



— ICEP's — CSS WEEKLY

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- National Affairs
- International Affairs
- Geopolitical Trends
- Pakistan's Strategic Outlook
- Current Developments



Current Affairs
Analysis • Insights • Preparation

— A Weekly Current Affairs Digest for CSS / PMS Aspirants —

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This Week's Theme: A trilateral defence pact moves from signature to institutionalisation even as Gaza's disarmament stalls, Hormuz diplomacy is derailed by a deadly Houthi strike, and West Bank displacement accelerates — underscoring the gap between security architecture and durable peace across the Middle East, while at home Pakistan navigates a live federalism debate, a landmark DISCO privatisation, and a widening monsoon crisis.

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Current Affairs



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N-01

NATIONAL AFFAIRS

The New-Provinces Debate: Is the 28th Amendment a Governance Reform or a Political Gimmick?



A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Pakistan's debate over the proposed 28th Constitutional Amendment has intensified. While the government signals intent to create new provinces and revise key constitutional provisions, critics argue it may be a political tool to consolidate power rather than a genuine devolution reform.



Initiated after the 27th Amendment; government interested in creating new provinces.



Proposed package may touch up to 117 articles of the Constitution.



Requires two-thirds majority in both houses of Parliament.



Debate highlights: federalism, governance efficiency, political consensus, and provincial autonomy.



D. KEY FACTS AT A GLANCE



117

Constitutional articles reported under review



2/3

Parliamentary majority required to pass



4

New provinces speculated for Punjab alone



2025

Year the 27th Amendment (predecessor) was passed



B. PROPOSED CHANGES (UNVERIFIED PROPOSALS)



Creation of New Provinces:
Splitting Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan & KP into smaller units.



Article 239 Amendment:
Shift power to Parliament alone to create new provinces (bypassing provincial assembly consent).



Delinking Delimitation from Census:
Constituency boundaries may no longer depend on census.



Raise Voting Age:
Proposal to increase voting age from 18 to 25.



Stronger Local Government:
Empowering local bodies at the expense of provincial autonomy.



Federal Territories:
Separate federal territories for Islamabad, Karachi & Gwadar.



C. THE DEBATE



SUPPORTERS SAY

- Smaller provinces mean better governance, service delivery & administrative responsiveness.
- Addresses ethnic & regional grievances.
- Strengthens local governments.
- Creates opportunities for balanced development.



CRITICS SAY

- Political gimmick to entrench current coalition.
- Undermines provincial autonomy (18th Amendment).
- No official bill tabled; public debate lacks transparency.
- May trigger fresh disputes over resources, boundaries & NFC share.



E. IMPLICATIONS



Could re-engineer Pakistan's federal structure since 1973.



May either strengthen federalism or weaken provincial autonomy.



Requires broad political consensus for legitimacy.



High political cost if perceived as power grab.



Opportunity to modernize governance if implemented fairly.

“ Provincial balance is not just a constitutional issue; it is the cornerstone of Pakistan's unity and stability. ”



FOR CSS / PMS ASPIRANTS

Understand the constitutional provisions, political dynamics, arguments for and against, and potential impacts of the 28th Amendment debate.



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The New-Provinces Debate: Is the 28th Amendment a Governance Reform or a Political Gimmick?

A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Pakistan's simmering debate over a proposed 28th Constitutional Amendment sharpened this week as commentators and political actors weighed whether the drive to redraw the map of the federation is a genuine governance reform or an elite bargaining chip. The idea traces back to the passage of the 27th Amendment last year, after which Senator Faisal Vawda and other government allies signalled that "preparations should now begin" for a follow-up package. Minister of State for Law and Justice Barrister Aqeel has since confirmed government interest in creating new provinces, though the exact formula remains unsettled, while Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar has insisted no concrete package yet stands before the government without coalition consensus.

What began as speculation has hardened into a structured, if still unofficial, debate. Investigative reporting suggests the proposed package could touch as many as 117 articles of the Constitution, covering everything from the mechanism for creating new provinces (shifting the power to Parliament alone, bypassing the presently required consent of the provincial assembly concerned under Article 239), to delinking constituency delimitation from the census, to raising the voting age from 18 to 25, to strengthening local government at the expense of provincial autonomy secured under the 18th Amendment. Unverified but widely circulated proposals envisage splitting Punjab into West Punjab, South Punjab, Bahawalpur and Potohar; Sindh into urban and rural zones plus a separate Mehran province; Balochistan into a coastal Makran province; and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa into a southern KP and a separate Hazara province, alongside federal territories for Islamabad, Karachi and Gwadar.

This week's most consequential intervention came from The Diplomat, which argued the province debate risks becoming a "political gimmick" that entrenches the current hybrid coalition rather than genuinely devolving power, noting that the government commands the two-thirds majority needed for such an amendment only because of an Election Commission ruling and a Supreme Court verdict last summer. PPP has raised reservations over clauses affecting provincial fiscal arrangements, while MQM-P has emerged as the most aggressive proponent, tying its coalition support to constitutional protection for local bodies. Legal experts have floated the possibility that Parliament could simply amend Article 239 to remove the provincial-assembly-consent requirement altogether, a move critics say would gut the spirit of the 18th Amendment's federalism. For CSS and PMS aspirants, the debate offers a live case study in the tension between administrative efficiency arguments for smaller provinces and federalism concerns about eroding provincial autonomy.

B. KEY ARGUMENTS

- The 28th Amendment debate follows directly from the 27th Amendment, with government allies signalling early that a follow-up constitutional package was already being planned.
- Minister of State for Law and Justice Barrister Aqeel has confirmed government interest in new provinces, though no formula has been finalised.
- Reports suggest the package could touch up to 117 constitutional articles, an unusually broad scope for a single amendment.
- A central proposal would shift the power to create new provinces solely to the federal Parliament, removing the requirement for the affected provincial assembly's consent under Article 239.
- Speculative maps circulating in the media envisage splitting Punjab into four units and Sindh, KP and Balochistan into smaller provinces or federal territories.
- PPP has raised reservations over clauses touching provincial fiscal arrangements and the NFC Award formula.
- MQM-P has emerged as the most vocal supporter, linking coalition backing to constitutional protection for local government empowerment.
- The Diplomat's analysis frames the debate as potentially entrenching the current hybrid coalition rather than delivering genuine devolution.
- Analysts note the government's two-thirds majority rests on an Election Commission decision and a Supreme Court verdict, making its durability a live legal and political question.
- Legal commentators warn that after the 27th Amendment's Article 239(5), courts may lack jurisdiction to question any future constitutional amendment on any ground.

- Supporters argue smaller provinces would improve governance, service delivery and administrative responsiveness in over-large units like Punjab.
- Critics counter that dividing provinces along the proposed lines could revive old sub-regional and ethnic grievances, particularly in Sindh and Punjab.
- The debate is unfolding without an official bill tabled in Parliament, leaving most public discussion reliant on background briefings and leaks.
- The timing, alongside a federal budget and ongoing IMF reviews, has fuelled speculation the amendment is partly aimed at consolidating fiscal and political control.
- Former senator Mustafa Nawaz Khokhar has called for a national debate on the necessity and benefits of new provinces rather than a closed-door elite bargain.
- The outcome will shape Pakistan's federal structure for a generation, making it a recurring and high-value CSS/PMS current affairs and Pakistan Affairs topic.

C. CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Causes: The push stems from long-standing complaints that Pakistan's largest provinces, especially Punjab, have grown too unwieldy to govern efficiently, producing slow decision-making and uneven service delivery. It is also driven by coalition politics: after the 27th Amendment concentrated power in new ways, allied parties see a further amendment as an opportunity to lock in gains before the coalition's parliamentary majority, resting on contested legal grounds, might not persist. MQM-P's insistence on local-government protection reflects Karachi-specific grievances over urban governance, while broader administrative-reform rhetoric provides political cover for what critics see as a recentralisation agenda.

Implications: If enacted broadly, the amendment would be one of the most consequential re-engineerings of Pakistan's federal structure since 1973, potentially reversing elements of the 18th Amendment's provincial autonomy just fifteen years after it was passed. Shifting province-creation power to Parliament alone would weaken the constitutional veto smaller units currently hold over their own dismemberment, with particular sensitivity in Sindh, where any division is viewed as an existential threat by nationalist parties. Delinking delimitation from the census could also reshape electoral representation ahead of the next general election.

Challenges: The government faces the challenge of building genuine cross-party consensus rather than relying solely on its contested two-thirds majority, since a move perceived as railroaded risks street agitation, particularly from Sindhi nationalist parties and Baloch groups already alienated by security operations. Balancing MQM-P's local-government demands against PPP's provincial-autonomy concerns within the same coalition is a delicate needle to thread. There is also the practical challenge of designing new provincial boundaries, capitals, bureaucracies and NFC shares without triggering fresh disputes over resource allocation.

Opportunities: Handled transparently, the amendment offers a genuine opportunity to modernise a federal structure largely unchanged since 1973, bringing government closer to under-served populations in southern Punjab, Karachi and Balochistan's coastal belt. A well-designed local-government tier with constitutionally protected fiscal transfers could improve service delivery without necessarily requiring full new provinces. It also offers an opening to revisit the NFC Award formula to better reflect population and development needs.

Way Forward: Analysts recommend a phased approach: first strengthening local government within existing provinces, then convening a genuinely inclusive constitutional convention involving all provincial assemblies before touching Article 239. Any final package should be debated publicly with a formal bill and committee hearings rather than announced through background briefings, and should preserve meaningful provincial consent mechanisms to avoid the amendment being challenged as illegitimate federalism engineering rather than governance reform.

D. STATISTICS & FACTS

117 Constitutional articles reportedly under review	2/3 Parliamentary majority required to pass the amendment
4 New provinces speculated for Punjab alone	2025 Year the 27th Amendment, its predecessor, was passed

- The 27th Amendment was passed in the previous parliamentary session, setting the stage for the current 28th Amendment debate.

- Reports suggest the proposed package could touch as many as 117 articles of the Constitution.
- Passage of a constitutional amendment requires a two-thirds majority in both houses of Parliament.
- Speculative circulating maps propose splitting Punjab into West Punjab, South Punjab, Bahawalpur and Potohar.
- Sindh's speculative division includes urban and rural zones plus a proposed Mehran province.
- KP's speculative division includes a southern KP unit and a separate Hazara province.
- Balochistan's speculative division includes a coastal Makran province distinct from the rest of the province.
- Federal territory status has been floated for Islamabad, Karachi and Gwadar under some proposals.
- Article 239 currently requires the consent of the relevant provincial assembly to create a new province from it.
- The proposed change would vest the power to create new provinces solely in the federal Parliament.
- Article 239(5), inserted via the 27th Amendment, bars courts from questioning constitutional amendments on any ground.
- MQM-P has nominated local-government empowerment as its central coalition demand tied to the amendment.
- PPP's Secretary General has publicly defended provincial powers devolved under the 18th Amendment of 2010.
- No official bill on the 28th Amendment had been tabled in Parliament as of this week.
- The debate coincides with Pakistan's federal budget cycle and an ongoing IMF Extended Fund Facility review.
- The 18th Amendment, whose provisions are now under partial reconsideration, was passed sixteen years ago in 2010.

E. QUOTABLE QUOTES

"Preparations should now begin for the 28th Amendment."

— Senator Faisal Vawda, Government coalition senator (August 2026)

"No concrete 28th Amendment package stands before the government without coalition consensus."

— Azam Nazeer Tarar, Federal Law Minister (2026)

"There is a pressing need to initiate a national debate on the necessity and benefits of creating new provinces."

— Mustafa Nawaz Khokhar, Former senator (August 2026)

F. EXAMINER'S PERSPECTIVE

Essay: A strong essay topic would interrogate whether administrative decentralisation through new provinces strengthens or weakens federalism when pursued without provincial consent.

Current Affairs: Candidates should track the formal tabling of any 28th Amendment bill and compare its final text against the leaked proposals summarised this week.

Pakistan Affairs: This is a high-value topic connecting the 1973 Constitution's federal design, the 18th Amendment's devolution, and the ongoing tension between provincial autonomy and administrative efficiency.

Interview: Panels frequently probe candidates on whether they support new provinces and why, testing both constitutional knowledge and the ability to present a balanced, non-partisan position.

G. VOCABULARY BUILDER

Word	Meaning	Synonym	Example
Devolution	The transfer of power from central to regional or local government	Decentralisation	The 18th Amendment's devolution package transferred subjects to the provinces.
Federalism	A system of government dividing power between central and regional authorities	Confederation (loosely)	Pakistan's federalism rests on the division of powers under the 1973 Constitution.
Entrench	To establish firmly so as to be difficult to change	Fortify	Critics fear the amendment could entrench the current coalition's hold on power.
Delimitation	The act of fixing the boundaries of electoral constituencies	Demarcation	Delinking delimitation from the census would change how constituencies are drawn.
Consensus	General agreement among a group	Accord	The Law Minister said no package could proceed without coalition consensus.

Word	Meaning	Synonym	Example
Bargain	An agreement reached after negotiation, often involving trade-offs	Deal	Critics call the province debate an elite political bargain rather than reform.
Autonomy	The right of self-governance	Self-rule	Provincial autonomy was strengthened by the 18th Amendment in 2010.
Jurisdiction	The official power to make legal decisions	Authority	Courts may lack jurisdiction to question the amendment under the new Article 239(5).
Coalition	A temporary alliance of political parties for joint action	Alliance	The ruling coalition needs unity to pass the amendment.
Reservation	A formal expression of doubt or objection	Objection	PPP raised reservations over the amendment's fiscal clauses.
Recentralisation	The process of returning power to a central authority	Centralisation	Some analysts view the amendment as quiet recentralisation.
Supermajority	A majority greater than a simple majority, often two-thirds	Two-thirds majority	A supermajority is required in Parliament to pass a constitutional amendment.

H. CSS/PMS COMPLETE QUESTION BANK

MCQ: Which amendment immediately preceded the current 28th Amendment debate?

A) 26th Amendment B) 27th Amendment C) 25th Amendment D) 18th Amendment **[Ans: B]**

Pakistan Affairs Questions:

1. Discuss the constitutional mechanism under Article 239 for creating a new province and the changes reportedly proposed to it.
1. Examine the relationship between the 18th Amendment's devolution and the current push for new provinces.
1. Analyse the political dynamics between coalition partners PPP and MQM-P over the 28th Amendment.

Current Affairs Questions:

1. Evaluate The Diplomat's characterisation of the province debate as a 'political gimmick.'
1. Discuss the role of Article 239(5) in limiting judicial review of constitutional amendments.
1. Assess the risks of pursuing major constitutional change without a formally tabled bill.

Short Question: Briefly explain why the proposed 28th Amendment is considered constitutionally significant.

Analytical Question: Critically analyse whether creating new provinces through parliamentary majority alone, without provincial assembly consent, is compatible with the spirit of federalism.

Essay Topic: New Provinces in Pakistan: Administrative Necessity or Political Expediency?

Further In-Depth Study:

- The Diplomat: Is Pakistan's Province Debate a Political Gimmick? — <https://thedi diplomat.com/2026/08/is-pakistans-province-debate-a-political-gimmick>
- Wikipedia: Twenty-Eighth Amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan — https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twenty-Eighth_Amendment_to_the_Constitution_of_Pakistan
- Pakistan Observer: 28th Constitutional Amendment - Key Changes Under Discussion — <https://pakobserver.net/28th-constitutional-amendment-a-look-at-key-changes-under-discussion/>
- Shafaqna Pakistan: Debate Over Legal Framework for New Provinces Intensifies — <https://pakistan.shafaqna.com/EN/332198>



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N-02

NATIONAL AFFAIRS

Institutionalising the Mecca Pact: Pakistan Builds Domestic and Diplomatic Follow-Through



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A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Pakistan is converting the Mecca Pact—its comprehensive Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement (SMDA) with Saudi Arabia—into concrete institutions, capabilities and coordination mechanisms.



Signed in September 2025, the pact commits both countries that any aggression against either shall be treated as aggression against both.



This week, Pakistan advanced domestic legal, military and industrial steps to give the pact operational depth.



Diplomatically, both sides are broadening the pact's deterrence value and regional signalling.



The goal: long-term security, joint capability development and defence-industrial integration aligned with Vision 2030 and Pakistan's economic stabilisation plan.



B. KEY FACTS AT A GLANCE



SEPTEMBER 2025

Mecca Pact (SMDA) signed in Riyadh



MUTUAL DEFENCE

Any aggression against either = aggression against both



BROAD COOPERATION

Defence, intelligence, training, logistics, industry & tech



INDUSTRIAL FOCUS

Joint production, technology transfer, localisation



STRATEGIC SIGNAL

Enhances deterrence and regional stability



C. KEY DEVELOPMENTS THIS WEEK

1



DOMESTIC LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The government initiated legal vetting to align the pact with Pakistan's Constitution and existing defence treaties, ensuring parliamentary oversight and continuity.

2



MILITARY INTEGRATION

Armed Forces are setting up a Joint Coordination Cell to operationalise information sharing, exercises, logistics planning and rapid response protocols.

3



DEFENCE-INDUSTRIAL COOPERATION

Both sides agreed to expand joint production in priority domains—air defence, UAVs, munitions, naval systems and cybersecurity.

4



CAPACITY BUILDING & TRAINING

Scholarships, professional military education, specialised training and scientific exchange programmes are being scaled up.

5



DIPLOMATIC FOLLOW-THROUGH

High-level exchanges continued this week, reaffirming the pact's defensive nature and its commitment to regional peace and sovereignty.



D. STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS



Enhances Pakistan's deterrence posture through a credible security umbrella.



Supports defence-industry growth, technology transfer and export potential.



Strengthens Pakistan–Saudi strategic partnership across multiple domains.



Promotes regional stability and discourages hostile adventurism.



Aligns with economic goals by attracting investment and creating skilled jobs.



E. CHALLENGES AHEAD



Ensuring constitutional compliance and political consensus at home.



Sustaining long-term funding for joint projects and capability development.



Achieving interoperability and standardisation between armed forces.



Managing external pressures and misinformation about the pact.



Addressing emerging domains like cyber, space and advanced tech security.

“ Stronger together for peace, security and a shared future. ”

Institutionalising the Mecca Pact: Pakistan Builds Domestic and Diplomatic Follow-Through

A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Two weeks after Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan signed the Mecca Joint Defence Agreement on 7 August, Islamabad spent this week converting a headline diplomatic moment into institutional follow-through. The pact, which stipulates that an armed attack against any of the three signatories shall be regarded as an attack against all, was struck amid the still-simmering 2026 Iran war and Houthi threats to Gulf shipping. Pakistan's foreign ministry has continued to stress the agreement is "purely defensive" and open to other states, a message repeated by Islamabad-based defence analysts who caution against reading it as a NATO-style alliance directed at Iran.

This week's developments centred on consolidation rather than new announcements. Bangladesh's Foreign Affairs Adviser Humaiun Kobir confirmed Dhaka maintains a positive approach toward joining a potential economic or defence framework tied to the Saudi-Pakistan-Turkiye axis, guided by its "Bangladesh First" policy, with Prime Minister Tarique Rahman's Riyadh visit likely to be finalised soon. Analysts at the Middle East Policy and Economic Institute noted the pact did not emerge from nothing: it formalised two already-converging bilateral tracks, the September 2025 Pakistan-Saudi Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement and years of Turkish-Pakistani military cooperation, arguing this layered architecture makes the pact more durable than a treaty negotiated cold.

Domestically, the pact has become a touchstone in Pakistan's post-Independence Day political narrative, with government figures citing it as validation of the country's diplomatic weight and its unique status as the Muslim world's only nuclear-armed state. Al Jazeera's capability audit found the three signatories together field nearly 1.4 million active military personnel, 3,400 aircraft, 6,000 tanks and over 340 naval assets. For CSS/PMS candidates, the week's developments illustrate how a landmark agreement moves from signature to institutionalisation, and the balancing act Pakistan must perform between deepening Gulf-Ankara security ties and preserving working relationships with Iran and other regional actors excluded from the pact, including Egypt, whose exclusion despite its role in four-nation Gaza talks has drawn commentary.

B. KEY ARGUMENTS

- The Mecca Joint Defence Agreement was signed on 7 August 2026 by Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye, with a collective-defence clause treating an attack on one as an attack on all.
- Pakistan's foreign ministry has repeatedly stressed the pact is purely defensive and not directed against Iran or any other state.
- Bangladesh's Foreign Affairs Adviser confirmed Dhaka's positive approach toward a potential Saudi-Pakistan-Turkiye economic or defence framework.
- The pact builds on the September 2025 bilateral Pakistan-Saudi Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement rather than emerging in isolation.
- Türkiye and Pakistan's separate track of military cooperation, including drone exports and pilot training, provided an operational foundation for the trilateral deal.
- Combined, the three states field nearly 1.4 million active personnel, 3,400 aircraft, 6,000 tanks and over 340 naval assets per the 2026 Global Firepower Index.
- Islamabad-based defence analysts caution against comparing the pact to NATO despite its Article 5-style collective-defence provision.
- The pact was signed while Saudi Arabia faced Iranian drone strikes linked to the wider 2026 Iran war, shaping its immediate strategic rationale.
- Egypt's exclusion from the pact, despite its role in parallel four-nation Gaza mediation talks, has become a point of regional commentary.
- Domestic political narratives in Pakistan have framed the pact as validation of the country's diplomatic standing as the Muslim world's sole nuclear power.
- The pact's durability is assessed by analysts as stronger than a treaty negotiated cold, since it merges pre-existing bilateral relationships.

- Questions remain over the pact's implications for the US role in Middle East security architecture, given Washington's traditional primacy in Gulf defence.
- Domestic consolidation this week focused on messaging and diplomatic outreach rather than new military commitments.
- The pact's open-ended invitation to other regional states positions it as a potential nucleus for a broader Muslim-world security framework.

C. CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Causes: The pact's timing was driven directly by the security shock of Iranian strikes on Saudi Arabia amid the 2026 Iran war, which threatened Gulf oil exports and stability, alongside Turkish and Pakistani anxieties about wider regional spillover. It also reflects years of deepening bilateral defence cooperation between all three pairs of states, meaning the trilateral step was less a rupture than a formalisation of existing trust.

Implications: For Pakistan, the pact elevates its regional security profile and offers potential economic dividends through deeper Gulf investment, but it also draws Islamabad more visibly into Middle Eastern security dynamics at a moment of active war, raising the stakes of any future escalation involving Iran. It also creates diplomatic complexity with Tehran, a neighbour with which Pakistan must maintain a working relationship regardless of the pact's stated neutrality.

Challenges: Pakistan must manage the perception, however denied, that the pact is anti-Iran, particularly given Tehran's proximity and the sensitivity of Pakistan's own western border. Coordinating three militaries with different doctrines, equipment standards and chains of command presents a genuine interoperability challenge. There is also the diplomatic task of managing states like Egypt that feel excluded despite playing comparable regional roles.

Opportunities: The pact offers Pakistan an opportunity to convert its military expertise, honed through decades of counter-insurgency and conventional deterrence, into deeper economic partnerships with Gulf capital, potentially easing pressure on foreign exchange reserves. Bangladesh's interest signals room for the framework to expand into a broader Muslim-world economic and security bloc, enhancing Pakistan's diplomatic centrality.

Way Forward: Analysts recommend Pakistan pursue quiet, sustained diplomacy with Iran to reassure Tehran the pact is not existentially threatening, while using the coming months to build concrete joint mechanisms, standing committees, and interoperability protocols, that give the pact institutional substance beyond its symbolic signing. Clear communication with excluded regional actors would also reduce the risk of the pact being read as a bloc against them.

D. STATISTICS & FACTS

1.4M Combined active military personnel of the three signatories	3,400 Combined aircraft fielded by the pact members
6,000 Combined tanks fielded by the pact members	Aug 7 Date the Mecca Joint Defence Agreement was signed

- The Mecca Joint Defence Agreement was signed in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, on 7 August 2026.
- The three signatories are Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Turkiye.
- Combined, the three states field nearly 1.4 million active military personnel.
- The pact members together operate roughly 3,400 aircraft and 6,000 tanks.
- Naval assets across the three states exceed 340 vessels according to the 2026 Global Firepower Index.
- The pact builds on a September 2025 bilateral Pakistan-Saudi Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement.
- Pakistan remains the only nuclear-armed state in the Muslim world, a key element of the pact's deterrent value.
- Turkiye is a NATO member, giving the pact an indirect institutional link to the Western alliance system.
- Bangladesh's Foreign Affairs Adviser has signalled interest in a related economic or defence framework.
- Egypt was not included in the pact despite participating in parallel four-nation Gaza ceasefire talks.
- PM Shehbaz Sharif performed Umrah in Mecca the day before the pact's formal signing.
- The pact's collective-defence clause mirrors, in wording, NATO's Article 5 mutual-defence principle.

