIS-K and the alleged mastermind behind the 2021 Kabul airport bombing, had been on the radar of intelligence agencies due to his involvement in orchestrating deadly attacks in the region.

Following his capture, Pakistani authorities engaged in high-level discussions with their U.S. counterparts to facilitate a smooth extradition process. The decision to hand over Sharifullah to the United States underscored Pakistan's unwavering commitment to global counter-terrorism efforts and its resolve to ensure that its territory is not used as a safe haven for militants. By cooperating with the U.S. on such a significant case, Pakistan aimed to strengthen

diplomatic ties and reinforce its position as a reliable partner in combating terrorism. The successful operation was widely hailed as a testament to Pakistan's growing capabilities in tackling transnational threats and disrupting terror networks operating within the region.

### 2021 Kabul Airport Bombing

The 2021 Kabul airport bombing was one of the deadliest attacks during the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, causing the deaths of 13 American service members and approximately 170 Afghan civilians. The attack, claimed by ISIS-K, occurred as thousands of desperate Afghans gathered at the airport, attempting to flee the country following the Taliban's takeover. The explosion caused widespread panic, further complicating evacuation efforts and exposing the volatile security situation in the region.

Following the attack, President Donald Trump, upon assuming office, directed CIA Director John Ratcliffe to make the capture of those responsible a top priority. Intelligence agencies intensified their efforts, focusing on key ISIS-K operatives suspected of orchestrating the bombing. High-level intelligence discussions between U.S. and Pakistani officials, including at the Munich Security Conference in February, played a critical role in coordinating operations. Reports indicate that the FBI Director also engaged in direct discussions with Pakistani authorities to track down the suspects. According to intelligence sources, Muhammad Sharifullah, also known as Jafar, was identified as a senior ISIS leader and one of the key masterminds behind the Kabul bombing. A U.S. official described him as the principal architect of the attack. Pakistani authorities reportedly informed their U.S. counterparts about his capture 10 days before the official announcement. His arrest and transfer to U.S. custody represent a significant milestone in counter-terrorism efforts, highlighting Pakistan's role as a critical partner in global security operations.

### U.S. Stance on Pakistan's Role in Sharifullah's Extradition

President Donald Trump publicly acknowledged Pakistan's crucial role in the arrest and extradition of Mohammad Sharifullah,

highlighting the country's commitment to global counter-terrorism efforts. In a formal address to Congress, Trump stated, "I want to thank especially the government of Pakistan for helping arrest this monster and ensuring that justice is served. Pakistan has been a strong ally in the fight against terrorism, and we must continue to stand with them in eliminating these threats." His remarks emphasized the importance of Pakistan's contributions in dismantling terrorist networks and reinforced the need for continued bilateral cooperation in security matters.

Trump's praise marked a notable shift in U.S.-Pakistan relations, which have historically seen fluctuations, particularly concerning counter-terrorism collaboration. While past administrations have expressed concerns about Pakistan's role in regional security, Trump's acknowledgment signaled a renewed level of trust and diplomatic engagement between the two nations. Security analysts viewed this as a step toward strengthening intelligence-sharing mechanisms, joint counter-terrorism initiatives, and improved bilateral relations. Pakistan's role in facilitating Sharifullah's capture was seen as a testament to its evolving counter-terrorism policies, reinforcing its stance as a responsible international partner. The recognition from the U.S. administration was also a morale booster for Pakistan's security forces, demonstrating the effectiveness of their ongoing efforts in combating extremism.

### Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's Response

In response to President Donald Trump's acknowledgment of Pakistan's role in the arrest and extradition of Mohammad Sharifullah, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif welcomed the remarks, reaffirming Pakistan's steadfast commitment to global security. In an official statement, he asserted, "Pakistan has always been at the forefront of countering terrorism. Our security forces and intelligence agencies have worked tirelessly to dismantle terror networks and ensure the safety of our citizens and the broader global community. We appreciate President Trump's recognition of our efforts and remain committed to working with international partners to eliminate terrorism in all its forms."

Shehbaz Sharif aimed to reinforce diplomatic ties with the U.S. while showcasing Pakistan's determination to combat terrorism at every level.

## Diplomatic Implications of the Extradition

The extradition of Mohammad Sharifullah to the United States is expected to serve as a catalyst in strengthening Pakistan-U.S. relations, paving the way for enhanced military cooperation, intelligence-sharing, and financial assistance for counter-terrorism initiatives. Washington, which has historically maintained a cautious stance toward Pakistan's counter-terrorism policies, is now likely to reassess its approach, potentially reinstating security aid and fostering a more collaborative partnership within the broader South Asian security framework.



Security experts suggest that this development could also bolster Pakistan's global standing, particularly in influential international forums such as the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and the United Nations. By demonstrating its commitment to dismantling terrorist networks, Pakistan positions itself as a responsible and proactive global security partner. This could lead to improved diplomatic ties, economic support, and a stronger voice in shaping regional counter-terrorism policies. The move reflects Islamabad's evolving security strategy, reinforcing its dedication to combating extremism at a global level.

## Challenges and Criticisms

Despite Pakistan's notable successes in counter-terrorism efforts, several challenges

continue to hinder its fight against extremism. These challenges are multifaceted, involving both domestic and international concerns.

### 1. Militant Safe Havens

One of the most contentious issues in Pakistan's counter-terrorism strategy is the alleged presence of militant safe havens within its borders. Critics argue that groups such as the Haqqani Network and remnants of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) have, at times, operated from Pakistani territory, complicating regional security dynamics. The United States and Afghanistan have repeatedly expressed concerns over the existence of these sanctuaries, alleging that elements within Pakistan's security establishment have turned a blind eye to certain groups. However, Pakistan has consistently denied these claims, highlighting its military

operations such as Zarb-e-Azb and Radd-ul-Fasaad, which have targeted militant strongholds in North Waziristan and other tribal areas.

### 2. Human Rights Concerns

Pakistan's counter-terrorism operations, particularly in its tribal regions, have faced criticism for causing civilian casualties and mass displacements. Large-scale military campaigns against militant groups have often led to significant collateral damage, raising concerns among human rights organizations. The displacement of local populations, destruction of infrastructure, and reported extrajudicial actions have fueled tensions between security forces and local communities. The Pakistani government has attempted to mitigate these concerns by launching rehabilitation

programs and resettlement initiatives, but balancing military action with humanitarian considerations remains a complex challenge.

### 3. Radicalization and Extremism

Beyond militant groups, the broader issue of radicalization poses a long-term threat to Pakistan's security. Extremist ideologies continue to gain traction among vulnerable segments of society, fueled by socio-economic disparities, lack of education, and political instability. The presence of madrassas (religious seminaries) that promote hardline interpretations of Islam has further complicated deradicalization efforts. In response, the government has sought to regulate religious institutions, revise school curricula to promote tolerance, and initiate programs aimed at rehabilitating individuals exposed to extremist ideologies. However, these measures require sustained political will and cooperation from religious leaders to be fully effective.

Despite these challenges, Pakistan's ongoing counter-terrorism efforts continue to evolve. The country has made strides in improving intelligence coordination, tightening border security, and engaging in international counter-terrorism partnerships. While obstacles remain, Pakistan's commitment to eliminating terrorism is evident in its latest operations and diplomatic engagements.

## Conclusion

Pakistan's role in counterterrorism has been both complex and critical. While the country has made significant strides in dismantling terrorist networks, challenges remain. The recent arrest and extradition of Mohammad Sharifullah, along with President Trump's recognition of Pakistan's efforts, underscores the nation's ongoing commitment to global security.

Moving forward, Pakistan must continue to strengthen its counter-terrorism framework through enhanced intelligence-sharing, regional cooperation, and socio-economic reforms to address the root causes of extremism. The road ahead is challenging, but with sustained efforts, Pakistan can continue to play a crucial role in the global fight against terrorism.



# Pakistan Gifts Kabul Airport Bomber to Trump: What Does It Mean For Pak-US Ties?



By Javed Mahmood

Pakistan has recently handed over Sharifullah, a Daesh commander, to the Trump administration for his key role in the Kabul Airport bombing in 2021. The successful capture of IS-K commander Mohammad Sharifullah underscores a long-standing reality in US-Pakistan ties: Washington's primary partner in Islamabad remains the military and intelligence establishment, not the civilian government. There is a general perception that Pakistan has gifted the Kabul Airport bomber to the Trump administration as a goodwill gesture to bolster the two countries' counter-terrorism bonds.

By publicly thanking Pakistan's military for its cooperation, President Donald Trump signaled that under his leadership, security collaboration will take precedence over political concerns—continuing past policies rather than marking a dramatic shift.

For Pakistan's military establishment, this is a diplomatic win. After years of strained ties—particularly following the US withdrawal from Afghanistan and Washington's growing alignment

with India—this successful operation positions Pakistan once again as an indispensable counterterrorism partner for the US.

Michael Kugelman, a leading expert on South Asia, framed the development in broader strategic terms. "Pakistan wants to leverage US concerns about terror in Afghanistan and pitch a renewed security partnership," he noted, adding that Islamabad's role in Sharifullah's capture should be viewed in this context.

## Trump Thanks Pakistan

United States President Donald Trump expressed his gratitude to the Pakistani government for apprehending the terrorist responsible for the deadly 2021 Kabul airport bombing. The attack, which took place during the chaotic withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan, resulted in the deaths of 13 American service members and around 170 Afghan civilians.

Speaking during his address to a joint

session of Congress, Trump recalled the devastating impact of the Abbey Gate bombing, which occurred as thousands of Afghans desperately tried to flee Kabul following the Taliban's takeover. "Three and a half years ago, a [Daesh] terrorist killed 13 American service members and countless others in the Abbey Gate bombing," Trump stated, emphasizing the tragedy that marked the final days of America's longest war. During his speech, which lasted an unprecedented one hour and 49 minutes—the longest in US presidential history—Trump made a significant announcement. "Tonight, I am pleased to announce that we have just apprehended the top terrorist responsible for that atrocity. And he is right now on his way here to face the swift sword of American justice," he declared, prompting a round of applause from lawmakers.

Trump then took a moment to acknowledge Pakistan's role in the capture. "I want to thank the Government of Pakistan for helping apprehend this monster. This is a very huge

day for the affected families,” he said, referring to the families of the fallen US troops. “This was a very momentous day for those 13 families, whom I got to know very well, whose children were murdered. What a horrible day.”

### A Familiar Pattern in US-Pakistan Engagement

Historically, Pakistan’s military has used counterterrorism cooperation to rebuild ties with Washington. This was evident after 9/11 when then-President Pervez Musharraf aligned with the US in its war on terror, cementing Pakistan’s role as a key ally. Now, with Sharifullah’s extradition, Pakistan’s military is once again positioning itself as Washington’s most reliable partner. The US, in turn, values this partnership for its ability to deliver on critical security priorities—counterterrorism, border security, and intelligence sharing.

In contrast, Pakistan’s civilian leadership remains entangled in domestic political conflicts, offering little in terms of a stable or strategic partnership from Washington’s perspective.

### A Reality Check for PTI Supporters in the US

For supporters of former Prime Minister Imran Khan, especially those in the US who had placed their hopes on Trump’s return, this episode serves as a stark reality check. Since Imran’s removal two years ago, PTI-affiliated groups in the US have lobbied Washington—first under Biden and then in anticipation of a Trump comeback—urging intervention in Pakistan’s political turmoil. They sought US pressure to secure Imran’s release and push for fresh elections.

While their efforts were largely ignored by the Biden administration, PTI activists campaigned for Trump in 2024, portraying him as a potential ally who might challenge Pakistan’s military establishment.

However, Trump’s address to Congress made no mention of Imran Khan, PTI, or Pakistan’s democratic process, reinforcing Washington’s long-standing position that its primary interest in Pakistan lies in security and counterterrorism, not domestic

politics. The message is clear: in the eyes of Washington, the road to Islamabad still runs through Rawalpindi.

### Sharifullah Admits His Role in Kabul Airport Bombing

A suspected militant involved in the 2021 Kabul airport suicide bombing—an attack that killed 13 U.S. service members and approximately 170 Afghan civilians—has been extradited to the United States to face criminal charges. Mohammad Sharifullah, who was apprehended over the weekend, confessed during an FBI interrogation to being a member of Daesh’s Afghan affiliate and admitted to participating in the deadly August 2021 attack, along with other terror operations, U.S. officials said.



President Donald Trump announced the arrest during his address to Congress on Tuesday night, stating, “I am pleased to announce that we have just apprehended the top terrorist responsible for that atrocity. He is now on his way here to face the swift sword of American justice.”

### Sharifullah’s Arrest and Legal Proceedings

Pakistani intelligence officials confirmed that Sharifullah, also known as Jafar, was captured in Balochistan province near the Afghan border after multiple failed attempts to detain him. Now facing federal charges in Virginia for providing material support to a foreign terrorist organization resulting in death, Sharifullah appeared in

court wearing a light-blue jumpsuit, listening to the proceedings through an interpreter. His public defender declined to comment, and he remains in custody ahead of a detention hearing scheduled for Monday.

### Impact of the 2021 Attack

The bombing at Kabul’s Abbey Gate occurred in the chaotic final days of the U.S.-led evacuation as thousands of Afghans attempted to flee the Taliban takeover. The attack not only resulted in significant loss of life but also triggered intense criticism of the Biden administration’s handling of the withdrawal, further shaking public confidence in its approach to ending the war.

### US Centcom Thanks Pakistan

The United States Central Command (US Centcom) has expressed its appreciation to Pakistan for aiding in the capture of Mohammad Sharifullah, the primary suspect behind the 2021 suicide bombing at Kabul Airport.

In an official statement, US Centcom reaffirmed the strong counterterrorism partnership between the U.S. and Pakistan, emphasizing their shared commitment to bringing terrorists to justice.

Posting on its official Urdu-language account on X, US Centcom acknowledged Pakistan’s role in the high-profile arrest,



stating: "We are grateful to Pakistan for its cooperation in the arrest of Sharifullah, the main suspect in the attack on the Abbey Gate of Kabul Airport in Afghanistan, and for working alongside the United States to ensure he faces justice."

## Sharifullah's Capture and Role in the 2021 Kabul Bombing

According to reports, Sharifullah was a key figure within Daesh-Khorasan (IS-K) and was captured in Pakistan's Balochistan province following intelligence provided by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). The militant reportedly admitted to scouting the airport's access points to facilitate the devastating August 2021 suicide bombing, which killed 13 U.S. service members and at least 170 Afghan civilians.

During his address to Congress, former U.S. President Donald Trump publicly announced the arrest, calling Sharifullah a "monster" and thanking Pakistan for its role in bringing him into custody.

## Links to Other Terrorist Activities

Beyond the Kabul attack, U.S. officials have linked Sharifullah to additional terror plots. The U.S. Justice Department revealed that he confessed to playing a role in the March 2024 attack on Moscow's Crocus City Hall, where he allegedly provided video instructions on handling AK-style rifles and other weapons.

Following his extradition, Sharifullah appeared before a federal court in Virginia, where legal proceedings are now underway.

