

Perceptions, Power, and Polarization: U.S. Strategic Views on Pakistan's Emerging Alliance with China

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ABSTRACT

The research was carried out in investigating how the U.S. strategic decision makers perceived the deepening relationship between Pakistan and China. Qualitative content analysis was used in conjunction with policy documents, congressional testimony, think-tank stuff and open source security collection data. The central investigation was whether the assessment on Pakistan on the global scale has changed to focus on technologically advanced instruments. Its results revealed a strongly re-oriented U.S. attitude: Pakistan was being seen more and more as a key component of Chinese regional strategy. They linked this evolution, in part, to Pakistan developing cyber and network-centric capability, which was altering the U.S. calculus of military imbalance and risk of escalation especially relative to India. The reliance of the United States on India as the offshore balancing option to China, therefore, became very complicated, creating a question on whether to embrace or hedge the role of Pakistan. The study offers a contribution to the international relations theory because it was able to show how great powers form their strategy based on their perception of middle states. It also provides information on the way these changes can affect the state of regional stability and crisis management in South Asia.

Keywords: Perception, US, Network warfare, Pakistan, Geo-Politics

INTRODUCTION

South Asia has remained an area that is currently characterized with clear geopolitical instability and this is highly attributable to the deep-seated regional animosities, changing formulations of strategic alliances as well as increasing rivalry of power especially amongst Pakistan, India and China. At the center of this is the long-standing enmity between Pakistan and India over the state of Jammu and Kashmir, as this conflict has supported vast levels of militarization and deep suspicion and further conflict (Fair, 2021; Tellis, 2019). Tensions were again heightened by the April 2025 Pahalgam terrorist attack, remembered as the killing of 26 Indian civilians, the tensions were reportedly aggravated by the fact that it forced India to conduct Operation Sindoor on 6 May 2025, a military action against militant infrastructures in Pakistan and in Pakistan-administered Kashmir and the most widespread military conflict between the two countries since the 2019 Pulwama-Balakot crisis (The Economic Times, 2025).

In contrast to the earlier episodes, though, the 2025 Indo-Pakistan conflict happened in a more polarized international system, where the politics of alliance and strategy in the form of digital warfare still played a significant role in the response of the region and perception of international relations. Among them, the cooperation of Pakistan with China in the areas of network-centric warfare, cyber warfare, and space-based surveillance stood out, which interested the U.S. policymakers and strategic analysts in terms of monitoring. In this regard, the crisis served as an eye opener in which the United States was reevaluating Pakistan not only as a traditional security player in South Asia but also as a potential China cyber-ally

during a toning up U.S.-China strategic rivalry. The implications of this changing perception have large-scale repercussions to the American foreign policy, status of alliances and the stability of the region considering the increased overlapping between technological collusion with the modernization of global polarization.

Coming to its conclusion in the year 2025, the Indo-Pakistan conflict ended in one of the most complexed and technologically advanced air combat in Indian sub-continental history ever. The defining point of such escalation was the introduction in the armories of Pakistan of Chinese-manufactured Chengdu J-10C/JF-17, Thunder fighter-jet aircraft with the latest avionics and a much longer range in the ability of air-to-air shootings such as PL-15. Such systems were critical in destroying several Indian planes, inclusive of three Rafales, one MiG-29 and one Su-30MKI, hence, exemplifying the initial of Chinese-made weaponry proving to be higher than that of NATO grade (Eurasian Times, 2025; The Washington Post, 2025; Wikipedia, 2025b).

The episode was more than an exercise in air supremacy since it revealed the technological and strategic transformation of South Asia. Due to Pakistan successfully using Chinese military technology, the balance of air power in the region was affected and indicated an increased strategic relationship between Islamabad and Beijing as well, thus showing an increased Chinese desire to counter the Indian military dominance and rebuild the power balance in the region with asymmetric and network-centric capabilities (CFR, 2025; Tellis, 2022). These trends have to be put in context facing the reality of a geopolitically polarized world full of constitutional unions and loyalties shattered.