E. QUOTABLE QUOTES

“The agreement was not directed against Iran or another country.”

— Abdullah Khan, Islamabad-based defence analyst (August 2026)

"The pact is purely defensive and open to other nations in the region."

— Pakistan's Foreign Minister, Government of Pakistan (August 2026)

"Bangladesh maintains a positive approach guided by its Bangladesh First policy."

— Humaiun Kobir, Bangladesh Foreign Affairs Adviser (August 2026)

F. EXAMINER'S PERSPECTIVE

Essay: A relevant essay angle examines whether minilateral defence pacts like the Mecca agreement strengthen or fragment collective security in the Muslim world.

Current Affairs: Track how the pact's institutional mechanisms, joint commands, standing committees, evolve in the coming months.

Pakistan Affairs: Connects to Pakistan's post-1998 nuclear posture and its historical role as a security partner to Gulf monarchies since the 1960s and 1970s.

Interview: Panels may ask candidates to assess whether the pact serves Pakistan's national interest given its geographic proximity to Iran.

G. VOCABULARY BUILDER

Word	Meaning	Synonym	Example
Minilateral	Involving cooperation among a small number of states	Trilateral (in this case)	The Mecca pact is a minilateral defence arrangement among three states.
Deterrence	The prevention of an action through fear of consequences	Dissuasion	Pakistan's nuclear capability adds a deterrence element to the pact.
Interoperability	The ability of different military systems to work together	Compatibility	Interoperability among the three militaries remains a practical challenge.
Institutionalise	To establish something as a formal, lasting structure	Formalise	This week's efforts focused on institutionalising the pact's provisions.
Spillover	The unintended spread of effects beyond an original area	Overflow	Turkiye and Pakistan feared spillover from the Iran war.
Consolidation	The process of making something stronger or more solid	Reinforcement	This week centred on domestic consolidation rather than new announcements.
Bloc	A group of countries acting together for a common purpose	Alliance	Some see the pact as the nucleus of a broader Muslim-world bloc.
Dividend	A benefit received from an action or arrangement	Benefit	The pact could yield economic dividends through Gulf investment.
Doctrine	A stated principle or set of beliefs guiding policy or strategy	Policy	The three militaries operate under different strategic doctrines.
Nucleus	The central or most important part of something around which others gather	Core	The pact could become the nucleus of a wider security framework.

H. CSS/PMS COMPLETE QUESTION BANK

MCQ: Which country's Foreign Affairs Adviser expressed interest in joining a Saudi-Pakistan-Turkiye framework this week?

A) Indonesia B) Bangladesh C) Malaysia D) Egypt **[Ans: B]**

Pakistan Affairs Questions:

1. Discuss Pakistan's historical defence relationship with Saudi Arabia prior to the 2026 Mecca pact.
1. Examine the significance of Pakistan's nuclear status within the Mecca Joint Defence Agreement.
1. Analyse how the pact affects Pakistan's diplomatic balancing act with Iran.

Current Affairs Questions:

1. Evaluate the strategic rationale behind the timing of the Mecca Joint Defence Agreement.
1. Discuss the significance of Bangladesh's interest in joining the Saudi-Pakistan-Turkiye framework.
1. Assess whether the pact represents a genuine collective-security mechanism or a symbolic gesture.

Short Question: Briefly state the core collective-defence clause of the Mecca Joint Defence Agreement.

Analytical Question: Critically analyse whether the Mecca Joint Defence Agreement can remain durable and effective without full military interoperability among its signatories.

Essay Topic: Minilateral Defence Pacts and the Changing Security Architecture of the Muslim World

Further In-Depth Study:

- Al Jazeera: What are Saudi Arabia, Turkiye and Pakistan's joint military capabilities? — <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/8/11/what-are-saudi-arabia-turkiye-and-pakistans-joint-military-capabilities>
- MEPEI: The Mecca Joint Defense Agreement and the Limits of Gulf Strategic Autonomy — <https://mepei.com/the-mecca-joint-defense-agreement-and-the-limits-of-gulf-strategic-autonomy/>
- PBS News: Pakistan says new defense pact is 'purely defensive' — <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/pakistan-says-new-defense-pact-with-saudi-arabia-and-turkey-is-purely-defensive-and-open-to-others>
- Wikipedia: Mecca Joint Defence Agreement — https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mecca_Joint_Defence_Agreement

Operation Radd-ul-Fitna 3: Security Forces Intensify Counter-Militancy Push in Balochistan



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A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Operation Radd-ul-Fitna 3, launched by Pakistan's security forces in Balochistan, aims to neutralise militants, dismantle networks and restore lasting peace.



This week saw intensified intelligence-based operations (IBOs), successful strikes and arrests across multiple districts.



The focus remains on districts with high militant presence including Kech, Panjgur, Kharan, Awaran, Nushki and Zhob.



Security forces are working with local communities and provincial authorities to ensure stability and development.



The objective is to break the cycle of violence, secure infrastructure projects and enable socio-economic progress.



B. KEY FACTS AT A GLANCE



ONGOING OPERATION

Radd-ul-Fitna 3 is the latest phase of a multi-pronged strategy.



INTELLIGENCE-BASED OPERATIONS

Multiple IBOs conducted across Balochistan this week.



MILITANTS NEUTRALISED & ARRESTS

Several terrorists killed and facilitators apprehended.



EXTERNAL HAND CONFIRMED

Evidence of foreign sponsorship and cross-border support.



PEOPLE-CENTRIC APPROACH

Coordination with locals to isolate militants and win public trust.



RESTORE PEACE & DEVELOPMENT

Protect CPEC projects, trade routes and development initiatives.



C. MAJOR ACTIONS THIS WEEK



TARGETED OPERATIONS

Operations conducted in Kech, Panjgur, Kharan, Awaran, Nushki and Zhob based on actionable intelligence.



WEAPONS & EXPLOSIVES RECOVERED

Large cache of weapons, ammunition, IEDs and communication devices recovered from militant hideouts.



FACILITATORS ARRESTED

Key facilitators, financiers and logistics handlers taken into custody for interrogation.



SECURITY OF CRITICAL ASSETS

Increased protection of CPEC projects, highways, railways and energy infrastructure.



CIVIL-MILITARY COOPERATION

Engagement with tribal elders, community leaders and civil administration for information sharing.



D. STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE



Ensures internal security and protects national sovereignty.



Safeguards economic corridors and investment climate.



Creates enabling environment for development and social services.



Undermines anti-state narratives and foreign proxy war.



Strengthens Pakistan's position in regional peace and counter-terrorism.



E. CHALLENGES AHEAD



Militants' use of hit-and-run tactics and IEDs.



Safe havens and cross-border sanctuaries.



Foreign funding and propaganda networks.



Need for timely justice and legal follow-through.



Winning sustained trust of local communities.



F. THE WAY FORWARD



Maintain operational momentum and intelligence dominance.



Invest in development, education and youth opportunities.



Strengthen regional diplomacy and border management.



Ensure whole-of-nation approach for lasting stability.

Operation Radd-ul-Fitna 3: Security Forces Intensify Counter-Militancy Push in Balochistan

A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Pakistan's security forces carried out a fresh round of intelligence-led operations in Balochistan this week under the umbrella of Operation Radd-ul-Fitna 3, killing nine militants in coordinated actions in the mountainous terrain between Ziarat and Harnai and in Hajika village of Surab district. Officials said personnel acted on specific intelligence to surround a suspected hideout in the Ziarat-Harnai belt, killing eight militants and destroying the compound, while a separate operation in Surab targeted another cell. The operations continue a pattern of near-weekly counter-militancy action that has defined Balochistan's security calendar through much of 2026, following a bloody July in which coordinated Baloch Liberation Army and Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan assaults killed 42 people across the Hanna Urak valley and the Bela-Winder highway corridor in Lasbela.

This week's action follows a mid-August blast at a militant hideout that the ISPR said killed eight terrorists outright, with secondary explosions from stored explosives killing three additional civilians nearby, illustrating the persistent danger improvised explosive stockpiles pose to surrounding communities even after successful operations. Balochistan's insurgency, rooted in decades-old grievances over resource distribution and political marginalisation, has increasingly intertwined with a resurgent TTP presence exploiting the porous Afghan border, prompting the security establishment to frame current operations as part of a sustained, multi-front campaign rather than isolated raids.

For CSS and PMS candidates, this week's operations underscore Balochistan's centrality to Pakistan's internal security architecture: the province hosts critical China-Pakistan Economic Corridor infrastructure, including the Gwadar port and associated transit routes, that Baloch separatist groups have specifically targeted, tying the security question directly to Pakistan's economic and geopolitical strategy. The recurring civilian toll from stored militant explosives, as seen in the mid-August blast, also raises policy questions about post-operation area clearance and community protection protocols that examiners frequently probe in Pakistan Affairs and Current Affairs papers.

B. KEY ARGUMENTS

- Security forces killed nine militants this week in intelligence-led operations under Operation Radd-ul-Fitna 3 in Ziarat-Harnai and Surab district.
- Eight militants were killed and their hideout destroyed in the mountainous belt between Ziarat and Harnai.
- A separate operation in Hajika village of Surab district targeted another militant cell.
- The operations follow a bloody July in which coordinated BLA-TTP assaults killed 42 people across Hanna Urak and the Bela-Winder highway.
- A mid-August blast at a militant hideout killed eight terrorists, with secondary explosions from stored explosives killing three civilians nearby.
- Balochistan's insurgency combines a decades-old Baloch separatist movement with a resurgent Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan presence.
- The Mangi Dam water-supply project near Quetta has repeatedly been targeted, reflecting militant efforts to disrupt critical infrastructure.
- The July attacks were attributed jointly to the TTP and the Balochistan Liberation Army by Pakistan's military.
- Balochistan hosts key China-Pakistan Economic Corridor infrastructure, including the Gwadar port, making the province's security a geo-economic priority.
- Civilian casualties from stored militant explosives during clearance operations remain a recurring secondary hazard.
- The scale of 2025's toll, 2,115 militants and insurgents and 664 security personnel killed nationwide, underscores the persistence of the threat.
- Local highway blockades and protests, as seen near the Mangi Dam site last year, reflect civilian frustration over both militancy and heavy-handed security responses.
- Operation Radd-ul-Fitna 3 represents the latest phase of a security campaign whose name evokes earlier Radd-ul-Fitna operations against militancy.
- China, France, Turkey and the United States have previously condemned major Balochistan attacks, reflecting international stakes in CPEC security.

C. CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Causes: The insurgency's roots lie in long-standing Baloch grievances over the province's share of natural-resource revenue, underdevelopment relative to other provinces, and demands for greater political autonomy, compounded in recent years by a TTP presence exploiting weak border control with Afghanistan. Large infrastructure projects tied to CPEC have become flashpoints, seen by separatist groups as symbols of resource extraction without local benefit.

Implications: Continued militant activity threatens to slow CPEC-linked investment and deter the very economic development that could address underlying grievances, creating a self-reinforcing cycle of insecurity and underdevelopment. It also strains security force resources already stretched across multiple fronts, including counter-terrorism operations along the Afghan border and flood relief duties this monsoon season.

Challenges: Balochistan's vast, mountainous and sparsely populated terrain makes sustained area denial extremely difficult, allowing militant cells to regroup after successful raids. The intertwining of separatist and TTP networks complicates a purely military response, since political grievances cannot be resolved through force alone. Civilian casualties from post-operation explosive hazards also undermine public trust in security operations.

Opportunities: A genuine opportunity exists to pair continued security operations with visible, locally-owned development dividends from CPEC and the Mangi Dam project, potentially reducing the recruitment pool for militant groups. Improved coordination between the Frontier Corps, police and intelligence agencies, evident in this week's precise, intelligence-led raids, offers a template for more surgical, lower-collateral operations going forward.

Way Forward: Analysts recommend accelerating explosive-ordnance clearance protocols after raids to prevent secondary civilian casualties, alongside sustained political engagement with moderate Baloch nationalist voices to separate legitimate grievances from armed insurgency. A transparent accounting of CPEC revenue-sharing with Balochistan could also help address root economic causes alongside continued security operations.

D. STATISTICS & FACTS

9 Militants killed in this week's operations	42 Deaths in July's coordinated Balochistan attacks
2,115 Militants/insurgents killed nationwide in 2025	664 Security personnel killed nationwide in 2025

- Security forces killed nine militants this week under Operation Radd-ul-Fitna 3.
- Eight militants were killed in the Ziarat-Harnai operation, with the hideout subsequently destroyed.
- A mid-August blast at a separate hideout killed eight terrorists outright per ISPR.
- Secondary explosions from stored explosives at that site killed three additional civilians.
- July's coordinated Balochistan attacks killed 42 people, comprising 38 security personnel and 4 civilians.
- The July attacks spanned Hanna Urak Valley near Quetta and the Bela-Winder highway corridor in Lasbela district.
- Eleven Pakistani soldiers and 14 militants died in the Lasbela highway ambush battle alone.
- Pakistan's military attributed the July attacks jointly to the TTP and the Balochistan Liberation Army.
- Nationwide, 2,115 militants and insurgents were killed in 2025, alongside 664 security personnel.
- The Mangi Dam project, repeatedly targeted by militants, is designed to resolve chronic water shortages in Quetta.
- Balochistan is Pakistan's largest province by land area and hosts the strategic Gwadar port.
- China, France, Turkey and the U.S. Embassy have previously condemned major attacks in the province.

E. QUOTABLE QUOTES

"The operations were conducted as part of Operation Radd-ul-Fitna 3, targeting suspected militant activity in several parts of the province."

— Security official, Balochistan security sources (18 August 2026)

"Further explosions occurred after other explosives stored at the site detonated, killing three civilians."

— ISPR spokesperson, Inter-Services Public Relations (August 2026)

F. EXAMINER'S PERSPECTIVE

Essay: A recurring essay theme links Balochistan's insurgency to the broader question of resource-driven conflict and the politics of underdevelopment in federations.

Current Affairs: Track the cumulative militant and security-personnel casualty figures for 2026 as they are released by ISPR and independent trackers.

Pakistan Affairs: Connects to the historical insurgency in Balochistan dating to the 1940s and its recurring cycles since 2004.

Interview: Panels may ask candidates to propose a balanced security-and-development strategy for Balochistan beyond kinetic operations.

G. VOCABULARY BUILDER

Word	Meaning	Synonym	Example
Insurgency	An active revolt or uprising against an established authority	Rebellion	Balochistan has experienced a decades-long insurgency.
Ordnance	Military weapons, ammunition and equipment, including explosives	Munitions	Explosive-ordnance clearance is critical after counter-militant raids.
Marginalisation	The process of treating a group as insignificant or peripheral	Exclusion	Political marginalisation is cited as a root cause of the insurgency.
Kinetic	Relating to or involving direct physical military force	Combat-based	A purely kinetic response cannot resolve underlying political grievances.
Secessionist	Advocating formal withdrawal from a political union	Separatist	Some Baloch groups hold secessionist aims.
Corridor	A strip of land connecting two areas, often for trade or transit	Passage	CPEC's transit corridor runs through Balochistan to Gwadar.
Ambush	A surprise attack from a concealed position	Surprise assault	Militants staged a deadly ambush on the highway convoy.
Reinforce	To strengthen or support	Bolster	Repeated attacks reinforce the need for sustained security operations.
Grievance	A real or imagined wrong seen as grounds for complaint	Complaint	Resource-sharing grievances fuel the Baloch insurgency.
Denial	Prevention of an adversary's access to or use of an area	Exclusion	Area denial in Balochistan's terrain remains operationally difficult.

H. CSS/PMS COMPLETE QUESTION BANK

MCQ: Under which named operation did security forces conduct this week's Balochistan raids?

A) Operation Zarb-e-Azb B) Operation Radd-ul-Fitra 3 C) Operation Al-Azm D) Operation Rah-e-Nijat **[Ans: B]**

Pakistan Affairs Questions:

1. Discuss the historical roots of the Baloch insurgency and its evolution since 2004.
1. Examine the security implications of CPEC infrastructure for Balochistan's stability.
1. Analyse the relationship between the TTP and Baloch separatist groups in the current security environment.

Current Affairs Questions:

1. Evaluate the effectiveness of intelligence-led counter-militancy operations compared to large-scale sweeps.
1. Discuss the civilian protection challenges posed by stored militant explosives after raids.
1. Assess international responses to major Balochistan attacks in 2026.

Short Question: Briefly outline the outcome of this week's security operations in Ziarat-Harnai and Surab.

Analytical Question: Critically analyse whether Pakistan's counter-militancy strategy in Balochistan adequately balances security operations with addressing underlying political and economic grievances.

Essay Topic: Security and Development in Balochistan: Two Sides of the Same Policy

Further In-Depth Study:

- Daily Pakistan: Security forces eliminate nine terrorists in Balochistan operations — <https://en.dailypakistan.com.pk/18-Aug-2026/security-forces-eliminate-nine-terrorists-in-balochistan-operations>
- Wikipedia: July 2026 Balochistan attacks — https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/July_2026_Balochistan_attacks
- Wikipedia: 2026 Balochistan attacks — https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2026_Balochistan_attacks
- Aaj English: Balochistan blast, security operation kill 18 terrorists — <https://english.aaj.tv/news/330467569/balochistan-blast-security-operation-kill-18-terrorists>



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NATIONAL AFFAIRS

GEPCO Privatisation Draws Eleven Investor Bids in Major DISCO Reform Milestone



In-Depth Analysis



Exam-Focused Content



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A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The Government of Pakistan received eleven investor bids for the privatisation of Gujranwala Electric Power Company (GEPCO).



It marks a landmark step in the power sector reform agenda and the broader plan to restructure and privatise distribution companies (DISCOs).



Bids were submitted from local and international strategic investors, financial investors and consortiums.



The transaction is expected to improve operational efficiency, reduce losses and enhance service delivery in GEPCO's service area.



Proceeds and efficiency gains will support power sector sustainability and the government's fiscal and reform commitments.



B. KEY FACTS AT A GLANCE



BIDS RECEIVED

Eleven investor bids received for GEPCO privatisation.



THE ASSET

Gujranwala Electric Power Company (GEPCO) – one of Pakistan's largest DISCOs.



TYPE OF INVESTORS

Local & international strategic investors, financial investors, consortiums.



OBJECTIVE

Improve efficiency, reduce losses and enhance service delivery.



STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE

Strengthen power sector sustainability and support economic stability.



C. KEY DEVELOPMENTS

1



Government approved GEPCO privatisation under the broader DISCO reform plan.

2



Expression of Interest (EOI) invited nationally and internationally.

3



Eleven bids submitted by interested investors and consortiums.

4



Bid evaluation by Transaction Committee and advisors underway.

5



Successful investor to be selected; implementation to follow regulatory approvals.



D. EXPECTED IMPACT



Operational Efficiency

Better management, reduced technical & commercial losses.



Improved Service Delivery

Enhanced reliability and consumer satisfaction.



Financial Sustainability

Stronger revenues and reduced circular debt.



Economic Benefits

Attracts investment, creates jobs and supports growth.



Sectoral Reform

Strengthens governance and accelerates DISCO reforms.



E. CHALLENGES AHEAD



High Circular Debt

Legacy debt may affect investor confidence.



Regulatory Approvals

Timely approvals from NEPRA and other bodies.



Workforce Rationalisation

Managing human resource transition.



Political & Social Resistance

Addressing stakeholder concerns and public perception.



Infrastructure Investment

Need for continued investment in network upgradation.



F. THE WAY FORWARD



Ensure transparency in selection and transaction process.



Strengthen regulatory framework and enforcement.



Accelerate loss reduction and recovery initiatives post-privatisation.



Use proceeds and efficiency gains to reinvest in the sector.

★ REFORM TODAY, POWERING A BETTER TOMORROW ★

GEPCO Privatisation Draws Eleven Investor Bids in Major DISCO Reform Milestone

A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Pakistan's power-sector reform programme reached a significant milestone this week when the Privatisation Commission confirmed it had received Expressions of Interest from eleven prospective investors for the Gujranwala Electric Power Company, seeking to acquire between 51 and 100 percent of the distribution company's shares along with full management control. The closing date for submissions fell on Friday, 21 August, with the Commission describing the response as "another important achievement" in the government's programme to privatise state-owned electricity distribution companies, or DISCOs.

The investor list spans Turkish energy firms including Aktor Elektrik Enerji Yatirimlari, Genvera Enerji and Cengiz Enerji, Saudi Arabia's Al Sharif Contracting and Commercial Development Company, and a broad cross-section of Pakistan's leading business groups, including Engro Energy, Sapphire Fibers, Hub Power Holdings and Lucky Cement, Shirazi Investments, Artistic Milliners, Fatima Group, K-Electric, and a consortium of AKD Securities, Fast Cable and Mughal Steel. Muhammad Ali, Adviser to the Prime Minister on Privatisation and Chairman of the Privatisation Commission, said the response reflected investor confidence in the sector's potential and the government's commitment to a transparent, competitive process, adding that qualified investors would next gain access to a Virtual Data Room for detailed due diligence.

GEPCO is one of three DISCOs in the government's first privatisation batch alongside the Faisalabad Electric Supply Company, which drew twelve EOIs by its 7 August deadline, and the Islamabad Electric Supply Company, whose deadline falls on 7 September. The involvement of Turkish and Saudi investors dovetails with the broader deepening of Pakistan-Gulf and Pakistan-Turkiye economic ties visible elsewhere this week, including the domestic follow-through on the Mecca Joint Defence Agreement. For CSS/PMS aspirants, the DISCO privatisation programme is a core case study in Pakistan's structural-reform commitments under its IMF Extended Fund Facility, directly tied to efforts to reduce circular debt and transmission losses that have long burdened the national exchequer.

B. KEY ARGUMENTS

- The Privatisation Commission received eleven Expressions of Interest for GEPCO by the 21 August closing deadline.
- Investors are seeking to acquire between 51 and 100 percent of GEPCO's shares along with full management control.
- Turkish firms Aktor Elektrik Enerji Yatirimlari, Genvera Enerji and Cengiz Enerji are among the interested parties.
- Saudi Arabia's Al Sharif Contracting and Commercial Development Company is also among the bidders.
- Major Pakistani business groups bidding include Engro Energy, Sapphire Fibers, Hub Power Holdings, Lucky Cement, Shirazi Investments and Fatima Group.
- K-Electric and a consortium of AKD Securities, Fast Cable and Mughal Steel have also expressed interest.
- GEPCO is one of three DISCOs, alongside FESCO and IESCO, in the government's first privatisation batch.
- FESCO received twelve EOIs by its 7 August deadline; IESCO's deadline is 7 September 2026.
- Qualified GEPCO bidders will next access a Virtual Data Room for detailed buy-side due diligence.
- Privatisation Commission Chairman Muhammad Ali called the response an important milestone in the DISCO reform programme.
- The Commission credited extensive domestic and international investor roadshows over the past six months for the strong response.
- The privatisation programme aims to improve operational efficiency, reduce electricity losses, and attract private investment into distribution.
- The programme is closely tied to Pakistan's structural-reform commitments under its ongoing IMF Extended Fund Facility.
- Turkish and Saudi investor interest in GEPCO reflects broader deepening of Pakistan's economic ties with Ankara and Riyadh.

C. CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Causes: Pakistan's DISCOs have long suffered from high transmission and distribution losses, theft, and poor bill recovery, generating circular debt that drains the federal budget through subsidies and payment arrears to power producers. Privatisation is being pursued as a structural fix demanded, in part, by IMF programme conditionality, aiming to bring private capital and management discipline to a chronically loss-making sector.

Implications: Successful privatisation of GEPCO could reduce the government's fiscal burden from circular debt and improve service reliability for millions of consumers in Gujranwala's industrial belt, one of Pakistan's most economically significant regions. It also signals renewed investor confidence in Pakistan's economic trajectory following the stabilisation reflected in the current PSX rally and improving credit assessments.

Challenges: Converting strong EOI interest into a completed transaction requires navigating due diligence, valuation disputes, and often politically sensitive questions about tariff structures and labour union concerns within the DISCOs. Past DISCO privatisation attempts in Pakistan have stalled at various stages, meaning execution risk remains significant despite the strong initial response.