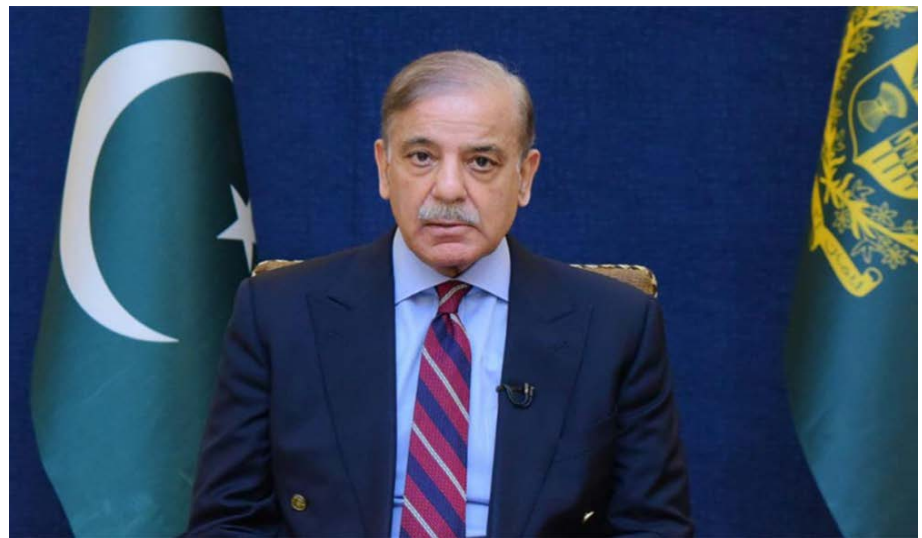
## Strengthening US-Pakistan Counterterrorism Cooperation

US Centcom's statement highlighted the broader security collaboration between Islamabad and Washington, underscoring their mutual interest in combating terrorism and maintaining regional stability. The successful operation signals renewed cooperation between U.S. and Pakistani

intelligence services in efforts to dismantle global terrorist networks and prevent future attacks.

## PM Shehbaz Thanks Trump for Recognizing Pakistan's Counterterrorism Efforts

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday expressed gratitude to U.S. President Donald Trump for acknowledging Pakistan's role in counterterrorism efforts across the region.



Trump's recognition came after Pakistani security forces successfully apprehended Sharifullah, a top-tier operational commander of ISKP and an Afghan national, in a major operation near the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. Sharing the news on his X account, PM Shehbaz highlighted the significance of the arrest and Pakistan's commitment to global security.

During his first address to Congress since returning to the White House for a second term, President Trump revealed that the individual responsible for the 2021 Abbey Gate bombing, which killed 13 U.S. service members, had been captured with Pakistan's assistance and was en route to the U.S. to face justice.

"Tonight, I am pleased to announce that we have just apprehended the top terrorist responsible for that atrocity... I want to thank especially the government of Pakistan for helping arrest this monster," Trump declared.

## Pakistan's Commitment to Counterterrorism

Responding to Trump's remarks, PM Shehbaz reaffirmed Pakistan's longstanding role in counterterrorism, stating: "Pakistan has always played a critical role in efforts to deny safe havens to terrorists and militant groups operating against any country."

He emphasized Pakistan's unwavering commitment to combating terrorism in all its forms, noting that the country has sacrificed over 80,000 soldiers and civilians

in the fight against extremist threats.

"The resolve of our leadership and our people remains unflinching in eradicating the menace of terrorism from our country. We will continue to partner closely with the United States in securing regional peace and stability," the prime minister assured.

## What is the Abbey Gate Bombing?

As the Taliban seized control of Kabul on August 15, 2021, U.S. authorities set an August 31, 2021, deadline for the complete withdrawal of American troops, marking the end of a two-decade-long military presence in Afghanistan.

However, on August 26, as thousands of Afghans desperately sought to flee the country, a devastating suicide bombing occurred at Abbey Gate, one of the main entry points to Kabul's Hamid Karzai International Airport. The explosion killed nearly 200 people, including 13 American

service members. A subsequent U.S. investigation identified the bomber as Abdul Rahman al-Logari, a long-time member of the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP). He had been imprisoned until the Taliban's takeover, during which thousands of ISKP militants were released.

In retaliation, the U.S. launched a drone strike in Kabul three days later, claiming to have targeted an ISKP commander. However, the attack mistakenly killed 10 civilians, including seven children. After initially defending the strike, U.S. officials later admitted the mistake and issued an apology.

## Who Is Sharifullah, and How Was He Captured?

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif confirmed that the arrested suspect, Mohammad Sharifullah, is an Afghan national but did not disclose details about the operation leading to his capture. A government source said that the operation reflected "strong cooperation" between U.S. and Pakistani security forces in counterterrorism efforts. The source revealed that Pakistani authorities began tracking Sharifullah after receiving intelligence from the U.S. a few days before his arrest.

"He was arrested in late February near the Pakistan-Afghanistan border in an operation solely conducted by Pakistani security agencies. Following his capture, he was extradited to the U.S. for legal proceedings," the source stated. The arrest supports Pakistan's long-standing claim that Afghanistan remains a hub for terrorist activity, the source added, speaking anonymously due to the sensitivity of the matter.

Pakistan has repeatedly criticized the Taliban-led Afghan government for failing to curb the presence of militant groups that launch attacks across the border. However, the Afghan government has consistently denied these accusations.

According to CNN, CIA Director John Ratcliffe raised the issue of Sharifullah's capture during his first call with Pakistan's intelligence chief, Lt. Gen. Asim Malik, shortly after assuming office. Sharifullah is facing prosecution in the United States. FBI Director Kash Patel confirmed his arrival, stating: "Terrorist Jafar is officially in U.S. custody."

## What Does This Mean for Pakistan-U.S. Relations?

In recent years, Pakistan's relationship with the U.S. has remained lukewarm due to Washington's declining focus on the region and Islamabad's growing ties with China, America's key global rival. However, Maleeha Lodhi, Pakistan's former ambassador to the U.S., believes the operation highlights ongoing security cooperation between the two nations.

"Despite a lack of deep political engagement, military-to-military ties remain strong, as they have throughout this roller-coaster relationship," Lodhi told the media.

Qamar Cheema, an international affairs expert, echoed this view, stating that the U.S. continues to view Afghanistan through the lens of its relationship with Pakistan.

"Pakistani officials argue that illegal U.S.-made weapons left behind in Afghanistan are being used by armed groups to launch attacks in Pakistan and the wider region," Cheema explained. "This operation underscores the need for both nations to work together to ensure regional stability."

He added that the Biden administration had been less engaged with Pakistan, but this latest development suggests that President Trump's administration recognizes Islamabad's strategic importance. However, Lodhi cautioned that while the arrest may open a window for improving ties, a broader diplomatic reset is needed.

"The relationship between Pakistan and the U.S. has been at a low point since the 2021 U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan. While this arrest highlights continued cooperation, it remains limited in scope. Pakistan is not a priority for Trump's foreign policy, but his acknowledgment of Pakistan's role presents an opportunity to redefine the relationship," she said.

"That said, it is important not to overstate the impact of this single event. The larger relationship remains in need of a significant reset."

## Trump Calls for Retrieval of U.S. Military Equipment Left in Afghanistan

U.S. President Donald Trump has renewed calls for the recovery of billions of dollars' worth of military equipment left behind in Afghanistan following the 2021 withdrawal.

During his first Cabinet meeting of his second term, Trump strongly criticized the exit strategy, describing it as a "disastrous withdrawal." He specifically highlighted the abandonment of "billions, tens of billions of dollars' worth of equipment," including brand-new military trucks.

Trump suggested that the United States should explore ways to reclaim the equipment, which he claimed is now regularly displayed by the Taliban. He also called for the removal of military leaders responsible for overseeing the withdrawal.

## A Call for Re-Invasion?

In his remarks, Trump went even further, suggesting that the U.S. should consider re-entering Afghanistan to reclaim the abandoned military assets.

"We left billions, tens of billions of dollars worth of equipment behind—brand-new trucks. You see them display it every year, waving their flag, talking about America," Trump said. "That's all top-of-the-line equipment. I think we should get a lot of it back."

Trump also claimed that the Taliban, now in control of Afghanistan, has been selling American-made military hardware, including 777,000 rifles and 70,000 armored vehicles, turning Afghanistan into "one of the biggest sellers of military equipment in the world."

## Challenges and Implications

Trump's remarks have sparked debate over whether such a recovery effort would even be feasible. Defense experts argue that retrieving the equipment would require military intervention, raising the possibility of re-invading Afghanistan—an option with major geopolitical and military implications.



Historically, the U.S. military has often abandoned heavy equipment in combat zones due to the high cost of retrieval. Sensitive assets, such as aircraft, are typically demilitarized before being left behind, rendering them nonfunctional.

Additionally, much of the military hardware in question was originally supplied to the Afghan National Army (ANA) as part of a broader U.S. military assistance program. Between 2005 and 2021, the U.S. provided \$18.6 billion worth of equipment to the ANA, including vehicles, weapons, aircraft, and communication systems. When the Afghan government collapsed in August 2021, approximately \$7 billion worth of U.S.-supplied military equipment fell into Taliban hands.

## A Risky Proposal

While Trump's comments have reignited concerns over the U.S. withdrawal, experts warn that attempting to recover the abandoned military assets would be extraordinarily complex and could lead to significant consequences. Afghanistan has a long history of resisting foreign invasions, having repelled both the Soviet Union in the 1980s and the United States in the 21st century.

Whether the Trump administration will take any concrete steps toward retrieving the equipment remains uncertain, but the discussion adds a new layer of controversy to an already contentious chapter in U.S. foreign policy.

## Pakistan Warns UNSC of TTP's Growing Influence as Regional Terror Group

As Pakistan grapples with a surge in terrorist attacks, the country has cautioned the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) that the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) is evolving into an umbrella organization for regional terrorist groups. Pakistan's Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador Munir Akram, issued the warning during a UNSC meeting on Afghanistan. He emphasized that the greatest security threat to the region stems from more than 20 terrorist organizations operating from Afghan soil.

## Escalating Terror Threat in Pakistan

Ambassador Akram's remarks come amid an alarming rise in terrorist activity in Pakistan. According to the Global Terrorism Index 2025 report, Pakistan has become the world's second-most terrorism-affected country, moving up from fourth place.

The report highlights a 45% surge in terrorism-related deaths, rising from 748 in 2023 to 1,081 in 2024, marking one of the sharpest global increases. The number of terrorist attacks more than doubled, from 517 in 2023 to 1,099 in 2024, exceeding the 1,000 mark for the first time since the index's inception.



Experts link the rise in terrorist attacks to the Afghan Taliban's return to power in Kabul, which has emboldened militant groups operating in the region.

## Pakistan's Counterterrorism Efforts

Despite the escalating threats, Pakistan's security forces remain resolute in their counterterrorism operations. Last week, they successfully foiled a terrorist attack on Bannu Cantonment in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, eliminating all 16 militants involved. However, the operation also claimed the lives of five soldiers and 13 civilians.

Additionally, Pakistani forces, acting on intelligence from the U.S. Central Intelli-

gence Agency (CIA), arrested Daesh-Khorasan operative Mohammad Sharifullah, also known as Jafar, and handed him over to the United States. Sharifullah is the main suspect in the Abbey Gate suicide bombing at Kabul Airport in 2021, which killed 170 Afghans and 13 U.S. troops.

## 'Kabul is Complicit'

Ambassador Akram underscored that the TTP, with an estimated 6,000 fighters, is the largest terrorist group operating from Afghan soil.

"With safe havens near our border, the TTP has carried out numerous attacks on Pakistan's soldiers, civilians, and institutions, causing hundreds of casualties," Akram stated.

He further accused Afghanistan's Taliban-led government of tolerating and even facilitating the TTP's cross-border terrorist operations.

"We have evidence that the Kabul authorities are not just turning a blind eye but are complicit in the TTP's cross-border attacks," he said.

Akram also warned that the TTP is actively collaborating with other terrorist organizations in Afghanistan, including the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) and the Majeed Brigade, both of which aim to destabilize Pakistan and sabotage its economic ties with China. Pakistan's warning to the UNSC underscores the urgent need for global action against the growing terror threat emanating from Afghanistan.

# A Fractured Alliance: Trump's Hardline Stance on Ukraine and the Global Fallout

By Romana Afsheen

On February 8, 2025, the highly anticipated White House meeting between U.S. President Donald Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy took place against a backdrop of escalating tensions, both on the battlefield in Ukraine and within the diplomatic corridors of Washington. This meeting was set to be a defining moment for U.S.-Ukraine relations, particularly as Trump had taken office with a starkly different approach to foreign policy compared to his predecessor, Joe Biden.

The discussion was expected to address several key issues, including the continuation of military aid, the future of U.S. support for Ukraine's war efforts against Russia, and the broader implications for NATO and European security. However, the meeting quickly took a controversial turn, leading to a sharp exchange between the two leaders, a temporary suspension of U.S. military aid to Ukraine, and an unprecedented diplomatic rift.

The fallout from this encounter was immediate and profound, sending shockwaves through Washington, Kyiv, and European capitals. Trump's criticism of Zelenskyy's stance on the war, his reluctance to offer continued financial support without reassurances, and his insistence on a more immediate resolution to the conflict left Ukraine in a precarious position. The developments that followed signaled a potential shift in the geopolitical landscape, raising concerns among Western allies about the future of U.S. involvement in European security.

This cover story delves into the lead-up to this explosive meeting, the key moments during the White House discussions, and the aftermath that reshaped U.S.-Ukraine relations. It explores the immediate consequences of Trump's decision to pause military aid, the reactions from global leaders, and the potential long-term implications of this diplomatic confrontation.



## The Build-Up: Diverging Expectations and Rising Tensions

Leading up to the February 8 meeting, tensions between Trump and Zelenskyy had been growing. Trump had made it clear throughout his campaign and early days in office that he wanted a reassessment of U.S. foreign aid commitments, particularly concerning Ukraine. Unlike the Biden administration, which had been one of Kyiv's strongest allies in its war against Russia, Trump expressed skepticism about the financial and military burden placed on the U.S. to support the Ukrainian war effort.

In contrast, Zelenskyy arrived in Washington with high expectations. Since Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, Ukraine had relied heavily on Western military aid, intelligence sharing, and economic support. The war had reached a critical stage, with Ukrainian forces facing increasing pressure from Russia's relentless offensives. For Zelenskyy, securing continued U.S. assistance was a matter of national survival.

However, Trump's foreign policy approach had always been centered on what he termed "America First," emphasizing domestic priorities over international commitments. His skepticism of NATO

and his insistence on European nations taking on more responsibility for Ukraine's defense had already raised alarms in Brussels and Kyiv. As a result, Zelenskyy's visit to Washington was seen as a crucial diplomatic mission to persuade Trump to maintain U.S. support.

What followed in the Oval Office meeting, however, was far from what Ukraine had hoped for. Instead of reassurances, Zelenskyy found himself facing an assertive Trump who was unwilling to offer unconditional aid and demanded that Ukraine rethink its long-term strategy for the war.

