



CENJOWS

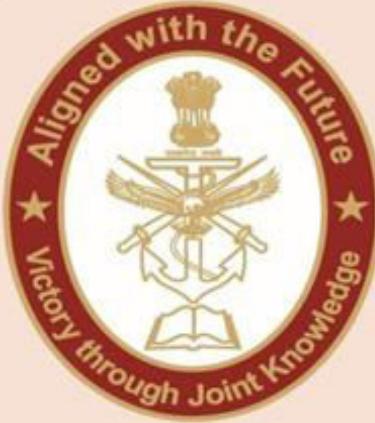
ISSUE BRIEF

IB / 08 / 26

THE PHOENIX PROTOCOL: A COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT OF PAKISTAN'S POST-SINDOOR MILITARY TRANSFORMATION AND STRATEGIC REBALANCING

TEAM CENJOWS





CENJOWS

The Phoenix Protocol: A Comprehensive Assessment of Pakistan's Post-Sindoor Military Transformation and Strategic Rebalancing

TEAM CENJOWS

Introduction: The Strategic Shock of Operation Sindoor

The geopolitical stability of South Asia was irrevocably altered in May 2025. The conflict, now catalogued in military archives as "Operation Sindoor" by India and "Operation Bunyan-un- Marsous" by Pakistan, served as a violent stress test for the deterrence theories that had governed the subcontinent for nearly three decades. While the engagement lasted only four days from May 7 to May 10, 2025, its brevity belied its transformational impact on the strategic calculus of the region. For the Pakistan Defense Forces, the conflict was less a military engagement and more a revelation of systemic obsolescence, catalysing one of the most aggressive and rapid military restructuring programs in the nation's history.¹

The Pre-Conflict Equilibrium and its Collapse

Prior to May 2025, the strategic equilibrium in South Asia rested on

Pakistan's doctrine of "Full Spectrum Deterrence." This doctrine posited that any significant conventional incursion by India would be met with a rapid escalation to the nuclear threshold, utilizing tactical nuclear weapons (TNWs) like the *Nasr* missile to deny Indian forces space for maneuver. This posture was designed to negate India's "Cold Start" doctrine or Proactive Operations strategy. However, the events of May 2025 dismantled this assumption. The crisis began with a terrorist attack in Pahalgam, Jammu and Kashmir, on April 22, 2025, which resulted in the deaths of 26 civilians.² India's response, launched on May 7, was calibrated to puncture the nuclear umbrella without collapsing it.

Operation Sindoor demonstrated that New Delhi had successfully identified and exploited a gap in the escalation ladder. By employing precision airstrikes and standoff missiles against terrorist infrastructure in Pakistani-administered Kashmir and Punjab, India inflicted punitive damage while signaling restraint avoiding military garrisons and nuclear storage sites.³ This "calibrated force" paralyzed Pakistan's decision-making cycle. The expected automatic escalation to the nuclear level did not occur because the threshold for such a response an existential threat to the state had not been met, yet the conventional punishment was severe enough to be strategically humiliating.⁴

The Operational Deficit

While public narratives in Pakistan, championed by figures such as Field Marshal Asim Munir, projected a victory claiming India was "forced to beg for a ceasefire," the internal operational reality was starkly different.⁵ The conflict exposed critical vulnerabilities in Pakistan's conventional war fighting capability. The Pakistan Air Force (PAF), despite its high readiness, struggled to defend against the saturation attacks of Indian cruise missiles like the BrahMos. The integration between the Army, Navy, and Air Force was notably frictional, with each service fighting a disparate war rather than a joint campaign. The Pakistan Navy, facing a superior Indian carrier battle group, was forced into a defensive posture,

keeping its capital ships in harbor to avoid attrition a "fleet-in-being" strategy that effectively ceded sea control to India.⁶

Furthermore, the technological disparity in network-centric warfare became glaring. Indian forces demonstrated superior situational awareness, utilizing networked sensors to identify targets and assess damage in real-time.⁷ Pakistan's "net-centric" approach was deemed insufficient against India's "data-centric" warfare, which leveraged artificial intelligence and advanced ISR (Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance) to dominate the OODA (Observe, Orient, Decide, Act) loop.⁸

The Post-War Pivot

The cessation of hostilities on May 10, 2025 did not lead to an immediate de-escalation of military readiness.⁹ Instead, it triggered a "Phoenix Moment" for the Pakistani military establishment. Recognizing that economic parity with India is unattainable with India's defense budget outstripping Pakistan's by a factor of nearly nine¹⁰ Pakistan initiated a strategy of *asymmetric parity*. This strategy relies on three pillars: the centralization of command to speed up decision-making, the acquisition of high-yield/low-cost strategic assets (stealth fighters, hypersonic missiles), and the forging of new "iron-clad" alliances that provide extended deterrence and economic shielding.¹¹

This article serves as a definitive audit of this transformation. It details the constitutional mechanics of the new command structure, the technical specifications of the new arsenal, and the geopolitical maneuvering that has allowed a cash-strapped nation to finance a military renaissance. It concludes with a rigorous differential analysis, tabulating the narrowing gap between the two nuclear-armed neighbors as of January 2026.

