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A Weekly Magazine for CSS/PMS Aspirants

ISSUE
19

SEPTEMBER 20 – SEPTEMBER 26, 2026

ICEP's CSS Weekly

CURRENT AFFAIRS | ANALYSIS | EXAM PERSPECTIVE



COVER STORY

Targeted Fuel Subsidy Survives Its First IMF Test at the UN

Relief Scheme Clears First IMF Hurdle as Pakistan Balances Fiscal Space and Social Protection

14 CURATED ARTICLES | **50** QUESTION MCQ BANK | THREAD TRACKER | MODEL ANSWER BLUEPRINT | CONFUSABLES CORNER | ESSAY OUTLINE

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THREAD TRACKER

Thread	This Week	One Year Ago
Fuel Subsidy & IMF Review	PM-Georgieva UNGA meeting; 4th EFF / 3rd RSF reviews opened.	No verified echo found for this specific week last year.
Kohat Attack & Pak-Afghan Border War	Follow-up IBO across Kohat/Hangu; air strikes on hideouts.	Sept 2025 saw the deadliest Pakistan-Afghanistan clashes in years, later Qatar-mediated.
AJK Internet Shutdown	AJK High Court issues notices to PTA, AJK Council, govt, SCO.	No verified echo found for this specific week last year.
Imaan Mazari PECA Case	IHC grants pre-arrest bail in the resurfaced BYC-protest case.	No verified echo found for this specific week last year.
New Provinces Debate	Govt commits both houses to formal October parliamentary debate.	No verified echo found for this specific week last year.
Gaza ISF / Disarmament	Indonesia emerges as first likely ISF troop contributor for Phase II.	Nov 2025: UNSC passed Resolution 2803 authorising the ISF, 13-0-2.
Makkah Pact / Hormuz Crisis	Houthi strikes intensify; Pakistan FO says pact implementation needs more time.	No verified echo found for this specific week last year.
UN Secretary-General Race	Bachelet withdraws (Sept 19); Security Council straw polls continue.	Sept 2025: UNGA resolution 79/327 set the process's formal ground rules.

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NATIONAL AFFAIRS | N-01

ICEP's CSS Weekly

Issue 19

September 20 – September 26, 2026

Targeted Fuel Subsidy Survives Its First IMF Test at the UN

Relief Scheme Clears First IMF Hurdle as Pakistan Balances Fiscal Space and Social Protection



PM Shehbaz Sharif meets IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva on the sidelines of UNGA 81st Session, New York

WHAT IS THE SCHEME?

Government is providing a **Rs 100 per litre** targeted subsidy on petrol for:



Motorcycles | Rickshaws | Small cars (below 800cc)

KEY FIGURES

Rs 100 per litre
Subsidy amount

~ Rs 75 billion
Estimated cost of the scheme

Targeted groups
Motorcyclists, rickshaw drivers and small car owners (<800cc)

WHY WAS IT INTRODUCED?

- Renewed Middle East conflict pushed international energy prices higher.
- Rising fuel prices were straining household budgets.
- Already high Petroleum Development Levy (PDL) was increasing the burden on consumers.

IMF'S RESPONSE

- During the UNGA meeting, the IMF **raised no serious objections** to the scheme.
- Seen as a targeted and time-bound relief measure.
- Consistent with the programme's **focus on protecting vulnerable groups.**

GOVERNMENT'S POSITION

- Targeted **relief** to protect low-income groups
- Balance between fiscal discipline and social protection
- **Commitment** to continue reforms under the IMF programme

CONTEXT: RISING GLOBAL ENERGY PRICES

- Middle East conflict disrupted energy markets.
- International oil prices increased.
- Imported fuel costs put pressure on Pakistan's economy and consumers.



CHALLENGES AHEAD

- Fiscal cost and sustainability (~ Rs 75 billion)
- Managing circular debt and PDL
- Volatility in global oil prices
- Ensuring the scheme remains targeted and time-bound
- Balancing IMF conditions with domestic political pressures

WAY FORWARD

- Maintain strict targeting to avoid leakages
- Continue energy sector reforms
- Protect vulnerable groups through smart social safety nets
- Diversify energy sources to reduce import dependence
- Remain engaged with the IMF for programme continuity

Essay Topic

Targeted Subsidies and the Limits of Fiscal Space in an IMF Programme

Past Paper Echo

CSS 2023 Current Affairs:
"Discuss the structural weaknesses of Pakistan's energy pricing regime."

Key Takeaway

The scheme marks a cautious balance between social relief and fiscal discipline, but long-term stability requires structural reforms in Pakistan's energy sector.

ICEP CSS-PMS PREPARATION

NATIONAL AFFAIRS · N-01

Targeted Fuel Subsidy Survives Its First IMF Test at the UN

HIGH Continuity: Continues Issue 18's fuel-price/PDL coverage as the subsidy question moves from Islamabad to New York.

Essay Topic: Targeted Subsidies and the Limits of Fiscal Space in an IMF Programme

Past Paper Echo: CSS 2023 Current Affairs: 'Discuss the structural weaknesses of Pakistan's energy pricing regime.'

A. Executive Summary

On the sidelines of the UN General Assembly's 81st session in New York, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif met IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva and told reporters afterward that the Fund had raised no serious objections to Pakistan's Rs100-per-litre targeted petrol subsidy for motorcycles, rickshaws and small cars under 800cc. The relief scheme, worth roughly Rs75 billion, was introduced after the renewed Middle East conflict pushed international energy prices higher, straining household budgets already squeezed by a PDL that Petroleum Minister Ali Pervaiz Malik says has crept back close to its pre-crisis level. Georgieva's own public remarks, however, stopped short of endorsing the subsidy by name; she instead praised Pakistan's continuation of reform under the $7 billion Extended Fund Facility and the parallel $1.4 billion Resilience and Sustainability Facility, with the Fund opening discussions on the programme's fourth review and the climate facility's third review. Successful completion of both could unlock roughly $1.2 billion in fresh financing. The distinction matters for CSS candidates because Pakistan's Extended Fund Facility explicitly commits the government to refrain from introducing new fuel subsidies or cross-subsidy arrangements, and to keep any fiscal response to high fuel prices targeted, limited, temporary and budget-neutral. The government's framing — relief for motorcycles and small cars rather than a blanket price cut for all consumers — is a textbook attempt to satisfy that letter while answering domestic political pressure over the cost of living. Whether the IMF's silence on formal approval becomes a sticking point at the fourth review, due before the end of the year, will be an early indicator of how much fiscal room Islamabad actually has left as it also tries to fund flood preparedness, new provinces administration, and defence spending tied to the Makkah pact. The episode illustrates a recurring pattern in Pakistan's IMF relationship: politically necessary relief measures dressed in technocratic language of 'targeting' to survive Fund scrutiny, with the true test coming only at the next formal review when actual fiscal outturns are measured against programme benchmarks.

B. Key Arguments / Developments

- PM Shehbaz met IMF chief Georgieva at UNGA on Sept 24, 2026 in New York.
- PM says IMF raised no serious concerns over the Rs100/litre targeted petrol subsidy.
- Georgieva's public remarks praised reform continuity but did not name-check the subsidy.
- Scheme covers motorcycles, rickshaws and cars up to 800cc; costed at roughly Rs75 billion.
- IMF has opened the fourth review of the $7bn EFF and third review of the $1.4bn RSF.
- Successful reviews could unlock about $1.2 billion in combined financing.
- EFF conditionality bars new blanket fuel subsidies; only targeted, temporary relief is permitted.
- PDL has been restored close to its pre-crisis level after a temporary wartime cut.
- Subsidy introduced after Middle East conflict pushed global energy prices higher.
- Petroleum Minister Ali Pervaiz Malik says refiners are being asked to protect consumers voluntarily.
- Government frames the scheme as protecting low-income transport users, not universal relief.
- Fourth review outcome will be an early test of Pakistan's post-subsidy fiscal room.

C. Analytical Categories

Economic

- Targeted subsidies reduce fiscal cost versus blanket price cuts but raise administrative/verification burdens.
- Fourth EFF review will scrutinise whether Rs75bn relief breaches budget-neutrality commitments.

Political

- Cost-of-living relief ahead of continued inflation pressure carries clear domestic political utility.
- Ambiguity over IMF's actual position lets government claim vindication without a formal record.

Diplomatic

- UNGA sidelines meeting doubles as informal signalling ahead of the formal review mission.

Governance

- Programme conditionality increasingly shapes even micro-level domestic relief design.