## A Heated Encounter in the Oval Office

The February 8, 2025, meeting between President Donald Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was initially expected to be a diplomatic discussion centered on military aid and U.S. support for Ukraine. However, it quickly turned into a contentious exchange, exposing deep divisions between the two leaders.

As the meeting commenced in the Oval Office, Zelenskyy outlined Ukraine's current situation on the battlefield, emphasizing the continued need for American military aid to counter Russian advances. He detailed how Ukrainian forces were



facing increasing shortages of ammunition, air defense systems, and armored vehicles—resources that had been steadily provided by the U.S. and NATO partners during Joe Biden's presidency.

Zelenskyy's pitch was clear: without ongoing support, Ukraine's ability to defend itself and push back Russian aggression would be severely weakened. He urged Trump to reaffirm U.S. commitment to Ukraine, highlighting the strategic importance of defeating Russia not just for Ukraine but for global stability.

However, Trump's response was far from supportive. According to White House officials present at the meeting, Trump was visibly frustrated by Zelenskyy's appeal for more aid. Instead of promising continued assistance, Trump expressed strong dissatisfaction with Ukraine's progress in the war, questioning whether additional American resources were being used effectively.

### **Trump's Sharp Criticism of Ukraine's War Strategy**

At one point, Trump reportedly interrupted Zelenskyy, saying, "You keep asking for more, but where are the results? The American people will not keep paying for a war that has no end in sight."

Trump's stance reflected his broader skepticism about the Ukraine conflict, which he had frequently voiced during his campaign. He had repeatedly argued that European nations should take on more responsibility for Ukraine's defense and suggested that Kyiv should pursue a negotiated settlement with Moscow instead of prolonging the war.

As the discussion grew more tense, Trump accused Zelenskyy of failing to consider diplomatic solutions. "You're saying this war could go on for years? That's unacceptable. There needs to be a plan to end it," he told the Ukrainian leader.

Zelenskyy, taken aback by Trump's remarks, pushed back, arguing that negotiations with Russia under the current circumstances were impossible. "Mr. President, we are not the ones prolonging the war. It is Russia that refuses to withdraw and continues its attacks on our cities and civilians," Zelenskyy stated firmly.

Trump, however, was unconvinced. He reiterated that he was "not going to sign blank checks for a war that doesn't have a clear endgame" and suggested that Ukraine should seek alternative solutions, even if it meant difficult compromises.

### **Trump's Decision to Pause Military Aid**

The discussion reached a breaking point when Trump abruptly announced that he would pause U.S. military aid to Ukraine, pending a full review of American assistance and Ukraine's war strategy. This decision sent shockwaves through Zelenskyy's delegation, who had expected reassurances rather than a potential withdrawal of support.

White House officials later confirmed that Trump's decision was driven by his desire to pressure Ukraine into reassessing its military approach and exploring diplomatic options. However, the immediate effect of the pause was clear: Ukraine would no longer receive crucial weapons shipments until Trump was satisfied with a new plan.

Zelenskyy reportedly tried to salvage the meeting by emphasizing the existential threat Ukraine faced, but Trump remained resolute. "I will not put up with this anymore," he said, according to one senior White House official. "It's time for a different approach."

The meeting ended on a tense note, with Zelenskyy leaving the White House without the assurances he had hoped for. The repercussions of this exchange were immediate, with officials in Washington, Kyiv, and across Europe scrambling to respond to Trump's unexpected shift in policy.

### **Fallout and Global Reactions**

#### **Shockwaves in Kyiv and Washington**

As news of Trump's decision to pause military aid spread, the reaction in Kyiv was one of deep concern and alarm. Ukrainian officials, already struggling with supply shortages, viewed this as a potentially catastrophic shift in U.S. policy. For President Zelenskyy, who had traveled to

Washington in hopes of securing continued American support, the outcome of the meeting was a worst-case scenario.

In an emergency press conference in Washington, Zelenskyy sought to downplay the tension between himself and Trump while reaffirming Ukraine's determination to continue fighting. "Ukraine is grateful for all the support we have received, and we believe that our partnership with the United States remains strong," he said, carefully avoiding any direct criticism of Trump. However, his frustration was evident when he added, "For us, this war is not about politics. It is about survival."

Back in Kyiv, government officials scrambled to assess the potential consequences of Trump's decision. Defense analysts warned that even a temporary pause in military aid could have severe repercussions on the battlefield, where Ukrainian forces relied heavily on U.S.-supplied weapons, ammunition, and intelligence support.

The Ukrainian parliament, Verkhovna Rada, held an emergency session to discuss alternative strategies in the event that Trump permanently halted aid. Some lawmakers urged European allies to step in and fill the gap, while others expressed hope that pressure from the U.S. Congress could reverse Trump's decision.

### **Reactions from the U.S. Political Establishment**

In Washington, Trump's announcement sparked a fierce political battle. Congressional Democrats and some Republicans strongly condemned the move, arguing that it would embolden Russia and weaken Ukraine's ability to defend itself.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer criticized Trump's decision as "a reckless abandonment of a key ally in the fight against authoritarian aggression." House Speaker Mike Johnson, a Republican who had previously supported Ukraine aid, expressed concerns about the strategic implications, stating, "Halting aid at this critical moment could have long-term consequences for global stability."

However, Trump's allies defended his decision, framing it as a necessary reassessment of U.S. foreign policy. Senator J.D. Vance, a staunch Trump supporter, echoed

the president's concerns about "endless funding for a war with no clear plan for victory," while Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene called for a full audit of all U.S. aid sent to Ukraine.

The debate over Ukraine aid reignited partisan tensions, with Trump's critics accusing him of playing into Vladimir Putin's hands. Former national security officials warned that a sudden withdrawal of U.S. support could lead to Russian gains on the battlefield, putting Ukraine at a significant disadvantage.



### European Allies Express Alarm

The reaction from European leaders was equally swift and critical. Countries like Poland, Germany, France, and the United Kingdom had closely aligned their policies with Washington's stance on Ukraine, and Trump's decision caught them off guard.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz warned that "any signal of wavering commitment from the West will only embolden Moscow." French President Emmanuel Macron called for an emergency meeting of European leaders to discuss contingency plans in case Trump followed through with a long-term reduction in U.S. support.

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak emphasized that the U.K. would continue supporting Ukraine regardless of U.S. policy changes, but acknowledged that losing American military backing would be a severe blow to Ukraine's war effort.

Meanwhile, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg expressed concerns about the broader implications of Trump's decision. "NATO unity is crucial at this moment.

Any divisions will be exploited by Russia," he warned, urging Trump to reconsider his position.

### Moscow Welcomes Trump's Decision

In stark contrast to the alarm in Kyiv and European capitals, Moscow celebrated the news. Russian officials interpreted Trump's decision as a sign that U.S. commitment to Ukraine was weakening, a development that could shift the balance of power in the conflict.

Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov stated that "Russia has always maintained that Western military support only prolongs the conflict. If the U.S. is reconsidering its approach, it is a step in the right direction."

Some Russian analysts suggested that Trump's move might encourage Ukraine to engage in peace talks under conditions more favorable to Moscow. Others speculated that if Trump won a second term, he might push for a settlement that would leave parts of occupied Ukraine under Russian control.

### A Growing Rift Between Trump and Zelenskyy

The February 8 meeting not only resulted in a policy shift but also marked a visible deterioration in Trump and Zelenskyy's personal relationship. Trump's public remarks following the meeting underscored his frustration with the Ukrainian leader's insistence on continued aid.

During a press conference at the White

House, Trump criticized Zelenskyy's war stance, saying, "We're not going to keep funding a war where the leader himself says it could go on indefinitely. That's not how you negotiate peace." He further doubled down on his call for Ukraine to seek a resolution with Russia, stating, "The American taxpayer will not bankroll an endless war. Ukraine needs to start thinking about solutions, not just more weapons."

Trump's comments suggested that he saw Zelenskyy as unwilling to consider diplomatic options, a stance that conflicted with Ukraine's insistence that peace talks could only happen if Russia fully withdrew from occupied territories. Zelenskyy, for his part, remained diplomatic in his responses but made it clear that Ukraine would not be pressured into accepting a deal on unfavorable terms. In an interview with a Ukrainian news outlet, he stated, "We cannot negotiate our sovereignty. We will continue to fight for our land with or without certain allies."

### Congressional Efforts to Restore Aid

Despite Trump's decision, bipartisan efforts were already underway in Congress to pass legislation that would ensure continued military assistance to Ukraine, regardless of the White House's stance.

Senators Lindsey Graham (R) and Chris Murphy (D) introduced a bill aimed at securing additional funding for Ukraine, arguing that support for Kyiv was vital for U.S. national security. "If we abandon Ukraine now, we are telling every authoritarian regime that aggression goes unpunished," Murphy said.

Some lawmakers sought to attach Ukraine aid provisions to larger defense spending bills, forcing Trump's hand. Others urged European allies to take a more prominent role in providing financial and military support.

However, with Trump's influence over the Republican Party still strong, it remained uncertain whether Congress would be able to override his decision.

### A Critical Moment for Ukraine

As Ukraine braced for the consequences of Trump's pause on military aid, the coming



weeks were expected to be critical. Without immediate replacements for halted U.S. supplies, Ukrainian forces faced increased pressure to conserve resources.

The pause also raised fears that Ukraine's military momentum could slow down, giving Russia an opportunity to exploit the situation. Analysts warned that if Trump's decision became permanent, it could mark a turning point in the war—one that favored Moscow.

For Zelenskyy, the diplomatic challenge ahead was formidable. He now had to navigate not just the battlefield but also an increasingly uncertain geopolitical landscape, where the U.S., under Trump's leadership, was no longer the unwavering ally it had been under Biden.

## Long-Term Consequences and the Future of U.S.-Ukraine Relations

The fallout from Trump's contentious meeting with Zelenskyy and his decision to pause military aid sent shockwaves through international politics. Beyond the immediate concerns of Ukraine's battlefield capabilities, the move raised critical questions about the future of U.S.-Ukraine relations, the strength of NATO, and the global balance of power.

In this final section, we explore the long-term consequences of Trump's policy shift, including its impact on Ukraine's war effort, the political battle within the U.S., the response from European allies, and the broader geopolitical ramifications.

## 1. A Precarious Future for Ukraine

### Ukraine's Military Challenges Without U.S. Support

For Ukraine, the most pressing concern was the impact of the aid pause on its ongoing war effort. Since the start of the full-scale Russian invasion in 2022, Ukraine had depended heavily on American military assistance, including advanced weaponry, intelligence sharing, and financial support.

With U.S. aid in jeopardy, Ukrainian military officials faced difficult choices. Would they have to ration ammunition and prioritize defensive operations? Could they maintain their counteroffensive efforts without fresh supplies?

One immediate consequence was the need to rely more heavily on European allies. However, European nations—despite their vocal support—lacked the industrial capacity to replace U.S. military aid on a 1:1 scale. While Germany, the U.K., and France pledged continued support, the reality was that without U.S. weapons systems like Patriot missile batteries and long-range artillery, Ukraine's ability to hold the front lines could weaken.

## 2. The Battle in Washington: Will Congress Override Trump?

### Bipartisan Push for Continued Support

Despite Trump's decision, a bipartisan group in Congress worked tirelessly to keep Ukraine aid flowing. Many lawmakers—both Democrats and Republicans—argued that abandoning Ukraine would embolden Russia, China, and other authoritarian regimes.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, a staunch supporter of Ukraine, warned that “stopping aid now is an invitation for Putin to expand his aggression beyond Ukraine.” Meanwhile, Democratic leaders framed Trump's policy shift as a betrayal of U.S. commitments to democracy.

Lawmakers proposed new legislation aimed at bypassing Trump's authority and guaranteeing Ukraine a continued stream of funding. However, with Trump's hold over the Republican Party growing stronger, passing such measures proved to be a significant challenge.

### Trump's America First Agenda Gains Traction

At the same time, Trump's decision energized the “America First” faction within the Republican Party. Many of his supporters viewed foreign aid—especially

military assistance—as an unnecessary drain on U.S. resources. Trump doubled down on this sentiment in campaign rallies, telling his base:

“We're done fighting endless wars. We need to secure OUR borders, not Ukraine's.”

This rhetoric resonated with a significant portion of the American public, particularly among those who felt that domestic issues like inflation, crime, and immigration should take precedence over foreign conflicts.

The 2025 political landscape in Washington was now split between those who viewed Ukraine's survival as essential to U.S. national security and those who believed America should prioritize its own interests and disengage from foreign wars.

## 3. European Allies Take the Lead—Or Do They?

With Trump signaling a shift away from unwavering U.S. support for Ukraine, European leaders faced an urgent question: Could they step up to fill the void?

### Increased European Defense Spending

Germany, France, and the U.K. announced plans to boost military aid, with Germany pledging an additional €10 billion in security assistance. The European Union also considered expanding the European Peace Facility, a fund used to finance military support for Ukraine.

However, European leaders privately worried about the long-term sustainability of their support. Without U.S. leadership, there was a risk of fractures within NATO and divisions within the EU itself.

### The “Trump Effect” on NATO

Trump's decision also raised concerns about NATO's future unity. During his presidency from 2017 to 2021, he had frequently criticized NATO, questioning why the U.S. should bear the bulk of its defense spending. Now, with Trump once again signaling a reduced U.S. commitment, European leaders braced for potential further disruptions.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg attempted to reassure members, stating, “NATO remains committed to Ukraine, regardless of individual political changes.” But behind closed doors, concerns grew over whether Trump would take even more drastic steps—such as reducing U.S. troop presence in Europe or withdrawing from NATO altogether.

## 4. Russia’s Strategic Advantage and the Global Balance of Power

### Putin’s Calculated Patience

For Russian President Vladimir Putin, Trump’s decision to pause military aid was a strategic victory.

For years, Putin had sought to fracture Western unity on Ukraine. Now, with Trump undermining support from within the U.S., Putin saw an opportunity to press his advantage. Russian military offensives increased in intensity, especially in eastern Ukraine, where Ukrainian forces were already stretched thin.

The Kremlin’s propaganda machine also went into overdrive, portraying Trump’s move as proof that the West was losing interest in Ukraine. Russian state media suggested that Kyiv should accept territorial losses and negotiate a settlement before losing even more ground.

### China Watches Closely

Beyond Europe, China closely monitored

the situation. Would Trump’s retreat from Ukraine signal a broader shift in U.S. global engagement?

Chinese officials speculated that if Trump was willing to scale back support for Ukraine, he might also be hesitant to defend Taiwan in the event of a conflict. This perception could embolden Beijing in its ambitions regarding the self-governing island, raising concerns among U.S. allies in the Indo-Pacific.

## 5. The Road Ahead: A New World Order?

As the dust settled from the February 8 meeting, one thing was clear: Trump’s approach to Ukraine had reshaped global geopolitics.

- For Ukraine, the challenge was survival. Zelenskyy now faced the enormous task of securing alternative sources of military aid while maintaining morale on the battlefield.
- For the U.S., the political divide over Ukraine aid deepened, with Congress caught between Trump’s “America First” stance and bipartisan calls to continue supporting Kyiv.
- For Europe, the pressure to lead the fight against Russian aggression grew, but doubts lingered over whether they could maintain long-term military support without Washington’s backing.
- For Russia, Trump’s decision was a

strategic win, potentially paving the way for increased territorial gains.