Opportunities: A successful GEPCO transaction could serve as a template accelerating the FESCO and IESCO privatisations, potentially triggering a broader wave of private investment into Pakistan's power distribution infrastructure. Gulf and Turkish investor participation also strengthens economic linkages that complement the diplomatic deepening seen in the Mecca Joint Defence Agreement.

Way Forward: Analysts recommend the government maintain transparency through the due-diligence and bidding phases to sustain investor confidence, while developing a clear post-privatisation regulatory framework covering tariffs, service standards and consumer protection. Coordinating the DISCO privatisation timeline with broader energy-sector reforms, including circular-debt resolution, will be essential to realising the programme's full benefits.

D. STATISTICS & FACTS

11 Investor EOIs received for GEPCO	51-100% Shareholding range sought by bidders
12 EOIs received for FESCO by its August deadline	Sept 7 IESCO's EOI submission deadline

- Eleven prospective investors submitted Expressions of Interest for GEPCO by the 21 August 2026 deadline.
- Bidders are seeking between 51 percent and 100 percent of GEPCO's shareholding with management control.
- GEPCO is one of three DISCOs in Batch-I of the government's privatisation programme.
- FESCO received twelve Expressions of Interest by its 7 August 2026 deadline.
- IESCO's EOI submission deadline is set for 7 September 2026.
- Turkish bidders include Aktor Elektrik Enerji Yatirimlari, Genvera Enerji and Cengiz Enerji.
- Saudi Arabia's Al Sharif Contracting and Commercial Development Company is among the bidders.
- Pakistani bidders include Engro Energy, Sapphire Fibers, Hub Power Holdings and Lucky Cement.
- Other Pakistani bidders include Shirazi Investments, Artistic Milliners, Fatima Group and K-Electric.
- A consortium of AKD Securities, Fast Cable and Mughal Steel is also among the interested parties.
- The Privatisation Commission cited six months of domestic and international investor roadshows preceding the bids.
- Qualified investors will next receive Virtual Data Room access for detailed due diligence.

E. QUOTABLE QUOTES

"The strong response for Gepco is indicative of investor confidence in the potential of Pakistan's electricity distribution sector."

— Muhammad Ali, Adviser to the PM on Privatisation, Chairman Privatisation Commission (21 August 2026)

"Today marks another important achievement in the privatisation of Discos."

— Privatisation Commission statement, Government of Pakistan (21 August 2026)

F. EXAMINER'S PERSPECTIVE

Essay: A useful essay angle explores whether privatisation of state-owned utilities is a sustainable fix for structural fiscal problems or a temporary palliative.

Current Affairs: Candidates should follow the due-diligence phase and eventual transaction outcome for GEPCO as a live policy case study.

Pakistan Affairs: Connects to Pakistan's broader history of privatisation since the 1990s and its recurring role in IMF programme conditionality.

Interview: Panels may probe candidates on the trade-offs between private efficiency gains and public-service affordability in essential utilities.

G. VOCABULARY BUILDER

Word	Meaning	Synonym	Example
Privatisation	The transfer of ownership of a business from public to private control	Denationalisation	GEPCO's privatisation drew eleven investor bids.
Circular debt	A chain of unpaid obligations across a supply sector, often in energy	Payment arrears chain	Circular debt has burdened Pakistan's power sector for years.
Due diligence	Careful investigation of a business before a transaction	Vetting	Qualified bidders will undergo detailed due diligence.
Conditionality	Requirements attached to a loan or financial assistance	Stipulation	Privatisation is partly driven by IMF programme conditionality.
Consortium	A group of companies formally combined for a joint venture	Alliance	A consortium of three firms submitted a joint bid for GEPCO.
Valuation	The process of determining the worth of an asset or company	Appraisal	Valuation disputes can delay privatisation transactions.
Divestment	The action of selling off an asset or subsidiary	Disposal	The DISCO divestment programme covers three companies in its first batch.
Roadshow	A series of presentations by a company to potential investors	Investor tour	Six months of roadshows preceded the strong EOI response.

H. CSS/PMS COMPLETE QUESTION BANK

MCQ: How many DISCOs are included in Batch-I of Pakistan's privatisation programme?

A) Two B) Three C) Four D) Five **[Ans: B]**

Pakistan Affairs Questions:

1. Discuss the history and rationale of Pakistan's power-sector privatisation programme.
1. Examine the link between circular debt and the case for DISCO privatisation.
1. Analyse the significance of Gulf and Turkish investor interest in Pakistan's energy sector.

Current Affairs Questions:

1. Evaluate the risks and opportunities in privatising essential public utilities like electricity distribution.
1. Discuss how DISCO privatisation fits within Pakistan's IMF Extended Fund Facility commitments.
1. Assess the potential impact of successful GEPCO privatisation on the FESCO and IESCO processes.

Short Question: Briefly summarise the outcome of the GEPCO privatisation EOI process this week.

Analytical Question: Critically analyse whether privatising Pakistan's electricity distribution companies can durably resolve the country's circular-debt crisis.

Essay Topic: Privatisation and Public Utilities: Balancing Efficiency with Affordability in Pakistan

Further In-Depth Study:

- Business Recorder: GEPCO privatisation draws 11 investor bids — <https://www.brecorder.com/news/40435971/gepc0-privatisation-draws-11-investor-bids-says-privatisation-commission>
- Geo News: Saudi, Turkish, Pakistani firms show strong interest in Gepco's privatisation — <https://www.geo.tv/latest/678676-saudi-turkish-pakistani-firms-show-strong-interest-in-gepcos-privatisation>

- ProPakistani: 11 Saudi, Turkish and Pakistani Investors Want to Buy GEPCO —
<https://propakistani.pk/2026/08/21/11-saudi-turkish-and-pakistani-investors-want-to-buy-gepco/>
- The News: 11 investors from Pakistan, Türkiye, Saudi Arabia enter race for Gepco privatisation —
<https://www.thenews.pk/story/1433220-11-investors-from-pakistan-turkiye-saudi-arabia-enter-race-for-gepco-privatisation>

Monsoon Death Toll Nears 740 as Fresh Urban Flooding Hits Karachi



In-Depth Analysis



Exam-Focused Content



Data-Driven Insights



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A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Pakistan's monsoon spell continues to wreak havoc, with the national death toll nearing 740 since late June 2025.



Sindh remains the worst affected province, while Karachi witnessed fresh urban flooding due to heavy downpours and drain overflows.



Infrastructure damage, crop losses, displacement and disease outbreaks have intensified the humanitarian crisis.



The NDMA and provincial authorities are undertaking relief operations, while long-term measures are urgently needed to build climate resilience.



B. KEY FACTS AT A GLANCE



DEATH TOLL

Nearly 740 people killed since late June 2025



WORST AFFECTED

Sindh (majority of deaths), followed by Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan, GB & AJK



KARACHI IMPACT

Fresh urban flooding, traffic disruptions, power outages



INFRASTRUCTURE DAMAGE

Homes, roads, bridges, electricity lines and crops severely damaged



RESPONSE

Relief operations by NDMA, PDMA, Rangers, Army and local authorities



C. IMPACT SNAPSHOT



**~740
DEATHS**

Nationwide since late June 2025



**1,300+
INJURED**

People injured across the country



**100,000+
HOMES DAMAGED**

Partial and complete damage reported



**500+
ROADS & BRIDGES
DAMAGED**

Connectivity badly affected



CROP LOSSES

Thousands of acres of standing crops destroyed



DISPLACEMENT

Tens of thousands of people displaced in affected areas



D. MAJOR CHALLENGES



Intense and unpredictable rainfall exceeding urban drainage capacity.



Poor drainage system, encroachments and solid waste clogging waterways.



Vulnerable infrastructure and weak urban planning in flood-prone areas.



Risk of water-borne diseases and public health crises.



Economic losses to agriculture, livelihoods and businesses.



E. WAY FORWARD



Upgrade urban drainage and storm-water systems in major cities.



Enforce land-use regulations and stop encroachments on natural nullahs.



Invest in climate-resilient infrastructure and nature-based solutions.



Strengthen early warning systems and community awareness.



Improve coordination among federal, provincial and local agencies for timely response.



F. KEY TAKEAWAY

“Climate resilience, better planning and strong governance are the only ways to save lives and secure livelihoods.”



Monsoon Death Toll Nears 740 as Fresh Urban Flooding Hits Karachi

A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Pakistan's 2026 monsoon season pushed its death toll to at least 739 people this week, according to figures compiled by UN agencies and the National Disaster Management Authority, with the toll on children described as particularly severe. NDMA data through Thursday, 21 August, recorded 978 injuries nationwide and the destruction or damage of more than 2,400 houses, alongside the loss of over 1,000 livestock. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has borne the brunt of the disaster, while UNICEF reported that at least 21 children were among those killed in the province since 15 August alone, with widespread school destruction and disruption to education compounding the humanitarian toll.

This week brought a new front to the crisis: urban flooding in Karachi, Pakistan's largest city, where heavy rains on 19 August triggered flash flooding that killed at least six people in wall collapses and electrocutions, exposing the chronic vulnerability of the country's premier commercial hub to monsoon extremes despite years of drainage-infrastructure promises. The UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs forecast severe weather would continue into early September, raising the risk of further flooding, landslides and crop losses at a time when the agricultural sector is already absorbing losses from a season that began in late June.

The toll, while severe, remains well below 2025's monsoon, which killed more than 1,000 people, and dramatically below the catastrophic 2022 floods that killed over 1,700 people and caused an estimated \$30 billion in economic losses. Nonetheless, this week's Karachi flooding renewed scrutiny of urban planning failures linked to rapid, unplanned rural-to-urban migration that has produced flood-vulnerable informal settlements across major cities. For CSS/PMS candidates, the monsoon crisis offers a recurring case study connecting climate-change vulnerability, disaster-management capacity, and urban-planning policy, themes examiners frequently link across Current Affairs, Pakistan Affairs and Essay papers.

B. KEY ARGUMENTS

- Pakistan's 2026 monsoon death toll reached at least 739 people as of 21 August, according to UN and NDMA data.
- NDMA recorded 978 injuries nationwide and damage to or destruction of more than 2,400 houses.
- Over 1,000 livestock have been lost as of the latest NDMA situation report.
- Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has recorded the highest toll among all provinces throughout the season.
- UNICEF reported at least 21 children killed in KP since 15 August alone.
- Widespread school destruction has disrupted education and forced some schools to serve as temporary shelters.
- Karachi experienced urban flash flooding on 19 August that killed at least six people through wall collapses and electrocutions.
- OCHA forecasts severe weather to continue into early September, raising further flood, landslide and crop-loss risk.
- The 2026 toll remains below 2025's monsoon, which killed more than 1,000 people nationwide.
- The 2022 floods, by comparison, killed over 1,700 people and caused an estimated \$30 billion in economic losses.
- Urban flooding in Karachi renewed scrutiny of drainage infrastructure and unplanned urban growth.
- Pakistan ranks 18th among 191 countries on the INFORM Risk Index due to high hazard exposure and limited coping capacity.
- The monsoon season, which began 26 June, has now run for nearly two months with recurring casualty spikes.
- Displacement, loss of schooling, and limited access to safe water disproportionately affect children in flood-hit areas.

C. CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Causes: Pakistan's extreme monsoon vulnerability stems from its geography, straddling both glacier-fed northern catchments and low-lying southern floodplains, combined with intensifying rainfall patterns linked to climate change. Rapid, largely unplanned urbanisation has compounded the risk, with informal settlements built on natural drainage channels in cities like Karachi and Lahore turning ordinary heavy rain into deadly flash flooding.

Implications: The recurring, near-annual scale of monsoon disasters signals a structural rather than episodic crisis, straining NDMA's response capacity and diverting fiscal resources toward emergency relief rather than long-term

resilience investment. The disproportionate impact on children, through deaths, displacement and disrupted schooling, carries long-term human-capital costs for affected regions, particularly KP.

Challenges: Pakistan faces the dual challenge of responding to immediate humanitarian needs while making structural investments, drainage upgrades, flood defences, early-warning systems, that require sustained funding at a time of tight fiscal space under the ongoing IMF programme. Urban flooding specifically exposes decades of inadequate municipal planning that resists quick fixes.

Opportunities: The Resilience and Sustainability Facility component of Pakistan's IMF arrangement specifically funds climate-resilience reforms, offering a financing channel to pair immediate relief with structural adaptation investment. Karachi's renewed flooding could catalyse overdue municipal drainage modernisation if political will translates crisis attention into sustained funding.

Way Forward: Analysts recommend prioritising early-warning system upgrades and pre-positioned relief stocks ahead of forecast severe weather through early September, alongside accelerated drainage infrastructure investment in flood-prone urban areas like Karachi. Longer term, integrating climate-resilience criteria into urban planning approvals could reduce the informal-settlement exposure that turns routine monsoon rain into recurring mass-casualty events.

D. STATISTICS & FACTS

739 Monsoon deaths nationwide since late June	978 Injuries recorded by NDMA
2,400+ Houses destroyed or damaged	21 Children killed in KP since 15 August alone

- Pakistan's 2026 monsoon death toll stood at 739 as of 21 August, per UN and NDMA figures.
- NDMA recorded 978 injuries and damage or destruction of more than 2,400 houses.
- Over 1,000 livestock have been lost during the season.
- At least 21 children were killed in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa since 15 August alone, per UNICEF.
- Karachi's 19 August flash flooding killed at least six people through wall collapses and electrocutions.
- Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has recorded the highest provincial death toll throughout the 2026 season.
- The monsoon season began on 26 June 2026.
- OCHA forecasts severe weather continuing into early September 2026.
- The 2025 monsoon killed more than 1,000 people nationwide, a higher toll than the current season to date.
- The 2022 floods killed over 1,700 people and caused roughly \$30 billion in economic losses.
- Pakistan ranks 18th among 191 countries on the INFORM Risk Index for hazard exposure and vulnerability.
- More than half of monsoon-related deaths nationwide have historically resulted from house or roof collapses.

E. QUOTABLE QUOTES

"The toll on children has been particularly severe."
— UN agencies statement, United Nations (21 August 2026)
"Severe weather is forecast to continue into early September, raising the risk of further flooding, landslides and crop losses."
— OCHA, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (August 2026)

F. EXAMINER'S PERSPECTIVE

Essay: A strong essay theme connects climate change, urban planning failures, and disaster-management capacity as compounding drivers of Pakistan's monsoon crisis.

Current Affairs: Track the final cumulative 2026 monsoon toll against 2025 and 2022 for comparative disaster-management analysis.

Pakistan Affairs: Connects to Pakistan's historical vulnerability to monsoon flooding, notably the catastrophic 2010 and 2022 floods.

Interview: Panels may ask candidates to propose concrete urban-drainage or early-warning reforms for flood-prone cities like Karachi.

G. VOCABULARY BUILDER

Word	Meaning	Synonym	Example
Catchment	An area from which rainfall drains into a river or reservoir	Drainage basin	Northern glacier-fed catchments feed Pakistan's major rivers.
Resilience	The capacity to recover quickly from difficulties	Robustness	Climate resilience investment is critical for flood-prone cities.
Informal settlement	An unplanned residential area lacking formal legal or infrastructure status	Slum	Informal settlements on drainage channels worsen urban flooding.
Displacement	The forced movement of people from their homes	Dislocation	Flooding caused widespread displacement across KP.
Mitigation	Action to reduce the severity of a problem	Alleviation	Flood mitigation requires sustained infrastructure investment.
Vulnerability	The state of being exposed to harm with limited capacity to cope	Susceptibility	Pakistan's high vulnerability ranks it 18th globally on hazard exposure.
Cumulative	Increasing by successive additions	Aggregate	The cumulative monsoon death toll reached 739 this week.
Exacerbate	To make a problem worse	Aggravate	Unplanned urbanisation exacerbates flood risk in major cities.

H. CSS/PMS COMPLETE QUESTION BANK

MCQ: What was Pakistan's cumulative monsoon death toll as of 21 August 2026?

A) 326 B) 522 C) 739 D) 1,033 **[Ans: C]**

Pakistan Affairs Questions:

1. Discuss Pakistan's monsoon flood management framework and the role of the NDMA.
1. Examine the comparative severity of the 2022, 2025 and 2026 monsoon floods.
1. Analyse the structural causes of Karachi's chronic vulnerability to urban flooding.

Current Affairs Questions:

1. Evaluate the effectiveness of Pakistan's early-warning systems for flash flooding.
1. Discuss the role of the IMF's Resilience and Sustainability Facility in financing climate adaptation.
1. Assess the humanitarian impact of the 2026 monsoon on children in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Short Question: Briefly state the cumulative monsoon death toll and the cities/provinces most affected this week.

Analytical Question: Critically analyse whether Pakistan's disaster-management framework has structurally improved since the catastrophic 2022 floods.

Essay Topic: Climate Change and Urban Planning: Pakistan's Recurring Monsoon Crisis

Further In-Depth Study:

- UN News: Monsoon floods kill more than 700 in Pakistan — <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/08/1165699>
- Arab News: Pakistan braces for heavy rains as monsoon death toll rises to 126 — <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2653102/pakistan>
- Al Jazeera: Death toll from Pakistan monsoon rains, floods tops 100 — <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/7/27/death-toll-from-pakistan-monsoon-rains-floods-tops-100>
- The Watchers: Monsoon floods in Pakistan leave 47 dead — <https://watchers.news/2026/07/22/monsoon-floods-in-pakistan-leave-47-dead-as-active-flood-alerts-trigger-evacuations/>

PSX Holds Near Record Highs as Trade Deficit Narrows and Reserves Build



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A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) remained near record highs this week, reflecting strong investor confidence.



A narrowing trade deficit, improved exports and lower import bill supported macroeconomic stability.



Foreign exchange reserves continued to build, strengthening the country's external position.



Positive economic indicators and corporate earnings boosted market sentiment.



Sustained reforms, fiscal discipline and political stability remain key to maintaining the momentum.



B. KEY FACTS AT A GLANCE



PSX PERFORMANCE

KSE-100 index traded near record highs, crossing 72,000 points this week.



TRADE DEFICIT

Trade deficit narrowed significantly in June 2026 due to lower import bill and higher exports.



FOREIGN EXCHANGE RESERVES

Total liquid reserves rose to over \$16 billion, providing strength to the rupee.



RUPEE STABILITY

Rupee remained relatively stable against the US dollar in interbank market.



INVESTOR CONFIDENCE

Strong local buying, foreign inflows and record corporate earnings.



C. MARKET & MACRO INDICATORS

KSE-100 INDEX



72,000+

Near all-time highs

WEEKLY CHANGE



+2.8%

Positive weekly performance

TRADE DEFICIT (JUNE 2026)



\$2.1 BN

Down from \$2.9 BN in May 2026

EXPORTS GROWTH (JUNE 2026)



+10.4%

Year-on-year increase

FOREIGN EXCHANGE RESERVES



\$16+ BN

Total liquid reserves

INFLATION (YoY)



6.2%

Continued disinflation trend

POLICY RATE



11.00%

SBP maintains steady stance



D. FACTORS BEHIND POSITIVE OUTLOOK



Narrowing trade deficit and higher exports improving external account.



Increase in foreign exchange reserves building market confidence.



Lower global commodity prices reducing import costs.



Strong corporate earnings, especially in banking, energy and cement sectors.



Policy rate stability and improving macroeconomic indicators.



Government reforms and fiscal consolidation measures supporting investor sentiment.



E. CHALLENGES AHEAD



Global economic uncertainty and possible slowdown in developed markets.



Rising geopolitical tensions and impact on energy prices.



High public debt and fiscal pressures remain a concern.



Exchange rate volatility could affect market stability.



Need for sustained reforms to ensure long-term growth and investor confidence.



F. THE WAY FORWARD



Maintain fiscal discipline and control current account deficit.



Promote exports and import substitution industries.



Enhance investor facilitation and market depth.



Continue structural reforms for sustainable economic growth.



Ensure political stability and policy continuity.

PSX Holds Near Record Highs as Trade Deficit Narrows and Reserves Build

A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Pakistan's benchmark KSE-100 index closed Friday's session up 574.76 points, or 0.33 percent, at 177,166.52, capping a week in which the Pakistan Stock Exchange oscillated near record territory after touching an all-time intraday high above 189,500 points earlier in the month. Energy stocks led Friday's gains, with Oil and Gas Development Company, Hub Power and Attock Refinery among the strongest contributors, while market breadth stayed positive with 62 advancing shares against 37 decliners. The index's resistance zone between 178,000 and 180,000 points held firm through the week, according to brokerage house Arif Habib Limited, even as the index posted a 3 percent weekly gain of 5,336 points the previous week on hopes of a US-Iran de-escalation deal.

Beneath the headline index moves, macroeconomic indicators offered a mixed but broadly encouraging picture. July's trade deficit came in at \$3.9 billion, down 15 percent month-on-month, driven by higher exports, while headline CPI inflation eased to single digits after four months at 9.2 percent year-on-year, still higher than markets had anticipated. State Bank of Pakistan foreign exchange reserves rose to \$17.0 billion as of 31 July, reflecting continued reserve-rebuilding momentum that has underpinned investor confidence alongside the government's ongoing IMF Extended Fund Facility programme. Petroleum offtake rose 23 percent year-on-year in July to 1.5 million tonnes, partly reflecting a lower base from last year's rains and floods along with tighter enforcement against fuel smuggling from Iran, while cement offtake grew 6 percent year-on-year on improved construction activity.

However, this economic momentum coexists with a more cautionary signal: Pakistan has fallen short on its broader IMF structural-benchmark commitments, completing only four of nineteen targeted governance and transparency actions due in the first half of 2026, according to reporting this week. For CSS/PMS candidates, the week's data offers a compact case study in reading Pakistan's macroeconomic trajectory across multiple indicators simultaneously, market sentiment, trade balance, inflation, reserves and structural reform compliance, rather than relying on any single headline figure.

B. KEY ARGUMENTS

- The KSE-100 index closed at 177,166.52 on Friday, up 574.76 points or 0.33 percent on the day.
- The index touched an all-time intraday high above 189,500 points earlier in August before easing back.
- Energy stocks, led by OGDC, Hub Power and Attock Refinery, drove Friday's gains.
- The index posted a 3 percent weekly gain of 5,336 points the previous week on US-Iran de-escalation hopes.
- Pakistan's July trade deficit was \$3.9 billion, down 15 percent month-on-month on higher exports.
- Headline CPI inflation eased to 9.2 percent year-on-year in July, its first single-digit reading in four months.
- SBP foreign exchange reserves rose to \$17.0 billion as of 31 July 2026.
- Petroleum offtake rose 23 percent year-on-year in July to 1.5 million tonnes.
- Cement sector offtake grew 6 percent year-on-year to 4.5 million tonnes in July.
- The government raised PKR 882 billion through T-bill auctions and PKR 474 billion via PIB sales during the period.
- Pakistan has completed only four of nineteen IMF structural-benchmark actions due in the first half of 2026.
- Market sentiment was also supported by easing Middle East tensions and softer international oil prices.
- Trading volumes remained relatively thin, with average daily volume falling 29 percent week-on-week to 934 million shares.
- The rupee and broader macro indicators have benefited from the government's ongoing IMF Extended Fund Facility programme.

C. CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Causes: The PSX's resilience near record highs reflects a combination of improving macro fundamentals, narrower trade deficit, easing inflation, rising reserves, and easing geopolitical risk premiums as US-Iran and Hormuz tensions showed signs of de-escalation during the week. Strong banking-sector earnings and expectations of continued policy-rate stability have also supported equity valuations.

Implications: A stable, near-record equity market alongside improving reserves strengthens Pakistan's external financing position ahead of the IMF's fifth EFF review, potentially easing pressure on the exchange rate and import financing. However, the shortfall on structural-benchmark compliance signals that headline macro stabilisation has not been matched by equivalent progress on governance and transparency reforms the Fund considers essential to durable recovery.

Challenges: Sustaining reserve accumulation and trade-deficit narrowing depends heavily on external factors, including global oil prices and the trajectory of the Middle East conflict, that lie outside Islamabad's direct control. The gap between macro stabilisation and structural reform compliance risks becoming a friction point in the upcoming IMF review, given the Fund's consistent emphasis on governance benchmarks.

Opportunities: Continued reserve building and a narrowing trade deficit create room for the SBP to maintain supportive monetary conditions without risking external-account instability, potentially sustaining the equity rally and lowering borrowing costs for productive investment. Success in privatisation transactions like GEPCO could further reinforce investor confidence in the reform trajectory.