D. Stakeholder Positions & Way Forward

Stakeholder Positions

- Government of Pakistan: Frames the scheme as targeted relief balancing fiscal discipline and social protection; committed to continuing reforms under the IMF programme.
- IMF: Raised no serious objections at the UNGA meeting; treats it as a targeted, time-bound measure consistent with protecting vulnerable groups.
- Petroleum Division: Managing the tension between the restored PDL and consumer relief; monitoring refiners' pricing conduct.

Challenges Ahead

- Fiscal cost and sustainability of the ~Rs75 billion scheme over a full fiscal year.
- Managing circular debt alongside a restored Petroleum Development Levy.
- Volatility in global oil prices tied to the wider Middle East conflict.
- Ensuring the scheme remains genuinely targeted and time-bound rather than becoming permanent.

Way Forward

- Maintain strict targeting criteria to avoid leakage to ineligible vehicle categories.
- Continue energy-sector reforms alongside the relief measure rather than treating it as a substitute.
- Protect vulnerable groups through smart, means-tested social safety nets rather than price distortions.
- Diversify energy sources to reduce exposure to imported-fuel price shocks.
- Remain engaged with the IMF through the fourth review to preserve programme continuity.

E. Statistical Digest

▸ Rs100/litre — targeted subsidy on petrol for motorcycles, rickshaws, sub-800cc cars	▸ Rs75 billion — approximate cost of the relief package
▸ $7 billion — size of Pakistan's ongoing IMF Extended Fund Facility	▸ $1.4 billion — size of the parallel Resilience and Sustainability Facility
▸ ~$1.2 billion — potential combined disbursement if 4th EFF and 3rd RSF reviews succeed	▸ $1 billion — approximate share of the $1.2bn tied to the EFF review alone
▸ $200 million — approximate share tied to the climate facility review	▸ 81st session — UNGA session on whose sidelines the Shehbaz-Georgieva meeting occurred
▸ 800cc — engine-size ceiling for cars eligible under the subsidy	

F. Quotes & Essay-Relevant Vocabulary

"said he raised with the IMF chief where a poor man would go for relief." — PM Shehbaz Sharif

"said the PDL has climbed back close to its original level." — Petroleum Minister Ali Pervaiz Malik

"highlighted continued reform implementation rather than the subsidy itself." — IMF MD Kristalina Georgieva

conditionality | budget-neutral | cross-subsidy | disbursement | fiscal space | levy (PDL) | programme review | targeted relief | resilience facility | fourth review | surety | macro-stabilisation

G. Further In-Depth Study

- PakWheels Blog — 'PM Says IMF Raised No Serious Concerns Over Fuel Subsidy'
- The Express Tribune — 'IMF has no issue with fuel subsidy: PM' (Sept 24, 2026)
- The Express Tribune — 'IMF chief expresses satisfaction over Pakistan's economic reform programme'
- IMF Country Report on Pakistan (EFF/RSF documentation), imf.org

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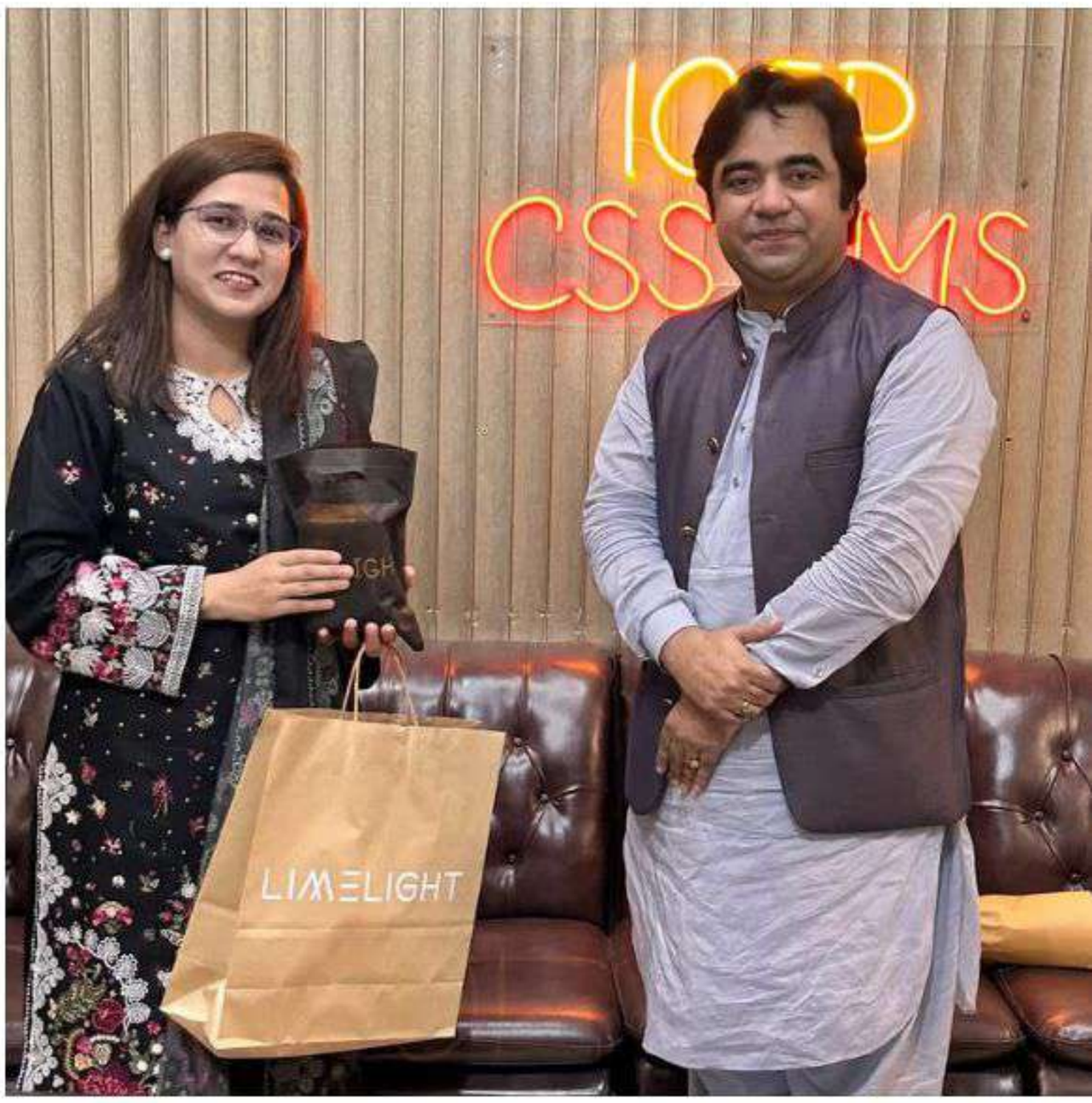
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ANNEX-A

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No.F.2/4/2026-CE. Islamabad, the 10th April, 2026.

Subject: **ANNOUNCEMENT OF FINAL RESULT – CSS COMPETITIVE EXAMINATION 2025 FOR RECRUITMENT TO POSTS IN BS-17 UNDER THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT.**

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NATIONAL AFFAIRS | N-02

ICEP's CSS Weekly

Issue 19

September 20 – September 26, 2026

After Kohat, Pakistan-Afghanistan Border War Enters a Harder Phase

Follow-up IBOs across Kohat/Hangu; air strikes on hideouts as military operations intensify



WHAT HAPPENED THIS WEEK?

- Intensified militant attacks in Kohat and adjoining areas prompted a major military response.
- Follow-up Intelligence-Based Operations (IBOs) conducted across Kohat and Hangu.
- Air strikes targeted militant hideouts along the border.
- Security forces reported multiple militants killed and key hideouts dismantled.

KEY DEVELOPMENTS

01 Series of coordinated IBOs in Kohat and Hangu districts.

02 Air strikes on identified militant hideouts.

03 Heightened border vigilance and movement restrictions in vulnerable areas.

04 Increased coordination between civil administration and security forces.

WHY IS IT A HARDER PHASE?

- Militants are using difficult terrain and cross-border safe havens.
- Improved tactical coordination among TTP-linked groups.
- Complex operational environment due to porous border.
- Limited cooperation from the Afghan side despite repeated requests.

STRATEGIC CONTEXT

- Part of the broader resurgence of TTP activities since 2021.
- Border remains porous, allowing movement of fighters and supplies.
- Past escalations in 2025 saw deadliest Pakistan-Afghanistan clashes in years, later mediated by Qatar.
- Current phase indicates a more prolonged and challenging security environment.



PAKISTAN'S RESPONSE

- Continued IBOs and precision air strikes.
- Diplomatic engagement with the interim Afghan government.
- Strengthening border management and fencing.
- Focus on intelligence sharing and counter-terrorism coordination.