The 27th Amendment: Constitutionalizing the Garrison State

The most profound shift in Pakistan's post-Sindoor trajectory is not merely hardware acquisition but a fundamental re-engineering of the state's constitutional architecture. The 27th Amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan, passed in November 2025, represents the legal codification of the military's absolute primacy in national affairs, ostensibly to rectify the command inefficiencies observed during the conflict.¹²

Abolition of Joint Staff and Creation of the CDF

Historically, Pakistan's military command was coordinated by the Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (CJCSC), a four-star officer who served as the principal military advisor but lacked direct operational command over the three service. This structure was often criticized for fostering inter-service rivalry and slowing decision-making during crises. The May 2025 conflict was viewed as the death knell for this "committee-style" leadership.¹³ The 27th Amendment abolished the office of the CJCSC, replacing it with the Chief of Defence Forces (CDF).¹⁴

- **Operational Supremacy:** Unlike the CJCSC, the CDF possesses direct operational command authority over the Army, Navy, and Air Force. The service chiefs (Chief of Air Staff, Chief of Naval Staff) are now effectively subordinate to the CDF in matters of war strategy and joint force application. This moves Pakistan towards a unified command model similar to the Turkish General Staff or the pre-1945 German General Staff.¹⁵
- **Dual-Hatting:** Crucially, the amendment stipulates that the CDF position is held concurrently by the Chief of Army Staff (COAS). This constitutional provision ensures that the Army the dominant service permanently retains the supreme command, institutionalizing a land-centric strategic culture.¹⁶

Institutionalizing Immunity and Tenure

The amendment introduced sweeping protections for the military leadership, specifically tailored for the incumbent and future holders of the CDF office.

- **Tenure Reset:** The tenure of the CDF is fixed at five years. Upon appointment, the tenure of the incumbent COAS acts as a reset button. For Field Marshal Asim Munir, who was appointed as the first CDF on December 4, 2025, this reset his command clock, extending his tenure until at least 2030.¹⁷
- **Field Marshal Rank:** In recognition of his "leadership" during the May conflict, General Munir was elevated to the five-star rank of Field Marshal. The 27th Amendment grants five-star officers lifetime immunity from criminal prosecution and stipulates they "remain in uniform for life," effectively creating a position that is above the vagaries of civilian politics and judicial oversight.¹⁸
- **Removal Threshold:** The removal of a CDF now requires a two-thirds majority in Parliament, a higher threshold than that required for removing the Prime Minister. This effectively makes the CDF the most secure constitutional office in the country, shielding the military leadership from civilian dismissal.¹⁹

Strategic Implications of Centralization

The consolidation of power under the CDF was explicitly justified by CDS General Anil Chauhan of India as a reaction to the "weaknesses that came to light" during Operation Sindoor.²⁰ The "frictional losses" caused by poor inter-service coordination exemplified by the lack of naval support for air operations in the Arabian Sea are addressed by creating a single decision-making node.

However, this centralization carries inherent risks. By vesting supreme

authority in an Army officer, the specific strategic needs of the Air Force and Navy may be subordinated to land warfare priorities. Critics argue that this reflects a "land-centric mindset" that may not be suitable for modern, multi-domain warfare where air and sea power often play decisive roles.²¹ Furthermore, the elimination of the CJSC removes a layer of peer review within the military, potentially leading to "groupthink" where the Army Chief's strategic blunders face no internal institutional check.

- **The New Spear: Army Rocket Force Command (ARFC) and Conventional Deterrence**

The lessons of Operation Sindoor underscored a critical gap in Pakistan's arsenal: the lack of a dedicated, conventional deep-strike capability that could deter Indian aggression without resorting to nuclear use. The result was the formation of the Army Rocket Force Command (ARFC) on August 13, 2025.²²

➤ **Doctrine of Conventional Deterrence**

Prior to 2025, Pakistan's missile forces were dual use but primarily viewed as nuclear delivery vehicles under the Strategic Plans Division (SPD). The ambiguity of whether a missile was nuclear or conventional was a deliberate feature of Pakistan's deterrence signaling. However, the 2025 conflict revealed that this ambiguity limited *Pakistan's* own options; firing a ballistic missile at an Indian airbase risked triggering an Indian nuclear response because New Delhi could not distinguish the warhead type in flight.²³

The ARFC is designed to solve this "entanglement" problem. It is a dedicated *conventional* force, tasked with operating non-nuclear surface-to-surface missiles. Its doctrinal purpose is "Counter- Force Precision Strike" the ability to destroy high-value Indian military targets (airfields, radar sites, logistics hubs) with

high precision, thereby imposing conventional costs on India and raising the threshold for Indian military action.²⁴

➤ Arsenal and Capabilities

The ARFC has been rapidly equipped with a suite of indigenous and Chinese-derived systems that emphasize survivability, precision, and saturation.