- For China and other authoritarian regimes, Trump’s reluctance to maintain U.S. commitments abroad raised questions about the reliability of American alliances worldwide.

As the world adapted to this new reality, one question loomed large: Would Trump’s decision mark the beginning of Ukraine’s decline—or could Zelenskyy and his allies find a way to counteract it?

Only time would tell.

## Conclusion: A Defining Moment in History

The February 8 meeting between Donald Trump and Volodymyr Zelenskyy will likely be remembered as a defining moment in the ongoing war in Ukraine. What was initially expected to be a routine diplomatic visit turned into a political and strategic earthquake, shifting the trajectory of U.S.-Ukraine relations and redefining global alliances.

With Trump pausing military aid and openly challenging Zelenskyy’s war stance, the future of Ukraine became more uncertain than ever. The world now stood at a crossroads: would Western allies rally to ensure Ukraine’s survival, or would Trump’s decision mark the beginning of a broader shift away from U.S. interventionism?

As the conflict raged on, one thing was certain—the world was watching.





# Macron's Nuclear Gamble: A New Dawn for European Defense Amid Rising Russia Threat



By Romana Afsheen

## A Shift in European Security Strategy

French President Emmanuel Macron has ignited a bold new debate in European defense by proposing to extend France's nuclear deterrence to its allies—challenging long-held security doctrines amid growing uncertainty over NATO's future. This move, announced during a pivotal speech, comes against the backdrop of rising geopolitical tensions, growing concerns over U.S. reliability in NATO, and Russia's continued aggression in Ukraine. Macron's proposal has ignited intense discussions within the European Union (EU), forcing policymakers to reassess the continent's security framework.

This initiative, if realized, could redefine the balance of power in Europe, strengthen the EU's strategic autonomy, and reshape its defense commitments. However, it also presents significant challenges, including political, financial, and military hurdles that need careful consideration.

This two-part article delves into the history of France's nuclear policy, the motivations behind Macron's proposal, its reception in Europe, and its broader implications for global security.

## Historical Context: France's Nuclear Deterrence Policy

France's nuclear deterrent, known as force de frappe (strike force), has been central to its defense policy since the Cold War. Established under President Charles de Gaulle in the 1960s, this doctrine was based on the idea of national strategic autonomy, ensuring that France retained independent control over its nuclear arsenal.

Unlike the United Kingdom, which integrates its nuclear weapons into NATO's collective defense framework, France has always maintained an independent nuclear force. This independence stems from de Gaulle's skepticism about U.S. reliability in ensuring European security, a sentiment that continues to shape France's defense policies today.

The French nuclear arsenal consists of submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) and air-launched cruise missiles, forming a robust second-strike capability. France has consistently maintained that its nuclear forces exist solely to protect its "vital interests," a term that has remained deliberately ambiguous.

Macron's proposal marks a departure from this doctrine, suggesting that France may be willing to extend its nuclear umbrella beyond its own borders.

## Macron's Proposal: A Strategic Shift

On March 5, 2025, President Macron delivered a speech outlining his vision for European defense. Addressing both domestic and international audiences, he stated:

"Our nuclear deterrent protects us: it's complete, sovereign, and uniquely French. But, responding to the historic call of the future German Chancellor, I have decided to open the strategic debate on the protection of our allies on the European continent through our [nuclear] deterrence."

This statement signaled Macron's willingness to discuss a European nuclear deterrent under French leadership. While he did not propose placing France's nuclear forces under collective European command, he made it clear that France was prepared to take on a greater role in defending its neighbors.

The proposal comes amid growing uncertainty over NATO's future, particularly as concerns rise about a potential U.S. admin-

istration under Donald Trump scaling back commitments to European defense. As a response, Macron argues that Europe must take greater responsibility for its own security. His vision involves a nuclear-sharing framework in which willing European nations contribute to the financial costs of maintaining France's nuclear deterrent while benefiting from its protection.

Germany's future chancellor, Friedrich Merz, has already indicated interest in exploring such agreements with both France and the United Kingdom. While this approach could lead to deeper defense integration, it also raises significant questions about sovereignty, strategic alignment, and financial responsibility.

## Reactions from European Leaders

Macron's proposal has received mixed reactions across Europe. Some leaders have welcomed it as a necessary step toward greater European strategic autonomy, while others have expressed concerns about its feasibility and implications.

### Germany's Response:

Germany, which has long relied on the U.S. nuclear umbrella, is cautiously optimistic about Macron's proposal. Friedrich Merz has called for discussions on nuclear-sharing arrangements, emphasizing that such a move would complement, rather than replace, NATO's existing nuclear deterrence strategy.

### Eastern European Concerns:

Countries like Poland and the Baltic states, which face the greatest direct threat from Russia, remain wary. They continue to see NATO, and particularly the United States, as the most credible guarantor of their security. However, they are open to discussions on strengthening European defense capabilities.

### United Kingdom's Position:

As the only other nuclear power in Europe, the United Kingdom plays a crucial role in this discussion. While London has traditionally aligned its nuclear policy with NATO, there is growing interest in exploring how Britain and France could cooperate to enhance European security.

## EU Leadership:

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has stressed the need for a coordinated European defense strategy. She recently announced a plan to mobilize €800 billion in defense investments, reflecting the EU's commitment to strengthening its military capabilities.

## Challenges and Considerations

While European leaders weigh the merits of this unprecedented shift, the plan is not without obstacles. Its success depends on overcoming several legal, financial, and strategic hurdles. While Macron's proposal is ambitious, it faces several significant challenges.

### 1. Legal and Strategic Doctrines:

France's nuclear doctrine is designed to protect its own sovereignty. Expanding it to cover European allies would require fundamental legal and strategic adjustments, raising complex questions about command and control.

### 2. Financial and Logistical Hurdles:

Extending nuclear deterrence is expensive. France would likely require financial contributions from participating nations to maintain and modernize its arsenal. The logistical aspects, including basing rights, deployment protocols, and decision-making authority, would also need to be addressed.

### 3. Public Opinion:

Nuclear policy is politically sensitive. Public opposition to nuclear weapons remains strong in several European countries, including Germany, where past governments have resisted calls for nuclear-sharing agreements. Convincing European citizens of the need for an expanded deterrent will require careful political messaging.

### 4. NATO Implications:

Macron's initiative must be carefully coordinated with NATO to avoid duplication or fragmentation. The alliance's existing nuclear deterrent, led by the United

States, plays a central role in European security, and any changes must complement rather than undermine NATO's strategy.

## Russia's Response: A Heightened Security Dilemma

The Kremlin has strongly criticized Macron's proposal, viewing it as an escalation of military posturing. Russian officials have warned that expanding Europe's nuclear deterrence could lead to further destabilization and increase the risk of conflict.

In a statement, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov accused France of engaging in a "dangerous provocation," adding that such moves could push Europe "closer to the brink of a new world war." Moscow's concerns stem from its longstanding opposition to NATO expansion and its belief that a more nuclear-capable Europe would threaten Russia's strategic interests.

Additionally, some Russian analysts suggest that this development may prompt Moscow to deploy more nuclear-capable weapons along its western borders, heightening the already tense standoff between Russia and NATO-aligned European states.

President Macron's proposal to extend France's nuclear deterrence to European allies represents a historic shift in European defense strategy. While it has sparked important discussions about the future of European security, it also raises critical questions about legal frameworks, financial costs, NATO's role, and potential escalations with Russia.

As European leaders continue these discussions, the coming months will be crucial in determining whether a collective European nuclear deterrent is a feasible and desirable path forward.

## Potential Consequences of an Expanded Nuclear Umbrella

If France were to extend its nuclear deterrence to European allies, the strategic consequences would be profound. This



decision would not only redefine Europe's security architecture but also influence NATO's nuclear strategy, U.S.-EU relations, and global geopolitical stability.

While some European nations view this shift as a necessary step toward self-reliance, others worry about increased tensions with Russia and potential fractures within NATO. Below, we explore the possible repercussions of France's proposal across key areas.

## 1. NATO's Role and Transatlantic Relations

One of the most immediate concerns surrounding Macron's proposal is how it aligns with NATO's existing nuclear strategy. Currently, the U.S. provides the primary nuclear deterrent for Europe, deploying nuclear weapons in several NATO countries under the nuclear sharing arrangement.

If France takes on an expanded nuclear role, several questions emerge:

- Will France's deterrence complement or compete with NATO's nuclear doctrine?
- How will the U.S. react to a more self-reliant European defense strategy?
- Will European nations remain committed to NATO's nuclear-sharing agreement, or will they pivot toward a French-led model?

The U.S. response to Macron's proposal will be crucial. Under President Joe Biden, Washington has supported European strategic autonomy as long as it strengthens NATO rather than undermines it. However, if a future U.S. administration—potentially led by Donald Trump—reduces America's military commitments to NATO, European nations might view France's offer as an essential fallback.

Germany's potential participation in a French nuclear-sharing arrangement could signal a gradual shift away from American dependence. However, such a transition would require extensive negotiations within NATO, given that nuclear sharing currently involves U.S. weapons stationed in countries like Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy, and Turkey.

A more independent European nuclear deterrent could reduce reliance on the U.S., but it might also lead to divisions within NATO, especially if countries like Poland and the Baltic states remain skeptical of France's ability to deter Russian aggression.

## 2. European Defense Industry and Strategic Autonomy

Macron's nuclear deterrence proposal is closely tied to his broader vision of European strategic autonomy. In recent years, France has championed efforts to develop a more self-sufficient European defense industry, advocating for reduced dependence on American weapons and military systems.



Expanding France's nuclear umbrella could provide the political momentum needed to accelerate joint European defense projects, including:

- The Future Combat Air System (FCAS), a joint fighter jet program between France, Germany, and Spain.
- The Main Ground Combat System (MGCS), a Franco-German project to develop next-generation tanks.
- Greater cooperation on missile defense systems and intelligence-sharing mechanisms.

A stronger European defense industry, supported by nuclear deterrence, could allow the EU to become a more independent global military power. However, such ambitions come with significant financial costs.

France currently spends around €5.6 billion annually on its nuclear arsenal, and any expansion to cover European allies would require additional investments. Macron has hinted that European nations benefiting from French deterrence may need to contribute financially, similar to NATO's burden-sharing model.

The key challenge will be convincing countries like Germany, which has historically been reluctant to increase military spending, to commit significant resources to a French-led nuclear defense initiative.

## 3. The Russian Response: Escalation or Deterrence?

Moscow has reacted with alarm to the

possibility of France extending its nuclear umbrella. Russian officials have framed the move as an aggressive shift in European military policy, arguing that it would escalate tensions and increase the likelihood of conflict.

In a recent speech, Russian President Vladimir Putin warned that any European attempt to develop an independent nuclear deterrent could be seen as a direct provocation. The Kremlin has already signaled possible countermeasures, which may include:

- Increased nuclear deployments near European borders: Russia could place additional tactical nuclear weapons in Kaliningrad, Belarus, or occupied Ukrainian territories to counterbalance a French-led deterrent.
- Heightened military exercises and

- missile tests: Moscow may conduct more frequent military drills involving nuclear-capable weapons to signal its ability to retaliate.
- Strengthened alliances with China and other partners: Russia may seek closer strategic cooperation with China and other nations to offset the perceived threat of a stronger European defense framework.

One of the greatest risks is that miscalculations on either side could trigger a nuclear standoff, similar to Cold War-era crises like the Cuban Missile Crisis. A French-led nuclear deterrent must therefore be carefully calibrated to deter aggression without provoking an arms race.



## 4. The Role of Germany and Other European Allies

For Macron's nuclear vision to succeed, Germany's participation is crucial. As Europe's largest economy and a key NATO member, Germany holds significant influence over the continent's defense policies.

However, Germany has long maintained a pacifist stance on nuclear weapons. Despite hosting U.S. nuclear warheads as part of NATO's deterrence strategy, Berlin has avoided direct nuclear involvement. Macron's proposal forces Germany to confront difficult questions:

- Should Germany contribute financially to France's nuclear deterrence?
- Would this arrangement replace or complement NATO's existing framework?

- How would the German public react to deeper nuclear commitments?

Beyond Germany, other European nations must also weigh their positions. Eastern European states like Poland and the Baltic nations may remain hesitant to rely on France's deterrence, preferring the U.S. nuclear umbrella. Meanwhile, Italy, Spain, and the Netherlands could play a balancing role, supporting European defense initiatives while maintaining close ties with NATO.

## 5. The Future of European Security: Possible Scenarios

Depending on how France and its European allies proceed, several scenarios

could emerge in the coming years:

### Scenario 1: France Becomes Europe's Nuclear Protector

In this scenario, Germany and other key European nations formally enter a nuclear-sharing agreement with France. France maintains control over its arsenal but provides security guarantees to European allies, who in turn contribute financially. NATO remains intact, but Europe gains greater autonomy in its defense strategy.

### Scenario 2: NATO Remains the Primary Nuclear Umbrella

If European nations remain skeptical of France's proposal, NATO's U.S.-led nuclear deterrence remains the dominant framework. France continues to maintain its independent deterrent, but no formal European nuclear-sharing agreement emerges.

### Scenario 3: A Fragmented European Defense Approach

Political disagreements prevent a unified approach, leading to a fragmented security landscape. Some nations align more closely with NATO, while others explore alternative defense mechanisms. This could weaken European security cohesion and create vulnerabilities.

### Scenario 4: A New European Defense Alliance Outside NATO

A more radical outcome could involve France leading a separate European defense alliance, independent from NATO. This would be a controversial move, potentially leading to tensions with the U.S. and divisions within the EU.

## Conclusion: A Defining Moment for European Security

Macron's proposal to extend France's nuclear deterrence represents a watershed moment in European security policy. As geopolitical tensions rise, particularly with Russia's aggression in Ukraine and concerns about U.S. commitment to NATO, European leaders must carefully navigate this complex issue.

While France's nuclear umbrella could offer a pathway to greater European strategic autonomy, its success hinges on political consensus, financial commitments, and careful coordination with NATO. As Europe stands at a nuclear crossroads, the choices made today could redefine the continent's security for generations. The question remains: Will this gamble make Europe safer or drive it closer to the edge of conflict?

Ultimately, Macron's nuclear gamble reflects a broader shift in European defense thinking—one that acknowledges the need for self-reliance while balancing longstanding alliances. Whether this marks the beginning of a truly independent European military force or a complementary pillar within NATO remains to be seen.



# Europe fending for itself ‘America First’ plays havoc



By Naqi Akbar

Among the many disastrous fallouts of the new republican administration under Trump on the prevailing world order has been a slow and steady disintegration of the western military alliances like the ‘five eyes’, NATO and similar arrangements elsewhere. Though there is no official word on them, but going by the dominant trends in the Oval office, the days of military dominant United States in the global arena might be numbered in the coming days.

The unceremonious welcome to the Ukrainian President in the White House and the consequent falling out of the military alliance between the NATO and Ukraine are enough the alarm bells for the European capitals to take note of and accordingly change their proverbial ‘course’.