IMPLICATIONS

- Short-term security challenges in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.
- Humanitarian impact on border communities.
- Risk of further escalation if cross-border sanctuaries remain unaddressed.
- Added strain on Pakistan-Afghanistan relations and regional stability.

THE WAY FORWARD

- Sustained and intelligence-driven operations.
- Effective border management and surveillance.
- Renewed diplomatic pressure for greater Afghan cooperation.
- Addressing root causes including militant safe havens.

KEY TAKEAWAY

The post-Kohat phase signals a more complex and prolonged security challenge, requiring a combination of military pressure, effective border management and diplomatic engagement.

Essay Topic

Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations: Challenges and the Way Forward

Past Paper Echo

CSS 2021 Pakistan Affairs:
"Discuss the challenges in Pakistan-Afghanistan relations and suggest a roadmap for peace."

Related Themes

- Regional Security
- Role of TTP
- Pakistan's Counter-Terrorism Strategy
- Border Management

NATIONAL AFFAIRS · N-02

After Kohat, Pakistan-Afghanistan Border War Enters a Harder Phase

HIGH Continuity: Direct continuation of Issue 18's Kohat attack coverage; this week covers the security and diplomatic aftermath.

Essay Topic: Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations After the Collapse of the 2025 Ceasefire

Past Paper Echo: CSS 2022 Current Affairs: 'Examine the causes of the resurgence of terrorism in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.'

A. Executive Summary

A week after militants stormed the Old Police Lines complex in Kohat on 18-19 September, killing at least 31 people including two suicide bombers, in the deadliest attack on a KP police facility since the 2023 Peshawar Police Lines mosque bombing, security forces this week pressed a follow-up intelligence-based operation across Kohat and Hangu districts, backed by air strikes on what the Ministry of Information described as hideouts and safe havens used by groups responsible for the violence. The Peshawar Corps Commander visited the Kohat garrison to commend troops and police for the clearance operation, in which Counter-Terrorism Department officers led the fight to retake the Special Branch building after attackers occupied it for roughly 22 hours. Islamabad has again pointed across the border, framing the Kohat assault as evidence that Afghan soil continues to shelter Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) networks despite a fragile Qatar-brokered ceasefire reached in October 2025 after the deadliest cross-border clashes in years. For CSS/PMS purposes, the episode should be read against the broader 2026 Pakistani airstrikes in Afghanistan, described by Islamabad as intelligence-based, selective operations against TTP, its affiliates, and Islamic State-Khorasan Province camps — and against the pattern, now several years old, in which each major attack inside Pakistan is followed by demarches to Kabul, retaliatory strikes, and a short-lived de-escalation before the cycle resumes. The durability of the October 2025 ceasefire is now in serious doubt, and the domestic political consequence is renewed pressure on the federal government to show that the National Action Plan's border-security components are actually being implemented, not merely announced after each atrocity.

B. Key Arguments / Developments

- Kohat attack (18-19 Sept) killed at least 31 people including 8 attackers; 103 injured.
- It is the deadliest attack on a KP police facility since the 2023 Peshawar Police Lines bombing.
- Attackers occupied the Special Branch building for roughly 22 hours before being cleared.
- Follow-up intelligence-based operation launched Sept 20 across Kohat and Hangu districts.
- Government says operation was followed by calibrated air strikes on hideouts and safe havens.
- Peshawar Corps Commander visited Kohat garrison to commend troops and police (Sept 21).
- Pakistan again blames Afghan-based TTP networks for planning and enabling the assault.
- October 2025 Qatar-mediated ceasefire followed the deadliest Pakistan-Afghanistan clashes in years.
- Post-ceasefire talks have repeatedly failed to produce a durable, lasting agreement.
- 2026 Pakistani airstrikes in Afghanistan targeted seven camps linked to TTP and ISKP.
- CTD additional IG was injured by a grenade during the Kohat operation but returned to duty.
- Cycle pattern: attack, demarche to Kabul, retaliatory strikes, brief lull, repeat.

C. Analytical Categories

Security

- Second attack on the same Kohat complex (first in 2010) suggests target selection reflects known vulnerabilities.
- Reliance on post-hoc clearance operations highlights gaps in preventive/border-interdiction capacity.

Diplomatic

- Repeated demarches to Kabul have not altered Afghan Taliban policy on TTP sanctuary.

Strategic

- Qatar-brokered ceasefire's erosion raises the question of what mediation leverage remains.

Domestic Political

- Attack renews scrutiny of National Action Plan implementation nearly twelve years after its adoption.

D. Stakeholder Positions & Way Forward

Stakeholder Positions

- Pakistan Army / KP Police: Leading follow-up intelligence-based operations and precision air strikes; CTD spearheading clearance efforts.
- Federal Government: Engaging diplomatically with the interim Afghan government while strengthening border fencing and management.
- Border communities in KP: Bearing the humanitarian brunt of intensified operations and militant activity.

Challenges Ahead

- Militants exploiting difficult terrain and cross-border safe havens.
- Improved tactical coordination among TTP-linked groups.
- A porous border enabling continued movement of fighters and supplies.
- Limited cooperation from the Afghan side despite repeated Pakistani requests.

Way Forward

- Sustain intelligence-driven operations rather than reactive, post-attack clearance alone.
- Strengthen border management, surveillance and fencing along the porous Pak-Afghan frontier.
- Apply renewed diplomatic pressure for greater Afghan cooperation against TTP sanctuaries.
- Address root causes, including militant safe havens and cross-border logistics networks.

E. Statistical Digest

▸ 31 — minimum confirmed deaths in the Kohat attack (incl. 8 attackers)	▸ 103 — reported injured, 4 in critical condition
▸ 22 hours — approximate duration of the clearance operation	▸ 8 — militants killed in the Kohat clearance operation, per KP IGP Zulfiqar Hameed
▸ 2010 — year of the first suicide bombing at the same Old Police Lines complex	▸ 7 — camps/hideouts Pakistan says were targeted in its 2026 cross-border strikes
▸ Oct 2025 — month the Qatar-mediated Pakistan-Afghanistan ceasefire was signed	▸ 2023 — year of the Peshawar Police Lines mosque bombing this attack is compared to

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F. Quotes & Essay-Relevant Vocabulary

“said a well-planned, intelligence-based operation followed multiple KP terrorist incidents.” — Ministry of Information & Broadcasting

“confirmed security forces had cleared key buildings inside the Police Lines compound.” — KP IGP Zulfiqar Hameed

demarche | safe haven | intelligence-based operation | sanctuary | clearance operation | cross-border strike | insurgency | counter-terrorism department | escalation cycle | National Action Plan | affiliate network | ceasefire erosion

G. Further In-Depth Study

- Wikipedia — '2026 Kohat attack' (chronology and casualty figures)
- The Nation — 'Corps Commander lauds forces for Kohat clearance operation' (Sept 21, 2026)
- The Nation — 'Kohat Police Lines operation ends with 8 militants killed'
- Wikipedia — '2026 Pakistani airstrikes in Afghanistan'

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NATIONAL AFFAIRS | N-03

ICEP's CSS Weekly

Issue 19

September 20 – September 26, 2026

AJK's Internet Blackout Moves From the Street to the Courtroom

AJK High Court issues notices to PTA, AJK Council, government and SCO



WHAT HAPPENED?

- Internet services were suspended across several areas of AJK amid protests and security concerns.
- The blackout followed growing public protests and a crackdown on online communication.
- The move drew criticism from civil society, journalists and political activists.

COURT ACTION

- AJK High Court issued notices to the PTA, AJK Council, government and SCO for an explanation on the internet shutdown.
- The court sought a report on the legal basis, scope and duration of the restrictions.
- The case marks a key judicial intervention on digital rights and freedom of expression in AJK.

KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA)
Issued notices for justification of the shutdown.

AJK Council & Government
Asked to explain the decision and legal grounds.

Strategic Communications Organisation (SCO)
Also issued notices by the court.

IMPACT OF THE SHUTDOWN

- Disrupted communication and information flow
- Affecting students, businesses and online services
- Raised concerns over freedom of expression
- Fuelled public dissent and protests in several areas

LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL QUESTIONS

- Compatibility with fundamental rights (freedom of speech and information)
- Proportionality and necessity of restrictions
- Role of PTA vs. AJK government
- Judicial oversight over executive actions in AJK

BROADER CONTEXT

- Part of a wider trend of internet restrictions during periods of political unrest.
- Similar patterns observed globally in conflict and protest situations.
- Raises questions about digital governance, security vs. rights balance and long-term impacts on AJK's connectivity.