Way Forward: Analysts recommend the government accelerate completion of pending structural-benchmark actions, particularly around public procurement transparency and regulatory disclosure, ahead of the IMF's fifth review to avoid jeopardising continued disbursements. Sustaining export growth momentum, rather than relying solely on import compression, would provide a more durable basis for trade-balance improvement.

D. STATISTICS & FACTS

177,166 KSE-100 closing level this Friday	\$3.9bn July trade deficit, down 15% MoM
9.2% July CPI inflation, year-on-year	\$17.0bn SBP foreign exchange reserves, 31 July

- The KSE-100 index closed at 177,166.52 on Friday, up 574.76 points or 0.33 percent.
- The index touched an all-time intraday high above 189,500 points earlier in August.
- The index gained 5,336 points, or 3 percent, in the prior week alone.
- July's trade deficit stood at \$3.9 billion, down 15 percent month-on-month.
- CPI inflation eased to 9.2 percent year-on-year in July, its first single-digit reading in four months.
- SBP foreign exchange reserves rose to \$17.0 billion as of 31 July 2026.
- Petroleum offtake rose 23 percent year-on-year in July to 1.5 million tonnes.
- Cement offtake grew 6 percent year-on-year to 4.5 million tonnes in July.
- The government raised PKR 882 billion through T-bill auctions during the period.
- The government also raised PKR 474 billion via Pakistan Investment Bond sales.
- Pakistan completed only four of nineteen IMF structural-benchmark actions targeted for the first half of 2026.
- Average daily trading volume fell 29 percent week-on-week to 934 million shares.

E. QUOTABLE QUOTES

"Resistance in the 178,000 to 180,000 zone held firm."

— Arif Habib Limited, Brokerage house market report (22 August 2026)

"Positive sentiments were partially tempered by uncertainties surrounding the Red Sea passageway and higher-than-anticipated CPI."

— Pakistan & Gulf Economist, Weekly market review (17 August 2026)

F. EXAMINER'S PERSPECTIVE

Essay: A relevant essay theme examines whether stock-market performance is a reliable proxy for genuine macroeconomic health in a developing economy like Pakistan's.

Current Affairs: Track the outcome of the IMF's fifth EFF review and whether Pakistan closes the gap on its outstanding structural-benchmark actions.

Pakistan Affairs: Connects to Pakistan's recurring boom-bust cycles of reserve accumulation and depletion since the 1990s.

Interview: Panels may ask candidates to explain the difference between headline market performance and structural economic reform compliance.

G. VOCABULARY BUILDER

Word	Meaning	Synonym	Example
Benchmark	A standard or reference point against which things are compared	Standard	The KSE-100 is Pakistan's benchmark stock index.
Offtake	The quantity of a product purchased or consumed	Consumption	Petroleum offtake rose 23 percent year-on-year in July.
Compliance	The act of conforming to a rule or standard	Adherence	Pakistan lagged on IMF structural-benchmark compliance.
Disbursement	The payment of money from a fund	Payout	Continued IMF disbursements depend on reform progress.
Momentum	The impetus gained by a moving process or object	Impetus	The market's upward momentum continued into Friday's session.
Volatility	The tendency of a market to change rapidly and unpredictably	Instability	Oil-price volatility affects Pakistan's import bill.
Fundamentals	The basic underlying factors that determine value or performance	Basics	Improving macro fundamentals supported the equity rally.
De-escalation	A reduction in the intensity of a conflict	Easing	Hopes of US-Iran de-escalation lifted market sentiment.

H. CSS/PMS COMPLETE QUESTION BANK

MCQ: What was Pakistan's trade deficit for July 2026?

A) \$1.9 billion B) \$2.9 billion C) \$3.9 billion D) \$4.9 billion **[Ans: C]**

Pakistan Affairs Questions:

1. Discuss the significance of foreign exchange reserve accumulation for Pakistan's economic stability.
1. Examine the relationship between stock-market performance and structural economic reform in Pakistan.
1. Analyse the role of the IMF Extended Fund Facility in shaping Pakistan's macroeconomic trajectory.

Current Affairs Questions:

1. Evaluate the drivers behind the PSX's near-record performance in August 2026.
1. Discuss the implications of Pakistan completing only four of nineteen IMF structural-benchmark actions.
1. Assess how easing Middle East tensions have influenced Pakistan's financial markets.

Short Question: Briefly state the KSE-100's closing level this week and the main sector driving gains.

Analytical Question: Critically analyse whether Pakistan's improving headline macro indicators reflect durable structural reform or temporary external tailwinds.

Essay Topic: Beyond the Index: Assessing the Real Health of Pakistan's Economy

Further In-Depth Study:

- Express Tribune: Led by energy stocks, PSX gains 575 points — <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2625172/led-by-energy-stocks-psx-gains-575-points>
- Pakistan & Gulf Economist: Stock Review — <https://www.pakistangulfeconomist.com/2026/08/17/stock-review-32-33-26>
- ProPakistani: Pakistan Falls Short on IMF Targets, Completes 4 of 19 Actions — <https://propakistani.pk/2026/08/21/pakistan-falls-short-on-imf-targets-completes-4-of-19-actions/>
- Trading Economics: Pakistan Stock Market (KSE100) — <https://tradingeconomics.com/pakistan/stock-market>

Pakistan Falls Short on IMF Governance Targets Ahead of Fifth EFF Review



In-Depth Analysis



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A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Pakistan has fallen short on key governance targets linked to the IMF's Extended Fund Facility (EFF).



Shortcomings in transparency, state-owned enterprises (SOEs) reforms, and anti-corruption measures remain major concerns.



The performance gap may affect the pace of disbursement under the \$7 billion EFF program.



The government has acknowledged delays and reaffirmed its commitment to implement reforms.



Timely action is critical to unlock the next tranche and maintain macroeconomic stability.



B. KEY FACTS AT A GLANCE



PROGRAM

\$7 Billion Extended Fund Facility (EFF)



REVIEW

Fifth EFF Review Upcoming



GOVERNANCE PERFORMANCE

Below expectations on several structural benchmarks



KEY AREAS OF CONCERN

SOEs reforms, transparency, anti-corruption, public procurement



NEXT TRANCHE

Dependent on satisfactory implementation of reforms



IMPACT

Delays may affect fiscal support and investor confidence



C. GOVERNANCE BENCHMARKS – STATUS OVERVIEW

AREA	IMF BENCHMARK	TARGET	STATUS	COMMENTS
 State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs)	Restructuring and reducing quasi-fiscal risks	End-June 2026	 Not Met	Reforms delayed; governance and financial oversight weak
 Transparency & Disclosure	Improve fiscal transparency and data reporting	Continuous	 Not Met	Data gaps and reporting delays continue
 Anti-Corruption Measures	Strengthen accountability and enforcement	End-June 2026	 Not Met	Cases pending; institutional capacity needs improvement
 Public Procurement	Implement e-procurement and oversight	End-June 2026	 Partially Met	E-procurement rollout slow; oversight mechanisms weak
 Civil Service Reforms	Merit-based appointments and capacity building	End-June 2026	 Partially Met	Progress uneven across ministries



D. WHY IT MATTERS

- ✓ Good governance ensures efficient use of public resources.
- ✓ IMF support is crucial for balance of payments stability.
- ✓ Reforms boost investor confidence and economic growth.
- ✓ Delays increase fiscal and external risks.
- ✓ Strong institutions are key to long-term development.



E. CHALLENGES AHEAD

-  Resistance to change in public institutions and SOEs.
-  Weak accountability and enforcement mechanisms.
-  Capacity constraints in implementing reforms.
-  Political economy challenges and vested interests.
-  Tight timelines before the IMF review.



F. WAY FORWARD

-  Fast-track SOEs reforms and improve oversight.
-  Enhance fiscal transparency and data quality.
-  Strengthen anti-corruption institutions and enforcement.
-  Expand e-procurement and ensure open, competitive processes.
-  Invest in civil service capacity and merit-based systems.
-  Maintain close dialogue with IMF and meet all commitments.

Pakistan Falls Short on IMF Governance Targets Ahead of Fifth EFF Review

A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A government oversight committee monitoring Pakistan's structural-reform commitments has confirmed that only four of nineteen governance and transparency actions targeted for completion in the first half of 2026 have actually been finished, exposing a widening gap between the country's headline macroeconomic stabilisation and its slower-moving institutional reform agenda. The committee is responsible for tracking 59 total actions under a three-year reform plan tied to Pakistan's IMF Extended Fund Facility programme, of which the nineteen were specifically due for completion by mid-2026.

The four completed measures span a narrow band of technical steps: the formation of a methodology working group, a review of international practices in judicial governance, and legal clarity work, incremental progress that officials describe as foundational but that falls well short of the substantive institutional changes envisioned in the original timeline. Progress on public procurement monitoring and regulatory transparency has been particularly slow; the government has prepared, but not yet published, its procurement monitoring report for fiscal year 2024-25, while a promised machine-readable database of laws and regulations remains targeted only for completion by the end of August, and the Ministry of Finance has yet to publish the six-monthly progress report required under the broader reform plan.

The shortfall arrives at an awkward moment, just as Pakistan prepares for its fifth EFF review and simultaneously courts fresh IMF financing of roughly \$1.2 billion, including under the climate-focused Resilience and Sustainability Facility. It also sits in tension with this week's more encouraging economic signals, a resilient stock market, a narrowing trade deficit, and rising reserves, illustrating a familiar pattern in Pakistan's reform history where macroeconomic indicators improve faster than the institutional and governance changes needed to make that improvement durable. For CSS/PMS aspirants, this is a valuable case study in distinguishing macroeconomic stabilisation from structural reform, a distinction examiners frequently test in Current Affairs and essay questions on Pakistan's economy.

B. KEY ARGUMENTS

- A government committee confirmed only four of nineteen structural-reform actions due in the first half of 2026 have been completed.
- The oversight committee tracks 59 total governance and transparency actions under a three-year IMF-linked reform plan.
- Completed measures include forming a methodology working group and reviewing international judicial-governance practices.
- Progress on public procurement monitoring and regulatory transparency has been especially slow.
- The government has prepared but not yet published its FY2024-25 procurement monitoring report.
- A promised machine-readable database of laws and regulations is now targeted only for end-August completion.
- The Ministry of Finance has yet to publish the required six-monthly progress report under the reform plan.
- The shortfall comes as Pakistan prepares for the fifth review of its IMF Extended Fund Facility.
- Pakistan is simultaneously seeking roughly \$1.2 billion in fresh IMF financing, including RSF disbursements.
- The governance shortfall contrasts with encouraging headline indicators including a resilient PSX and narrowing trade deficit.
- The pattern reflects a recurring gap in Pakistan's reform history between macro stabilisation and institutional change.
- Energy-sector circular-debt reforms remain a key area of continued IMF scrutiny alongside governance benchmarks.

C. CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Causes: Institutional and governance reforms typically require sustained bureaucratic coordination, legislative action, and political capital that are harder to mobilise than monetary or fiscal adjustments achievable through executive decision. Competing priorities, including flood response, security operations, and the 28th Amendment debate, have likely diverted administrative bandwidth away from technical reform implementation this year.

Implications: Slow governance reform progress risks becoming a sticking point in the fifth EFF review, potentially complicating the disbursement of the roughly \$1.2 billion in fresh financing Pakistan is seeking. It also undermines the

durability of the current macroeconomic recovery, since transparency and procurement reforms are designed precisely to prevent the recurrence of past fiscal mismanagement.

Challenges: Publishing sensitive documents like the procurement monitoring report and law databases requires overcoming institutional resistance and data-collection gaps that have persisted for years. Coordinating action across multiple ministries and provincial governments, given Pakistan's federal structure, adds further complexity to meeting centrally negotiated IMF benchmarks.

Opportunities: The upcoming EFF review offers a concrete deadline that could catalyse a final push to complete outstanding actions, particularly the near-ready procurement report and law database. Demonstrating credible governance progress alongside strong macro indicators could strengthen Pakistan's negotiating position for more favourable future financing terms.

Way Forward: Analysts recommend the government prioritise publishing the already-prepared procurement monitoring report and accelerating the law database ahead of the IMF mission's visit, using these as visible good-faith signals. Establishing a dedicated implementation unit with ministerial accountability for the remaining 15 overdue actions could help close the gap before it becomes a review-jeopardising issue.

D. STATISTICS & FACTS

4/19 Structural actions completed of those due	59 Total actions tracked under the reform plan
\$1.2bn Fresh IMF financing Pakistan is pursuing	FY25 Procurement report prepared but unpublished

- Only four of nineteen structural-reform actions due in H1 2026 have been completed.
- The oversight committee tracks 59 total actions under a three-year IMF-linked reform plan.
- The procurement monitoring report for FY2024-25 has been prepared but not yet published.
- A machine-readable law and regulation database is targeted for completion by end-August 2026.
- The Ministry of Finance has yet to publish its required six-monthly progress report.
- Pakistan is pursuing approximately \$1.2 billion in fresh IMF financing, including EFF and RSF tranches.
- The fifth EFF review talks are expected to take place with an IMF mission visiting Islamabad.
- The reform plan sits alongside a broader \$7 billion Extended Fund Facility programme.

E. QUOTABLE QUOTES

“The four completed measures included the formation of a methodology working group and a review of international practices in judicial governance.”

— Express Tribune reporting, Business desk (August 2026)

F. EXAMINER'S PERSPECTIVE

Essay: A strong essay theme distinguishes macroeconomic stabilisation from durable institutional and governance reform in developing economies.

Current Affairs: Track the outcome of Pakistan's fifth EFF review and whether the outstanding structural-benchmark actions are completed beforehand.

Pakistan Affairs: Connects to Pakistan's recurring cycle of IMF programmes since 1988 and the persistent challenge of institutional reform implementation.

Interview: Panels may ask candidates why governance reforms tend to lag behind macroeconomic indicators in IMF programme countries.

G. VOCABULARY BUILDER

Word	Meaning	Synonym	Example
Benchmark	A specific, measurable target used to assess progress	Milestone	Pakistan missed several structural benchmarks due in mid-2026.

Word	Meaning	Synonym	Example
Transparency	Openness and accountability in decision-making and information sharing	Openness	Regulatory transparency reforms have progressed slowly.
Procurement	The process of obtaining goods or services, especially by a government	Purchasing	Public procurement monitoring remains an unpublished reform area.
Institutional	Relating to an established organisation or system, especially in government	Structural	Institutional reform lags behind macroeconomic stabilisation.
Catalyse	To cause or accelerate a process	Trigger	The IMF review deadline could catalyse faster reform completion.

H. CSS/PMS COMPLETE QUESTION BANK

MCQ: How many of the nineteen targeted structural-reform actions has Pakistan completed?

A) 2 B) 4 C) 6 D) 9 **[Ans: B]**

Pakistan Affairs Questions:

1. Discuss Pakistan's historical pattern of engagement with IMF structural-reform conditionality.
1. Examine the institutional barriers to completing governance and transparency reforms in Pakistan.

Current Affairs Questions:

1. Evaluate the significance of the governance-reform shortfall ahead of the IMF's fifth EFF review.
1. Discuss the relationship between macroeconomic stabilisation and structural reform in Pakistan's current IMF programme.

Short Question: Briefly state how many of the nineteen due structural-reform actions Pakistan has completed.

Analytical Question: Critically analyse why governance and transparency reforms tend to lag behind fiscal and monetary stabilisation measures in IMF programme countries like Pakistan.

Essay Topic: Macroeconomic Stability Without Institutional Reform: A Sustainable Path for Pakistan?

Further In-Depth Study:

- ProPakistani: Pakistan Falls Short on IMF Targets, Completes 4 of 19 Actions — <https://propakistani.pk/2026/08/21/pakistan-falls-short-on-imf-targets-completes-4-of-19-actions/>
- ProPakistani: Pakistan Eyes \$1.2 Billion Tranche as Crucial IMF Review Talks Set — <https://propakistani.pk/2026/08/11/pakistan-eyes-1-2-billion-tranche-as-crucial-imf-review-talks-set-for-next-month/amp/>
- Daily Pakistan: Pakistan eyes \$1.2 Billion IMF Financing — <https://en.dailypakistan.com.pk/11-Aug-2026/pakistan-eyes-1-2-billion-imf-financing-with-another-3-billion-expected-by-september>



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INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Kushner and Netanyahu Agree US General Should Oversee Hamas 'Demilitarisation'

A proposed international security mechanism aims to oversee Hamas disarmament as part of the Gaza peace plan.



In-Depth Analysis



Exam-Focused Content



Global Perspective



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A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Senior White House adviser Jared Kushner and Israeli PM Netanyahu have agreed that a US general should head an international force to oversee Hamas 'demilitarisation' in Gaza.



The plan is part of a broader post-war governance and security framework under discussion with regional and international partners.



The proposed mechanism seeks to ensure Hamas disarms, tunnels are neutralised, and security is stabilised.



The proposal still requires Arab and international buy-in and clarity on mandate, rules of engagement and timeline.



B. KEY FACTS AT A GLANCE



WHO

Jared Kushner (US Senior Adviser) and Benjamin Netanyahu (Israel PM)



AGREEMENT

US general to lead an international force overseeing Hamas 'demilitarisation'



OBJECTIVE

Ensure disarmament, dismantle tunnels, and establish long-term security in Gaza



FRAMEWORK

Part of a broader post-war governance and security plan for Gaza



STATUS

Proposal under discussion; needs regional & international approval and detailed mandate



C. THE PROPOSED MECHANISM – KEY ELEMENTS

01



INTERNATIONAL FORCE

Multinational force led by a US general with participation from Arab and other partner countries.

02



DISARMAMENT

Hamas to surrender weapons; monitored and verified by international force.

03



TUNNEL NEUTRALISATION

Locate and destroy offensive tunnels and weapons infrastructure in Gaza.

04



SECURITY STABILISATION

Maintain law and order, secure borders, and prevent rearmament.

05



GOVERNANCE SUPPORT

Facilitate a transitional administration and create conditions for a political settlement.

06



PHASED TRANSFER

Gradual handover of responsibilities to a reformed Palestinian authority.



D. CHALLENGES & CONCERNS



Hamas may resist disarmament or reject international oversight.



Arab states seek clear mandate, UN involvement, and role in decision-making.



Questions over legality, sovereignty, and duration of foreign troop presence.



Humanitarian situation must improve to ensure local cooperation and stability.



Risk of renewed violence if political track stalls or spoilers act.



E. IMPLICATIONS



If implemented, could pave the way for long-term stability in Gaza.



Strengthens prospects for a broader regional peace framework.



Supports reconstruction, economic recovery, and humanitarian relief.



Will test international cooperation and readiness to commit resources.



Success depends on inclusive governance and addressing Palestinian aspirations.



F. THE KEY TAKEAWAY

The proposed international mechanism, led by a US general, to oversee Hamas 'demilitarisation' is a critical component of the post-war plan for Gaza, but its success hinges on broad regional support, a clear mandate, and a parallel political track.



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Kushner and Netanyahu Agree US General Should Oversee Hamas 'Demilitarisation'

A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Gaza's fraught disarmament process took a fresh procedural turn this week when Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and US presidential envoy Jared Kushner agreed that the "demilitarisation" of the Gaza Strip should begin with a Hamas weapons handover supervised by an American military general, according to a senior Israeli official briefed on an hours-long meeting on Monday. The agreement followed rare direct talks between Kushner, other members of Trump's Board of Peace, and Hamas's own leadership, a notable escalation in engagement given the group's continued formal exclusion from governing Gaza under the US-backed roadmap.

The development builds on the "historic" disarmament agreement announced by President Trump in late July, under which Hamas agreed in principle to hand over weapons in stages, first through police-held arms, then heavier weaponry, to a National Committee set to administer Gaza, while Israeli forces would gradually withdraw. That roadmap has been fraught from the outset: Hamas negotiator Ghazi Hamad has repeatedly said the group will not implement any part of the deal unless Israel fulfils its own obligations, chiefly a phased troop withdrawal, while Netanyahu has publicly stated Israel "didn't agree" to the Board of Peace's full terms and will not withdraw from its current lines "until Hamas is completely disarmed." This week's US-general-supervision compromise represents an attempt to bridge that sequencing deadlock by inserting a nominally neutral American military figure into the verification chain.

Complicating the diplomatic track, Israeli strikes on Gaza have continued and, in some cases intensified, since the disarmament announcement, with the "Yellow Line" demarcating Israeli-controlled territory expanding to cover nearly 70 percent of the Strip, up from roughly 53 percent in October. For CSS/PMS aspirants, the Gaza file remains one of the highest-value recurring topics across Current Affairs, Essay and International Relations papers, testing candidates' ability to track a fast-evolving, multi-actor negotiation where formal agreements and battlefield realities frequently diverge.

B. KEY ARGUMENTS

- Netanyahu and Kushner agreed this week that Hamas 'demilitarisation' should begin with a weapons handover supervised by a US military general.
- The agreement followed rare direct talks between Kushner, Board of Peace members, and Hamas's negotiating leadership.
- It builds on the late-July disarmament roadmap in which Hamas agreed in principle to phased weapons handover.
- Under that roadmap, police-held weapons are to be surrendered first, followed by heavier armaments, to a National Committee administering Gaza.
- Hamas negotiator Ghazi Hamad has said the group will not implement the deal unless Israel fulfils its own withdrawal obligations.
- Netanyahu has publicly said Israel 'didn't agree' to the Board of Peace's full terms for disarming Hamas.
- Israel has stated it will not withdraw from its current lines until Hamas is completely disarmed, reversing the roadmap's intended sequencing.
- The 'Yellow Line' demarcating Israeli-controlled Gaza territory has expanded to nearly 70 percent of the Strip, up from about 53 percent in October.
- Israeli strikes on Gaza have continued, and in some periods intensified, since the disarmament announcement.
- Mediators from Egypt, Qatar, Türkiye and the US were involved in finalising the underlying roadmap.
- The precise disarmament roadmap was originally meant to be finalised within 14 days of the late-July agreement, subject to extensions.
- No weapons are to be handed over to Israel or any non-Palestinian body under the agreement's stated terms.
- The National Committee for the Administration of Gaza is intended to be the sole body holding weapons once disarmament is complete.

C. CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Causes: The impasse stems from a fundamental sequencing disagreement: Hamas wants Israeli withdrawal to accompany or precede disarmament, while Israel insists on complete disarmament first, a gap the original roadmap's ambiguous phrasing failed to resolve. The insertion of a US general reflects Washington's effort to manufacture a face-saving, verifiable middle path that neither side would accept from the other directly.

Implications: If the US-general mechanism succeeds, it could unlock the broader post-war reconstruction and governance track for Gaza, including the entry of the National Committee and an International Stabilisation Force. If it fails, as previous sequencing compromises have, the ceasefire framework risks further erosion, with continued Israeli territorial expansion inside Gaza normalising a de facto long-term occupation of most of the Strip.

Challenges: Deep mutual distrust between Hamas and Israel makes any verification mechanism vulnerable to accusations of bad faith from either side at the first sign of delay. The continued expansion of Israeli-controlled territory even as talks proceed undermines confidence that disarmament will be reciprocated with genuine withdrawal, while political pressures within Israel's coalition constrain Netanyahu's room for concessions.

Opportunities: US direct involvement through a general-level verification role offers a genuinely novel mechanism that could de-link disarmament from the politically fraught question of full Israeli withdrawal timing, allowing incremental progress. Sustained international mediator engagement from Egypt, Qatar and Turkiye provides multiple channels to keep talks alive even when bilateral trust breaks down.

Way Forward: Analysts recommend establishing clear, internationally monitored milestones with automatic verification triggers rather than relying on sequential trust-building, reducing space for either side to stall indefinitely. Sustained pressure from the Board of Peace's international backers, paired with meaningful reconstruction incentives for Gaza's population, could help maintain momentum toward full implementation.

D. STATISTICS & FACTS

70% Gaza territory now under Israeli control (Yellow Line)	53% Israeli-controlled territory in October, for comparison
14 days Original roadmap timeline for finalising disarmament details	Jul 30 Date the disarmament agreement was announced

- The disarmament agreement was announced by President Trump on 30 July 2026.
- The 'Yellow Line' demarcating Israeli-controlled Gaza territory has expanded to nearly 70 percent of the Strip.
- That compares to roughly 53 percent of Gaza under Israeli control in October 2025.
- The original roadmap called for the precise disarmament plan to be finalised within 14 days, with possible extensions.
- Mediators from Egypt, Qatar, Turkiye and the United States were involved in finalising the roadmap.
- Kushner and Netanyahu's agreement on US-general oversight followed an hours-long meeting on Monday, 17 August 2026.
- The October 2025 ceasefire marked the start of the current phase of the Gaza peace process.
- The disarmament plan stipulates that police-held weapons are surrendered first, followed by heavier armaments.