To the United States, which has long been a security interest in South Asia and an Indian strategic partner, the consequences of the shifting of Sino-Pakistani defence relations presents its own consequences. The already proven effectiveness of Chinese military exports on the battlefield challenges the established ideology of Western technological dominance, both on the fronts of defense spending and sales (Fair, 2021; The Washington Post, 2025). Washington will henceforth have the challenge of playing its strategic stance vis-a-vis India and Pakistan in a bilateral environment of rising tensions that combine with multinational rivalries.

This environment is further complicated by the fast rate of integrating Geographic Information Systems (GIS), cyber and space based technologies into South Asian defense strategies. In the 2025 war, GIS technologies were used to map cross border incursions, orchestrate precision airstrikes and follow digital incursion exploiting vital infrastructure networks. Noteworthy, the introduction of the Chinese Beidou satellite navigation system into the Pakistani defense sphere allowed aiming at the desired target in real-time and reduced the dependence of Islamabad on the GPS infrastructure under the control of the U.S. (Zhao & Wang, 2021). Cyber mapping, powered by GIS, in its turn enabled Pakistan and China to track the attack vectors in a digital domain and strengthen their network-warfare capabilities (Cavelty, 2019).

All these moves are the indicators of a strategic repositioning: the formation of a network centric warfare coalition where cyber capabilities, electronic warfare, spatial intelligence and strategic autonomy come together to form a rationalised deterrence paradigm. And the discussion provided above indicates that the alliance in question is not a rather simple technological convergence; instead, it implies a general redefinition of the power projection reflecting the era of global polarization when the collaboration between authoritarian regimes and the decline of the Western influence requires a strict review of the U.S. strategy in South Asia (Malik & Awan, 2023).

The paper has explored the perceptions by the U.S. to the changing military-technological alliance between Pakistan and China in the wake of the conflict in 2025 and its effects on India as well as power balance in the region and the U.S. participation in the South Asian region in future. Through probing of battles, military technology improvements, and political congruent relations, the analysis brings a general

insight on how power is challenged, coalitions are renegotiated, and narratives are re-created in a geopolitical world that is being polarized progressively.

Statement of the Problem

Although Pakistan is a nuclear-armed nation of strategic geographic importance, it has consistently faced challenges in cultivating a positive image inside U.S. foreign policy circles, frequently perceived solely through the prism of counterterrorism & regional instability. The aerial confrontations between India and Pakistan in May 2025, coupled with Islamabad's proficient exhibition of modern network-centric warfare, have instigated a notable alteration in global and American views about Pakistan's military prowess, strategic sophistication, and regional significance. This transition, propelled by strengthened defense collaboration with Russia and China, an assertive diplomatic initiative, and the reestablishment of Pakistan as a balancing entity in critical regional matters like Afghanistan and Kashmir, offers a significant chance to redefine Pakistan's international reputation. This transition has not been comprehensively examined in scholarly or policy literature, especially regarding the United States' current assessment of Pakistan's strategic value in light of the escalating U.S.-China competition. Absent this insight, Pakistan jeopardizes the opportunity to solidify its enhanced reputation and capitalize on its newfound strategic significance in a reconfigured global landscape.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper uses Geographic Information Systems (GIS) multidisciplinary approach combining qualitative content analysis with spatial analysis to investigate the United States of America's impressions of Pakistan's network warfare collaboration with China and its tactical consequences for India. The approach seeks to capture discursive as well as geospatial patterns influencing U.S. strategic evaluations regarding South Asian security behavior. Emphasizing Pakistan, India, and China, the second phase of the study uses Geographic Information Systems (GIS) for mapping cyber incidents as well as border conflicts in South Asia. The Center for Strategic and International Studies, or CSIS, Cyber incident Tracker, which is Digital An assault Map, Satellite images (e.g., Planet Laboratory, Sentinel The hub), as well as open-source intelligence (OSINT) platforms are among the several sources the spatial analysis combines. Extracted from Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) and ACLED (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project) are physical conflict events Weidmann & Schutte, 2017 found.

Major cyber-attack origins, network warfare hotspots, and border conflict flashpoints are spatially located using the GIS program. Layers are built to reflect attack paths, temporal escalation, and proximity to military installations or strategic infrastructure (Gould, 2020).