WAY FORWARD

- Transparent legal justification for restrictions
- Clear guidelines and time-bound restoration
- Protection of digital rights while addressing genuine security concerns
- Institutional coordination among PTA, AJK government and SCO

ESSAY PERSPECTIVE

Internet Shutdowns: Security Necessity or a Threat to Democratic Rights?

KEY TAKEAWAY

The AJK internet blackout highlights the complex trade-off between security imperatives and fundamental rights in the digital age, with the judiciary now playing a crucial oversight role.

ICEP CSS-PMS PREPARATION

NATIONAL AFFAIRS · N-03

AJK's Internet Blackout Moves From the Street to the Courtroom

MEDIUM Continuity: Continues the AJK internet-shutdown thread; the dispute has now shifted from street protest to constitutional litigation.

Essay Topic: Internet Shutdowns as a Tool of Public Order: Rights, Remedies and Limits

Past Paper Echo: No direct past-paper precedent yet on internet shutdowns; related to CSS 2021 essay theme on 'Digital Rights and the Pakistani State.'

A. Executive Summary

More than three months after AJK authorities first suspended internet and mobile data services on 5 June 2026 in response to the Jammu Kashmir Joint Awami Action Committee's (JKJAAC) protest call, the dispute has shifted from the street into the courtroom. The AJK High Court has issued notices to the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority, the AJK Council, the AJK government and the Special Communications Organisation on a constitutional petition arguing the prolonged suspension — now well past its originally announced one-week window — is unconstitutional and has disrupted legal practice, education, banking, business and access to information across the region. AJK Prime Minister Iftikhar Gilani has partially reversed course, restoring full connectivity in Mirpur, Bhimber, Haveli and Neelum Valley and educational-institution-only access in four more districts, while keeping Poonch division's Sudhnoti and Rawalakot under total blackout — the two districts at the epicentre of the 2026 Azad Kashmir protests that followed false rumours of activist Sardar Umar Nazir's death and the subsequent discovery of Shahzaib Habib's body. The petitioner's argument, that access to telecommunications is now inseparable from fundamental rights to life, liberty, movement, trade, expression, education and information under the AJK Interim Constitution, gives CSS/PMS candidates a clean case study in balancing public-order justifications against constitutionally protected freedoms, and in the gap between announced shutdown durations and their actual, often indefinite, continuation — a pattern also seen in the 2024 and 2025 AJK protest cycles.

B. Key Arguments / Developments

- Shutdown began June 5, 2026 amid a JKJAAC lockdown/long-march call; framed as a week-long measure.
- AJK High Court has issued notices to PTA, the AJK Council, AJK government and SCO.
- Petition argues the blackout violates fundamental rights under the AJK Interim Constitution.
- Petitioner seeks restoration, compensation for consumers, and independent regulatory oversight.
- AJK PM Iftikhar Gilani has restored full service in Mirpur, Bhimber, Haveli, Neelum Valley.
- Four other districts get education-institution-only broadband/Wi-Fi access.
- Sudhnoti and Rawalakot — epicentre of the unrest — remain under complete blackout.
- 2026 Azad Kashmir protests followed false death rumours and the discovery of a body at Rawalakot's CMH.
- Amnesty International has criticised internet shutdowns, arbitrary arrests and use of force.
- Pattern echoes 2024 and 2025 AJK protest cycles, each accompanied by communications blackouts.

C. Analytical Categories

Constitutional/Legal

- Case tests whether AJK Interim Constitution's rights guarantees extend explicitly to digital access.
- Court's notice-issuance stage signals judicial willingness to scrutinise executive shutdown powers.

Human Rights

- International bodies frame prolonged shutdowns as disproportionate collective punishment.

Economic

- Extended blackout disrupts banking, freelancing and business activity dependent on connectivity.

Political

- Phased, geographically uneven restoration reflects a strategy of selective de-escalation.

D. Stakeholder Positions & Way Forward

Stakeholder Positions

- PTA: Issued notices by the AJK High Court; asked to justify the shutdown's legal basis.
- AJK Council & Government: Asked to explain the decision and its legal grounds; has partially restored service in several districts.
- Special Communications Organisation (SCO): Also issued notices by the court over its role in the suspension.
- Civil society, journalists, students: Report disrupted communication, education, business and information flow; have criticised the prolonged blackout.

Challenges Ahead

- Compatibility of prolonged shutdowns with fundamental rights to speech and information.
- Proportionality and necessity of restrictions relative to the security concern cited.
- Unclear division of responsibility between PTA and the AJK government.
- Judicial oversight of executive shutdown powers remains untested territory.

Way Forward

- Provide transparent legal justification for any continued restrictions.
- Set clear guidelines and a time-bound restoration schedule rather than open-ended suspension.
- Protect digital rights while addressing genuine security concerns through narrower, targeted measures.
- Improve institutional coordination among PTA, the AJK government and the SCO.

E. Statistical Digest

▸ June 5, 2026 — date the AJK-wide internet suspension began	▸ 8 — districts where services have been ordered restored in some form
▸ 2 — districts (Sudhnoti, Rawalakot) still under complete suspension	▸ 48 days — length of an earlier 2026 suspension before partial restoration in a prior cycle
▸ 2023 — year JKJAAC was founded in Rawalakot as a civil-society coalition	▸ 35 of 38 — demands from JKJAAC's charter that the government has reportedly agreed to

F. Quotes & Essay-Relevant Vocabulary

“argued the shutdown occurred without prior notice despite consumers paying full service charges.” — Petitioner before AJK High Court

communications blackout | constitutional petition | interim constitution | fundamental rights | digital rights | regulatory oversight | proportionality | collective punishment | civil-society coalition | long march | shutter-down strike

G. Further In-Depth Study

- Dawn — 'AJK court seeks replies on plea challenging internet shutdown'
- The Express Tribune — 'Internet returns to parts of AJK' (Sept 1, 2026)
- Wikipedia — '2026 Azad Kashmir protests'
- The Express Tribune — 'Internet services partially restored in parts of AJK after 48-day suspension'

ICEP's CSS Weekly
Issue 19
September 20 – September 26, 2026

Imaan Mazari Case Tests the Limits of Judicial Relief Against Executive Re-Arrest

IHC grants pre-arrest bail in the resurfaced BYC-protest case



WHO IS IMAAN MAZARI?

- Human rights lawyer and activist.
- Daughter of former Federal Minister Shireen Mazari.
- Known for her vocal stance on civil liberties, digital rights and political dissent.

WHAT IS THE CASE?

- Linked to the resurfaced BYC-protest case.
- Authorities sought her arrest under the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA).
- Allegations relate to her online posts and participation/association with protest activities.

RECENT DEVELOPMENT

- Islamabad High Court (IHC) granted pre-arrest bail in the case.
- The court sought a report on the legal basis, scope and status of the case.
- Issued notices to relevant authorities while restraining arrest subject to conditions.

LEGAL PROVISIONS INVOLVED

PECA 2016

- Provisions related to online speech, hate speech and incitement.
- Often criticized for broad and ambiguous wording affecting freedom of expression.

KEY ISSUES

- Scope of judicial protection against re-arrest.
- Misuse of PECA against political dissent.
- Balance between state security and fundamental rights.
- Role of higher judiciary in safeguarding civil liberties.

STAKEHOLDERS

- **Executive Branch** (Interior Ministry, Law Enforcement Agencies)
- **Judiciary** (IHC)
- **Civil Society** (Human rights groups, lawyers, media)
- **Political Opposition** (Concerns over shrinking democratic space)

CONTEXT



- Part of a wider debate on freedom of expression and digital rights in Pakistan.
- Increasing use of PECA in cases involving activists, journalists and political workers.
- Growing concerns over re-arrest after grant of bail in politically sensitive cases.

WAY FORWARD

- Ensure clear legal grounds for prosecution.
- Prevent misuse of PECA through reforms.
- Strengthen judicial oversight to protect fundamental rights.
- Maintain balance between national security and democratic freedoms.

KEY TAKEAWAY

The Imaan Mazari case highlights the ongoing tension between state security measures and fundamental freedoms, with the judiciary playing a crucial role in checking executive overreach.

NATIONAL AFFAIRS · N-04

Imaan Mazari Case Tests the Limits of Judicial Relief Against Executive Re-Arrest

HIGH Continuity: Continues Issue 18's PECA/Mazari coverage; this week's IHC pre-arrest bail is the concrete follow-on development.

Essay Topic: PECA, Preventive Detention, and the Doctrine of Judicial Protection Against Executive Overreach

Past Paper Echo: CSS 2021 Current Affairs: 'Critically examine PECA 2016 and its implications for freedom of expression.'