E. QUOTABLE QUOTES

- "Israel will not withdraw from our current lines until Hamas is completely disarmed."*
— Benjamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister of Israel (August 2026)
- "These negotiations were difficult and hard, and we tried to reach the best possible formula that was achievable."*
— Ghazi Hamad, Hamas negotiating delegation member (30 July 2026)
- "A monumental step toward lasting peace and security."*
— Donald Trump, President of the United States (30 July 2026)

F. EXAMINER'S PERSPECTIVE

Essay: A recurring essay theme examines whether externally brokered disarmament agreements can succeed absent genuine mutual trust between belligerents.

Current Affairs: Track whether the US-general verification mechanism produces a verified weapons handover in the coming weeks.

Pakistan Affairs: Connects to Pakistan's consistent diplomatic support for Palestinian statehood and its participation in broader Muslim-world responses to the Gaza crisis.

Interview: Panels may ask candidates to assess the feasibility of third-party verification mechanisms in post-conflict disarmament processes.

G. VOCABULARY BUILDER

Word	Meaning	Synonym	Example
Demilitarisation	The removal of military forces or weapons from an area	Disarmament	Gaza's demilitarisation remains the central sticking point in talks.
Sequencing	The order in which a series of actions or events occurs	Ordering	Disagreement over sequencing has stalled the disarmament roadmap.
Verification	The process of establishing the truth or accuracy of something	Confirmation	A US general will oversee verification of the weapons handover.
Roadmap	A plan or strategy intended to achieve a future goal	Blueprint	The Gaza roadmap outlines phased disarmament and withdrawal.
Stabilisation force	A military force deployed to maintain order after conflict	Peacekeeping force	An International Stabilisation Force is planned for post-war Gaza.
De facto	Existing in practice, whether officially recognised or not	In practice	Continued territorial expansion risks a de facto long-term occupation.
Impasse	A situation in which no progress is possible; a deadlock	Deadlock	The sequencing dispute created a diplomatic impasse.
Mediator	A neutral party who helps resolve a dispute between others	Intermediary	Egypt, Qatar and Turkiye acted as mediators in the talks.

H. CSS/PMS COMPLETE QUESTION BANK

MCQ: Which US official agreed with Netanyahu on the US-general oversight mechanism this week?

A) Marco Rubio B) Jared Kushner C) Steve Witkoff D) JD Vance **[Ans: B]**

Pakistan Affairs Questions:

1. Discuss Pakistan's diplomatic position on the Gaza ceasefire and disarmament process.
1. Examine how the Gaza crisis has influenced Pakistan's engagement with the Muslim world through initiatives like the Mecca pact.

Current Affairs Questions:

1. Evaluate the significance of appointing a US general to oversee Hamas's weapons handover.
1. Discuss the sequencing dispute between Hamas and Israel over disarmament and withdrawal.
1. Assess the implications of the expanding 'Yellow Line' for Gaza's post-war governance.

Short Question: Briefly explain the sequencing disagreement at the heart of the Gaza disarmament impasse.

Analytical Question: Critically analyse whether third-party military verification can resolve the fundamental trust deficit between Hamas and Israel over Gaza's disarmament.

Essay Topic: Disarmament Without Trust: The Challenge of Post-Conflict Verification in Gaza

Further In-Depth Study:

- NBC News: Kushner and Netanyahu agree U.S. general should oversee Hamas demilitarization — <https://www.nbcnews.com/world/gaza/kushner-netanyahu-hamas-talks-gaza-plan-peace-trump-rcna592871>
- Al Jazeera: Hamas reaches Gaza disarmament agreement with Board of Peace — <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/7/30/trump-says-board-of-peace-reaches-agreement-on-disarmament-of-hamas-in-gaza>
- Times of Israel: Netanyahu says Israel 'didn't agree' to Board of Peace's terms — <https://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahu-announces-israel-didnt-agree-to-board-of-peaces-plan-to-disarm-hamas/>
- Chatham House: By agreeing to disarm, Hamas is trying to call Israel's bluff in Gaza — <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2026/08/agreeing-disarm-hamas-trying-call-israels-bluff-gaza>



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I-02

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Deadly Houthi Strike and Stalled Hormuz Diplomacy Deepen Shipping Crisis

A deadly attack in the Red Sea and failed diplomacy around the Strait of Hormuz have intensified global shipping risks and energy market uncertainty.



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A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



A Houthi missile and drone attack on a commercial vessel in the Red Sea has escalated security risks for global shipping.



Diplomatic efforts to ease tensions in the Strait of Hormuz have stalled, raising fears of further disruptions.



Shipping routes remain costly and longer, leading to higher freight rates and insurance premiums.



Energy markets face renewed volatility as a significant share of global oil trade passes through the Strait of Hormuz.



The crisis underscores the fragility of global supply chains and the urgent need for diplomatic resolution.



B. KEY FACTS AT A GLANCE



INCIDENT

Houthi missile and drone strike targets commercial vessel in the Red Sea.



PERPETRATOR

Yemen's Houthi rebels claim responsibility.



DIPLOMACY

Talks on de-escalation in the Strait of Hormuz remain unsuccessful.



STRATEGIC CHOKE POINT

About 20–21 million barrels of oil transit the Strait daily (~20% of global supply).



IMPACT

Higher shipping costs, energy price volatility, and global economic uncertainty.



OUTLOOK

Risks remain high; markets and policymakers await diplomatic breakthrough.



C. THE SHIPPING & ENERGY IMPACT



DISRUPTED ROUTES

Ships avoid Red Sea and Suez route, opting for longer Cape of Good Hope route.



HIGHER COSTS

Freight rates surge, insurance premiums rise sharply.



ENERGY VOLATILITY

Crude oil prices sensitive to any threat of closure in Hormuz.



SUPPLY CHAIN PRESSURE

Delays and higher costs impact global trade and inflation.



GLOBAL SECURITY RISK

Attacks on commercial shipping threaten international maritime security.



D. KEY CHALLENGES



Houthi attacks continue despite international warnings.



Diplomatic deadlock between Iran and Western powers.



Protection of commercial shipping remains difficult.



Rising energy prices strain global economies.



Fragile global supply chains vulnerable to shocks.



E. WAY FORWARD



Renewed diplomatic engagement to reduce regional tensions.



Strengthen maritime security cooperation and intelligence sharing.



Enhance naval presence to safeguard critical sea lanes.



Diversify energy routes and reduce dependence on choke points.



Promote dialogue with all regional stakeholders for lasting peace.



F. KEY TAKEAWAY

The deadly strike and stalled diplomacy highlight the increasing risks to global shipping and energy security. Sustained diplomacy, maritime security, and regional cooperation are vital to prevent a wider crisis.



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Deadly Houthi Strike and Stalled Hormuz Diplomacy Deepen Shipping Crisis

A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The maritime dimension of the 2026 Iran war took a grim turn this week when Iran-backed Houthi rebels killed six people aboard a cargo ship in the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, the first reported fatalities from Red Sea shipping attacks in more than a year. Within hours, US forces said they had fired missiles at a container ship attempting to breach Washington's naval blockade of Iranian ports in the Gulf of Oman, underscoring how the six-month-old conflict continues to inflict a widening toll on two of the world's most critical shipping lanes simultaneously. President Trump responded on Truth Social by mocking Iran's military and reasserting that the United States maintains "total control" over the Strait of Hormuz.

The twin incidents landed just as diplomacy over reopening Hormuz appeared to stall. Iran's Supreme National Security Council issued sweeping demands over the preceding weekend for any deal, including an end to the US naval blockade, sanctions relief, American troop withdrawals from the region, and war reparations, prompting Trump to counter-demand compensation from Iran instead. Earlier in the month, Iran and Oman had appeared close to an interim arrangement, with Pakistani, Saudi and Qatari officials also involved in mediation and the US "indirectly" engaged, but by this week the impasse had pushed a return to normal shipping further out of reach. Traffic through Hormuz, which carried roughly 20 percent of the world's oil trade before the conflict, has been reduced to a trickle, with Aramco's chief executive estimating replenishing depleted global inventories could take up to 18 months even after reopening.

For CSS/PMS aspirants, this week's developments illustrate how localised tactical escalations, a single deadly Houthi attack, can derail broader diplomatic tracks even when negotiators appear close to a breakthrough, a dynamic with direct relevance to essay questions on the fragility of conflict de-escalation and to Pakistan's own stake in the crisis given its mediating role between Iran and Oman and its heavy reliance on Gulf energy imports.

B. KEY ARGUMENTS

- Houthi rebels killed six people aboard a cargo ship in the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, the first Red Sea shipping fatalities in over a year.
- US forces fired missiles at a container ship allegedly attempting to breach the naval blockade of Iranian ports within hours of the Houthi attack.
- Trump claimed the US maintains 'total control' over the Strait of Hormuz following the twin incidents.
- Iran's Supreme National Security Council issued sweeping demands for reopening Hormuz, including an end to the naval blockade and war reparations.
- Trump responded by demanding Iran pay compensation of its own, deepening the negotiating impasse.
- Iran and Oman had appeared close to an interim reopening agreement earlier in August, with a document described as 'close to being finalized.'
- Pakistani, Saudi and Qatari officials have all been involved in mediating the Hormuz talks, with the US engaged indirectly.
- Traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, which carried about 20 percent of world oil trade pre-conflict, has slowed to a trickle.
- Saudi Aramco's CEO estimated replenishing depleted global oil inventories could take up to 18 months even after Hormuz reopens.
- Global markets are estimated to be losing more than 100 million barrels a week due to constricted Hormuz traffic.
- Iran has denied holding direct talks with the US, framing its engagement as solely with Oman on a transit arrangement.
- The IRGC has stated that reopening Hormuz has 'its own specific mechanism' unrelated to broader Iran-Oman negotiations.
- The UAE reported a missile attack on an ADNOC-linked vessel crossing the Strait of Hormuz, though no casualties were reported.

C. CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Causes: The renewed maritime escalation stems from the underlying, unresolved 2026 Iran war, which has left Tehran seeking maximal leverage, sanctions relief, troop withdrawal, reparations, before conceding on Hormuz access, while Washington resists conceding to what it frames as ransom demands. Houthi attacks, though nominally separate from the Iran-US-Oman track, function as leverage points that Tehran's regional allies can deploy to pressure negotiations without direct Iranian government fingerprints.

Implications: The fatal Houthi attack and stalled Hormuz talks threaten to prolong the global energy-price shock the conflict has already caused, with direct implications for oil-importing economies like Pakistan, where petroleum offtake and inflation dynamics are already sensitive to Gulf shipping disruptions. Continued uncertainty also complicates the parallel Gaza and broader Middle East de-escalation tracks, since regional actors read Hormuz developments as a barometer of overall US-Iran relations.

Challenges: Untangling which attacks are Iranian-directed versus autonomous Houthi action complicates any negotiated settlement, since Tehran can plausibly deny responsibility while still benefiting from the pressure such attacks generate. The gap between Iran's maximalist demands and Washington's insistence on unconditional strait access leaves little obvious middle ground without a face-saving formula for both sides.

Opportunities: The reported near-completion of an Iran-Oman document earlier in August shows a workable framework exists and could be revived once the immediate crisis from this week's fatal attack subsides. Pakistan's established mediating channel, alongside Saudi and Qatari involvement, offers multiple parallel tracks through which a face-saving reopening formula could still be reached.

Way Forward: Analysts recommend delinking the immediate humanitarian and shipping-safety questions, protecting commercial vessels, from the broader nuclear and sanctions negotiations, allowing incremental progress on safe passage even while harder political questions remain unresolved. Sustained mediator engagement from Oman, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, insulated from the volatility of individual attack incidents, will likely be necessary to eventually close the gap.

D. STATISTICS & FACTS

6 Deaths in this week's Houthi attack, first in a year	20% Share of world oil trade Hormuz carried pre-conflict
18 months Estimated time to replenish depleted oil inventories	100M+ Barrels lost weekly due to constricted Hormuz traffic

- Houthi rebels killed six people aboard a cargo ship in the Bab el-Mandeb Strait this week.
- It marked the first reported fatalities from Red Sea shipping attacks in more than a year.
- The Strait of Hormuz carried approximately 20 percent of world oil trade before the conflict began.
- Saudi Aramco's CEO estimated replenishing depleted global oil inventories could take up to 18 months post-reopening.
- Global markets are estimated to be losing over 100 million barrels a week due to constricted Hormuz traffic.
- The Iran war has now entered its sixth month as of this week.
- Pakistani, Saudi and Qatari officials have all been involved in mediating the Hormuz reopening talks.
- The UAE reported a missile attack on an ADNOC-linked vessel in the Strait of Hormuz with no casualties.

E. QUOTABLE QUOTES

"Iran's military and repeated claim of total control over the Strait of Hormuz."

— Donald Trump, President of the United States (August 2026)

"A senior Pakistan government official said a document on reopening the strait is close to being finalized."

— Senior Middle East diplomat, Unnamed source close to talks (August 2026)

"The reopening of the Strait of Hormuz has its own specific mechanism and has nothing to do with the negotiations between Iran and Oman."

— Hossein Mohebbi, IRGC spokesperson (August 2026)

F. EXAMINER'S PERSPECTIVE

Essay: A relevant essay theme examines how localised tactical incidents can derail broader diplomatic de-escalation tracks in protracted conflicts.

Current Affairs: Track whether the Iran-Oman Hormuz reopening framework is revived following this week's fatal attack.

Pakistan Affairs: Connects to Pakistan's active mediating role between Iran and Oman and its vulnerability to Gulf energy-price shocks.

Interview: Panels may ask candidates to assess Pakistan's interests and leverage as a mediator in the Hormuz dispute.

G. VOCABULARY BUILDER

Word	Meaning	Synonym	Example
Blockade	The sealing off of a place to prevent goods or people from entering or leaving	Siege	The US naval blockade of Iranian ports remains a key sticking point.
Leverage	The power to influence a situation or people's behaviour	Influence	Houthi attacks provide Iran with negotiating leverage.
Maximalist	Advocating extreme or far-reaching demands or positions	Extreme	Iran's maximalist demands complicated the Hormuz talks.
Reparations	Compensation paid for wrongdoing or damage	Compensation	Iran demanded war reparations as part of any deal.
Autonomous	Acting independently, without external control	Independent	It remains unclear whether the attack was Iranian-directed or autonomous Houthi action.
Barometer	Something that indicates or reflects changes in a situation	Indicator	Hormuz developments serve as a barometer of US-Iran relations.
Face-saving	Preserving one's dignity or reputation, especially in a negotiation	Dignity-preserving	A face-saving formula is needed to break the negotiating impasse.

H. CSS/PMS COMPLETE QUESTION BANK

MCQ: In which strait did the deadly Houthi attack occur this week?

A) Strait of Hormuz B) Bab el-Mandeb Strait C) Strait of Malacca D) Suez Canal **[Ans: B]**

Pakistan Affairs Questions:

1. Discuss Pakistan's role in mediating the Iran-Oman talks over the Strait of Hormuz.
1. Examine the economic implications for Pakistan of prolonged Gulf shipping disruptions.

Current Affairs Questions:

1. Evaluate the impact of the deadly Houthi attack on broader US-Iran de-escalation efforts.
1. Discuss the competing demands each side has placed on any Hormuz reopening agreement.
1. Assess the global economic consequences of continued Strait of Hormuz disruption.

Short Question: Briefly summarise this week's Houthi attack and its impact on Hormuz reopening diplomacy.

Analytical Question: Critically analyse whether Pakistan's mediating role between Iran and Oman can succeed given the volatility introduced by non-state actors like the Houthis.

Essay Topic: Proxy Escalation and the Fragility of Great-Power Diplomacy in the Gulf

Further In-Depth Study:

- CNBC: Houthi attack kills six in Red Sea; hopes for Hormuz deal dim — <https://www.cnbc.com/2026/08/12/us-iran-war-trump-hormuz-houthi-attack-blockade-.html>
- Axios: US nears Iran deal to reopen Strait of Hormuz — <https://www.axios.com/2026/08/05/us-iran-strait-of-hormuz-deal-nears>
- Al Jazeera: Iran deliberates Hormuz arrangement amid uncertain prospects with US — <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/8/8/iran-deliberates-hormuz-arrangement-amid-uncertain-prospects-with-us>

- CNBC: Iran, Oman say Strait of Hormuz talks in final stages —
<https://www.cnbc.com/2026/08/05/us-iran-war-trump-hormuz-bessent-iran-deal-close.html>



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I-03

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Secrecy Clouds Renewed US-Mediated Ukraine-Russia Talks in Saudi Arabia

Back-channel diplomacy resumes in Riyadh, but lack of transparency and core differences continue to hamper a breakthrough.



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A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



US-mediated talks between Ukraine and Russia resumed in Saudi Arabia, aiming to revive a path toward peace.



The discussions are shrouded in secrecy, with limited official details disclosed by any party.



Key issues—territorial control, security guarantees, and prisoner exchanges—remain unresolved.



Both sides show conditional openness, but deep mistrust and divergent demands persist.



A breakthrough remains elusive, though the talks keep diplomatic channels alive.



B. KEY FACTS AT A GLANCE



TALKS

US-mediated Ukraine-Russia talks held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.



MEDIATOR

United States acting as the primary facilitator.



NATURE

Back-channel / behind-the-scenes diplomacy.



KEY ISSUES

Territorial disputes, security guarantees, prisoner exchanges, ceasefire framework.



CHALLENGE

Lack of transparency and fundamental differences.



OUTLOOK

No immediate breakthrough; talks to continue.



C. CORE ISSUES UNDER DISCUSSION



TERRITORIAL CONTROL

Ukraine seeks restoration of full sovereignty; Russia insists on control over occupied regions.



SECURITY GUARANTEES

Ukraine demands firm international guarantees; Russia opposes NATO expansion.



PRISONER EXCHANGES

Both sides pushing for large-scale prisoner swaps as a confidence-building measure.



CEASEFIRE FRAMEWORK

Discussion on partial or phased ceasefire to reduce hostilities and humanitarian impact.



HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

Ukraine seeks safe corridors and aid access; Russia links this to sanctions relief.



D. CHALLENGES & OBSTACLES



Deep mistrust between Ukraine and Russia.



Maximalist positions on territory and security.



Lack of transparency fuels speculation and uncertainty.



External actors' competing interests complicate consensus.



Domestic political pressures limit leaders' flexibility.



E. IMPLICATIONS



Diplomatic talks are the only viable path to end the war.



Prolonged war risks wider regional instability.



Global economy and energy markets remain vulnerable.



Humanitarian crisis will worsen without a ceasefire.



Outcome will shape future global conflict resolution norms.



F. WAY FORWARD



Maintain continuous dialogue and prevent talks from collapsing.



Build confidence through incremental agreements (prisoners, ceasefire).



Ensure neutral mediation with clear commitments.



Engage international partners for a coordinated approach.



Focus on humanitarian relief and protection of civilians.



Secrecy Clouds Renewed US-Mediated Ukraine-Russia Talks in Saudi Arabia

A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

More than four years into Russia's war on Ukraine, a senior team from the Trump administration began a fresh round of talks with Russian and Ukrainian negotiators in Saudi Arabia this week, the latest attempt to bridge a gap both sides acknowledge remains centred on the same intractable issue: territory. The talks follow months of stop-start diplomacy since President Zelensky's rare open letter to Vladimir Putin in early June proposing direct negotiations, and come amid mounting criticism, including from the Moscow Times this week, that excessive secrecy around the process is undermining confidence in Washington's credibility as an honest mediator.

Moscow continues to insist on control of all of the Donbas region, including Ukrainian-held territory, a demand Kyiv has refused to accept, while both sides claim, per US officials, to be "close" to a deal without either side explaining the other's position in detail publicly. The Kremlin said in July there was no immediate prospect of resuming formal negotiations, even as President Trump and President Zelensky have separately discussed reviving the peace process, illustrating the whiplash quality that has characterised this negotiating track since the Geneva talks in February. Zelensky himself acknowledged in a recent interview that in the course of seeking Patriot missile defences from Washington, he is discussing matters he "cannot even share" publicly, a remark that has fuelled the broader transparency criticism.

For CSS/PMS aspirants, the persistent territorial deadlock over Donbas, and the recurring cycle of near-breakthroughs followed by stalling, offers a compact illustration of why protracted interstate wars are so difficult to conclude through diplomacy alone, a theme with direct relevance to essay questions on conflict resolution, and one worth comparing against the parallel Gaza and Iran de-escalation tracks covered elsewhere in this issue.

B. KEY ARGUMENTS

- A senior Trump administration team began fresh talks with Russian and Ukrainian negotiators in Saudi Arabia this week.
- The talks are the latest attempt to resolve the core dispute over territory, particularly control of the Donbas region.
- Moscow continues to insist on control of all of Donbas, including areas currently held by Ukraine.
- Kyiv remains unwilling to surrender Ukrainian-held Donbas territory to Russia.
- The Moscow Times criticised the talks' secrecy this week, arguing it undermines confidence in US mediation credibility.
- US officials say both sides are 'close to a deal' but have not detailed the other side's position publicly.
- President Zelensky proposed direct talks with Putin in a rare open letter published in early June 2026.
- The Kremlin said in July there was no immediate prospect of resuming formal negotiations.
- Trump and Zelensky have separately discussed reviving the peace talks despite the Kremlin's stated reluctance.
- Zelensky acknowledged discussing matters regarding Patriot missile defences that he 'cannot even share' publicly.
- Earlier US-mediated negotiations in Geneva in February 2026 ended without a breakthrough.
- US mediation since early 2025 has produced only limited restraints, including a Black Sea navigation understanding and a three-day ceasefire, but no lasting truce.

C. CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Causes: The persistent deadlock stems from irreconcilable core positions: Russia's insistence on formalising territorial gains in Donbas versus Ukraine's refusal to cede sovereign territory without corresponding security guarantees. The secrecy surrounding the current talks likely reflects Washington's attempt to give both sides room to negotiate without domestic political backlash, but it has instead fuelled suspicion that concessions may be extracted from Ukraine without full transparency.

Implications: Continued stalemate prolongs the human and economic costs of the war for Ukraine while sustaining broader global economic disruption, including energy-market volatility that compounds the effects of the simultaneous Middle East crisis. A non-transparent process also risks a settlement that lacks durable domestic legitimacy in Ukraine if the terms are perceived as imposed rather than negotiated.

Challenges: Bridging the territorial gap requires either side accepting politically costly concessions, Russia forgoing claims to Ukrainian-held Donbas or Ukraine accepting some form of territorial loss, neither of which domestic constituencies in Moscow or Kyiv currently appear ready to accept. The secrecy criticism itself has become a challenge, as it erodes the coalition of European and US domestic support needed to sustain any eventual settlement.

Opportunities: The fact that both sides describe themselves as 'close' to a deal, even amid public disagreement over details, suggests genuine common ground may exist on security-guarantee and reconstruction-financing questions even if territory remains unresolved. Saudi Arabia's role as host offers a relatively neutral venue that could be leveraged for confidence-building measures alongside the core territorial negotiation.

Way Forward: Analysts recommend greater transparency with domestic constituencies in both Ukraine and allied capitals about the trade-offs under discussion, even if full details cannot be disclosed, to build sustainable political support for an eventual deal. Sequencing an interim security-guarantee and reconstruction framework ahead of a final territorial settlement could allow tangible progress while the hardest issue remains under negotiation.

D. STATISTICS & FACTS

4+ yrs Duration of the Russia-Ukraine war	Feb 2026 Geneva talks that ended without breakthrough
Jun 2026 Zelensky's open letter proposing direct talks	Aug 2026 Latest Saudi Arabia-hosted negotiating round

- Russia's war on Ukraine has continued for more than four years as of this week.
- Zelensky's open letter proposing direct talks with Putin was published in early June 2026.
- Geneva talks in February 2026 ended without a breakthrough on core issues.
- This week's talks in Saudi Arabia are the latest US-mediated negotiating round.
- The Kremlin stated in July 2026 there was no immediate prospect of resuming formal negotiations.
- US mediation efforts have been ongoing since early 2025.
- A three-day ceasefire and a Black Sea navigation understanding are among the limited concrete outcomes achieved so far.