The North Atlantic Treaty Alliance (NATO), which came into being after the second World War to counter the Soviet military presence quantified in the form of the now defunct Warsaw Pact, was almost

like a European military alliance in the tradition of a similar lineup of forces during the old Crusade times. That alliance, though never taking part in the Cold War days and engaged in near war scenarios, but in the case of Afghanistan and Iraq; its participation meant that it was needed by the leadership especially the US administrations overseeing the above-mentioned war efforts.

The European nations best represented in the form of NATO and EU have been in the forefront of even peacetime arrangement like the famous JCPOA formalized between Iran and United States; an arrangement, which the Iranian Reform Camp still nostalgically wants to restore. Lately the bone of contention between United States and Russia has been US insistence to grant the Ukrainian state the status of NATO member state.

Come the Republican administration under Trump, the fortunes built over years seem to be in doldrums now. The virtual end of

the war between Russia and Ukraine, coupled with peace talks in Riyadh under the watchful eyes of MBS shows where the priorities of the US administration lay now. It is the Abraham Accord pillars; namely the modernizing Saudi Arabia, coupled with bandwagon UAE and above them the Israeli system.

The EU or NATO seem to be odd men out, with clear cut signals from the United States that they now have to fend for themselves in terms of defence shield, budgeting for the military expenses as well as looking at ways they can reorganize their defences against an increasingly assertive Russia under Putin.

These rearrangements might still take many months and a year so to materialize, but have the potential to disturb the military plans at hand for responding to the immediate tasks and threats that might come the Western alliances' way. Of late, all the B-52 flights to the Middle East are taken care of by the NATO airfields situated in the

United Kingdom and Germany. Future arrangements mean that the subsidizing role these arrangements have been playing of late will not be available to the United States in the case of any new conflict.

The reasons for that emanate from the single minded 'austerity' drive by Trump administration that United States should cease to subsidize the military alliances to save a few bucks. As a matter of fact, with the 'noble' exception of Israel, most of the military arrangements with various countries in the world have been put on hold or drastically cut down.

Apparently, the United States Treasury seem to benefit from these budgetary cuts, but in the process, it has dealt a deep blow to the decades of military alliances so painstakingly cultivated by both the side, namely the traditional Europe and the new world best personified in the form of United States.

Nation states-based arrangements, as advocated by the US administration, can be analyzed on the basis of benefiting the nation state in question. But at the same time, it is opening the door for retaliatory steps by the former military allies. It is like that a landing or storage of ammunition in the previous arrangement might have been subsidized with the military alliance budgetary setups. In the new arrangements, the United States might well have to in turn fend for itself, what it is going to do for parking; taxing and fuel charges for its fleets of combat jets; usually parked in

European destinations for rapid deployment to Udaid Qatar facility in case of any volatile situation in Middle East.

The budgetary arrangements in the form of executive Orders might look like a very wise move, but in a world of interdependence, the final analysis means still more costs to incur. The America First arrangement; first in the form of trade wars via new tariff walls, and later in the form of budgetary cuts, might divert a few resources for better use at home by the Republicans, but it does not diminish the external imperatives; like keeping a military presence for one's own benefit and for the allies. With a matter-of-fact demeanor that United States is no longer willing to foot the NATO budget to the extent, it used to, apart from pushing the European states to fend for themselves, but will also make them realize to keep their respective security policies independent of the United States in the long run. That can mean that instead of being in tune with the United States in support of Israel and keeping the Muslim bloc and the Russian bloc in the tight corner, they might employ a more creative foreign policy to not just disengage from the US prescription, but also a different geo political world from their perspective.

The next few months if for the United States mean saving a lot of bucks; may also mean trade wars from the former allies like NATO states, NAFTA states especially Canada and an alienated conglomerate of former allies; who might not be listening as

dutifully as they used to be.

Sometimes, it is the will to self-destruct that forces civilizations and great powers to implode. It has been the trend in the world since the days when it organized itself into city states, nation states, and alliances. United States' move away from the world state has been a process which had taken root after the Bush Jr era, the Democratic administrations' withdrawal has been steadier. The anti-war sentiments as characterized during the Obama years have been less intrusive for the allies and the world at large. However, the current reelection of Republicans to the Oval office has been an earthquake of sorts for all concerned.

The first world emerging out of the debris of this earthquake will be a different world. To make the most of these advantages, countries in the Third World, like Pakistan, need to have authentic visionaries as against managers. That is not just true for Pakistan; rather, countries like India, Iran, and Turkey can make the most of it. In the coming days, if not for the pleasure of the reformists, Europeans might find it fit to have a common cause with the Theocracy in Iran, a modern caliphate in Turkey, and a hopefully better democratic arrangement in Pakistan. These things might bode well for nations in distress like the Syrians.

Conclusively, there are dividends out of every crisis. The US withdrawal from the coffers might well be the beginning of the end of the unipolar world, finally a better world to 'live in'.





# Torkham Border: Pakistan and Afghanistan Agree on Ceasefire

By Hina Kashif

The Torkham Border, one of the most significant crossings between Pakistan and Afghanistan, has long been a focal point for trade, cultural exchange, and political disputes between the two neighboring countries. Situated in the Khyber Pass, the border has seen both cooperation and conflict over the centuries. Its importance cannot be overstated, as it connects the South Asian subcontinent with Central Asia and the Middle East. Recently, a ceasefire agreement between Pakistan and Afghanistan has drawn renewed attention to the Torkham Border, highlighting the strategic and historical significance of this critical juncture. This article will explore the history, the ceasefire agreement, and the importance of the Torkham Border for both nations.

## Historical Background of the Torkham Border

The history of the Torkham Border is deeply intertwined with the history of the Khyber Pass and the geopolitical dynamics of the region. The Khyber Pass, located in the mountainous terrain of the Hindu Kush, has been a critical trade and invasion route for millennia. It has served as a gateway for Central Asian traders, military expeditions, and conquerors, including the famous invasions of Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan, and the British Empire.

Historically, the region around the Torkham Border was part of the larger territories of the various empires that ruled the subcontinent and Central Asia. Before the establishment of the modern-day borders of Pakistan and Afghanistan, the area was a part of British India, with the frontier largely shaped by imperial interests. The creation of Pakistan in 1947 led to the demarcation of borders between the newly formed state and Afghanistan. The Torkham Border became the official crossing point between the two countries, following the Durand Line, a contentious border agreement between the British Raj and Afghanistan in 1893.



The Durand Line was drawn to define the border between British India and Afghanistan, but it has remained a point of contention between Pakistan and Afghanistan ever since. Afghanistan never formally accepted the line as the international boundary, leading to numerous border disputes throughout the 20th century. The Torkham crossing, being one of the primary points of access between the two countries, became a flashpoint for diplomatic tensions and skirmishes, especially in the context of the volatile political climate in both nations.

## Torkham Border during the 20th Century

Throughout the 20th century, the Torkham Border continued to play a pivotal role in regional geopolitics. After the independence of Pakistan in 1947, the border with Afghanistan remained a source of dispute. Afghanistan's refusal to recognize the Durand Line and its support for Pashtun nationalism, which sought greater autonomy for Pashtun-dominated regions on both sides of the border, fueled tensions.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the significance of the Torkham Border increased dramatically due to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. Pakistan, under President Zia-ul-Haq, played a crucial role in

supporting the Afghan Mujahideen fighters who were resisting Soviet occupation. The United States, in partnership with Pakistan, provided military and financial support to these insurgent groups, making the Torkham Border a crucial transit point for weapons, supplies, and fighters. The flow of refugees also increased, as millions of Afghans sought refuge in Pakistan, further complicating the situation.

During this period, the Torkham Border witnessed regular military confrontations and cross-border skirmishes. The region was heavily militarized, with both Pakistan and Afghanistan deploying forces along the border. Despite the heavy presence of troops, the porous nature of the border and the rugged terrain made it difficult to control smuggling, trafficking, and insurgent movements.

The end of the Soviet-Afghan war in 1989 and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 did not lead to peace in the region. Afghanistan descended into a civil war, which further destabilized the border area. The rise of the Taliban in the mid-1990s added a new layer of complexity to the dynamics of the Torkham Border. Pakistan, which had initially supported the Taliban, found itself caught between Afghan internal politics and its own strategic interests in the region.

## The Torkham Border in the Post-9/11 Era

The events of September 11, 2001, marked a new chapter in the history of the Torkham Border. Following the 9/11 attacks, the United States launched a military campaign in Afghanistan, toppling the Taliban regime and beginning the War on Terror. Pakistan, a key ally of the United States in this effort, became a crucial partner in the campaign against terrorism. The Torkham Border, being the main entry point for supplies, equipment, and personnel into Afghanistan, became a focal point for logistical operations during the war.

The border was also a key route for the movement of refugees, militants, and supplies. Smuggling and the movement of insurgents remained persistent challenges for both Pakistan and Afghanistan. The border was heavily guarded, with both sides building walls and fencing to control movement. This effort to physically demarcate the border was particularly evident in the mid-2000s, when Pakistan began constructing a fence along the border to prevent cross-border movement of militants and to curb the illegal flow of goods.

In 2010, the Torkham Border was closed temporarily by Pakistan in an effort to assert control and stop the flow of insurgents. This move highlighted the tension between the two nations, particularly as cross-border terrorism and militant groups such as the Taliban and the Haqqani Network used the porous border to launch attacks.

## Recent Ceasefire Agreement: A New Dawn for Torkham Border Relations

In recent years, both Pakistan and Afghanistan have taken steps toward improving their relationship, particularly after the rise of new regional dynamics, including the evolving role of the United States and the growing influence of China in the region. The agreement on a ceasefire at the Torkham Border is a significant step in rebuilding diplomatic ties and reducing the risk of armed conflict between the two nations.

In 2023, Pakistan and Afghanistan announced a ceasefire agreement after months of tense exchanges and occasional military clashes along the border. The agreement, brokered by both governments and international mediators, aims to ease tensions and foster cooperation on border security, trade, and refugee management. The ceasefire is seen as an attempt to stabilize the region and ensure that the border does not become a hotspot for militant activity.

Both countries agreed to enhance coordination between their security forces and to jointly monitor border security to prevent militant groups from exploiting the porous border. The ceasefire also aims to allow for the safe movement of people and goods, which is crucial for both nations' economies. This agreement has brought a renewed sense of optimism, as it lays the groundwork for future cooperation and peace-building efforts between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

## The Strategic Importance of the Torkham Border

The Torkham Border holds immense strategic value for both Pakistan and Afghanistan. Geographically, it connects Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province to Afghanistan's Nangarhar province. The border crossing is part of the larger Khyber Pass, which has historically been a critical link between the Indian subcontinent and Central Asia.

- 1. Economic Importance:** The Torkham Border is a vital trade route for both nations. For Pakistan, it offers access to Afghanistan, and through Afghanistan, to Central Asia and beyond. Conversely, for Afghanistan, Torkham provides the most direct route to Pakistan's major ports, particularly Karachi. Trade between the two countries, although often hampered by security concerns, is crucial for their economies.
- 2. Political Significance:** The Torkham Border has been a focal point of the geopolitical rivalry between the two countries. The issue of border demarcation, the legitimacy of the Durand

Line, and the movement of refugees have all been points of contention. The ceasefire agreement is seen as an important step in reducing tensions and building a more cooperative relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

- 3. Security Concerns:** The border is also crucial for regional security. It has been a point of infiltration for militant groups such as the Taliban and the Haqqani Network. Both Pakistan and Afghanistan have had difficulties in managing security along the border, with insurgents using the porous border to carry out attacks and smuggle weapons. A peaceful Torkham Border would enable both nations to better address the threats posed by these groups.
- 4. Cultural and Social Connections:** The people living on both sides of the Torkham Border share cultural, ethnic, and linguistic ties. The Pashtun population, which spans both countries, has often found itself divided by the international boundary. The resolution of border issues and the easing of tensions could help foster greater people-to-people connectivity and reduce the strain on cross-border social relations.

The Torkham Border stands as a symbol of the complex and intertwined relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Its history, marked by colonial legacies, military conflicts, and political disputes, highlights the challenges both countries face in achieving lasting peace and stability. The recent ceasefire agreement between the two nations represents a hopeful turn in this long-standing conflict, offering an opportunity to build a more cooperative and secure future. However, the real test will lie in the implementation of this agreement and the willingness of both countries to work together for the benefit of their peoples.

For both nations, the Torkham Border is not just a line on a map but a critical lifeline for trade, security, and cultural exchange. As both countries navigate the challenges of the 21st century, the Torkham Border will continue to be an important touchstone for their bilateral relations and regional peace.



# Global Inflation and Pakistan: How Rising Prices Are Squeezing Households

By Saad Jadoon

Inflation has become one of the most pressing economic challenges of the 21st century, affecting both developed and developing nations. For Pakistan, a country already grappling with structural economic issues, the global inflation crisis has exacerbated existing vulnerabilities, leading to skyrocketing prices, declining purchasing power, and widespread public discontent. As we look ahead to 2025, the situation remains precarious, with households bearing the brunt of rising costs.

## The Global Inflation Crisis: Causes and Trends

Inflation, defined as the sustained increase in the general price level of goods and services, has been driven by a confluence of factors in recent years. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted global supply chains, leading to shortages of critical goods such as semiconductors, medical equipment, and agricultural products. As economies reopened, pent-up demand collided with constrained supply, driving prices upward.

The Ukraine-Russia war, which began in February 2022, further exacerbated the crisis. Ukraine, a major exporter of wheat and sunflower oil, and Russia, a key supplier of energy and fertilizers, saw their exports disrupted, leading to global food and energy shortages. According to the World Bank, global food prices rose by 23% in 2022, while energy prices increased by 50%. These shocks have had a cascading effect on economies worldwide, particularly in developing countries like Pakistan.

Central banks in developed economies, such as the U.S. Federal Reserve and the European Central Bank, responded to inflation by raising interest rates. While these measures have helped curb inflation in some regions, they have also increased the cost of borrowing for developing countries, many of which are already burdened by high levels of debt.

## Pakistan's Economic Landscape: A Perfect Storm

Looking ahead to 2025, the global economic landscape is expected to remain volatile. While inflation in developed economies may stabilize, developing countries like Pakistan will face significant challenges. The IMF projects that Pakistan's inflation rate could moderate to 15-20% by 2025, provided the government implements necessary reforms and stabilizes global commodity prices. However, this projection is contingent on several factors, including geopolitical stability, climate conditions, and domestic policy decisions.

One of the key drivers of inflation in Pakistan is the cost of energy. The country relies heavily on imported oil and gas, which account for a significant portion of its import bill. If global energy prices remain high, Pakistan's inflation rate could stay elevated, further squeezing household budgets. To



mitigate this risk, the government must accelerate its transition to renewable energy sources, such as solar and wind power, and invest in energy efficiency measures.

Another critical factor is food security. Pakistan's agricultural sector has been underperforming due to a lack of investment, outdated farming practices, and the impacts of climate change. If these issues are not addressed, food prices could continue to rise, exacerbating poverty and malnutrition. The government must prioritize agricultural reforms, including the adoption of modern technologies, improved irrigation systems, and better access to credit for farmers.