Missile System	Classification	Range	Guidance & Capability	Strategic Role
Fatah-I	Guided MLRS	140 km	Inertial + GPS; CEP < 10m	Tactical battlefield strikes; counter-battery fire against Indian artillery. ²⁵
Fatah-II	Guided MLRS	400 km	Satellite/ Inertial; Flattening trajectory	Operational depth strikes; targeting forward airbases and assembly areas. ²⁶
Fatah-IV	Cruise Missile	750 km	Terrain Hugging; Stealth profile	Deep interdiction; targeting C2 nodes and air defense sites behind the front lines. ²⁷
Fatah-5	Precision Rocket	~1,000 km	MaRV Hypersonic Glide	Strategic Conventional Strike; Capable of hitting New Delhi and central Indian airbases. ²⁸

The Strategic Significance of Fatah-5

The Fatah-5, expected to be fully operational by 2026, represents a quantum leap. With a range of 1,000 km and a 400 kg warhead, it blurs the line between rocket artillery and ballistic missiles. Reports suggest it utilizes a maneuvering reentry vehicle (MaRV) or an extended-glide trajectory, specifically designed to penetrate India's S-400 air defense shield. By placing it under the ARFC, Pakistan signals that this is a war fighting weapon, not a doomsday device.²⁹

The Stability-Instability Paradox

While the creation of the ARFC is intended to provide a "firebreak" between conventional and nuclear war, analysts warn it may have the opposite effect. The "stability-instability paradox" suggests that by making conventional war "safer" (i.e., less likely to go nuclear immediately), Pakistan may be emboldened to engage in large-scale missile duels. Furthermore, the physical separation of missiles does not fully resolve the entanglement issue for Indian defenders. In the heat of battle, a salvo of Fatah- 5s appearing on Indian radars might still be interpreted as a strategic First Strike, potentially triggering the very escalation the ARFC is designed to avoid.³⁰

- **National Strategic Command (NSC)**

Parallel to the ARFC, the nuclear forces have been reorganized under the National Strategic Command (NSC). The 27th Amendment created the post of Commander NSC (CNSC), a four- star Army general appointed by the Prime Minister on the recommendation of the CDF. This moves the control of nuclear assets from a potentially civilian-led oversight body (the National Command Authority) to a direct military chain of command, centralizing the nuclear trigger within the Army's hierarchy.³¹

- **Air Power Renaissance: The Fifth-Generation Shift**

The air domain was the primary theater of Operation Sindoar,

and the losses sustained there allegedly including the failure to intercept Indian Rafales have driven the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) to abandon its incremental modernization for a generational leap.

- **Introduction of the J-31 (FC-31) Gyrfalcon**

The most visible symbol of this modernization is the acquisition of the Shenyang FC-31 (export designation J-31) stealth fighter. Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Sidhu confirmed in late 2025 that the foundation for acquiring these jets had been laid.³²

➤ **Capability Leap:** The J-31 is a twin-engine, fifth-generation multi-role fighter featuring stealth airframes, internal weapons bays, and advanced sensor fusion. It is designed to contest air superiority against 4.5 generation fighters like the Rafale and upcoming 5th generation platforms.

➤ **Strategic Differential:** Prior to this, the PAF relied on the F-16 and JF-17, both 4th generation platforms vulnerable to modern AESA radars. The J-31 gives Pakistan a "First Look, First Shot, First Kill" capability. This acquisition is specifically timed to bridge the gap before India can field its indigenous Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA), which is not expected until the mid-2030s.³³

- **Expansion of the J-10C Fleet**

While the J-31 represents the future, the immediate gap is being filled by the Chengdu J-10C "Vigorous Dragon."

➤ **Fleet Status:** Deliveries have accelerated. By late 2025, over 20 aircraft had been delivered against an initial order of 25, with options for more being exercised. Pentagon reports confirm Pakistan is the sole export customer, highlighting the depth of

the China-Pakistan strategic nexus.³⁴

➤ **Operational Role:** The J-10C, equipped with the KLJ-7A AESA radar and PL-15 long-range air-to-air missiles (range~200km), serves as the primary interceptor. It provides a credible threat to India's Su-30MKI fleet and integrates seamlessly with Chinese-supplied AEW&C platforms like the ZDK-03 and Erieye.³⁵

- **Electronic Warfare and Unmanned Systems**

Recognizing the role of electronic warfare (EW) in the Sindoar conflict, the PAF has invested in specialized assets.

➤ **Stand-Off Jamming (SOJ):** Global 6000 business jets are being modified by Turkish Aerospace Industries (TAI) into high-powered SOJ platforms. These aircraft are designed to blind Indian air defense radars from safe distances, creating corridors for strike packages.³⁶

➤ **Drone Warfare:** The PAF has inducted advanced unmanned combat aerial vehicles (UCAVs) like the Wing Loong II and Caihong-4/5. These platforms provide persistent surveillance and "hunter-killer" capabilities, essential for monitoring the Line of Control (LoC) without risking manned aircraft.³⁷

Maritime Modernization: Denial and Deterrence

The Pakistan Navy (PN), often the neglected service, has leveraged the post-Sindoar reforms to secure a massive capability upgrade aimed at "Sea Denial" preventing the Indian Navy from imposing a blockade or launching carrier-based strikes.