E. QUOTABLE QUOTES

- "Ukraine is ready for a full ceasefire for the duration of the negotiations."*
— Volodymyr Zelensky, President of Ukraine (June 2026)
- "Secrecy is creating an opening for attacks on Washington's credibility as mediator."*
— The Moscow Times editorial, Independent news outlet (20 August 2026)

F. EXAMINER'S PERSPECTIVE

Essay: A strong essay theme examines whether secrecy in diplomatic mediation builds trust between belligerents or undermines the legitimacy of eventual settlements.

Current Affairs: Track the outcome of this week's Saudi Arabia talks and whether a territorial framework emerges in the coming weeks.

Pakistan Affairs: Connects to Pakistan's traditionally neutral stance on the Russia-Ukraine conflict and its balancing of ties with both Moscow and Kyiv's Western backers.

Interview: Panels may ask candidates to compare mediation approaches across the Ukraine, Gaza and Iran conflicts covered in this issue.

G. VOCABULARY BUILDER

Word	Meaning	Synonym	Example
Intractable	Difficult to resolve or control	Unmanageable	The territorial dispute over Donbas remains intractable.

Word	Meaning	Synonym	Example
Sovereignty	Supreme authority of a state over its own territory	Self-governance	Ukraine refuses to compromise its sovereignty over Donbas.
Whiplash	A sudden, jarring reversal or change of direction	Reversal	The talks have shown a whiplash quality of progress and stalling.
Legitimacy	The quality of being lawful, valid or accepted	Validity	A secretive process risks undermining the settlement's legitimacy.
Concession	A thing granted, especially in negotiation, in response to demands	Compromise	Neither side appears ready for major territorial concessions.

H. CSS/PMS COMPLETE QUESTION BANK

MCQ: In which country did this week's Ukraine-Russia negotiating round take place?

A) Switzerland B) Turkiye C) Saudi Arabia D) Qatar **[Ans: C]**

Pakistan Affairs Questions:

1. Discuss Pakistan's diplomatic posture toward the Russia-Ukraine conflict since 2022.

Current Affairs Questions:

1. Evaluate the significance of the territorial deadlock over Donbas in the Russia-Ukraine peace process.
1. Discuss the criticism of secrecy surrounding US-mediated Ukraine-Russia talks.

Short Question: Briefly explain the core sticking point in the Russia-Ukraine peace negotiations.

Analytical Question: Critically analyse whether secrecy in high-stakes diplomatic mediation ultimately helps or hinders durable conflict resolution.

Essay Topic: Secret Diplomacy in the Age of Transparency: The Ukraine Peace Process

Further In-Depth Study:

- Moscow Times: Tear Down the Wall of Silence Around Negotiations — <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2026/08/20/tear-down-the-wall-of-silence-around-negotiations-to-end-russia-ukraine-war-a93533>
- Al Jazeera: Zelenskyy asks Putin for meeting — <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/6/5/zelenskyy-asks-putin-for-meeting-whats-he-offering-could-russia-accept>
- Bloomberg: Ukraine's Zelenskyy Calls for Peace Talks With Russia — <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2026-06-04/ukraine-s-zelenskyy-proposes-peace-talks-in-open-letter-to-putin>

Taliban Marks Five Years in Power as UN Warns of Grave Rights Crisis

The Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan enters its fifth year amid deepening humanitarian suffering and severe human rights violations.



FIVE YEARS
15 AUG 2021 –
15 AUG 2026



In-Depth Analysis



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A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



On 15 August 2026, the Taliban marked five years since retaking Kabul.



The UN reports a grave human rights crisis, especially for women and girls.



Severe restrictions on education, work, freedom of movement, and expression continue.



Humanitarian needs are at record levels with millions facing hunger and poverty.



The international community remains divided on engagement with the Taliban.



B. KEY FACTS AT A GLANCE



ANNIVERSARY

Five years since Taliban takeover: 15 August 2021 – 15 August 2026.



REGIME

Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan under Taliban rule.



WOMEN & GIRLS

Banned from secondary and higher education; severe limits on work and public life.



HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

Over 23 million people need humanitarian assistance (UN estimate).



UN WARNING

UN calls the situation of human rights in Afghanistan "deeply alarming".



INTERNATIONAL STATUS

No country formally recognizes the Taliban government.



ECONOMIC CONDITION

Economy in crisis; high unemployment and poverty; aid-dependent.



C. HUMAN RIGHTS CONCERNS



WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Systematic exclusion from education, employment, and public life.



EDUCATION BAN

Girls barred from secondary school and universities.



FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Media restrictions, censorship, and arrests of journalists continue.



RULE OF LAW

Sharia-based laws applied; lack of fair trial guarantees.



FORCED DISPLACEMENT

Millions displaced internally and to neighboring countries.



MINORITY RIGHTS

Minorities face discrimination, attacks, and lack of representation.



D. CHALLENGES AHEAD



Entrenched restrictions on women and girls may create a lost generation.



Security threats from groups like ISIS-K remain a serious concern.



Economic collapse and aid cuts worsen humanitarian conditions.



Diplomatic isolation limits engagement and development support.



Brain drain and emigration continue to weaken the country's future.



E. WAY FORWARD



The international community should support the Afghan people, not the regime.



Advocate for the restoration of education and basic freedoms.



Increase humanitarian aid and support life-saving programs.



Pursue principled engagement linked to human rights benchmarks.



Support inclusive dialogue for a peaceful and representative future.



F. THE BOTTOM LINE

Five years on, Afghanistan remains trapped in crisis. Sustainable peace and stability require respect for human rights, inclusive governance, and continued global solidarity with the Afghan people.



23+ MILLION
People in need of humanitarian aid



1.4 MILLION+
Girls banned from secondary education



-30%
Afghanistan's economy smaller than in 2020



0
Countries formally recognize Taliban rule

Taliban Marks Five Years in Power as UN Warns of Grave Rights Crisis

A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Afghanistan's Taliban government marked the fifth anniversary of its return to power on 15 August with ceremonies at Kabul's traditional Loya Jirga assembly hall, touting what officials described as restored stability and an end to decades of conflict, even as a top United Nations official warned in the same week of a grave and deepening human rights crisis, particularly for women and girls barred from education beyond age twelve. Deputy Prime Minister Abdul Salam Hanafi told assembled delegates that Taliban rule had ended "an era of external interventions and internal strife," framing the anniversary as vindication after the costly two-decade war that preceded the August 2021 US withdrawal. No women were present at the official ceremony.

The anniversary is unusually significant, analysts noted this week, because it equals the lifespan of the Taliban's first period of rule from 1996 to 2001, a milestone commentary in *The National Interest* suggested undercuts years of Western predictions that the movement's second stint in power would prove similarly short-lived. Five years on, the government remains diplomatically isolated, with Russia the only country to have formally recognised it, even as neighbouring states, including Pakistan, China and several Central Asian republics, maintain pragmatic working relations without formal recognition. Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi used the occasion to argue that countries engaging with the Taliban government were making a wise choice, implicitly pressing for broader international acceptance.

The anniversary arrives against the backdrop of the still-tense Pakistan-Afghanistan relationship, marked by recurring cross-border militancy disputes and periodic clashes over the past year, a dynamic that complicates any simple narrative of "restored stability." For CSS/PMS aspirants, the Taliban's five-year mark offers a valuable comparative case study in state legitimacy, international recognition, and the durability of ideologically rigid governance models, themes frequently tested in International Relations and Current Affairs papers.

B. KEY ARGUMENTS

- The Taliban marked five years since retaking Kabul on 15 August 2026 with ceremonies at the Loya Jirga assembly hall.
- Officials described the period as one of restored stability and an end to decades of conflict.
- Deputy PM Abdul Salam Hanafi said Taliban rule ended an era of external interventions and internal strife.
- No women were present at the official anniversary ceremony.
- A top UN official warned of a grave human rights crisis, highlighting the ban on girls' education beyond age twelve.
- The five-year mark equals the lifespan of the Taliban's first period of rule, from 1996 to 2001.
- Analysts note this anniversary undercuts predictions that the second Taliban government would prove short-lived.
- Russia remains the only country to have formally recognised the Taliban government.
- Pakistan, China and several Central Asian states maintain pragmatic relations without formal recognition.
- Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi argued countries engaging with the Taliban were making a wise choice.
- The anniversary occurs against a backdrop of continued Pakistan-Afghanistan cross-border tension over militancy.
- The Taliban seized power on 15 August 2021 as US and NATO forces completed their withdrawal.

C. CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Causes: The Taliban's durability owes to a combination of factors: the absence of a credible unified domestic opposition, sustained internal cohesion around its leadership structure, and the practical reality that neighbouring states have found it more useful to engage pragmatically than to isolate the government entirely. The lack of formal international recognition beyond Russia reflects continued Western and broader international concern over the movement's human rights record, particularly regarding women's rights.

Implications: Five years of entrenched rule without meaningful moderation on core social policies suggests the international community's leverage to reshape Taliban governance through isolation has proven limited, raising questions about the effectiveness of non-recognition as a policy tool. For the region, including Pakistan, continued Taliban rule without full international integration sustains an unstable equilibrium in which economic and security

cooperation proceeds informally, generating friction over issues like TTP sanctuary.

Challenges: The Taliban faces the challenge of managing a fragile domestic economy still largely cut off from formal international financial systems due to non-recognition and sanctions, even as it seeks to project an image of stability. Balancing internal hardline factions resistant to any social-policy moderation against the practical benefits of deeper regional and international engagement remains an unresolved internal tension.

Opportunities: Regional states, including Pakistan, have an opportunity to use existing pragmatic channels to press for concrete counter-terrorism cooperation and eventual social-policy moderation without conditioning all engagement on formal recognition. The anniversary attention offers a moment for renewed international focus on practical humanitarian and economic engagement that could indirectly benefit ordinary Afghans regardless of the recognition question.

Way Forward: Analysts recommend regional states continue calibrated, interest-based engagement, focused on counter-terrorism, trade, and refugee management, while coordinating with international humanitarian actors to sustain aid flows independent of the recognition debate. Sustained, unified pressure on women's education and rights, paired with incentives rather than pure isolation, may offer a more effective long-term lever than the current non-recognition stalemate.

D. STATISTICS & FACTS

5 years Since the Taliban's return to power	1 Countries formally recognising the Taliban government
12 Age above which girls are barred from school	1996-2001 The Taliban's first period of rule, for comparison

- The Taliban marked five years in power on 15 August 2026.
- The Taliban's first period of rule lasted from September 1996 to November 2001, also five years.
- Russia remains the only country to have formally recognised the current Taliban government.
- Girls in Afghanistan remain barred from attending school beyond age twelve under current Taliban policy.
- No women were present at the official five-year anniversary ceremony in Kabul.
- The Taliban seized power on 15 August 2021 as US and NATO forces withdrew.
- Pakistan, China and several Central Asian states maintain relations with the Taliban without formal recognition.

E. QUOTABLE QUOTES

"At least 300 Afghan youth were martyred or killed every day. With the rule of the Islamic Emirate, this tragedy was removed."

— Abdul Salam Hanafi, Deputy Prime Minister, Taliban government (15 August 2026)

"A grave human rights crisis persists in Afghanistan, where girls over age 12 are barred from attending school."

— Senior UN official, United Nations (August 2026)

F. EXAMINER'S PERSPECTIVE

Essay: A strong essay theme examines whether international non-recognition is an effective tool for shaping the behaviour of de facto governments.

Current Affairs: Track shifts in Pakistan-Afghanistan relations and any movement toward broader international recognition of the Taliban government.

Pakistan Affairs: Connects directly to Pakistan's complex relationship with Afghanistan, including recurring TTP-related tensions covered elsewhere in this issue.

Interview: Panels may ask candidates whether Pakistan should pursue deeper engagement with or more distance from the Taliban government.

G. VOCABULARY BUILDER

Word	Meaning	Synonym	Example
Legitimacy	The quality of being accepted as lawful or rightful	Validity	International recognition confers a degree of legitimacy on a government.
De facto	Existing in practice, whether officially recognised or not	In practice	The Taliban is the de facto government of Afghanistan.
Entrenched	Firmly established and difficult to change	Firmly established	Five years on, Taliban rule appears entrenched.
Isolation	The state of being separated or cut off from others	Seclusion	International isolation has had limited effect on Taliban policy.
Pragmatic	Dealing with matters practically rather than theoretically	Practical	Pakistan pursues a pragmatic relationship with the Taliban.

H. CSS/PMS COMPLETE QUESTION BANK

MCQ: Which country is the only one to have formally recognised the current Taliban government?

A) China B) Pakistan C) Russia D) Qatar **[Ans: C]**

Pakistan Affairs Questions:

1. Discuss the evolution of Pakistan-Afghanistan relations since the Taliban's return to power in 2021.
1. Examine the impact of TTP sanctuary allegations on Pakistan-Taliban relations.

Current Affairs Questions:

1. Evaluate the effectiveness of international non-recognition as a policy tool toward the Taliban government.
1. Discuss the human rights situation in Afghanistan five years into Taliban rule.

Short Question: Briefly state the significance of the Taliban's five-year anniversary in power.

Analytical Question: Critically analyse whether five years of Taliban rule without broad international recognition suggests non-recognition is an ineffective policy lever.

Essay Topic: Recognition, Isolation and Legitimacy: The Politics of Engaging De Facto Governments

Further In-Depth Study:

- Washington Post: While Taliban leaders mark 5 years in power, UN official warns of rights crisis — https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2026/08/15/afghanistan-taliban-marks-takeover-anniversary/40be50ba-988d-11f1-9ef9-1be722184483_story.html
- The National Interest: The Taliban's Second Five-Year Anniversary — <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/silk-road-rivalries/the-talibans-second-five-year-anniversary>
- Euronews: Taliban mark five-year anniversary of regaining power — <https://www.euronews.com/2026/08/16/taliban-mark-five-year-anniversary-of-regaining-power-in-afghanistan>



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I-05

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

HRW Report Details Settler-Driven Displacement as West Bank Annexation Accelerates

Human Rights Watch reports a sharp rise in settler violence and forcible displacement in the West Bank amid de facto annexation measures by Israel.



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A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



A new HRW report documents how Israeli authorities enable settler violence and land seizures, forcing Palestinians out of their homes.



De facto annexation is accelerating through settlement expansion, outposts, and restrictive military orders.



Tens of thousands of Palestinians have been displaced since Oct 2023, with entire communities at risk.



HRW calls on states to act against these violations and hold perpetrators accountable.



The international community faces a critical test in upholding international law and human rights.



B. KEY FACTS AT A GLANCE



REPORT

Human Rights Watch (HRW) Report released in August 2026



FOCUS AREA

Occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem



KEY FINDING

Settler violence, land seizures, and state support drive displacement



DISPLACED

Over 40,000 Palestinians displaced since Oct 2023 (UN estimate)



ANNEXATION TREND

Settlement expansion and outposts entrench Israeli control



HRW APPEAL

States must act, end complicity, and ensure accountability



C. HOW SETTLER-DRIVEN DISPLACEMENT WORKS

01



SETTLER VIOLENCE

Attacks on Palestinians, including assault, arson, and property destruction.

02



LAND SEIZURE

Forcible takeover of land through illegal settlements and outposts.

03



STATE ENABLEMENT

Military protection for settlers and failure to investigate crimes.

04



MOVEMENT RESTRICTIONS

Roadblocks, checkpoints, and permit regime isolate communities.

05



FORCED DISPLACEMENT

Palestinians are left with no choice but to leave.

06



ANNEXATION CONSOLIDATION

Vacated land absorbed into settlements, entrenching control.



D. KEY CONCERNS RAISED BY HRW



Widespread settler violence with near-total impunity.



Expansion of illegal settlements and outposts.



Use of military orders to displace and demolish homes.



Discriminatory legal system favoring settlers.



Destruction of livelihoods and humanitarian access.



De facto annexation violates international law.



E. IMPLICATIONS



Threatens the viability of a two-state solution.



Escalates tensions and instability in the region.



Humanitarian crisis deepens with mass displacement.



Undermines international law and norms.



Global credibility at stake if inaction continues.



Urgent need for diplomatic and legal action.



F. WAY FORWARD



UN & states must impose meaningful pressure on Israel.



Hold perpetrators accountable in international courts.



Protect Palestinian communities and ensure their rights.



Support a rights-based peace process ending occupation.



Provide humanitarian aid and rebuild livelihoods.



Ensure monitoring, documentation, and public reporting.



THE BOTTOM LINE

Settler-driven displacement in the West Bank is accelerating de facto annexation and deepening a human rights crisis. The world must act decisively to uphold justice, protect Palestinians, and preserve the possibility of lasting peace.



Justice delayed in the face of occupation is justice denied.



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★ KNOW TODAY, LEAD TOMORROW ★

HRW Report Details Settler-Driven Displacement as West Bank Annexation Accelerates

A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Human Rights Watch published a detailed report this week documenting how escalating Israeli settler violence, backed by the financial, material and legal support of the Israeli state, has fully or partially displaced 107 Palestinian communities in the West Bank since January 2023, alongside what the organisation described as unprecedented settlement expansion. The report singled out the E1 settlement project east of Jerusalem, for which the Israeli government opened a new construction tender on 18 August, warning it would forcibly displace more than 18 additional Bedouin communities in the area if completed as planned.

The findings build on documentation from the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, which reported this month that settler militias had besieged three houses in Qasra village, southeast of Nablus, for nine consecutive days, cutting off electricity and water to force residents from their homes, before Israeli occupation forces themselves entered the village on 13 August, closed shops, and converted fifteen houses into military barracks. Israeli watchdog groups Kerem Navot and PeaceNow reported that settlers have established 248 new outposts in the West Bank under the current Israeli government, 65 of them in 2026 alone as of 1 August, with these outposts and settlements now controlling more than 1 million dunams, roughly 18 percent of the West Bank's total land area.

The pattern documented this week, settler attacks intertwined with Israeli military and administrative measures including home demolitions, killings, arrests and severe movement restrictions, has led human rights organisations to characterise the situation as a systematic campaign of ethnic cleansing aimed at eradicating Palestinian presence in the West Bank, including occupied Jerusalem. For CSS/PMS aspirants, this week's documentation offers substantial material for essay and current affairs questions on the legal and human rights dimensions of prolonged occupation, territorial annexation, and the international community's response to settlement expansion in defiance of international law.

B. KEY ARGUMENTS

- Human Rights Watch reported that settler violence has fully or partially displaced 107 West Bank communities since January 2023.
- The Israeli government opened a new construction tender for the E1 settlement project east of Jerusalem on 18 August.
- HRW warned the E1 project would forcibly displace more than 18 additional Bedouin communities.
- Settler militias besieged three houses in Qasra village for nine consecutive days, cutting electricity and water.
- Israeli occupation forces entered Qasra on 13 August, closing shops and converting fifteen houses into military barracks.
- Israeli watchdog groups reported 248 new settlement outposts established under the current government, 65 in 2026 alone.
- Settlements and outposts now control more than 1 million dunams, roughly 18 percent of the West Bank.
- Settler attacks are documented as occurring alongside Israeli military and administrative measures including demolitions and arrests.
- Human rights organisations describe the pattern as a systematic campaign of ethnic cleansing targeting Palestinian presence.
- The report notes settlers responsible for attacks operate with financial, material and legal backing from the Israeli state.
- Israeli officials have publicly acknowledged legalising roughly 160 outposts during the current government's tenure.
- The documentation follows a broader pattern of displacement dating back to at least January 2025, when 32,000 refugees were expelled from Jenin, Tulkarem and Nur Shams camps.

C. CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Causes: The acceleration of settler violence and settlement expansion reflects a deliberate policy trajectory by the current Israeli government, which has moved to formally legalise outposts previously considered illegal even under Israeli law, effectively incentivising further settler activity. The absence of meaningful international enforcement

mechanisms against settlement expansion, despite repeated condemnations and the 2024 ICJ Advisory Opinion, has removed a key deterrent.

Implications: Continued displacement and territorial control erosion severely undermine the practical viability of a future Palestinian state, as settlements and associated infrastructure fragment the West Bank into disconnected enclaves. The pattern also deepens humanitarian suffering for displaced Bedouin and rural Palestinian communities who lose not only homes but agricultural livelihoods tied to specific land.

Challenges: International human rights organisations face the challenge of translating documentation into enforceable consequences, given the limited willingness of major powers to impose binding sanctions or other costly measures on Israel over settlement policy. Distinguishing settler violence from state action for accountability purposes is also complicated by the well-documented coordination between settlers and Israeli security forces described in the report.

Opportunities: Detailed, well-sourced documentation from organisations like HRW and PCHR creates an evidentiary record that could support future legal accountability efforts, including at international tribunals, even if enforcement remains distant. Sustained international attention could also strengthen diplomatic pressure for targeted measures, such as settlement-linked trade restrictions, that fall short of comprehensive sanctions but carry real economic cost.

Way Forward: Analysts recommend the international community move beyond verbal condemnation toward concrete, differentiated measures targeting settlement-linked economic activity specifically, distinguishing between Israel proper and settlement enterprises. Continued, systematic human rights documentation remains essential both for accountability purposes and to counter narratives that minimise the scale and coordination of settler-driven displacement.

D. STATISTICS & FACTS

107 West Bank communities displaced since January 2023	248 New settlement outposts established under current government
65 New outposts established in 2026 alone	18% Share of West Bank land under settlement/outpost control

- Settler violence has fully or partially displaced 107 Palestinian communities since January 2023.
- The Israeli government opened a new tender for the E1 settlement project on 18 August 2026.
- The E1 project would displace more than 18 additional Bedouin communities if completed.
- Settler militias besieged three houses in Qasra village for nine consecutive days this month.
- Israeli forces converted fifteen houses in Qasra into military barracks on 13 August.
- 248 new settlement outposts have been established under the current Israeli government, 65 in 2026 alone.
- Settlements and outposts now control more than 1 million dunams, about 18 percent of the West Bank.
- Roughly 160 outposts have been formally 'legalised' during the current government's tenure.
- 32,000 Palestinian refugees were expelled from Jenin, Tulkarem and Nur Shams camps in January 2025.

E. QUOTABLE QUOTES

“Escalating Israeli settler attacks on Palestinians in the West Bank have fully or partially displaced 107 communities since January 2023.”
— Human Rights Watch, International human rights organisation (20 August 2026)
“The mayor of Qasra village said a large Israeli force entered the area, closed the shops.”
— Abdel Azim al-Wadi, Mayor of Qasra village (13 August 2026)

F. EXAMINER'S PERSPECTIVE

Essay: A recurring essay theme examines the tension between international law and the practical realities of prolonged occupation and settlement expansion.

Current Affairs: Track international responses, including any concrete economic measures, to the HRW and PCHR documentation released this month.

Pakistan Affairs: Connects to Pakistan's longstanding diplomatic support for Palestinian statehood and its non-recognition of Israel.

Interview: Panels may ask candidates to evaluate the effectiveness of human rights documentation absent enforcement mechanisms.

G. VOCABULARY BUILDER

Word	Meaning	Synonym	Example
Annexation	The forcible acquisition of territory by one state from another	Appropriation	Critics describe settlement expansion as de facto annexation.
Outpost	A small, often unauthorised settlement outside formal boundaries	Encampment	Israel has established 248 new outposts under the current government.
Enclave	A distinct territorial area enclosed within a larger one	Pocket	Settlements fragment the West Bank into disconnected enclaves.
Displacement	The forced removal of people from their homes or land	Eviction	Settler violence has caused widespread displacement in the West Bank.
Accountability	The obligation to accept responsibility for one's actions	Answerability	Documentation efforts aim to support future legal accountability.
Dunam	A unit of land area used in parts of the Middle East, roughly 1,000 square metres	Land unit	Settlements control over one million dunams of West Bank land.

H. CSS/PMS COMPLETE QUESTION BANK

MCQ: How many West Bank communities has HRW reported as displaced since January 2023?

A) 65 B) 107 C) 160 D) 248 **[Ans: B]**

Pakistan Affairs Questions:

1. Discuss Pakistan's diplomatic position on Palestinian statehood and West Bank settlement expansion.

Current Affairs Questions:

1. Evaluate the significance of the HRW report on settler-driven displacement in the West Bank.
1. Discuss the implications of the E1 settlement project for the viability of a future Palestinian state.

Short Question: Briefly summarise the key findings of this week's Human Rights Watch report on the West Bank.

Analytical Question: Critically analyse why international documentation of settler violence has not translated into enforceable consequences under international law.