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that draws from Cyber Deterrence Theory, Network-Centric Warfare (NCW), and elements of Perception and Power Theory in international relations. These combined approaches allow for a nuanced understanding of how evolving cyber alliances, particularly between Pakistan and China, are perceived by the United States and how such perceptions influence regional strategic balances, especially vis-à-vis India.

Network-Centric Warfare (NCW)

Developed as a military doctrine in the post-Cold War era, Network-Centric Warfare emphasizes the importance of information superiority achieved through interconnected digital networks (Alberts et al., 2000). This concept explains how states seek to create synergy between sensors, decision-makers, and shooters to enable faster and more precise military responses. The NCW paradigm shifts the focus from traditional force-on-force combat to the role of information flows and cyber capabilities in determining

battlefield outcomes. The increasing fusion of cyber operations with conventional forces by China and Pakistan suggests an emerging network-centric alliance aimed at achieving asymmetrical advantages. For the U.S., this alliance is not just a threat to regional military balance but a disruptive force against its own strategic and surveillance networks in the Indo-Pacific.

Perception and Power in International Relations

Power in international relations is not solely a function of military strength but also of perception—how one state interprets the intentions, capabilities, and alliances of another (Jervis, 1976; Wendt, 1995). In this context, the U.S. perception of a China-Pakistan cyber alliance significantly influences its strategic posture in South Asia. Perceived threats—particularly those emerging from opaque, dual-use cyber technologies—can lead to shifts in alliance behavior, increased surveillance, and strategic hedging. The perception of an emboldened Pakistan leveraging Chinese cyber technologies and NCW doctrines contributes to a broader narrative of strategic encirclement of India and undermining of U.S. regional influence (Tellis, 2020). This theory helps explain why the U.S. response is shaped not just by empirical threat assessments but also by cognitive and interpretive factors, including mistrust, past behavior, and strategic signaling.

Pakistan-China Network Warfare Collaboration

Beyond conventional defense cooperation into the cyberspace, the Pakistan-China network warfare alliance marks a growing strategic and technological cooperation. Common geopolitical goals underlie this cooperation: counterbalancing Indian regional dominance, discouraging U.S. influence in South Asia, and undercutting India's vital utilities and digital autonomy (Raman, 2021; Joshi, 2020). With China allegedly offering Pakistan technological support and cybersecurity training in support of shared regional interests, both nations have progressively coordinated their cyber capabilities towards pursuing strategic goals (Buchanan, 2020). With Pakistan using Chinese frameworks of cyber governance as well as surveillance infrastructure, the alliance also reflects more general patterns in digital authoritarianism as well as data warfare (Segal, 2017).

China and Pakistan reportedly cooperate on cyber intelligence sharing including methods, malware, surveillance devices, and threat assessments. Supported by organizations like the People's Liberation Army Strategic Support Force (PLA SSF), China's advanced cyber capabilities provide Pakistan operational expertise, education, and technology for surveillance (Rolland, 2020).

Particularly under the cover of technical cooperation connected to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Chinese institutions have helped Pakistan's digital surveillance, digital warfare capabilities, and cybersecurity infrastructure to develop (Ramanathan, 2021). This includes helping Pakistan create military cyber command centers.

Though official records are opaque, cybersecurity companies and strategic analysts have highlighted coordinated cyber operations targeted at India's security, energy, health care, and financial sectors. Often targeting Indian military and diplomatic institutions, these involve Advanced Persistent Threats (APTs) including APT41 (China-based) and Transparent tribes (Pakistan-linked FireEye, 2020). China's provision of 5G telecommunications infrastructure (via Huawei and ZTE) perhaps allows Beijing indirect access or monitoring capability inside South Asian digital ecosystems, thereby more fully incorporating their cyber circumstances (Weinbaum & Ahmed, 2020).

Evidence of Network Warfare

Empirical and anecdotal data abound demonstrating how the Pakistan-China cyber accord has affected regional stability, especially by raising disputes with India and driving strategic reevaluations.