A. Executive Summary

Human rights lawyer Imaan Zainab Mazari-Hazir and her husband, advocate Hadi Ali Chattha, remain at the centre of one of Pakistan's most closely watched press-freedom cases after a now-familiar pattern: judicial relief followed almost immediately by fresh executive action. On 17 September the Supreme Court suspended their 17-year PECA sentences — handed down in January over social-media posts prosecutors said promoted anti-state narratives — and ordered their release on bail of Rs200,000 each pending the Islamabad High Court's final ruling on their appeal. Within hours, Islamabad police re-arrested the couple in connection with a separate, older case tied to a July 2025 Baloch Yakjehti Committee protest, prompting a joint statement from lawyers, civil-society members and academics condemning what they called an arbitrary re-arrest, and noting that terrorism charges under Section 7 of the Anti-Terrorism Act appeared to have been added by hand after the case was first registered. This week brought the next procedural turn: the Islamabad High Court granted the couple pre-arrest bail in the resurfaced BYC-protest case, against surety bonds of Rs10,000 each, after they spent a night sheltering in the Islamabad High Court Bar Association president's office to avoid arrest before the hearing. For CSS/PMS candidates, the case is a compact study in three overlapping doctrines: PECA's broad cyber-terrorism and 'glorification of an offence' provisions and their chilling effect on speech; the use of successive, older or freshly revived cases to functionally nullify bail granted in a primary case; and the judiciary's role — via suo motu-adjacent protective bail and expedited hearings — in checking what rights groups characterise as a pattern of harassment against lawyers and activists critical of state institutions.

B. Key Arguments / Developments

- SC suspended the couple's 17-year PECA sentences and granted bail on Sept 17, 2026.
- Hours later, Islamabad police re-arrested them under a revived July 2025 BYC-protest case.
- ATA Section 7 charges reportedly added by hand after initial case registration, rights groups say.
- Lawyers/civil-society statement called the re-arrest arbitrary and demanded charges be dropped.
- IHC's pending final ruling on the original PECA conviction appeal remains the core unresolved matter.
- This week: IHC granted pre-arrest bail in the BYC case against Rs10,000 surety bonds each.
- Couple had taken refuge overnight in the IHC Bar Association president's office to avoid arrest.
- Original PECA conviction (Jan 2026): 17 years combined, including 10 for cyber terrorism.
- International Commission of Jurists has previously flagged concerns over the prosecution and trial conduct.
- Case is part of a broader documented pattern of PECA use against journalists and rights defenders.

C. Analytical Categories

Legal

- Successive prosecutions across different case files functionally nullify bail granted in the primary case.
- PECA's cyber-terrorism and glorification-of-offence clauses remain vaguely defined and broadly applied.

Constitutional

- Case tests judiciary's willingness to grant protective, pre-arrest relief against pattern-of-harassment claims.

Human Rights

- UN experts and international legal bodies have flagged the case as emblematic of shrinking press freedom space.

D. Stakeholder Positions & Way Forward

Background: Imaan Zainab Mazari-Hazir is a human rights lawyer and activist, the daughter of former federal minister Shireen Mazari, and is known for her vocal stance on civil liberties, digital rights and political dissent.

Stakeholder Positions

- Executive branch (Interior Ministry, law enforcement): Pursuing the revived BYC-protest case shortly after the Supreme Court's bail order in the PECA case.
- Judiciary (IHC): Granted pre-arrest bail and sought a report on the legal basis, scope and status of the resurfaced case.
- Civil society (lawyers, rights groups, media): Issued a joint statement condemning the re-arrest as arbitrary and demanding the charges be dropped.
- Political opposition: Has voiced concern over shrinking democratic space illustrated by the case.

Way Forward

- Ensure clear, non-retroactive legal grounds before any prosecution under PECA or the ATA.
- Reform PECA's broad, ambiguous provisions to prevent misuse against political dissent.
- Strengthen judicial oversight mechanisms to protect against re-arrest patterns that nullify bail.
- Maintain a workable balance between legitimate national-security concerns and democratic freedoms.

E. Statistical Digest

▸ 17 years — combined sentence originally imposed on Mazari and Chattha in January 2026	▸ Rs200,000 — surety bond per person for SC's Sept 17 bail order
▸ Rs10,000 — surety bond per person for the IHC's pre-arrest bail in the BYC case	▸ 10 years — portion of the original sentence attributed to 'cyber terrorism' charges alone
▸ Aug 12, 2025 — date NCCIA registered the original complaint against the couple	▸ 2 — number of separate legal tracks (PECA case; BYC-protest case) now running in parallel

F. Quotes & Essay-Relevant Vocabulary

“said terrorism charges appeared to have been added by hand after registration.” — Lawyers/civil-society joint statement

“remarked that these days it is 'the era of surprises.'” — Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim, Supreme Court

PECA | cyber terrorism | glorification of an offence | pre-arrest bail | surety bond | anti-terrorism act | protective bail | suo motu | chilling effect | habeas corpus | judicial relief | sedition-adjacent charge

G. Further In-Depth Study

- Digital Rights Foundation — 'Imaan Mazari and Hadi Ali sent back to jail hours after release'
- Dawn (dawn.com) — IHC pre-arrest bail coverage, BYC protest case
- The Express Tribune — 'IHC adjourns Imaan, Chattha sentence pleas'
- IANS Live — 'Pakistan: Lawyers, civil society and academics condemn re-arrest'

NATIONAL AFFAIRS | N-05

ICEP's CSS Weekly

Issue 19

September 20 – September 26, 2026

New Provinces Debate Heads Toward a Parliamentary Reckoning

Government commits both houses to a formal October parliamentary debate



WHAT IS THE DEBATE?

- Proposals to create new provinces, mainly South Punjab and a separate Balochistan province, are under discussion.
- The government has committed both houses of Parliament to hold a formal debate in October.
- The debate aims to examine constitutional, administrative and political implications.
- The issue has triggered intense political debate across parties and regions.

KEY PROPOSALS

SOUTH PUNJAB PROVINCE



- Carved out from southern districts of Punjab.
- Aimed at better administration and equitable resource distribution.
- Supporters argue it will address regional neglect and improve development.

BALOCHISTAN PROVINCE (PROPOSED)



- Demand for further division within Balochistan.
- Aimed at improving governance and addressing long-standing grievances.
- Seen as a way to bring development closer to people and ensure representation.

CONSTITUTIONAL PROCESS

- Requires a constitutional amendment under Article 239.
- Needs approval from both houses of Parliament.
- Affects provincial boundaries, representation and resource sharing (NFC Award).
- Requires consultation with all provincial governments.
- Likely to involve a parliamentary committee and wide political consensus.

ARGUMENTS IN FAVOUR

- Better governance and closer administration to people.
- Address regional disparities and long-standing grievances.
- More equitable distribution of resources.
- Strengthen national integration by addressing sense of exclusion.



ARGUMENTS AGAINST

- Fear of political fragmentation and ethnic polarization.
- Concerns over financial viability and administrative costs.
- May create new inter-provincial disputes over resources.
- Critics see it as a political move rather than a genuine reform.



POLITICAL POSITIONS

- **Government:** Committed to a formal debate in October.
- **Opposition:** Calls for wider consultation and a parliamentary committee.
- **Provincial Governments:** Mixed responses, with concerns over federal-provincial balance.
- **Public Opinion:** Divided, with strong support in some regions and skepticism in others.
- **Experts:** Emphasize need for consensus, financial feasibility and clear delineation of powers.

KEY TAKEAWAY

The new provinces debate reflects a critical test for Pakistan's federal structure, requiring broad consensus, careful planning and a focus on inclusive development.

ESSAY TOPIC

New Provinces in Pakistan: A Pathway to Inclusive Development or a Recipe for Greater Fragmentation?

PAST PAPER ECHO

CSS 2018 Pakistan Affairs: "Discuss the challenges of federalism in Pakistan and suggest measures for strengthening it."

NATIONAL AFFAIRS · N-05

New Provinces Debate Heads Toward a Parliamentary Reckoning

HIGH Continuity: New thread this issue, building on weeks of ministerial statements; selected for durable federalism/governance exam value.

Essay Topic: Redrawing the Federation: The Case For and Against New Provinces in Pakistan

Past Paper Echo: CSS 2019 Current Affairs: 'Discuss the pros and cons of creating new provinces in Pakistan.'