The IMF deal, while necessary, is not a panacea for Pakistan's economic woes. The austerity measures required by the IMF, such as subsidy cuts and tax increases, have already caused significant pain for households and businesses. If these measures are not accompanied by structural reforms, they could lead to social unrest and political instability. The government must strike a delicate balance between fiscal discipline and social protection, ensuring that the burden of adjustment is shared equitably.

In the long term, Pakistan's economic prospects will depend on its ability to address deep-rooted structural issues. These include improving governance, reducing corruption, and creating an enabling environment for private sector investment. The country's young and growing population presents a unique opportunity, but only if it is equipped with the skills and education needed to compete in the global economy.

## The Impact of Inflation on Urban and Rural Households

To understand the real-world impact of inflation, let's examine how it affects different segments of Pakistani society. In urban areas, middle-class families are struggling to cope with rising rents, utility bills, and transportation costs. Many have been forced to cut back on discretionary spending, such as dining out and entertainment, while others have taken on additional jobs or loans to make ends meet.

In rural areas, the situation is even direr. Farmers, who form the backbone of Pakistan's agricultural economy, are facing skyrocketing input costs for seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides. At the same time, they are receiving lower prices for their crops due to market distortions and middlemen. This has led to a vicious cycle of debt and poverty, with many farmers abandoning their land and migrating to cities in search of better opportunities.

## Impact on Pakistani Households: A Daily Struggle

The most immediate and visible impact of inflation has been on the daily lives of ordinary Pakistanis. Food prices, in particular, have soared, with staples such as wheat, rice, and vegetables becoming unaffordable for many families. A report by the World Food Programme (WFP) found that nearly 40% of Pakistan's population is facing moderate to severe food insecurity.

Energy prices have also risen sharply, with the government raising fuel and electricity tariffs to meet IMF conditions. For households already struggling to make ends meet, these increases have been devastating. Many families have been forced to cut back on essential expenses, such as education and healthcare, while others have fallen into poverty. Unemployment and wage stagnation have further compounded the problem. Despite having a large and youthful population, Pakistan has failed to create enough jobs to absorb new entrants into the labor market. Those who are employed often earn low wages that fail to keep pace with inflation. As a result, millions of Pakistanis are finding it increasingly difficult to afford basic necessities.

## The Role of International Aid and Cooperation

Given the scale of Pakistan's economic challenges, international aid and cooperation will be crucial in the coming years. Organizations such as the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, and United Nations have already provided financial and technical assistance to support Pakistan's recovery efforts. However, more needs to be done to address the root causes of the crisis and build long-term resilience. One area where international cooperation can make a significant impact is climate change. Pakistan is one of the most vulnerable countries to the effects of climate change, with frequent floods, droughts, and heatwaves devastating its economy and infrastructure. By providing funding and expertise, the international community can help Pakistan adapt to these challenges and transition to a more sustainable development model.

## The Role of Technology in Mitigating Inflation

Technology can play a transformative role in addressing inflation. For instance, digital payment systems and e-commerce platforms can reduce transaction costs and improve market efficiency. Similarly, precision agriculture technologies can help farmers increase yields and reduce input costs. The government should prioritize investments in digital infrastructure and innovation to harness the potential of technology.

## Lessons from Other Countries

Pakistan can learn from the experiences of other countries that have successfully managed inflation. For example, Indonesia implemented targeted subsidies and social protection programs to shield vulnerable populations from the impact of rising prices. Similarly, Vietnam invested in agricultural modernization and export diversification to boost economic resilience. These case studies offer valuable insights for Pakistan's policymakers.

## The Importance of Public Awareness and Education

Public awareness and education are critical in addressing inflation. Citizens need to understand the causes of inflation and the measures being taken to address it. The government should launch awareness campaigns and provide financial literacy programs to empower people to make informed decisions.

## Conclusion

The global inflation crisis has placed immense pressure on Pakistan's economy and its citizens. Rising food and energy prices, coupled with stagnant wages and high unemployment, have eroded living standards and pushed millions into poverty. While the IMF deal has provided temporary relief, it has also highlighted the need for long-term structural reforms.

To address these challenges, Pakistan must focus on reducing its reliance on imports, investing in agriculture and industry, and improving governance. At the same time, the international community must recognize the disproportionate impact of global crises on developing countries and provide greater support. Only through a combination of domestic reforms and global cooperation can Pakistan hope to overcome its economic challenges and build a more resilient future.

The global inflation crisis has exposed the fragility of Pakistan's economy and the vulnerability of its citizens. Rising prices, stagnant wages, and high unemployment have created a perfect storm, pushing millions into poverty and eroding living standards. While the IMF deal has provided temporary relief, it is not a long-term solution. Pakistan must undertake bold and comprehensive reforms to address its structural vulnerabilities and build a more resilient economy.

As we look ahead to 2025, the challenges and opportunities are immense. With the right policies and investments, Pakistan can overcome its economic challenges and create a brighter future for its citizens. The international community must also play its part in providing support and cooperation to help developing countries navigate the global inflation crisis. Only through collective action can we hope to build a more equitable and sustainable world.

Despite these challenges, Pakistan also has opportunities to build a more resilient economy. If properly educated and trained, the country's young and growing population could become a powerful driver of economic growth. Similarly, Pakistan's strategic location and natural resources offer potential for increased trade and investment.



# SBP Monetary Policy Committee supports structural reforms for sustainable growth

*High-frequency indicators – including sales of automobiles, POL products, and cement, as well as import volumes, credit to the private sector, and purchasing managers' index – show that economic activity is gaining further traction.*



By Ayesha Bhatti

At its recent meeting, the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) decided to keep the policy rate unchanged at 12 percent. The Committee noted that inflation in February 2025 turned out to be lower than expected, mainly due to a drop in food and energy prices. Notwithstanding this decline, the Committee assessed the risks posed by the inherent volatility in these prices to the current declining trend in inflation. At the same time, core inflation is proving to be more persistent at an elevated level, and thus uptick in the food and energy prices may lead to increase in inflation. Meanwhile, economic activity continues to gain traction, as reflected in the latest high-frequency economic indicators. Moreover, the MPC viewed that some pressures on the external account have emerged due to rising imports amidst weak financial inflows. On balance, the MPC assessed the current real interest rate

to be adequately positive on a forward-looking basis to sustain the ongoing macroeconomic stability.

The Committee noted the following key developments since its last meeting. First, the current account turned into a deficit of \$0.4 billion in January 2025 after remaining in surplus over the past few months. This, coupled with weak financial inflows and ongoing debt repayments, led to a decline in the SBP's FX reserves. Second, large-scale manufacturing output declined during H1-FY25, despite a substantial m/m increase of 19.1 percent in December 2024. Third, the shortfall in tax revenues from the target widened further in January and February. Fourth, both consumer and business sentiments improved during the latest waves. And lastly, on the global front, uncertainty has increased significantly amidst the ongoing tariff escalations, which

may have implications for global economic growth, trade, and commodity prices. In response to these developments, central banks in advanced and emerging economies have recently slowed the pace of their monetary easing.

Based on these developments, the Committee noted that the impact of a sizable earlier reduction in the policy rate is now materializing. The MPC reiterated the importance of maintaining a cautious monetary policy stance to stabilize inflation within the target range of 5 – 7 percent. This, along with structural reforms, is essential to achieve sustainable economic growth.

## Real Sector

High-frequency indicators – including sales of automobiles, POL products, and cement, as well as import volumes, credit to

the private sector, and purchasing managers' index – show that economic activity is gaining further traction. Moreover, the latest pulse surveys show improved consumer and business confidence. Nonetheless, the Committee noted that the momentum depicted by these indicators is yet to fully reflect in LSM data, which contracted by 1.9 percent in H1-FY25. The drag in LSM growth is mainly coming from a few low-weight sub-sectors, which have more than offset the positive momentum in key sub-sectors like textiles, pharmaceuticals, automobiles, and POL. At the same time, in the agriculture sector, the latest information, including satellite imagery, indicates the subsiding of downside risks to

tances, along with relatively moderate growth in exports, proved instrumental in financing the elevated imports. The MPC assessed that these developments are broadly in line with its expectation, and reaffirmed the FY25 current account balance projection of a surplus and a deficit of 0.5 percent of GDP. Nonetheless, net financial inflows remained weak, mainly due to a shortfall in planned official inflows. At the same time, the MPC noted that the majority of debt repayments for the year have already been made. With lower debt repayments and the expected realization of planned official inflows in the remaining months of FY25, the SBP's FX reserves are likely to reach above \$13

fiscal balance close to the target for FY25. However, meeting the target for primary balance would be challenging. The MPC also emphasized the importance of the continued fiscal consolidation to support macroeconomic stability and reiterated the need for fiscal reforms targeted at widening the tax base.

## Money and Credit

The broad money (M2) growth remained unchanged at around 11.4 percent y/y since the last MPC meeting. The Committee noted a compositional shift in the NDA, as the government's borrowing from the banking system rebounded and private sector credit (PSC) showed greater than seasonal net retirement. The latter was anticipated, given the aggressive lending by banks during Q2-FY25 to avoid ADR-related taxation. However, the MPC noticed that PSC growth, at 9.4 percent, is still significant, reflecting the impact of the ease in financial conditions and ongoing economic recovery. On the liability side, the growth of the currency in circulation increased, while deposit growth further decelerated since the last MPC.

## Inflation

Led by conducive supply-side dynamics, headline inflation further declined to 1.5 percent y/y in February 2025 from 2.4 percent in the preceding month. The steep fall in the prices of perishable food items reinforced the impact of sufficient stocks of major non-perishable items on overall food prices. Similarly, energy prices continued to benefit from the moderation in global oil prices, stable exchange rate, and favorable base effect. However, core inflation is still at an elevated level and is proving stickier than anticipated. Inflation expectations of consumers and businesses are also showing a mixed picture. Given these developments, the Committee assessed inflation to come down further before gradually inching up and stabilizing within the target range of 5 – 7 percent. This inflation outlook, however, is susceptible to risks emanating mainly from volatility in food prices, timing and magnitude of energy price adjustments, additional revenue measures, protectionist policies in major economies, and an uncertain outlook of global commodity prices.



Rabi crops after the recent rainfalls. The MPC expects economic growth to recover in H2-FY25 on the back of easing financial conditions. On balance, the Committee maintains its earlier real GDP growth projection of 2.5 – 3.5 percent for FY25 and expects economic activity to gain further momentum going forward.

## External Sector

Led by a broad-based acceleration in imports, the current account turned into a deficit in January 2025; shrinking the cumulative surplus to \$0.7 billion during July-January FY25. While import volumes have been rising consistently in line with the pickup in economic activity, the uptick in some global commodity prices

further pushed up import payments in January. However, robust workers' remit-

billion by June 2025. Going forward, the MPC emphasized the importance of strengthening external buffers in the presence of heightened global economic uncertainty.

## Fiscal Sector

The fiscal accounts for H1-FY25 indicate an improvement in both the overall and primary balance relative to last year. This was on the back of a sizable rise in revenues, particularly non-tax revenues, as well as contained expenditures, mainly subsidies. The MPC noted that the shortfall in FBR tax revenue against its target widened further in January and February 2025. The Committee assessed that the fiscal cushion created through contained current expenditures and expected decline in interest payments may keep the overall



# How does Talent Fuel Growth?



By Harry Javed

Global economic growth will remain steady at 3.3 percent this year and next, broadly aligned with potential growth that has weakened substantially since before the pandemic, according to the IMF's latest World Economic Outlook Update. The report also projects that global inflation will decline to 4.2 percent this year and 3.5 percent next year, in a return to central bank targets that will allow further normalization of monetary policy. "This will help draw to a close the global disruptions of recent years, including the pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which precipitated the largest inflation surge in four decades," Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas, the IMF's economic counsellor and director of research, wrote in a blog that accompanied the report's release in January. But Gourinchas pointed to risks from the diverging prospects of some of the world's largest economies, notably between the fast-growing US economy on one hand and Europe and China on the other. "In the near term, a constellation of risks could further exacerbate these divergences," he warned. The main risk for the euro area is that monetary and fiscal policy will run out of room to support economic growth. China, meanwhile, could get stuck in a

debt-deflation trap, with falling prices raising the real value of debt. And in the US, a combination of surging demand and shrinking supply risks reigniting inflationary pressures. "Overall, these near-term risks could lead to further divergence across economies," Gourinchas said.

For centuries, governments have turned to investors to fund their activities. They mostly do this by issuing bonds. Today, the global market in government sovereign debt is worth about \$100 trillion—almost as large as the world economy itself. But what are government bonds? What determines how much investors will pay for them? And what can bond "yield curves" tell us about an economy? Consider a government whose outlays exceed its revenues by \$100.

To finance the deficit, it can borrow from investors by issuing a bond. The bond is a promise by the government to pay back the \$100 principal to investors at a future date, plus annual interest, called a coupon payment, to compensate investors for the opportunity cost of parking their funds in the bond rather than some other investment. This opportunity cost has two components: an inflation component (to preserve the purchasing power of investors'

money) and a real, inflation-adjusted component (the additional return, on top of inflation, investors might forgo on alternative investments). The higher the expected rate of inflation and returns on alternative investments, the higher the return the government must generally offer investors. Suppose the government issues a one-year \$100 bond, or bill, with a coupon rate of 5 percent. This is a commitment to pay back investors \$105 after one year: \$100 in principal and \$5 in interest. If the coupon rate equals the investors' opportunity cost, investors will be willing to buy the bond at its face value, or par (\$100, in this example). But if investors' opportunity cost exceeds the 5 percent coupon, they will buy the bond only at a price below par. Say they are willing to pay only \$98. This would provide a higher return on their investment, specifically 7.1 percent  $[(105 \div 98) - 1]$ . This total return, which by definition equals investors' opportunity cost, represents the bond's yield (or yield to maturity). A direct bond sale by the government to investors is a primary market transaction. But bonds can also change hands between investors in the secondary market. This is because bonds are tradable securities, like stocks. The key implication is that the issuance

yield on a bond can differ from the prevailing market yield. For instance, let's assume that a major commercial bank fails immediately after the government issues the \$100 bond above. This fuels fears of a financial crisis and recession. As investors come to expect smaller returns and lower inflation because of the recession, the opportunity cost of funds falls sharply, from 7.1 percent to 3 percent. In this situation, the bond issued at \$98 will now trade above par in the secondary market, at \$101.95, to reflect the new market yield of 3 percent.

Governments can issue bonds of different maturities, typically ranging from 1 to 30 years. Each bond has its coupon rate and associated yield to maturity. Longer-term bonds usually carry a higher yield. This is called term premium. It reflects the

higher yield on a longer-term than on a shorter-term government bond. In other words, the yield curve will slope upward—as was the case for the US on December 16, 2024. Are yield curves always upward-sloping? No. When US inflation spiked following the COVID-19 pandemic, the Federal Reserve hiked interest rates. Because higher interest rates typically dampen household consumption and business investment, the hike fueled expectations of an economic slowdown, weaker inflation, and lower economic returns. Reflecting these market expectations, the government yield curve began to invert, or slope downward. An inverted yield curve is often seen as a recession predictor, and, until recently, inversions have preceded every US economic contraction for the past half

their bonds' repayment profile, yield, or both). This default risk, or country risk premium, means their bond yields are generally higher than those for advanced economies across all maturities. This difference in bond yields, or spread, is an important indicator of sovereign credit risk. When country risk reaches a point where markets see debt restructuring as imminent, the yield on bonds with short residual maturities typically spikes, producing a sharply inverted yield curve. In early 2014, for instance, nobody knew that Ukraine would restructure its sovereign bonds within a year. However, the March 2014 inverted yield curve showed that investors were already pricing in a debt event. Because such operations involve a bigger extension of the residual maturity of bonds falling due sooner than those due later (2018), investors demanded a higher yield on the former than the latter.

