

Statistics can be misleading. In territorial size, Pakistan is the 33rd largest country in the world. In population size, it is the world's 5th largest country and the Muslim world's 2nd largest country. It has the 6th largest, and 15th most powerful, military in the world. It is one of only nine states in the world possessing nuclear weapons. And Pakistan's ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence) is rated as one of the top intelligence agencies in the world, writes Joseph E Fallon.

Despite such statistical strengths, Pakistan lacks security. It lacks security because it lacks strategic depth "*the distances between the front lines or battle sectors and the combatants' industrial core areas, capital cities, heartlands, and other key centers of population or military production.*"

From Islamabad, its capital, in the east to Peshawar in the west, Pakistan's width is 115 miles. The distance between Islamabad and the Indian border is 60 miles.

Not possessing strategic depth has had a devastating effect on the national security and territorial integrity of the state. In its 74-year history, Pakistan has fought and lost three wars with India over Kashmir, 1947, 1965, and 1999.

In 1971, India intervened in a Pakistani civil war between the east and west wings of the country resulting in the secession of East Pakistan and the birth of the independent country of Bangladesh. According to Pakistani historian Tariq Ali, as a result of the 1971 War, which lasted just 13 days, "*Pakistan lost half its navy, a quarter of its air force and a third of its army*". And over 15 percent of its pre-1971 territory. Furthermore, India had captured, but returned in the peace treaty, nearly 6,000 sq. miles of land in West Pakistan, now Pakistan, in Punjab, Sindh, and Kashmir.

During that time, Pakistan had been a member of two collective security organizations, the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), founded 1955, disbanded 1979, and the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), founded 1954, disbanded 1977. Article 1 of the CENTO Treaty stated, "*Consistent with article 51 of the United Nations Charter the High Contracting Parties will co-operate for their security and defence.*" Under Article 2 of SEATO "...*the parties, separately and jointly, by means of continuous and effective self-help and mutual aid, will maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack and to prevent and counter subversive activities directed from without against their territorial integrity and political stability.*"

Yet, neither CENTO, nor SEATO came to Pakistan's defense.

The 1971 defeat was traumatic. It seared into the psyche of Pakistan, the military, the politicians, and the public, a belief that outside powers, India, but also the US, seek to destroy Pakistan.

For many Pakistanis, this fear was vindicated by the unofficial proposals of US Army Lieutenant Colonel (ret) Ralph Peters, formerly of the Office of the US Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence. In his June 1, 2006 article, "Blood Borders", for Armed Forces Journal, Colonel Peters called for redrawing the borders of the Middle East and truncating Pakistan. "*The remaining 'natural' Pakistan would lie entirely east of the Indus, except for a westward spur near Karachi.*"

As The New York Times reported November 23, 2008, "*Redrawn theoretical map makes Pakistan uneasy*" , Colonel Peters' map "has fueled a belief among Pakistanis, including members of the armed forces, that what the United States really wants is the breakup of Pakistan, the only Muslim country with nuclear arms."Ã„Ã„Ã„

One of the biggest fears of the Pakistani military planners is the collaboration between India and Afghanistan to destroy Pakistan,' said a senior Pakistani government official involved in strategic planning who insisted on anonymity in accordance with diplomatic rules. 'Some people feel the United States is colluding in this.'" This suspicion lingers to this day.

Pakistan is a frail state; vulnerable from within and without. It is squeezed between traditionally hostile neighbors, Afghanistan to its west and India to its east. Both enjoy a geostrategic advantage over Pakistan. Afghanistan is guarded by one of the world's highest mountain ranges, the Hindu Kush, while India is shielded by its immense space, which extends nearly 2,000 miles east to west.

For Pakistan, its geography creates an existential threat. Its dependence on the Indus River and tributaries for drinking water and "*80 percent of Pakistan's irrigated agriculture*" poses a risk to national security. The sources of these rivers lie in India which can control their flow. India is Pakistan's Sword of Damocles which can wreak havoc by constructing dams that will reduce the amount of these waters Pakistan receives.

Furthermore, the Indus River divides Pakistan in unequal halves. Running east to the Indian border is open terrain ideal for tank warfare by India. Ten years ago, in "*An Introduction to*

Pakistan's Military"

Harvard University, the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs commented Pakistan is

"so narrow at its midpoint that an Indian advance of 300-400 kilometers -- the range of Indian tanks prior to refueling - could effectively cut the country (and its forces) in half. Furthermore, Pakistan's lines of communication - most importantly the highway that runs between Lahore and Karachi - run perpendicular to a probable Indian advance and could be easily severed if Indian forces gained ground. Many of Pakistan's major population centers, like Lahore, also lie within relatively easy striking distance of the border."

That geographic vulnerability has not changed.

To Pakistan's west and northwest lie the Hindu Kush, a continuation of the Pamirs and Himalayas and geographical extension of Afghanistan. Pakistan's disputed border with Afghanistan meanders through this rampart at the roof of the world.

Afghanistan, not India, was Pakistan's initial nemesis. For over half a century, the government of Afghanistan had recognized the Durand Line as its eastern border. The line drawn through the Hindu Kush by the British in 1893 demarcated Afghanistan from British India. With the creation of Pakistan in 1947, Kabul repudiated that boundary. That year the Afghan government was the sole vote against the admission of Pakistan into the United Nations. At the same time, Kabul made territorial claims against Pakistan. First, it called for extending Afghanistan's eastern border to the Indus River. Second, it supported an armed uprising to have the Pashtun inhabited lands in Pakistan recognized as the independent state of Pashtunistan. Third, in 1952, the Afghan government laid claim to all Baluch, as well as Pashtun territories in Pakistan. Fourth, in the early 1960s and early 1970s, Kabul again supported armed Pashtun separatists.