- **The Hangor-Class Submarine Program**

The PN's underwater capabilities are being transformed by the

induction of eight Hangor-class submarines, a customized variant of China's Type 039B Yuan-class.

- **Status:** As of December 2025, four submarines (Hangor, Ghazi, Mangro, and one other) have been launched in China and are undergoing sea trials. The first is expected to be commissioned in 2026.³⁸
- **Technology:** These submarines feature Air-Independent Propulsion (AIP) systems (likely Stirling cycle), allowing them to stay submerged for up to 21 days a massive improvement over diesel-electric boats that must snorkel every few days. This acoustic stealth significantly complicates the anti-submarine warfare (ASW) efforts of the Indian Navy.³⁹
- **Strategic Lethality:** The Hangor-class is expected to be armed with the Babur-3 submarine-launched cruise missile (SLCM). If nuclear tipped, this provides Pakistan with a survivable Second-Strike capability, completing a nuclear triad at sea.⁴⁰

- **The "Carrier-Killer": P-282 Anti-Ship Ballistic Missile**

To counter the threat of India's two aircraft carriers (*INS Vikramaditya* and *INS Vikrant*), the PN has developed and tested the P-282 "SMASH" anti-ship ballistic missile (ASBM).

- **Capability:** Tested in November 2025, the P-282 is a hypersonic, maneuverable ballistic missile designed to target large surface vessels. It flies a quasi-ballistic trajectory to evade ship-borne anti-missile defenses like the Barak-8.⁴¹
- **Implication:** This introduces an A2/AD (Anti-Access/Area Denial) bubble around the Pakistani coast. It forces Indian carrier battle groups to operate further out at sea, reducing the effectiveness of their air wings against shore targets.

- **Surface Fleet Expansion**

The surface fleet has been bolstered by the operationalization of four Type 054A/P frigates, which provide area air defense, and the induction of Babur-class corvettes (Turkish MILGEM design). These modern ships are equipped with advanced sensors and missiles (CM-302 supersonic anti-ship missiles), enhancing the PN's ability to contest littoral waters.⁴²

Diplomatic Rebalancing: The Dual-Track Alliance Strategy

Pakistan's military resurgence is not self-financed. It is underwritten by a sophisticated diplomatic strategy that balances traditional reliance on China with a renewed, transactional partnership with the United States and a deepening security integration with Saudi Arabia.

- **The Saudi-Pakistan Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement**

On September 17, 2025, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia signed a landmark defense pact that fundamentally alters the regional security architecture.⁴³

- **The "Article 5" Clause:** The agreement explicitly states that "any aggression against either country shall be considered an aggression against both." This collective defense clause is unprecedented for a non-NATO, non-Arab state.⁴⁴
- **Nuclear Ambiguity:** While the text does not explicitly mention nuclear weapons, statements from officials have created deliberate ambiguity. A Saudi official noted the pact encompasses "all military means," and Pakistani Defense Minister Khawaja Asif hinted that Pakistan's capabilities would be "made available".⁴⁵ This suggests an extended deterrence

umbrella, where Pakistan guarantees Saudi security against existential threats (implicitly Iran or Israel) in exchange for massive financial patronage.

- **Economic Impact:** This pact likely secures deferred oil payments and direct budgetary support, freeing up Pakistan's domestic resources for defense procurement.⁴⁶

- **The U.S. Pivot: Transactional Realism under Trump**

Post-Operation Sindoor, Pakistan launched a \$5 million lobbying blitz in Washington, utilizing firms with access to the Trump administration.⁴⁷ This investment has yielded significant returns, marking a shift from the Biden-era estrangement.

- **F-16 Sustainment:** In December 2025, the Trump administration notified Congress of a \$686 million sustainment package for Pakistan's F-16 fleet. This ensures the operational viability of Pakistan's premier western fighter, crucial for interoperability.⁴⁸

- **The Pasni Port Offer:** Reports indicate Pakistan has offered the U.S. access to a naval facility at **Pasni**, close to the Chinese-operated Gwadar port. This strategic masterstroke allows the U.S. to monitor the Persian Gulf and counter- balance China, making Pakistan indispensable to Washington's containment strategy against Iran and, ironically, China itself.⁴⁹

- **Counter-Terrorism Alignment:** The U.S. designation of the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) as a terrorist organization signals Washington's support for Pakistan's internal stability, a quid pro quo for Pakistan's alignment against Iran.⁵⁰

- **The Chinese Anchor:** China remains the "Iron Brother," providing the

bulk of the hardware (J-31, Hangor, Fatah rockets). However, Pakistan's diversification towards the U.S. and Saudi Arabia suggests a desire to avoid total dependence on Beijing, ensuring it has multiple patrons to sustain its military build-up.⁵¹

Comparative Analysis: The India-Pakistan Military Differential (2026)

As of January 2026, the military balance between India and Pakistan presents a complex picture. While India retains a massive quantitative and economic advantage, Pakistan has achieved *qualitative parity* in specific high-impact domains through asymmetric investments.