Technological and Cyber Collaboration

Joint Development of Military Technology: China and Pakistan have great technological synergy shown by cooperation of the JF-17 Thunder fighter jet. These kinds of cooperation not only improve Pakistan's own defense capacity but also show a great degree of strategic confidence.

Along with surveillance technologies, Pakistan's obtaining of sophisticated Chinese naval assets—including Type 054A/P naval vessels and Hangor-class submarines—showcases a deliberate attempt to strengthen its naval defense and electronic warfare capability. Regular exercises including the "Shaheen" (Air Force), "Sea Guardians" (Navy), and "Warrior" (Special Forces) series have progressively included scenarios including electronic warfare as well as cyber operations, so improving interconnection and operational preparedness in the cyberspace.

Strategic Collaboration and Regional Consequences of Network-Centric Warfare

Armed to carry PL-15 beyond-visual-range air-to-air missiles (BVRAAMs), the Chengdu J-10C fighter jets represent a radical change in Pakistan's aerial combat capability. Designed and developed by China, these systems not only have high kinetic performance but also fit a larger network-centric warfare (NCW) architecture thanks to Chinese-pakistani security and cyber cooperation.

J-10C and PL-15: Technology

Equipped to use Activated Electronically scanned Array (AESA) radar detectors, electronic warfare packages, and data-link systems allowing fast communication and data sharing, the 4.5-generation multirole fighter jet, the J-10C, backed by satellite as well as ground-based data inputs, the PL-15 missile—with an expected range of more than 200km—is directed by a functioning radar seeker. Combining its long-range engagement capacity along with the J-10C's radar data and electronic warfare platforms creates a significant threat to enemy air assets including India's Rafale jets.

Diversification of Advanced Systems by Networked Warfare

Combining J-10C combatants with Chinese ISR (intelligence, Monitoring, as well as Reconnaissance) structures, electromagnetic warfare (EW) platforms, and Pakistan's ground-based control and surveillance networks has enabled synchronized tracking of targets, long-range involvement, and electronic disruption of Indian systems in hypothetical or simulated operations. Strategic think tank and defense simulation reports point to evidence that, under such network-centric model. Out-ranged MICA missiles of Indian Rafale, PL-15 missiles let Pakistani pilots strike first with more situational awareness. Data fusion to ground as well as airborne assets and electronic warfare pods produced a seamless fighting picture that made India's S-400 radar arrays vulnerable to spoofing or jamming. Under conditions of strong electronic attack, the S-400's radar acquiring capabilities were degraded, allowing strike airplanes to take advantage of blind areas.

Defense analysts contend that in war-game simulations and strategic assessments, such networked capabilities presented a credible threat, reversing conventional balances of air superiority (Gady, 2022; Panda, 2023), even while publically confirmed battlefield damage of Rafale jets or S-400 systems is lacking. Particularly in a network-centric warfare (NCW) perspective, the entry of Chinese-made J-10C multirole fighter jets through Pakistan's Air Force equipped with PL-15 beyond-visual-range air-to-air missiles (BVRAAMs) has greatly improved Pakistan's air combat and deterrence capability. Equipped with integrated electronic warfare suites and an Active Electronically Scanned Array (AESA) radar, the J-10C provides exceptional awareness of situations and immediate information sharing (Panda, 2023). With a range of more than 200 kilometers, the PL-15 long-range missile outperforms the MICA missiles of the

Indian Rafale in engagement reach, so giving Pakistani pilots first-shot advantage in disputed territory (Gady,2022).

Reframing Perception and Power: The Geostrategic Relevance of the China–Pakistan Network Warfare Collaboration

The evolving China–Pakistan partnership has transcended traditional defense cooperation, entering a new phase defined by digital integration and cyber-enabled warfare. This transformation came into sharp focus during the May 2025 Indo-Pakistan conflict, where real-time collaboration between Beijing and Islamabad in cyberspace and aerial operations showcased a sophisticated strategic alignment. From Washington’s vantage point, this conflict was not just a regional flare-up—it was a vivid demonstration of an emerging alliance with significant geostrategic consequences. As perceptions of Pakistan shift in light of its deepening ties with China, especially in the domain of network warfare, the United States is compelled to reconsider its strategic calculus in South Asia. Understanding this recalibrated alliance is vital to navigating the shifting dynamics of regional security, technological influence, and global power competition. The benefits of this growing geostrategic relevance—particularly for Pakistan—are outlined in the discussion below.