Essay Topic: Documentation Without Enforcement: The Limits of International Human Rights Law

Further In-Depth Study:

- Human Rights Watch: West Bank: Israel-Backed Settler Violence Drives Displacement — <https://www.hrw.org/news/2026/08/20/west-bank-israel-backed-settler-violence-drives-displacement>
- PCHR: Settler Violence and Settlement Expansion — <https://pchr.org/settler-violence-and-settlement-expansion-israels-tools-to-impose-annexation-of-the-west-bank/>
- IMEMC: PCHR - Settler Violence and Settlement Expansion — <https://imemc.org/article/pchr-settler-violence-and-settlement-expansion-israels-tools-to-impose-annexation-of-the-west-bank/>

Sudan's Army Presses Darfur Counteroffensive as El-Obeid Siege Looms

Sudan's war enters a critical phase as the army launches new operations in Darfur while RSF forces tighten their siege on El-Obeid.



AT A GLANCE

-  War since April 2023
-  Millions displaced
-  Humanitarian crisis deepens

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A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

-  The Sudanese army has launched a counteroffensive in Darfur to regain territory from RSF forces.
-  Fighting has intensified around El-Fasher, North Darfur's last major city under army control.
-  RSF continues to besiege El-Obeid in North Kordofan, threatening a strategic breakthrough.
-  The conflict has caused mass displacement, hunger, and worsening humanitarian conditions.
-  International efforts remain weak as the war risks further regional destabilization.

B. KEY FACTS AT A GLANCE

-  **CONFLICT BEGAN** 15 April 2023 between Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and RSF.
-  **CURRENT FOCUS** Army counteroffensive in Darfur; RSF siege on El-Obeid.
-  **KEY AREAS** Darfur region, El-Fasher, El-Obeid (North Kordofan).
-  **HUMAN IMPACT** Millions displaced; widespread hunger and disease.
-  **INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE** Limited; ceasefire efforts stalemated.
-  **OUTLOOK** War likely to continue; risk of wider regional spillover.

C. THE STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF DARFUR & EL-OBEID

DARFUR

-  Rich in natural resources and farmland.
-  Controls key trade routes with Chad and Central African Republic.
-  Reclaiming Darfur is crucial for the army's legitimacy.



EL-OBEID (NORTH KORDOFAN)

-  A key logistical hub linking the capital to Darfur.
-  Fall of El-Obeid could open the way to Kordofan and eventually Khartoum.
-  RSF aims to break the army's supply lines and morale.

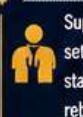
D. KEY CHALLENGES

-  RSF's superior mobility and use of drones.
-  Humanitarian catastrophe and lack of aid access.
-  Ethnic tensions and risk of atrocities in Darfur.
-  Regional involvement and flow of arms.
-  Collapse of state institutions and lawlessness.

E. IMPLICATIONS

-  Prolonged war threatens Sudan's unity and stability.
-  Displacement and famine may trigger regional refugee crisis.
-  Economic collapse will deepen and recovery delayed.
-  Security vacuum could empower extremist groups.
-  Peace efforts must be reignited with inclusive dialogue.

F. WAY FORWARD

-  Push for immediate humanitarian access and protection of civilians.
-  Renew inclusive peace talks under regional and global mediation.
-  Impose arms embargos and hold spoilers accountable.
-  Support political settlement and state institution rebuilding.
-  Increase humanitarian funding and prepare for post-conflict recovery.

★ THE BOTTOM LINE

Sudan stands at a dangerous crossroads. A decisive international response is vital to stop the war, save lives, and prevent the collapse of an entire nation.

Sudan's Army Presses Darfur Counteroffensive as El-Obeid Siege Looms

A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sudan's military and allied forces have notched a series of gains against the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces in Darfur this month, repelling two successive RSF attacks in the strategically important Bir Saliba region roughly 30 kilometres north of el-Geneina, West Darfur's capital and the RSF's last stronghold in the region. The counteroffensive, which continued through this week, represents a rare tactical reversal for the RSF in a conflict that has otherwise seen the paramilitary group consolidate control over most of Darfur and much of Kordofan since seizing El Fasher in October 2025 following an 18-month siege that human rights investigators have since documented as involving crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing.

The renewed fighting comes as international attention has shifted to el-Obeid, the strategic North Kordofan city the Sudanese Armed Forces have held despite an ongoing RSF siege, with analysts warning it could become "Sudan's next El Fasher" if it falls. An independent Sudan analyst told Al Jazeera that control of el-Obeid would give the RSF the ability to link Darfur, Kordofan and central Sudan, potentially allowing the group to rebuild the kind of expansive territorial project it lost when it was expelled from the national capital, Khartoum, in March 2025. Government-backed forces have sought to relieve pressure on el-Obeid by targeting RSF supply lines, seizing crossings and desert routes along the border with Chad that the paramilitary group has relied on for resupply.

Sudan's civil war, now in its fourth year since erupting in April 2023, remains the world's largest humanitarian crisis by most measures, having killed tens of thousands and displaced nearly 14 million people according to UN figures, with both the army and the RSF accused of atrocities throughout the conflict. For CSS/PMS aspirants, Sudan offers a critical, if under-covered, case study in how territorial control of logistics hubs and supply corridors, rather than capital cities alone, can determine the trajectory of a modern civil war, a theme with clear relevance to Current Affairs and International Relations papers on conflict analysis.

B. KEY ARGUMENTS

- Sudan's military and allied forces repelled two successive RSF attacks in the Bir Saliba region of West Darfur this month.
- Bir Saliba lies roughly 30 kilometres north of el-Geneina, the RSF's last stronghold in West Darfur.
- The gains mark a rare tactical reversal for the RSF, which has otherwise consolidated control over most of Darfur.
- The RSF seized El Fasher, North Darfur's capital, in October 2025 after an 18-month siege.
- Human rights investigators have documented the El Fasher takeover as involving crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing.
- International attention has shifted to el-Obeid, a strategic North Kordofan city under RSF siege but still held by the Sudanese Armed Forces.
- Analysts warn el-Obeid could become 'Sudan's next El Fasher' if it falls to the RSF.
- Control of el-Obeid would allow the RSF to link Darfur, Kordofan and central Sudan territorially.
- The RSF was expelled from the national capital, Khartoum, in March 2025.
- Government-backed forces have targeted RSF supply lines, seizing crossings along the Chad border.
- Sudan's civil war erupted in April 2023 and is now in its fourth year.
- The conflict has killed tens of thousands and displaced nearly 14 million people, per UN figures.
- Both the Sudanese Armed Forces and the RSF have been accused of atrocities throughout the war.

C. CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Causes: Sudan's civil war originated in an April 2023 power struggle between the army and the RSF, former allies who jointly overthrew the country's transitional civilian government in 2021 before turning on each other. The current Darfur and Kordofan fighting reflects the conflict's evolution into a struggle for control of logistics corridors and resource-rich peripheral regions after the RSF's loss of Khartoum shifted the war's centre of gravity westward.

Implications: A fall of el-Obeid would hand the RSF a contiguous territorial belt linking Darfur to central Sudan, potentially reviving its capacity to project power toward Khartoum and prolonging the war significantly. Conversely,

sustained army gains in West Darfur could pressure the RSF's supply networks enough to shift battlefield momentum, though neither outcome appears likely to produce a swift resolution given the conflict's entrenched, multi-front nature.

Challenges: Sudan's war has proven remarkably resistant to international mediation efforts, with neither side facing sufficient external pressure to compromise, while regional actors are alleged to provide material support to opposing sides, further entrenching the conflict. The scale of civilian displacement, nearly 14 million people, has overwhelmed humanitarian response capacity, with famine conditions reported in parts of Darfur.

Opportunities: The army's Bir Saliba gains, if sustained, offer a potential opening for renewed international mediation focused on protecting el-Obeid and preventing a repeat of the El Fasher atrocities, given the specific, documented warning signs analysts have identified. Sustained pressure on RSF supply lines through the Chad border could also create leverage for a negotiated de-escalation in Darfur specifically, even absent a nationwide settlement.

Way Forward: Analysts recommend the international community prioritise urgent, El Fasher-informed atrocity-prevention planning for el-Obeid specifically, given the clear documented pattern of what follows a successful RSF siege. Sustained humanitarian corridor access and accountability mechanisms for documented war crimes should proceed in parallel with any ceasefire diplomacy, given the demonstrated risk of further mass civilian harm.

D. STATISTICS & FACTS

14M Sudanese displaced by the civil war	Apr 2023 Start of the current civil war
Oct 2025 El Fasher's fall to the RSF	30km Distance of Bir Saliba from el-Geneina

- Sudan's civil war erupted in April 2023 and is now in its fourth year.
- The conflict has displaced nearly 14 million people according to UN figures.
- The RSF seized El Fasher, North Darfur's capital, in October 2025 after an 18-month siege.
- The RSF was expelled from Khartoum, the national capital, in March 2025.
- Bir Saliba lies roughly 30 kilometres north of el-Geneina, West Darfur's capital.
- El-Obeid, under RSF siege, has been held by the Sudanese Armed Forces despite the pressure.
- El-Obeid previously endured an 18-month RSF siege from May 2024 to October 2025 before the SAF held on.
- Amnesty International documented crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing during the RSF's El Fasher takeover.

E. QUOTABLE QUOTES

- "Control of it would give the RSF an opportunity to connect vast geographical areas and rebuild its political project."*
— Ahmed Ben Omer, Independent Sudan analyst (August 2026)
- "A nationwide ceasefire is immediately needed. An independent and adequately resourced international force must be deployed to Sudan."*
— Agnes Callamard, Secretary General, Amnesty International (2026)

F. EXAMINER'S PERSPECTIVE

Essay: A relevant essay theme examines the role of logistics corridors and resource geography in shaping the trajectory of modern civil wars.

Current Affairs: Track whether el-Obeid holds against the RSF siege and whether the Darfur counteroffensive gains are sustained.

Pakistan Affairs: Connects to Pakistan's broader engagement with African and Muslim-world humanitarian crises through OIC and UN channels.

Interview: Panels may ask candidates to compare the international response to Sudan's crisis against more heavily covered conflicts like Gaza and Ukraine.

G. VOCABULARY BUILDER

Word	Meaning	Synonym	Example
Paramilitary	An organisation operating in a military fashion but not part of the official armed forces	Militia	The RSF is a paramilitary group fighting Sudan's regular army.
Siege	A military operation surrounding and blockading a place to force surrender	Blockade	El Fasher endured an 18-month siege before falling to the RSF.
Contiguous	Sharing a common border; touching or adjoining	Adjoining	Control of el-Obeid would give the RSF a contiguous territorial belt.
Atrocity	An extremely cruel and violent act, especially in war	Brutality	Investigators documented atrocities during the El Fasher takeover.
Corridor	A strip of land connecting two areas, often used for transit or supply	Passage	The RSF relies on desert supply corridors along the Chad border.

H. CSS/PMS COMPLETE QUESTION BANK

MCQ: Which Sudanese city has analysts warned could become 'Sudan's next El Fasher'?

A) Khartoum B) El-Obeid C) Port Sudan D) El-Geneina **[Ans: B]**

Pakistan Affairs Questions:

1. Discuss Pakistan's role in humanitarian responses to African conflicts through multilateral organisations.

Current Affairs Questions:

1. Evaluate the strategic significance of el-Obeid in Sudan's ongoing civil war.
1. Discuss the humanitarian consequences of Sudan's civil war since April 2023.

Short Question: Briefly explain why analysts have warned el-Obeid could become 'Sudan's next El Fasher.'

Analytical Question: Critically analyse why Sudan's civil war has attracted comparatively limited international mediation attention relative to other major 2026 conflicts.

Essay Topic: Forgotten Wars: Sudan's Civil War and the Politics of International Attention

Further In-Depth Study:

- Al Jazeera: Has the army turned the page on control of western Sudan? — <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/8/10/has-the-sudanese-army-turned-the-page-on-control-of-western-sudan>
- Al Jazeera: El-Obeid under siege by RSF - Could this be Sudan's next el-Fasher? — <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/7/6/el-obeid-under-siege-by-rsf-could-this-be-sudans-next-el-fasher>
- Amnesty International: Sudan - RSF atrocities in El Fasher — <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2026/07/sudan-rsf-atrocities-in-el-fasher-a-stain-on-the-conscience-of-humanity-new-report/>



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I-07

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

US Section 301 Forced-Labour Probe Casts a Wide Net Across Sixty Trading Partners

The United States has launched a sweeping Section 301 investigation into alleged foreign trade barriers related to forced labour, targeting sixty countries and territories.



Ensure fair trade and protect workers' rights



Combat forced labour in global supply chains



Strengthen US trade enforcement



In-Depth Analysis



Exam-Focused Content



Global Perspective



Built for
CSS / PMS Aspirants



A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The US Trade Representative (USTR) has initiated a Section 301 investigation into foreign trade barriers linked to forced labour.



The probe covers sixty countries and territories across all major regions.



USTR will examine government policies, laws, practices, and private-sector involvement that enable forced labour.



The investigation aims to secure fair trade, protect workers' rights, and ensure resilient, ethical supply chains.



Findings could lead to tariffs, import restrictions, or other penalties against non-compliant countries.



B. KEY FACTS AT A GLANCE



INVESTIGATION LAUNCHED

17 July 2026 by the Office of the US Trade Representative (USTR).



LEGAL BASIS

Section 301 of the US Trade Act of 1974.



COUNTRIES COVERED

Sixty countries and territories worldwide.



FOCUS AREA

Foreign trade barriers related to forced labour.



ASPECTS UNDER REVIEW

Laws, policies, enforcement, and private-sector practices enabling forced labour.



POTENTIAL ACTIONS

Tariffs, import restrictions, or other trade measures.



OBJECTIVE

Protect workers' rights, ensure fair trade, and strengthen ethical supply chains.



C. WHAT THE INVESTIGATION WILL ASSESS



GOVERNMENT POLICIES & LAWS

Whether laws and regulations enable or fail to prevent forced labour.



ENFORCEMENT PRACTICES

Effectiveness of government action against forced labour.



PRIVATE SECTOR INVOLVEMENT

Role of companies in using or benefiting from forced labour.



SUPPLY CHAIN TRANSPARENCY

Visibility and traceability in global supply chains.



TRADE BARRIERS

Any policies causing unfair advantage or market distortion.



VULNERABLE WORKERS

Protection of at-risk workers, including migrants and minorities.



D. WHY IT MATTERS

- ✓ Forced labour undermines human rights and dignity.
- ✓ Unfair trade practices harm ethical businesses.
- ✓ Strengthens global accountability and governance.
- ✓ Protects US industries and workers from undercutting.
- ✓ Encourages countries to reform and comply.



E. CHALLENGES AHEAD

- ✓ Difficulty in verifying forced labour across complex supply chains.
- ✓ Potential backlash and trade tensions with affected countries.
- ✓ Different standards and enforcement capabilities worldwide.
- ✓ Risk of politicization and misuse of trade tools.
- ✓ Balancing enforcement with diplomatic and economic interests.



F. WAY FORWARD



Strengthen international cooperation.



Promote transparency and due diligence in supply chains.



Support capacity building in developing countries.



Harmonize standards and enforcement mechanisms.



Use targeted, evidence-based trade actions.



Engage in dialogue to encourage compliance and reform.



THE BOTTOM LINE

The US Section 301 forced-labour probe sends a strong message: trade must not come at the cost of human rights.

Fair trade. Ethical supply chains. Dignified work for all.

★ STAY INFORMED. STAY AHEAD. SUCCEED. ★



ICEP CSS INSTITUTE
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US Section 301 Forced-Labour Probe Casts a Wide Net Across Sixty Trading Partners

A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Trump administration's use of Section 301 trade investigations continued to reshape global commerce this week, with a sweeping forced-labour-import probe now covering roughly sixty trading partners, including major economies like the European Union, Japan, India, China and Pakistan, alongside dozens of smaller exporters from Algeria to Vietnam. The investigation, formally initiated in March and expanded through subsequent Federal Register notices, examines whether each named country has failed to impose and effectively enforce a ban on importing goods produced with forced labour, a legal hook the administration has used as an alternative avenue for tariff action after the Supreme Court struck down its broader emergency-powers tariffs in February 2026.

The forced-labour investigation sits alongside a parallel, more targeted use of Section 301 against Brazil, where the administration imposed an additional 12.5 percent tariff this summer on top of an existing 25 percent duty tied to a separate unfair-trading-practices finding, a combination analysts at the Peterson Institute for International Economics warned could rebuild a 37.5 percent effective trade barrier approaching the 50 percent rate the Supreme Court had invalidated. Brazil has responded by diversifying trade toward China, which now absorbs roughly 37 percent of its exports, and by threatening retaliation under its own Economic Reciprocity Law, including potential suspension of US intellectual-property protections in agriculture and pharmaceuticals.

For Pakistan specifically, inclusion in the sixty-country forced-labour probe adds a layer of trade-policy uncertainty even as Islamabad pursues deeper economic engagement with Gulf and Turkish partners through the Mecca pact's economic dimension covered elsewhere in this issue. For CSS/PMS aspirants, the expanding and evolving use of Section 301 investigations, following the Supreme Court's invalidation of the administration's broader emergency tariff authority, offers a valuable case study in how executive trade policy adapts to legal constraints while pursuing largely consistent protectionist objectives.

B. KEY ARGUMENTS

- A US Section 301 forced-labour-import investigation now covers roughly sixty trading partners, including Pakistan.
- The probe examines whether each country has failed to impose and effectively enforce bans on forced-labour-produced imports.
- The investigation followed the Supreme Court's invalidation of the administration's broader IEEPA emergency-powers tariffs in February 2026.
- The administration has used Section 301 as an alternative legal avenue for tariff action after the Court ruling.
- A separate, targeted Section 301 action imposed an additional 12.5 percent tariff on Brazil this summer.
- Combined with an existing 25 percent duty, the Brazil tariffs could reach a 37.5 percent effective rate.
- That approaches the 50 percent rate previously imposed under the now-invalidated IEEPA authority.
- Brazil has responded by diversifying trade toward China, which now absorbs roughly 37 percent of its exports.
- Brazil has threatened retaliation under its Economic Reciprocity Law, including suspending US intellectual-property protections.
- The forced-labour probe's sixty-country list includes major economies such as the EU, Japan, India, China and Pakistan.
- Major US trading partners have generally settled bilateral deals around 15-20 percent tariff rates to avoid punitive action.
- Pakistan's inclusion adds trade-policy uncertainty even as it deepens economic ties with Gulf and Turkish partners.

C. CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Causes: The administration's pivot to Section 301 investigations reflects a direct legal adaptation to the Supreme Court's February 2026 ruling striking down its broader emergency-powers tariff authority, forcing officials to find alternative statutory bases, unfair trade practices and forced-labour enforcement, that survive judicial scrutiny while achieving similar protectionist ends. The sheer breadth of the forced-labour probe, covering sixty countries, suggests a deliberately broad net designed to preserve maximum future tariff leverage across the global trading system.

Implications: For targeted economies, the shift from blanket emergency tariffs to investigation-based, country-specific findings creates prolonged uncertainty, since Section 301 processes involve extended review periods during which businesses cannot easily plan investment or sourcing decisions. Brazil's retaliatory threats illustrate a broader risk: repeated use of aggressive tariff tools may accelerate trade diversification away from the US toward China and other markets, potentially eroding long-term US trade leverage even as it achieves short-term political objectives.

Challenges: The administration faces the challenge of substantiating forced-labour findings against sixty diverse economies with credible evidence sufficient to withstand legal challenge, given the resource-intensive nature of genuine supply-chain investigations. Balancing aggressive trade action against maintaining functional relationships with allies and partners, including Gulf and South Asian states central to other US strategic priorities, adds further complexity.

Opportunities: Countries named in the investigation have an opportunity to pre-emptively strengthen forced-labour enforcement mechanisms, potentially avoiding punitive tariffs while genuinely improving labour standards in export supply chains. For Pakistan, demonstrating robust compliance could both avoid tariff exposure and support its broader trade-diversification efforts toward Gulf and Chinese markets.

Way Forward: Analysts recommend affected countries, including Pakistan, proactively document and strengthen forced-labour compliance mechanisms ahead of any formal 301 findings, reducing both legal exposure and reputational risk. Diversifying export markets, as Brazil has done toward China, offers a hedging strategy against the ongoing unpredictability of US trade policy under the current administration.

D. STATISTICS & FACTS

~60 Countries covered by the forced-labour Section 301 probe	37.5% Potential combined Brazil tariff rate
37% Share of Brazil's exports now absorbed by China	Feb 2026 Supreme Court ruling striking down IEEPA tariffs

- The Section 301 forced-labour investigation covers roughly sixty trading partners.
- The list includes the EU, Japan, India, China and Pakistan among major economies.
- The Supreme Court struck down the administration's broader IEEPA emergency-powers tariffs in February 2026.
- A separate Section 301 action added a 12.5 percent tariff on Brazil this summer.
- Combined with an existing 25 percent duty, Brazil's effective tariff rate could reach 37.5 percent.
- The previously invalidated IEEPA tariff on Brazil had reached 50 percent.
- China now absorbs roughly 37 percent of Brazil's total exports, a record share.
- Many major US trading partners have settled bilateral deals around 15-20 percent tariff rates.

E. QUOTABLE QUOTES

"Trump's new tariffs on Brazil reflect the weakness of US trade strategy."

— Peterson Institute for International Economics, Economic policy analysis (2026)

F. EXAMINER'S PERSPECTIVE

Essay: A relevant essay theme examines how unilateral trade policy tools reshape global supply chains and diversification strategies among developing economies.

Current Affairs: Track whether Pakistan faces any formal Section 301 findings or tariff action stemming from the forced-labour investigation.

Pakistan Affairs: Connects to Pakistan's broader trade-diversification strategy amid deepening Gulf, Chinese and Turkish economic engagement.

Interview: Panels may ask candidates to assess how developing economies should respond to unpredictable major-power trade policy.

G. VOCABULARY BUILDER

Word	Meaning	Synonym	Example
Protectionism	The policy of shielding domestic industry from foreign competition through tariffs	Trade barrier policy	The Section 301 probe reflects continued US protectionism.
Statutory	Required, permitted or enacted by statute (law)	Legal	The administration sought an alternative statutory basis for tariffs.
Retaliation	The action of returning a similar harm for one received	Reprisal	Brazil threatened retaliation under its Economic Reciprocity Law.
Diversification	The process of expanding into varied markets or products to reduce risk	Spreading risk	Brazil pursued trade diversification toward China.
Compliance	The act of conforming to a rule, standard or law	Adherence	Strengthening forced-labour compliance could reduce tariff exposure.

H. CSS/PMS COMPLETE QUESTION BANK

MCQ: What prompted the administration's shift toward Section 301 investigations for tariff action?

A) A new trade treaty B) The Supreme Court striking down IEEPA tariffs C) A WTO ruling D) Congressional legislation **[Ans: B]**

Pakistan Affairs Questions:

1. Discuss the implications of US Section 301 trade investigations for Pakistan's export sector.

Current Affairs Questions:

1. Evaluate the significance of the Supreme Court's ruling against the administration's IEEPA tariffs.
1. Discuss Brazil's response to combined Section 301 tariff actions.

Short Question: Briefly explain why the Section 301 forced-labour investigation covers roughly sixty countries.

Analytical Question: Critically analyse how developing economies like Pakistan should respond to unpredictable and legally evolving US trade policy tools.

Essay Topic: Trade Policy Under Legal Constraint: Adapting Protectionism After Judicial Setbacks

Further In-Depth Study:

- PIIE: Trump's new tariffs on Brazil reflect the weakness of US trade strategy — <https://www.piie.com/blogs/realtime-economics/2026/trumps-new-tariffs-brazil-reflect-weakness-us-trade-strategy>
- Trade Compliance Resource Hub: Trump 2.0 tariff tracker — <https://www.tradecomplianceresourcehub.com/2026/07/27/trump-2-0-tariff-tracker/>
- CFR: Trump's New Tariffs - What to Know — <https://www.cfr.org/articles/trumps-new-tariffs-what-to-know>

The Middle East's Compounding Crises: Diplomacy, Deterrence and Pakistan's Strategic Choices

Drawn from: Articles N-02 (Mecca Joint Defence Agreement), I-01 (Gaza disarmament impasse), I-02 (Hormuz/Houthi shipping crisis) and I-05 (West Bank settler violence) — the four articles in this issue most directly concerned with the interlocking Middle East crises and the diplomatic and security architecture responding to them.