- **Economic and Manpower Differential**

India's economy allows for a defense budget nearly nine times that of Pakistan. However, India's budget is heavily committed to pensions and personnel costs, limiting capital expenditure for modernization. Pakistan, utilizing foreign aid and lower personnel costs, allocates a higher percentage of its effective budget to hardware acquisition.

Metric	India	Pakistan	Differential Analysis
Defense Budget (2025-26)	~\$86.1 Billion (1.9% GDP) ⁵²	~\$10.2 Billion (2.7% GDP) ⁵³	Advantage India: Massive resource lead, but Pakistan achieves efficiency through single- threat focus (India), while India splits resources between China and Pakistan.
Active Personnel	~1.45 Million ⁵⁴	~660,000 ⁵⁵	Advantage India: 2.2:1 numerical superiority. Pakistan relies on mobilization and reserves to bridge the gap in wartime.

Command	Integrated	Unified Command	Advantage	Pakistan:
Structure	Theatre Commands (Stalled/In Progress) ⁵⁶	(CDF) - Operational ⁵⁷	streamlined CDF structure allows for faster OODA loops compared to India's still-siloed service commands.	

- **Air Power Differential**

The air domain shows the most aggressive Pakistani catch-up.

India's squadron strength has depleted to critical levels (~30 squadrons vs required 42), while delays in the MRFA tender have stalled Rafale acquisitions beyond the initial 36.

Capability	India	Pakistan	Differential Analysis
Fighter Squadrons	~30 Squadrons 45	~20 Squadrons	Advantage India (Quantity), Parity (Quality): India has more aircraft, but Pakistan's fleet is younger and rapidly modernizing.
5th Gen Stealth	AMCA (Development Phase, ~2035)	J-31 / FC-31 (Acquisition Started) ^[24]	Advantage Pakistan: Access to off-the-shelf Chinese stealth gives Pakistan a temporary monopoly on stealth fighters in the theater until India acquires AMCA or imports.
High-End 4.5 Gen	36 Rafale (+114 Planned) ⁵⁸	36+ J-10C, 150+ JF-17 Blk III ⁵⁹	Contested: Rafale is superior individually, but J-10C numbers are expanding faster. India's delay in MRFA is a critical vulnerability.
AEW&C	3 Phalcon, 3 Netra ⁶⁰	~10-12 (ZDK-03, Erieye)	Advantage Pakistan: Superior density of surveillance coverage along the border.

- **Missile and Strategic Forces Differential**

Pakistan's creation of the ARFC has formalized a conventional strike capability that India is still organizing.

System Class	India (Integrated Rocket Force - IRF)	Pakistan (Army Rocket Force - ARFC)	Differential Analysis
Organization	IRF (Proposed/Nascent) 47	ARFC (Operational Aug 2025) ⁶¹	Advantage Pakistan: Pakistan has a functional, dedicated command structure. India's IRF is delayed by inter-service debates.
Tactical Ballistic	Pralay (150-500 km) 48	Fatah-I/II (140-400 km) ⁶²	Parity: Both sides possess highly accurate, solid-fuel SRBMs for battlefield use.
Deep Strike	Agni Series (Dual Use?), BrahMos	Fatah-5 (1,000 km Conventional) ⁶³	Asymmetric Threat: Pakistan's Fatah-5 threatens India's strategic depth without nuclear use. India relies on dual-use Agni or expensive cruise missiles.
Hypersonic	HSTDV / ET-LDHC (Testing) ⁶⁴	Fatah-5 (MaRV capabilities)	Contested: Both sides are racing for hypersonic glide vehicles. India's program is indigenous; Pakistan's is Chinese-assisted.

- **Naval Power Differential**

India remains the dominant naval power, but Pakistan's denial

strategy creates high-risk zones.

Asset	India	Pakistan	Differential Analysis
Carriers	2 (Vikramaditya, Vikrant)	0	Advantage India: Total dominance in power projection and sea control.
Submarines	16 Conventional, 2 Nuclear ⁶⁵	8 Conventional (Agosta/Hang or) 28	Advantage India (Numbers), Parity (Tech): India has more boats, but Pakistan's 8 AIP-equipped Hangor subs are quieter than India's older Kilos and 209s.
Anti-Ship Capability	BrahMos (Universal)	P-282 ASBM (Hypersonic) ⁶⁶	New Threat: Pakistan's ASBM creates a "no-go" zone for Indian carriers near the Pakistani coast, challenging India's coercive naval strategy.

Conclusion: The New Security Architecture of South Asia

The aftermath of Operation Sindoora has not produced a chastened Pakistan but a transformed one. Through a combination of constitutional engineering, doctrinal innovation, and diplomatic agility, Pakistan has managed to blunt the conventional superiority of India.