India's Multidimensional Threat

The May 2025 conflict seriously tested India's reliance on a mix from Western as well as Russian devices, which included French-made Rafale jets as well as the Russian S-400 air defense system. Skilled Pakistani pilots effectively used Chinese-supplied J-10C fighter planes armed in PL-15 long-range missiles, so displaying not only technological edge but also the maturity of Pakistan's network-centric warfare capability (Global Connectivities, 2025). Pakistan's combined use of long-range targeting systems, electronic warfare, and radar made several Indian places vulnerable, so redefining ideas of regional air power.

Change in Americans' Perceptions

This calculated triumph made the United States reevaluate its presumptions about Pakistan's strength. Long seen mostly as a terrorism prevention partner, Pakistan's success in using sophisticated network warfare is establishing it as an increasingly capable and complex actor in the Asia-Pacific region. This has complicated the U.S. dependence on India as a potential offshore balancer for regulating China (ISSI, 2025). Moreover, American experts started reevaluating the viability of seeing India as the only regional hegemon able to stop Chinese progress, particularly considering that the fragility of Western platforms became clear. U.S. strategic thinkers are now dealing with a more complicated South Asian calculus given Pakistan's shown capability and the developing China–Pakistan axis. India is still a strategic ally in Indo-Pacific projects, but Pakistan's capacity to challenge Indian dominance with Chinese technology points to Washington perhaps having to interact with Islamabad to preserve regional balance (ORF America, 2025).

Effects for India's Regional Hegemonic Ambitions

The view of India as a growing regional hegemon experienced a big blow. The losses in the May 2025 skirmishes exposed weaknesses in India's advanced systems' integration and adaptability, so undermining its assertions of military supremacy in South Asia (Times of India, 2025). Accelerating defense indigenization, improving their cyberwarfare capabilities, and bridging technological gaps with rivals are now under more demand from Indian officials.

Improvement of Human Capital in Pakistan

Integration of these sophisticated systems into Pakistan's military doctrine was greatly aided by strategic investments in human capital, particularly via facilities like the National Aerospace Science and Technology Park (NASTP). The training and operational competency of Pakistani officials enhanced the tactical efficiency of the China-supplied systems, so indicating a change from reliance on foreign advisers to domestic capacity (NASTP, 2025).

Kashmir as Nuclear Flashpoint

Emphasizing the possibility for a nuclear arms race between two armed neighbors, the conflict attracted fresh global focus to the Kashmir issue. Analyzes pointed out that the skirmishes highlighted the frailty of peace in the area and the dangers connected with erroneous in a nuclear environment.

Building China-Pakistan Relations

China greatly increased its military as well as technological encouragement of Pakistan following the May 2025 disputes, so strengthening the China–Pakistan beneficial axis. Beijing promised to provide Pakistan with one of its fifth-generation J-35A stealth fighters as part of this increased cooperation, fitted with PL-17 long-range air-to-air missiles, generally regarded as a counter to Western missile systems. Furthermore promised to Pakistan access to next-generation drones for surveillance as well as military purposes was Global Connectivities, 2025.

Diplomatic Relevance of Pakistan

In the wake of the conflicts Kuwait's visa reopening following a 19-year ban was another symbolic result of Pakistan's improved global profile following conflict. Introduced in 2006, the prohibition was preventing numerous Pakistani workers off Gulf job markets. Following Pakistan's measured managing of the May 2025 tensions, the bank's decision illustrates improved international relations and rising regional confidence in Pakistan's governance and stability (The News International, 2025). This diplomatic triumph also signaled the start of more general re-engagement with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations, enabling Pakistan to resume its integration into regional labor markets and so confirm its relevance in the Muslim world.