A. Executive Summary

What began in late July as an offhand call by Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi for new 'administrative units' has hardened into the most consequential federalism debate Pakistan has had since the 18th Amendment. Naqvi's argument — that the four-province structure cannot govern a country of roughly 250 million people — found an echo in Defence Minister Khawaja Asif's suggestion that Islamabad Capital Territory become a pilot 'new administrative unit' with its own assembly, and in Planning Minister Ahsan Iqbal's call for a formal government committee to study anywhere from 12 to 15 new units nationwide. But the loudest amplifier has been Sindh, where the MQM-P has revived its decades-old demand for a separate urban-Sindh province, arguing that an honest, corrected census would force even the PPP to confront the issue, while the Sindh Assembly has categorically rejected the entire proposal. PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has called for the debate to be held formally in the National Assembly rather than through ministerial statements to television channels, a position echoed — with a pointed dig at Naqvi — by PM's political adviser Rana Sanaullah, who confirmed intra-party PML-N discussions are underway to settle a unified position. Federal Minister Tariq Fazal Chaudhry has now committed both houses of Parliament to a formal debate in October, while explicitly ruling out Islamabad becoming a province in its own right, opting instead for an unspecified 'new governance model' for the capital. Any referendum on new provinces, officials say, would itself require parliamentary approval. For CSS/PMS aspirants, the episode offers rich material on Article 239's amendment procedures for provincial boundaries, the two-thirds/simple-majority question for enabling legislation, the 18th Amendment's devolution legacy, and the recurring military-establishment interest in administrative restructuring — reportedly including a September 2025 remark by the Army Chief favouring a referendum on the question, according to commentary cited by analysts.

B. Key Arguments / Developments

- Debate traces to Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi's late-July call for new administrative units.
- Defence Minister Khawaja Asif proposes Islamabad as a pilot 'new unit' with its own assembly.
- Planning Minister Ahsan Iqbal proposes a formal committee to study 12-15 new provinces.
- MQM-P argues the case for a separate urban-Sindh province is Pakistan's strongest.
- Sindh Assembly has categorically rejected the new-provinces proposal.
- PPP chief Bilawal Bhutto Zardari insists the matter must be debated in the National Assembly.
- PM's adviser Rana Sanaullah says PML-N is still formulating its own unified internal position.
- Government has now committed both houses to formal debate in October 2026.
- Minister Tariq Fazal Chaudhry rules out Islamabad becoming a full province.
- Any referendum on new provinces would itself require prior parliamentary approval.
- PTI's Barrister Gohar Ali Khan warns a rushed move could weaken the federation.
- Debate implicates the 18th Amendment's devolution settlement and Article 239 procedures.

C. Analytical Categories

Constitutional

- Creating provinces requires a two-thirds constitutional amendment plus affected-provincial-assembly consent under Article 239.

- Islamabad's federal-territory status complicates any 'new unit' precedent being generalised.

Political

- Sindh-based resistance reflects fears that province-splitting could dilute PPP's provincial power base.
- Cross-party disagreement inside the ruling coalition (PML-N vs PPP) is itself newsworthy.

Administrative

- Proponents argue smaller units improve service delivery and local accountability; critics cite cost and fragmentation risk.

Strategic

- Reported military-establishment interest in the referendum option adds a civil-military dimension to the debate.

D. Stakeholder Positions & Way Forward

Specific Proposals on the Table

- South Punjab Province: A long-standing demand to carve a new province from Punjab's southern (Seraiki-belt) districts, argued to improve administration and deliver more equitable resource distribution to a historically under-developed region.
- A further division within Balochistan: A proposal to subdivide Balochistan further to address long-standing grievances over governance distance and bring development and representation closer to the province's dispersed population.
- Urban Sindh Province: MQM-P's revived demand for a separate urban-Sindh province, the proposal that has generated the sharpest political friction, given the Sindh Assembly's categorical rejection of the broader new-provinces push.

Stakeholder Positions

- Government: Committed to holding a formal debate in both houses of Parliament in October 2026.
- Opposition (PTI and others): Calls for wider consultation and a dedicated parliamentary committee before any move forward.
- Provincial governments: Mixed responses, with concerns over disturbing the federal-provincial balance.
- Public opinion: Divided, with strong support for restructuring in some regions and marked skepticism in others.
- Experts/analysts: Emphasise the need for political consensus, financial feasibility and clear delineation of powers before any boundary change.

Challenges Ahead

- Fear of political fragmentation and ethnic/regional polarisation.
- Concerns over the financial viability and administrative cost of new units.
- Risk of new inter-provincial disputes over resources and NFC shares.
- Perception among critics that the push is a political manoeuvre rather than a genuine governance reform.

Way Forward

- Route any boundary change strictly through Article 239 rather than executive announcements or informal maps.
- Conduct a transparent fiscal-impact assessment for any proposed new unit, covering revenue, expenditure and NFC implications.
- Strengthen Article 140A local government devolution as an alternative or complement to new provinces.
- Establish an independent boundary commission to examine population, geography and economic viability.
- Protect linguistic and cultural pluralism so new boundaries are not designed as instruments of ethnic exclusion.

E. Statistical Digest

▸ 250 million — approximate national population cited as straining the four-province structure	▸ 12 to 15 — new provinces proposed for study by Planning Minister Ahsan Iqbal

▸ 18 — administrative units shown in a widely circulated (unofficial) map splitting all four provinces	▸ 4 — existing provinces of Pakistan under the current federal structure
▸ October 2026 — month Parliament is now committed to formally debating the issue	▸ Late July 2026 — when the current round of the debate began

F. Quotes & Essay-Relevant Vocabulary

“said it would not be right to adopt an inflexible stance on new provinces.” — Defence Minister Khawaja Asif

“said the decision must be made in Parliament, not by any individual.” — PM's adviser Rana Sanaullah

“called the case for a separate urban-Sindh province the strongest in the country.” — MQM-P chief Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui

federalism | devolution | 18th Amendment | administrative unit | provincial autonomy | constitutional amendment | referendum | NFC award | census | fiscal decentralisation | two-thirds majority | federating unit

G. Further In-Depth Study

- The Express Tribune — 'Consensus call grows over new provinces' (Sept 8, 2026)
- The Express Tribune — 'Parliament to decide on creating new provinces: Sanaullah'
- The Express Tribune — 'MQM-P turns up heat for new provinces'
- The Express Tribune — 'Parliament showdown looms over new units'

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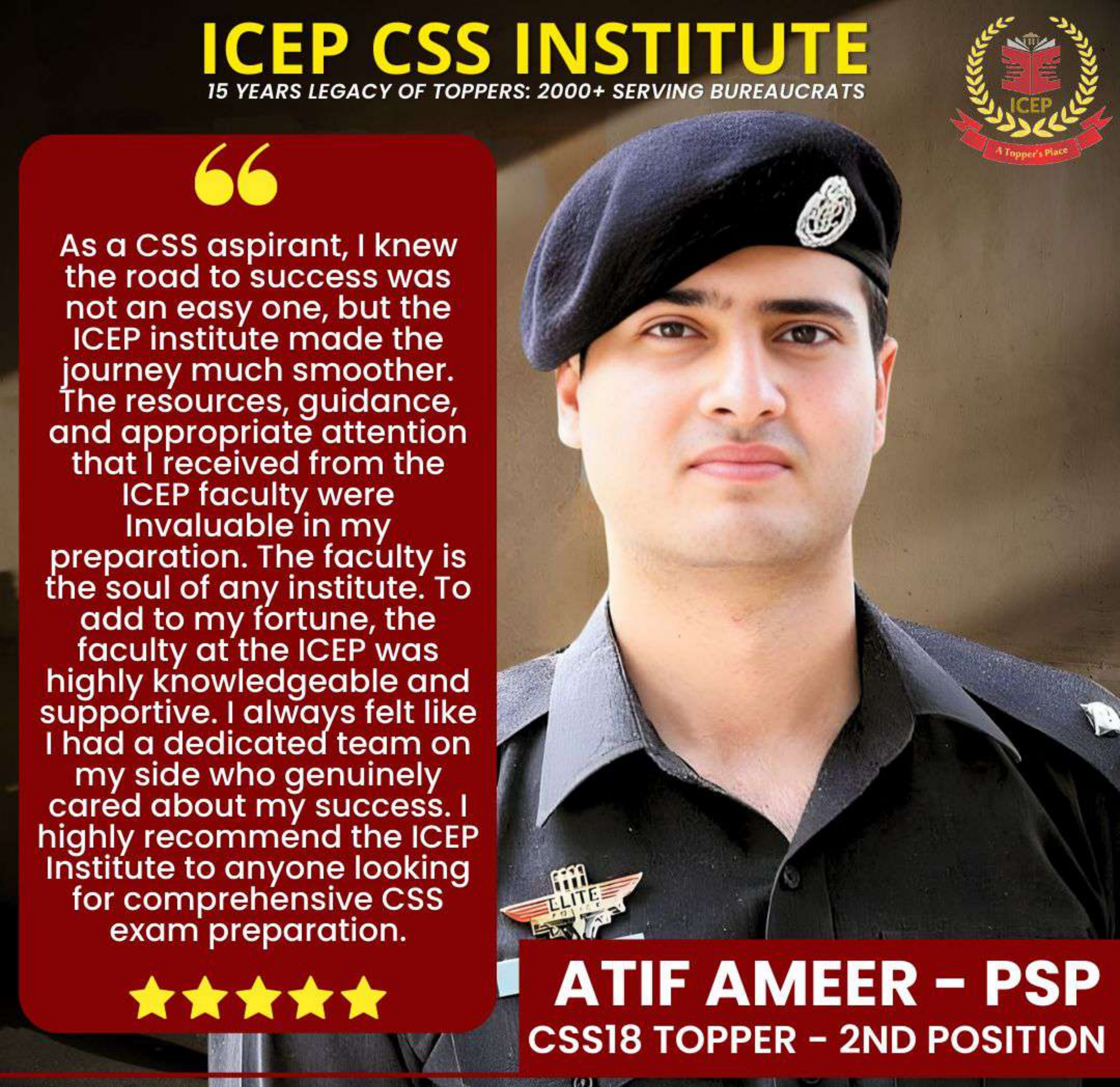