The 27th Amendment has created a streamlined, monolithic command structure under the Chief of Defence Forces, eliminating the friction that plagued previous wars. The Army Rocket Force Command provides a scalable option for conventional escalation, allowing Pakistan to strike deep into India without immediately resorting to nuclear weapons a capability it lacked in 2025. The acquisition of J-31 stealth fighters and Hangor submarines ensures that any future Indian offensive will face high-tech attrition that may be politically unsustainable for New Delhi.

However, this parity is fragile. It is built on a narrow economic base and heavy reliance on external patrons (China, Saudi Arabia, USA). Pakistan's strategy is one of high-stakes gambling: borrowing strategic depth and financial capability to maintain a military machine that its domestic economy cannot support. For India, the window of overwhelming conventional superiority has closed. The strategic

challenge of 2026 is no longer about managing a "troublesome neighbor" but deterring a near-peer adversary equipped with 5th-generation technology and integrated into a collective security alliance with the Gulf. The subcontinent has entered a new, more volatile era of armed peace, where the margin for error in crisis management has arguably disappeared.

DISCLAIMER

The paper is author's individual scholastic articulation and does not necessarily reflect the views of CENJOWS, the defence forces, or the Government of India. The author certifies that the article is original in content, unpublished and it has not been submitted for publication/ web upload elsewhere and that the facts and figures quoted are duly referenced, as needed and are believed to be correct.

ENDNOTES

¹ accessed January 11, 2026, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2025_India

² %E2%80%93Pakistan_crisis#:~:text=On%207%20May%202025%2C%20India

³ Truth Of Operation Sindoos / Bunyan-Un-Marsous – OpEd - Eurasia Review, accessed January 11, 2026, <https://www.eurasiareview.com/09012026-truth-of-operation-sindoos-bunyan-un-marsous-oped/>

⁴ Calibrated Force: Operation Sindoos and the Future of Indian Deterrence - RUSI, accessed January 11, 2026,

⁵ 2025 India–Pakistan crisis - Wikipedia, accessed January 11, 2026, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2025_India%E2%80%93Pakistan_crisis

⁶ Calibrated Force: Operation Sindoos and the Future of Indian Deterrence - RUSI, accessed January 11, 2026,

⁷ <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/calibrated-force-operation-sindoos-and-future-indian-deterrence>

⁸ Calibrated Force: Operation Sindoos and the Future of Indian Deterrence - RUSI, accessed January 11, 2026,

⁹ Calibrated Force: Operation Sindoos and the Future of Indian Deterrence - RUSI, accessed January 11, 2026,

¹⁰ Pakistan Navy Plans Modernization, Indigenization - PakAlumni Worldwide, accessed January 11, 2026, <http://www.pakalumni.com/profiles/blogs/pakistan-navy-plans-modernization-indigenization>

¹¹ Operation Sindoos forced Pakistan to carry out hurried constitutional amendments: CDS General Anil Chauhan, accessed January 11, 2026, <https://www.newsonair.gov.in/pakistans-military-and-constitutional-changes-reflect-weaknesses-exposed-in-operation-sindoos-cds-general-anil-chauhan/>

¹² Operation Sindoos forced Pakistan to carry out hurried constitutional amendments: CDS General Anil Chauhan, accessed January 11, 2026, <https://www.newsonair.gov.in/pakistans-military-and-constitutional-changes-reflect-weaknesses-exposed-in-operation-sindoos-cds-general-anil-chauhan/>

¹³ Pakistan hikes defence spending by 20% to \$9 bn, still nearly 9x less than India's, accessed January 11, 2026, <https://m.economictimes.com/news/defence/pakistan- hikes-defence-spending-by-20-to-9-bn-still-nearly-9x-less-than-indias/articleshow/ 121755652.cms>

¹⁴ India-Pakistan Conflict in Spring 2025 - Congress.gov, accessed January 11, 2026, <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/IF13000>

¹⁵ Chief of Defence Forces (Pakistan) - Wikipedia, accessed January 11, 2026, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chief_of_Defence_Forces_\(Pakistan\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chief_of_Defence_Forces_(Pakistan))

¹⁶ Chief of Defence Forces (Pakistan) - Wikipedia, accessed January 11, 2026, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chief_of_Defence_Forces_\(Pakistan\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chief_of_Defence_Forces_(Pakistan))

¹⁷ Pakistan hikes defence spending by 20% to \$9 bn, still nearly 9x less than India's, accessed January 11, 2026, <https://m.economictimes.com/news/defence/pakistan- hikes-defence-spending-by-20-to-9-bn-still-nearly-9x-less-than-indias/articleshow/ 121755652.cms>

¹⁸ Pakistan hikes defence spending by 20% to \$9 bn, still nearly 9x less than India's, accessed January 11, 2026, <https://m.economictimes.com/news/defence/pakistan- hikes-defence-spending-by-20-to-9-bn-still-nearly-9x-less-than-indias/articleshow/ 121755652.cms>