FINDINGS

Pakistan's Enhanced Military Credibility

- Utilizing China-supplied J-10C fighters alongside PL-15 missiles, Pakistan's Air Force allegedly destroyed six Indian aircraft—including two Rafale jets—in the May 2025 clashes (The Diplomat, 2025).
- Using network-centric warfare (NCW), Pakistan was able to combine real-time ISR data, jamming abilities, and long-range air-to-air targeting—a initially for the region—placing Pakistan of the top ten nations implementing NCW fundamentals operationally (SIPRI, 2025).

Shift in U.S. Strategic Perceptions

- Released in June 2025, a U.S. National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) noted that Pakistan's shown fighting abilities "demonstrates strategic complexity beyond beforehand evaluations" and "justification an adjusted policy perspective" (CRS, 2025).
- Over thirty U.S. legislators from both parties asked the State Department to review bilateral security negotiations with Pakistan following post-May conflicts (Congressional Record, June 2025).

Rebalancing of Regional Alliances

- China said that by Q1 2026 China will be fast forwarding 30 J-35A stealth fighter planes as well as next-generation drone technologies to Pakistan (Global Defense Corp, 2025).
- Signed in June 2025, Pakistan's \$2.6 billion defense and industrial partnership deal with Russia combines transfer of technology agreements as well as transformation of the Pakistan Steel (Rio Times, 2025).

End of Diplomatic Isolation

- Directly citing Pakistan's "responsible behavior in regional security," Kuwait restarted the processing of visas for Pakistanis in May 2025 after 19 years (Express Tribune, 2025).
- Signaling a change in bilateral relations, Pakistan assigned a new ambassador for Afghanistan by June 2025, its first after 2021. This matched a trilateral conference between Pakistan, China, as well as Afghanistan that generated a joint statement pledging to combat terror across borders (Al Jazeera, 2025).

Global Perceptions of the Kashmir Dispute

- Between May 7 and 12, 2025, Google Trends data showed that over 10 million Indian internet users searched over the term "ceasefire." This notable increase in internet searches exposes an unexpected discrepancy in public knowledge of a basic idea regularly deployed in strategic and military rhetoric (The Neutral, 2025).
- Citing Pakistan's narrative during post-clash diplomacy, the Washington Post as well as The Australian published opinions calling Kashmir a "flashpoint for nuclear escalation" (Washington Post, 2025; The Australian, 2025).

Economic and Strategic Autonomy Gains

- Pakistan's exports to Russia and Central Asia saw a 13% increase in the first half of 2025, largely attributed to enhanced bilateral channels post-defense agreements (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2025).
- The National Aerospace Science and Technology Park (NASTP) reported a 28% increase in defense R&D investment, boosted by new contracts for drone and stealth aviation research in collaboration with Chinese firms (NASTP Annual Report, 2025).

ANALYSIS

The May of 2025 India–Pakistan aerial clash prompted a reevaluation of Pakistan's military capacity, technical sophistication, and diplomatic significance by global powers, especially the United States. The proficient deployment of China-supplied J-10C planes, PL-series missiles, including real-time integrated warfare technologies by Pakistan astonished several Western analysts who had previously seen Pakistan as a subordinate conventional military power. This success, coupled with enhanced defense relations with Russia and fortified diplomatic connections with Kuwait & Afghanistan, challenged established narratives that perceived Pakistan predominantly as a security danger or aid-dependent entity.

Nonetheless, despite these advancements, U.S. attitudes continue to be cautious and inconsistent. Skepticism endures because to Pakistan's enduring strategic partnership with China, intermittent conflicts on counterterrorism collaboration, and apprehensions regarding nuclear escalation. Pakistan's actions following May 2025 have created new diplomatic and strategic opportunities; nevertheless, these will be ephemeral if Islamabad does not convert tactical advantages into enduring policy impact, organizational trustworthiness, and geopolitical narrative convergence with Washington.

Proposed Solutions

To solidify its enhanced reputation and boost its position in U.S. strategic assessments, Pakistan must implement a multifaceted strategy.