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ATIF AMEER – PSP

CSS18 TOPPER - 2ND POSITION

EXTENDED MODEL ANSWER I — NEW PROVINCES & FEDERALISM

CSS Pakistan Affairs — 20 Marks

Question: "Pakistan's debate over new provinces is fundamentally a question of federalism, governance and equitable political representation rather than mere administrative restructuring." Critically examine this proposition with reference to Article 239, the 18th Amendment, fiscal federalism, administrative efficiency and the risks of ethnic/regional polarization.

Examiner-oriented approach: FPSC's published examiner observations for Pakistan Affairs emphasise that candidates often suffer from poor expression, insufficient general reading, weak knowledge of contemporary Pakistan, and — most importantly — lack of analytical approach. The answer below deliberately uses thesis → constitutional framework → competing arguments → critical evaluation → synthesis, rather than merely listing advantages and disadvantages.

Introduction

The debate over creating new provinces in Pakistan cannot be reduced to the question of whether smaller administrative units are easier to govern. It concerns the distribution of political power, fiscal resources, constitutional authority and representation within a federation. Pakistan's existing four-province structure has increasingly been questioned because of population growth, regional disparities and perceived administrative distance between provincial capitals and peripheral areas. However, the creation of provinces also alters the political and fiscal balance among federating units. The 18th Amendment strengthened provincial autonomy, while Article 239 establishes a deliberately demanding constitutional mechanism for altering provincial boundaries. Thus, new provinces may improve governance, but unless accompanied by political consensus, fiscal restructuring and safeguards against ethnic polarization, administrative decentralization could become political fragmentation.

1. New provinces are primarily a question of federal restructuring

Federalism is based on the constitutional distribution of authority between the federation and its constituent units. Therefore, creating a new province is not equivalent to creating a new district or division; it changes the constitutional architecture of the federation. The present debate reflects three interconnected questions: who should exercise political authority, how should financial resources be distributed, and how can citizens receive effective representation and public services. The current debate has emerged partly from arguments that Pakistan's population and administrative complexity have outgrown the four-province structure, including proposals for studying multiple new administrative units and the revived demand for an urban Sindh province, which has given the debate a strong political and representational dimension. Hence, the issue is fundamentally about rebalancing federalism, not merely redrawing administrative maps.

2. Article 239 makes provincial creation a constitutional and consensual exercise

Article 239 provides the central constitutional mechanism for constitutional amendment. A constitutional amendment must secure a two-thirds majority in both Houses of Parliament. More importantly for the provinces debate, where an amendment would alter the limits of a province, the concerned Provincial Assembly must approve it by two-thirds of its total membership. This requirement has an important federal logic: it prevents unilateral restructuring, since a province cannot simply be divided by the federal government through an ordinary administrative order — the constitutional requirement gives the affected province a decisive institutional voice. It also promotes federal consensus, recognising that provincial boundaries belong not merely to the administrative convenience of the centre but to the constitutional settlement between the federation and provinces. But it can also produce a constitutional deadlock, since the same safeguard that protects provincial autonomy can make reform extremely difficult where the political interests of the existing provincial government conflict with the demand for a new province. Thus, Article 239 represents both a safeguard of federalism and a potential barrier to restructuring.

3. The 18th Amendment provides the essential background

The new-provinces debate cannot be intelligently analysed without understanding the 18th Amendment of 2010. The amendment substantially strengthened provincial autonomy, abolished the Concurrent Legislative List and transferred numerous areas of responsibility towards the provinces. It also strengthened institutions of cooperative federalism such as the Council of Common Interests (CCI) and reinforced the constitutional framework for fiscal devolution. Its significance for the present debate is twofold. First, it strengthened the provinces, so the argument for creating smaller provinces must be examined within a system in which provinces already possess substantial constitutional responsibilities. Second, it exposed the importance of intra-provincial devolution: if the problem is that citizens remain distant from decision-making, the solution does not necessarily have to be the creation of additional provinces. Article 140A requires provinces to establish local governments and devolve political, administrative and financial responsibility to elected local representatives. This creates an important analytical distinction — the failure of provincial-level decentralization cannot automatically be treated as proof that the number of provinces must increase. A province may be large but effectively governed through empowered local governments; conversely, a smaller province can remain centralized and administratively ineffective.

4. Administrative efficiency provides a strong argument for smaller provinces

There is nevertheless a genuine governance argument behind the demand for new provinces. Smaller federating units can potentially bring government closer to citizens, reduce geographical distance from provincial capitals, improve administrative supervision, make elected representatives more accessible, facilitate targeted development planning, improve representation of neglected regions, and make service delivery more responsive. This argument becomes particularly relevant where large provinces contain significant disparities between metropolitan centres and peripheral regions — a concern voiced both by proponents of a South Punjab province carved from Punjab's southern districts, and by those seeking further internal division within Balochistan to bring governance closer to its dispersed population. The current debate similarly reflects the argument that Pakistan's rapidly expanding population places pressure on a four-province administrative structure. However, size alone does not determine administrative performance: a smaller province would still require a new legislature, secretariat, bureaucracy, police structure, judiciary-related infrastructure, financial institutions, development departments and administrative headquarters. Therefore, territorial proximity may increase efficiency only if institutional capacity accompanies territorial restructuring. Otherwise, Pakistan could simply replace large administrative structures with several smaller but equally inefficient ones.

5. Fiscal federalism is the hidden core of the debate

The creation of a province necessarily raises the question of who receives the resources and who bears the expenditure. Article 160 establishes the National Finance Commission framework for distribution of financial resources between the federation and provinces. The 18th Amendment further strengthened the provincial share by inserting Article 160(3A), which provides that the provincial share in each NFC Award cannot be lower than that of the previous Award. Consequently, creating additional provinces is not financially neutral: a new province requires new institutions, new recurring expenditure, and new fiscal requirements, with direct implications for NFC distribution. The political economy becomes particularly significant where economically powerful metropolitan areas and resource-producing regions are involved — the fiscal stakes surrounding Sindh and Karachi illustrate how boundary changes can affect political interests under the NFC framework. Therefore, any serious proposal must answer what the revenue base of the new province will be, how NFC resources will be distributed, how existing provincial debt and liabilities will be divided, how employees and assets will be allocated, what happens to major cities and natural resources, and whether the new units will become financially viable or remain dependent on federal transfers. Without answers to these questions, the slogan of administrative efficiency remains incomplete.

6. Political representation gives the debate another dimension

The demand for new provinces also reflects a perceived problem of political representation. Large provinces can produce the perception that population concentration, geographical distance and the political dominance of major regions combine to under-represent peripheral communities. A new province

can potentially give previously marginalized regions their own elected government, greater control over development priorities, greater bureaucratic representation, and a stronger political voice in national institutions. The urban Sindh debate illustrates this representational dimension most sharply: MQM-P has revived the demand for a separate urban-Sindh province, while the Sindh Assembly has opposed the broader new-provinces proposal outright. This demonstrates that the debate is not simply large province versus small province, but also the existing distribution of political power versus a proposed redistribution of that power. That is why provincial restructuring inevitably becomes politically sensitive.