¹⁹ Pakistan hikes defence spending by 20% to \$9 bn, still nearly 9x less than India's, accessed January 11, 2026, <https://m.economictimes.com/news/defence/pakistan- hikes-defence-spending-by-20-to-9-bn-still-nearly-9x-less-than-indias/articleshow/ 121755652.cms>

²⁰ Pakistan hikes defence spending by 20% to \$9 bn, still nearly 9x less than India's, accessed January 11, 2026, <https://m.economictimes.com/news/defence/pakistan- hikes-defence-spending-by-20-to-9-bn-still-nearly-9x-less-than-indias/articleshow/ 121755652.cms>

²¹ Calibrated Force: Operation Sindoos and the Future of Indian Deterrence - RUSI, accessed January 11, 2026,

²² Pakistan Armed Forces - Wikipedia, accessed January 11, 2026, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pakistan_Armed_Forces

²³ Pakistan's New Chief Of The Defence Forces: A Long-Overdue Step Toward Joint Command - The Friday Times, accessed January 11, 2026, <https://www.thefridaytimes.com/08-Dec-2025/pakistan-s-new-chief-defence-forces- long-overdue-step-toward-joint-command>

²⁴ Pakistan Armed Forces - Wikipedia, accessed January 11, 2026, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pakistan_Armed_Forces

²⁵ Pakistan's National Assembly approves changes to Army Act - Asia News Network, accessed January 11, 2026, <https://asianews.network/pakistans-national-assembly-approves-changes-to-army-act/>

²⁶ Calibrated Force: Operation Sindoos and the Future of Indian Deterrence - RUSI, accessed January 11, 2026,

²⁷ Pakistan Armed Forces - Wikipedia, accessed January 11, 2026, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pakistan_Armed_Forces

²⁸ Will Pakistan's defence overhaul strengthen or upset its military balance? - Al Jazeera, accessed January 11, 2026, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/11/14/will-pakistans-defence-overhaul-strengthen-or-upset-its-military-balance>

²⁹ Will Pakistan's defence overhaul strengthen or upset its military balance? - Al Jazeera, accessed January 11, 2026, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/11/14/will-pakistans-defence-overhaul-strengthen-or-upset-its-military-balance>

³⁰ Pakistan's 27th constitutional amendment moves it one step closer to authoritarian rule, accessed January 11, 2026, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2025/12/pakistans-27th-constitutional-amendment-moves-it-one-step-closer-authoritarian-rule>

³¹ How Operation Sindoor made Pakistan 'rush through constitutional amendments', reset military, accessed January 11, 2026, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/how-operation-sindoor-made-pakistan-rush-through-constitutional-amendments-reset-military-101768028814851.html>

³² Army Rocket Force Command - Wikipedia, accessed January 11, 2026, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Army_Rocket_Force_Command

³³ Pakistan's 27th constitutional amendment moves it one step closer to authoritarian rule, accessed January 11, 2026, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2025/12/pakistans-27th-constitutional-amendment-moves-it-one-step-closer-authoritarian-rule>

³⁴ Firebreak or Fuse? Pakistan's Rocket Force and the Deterrence Dilemma in South Asia, accessed January 11, 2026, <https://southasianvoices.org/sec-m-pk-r-rocket-force-firebreak-fuse-11-11-2025/>

³⁵ Pakistan's New Rocket Force: Strategic Deterrence and Escalation Risks, accessed January 11, 2026, <https://southasianvoices.org/sec-m-pk-n-pakistan-rocket-force-09-30-2025/>

³⁶ Fatah (multiple rocket launcher) - Wikipedia, accessed January 11, 2026, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fatah_\(multiple_rocket_launcher\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fatah_(multiple_rocket_launcher))

³⁷ How Operation Sindoor made Pakistan 'rush through constitutional amendments', reset military, accessed January 11, 2026, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/how-operation-sindoor-made-pakistan-rush-through-constitutional-amendments-reset-military-101768028814851.html>

³⁸ Pakistan Set to Test 1,000km Fatah-5 Rocket in 2026, Transforming Rocket Artillery into Strategic-Depth Strike Weapon - Defence Security Asia, accessed January 11, 2026, <https://defencesecurityasia.com/en/pakistan-fatah-5-1000km-rocket-long-range-precision-strike-2026/>

³⁹ Pakistan Announces Acquisition of First Fifth Generation Fighters: What Chinese FC- 31 Stealth Jets Will Do For Its Fleet - Military Watch Magazine, accessed January 11, 2026, <https://militarywatchmagazine.com/article/pakistan-announces-acquisition-of-first-fifth-generation-fighters-what-chinese-fc-31-stealth-jets-will-do-for-its-fleet>

⁴⁰ Pakistan emerges as main recipient of Chinese combat aircraft - Dawn, accessed January 11, 2026, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1963311>