## Developing bond markets

Many developing economies are working to develop the market for local-currency government bonds to reduce reliance on foreign-currency borrowing, which carries exchange rate risk. Putting in place the requirements for such a market—sound debt management, robust laws, regulations and market infrastructure, and a diversified domestic investor base—can take time, but the rewards are substantial. The IMF, together with the World Bank, provides active guidance to governments in this area. It's encouraging that many developing economies, notably in Asia and Latin America, have made progress on this front in recent decades. A yield curve in a well-functioning government bond market not only tells us something about the economy's outlook but is also a benchmark for pricing other financial assets, such as long-term bank loans, corporate bonds, and mortgages. It facilitates more efficient allocation of resources and thus supports long-term economic growth.

## Searching for the hidden hands

The academic economist's dry prose usually benefits from an evocative metaphor. But we would all be better off if Adam Smith had skipped the bit about "the invisible



additional compensation investors demand for the uncertainty associated with future inflation and economic conditions and for forgoing other investments for longer. The bonds' maturities are on the horizontal axis, and their corresponding market yields at a given time are on the vertical axis. These yield curves tell us many things—the most important is whether markets expect the economy to strengthen or weaken. Let's assume markets expect economic growth to accelerate. This means future inflation will likely be higher than present inflation: As the economy heats up, demand for goods and services will pick up and eventually feed into prices.

The lure of alternative investments, such as commodities or property, will also rise as economic activity strengthens. Both these factors mean investors will demand a

century. Do country risk premium yield curves of government bonds in emerging markets and low-income countries convey the same information as those of advanced economies? Yes, but with a greater focus on country risk premium.

Major advanced economies are diversified, and their institutions are strong. Their sovereign bonds are generally considered safe because investors are almost certain the government will pay them back. The same cannot be said for all developing economies, which typically have weaker institutions and are more prone to shocks that can lead to large currency depreciations, rapid inflation, and loss of access to market funding. Some developing economy governments—especially those with lots of foreign-currency debt—must sometimes restructure their debt (change



hand.” He meant little, if anything, by it—he used the term only once in the entire two volumes of *The Wealth of Nations*, as he had a single time, in an entirely different context, in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. But in the second half of the 20th century, economists built an entire worldview around it, engendering the baseless assumption that, in the words of Pat Toomey, a former US senator, “capitalism is nothing more than economic freedom,” that, left untended, just works. Like the cartoon character Wile E. Coyote, they marched forward with plans lacking any means of support. Except it is not the economists who fell to the bottom of the ravine when their folly was discovered; it was the average citizen. Understanding the term requires first visiting it in its natural habitat: “By preferring the support of domestic to that of foreign industry, he intends only his securities,” Smith wrote, “and by directing that industry in such a manner as its produce may be of the greatest value, he intends only his gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention.” The invisible hand did not refer to a magical force but to the preference for domestic industry and the determination to direct industry toward the production of the greatest value. And so, for most of its history, the invisible hand was given precisely the little attention it

deserved. But drop “led by an invisible hand” into Google Ngram, plotting the frequency with which it appears across all English-language books since 1800, and just after World War II, the phrase begins an inexorable march upward. Determined to defend democratic capitalism from enthusiasm for communism’s central planning, economists like Paul Samuelson and Friedrich Hayek adopted Smith’s metaphor and placed it at the center of their free market’s logic. Blind faith Jonathan Schlefer, longtime editor of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Review, has shown how Samuelson’s *Economics*, first published in 1948 and the discipline’s leading textbook for decades, contorted this modest insight into a declaration of blind faith and placed it at the center of the economist’s worldview. Students learned that Smith had written, “He intends only his security, only his gain. And he is in this led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention.” Not even an ellipse. Hayek elevated the principle to a religion, professing “faith” in “spontaneous forces.” He was proud to “assume that, especially in the economic field, the self-regulating forces of the market will somehow bring about the required adjustments to new conditions, although no one can foretell how.” By the 1990s, economic historian Amity Shlaes could write in the *New York Times* that Adam

Smith had created the “powerful image” of the “‘invisible hand,’ the hand of free commerce that brings magic order and harmony to our lives.” What had been a description of the conditions under which markets can advance the common good became a claim that, regardless of conditions, they miraculously and automatically would. Release Smith’s conditions, though, and the logic immediately falls apart in theory and has indeed collapsed in practice. If the hard, capital- and labor-intensive work of extracting natural resources, practicing agriculture, building infrastructure, and manufacturing products offers the best return on capital, businessmen pursuing their private interest will indeed advance the common good. If those activities consistently offer a less attractive investment profile than trying to build a unicorn cloud-based application that might scale to millions of users in a year or two with just a few employees, capitalism may generate a facsimile of GDP growth, but it will not work in the sense Smith described and that a nation requires. If growth and margin expansion depend on investing in higher worker productivity, innovation will occur, wages will rise, and prosperity will spread. But if firms can most easily grow sales while reducing costs by offshoring production to foreign labor or bringing that labor into the United States for “jobs Americans won’t do,” capitalism will not work.



# Health Benefits of Fasting During Ramadan and the Consequences of Sugary and Fried Foods at Iftar



By Hina Kashif

**R**amadan is a month that holds deep significance for Muslims worldwide. It is a time for spiritual reflection, devotion, and self-discipline. Fasting during Ramadan, known as "Sawm," is one of the Five Pillars of Islam and requires Muslims to abstain from food, drink, smoking, and other physical needs from dawn to sunset. While the spiritual and religious benefits of fasting are widely known, it is also important to acknowledge the physical health benefits of fasting during Ramadan.

However, after a day of fasting, many people tend to indulge in sugary, fried, and heavy foods during Iftar (the evening meal that breaks the fast). While these foods may provide immediate pleasure and satisfaction, they can have long-term negative effects on our health. In this article, we will explore the health benefits of fasting during Ramadan and highlight the harmful impact of consuming sugary and fried foods at Iftar.

## Health Benefits of Fasting During Ramadan

Fasting during Ramadan offers several health benefits when done mindfully and responsibly. These benefits are not only physical but also mental and emotional.

### 1. Improved Metabolism

When you fast, your body shifts from using glucose for energy to burning stored fat. This process, called ketosis, helps reduce the body's fat stores and enhances metabolism. During the fasting period, the body relies on fat as a primary source of energy. This metabolic shift helps regulate blood sugar levels, and over time, it can improve insulin sensitivity, reducing the risk of type 2 diabetes.

Studies show that fasting can improve your body's ability to manage glucose and insulin, making it a powerful tool

for controlling blood sugar levels. In fact, research suggests that fasting during Ramadan may improve metabolic function and reduce the risk of metabolic diseases like obesity, diabetes, and heart disease.

### 2. Detoxification and Cellular Repair

Fasting is a natural form of detoxification. As the body abstains from food and drink for a significant portion of the day, it allows the digestive system to rest. During this period, the body shifts into a state of autophagy, a process in which cells break down and remove damaged or dysfunctional components. This cellular repair process helps regenerate healthy cells and tissues, promoting overall wellness.

Autophagy has been linked to the prevention of various diseases, including cancer, Alzheimer's disease, and cardiovascular conditions. The



process of autophagy also helps boost immunity, making the body more resilient to illness.

### 3. Improved Digestive Health

Fasting gives the digestive system a much-needed break. The digestive organs, including the stomach and intestines, undergo a rest period during fasting, allowing them to repair and rejuvenate. This can lead to improved digestion, reduced bloating, and better nutrient absorption. Additionally, fasting can help balance the gut microbiome, promoting the growth of beneficial bacteria that support digestion and overall gut health.

Over time, fasting can improve gut health, reduce symptoms of indigestion, and contribute to better bowel regularity. It also promotes a more stable gut environment, reducing the risk of gastrointestinal issues like acid reflux, constipation, and bloating.

### 4. Weight Loss and Fat Loss

One of the most well-known health benefits of fasting during Ramadan is weight loss. Since fasting restricts calorie intake during the daylight hours, it can lead to a calorie deficit, resulting in weight loss. However, it's essential to focus on healthy food choices during non-fasting hours to ensure that the weight loss is sustainable and promotes overall health.

Unlike many fad diets that focus on drastic calorie restriction, fasting during Ramadan leads to gradual, sustainable weight loss, especially when paired with healthy eating habits. Moreover, fasting helps the body burn fat for energy, leading to fat loss rather than muscle loss. If done correctly, fasting can help you lose excess fat while preserving lean muscle mass.

### 5. Reduced Inflammation

Chronic inflammation is linked to many diseases, including heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and arthritis. Fasting has been shown to reduce inflammation in the body. By fasting, your body reduces the production of pro-inflammatory cytokines, which are responsible for triggering inflammation in response to injury or infection.

Studies have indicated that fasting can reduce markers of inflammation, leading to

a lower risk of developing inflammatory diseases. This is particularly beneficial for individuals with conditions such as arthritis or cardiovascular disease, where inflammation plays a central role.

### 6. Mental Clarity and Emotional Well-being

Fasting during Ramadan provides an opportunity to reset both the body and the mind. Studies have found that fasting can have positive effects on brain function. During fasting, the body produces higher levels of brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF), a protein that supports the growth of new neurons and helps protect the brain from cognitive decline.



Fasting has also been linked to improved mood and emotional well-being. By focusing on spiritual growth and mindfulness during Ramadan, individuals often experience a sense of inner peace, calm, and improved mental clarity. The discipline of fasting encourages self-control and resilience, leading to increased emotional stability.

### The Harmful Effects of Sugary and Fried Foods at Iftar

While fasting offers numerous health benefits, the choices made during Iftar can counteract these positive effects. After a long day of fasting, it is common to feel the urge to indulge in foods that provide immediate pleasure, such as sugary desserts and

fried items. However, these foods can have detrimental effects on health, particularly when consumed in excess.

### 1. Blood Sugar Spikes

One of the most immediate effects of consuming sugary foods after fasting is a rapid spike in blood sugar levels. After a day of fasting, the body is more sensitive to glucose, and consuming sugary foods can cause an unhealthy surge in blood sugar. This spike can lead to insulin resistance over time, contributing to weight gain and an increased risk of type 2 diabetes.

When the body is subjected to constant fluctuations in blood sugar levels, it can

lead to energy crashes, irritability, and mood swings. To avoid these harmful effects, it is essential to choose foods that release sugar gradually, such as whole grains, fruits, and vegetables, rather than sugary desserts.

### 2. Weight Gain and Increased Fat Storage

Fried foods, such as samosas, pakoras, and fried chicken, are often consumed during Iftar. These foods are high in unhealthy fats and calories, contributing to weight gain and abdominal fat. Fried foods are also difficult for the digestive system to process and can lead to bloating, indigestion, and discomfort.

Additionally, consuming fried foods regularly can increase the levels of bad

cholesterol (LDL) in the body, which can contribute to heart disease and high blood pressure. The excessive intake of unhealthy fats from fried foods can also hinder weight loss efforts during Ramadan, making it harder to achieve a healthy body weight.

### 3. Digestive Discomfort

After a long day of fasting, the digestive system may be more sensitive, making it prone to discomfort. Consuming sugary and fried foods can cause indigestion, bloating, and heartburn. Fried foods, in particular, are heavy and difficult to digest, placing extra stress on the stomach and intestines.

Overeating at Iftar, especially with unhealthy foods, can lead to feelings of fullness and discomfort. This can disrupt sleep and affect your energy levels for the following day of fasting. To avoid digestive issues, it is important to consume lighter, more easily digestible foods and eat in moderation.

### 4. Inflammation and Increased Risk of Chronic Diseases

As mentioned earlier, fasting can reduce inflammation in the body. However, consuming sugary and fried foods can

counteract these anti-inflammatory benefits. Foods high in sugar and trans fats increase the production of pro-inflammatory markers, which can contribute to chronic diseases such as heart disease, arthritis, and metabolic disorders.

Excessive sugar intake is particularly harmful, as it can lead to insulin resistance, which increases the risk of developing type 2 diabetes. Similarly, consuming fried foods regularly can increase oxidative stress in the body, leading to cellular damage and inflammation.

### 5. Nutrient Deficiency

While sugary and fried foods may provide a temporary burst of energy, they lack the essential nutrients required for long-term health. Relying on these foods for Iftar can lead to nutrient deficiencies, as they do not provide adequate amounts of vitamins, minerals, and fiber. A lack of essential nutrients can negatively impact overall health, weakening the immune system and increasing the risk of illnesses.

To ensure that you are meeting your nutritional needs, it is essential to focus on nutrient-dense foods during Ramadan. Include a variety of whole foods, such as fruits, vegetables, lean proteins, and whole

grains, to provide your body with the vitamins and minerals it needs to stay healthy.

Fasting during Ramadan offers numerous health benefits, including improved metabolism, detoxification, weight loss, and better digestive health. However, the indulgence in sugary and fried foods during Iftar can negate these positive effects, leading to blood sugar spikes, weight gain, digestive discomfort, and increased inflammation.

To make the most of the health benefits of fasting, it is essential to make mindful food choices during Iftar. Opt for nutrient-dense foods, including whole grains, fruits, vegetables, lean proteins, and healthy fats, while avoiding sugary, fried, and processed foods. By maintaining a balanced and healthy approach to eating during Ramadan, you can support your body's well-being and achieve long-term health benefits while observing this sacred month.

Ultimately, Ramadan is not only a time for spiritual reflection but also an opportunity to improve your health and wellness. By making conscious food choices, you can ensure that both your body and soul are nourished during this holy month.





# ICC Champions Trophy 2025: A Comprehensive Tournament Review



By Kanwal Munir

## Introduction

The ICC Champions Trophy 2025, held from February 19 to March 9, 2025, was a thrilling tournament that brought together the top eight ODI teams in a high-stakes battle for glory. Hosted by Pakistan, it marked the country's first ICC event since 1996. However, due to political tensions between India and Pakistan, a hybrid model was adopted, with India's matches played in Dubai.

The tournament witnessed electrifying performances, unexpected upsets, and intense rivalries. From dominant team displays to record-breaking individual performances, every match added to the excitement. The grand final saw India defeat New Zealand in a gripping contest, securing their third Champions Trophy title. This article provides an in-depth review of team performances, key matches, player statistics, and the geopolitical and logistical challenges that shaped the tournament.