1. Pakistan ought to aggressively collaborate with U.S. think tanks, policymaking institutions, including congressional committees to redefine its position as a stabilizing regional entity, rather than solely a client state or security burden. Facilitating track-II and track-I dialogues. Five talks centered on regional the fight against terrorism cyber collaboration, and conflict avoidance in South Asia might reestablish Pakistan as a productive participant in the formation of regional order.
2. Pakistan must enhance defense transparency to mitigate apprehensions in Washington. This may encompass confidence-building measures (CBMs) that include collaborative cyberwarfare simulations, regulated military exchanges, and restricted openness in nuclear posture assessments via unofficial diplomatic channels. Utilizing its May 2025 effectiveness, Pakistan might suggest collaborative U.S.-Pakistan symposia on "accountable Nuclear Prevention and Crisis Intervention in South Asia."
3. As Pakistan strengthens its relations with China and Russia, it must preserve strategic flexibility by engaging in security conversations with Western entities such as NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue and U.S.-led non-NATO ally frameworks. A revised foreign policy approach that prioritizes "multi-vector engagement" instead than bloc alignment may alleviate U.S. concerns over Pakistan's long-term objectives.
4. By highlighting the development of entities such as the National Aerospace Science & technological Park (NASTP) and burgeoning research and development capabilities, Pakistan might transform the U.S. perception from "security consumer" to technological co-developer. Initiatives such as Pakistan–U.S. academic military technology exchanges and participation in forthcoming digital commerce corridors may redefine Pakistan's significance within the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy.
5. Pakistan need to establish a strategic communications campaign aimed at U.S. media, academic entities, and politicians to influence the narrative on its contributions to regional peace, counterterrorism initiatives, and judicious military engagement.
6. Success narratives—such as enabling Afghan dialogue or revealing Indian interference in Balochistan—must be meticulously recorded and presented inside U.S. policy circles.

CONCLUSION

The Indo-Pakistan conflict of May 2025 acted as more than just a military skirmish—it became a pivotal moment that reconfigured how the United States views Pakistan amid shifting regional dynamics. Pakistan's battlefield performance, particularly its adept use of Chinese-made J-10C fighter jets and synchronized cyber operations, showcased a leap in military sophistication. Yet, this advancement only deepened existing skepticism in Washington about Pakistan's strategic dependability, ambiguous military intentions, and its tightening embrace of Beijing. For American policymakers, the war didn't simply represent a clash between neighbors; it exposed a broader shift in Pakistan's defense doctrine. Increasingly, Pakistan leans into asymmetric strategies underpinned by cyber warfare and Chinese technological support. Such developments have sparked renewed debate in U.S. defense circles about Pakistan's long-term direction and its role in South Asia's security equation.

Washington finds itself in a bind. On the one hand, Pakistan remains a nuclear power with legitimate security anxieties vis-à-vis India and Afghanistan. On the other, its burgeoning military and digital partnership with China has triggered alarm bells. The real-time deployment of Chinese satellites and cyber assets in the conflict—facilitating surgical strikes and information warfare—highlighted the deep integration between the two states, especially worrying amid ongoing U.S.-China rivalry. Perceptually, Pakistan continues to face an uphill battle in reshaping its image in the United States. Years of

counterterrorism controversies, opaque dealings with extremist elements, and inconsistent democratic signals have painted it as a complex, often unreliable partner. The American media and policy community frequently portray it as a paradox: an ally when convenient, a saboteur when not.

However, this narrative isn't unanimous. Some voices in the U.S. strategic establishment advocate for cautious engagement, recognizing Pakistan's geostrategic relevance, its history of intelligence cooperation, and its sway over non-state actors. There's also an emerging realization that isolating Pakistan entirely might only nudge it further into China's strategic orbit—counterproductive for U.S. interests in both South Asia and across the Belt and Road Initiative corridor. Social-political rhetoric on middle powers indicates the balance between narrative factuality rebalances the distribution of power, confuses existing counterparts, and at the same time both creates risks and opportunities of stability to crisis-management. Solutions are needed in South Asia that seek a balance between deterrence and dialogue, integrate hedging and confidence building, vigilance and empathy to maintain stability in the region, which may often be termed as a possible nuclear flash point. The discussion therefore highlights the permanent influence of perceptions on the great-power actions and suggests avenues towards perpetuating crisis management in the region.

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