⁴¹ Pakistan Set to Test 1,000km Fatah-5 Rocket in 2026, Transforming Rocket Artillery into Strategic-Depth Strike Weapon - Defence Security Asia, accessed January 11, 2026, <https://defencesecurityasia.com/en/pakistan-fatah-5-1000km-rocket-long-range-precision-strike-2026/>

⁴² <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/calibrated-force-operation-sindoor-and-future-indian-deterrence>

⁴³ Firebreak or Fuse? Pakistan's Rocket Force and the Deterrence Dilemma in South Asia, accessed January 11, 2026, <https://southasianvoices.org/sec-m-pk-r-rocket-force-firebreak-fuse-11-11-2025/>

⁴⁴ Pakistan's New Rocket Force: Strategic Deterrence and Escalation Risks, accessed January 11, 2026, <https://southasianvoices.org/sec-m-pk-n-pakistan-rocket-force-09-30-2025/>

⁴⁵ Chengdu J-10 - Wikipedia, accessed January 11, 2026, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chengdu_J-10

⁴⁶ Pakistan Navy: Fourth Hangor-class submarine hits the water in China - Naval Today, accessed January 11, 2026, <https://www.navaltoday.com/2025/12/18/pakistan-navy-fourth-hangor-class-submarine-hits-the-water-in-china/>

⁴⁷ Pakistan Navy's fourth Hangor-class submarine launched in China - Naval Technology, accessed January 11, 2026, <https://www.naval-technology.com/news/pakistan-china-hangor-submarine/>

⁴⁸ <https://www.naval-technology.com/news/pakistan-china-hangor-submarine>

⁴⁹ Pakistan Set to Test 1,000km Fatah-5 Rocket in 2026, Transforming Rocket Artillery into Strategic-Depth Strike Weapon - Defence Security Asia, accessed January 11, 2026, <https://defencesecurityasia.com/en/pakistan-fatah-5-1000km-rocket-long-range-precision-strike-2026/>

⁵⁰ Hangor-class submarine - Wikipedia, accessed January 11, 2026, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hangor-class_submarine

⁵¹ How Operation Sindoor made Pakistan 'rush through constitutional amendments', reset military, accessed January 11, 2026, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/how-operation-sindoor-made-pakistan-rush-through-constitutional-amendments-reset-military-101768028814851.html>

⁵² Pakistan Navy Launches 4th Hangor-class Submarine "Ghazi" in China - Naval News, accessed January 11, 2026, <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/calibrated-force-operation-sindoor-and-future-indian-deterrence>

⁵⁴ <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2025/12/pakistan-navy-launches-4th-hangor-class-submarine-ghazi-in-china/>

⁵⁵ Chengdu J-10 - Wikipedia, accessed January 11, 2026, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chengdu_J-10

⁵⁶ In a major strategic shift, Pakistan offers a seaport and naval base to the U.S., accessed January 11, 2026, <https://www.globaldefensecorp.com/2025/10/06/in-a-major-strategic-shift-pakistan-offers-a-seaport-and-naval-base-to-the-u-s/>

⁵⁷ India-Pakistan Conflict in Spring 2025 - Congress.gov, accessed January 11, 2026, <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/IF13000>

⁵⁸ Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement - Wikipedia, accessed January 11, 2026, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strategic_Mutual_Defence_Agreement

⁵⁹ How Operation Sindoor made Pakistan 'rush through constitutional amendments', reset military, accessed January 11, 2026, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/how-operation-sindoor-made-pakistan-rush-through-constitutional-amendments-reset-military-101768028814851.html>

⁶⁰ Pakistan will commission in 2026 the first Hangor-class submarines built in cooperation with China - Zona Militar, accessed January 11, 2026, <https://www.zona-militar.com/en/2025/11/10/pakistan-will-commission-in-2026-the-first-hangor-class-submarines-built-in-cooperation-with-china/>

⁶¹ Pakistan Armed Forces - Wikipedia, accessed January 11, 2026, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pakistan_Armed_Forces

⁶² Calibrated Force: Operation Sindoor and the Future of Indian Deterrence - RUSI, accessed January 11, 2026,

⁶³ Pakistan Armed Forces - Wikipedia, accessed January 11, 2026, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pakistan_Armed_Forces

⁶⁴ Saudi Arabia and Pakistan's mutual defence pact sets a precedent for extended deterrence, accessed January 11, 2026, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2025/09/saudi-arabia-and-pakistans-mutual-defence-pact-sets-precedent-extended-deterrence>

⁶⁵ How the Saudi-Pakistan Defense Pact Could Destabilize the Middle East, accessed January 11, 2026, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/middle-east-watch/how-saudi-pakistan-defense-pact-could-destabilize-middle-east>

⁶⁶ Pakistan Set to Test 1,000km Fatah-5 Rocket in 2026, Transforming Rocket Artillery into Strategic-Depth Strike Weapon - Defence Security Asia, accessed January 11, 2026, <https://defencesecurityasia.com/en/pakistan-fatah-5-1000km-rocket-long-range-precision-strike-2026/>