## Tournament Format and Participating Teams

The ICC Champions Trophy 2025 followed a traditional format, featuring eight teams divided into two groups, each consisting of four teams. The group-stage matches determined the semi-finalists, leading to an intense knockout phase. The teams were categorized as follows:

### Group A:

- India – A powerhouse with a fierce batting lineup and a formidable spin attack.
- Pakistan – The host nation, known for its unpredictable performances and passionate fanbase.
- New Zealand – A disciplined unit with a well-balanced squad and experienced players.
- Bangladesh – An aggressive yet

inconsistent team capable of upsetting stronger opponents.

### Group B:

- Australia – A dominant force with a strong pace attack and aggressive batting approach.
- England – The defending champions, though struggling with form and injuries.
- South Africa – A resurgent side boasting quality all-rounders and a potent bowling attack.
- Afghanistan – The rising force in world cricket, driven by dangerous spinners and fearless batting.

The tournament matches were played across multiple venues in Pakistan, including Lahore, Karachi, and Rawalpindi. However, due to ongoing diplomatic tensions between India and Pakistan, a hybrid model was adopted. As a result, all of India's matches were relocated to Dubai, ensuring a neutral

ground for their fixtures. This arrangement added an extra layer of complexity to the tournament, impacting logistics and fan engagement.

Despite these challenges, the event maintained its competitive spirit, with every team striving to outshine its opponents and claim the coveted ICC Champions Trophy title.

## Group Stage Highlights

### Group Stage Analysis

The group stage of the ICC Champions Trophy 2025 delivered thrilling contests, unexpected upsets, and remarkable individual performances. Some teams dominated as expected, while others faltered, leading to a fiercely competitive race for the semi-finals.



### Group A Analysis

India showcased their strength and consistency, topping Group A with a flawless performance. Their campaign began with a resounding victory over Bangladesh, where Rohit Sharma and Shubman Gill provided a solid opening stand, setting the tone for the tournament. Against Pakistan, Virat Kohli stole the show with a magnificent century, silencing a packed Lahore crowd. Jasprit Bumrah's five-wicket haul against Bangladesh was another defining moment, highlighting India's dominance with both bat and ball. Their final group match against New Zealand tested their resilience, but a composed chase led by Shreyas Iyer secured another win, ensuring India entered the semi-finals unbeaten.

Pakistan's campaign was filled with inconsistency and disappointment. As the host

nation, expectations were high, but they struggled to deliver. Their tournament opener against New Zealand was a closely contested match, with Babar Azam and Fakhar Zaman fighting hard, but a lower-order collapse cost them the game. The much-anticipated clash against India turned into a one-sided affair, as Pakistan's bowlers failed to contain India's batting lineup, suffering a heavy defeat. Even a win against Bangladesh in their last match wasn't enough to save them from an early exit.

Bangladesh had a tournament to forget, losing all three of their matches and finishing at the bottom of Group A. Despite some stellar performances from Shakib Al Hasan, including a fighting half-century against Pakistan and crucial wickets against New Zealand, the team lacked the depth and

consistency to challenge the stronger opponents. Their batting lineup struggled under pressure, and their bowling attack failed to contain aggressive batting sides like India and New Zealand.

### Group B Analysis

Australia stamped their authority on Group B, finishing at the top with convincing victories in all their matches. David Warner's sublime 128 against England was one of the most memorable innings of the group stage, setting the tone for their aggressive approach. Pat Cummins and Mitchell Starc led the bowling attack with fiery spells, dismantling opposition batting orders with sheer pace. Their all-round dominance ensured they marched into the semi-finals as one of the tournament favorites.

South Africa displayed grit and determination, bouncing back after a tough opening loss to Australia. They faced England in a crucial match where Heinrich Klaasen's explosive 87 off 54 balls and Kagiso Rabada's three-wicket haul secured a vital victory. Against Afghanistan, they were once again tested, but a calm and calculated chase, anchored by Rassie van der Dussen, ensured they booked their place in the semi-finals.

England, the defending champions, had a tournament to forget. Their campaign started with a heavy defeat to Australia, where their batting lineup crumbled under relentless pressure. A shock defeat to Afghanistan further dented their hopes, with Rashid Khan's magical 4/18 tearing through their middle order. Even a consolation victory against South Africa wouldn't have been enough to secure qualification, leaving England out of the tournament much earlier than expected.

Afghanistan, despite not making it to the semi-finals, left a lasting impact with their fearless approach. Their stunning victory over England was a major highlight, with their spinners dominating the game. However, they couldn't replicate the same magic against Australia and South Africa, where their lack of experience in high-pressure situations was exposed. Nevertheless, Afghanistan's campaign was seen as a sign of their rising stature in international cricket.

The group stage set the stage for an exciting knockout phase, with India, New Zealand, Australia, and South Africa securing their places in the semi-finals.

## Semi-Finals: High-Stakes Battles

The semi-finals of the ICC Champions Trophy 2025 featured two intense clashes, with India facing Australia in Dubai and New Zealand battling South Africa in Lahore. Both matches lived up to expectations, with thrilling moments that kept fans on the edge of their seats.

### India vs. Australia (Dubai International Stadium)

In a high-voltage encounter, Australia won the toss and opted to bat first on a dry



Dubai surface. Their innings started cautiously, with Steve Smith anchoring the innings with a solid 73 off 95 balls. Wickets fell at regular intervals, but Alex Carey's 61 provided the much-needed stability in the middle overs. The Indian bowlers, led by Jasprit Bumrah and Kuldeep Yadav, kept the scoring in check, restricting Australia to 264/9 in 50 overs.

Chasing 265, India got off to a shaky start, losing both openers within the first 10 overs. However, Virat Kohli once again rose to the occasion, playing a masterclass under pressure. His composed 84 off 98 balls, supported by a crucial partnership with KL Rahul (47), guided India closer to the target. Despite a late fightback from Josh Hazlewood and Pat Cummins, Ravindra Jadeja's unbeaten 28 ensured India crossed the finish line with four wickets in hand and five balls to spare, securing their spot in the final.

## New Zealand vs. South Africa (Lahore)

In the second semi-final, South Africa struggled against New Zealand's disciplined bowling attack. Batting first, the Proteas found it difficult to build momentum, losing early wickets. Quinton de Kock's 42 and David Miller's 51 were the only significant contributions, while Kagiso Rabada's late cameo of 27 off 14 balls pushed South Africa to a modest 237/8 in 50 overs. Trent Boult and Lockie Ferguson were the pick of the bowlers, taking two wickets each.

New Zealand's chase was clinical, with Daryl Mitchell leading the way with a brilliant 76. Despite losing a few wickets in the middle overs, the experience of Kane Williamson (43) and Glenn Phillips (38) helped the Kiwis comfortably reach the target in 48.2 overs, securing a five-wicket victory.

With that, New Zealand set up a much-anticipated final showdown against India, promising a thrilling climax to the tournament.

## The Grand Finale: India vs. New Zealand

The final of the ICC Champions Trophy 2025 was a thrilling contest between India

and New Zealand, living up to its status as a high-stakes encounter. Both teams had displayed exceptional performances throughout the tournament, setting the stage for an epic showdown in Dubai after the final was relocated from Pakistan.

## New Zealand's Innings

Winning the toss, New Zealand opted to bat first on a surface that looked ideal for stroke play. Their top order showed resilience, with Will Young scoring 48 and Daryl Mitchell anchoring the innings with 63. They built a solid platform, reaching 120 for 2 before India's bowlers struck back.

Kuldeep Yadav's spin proved lethal as he took 3 for 42, breaking New Zealand's middle order. Mohammed Siraj also played a crucial role, dismissing key batters with figures of 2 for 38. Despite the collapse, Michael Bracewell fought back with an unbeaten 53, guiding New Zealand to 251 for 7 in 50 overs.



## India's Chase

Chasing 252, India had a disastrous start as Trent Boult removed Shubman Gill and Virat Kohli early, putting them under pressure. However, Rohit Sharma's composed 76 off 83 balls and Shreyas Iyer's steady 48 helped India recover.

A brief middle-order stutter gave New Zealand hope, but KL Rahul (34) and Ravindra Jadeja (28 not out) ensured India completed the chase comfortably, winning with six wickets in hand to claim the Champions Trophy title.

## Key Performances & Tournament Statistics

- Player of the Tournament: Rachin

Ravindra (New Zealand) – consistent all-round performances.

- Most Runs: Virat Kohli (India) – 372 runs in 5 matches.
- Most Wickets: Kuldeep Yadav (India) – 14 wickets.
- Fastest Century: Josh Inglis (Australia) – 77 balls vs England.
- Highest Individual Score: Ibrahim Zadran (Afghanistan) – 177 vs England.

## Geopolitical Challenges & Logistical Issues

The political landscape played a crucial role in shaping the ICC Champions Trophy 2025. Ongoing diplomatic tensions between India and Pakistan led to a hybrid model, where all of India's matches were moved to Dubai instead of being played in Pakistan. This decision, though

controversial, was taken to avoid political complications and ensure India's participation.

Security concerns in Pakistan also meant heightened safety measures for teams, officials, and spectators. Several teams required additional assurances before agreeing to play in Lahore, Karachi, and Rawalpindi.

The tournament's biggest political impact came when the final was relocated to Dubai instead of Pakistan. This move, influenced by ongoing India-Pakistan tensions, highlighted the complexities of hosting major international tournaments in politically sensitive regions.



## Impact on World Cricket

### India's Legacy Strengthened

India's third Champions Trophy title reinforced their dominance in white-ball cricket. The performance of young players like Shubman Gill and Kuldeep Yadav highlighted the depth of Indian cricket.

### New Zealand's Rising Stature

Despite their loss in the final, New Zealand once again proved why they are one of the most consistent teams in world cricket.

Their ability to perform on big occasions, led by players like Rachin Ravindra and

Daryl Mitchell, makes them a formidable side for the future.

### Afghanistan's Impressive Growth

Afghanistan's ability to challenge top-tier teams signals its growing prowess. With players like Rashid Khan and Ibrahim Zadran, they are no longer underdogs but legitimate contenders.

### Pakistan's Struggles Continue

Pakistan's inability to capitalize on home advantage exposed their vulnerabilities. The poor form of Babar Azam and ineffective bowling strategies hurt their chances.

## Australia & South Africa: Strong Contenders

Both teams showcased their talent but fell short in key moments. Australia's aggressive approach and South Africa's resurgence remain positive takeaways.

## Conclusion

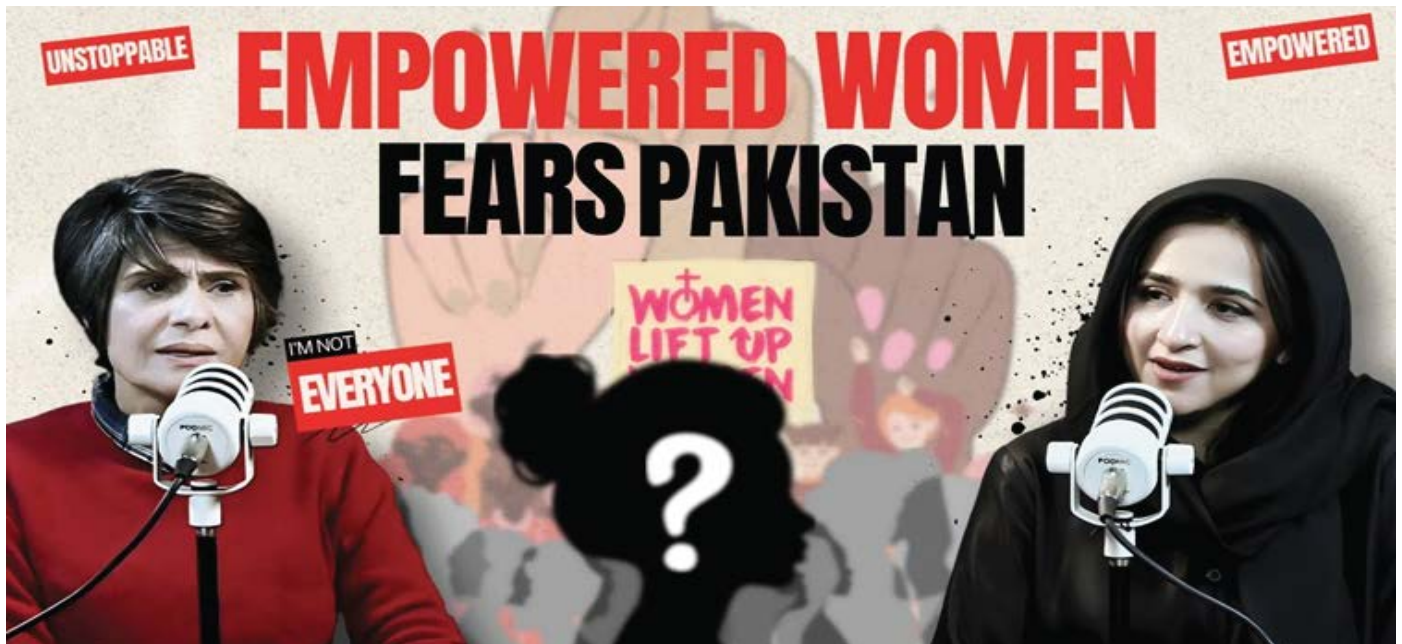
The ICC Champions Trophy 2025 will be remembered for its high-quality cricket, political complexities, and unforgettable performances. India's well-rounded squad, resilient leadership, and consistent execution led them to a historic win, reaffirming their stature in world cricket.

New Zealand's journey to the final highlighted their ability to compete with the best, while Afghanistan's rise was an inspiring narrative. The tournament also underlined the geopolitical hurdles that cricket must navigate in the modern era.

As the cricketing world shifts its focus to the ICC Cricket World Cup 2027, lessons from the Champions Trophy will shape strategies and player development. The 2025 edition was a spectacle of skill, passion, and resilience, reminding fans why ODI cricket remains one of the most exhilarating formats of the game.







This video delves into the powerful life story of Saima Batool, a woman who defied personal struggles and societal expectations to create a life of resilience, success, and empowerment. From battling adversity to breaking societal barriers, Saima's journey is not just about personal triumph, but also about advocating for women's rights and empowering others. Her story highlights the importance of resilience, self-belief, and standing up for women's rights in a world that often tries to limit their potential. Watch to be inspired by Saima Batool's courage and strength, and learn how one woman's determination can inspire change for others.

Youtube Link for the Video: [https://youtu.be/LHL0S3mXhvc?si=1c74bAmCsmsma8\\_D](https://youtu.be/LHL0S3mXhvc?si=1c74bAmCsmsma8_D)



Discover the incredible journey of Harmeet Singh, a renowned TV anchor and journalist who has defied countless challenges to achieve success. Harmeet's unwavering determination and commitment to his craft have allowed him to rise above personal hardships and societal barriers. His story goes beyond the glitz and glamour of TV studios—it's a powerful narrative of struggle, resilience, and the pursuit of dreams despite all odds.

From overcoming personal difficulties to challenging societal expectations, Harmeet's journey is a testament to perseverance and hard work. Join us as we uncover the lessons he's learned along the way, and discover how believing in yourself can make all the difference, no matter the obstacles in your path.

Youtube Video Link for the Video: <https://youtu.be/KmmamsHrq74?si=kvnZlXsMITfvhgTS>





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