With the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan December 1979, the dynamics of the Hindu Kush changed dramatically in Pakistan's favour. From bases in these mountains, Pakistan now supported the Taliban's guerrilla war in Afghanistan. As originally reported by Human Rights Watch in 2001, "Of all the foreign powers involved in efforts to sustain and manipulate the ongoing fighting, Pakistan is distinguished both by the sweep of its objectives and the scale of its efforts, which include soliciting funding for the Taliban, bankrolling Taliban operations, providing diplomatic support as the Taliban's virtual emissaries abroad, arranging training for Taliban fighters, recruiting skilled and unskilled manpower to serve in Taliban armies, planning and directing offensives, providing and facilitating shipments of ammunition and fuel, and on several occasions apparently directly providing combat support."

The reason for such support, then and now, is that by having influence over Afghanistan,

Pakistan can realize strategic depth. A friendly, pro-Pakistan, government in Kabul benefits Islamabad in three ways. First, such a government may recognize the Durand Line as the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. Second, such an Afghan government can facilitate Pakistan's access to the energy resources of the former Soviet republics of Central Asia. Third, and most importantly, a friendly government in Afghanistan removes the threat of a two-front war allowing Pakistan to concentrate its forces on India and Kashmir.

The quest for strategic depth further eroded Pakistan's security. In 2007, Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), an umbrella organization with ties to al-Qaeda, emerged from the Hindu Kush to launch an insurgency against Islamabad. According to Stanford University Center for International Security and Cooperation, "*The TTP claims that its jihad against the Pakistani government is an act of self-defense against an apostate and puppet regime of the United States. Ultimately, the group intends to overthrow the Pakistani government and establish an Islamic caliphate in Pakistan.*"

While tribal differences and targeted assassinations of its leadership have significantly weakened the group, the TTP, like the Taliban in Afghanistan, is a generic name for a collection of competing and collaborating groups. The TTP, therefore, remains a viable tool by which outside powers may undermine Pakistan.

In the southwest lies the Baluchistan plateau consisting of inhospitable highlands, valleys, basins, and deserts. The terrain, which favours guerrilla warfare, extends over much of Pakistan's province of Baluchistan. This province accounts for 44 percent of Pakistan's total land area, and which as reported by Business Standard, May 7, 2019, "*is rich in natural reserves including gold, copper, oil, valuable stones, chromite and natural gas. It has an oceanic coastline that stretches along with one of the world's most important shipping routes i.e., the Straits of Hormuz.*"

Baluchistan is also home to one of the longest running insurgencies in the country's history, dating back to the birth of Pakistan and its annexation of the princely state of the Khanate of Kalat. There have been five Baluchi insurgencies -- 1948, 1958–59, 1962–63, 1973–1977, and from 2003 to the present.

Pakistan blames India for the current violence. Reuters reported November 14, 2020, "*Pakistan's foreign minister and military said that India's Research & Analysis Wing (RAW) intelligence agency was operating a network of agents and training camps through its diplomatic*

missions in Afghanistan who were financing, training, and equipping militants operating inside Pakistan...the Pakistani Taliban, as well as Baloch insurgent groups from the southern province of Balochistan who have claimed responsibility for attacks on Chinese interests as part of an effort to sabotage China's \$65 billion Belt and Road investment plan in Pakistan."

Pakistan backs the Afghan Taliban in hope the Islamic insurgency will overthrow the government in Kabul and end Afghanistan's irredentism, which threatens Pakistan's territorial integrity. Years later, the Pakistani Taliban (TTP), allegedly backed by India, launches an insurgency to overthrow the government in Islamabad.

Pakistan supports the secession of Kashmir from India. India then supports Baluchistan's secession from Pakistan and later revokes the special status of Kashmir dividing it into two union territories.

For Pakistan, it is all a classic case of "blowback", a CIA term for "*the unintended consequence and unwanted side-effects of a covert operation*".

To redress this geostrategic imbalance, which favors India, Pakistan seeks more help from China. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Beijing became Islamabad's largest arms supplier after 2010.

With the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), launched in 2015, Beijing is investing \$65 billion in development projects in Pakistan including expansion of the port of Gwadar and creation of an oil pipeline from Gwadar to Kashgar in China. As the Mercator Institute for China Studies, (MERICS), explained, May 20, 2020, "*As a counterweight to India in South Asia and a potential training ground for Uyghur militants from Xinjiang, the stability of its "all-weather" ally is a major concern for Beijing, and so CPEC was deemed a necessary strategic commitment.*"

In December 2020, to counter a US-India alliance, China and Pakistan signed a mutual defense pact. China state media reported Chinese Defense Minister, General Wei called upon China and Pakistan to "*push the military-to-military relationship to a higher level, so as to jointly cope with various risks and challenges, firmly safeguard the sovereignty and security interests of the two countries and safeguard the regional peace and stability.*"

Nikkei Asia, reporting of the defence pact December 8, 2020, added, "*analysts believe it contains new commitments to intelligence-sharing that will help Pakistan track the movements of Indian forces across their tense shared border.*"

By allying with Beijing, Pakistan achieves strategic depth by becoming part of China's strategic depth. This confronts India with the prospect of a two-front war; war against Pakistan can expand into a war with China.

The cost to Pakistan is that it becomes a "strategic support state". One that insures "*China has the ability and resources to guide the actions of the country so that they fit into [China's] strategic needs*"

. This is a polite definition of a colony. For Pakistan, its geopolitical vulnerability remains, keeping it stuck between a rock and a hard place.

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