Opening Reference:

On 7 August 2026, Pakistan's Prime Minister stood beside Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince and Türkiye's President in Mecca to sign a pact declaring that an attack on any one of the three would be treated as an attack on all — a striking act of collective self-defence signed in the same month that a deadly Houthi strike on a Red Sea cargo ship, a stalled Hamas disarmament process in Gaza, and an escalating pattern of settler-driven displacement in the West Bank each demonstrated how far the region remains from the stability such pacts are meant to secure.

Thesis Statement:

The Middle East's 2026 crises, spanning the Iran war's maritime spillover, Gaza's fraying disarmament roadmap, and accelerating West Bank annexation, reveal that minilateral security pacts like the Mecca agreement can offer states like Pakistan a measure of collective deterrence, but cannot by themselves resolve the deeper diplomatic deadlocks driving regional instability, making sustained, trust-building mediation the indispensable complement to any defence architecture.

Outline:

I. Introduction: A Region of Simultaneous Crises

- (a) State the scope: Iran war spillover, Gaza disarmament, West Bank annexation, and the new Mecca pact as a response
- (b) Preview the thesis: deterrence pacts alone cannot substitute for diplomatic resolution

II. The Mecca Joint Defence Agreement: Genesis and Design

- (a) The immediate trigger: Iranian strikes on Saudi Arabia amid the 2026 Iran war
- (b) The pact's collective-defence clause and its NATO-like framing
- (c) How it formalises pre-existing bilateral ties rather than creating them from scratch

III. Pakistan's Strategic Calculus in Joining the Pact

- (a) Pakistan's unique position as the Muslim world's only nuclear power
- (b) Balancing Gulf and Turkish alignment against its working relationship with Iran
- (c) Economic dividends: Gulf investment interest visible in parallel developments like GEPCO privatisation

IV. The Limits of Minilateral Deterrence

- (a) Analysts' caution against reading the pact as equivalent to NATO
- (b) Interoperability and doctrinal challenges among three distinct militaries
- (c) Egypt's exclusion and the risk of fragmenting rather than unifying regional security

V. Gaza's Disarmament Impasse as a Case Study in Sequencing Failure

- (a) The core dispute: Israeli withdrawal versus Hamas disarmament sequencing
- (b) The introduction of US-general oversight as a face-saving compromise
- (c) Continued Israeli territorial expansion undermining trust in the process

VI. Maritime Spillover: Hormuz and the Houthi Dimension

- (a) The deadly Red Sea attack and its disruption of fragile reopening diplomacy
- (b) Iran's maximalist demands versus US insistence on unconditional access
- (c) Pakistan's mediating role between Iran and Oman

VII. The West Bank: Annexation Through Attrition

- (a) HRW's documentation of settler-driven displacement since 2023
- (b) The E1 settlement project and its threat to Palestinian territorial contiguity
- (c) The gap between international condemnation and enforceable consequences

VIII. Common Threads Across the Four Crises

- (a) Recurring failure of sequencing and trust-building mechanisms
- (b) The gap between formal agreements and battlefield or ground realities
- (c) The role of non-state and proxy actors in derailing state-level diplomacy

IX. Deterrence Pacts as Partial, Not Sufficient, Solutions

- (a) What the Mecca pact can realistically achieve: reassurance and burden-sharing
- (b) What it cannot achieve: resolving Gaza, Hormuz or West Bank disputes directly
- (c) The risk of over-reliance on military pacts crowding out diplomatic investment

X. Pakistan's Diplomatic Opportunities

- (a) Leveraging its Mecca pact standing and Iran-Oman mediation role simultaneously
- (b) Potential to broker confidence-building measures given trusted relationships across the divide
- (c) Risks of overextension given domestic economic and security priorities

XI. Lessons for Global Conflict Resolution

- (a) Why verification mechanisms need automatic triggers rather than sequential trust-building
- (b) The importance of addressing root humanitarian grievances alongside security arrangements
- (c) Comparative insight from the simultaneous Ukraine and Sudan conflicts covered elsewhere

XII. Policy Recommendations

- (a) Pair defence pacts with structured, milestone-based diplomatic tracks
- (b) Strengthen third-party verification mechanisms with automatic enforcement
- (c) Sustain humanitarian and reconstruction incentives alongside security guarantees

XIII. Conclusion: Deterrence and Diplomacy as Complements, Not Substitutes

- (a) Restate the thesis in light of the evidence surveyed
- (b) Final reflection on Pakistan's evolving role as both a security partner and a potential bridge-builder in a fracturing region

BACK MATTER

50-QUESTION MCQ BANK (25 National + 25 International)

National Affairs (Q1-25)

Q1. The Mecca Joint Defence Agreement was signed on which date?

A) 1 August 2026 B) 7 August 2026 C) 15 August 2026 D) 21 August 2026 **[Ans: B]**

Q2. Which article of the Constitution governs the creation of new provinces?

A) Article 140 B) Article 175 C) Article 239 D) Article 62 **[Ans: C]**

Q3. Under which operation did security forces conduct this week's Balochistan raids?

A) Zarb-e-Azb B) Radd-ul-Fitna 3 C) Al-Mizan D) Rah-e-Nijat **[Ans: B]**

Q4. How many investors submitted EOIs for GEPCO's privatisation?

A) 9 B) 11 C) 12 D) 14 **[Ans: B]**

Q5. What was Pakistan's cumulative monsoon death toll as of 21 August 2026?

A) 326 B) 522 C) 739 D) 1,033 **[Ans: C]**

Q6. At what level did the KSE-100 index close this Friday?

A) 170,591 B) 177,166 C) 180,014 D) 189,556 **[Ans: B]**

Q7. Pakistan's July 2026 trade deficit stood at approximately:

A) \$1.9 billion B) \$2.9 billion C) \$3.9 billion D) \$5.9 billion **[Ans: C]**

Q8. How many of nineteen targeted IMF structural-reform actions has Pakistan completed?

A) 2 B) 4 C) 7 D) 10 **[Ans: B]**

Q9. Which DISCO's privatisation EOI deadline is 7 September 2026?

A) FESCO B) GEPCO C) IESCO D) LESCO **[Ans: C]**

Q10. GEPCO is located in which city?

A) Faisalabad B) Gujranwala C) Islamabad D) Multan **[Ans: B]**

Q11. Which province recorded the highest monsoon death toll in 2026?

A) Punjab B) Sindh C) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa D) Balochistan **[Ans: C]**

Q12. Which country's Foreign Affairs Adviser expressed interest in joining a Saudi-Pakistan-Turkiye framework?

A) Indonesia B) Bangladesh C) Malaysia D) Egypt **[Ans: B]**

Q13. SBP's foreign exchange reserves stood at what level as of 31 July 2026?

A) \$12.0 billion B) \$14.5 billion C) \$17.0 billion D) \$20.0 billion **[Ans: C]**

Q14. How many articles of the Constitution could the proposed 28th Amendment reportedly touch?

A) 45 B) 78 C) 99 D) 117 **[Ans: D]**

Q15. Which minister confirmed government interest in creating new provinces?

A) Azam Nazeer Tarar B) Barrister Aqeel C) Ahsan Iqbal D) Ishaq Dar **[Ans: B]**

Q16. Karachi's flash flooding on 19 August killed at least how many people?

A) 3 B) 6 C) 10 D) 15 **[Ans: B]**

Q17. Which party has emerged as the most vocal supporter of the 28th Amendment among coalition partners?

A) PPP B) JUI-F C) MQM-P D) IPP **[Ans: C]**

Q18. July's CPI inflation reading was:

A) 6.2% YoY B) 7.8% YoY C) 9.2% YoY D) 11.4% YoY **[Ans: C]**

Q19. The Ziarat-Harnai security operation this week killed how many militants?

A) 3 B) 5 C) 8 D) 12 **[Ans: C]**

Q20. Which Pakistani business group is among the GEPCO bidders?

A) Nishat Group B) Engro Energy C) Interloop D) Ibrahim Fibres **[Ans: B]**

Q21. Cement sector offtake grew by what percentage year-on-year in July?

A) 3% B) 6% C) 9% D) 12% **[Ans: B]**

Q22. Petroleum offtake rose by what percentage year-on-year in July?

A) 10% B) 15% C) 23% D) 30% **[Ans: C]**

Q23. Which body confirmed the shortfall in IMF structural-reform actions?

A) Ministry of Finance oversight committee B) SBP C) FBR D) Privatisation Commission **[Ans: A]**

Q24. The Mecca pact's collective-defence clause is most comparable to which international framework's provision?

A) UN Charter Article 51 only B) NATO's Article 5 C) SAARC Charter D) OIC Charter Article 2 **[Ans: B]**

Q25. Which Gulf and Turkish investors are named among GEPCO bidders?

A) ACWA Power and Zorlu Energy B) Al Sharif Contracting and Cengiz Enerji C) Masdar and Enka D) NEOM and Kalyon Energy **[Ans: B]**

International Affairs (Q26-50)

Q26. Which US official agreed with Netanyahu on US-general oversight of Hamas's disarmament?

A) Marco Rubio B) Jared Kushner C) Steve Witkoff D) JD Vance **[Ans: B]**

Q27. The 'Yellow Line' in Gaza now demarcates Israeli control over approximately what share of the Strip?

A) 40% B) 53% C) 60% D) 70% **[Ans: D]**

Q28. In which strait did the deadly Houthi attack on a cargo ship occur this week?

A) Strait of Hormuz B) Bab el-Mandeb Strait C) Strait of Malacca D) Suez Canal **[Ans: B]**

Q29. What share of world oil trade did the Strait of Hormuz carry before the 2026 Iran war?

A) 10% B) 20% C) 30% D) 40% **[Ans: B]**

Q30. In which country did this week's US-mediated Ukraine-Russia negotiating round take place?

A) Switzerland B) Türkiye C) Saudi Arabia D) Qatar **[Ans: C]**

Q31. When did President Zelensky publish his open letter proposing direct talks with Putin?

A) January 2026 B) March 2026 C) June 2026 D) August 2026 **[Ans: C]**

Q32. Which country is the only one to have formally recognised the current Taliban government?

A) China B) Pakistan C) Russia D) Qatar **[Ans: C]**

Q33. On what date did the Taliban mark five years since retaking power?

A) 30 July 2026 B) 15 August 2026 C) 1 September 2026 D) 21 August 2026 **[Ans: B]**

Q34. How many West Bank communities has HRW reported as displaced since January 2023?

A) 65 B) 107 C) 160 D) 248 **[Ans: B]**

Q35. What share of the West Bank do settlements and outposts now reportedly control?

A) 8% B) 12% C) 18% D) 25% **[Ans: C]**

Q36. Which Sudanese city have analysts warned could become 'Sudan's next El Fasher'?

A) Khartoum B) El-Obeid C) Port Sudan D) El-Geneina **[Ans: B]**

Q37. When did the RSF seize El Fasher in North Darfur?

A) March 2025 B) June 2025 C) October 2025 D) January 2026 **[Ans: C]**

Q38. What prompted the US administration's pivot toward Section 301 tariff investigations?

A) A new WTO ruling B) The Supreme Court striking down IEEPA tariffs C) A congressional mandate D) A G7 agreement **[Ans: B]**

Q39. Approximately how many countries are covered by the Section 301 forced-labour investigation?

A) 25 B) 40 C) 60 D) 90 **[Ans: C]**

Q40. What combined tariff rate could Brazil face under stacked Section 301 measures?

A) 20% B) 25% C) 37.5% D) 50% **[Ans: C]**

Q41. Which country now absorbs roughly 37% of Brazil's exports, a record share?

A) United States B) European Union C) China D) India **[Ans: C]**

Q42. Which mediators were named in finalising the original Gaza disarmament roadmap?

A) UK, France, Germany, US B) Egypt, Qatar, Türkiye, US C) Saudi Arabia, UAE, US D) Jordan, Egypt, US **[Ans: B]**

Q43. What is the estimated time to replenish depleted global oil inventories after Hormuz reopens?

A) 6 months B) 12 months C) 18 months D) 24 months **[Ans: C]**

Q44. Which project east of Jerusalem drew renewed HRW scrutiny this week?

A) Ma'ale Adumim expansion B) E1 settlement project C) Gush Etzion bloc D) Har Homa expansion **[Ans: B]**

Q45. How many people has Sudan's civil war displaced according to UN figures?

A) 6 million B) 9 million C) 14 million D) 20 million **[Ans: C]**

Q46. When did Sudan's current civil war begin?

A) October 2021 B) April 2023 C) January 2024 D) March 2025 **[Ans: B]**

Q47. The RSF was expelled from Khartoum in which month and year?

A) October 2025 B) March 2025 C) June 2024 D) December 2025 **[Ans: B]**

Q48. Which Israeli watchdog groups documented settlement outpost expansion this week?

A) B'Tselem and Adalah B) Kerem Navot and PeaceNow C) Yesh Din and Breaking the Silence D) ACRI and Gisha **[Ans: B]**

Q49. What did Iran's Supreme National Security Council demand for reopening Hormuz?

A) UN Security Council resolution B) End to naval blockade, sanctions relief, troop withdrawal, reparations C) A bilateral trade agreement D) OPEC production quota increase **[Ans: B]**

Q50. Who told Al Jazeera that el-Obeid's fall would let the RSF connect Darfur, Kordofan and central Sudan?

A) A UN spokesperson B) An independent Sudan analyst C) A Sudanese government minister D) An RSF commander **[Ans: B]**

REPORTS & INDICES IN THE NEWS

2026 Global Firepower Index (Global Firepower) — Ranked the combined military capabilities of the Mecca pact's three signatories.

INFORM Risk Index (European Commission/Inter-agency) — Ranks Pakistan 18th among 191 countries for natural-hazard risk exposure.

Amnesty International El Fasher Report (Amnesty International) — Documented crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing during the RSF's October 2025 El Fasher takeover.

HRW West Bank Displacement Report (Human Rights Watch) — Documented displacement of 107 Palestinian communities since January 2023.

IMF Structural Benchmark Tracker (Government of Pakistan / IMF) — Tracks 59 governance and transparency reforms tied to Pakistan's Extended Fund Facility.

Trump Tariffs Tracker (Tax Foundation) — Tracks the evolving rates and revenue impact of US Section 301 and related tariff actions.

ORGANISATIONS IN THE NEWS

Privatisation Commission of Pakistan — Oversaw the GEPCO EOI process that drew eleven investor bids this week.

National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) — Published this week's monsoon situation report showing a 739-death toll.

Board of Peace — The US-led body overseeing Gaza's post-war governance and disarmament roadmap.

International Stabilization Force (Gaza) — Planned multinational force intended to deploy alongside Gaza's disarmament process.

Rapid Support Forces (RSF) — Sudanese paramilitary group besieging el-Obeid after seizing El Fasher in October 2025.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) — Published this week's report on settler-driven displacement in the West Bank.

Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR) — Documented the nine-day siege of homes in Qasra village this month.

Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) — Iran's military body commenting on the Strait of Hormuz reopening mechanism.

PERSONALITIES IN THE NEWS

Muhammad Ali, Adviser to the PM on Privatisation, Chairman Privatisation Commission — Announced the strong GEPCO privatisation investor response this week.

Barrister Aqeel, Minister of State for Law and Justice, Pakistan — Confirmed government interest in creating new provinces under the 28th Amendment.

Jared Kushner, US presidential envoy — Agreed with Netanyahu on US-general oversight of Hamas's weapons handover.

Benjamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister of Israel — Stated Israel will not withdraw from Gaza until Hamas is completely disarmed.

Ghazi Hamad, Hamas negotiating delegation member — Said Hamas will not implement the disarmament deal unless Israel fulfils its obligations.

Abdul Salam Hanafi, Deputy Prime Minister, Taliban government — Spoke at Kabul's ceremony marking five years of Taliban rule.

Humaion Kobir, Bangladesh Foreign Affairs Adviser — Expressed Dhaka's interest in joining a Saudi-Pakistan-Turkiye framework.

CONSOLIDATED VOCABULARY (ALL 14 ARTICLES)

Word	Meaning	Synonym
Devolution	The transfer of power from central to regional or local government	Decentralisation
Federalism	A system of government dividing power between central and regional authorities	Confederation (loosely)
Entrench	To establish firmly so as to be difficult to change	Fortify
Delimitation	The act of fixing the boundaries of electoral constituencies	Demarcation
Consensus	General agreement among a group	Accord
Bargain	An agreement reached after negotiation, often involving trade-offs	Deal
Autonomy	The right of self-governance	Self-rule
Jurisdiction	The official power to make legal decisions	Authority
Coalition	A temporary alliance of political parties for joint action	Alliance
Reservation	A formal expression of doubt or objection	Objection
Recentralisation	The process of returning power to a central authority	Centralisation
Supermajority	A majority greater than a simple majority, often two-thirds	Two-thirds majority
Minilateral	Involving cooperation among a small number of states	Trilateral (in this case)
Deterrence	The prevention of an action through fear of consequences	Dissuasion
Interoperability	The ability of different military systems to work together	Compatibility
Institutionalise	To establish something as a formal, lasting structure	Formalise
Spillover	The unintended spread of effects beyond an original area	Overflow
Consolidation	The process of making something stronger or more solid	Reinforcement
Bloc	A group of countries acting together for a common purpose	Alliance
Dividend	A benefit received from an action or arrangement	Benefit
Doctrine	A stated principle or set of beliefs guiding policy or strategy	Policy
Nucleus	The central or most important part of something around which others gather	Core
Insurgency	An active revolt or uprising against an established authority	Rebellion
Ordnance	Military weapons, ammunition and equipment, including explosives	Munitions
Marginalisation	The process of treating a group as insignificant or peripheral	Exclusion
Kinetic	Relating to or involving direct physical military force	Combat-based
Secessionist	Advocating formal withdrawal from a political union	Separatist
Corridor	A strip of land connecting two areas, often for trade or transit	Passage
Ambush	A surprise attack from a concealed position	Surprise assault
Reinforce	To strengthen or support	Bolster
Grievance	A real or imagined wrong seen as grounds for complaint	Complaint
Denial	Prevention of an adversary's access to or use of an area	Exclusion
Privatisation	The transfer of ownership of a business from public to private control	Denationalisation
Circular debt	A chain of unpaid obligations across a supply sector, often in energy	Payment arrears chain
Due diligence	Careful investigation of a business before a transaction	Vetting

Word	Meaning	Synonym
Conditionality	Requirements attached to a loan or financial assistance	Stipulation
Consortium	A group of companies formally combined for a joint venture	Alliance
Valuation	The process of determining the worth of an asset or company	Appraisal
Divestment	The action of selling off an asset or subsidiary	Disposal
Roadshow	A series of presentations by a company to potential investors	Investor tour
Catchment	An area from which rainfall drains into a river or reservoir	Drainage basin
Resilience	The capacity to recover quickly from difficulties	Robustness
Informal settlement	An unplanned residential area lacking formal legal or infrastructure status	Slum
Displacement	The forced movement of people from their homes	Dislocation
Mitigation	Action to reduce the severity of a problem	Alleviation
Vulnerability	The state of being exposed to harm with limited capacity to cope	Susceptibility
Cumulative	Increasing by successive additions	Aggregate
Exacerbate	To make a problem worse	Aggravate
Benchmark	A standard or reference point against which things are compared	Standard
Offtake	The quantity of a product purchased or consumed	Consumption
Compliance	The act of conforming to a rule or standard	Adherence
Disbursement	The payment of money from a fund	Payout
Momentum	The impetus gained by a moving process or object	Impetus
Volatility	The tendency of a market to change rapidly and unpredictably	Instability
Fundamentals	The basic underlying factors that determine value or performance	Basics
De-escalation	A reduction in the intensity of a conflict	Easing
Benchmark	A specific, measurable target used to assess progress	Milestone
Transparency	Openness and accountability in decision-making and information sharing	Openness
Procurement	The process of obtaining goods or services, especially by a government	Purchasing
Institutional	Relating to an established organisation or system, especially in government	Structural
Catalyse	To cause or accelerate a process	Trigger
Demilitarisation	The removal of military forces or weapons from an area	Disarmament
Sequencing	The order in which a series of actions or events occurs	Ordering
Verification	The process of establishing the truth or accuracy of something	Confirmation
Roadmap	A plan or strategy intended to achieve a future goal	Blueprint
Stabilisation force	A military force deployed to maintain order after conflict	Peacekeeping force
De facto	Existing in practice, whether officially recognised or not	In practice
Impasse	A situation in which no progress is possible; a deadlock	Deadlock
Mediator	A neutral party who helps resolve a dispute between others	Intermediary
Blockade	The sealing off of a place to prevent goods or people from entering or leaving	Siege
Leverage	The power to influence a situation or people's behaviour	Influence

Word	Meaning	Synonym
Maximalist	Advocating extreme or far-reaching demands or positions	Extreme
Reparations	Compensation paid for wrongdoing or damage	Compensation
Autonomous	Acting independently, without external control	Independent
Barometer	Something that indicates or reflects changes in a situation	Indicator
Face-saving	Preserving one's dignity or reputation, especially in a negotiation	Dignity-preserving
Intractable	Difficult to resolve or control	Unmanageable
Sovereignty	Supreme authority of a state over its own territory	Self-governance
Whiplash	A sudden, jarring reversal or change of direction	Reversal
Legitimacy	The quality of being lawful, valid or accepted	Validity
Concession	A thing granted, especially in negotiation, in response to demands	Compromise
Legitimacy	The quality of being accepted as lawful or rightful	Validity
De facto	Existing in practice, whether officially recognised or not	In practice
Entrenched	Firmly established and difficult to change	Firmly established
Isolation	The state of being separated or cut off from others	Seclusion
Pragmatic	Dealing with matters practically rather than theoretically	Practical
Annexation	The forcible acquisition of territory by one state from another	Appropriation
Outpost	A small, often unauthorised settlement outside formal boundaries	Encampment
Enclave	A distinct territorial area enclosed within a larger one	Pocket
Displacement	The forced removal of people from their homes or land	Eviction
Accountability	The obligation to accept responsibility for one's actions	Answerability
Dunam	A unit of land area used in parts of the Middle East, roughly 1,000 square metres	Land unit
Paramilitary	An organisation operating in a military fashion but not part of the official armed forces	Militia
Siege	A military operation surrounding and blockading a place to force surrender	Blockade
Contiguous	Sharing a common border; touching or adjoining	Adjoining
Atrocity	An extremely cruel and violent act, especially in war	Brutality
Corridor	A strip of land connecting two areas, often used for transit or supply	Passage
Protectionism	The policy of shielding domestic industry from foreign competition through tariffs	Trade barrier policy
Statutory	Required, permitted or enacted by statute (law)	Legal
Retaliation	The action of returning a similar harm for one received	Reprisal
Diversification	The process of expanding into varied markets or products to reduce risk	Spreading risk
Compliance	The act of conforming to a rule, standard or law	Adherence

20 ESSAY TOPICS FOR PRACTICE

- The Middle East's Compounding Crises: Diplomacy, Deterrence and Pakistan's Strategic Choices
- New Provinces in Pakistan: Administrative Necessity or Political Expediency?
- Minilateral Defence Pacts and the Changing Security Architecture of the Muslim World
- Security and Development in Balochistan: Two Sides of the Same Policy
- Privatisation and Public Utilities: Balancing Efficiency with Affordability in Pakistan
- Climate Change and Urban Planning: Pakistan's Recurring Monsoon Crisis
- Beyond the Index: Assessing the Real Health of Pakistan's Economy
- Macroeconomic Stability Without Institutional Reform: A Sustainable Path for Pakistan?
- Disarmament Without Trust: The Challenge of Post-Conflict Verification in Gaza
- Proxy Escalation and the Fragility of Great-Power Diplomacy in the Gulf
- Secret Diplomacy in the Age of Transparency: The Ukraine Peace Process
- Recognition, Isolation and Legitimacy: The Politics of Engaging De Facto Governments
- Documentation Without Enforcement: The Limits of International Human Rights Law
- Forgotten Wars: Sudan's Civil War and the Politics of International Attention
- Trade Policy Under Legal Constraint: Adapting Protectionism After Judicial Setbacks
- Federalism Under Pressure: Provincial Autonomy in an Era of Centralising Reform
- The Economics of National Security: CPEC, Gwadar and the Balochistan Insurgency
- From Ceasefire to Peace: Why Post-Conflict Roadmaps Fail to Hold
- Water, Land and Power: The Political Economy of Displacement in South Asia and the Middle East
- Pakistan Between the Gulf and Iran: Navigating a Fracturing Middle East