7. The greatest danger: ethnic and regional polarization

Pakistan's history demonstrates that territorial restructuring can have consequences beyond administrative efficiency. The One Unit scheme of 1955 provides an important historical lesson: it attempted to consolidate West Pakistan into a single administrative unit but generated substantial political and regional resistance before its abolition in 1970. The lesson is not that every new province will reproduce One Unit, but rather that territorial engineering without sufficient political legitimacy can intensify identity-based politics. New provinces could potentially transform linguistic identities into territorial political identities, create disputes over historical boundaries, intensify competition over natural resources, generate new capital-city controversies, produce rival claims over ethnic representation, and deepen centre-province mistrust. The present debate already demonstrates how quickly provincial restructuring can intersect with party politics and regional identity, given the resistance from Sindh and the visible disagreement among political actors over the appropriate constitutional route. Therefore, administrative decentralization becomes counterproductive if citizens begin to perceive provinces as ethnic possessions rather than constitutional units of a common federation.

8. New provinces are not a substitute for local government

A critical examination must also challenge the assumption that creating provinces automatically solves the governance problem. Pakistan's constitutional framework already contains a potentially important solution through Article 140A, which requires political, administrative and financial devolution to elected local governments. Excessive distance from citizens can be addressed through local government; weak municipal services through empowered municipalities; provincial political imbalance through a new province; unequal regional development through fiscal equalisation; weak political representation through electoral or local-government reform; and administrative overload through decentralisation plus institutional reform. Thus, province creation should be considered only after examining whether existing provincial and local institutions have been genuinely decentralised.

9. The case for new provinces is therefore conditional, not absolute

The proposition in the question is persuasive to the extent that the debate involves federalism, representation and governance simultaneously. Yet it would be equally misleading to suggest that administrative efficiency is irrelevant. There are legitimate administrative reasons for reconsidering territorial organisation: population growth leads to administrative overload, weak accessibility, and demand for smaller units. But the opposite chain is also possible: political fragmentation leads to institutional duplication, fiscal pressure, inter-provincial competition, and weaker federal cohesion. Therefore, the appropriate criterion should not be simply "more provinces" but "better-governed federating units."

10. Way forward: reform the federation without fragmenting it

A sustainable approach requires a consensus-based federal restructuring framework. First, constitutional consensus: any boundary change must strictly follow Article 239 rather than being driven by executive announcements or informal political maps. Second, a fiscal viability test: every proposed province should have a transparent fiscal-impact assessment covering revenue, expenditure, NFC implications and institutional costs. Third, strengthen Article 140A: local governments should receive meaningful political, administrative and financial authority before province creation is presented as the only solution. Fourth, an independent boundary commission could examine population, geography, administrative accessibility, economic viability and public preferences. Fifth, protect linguistic and cultural pluralism, so new boundaries are not designed as instruments for ethnic exclusion. Sixth, parliamentary ownership: the

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current debate itself indicates the importance of Parliament, rather than unilateral political announcements, in determining such a fundamental constitutional question. Seventh, strengthen cooperative federalism: the CCI and National Economic Council can provide institutional mechanisms for resolving disputes and pursuing balanced regional development, since the Constitution specifically assigns the NEC a role in promoting balanced development and regional equity.

Conclusion

Pakistan's new-provinces debate is not merely a cartographic exercise. It is fundamentally a debate over who governs, who is represented, who receives resources and how the federation accommodates regional diversity. Article 239 makes constitutional consensus indispensable; the 18th Amendment provides the contemporary framework of provincial autonomy; Article 160 makes fiscal viability central; and Article 140A demonstrates that local-government reform can address some problems without altering provincial boundaries. The strongest conclusion, therefore, is neither that Pakistan needs more provinces at any cost nor that the existing four-province structure is permanently adequate. The real test is whether territorial restructuring produces greater representation, accountable governance, fiscal sustainability and federal cohesion simultaneously. If pursued through constitutional consensus, evidence-based boundary design and genuine devolution, new provinces can become an instrument of federal adaptation. If pursued primarily through partisan or ethnic calculations, the same process can deepen regional polarization and weaken the very federation it seeks to reform. Hence, the question is not simply "How many provinces should Pakistan have?" but "What territorial and institutional structure can make federalism more representative, fiscally viable and administratively effective without sacrificing national cohesion?"

Why This Answer Is Examiner-Oriented

This answer deliberately addresses the weaknesses identified by FPSC's published Pakistan Affairs examiner observations: contemporary reading, conceptual knowledge, relevant Pakistani examples, expression and analytical approach. For a 20-mark question, it also avoids the common mistake of writing a purely descriptive advantages/disadvantages essay, continuously connecting Article 239 → 18th Amendment → federalism → fiscal federalism → governance → representation → polarization → Article 140A → reform framework. That interconnected argument is what turns the answer from information-based into CSS analytical writing.

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PREPARATION

NATIONAL AFFAIRS | N-06

ICEP's CSS Weekly

Issue 19

September 20 – September 26, 2026

Record Remittances and a Credit Upgrade Cushion a Fragile Recovery

Strong inflows and a better credit rating provide relief, but structural challenges remain

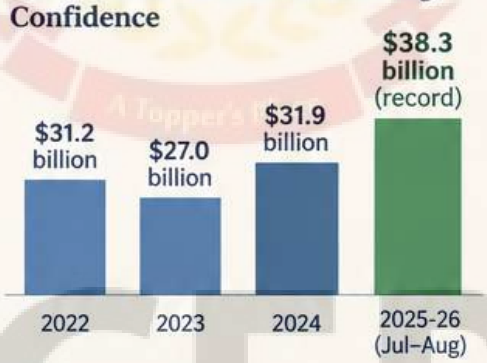


KEY DEVELOPMENTS

- Pakistan received record remittances during the period.
- A major international rating agency upgraded Pakistan's credit rating.
- The twin developments provided a cushion to the ongoing economic recovery.
- However, the economy remains fragile due to structural challenges.

REMITTANCES OUTLOOK

Record Inflows Reflect Growing Confidence



- Higher employment of Pakistanis abroad.
- Improved formal banking channels.
- Government measures to curb hawala/hundi.

CREDIT RATING UPGRADE

A major international rating agency upgraded Pakistan's sovereign credit rating, citing:

- Improved macroeconomic stability.
- Better external account position.
- Progress on IMF programme and policy reforms.
- Stronger remittance inflows.
- Increased confidence in Pakistan's ability to meet its external obligations.

IMPACT ON THE ECONOMY

- Supports foreign exchange reserves.
- Helps stabilize the exchange rate.
- Eases pressure on current account deficit.
- Provides room for social spending and development projects.

PERSISTENT CHALLENGES

- High public debt and debt servicing costs.
- Continued reliance on the IMF programme.
- External risks from global oil prices and geopolitical tensions.
- Structural weaknesses in exports and industrial growth.

WAY FORWARD

- Sustain remittance inflows through diaspora engagement.
- Implement structural reforms to boost exports.
- Broaden the tax base and improve revenue collection.
- Reduce dependence on short-term external financing.
- Invest in productivity and value-added sectors.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Record remittances and a credit upgrade provide a much-needed breather, but Pakistan's economic recovery will remain fragile without deep structural reforms and sustained policy consistency.

ESSAY PERSPECTIVE

"Remittances and external credit can buy time, but sustainable economic recovery requires structural reforms and export-led growth."

PAST PAPER ECHO

CSS 2023 Current Affairs:

"Discuss the role of remittances in Pakistan's economy and the challenges of achieving macroeconomic stability."

Record Remittances and a Credit Upgrade Cushion a Fragile Recovery

MEDIUM Continuity: New thread; folds together SBP's rate decision, the S&P; upgrade and record remittances into one macro-economy story to preserve topic diversity.

Essay Topic: Remittances as Pakistan's External-Sector Lifeline: Opportunities and Risks

Past Paper Echo: CSS 2020 Current Affairs: 'Remittances and their role in stabilising Pakistan's external account.'

A. Executive Summary

Pakistan's macroeconomic scorecard for the week rests on three linked data points. First, the State Bank's Monetary Policy Committee held its policy rate at 11.5 percent for a third consecutive meeting on 14 September, judging the stance appropriate to guide inflation — which rose to 11.1 percent year-on-year in August from 9.2 percent in July on the back of the renewed Middle East conflict — back toward its 5-7 percent medium-term target, while flagging that geopolitical uncertainty has increased since its last meeting. Second, Standard & Poor's upgraded Pakistan's sovereign credit rating to 'B', a milestone the SBP cited alongside foreign-exchange reserves that have surpassed their end-June 2026 target of $18 billion. Third, and most consequential for ordinary households, workers' remittances hit a record $41.6 billion in FY26, an 8.6 percent rise over FY25's $38.3 billion and, for the first time, a figure that exceeded the country's entire net export earnings of $30.1 billion — meaning remittances, not exports, are now doing the heavier lifting in offsetting Pakistan's roughly $40 billion trade deficit. Saudi Arabia and the UAE remain the largest single sources, together contributing well over $1.5 billion in a typical month. Taken together, these three data points describe an economy that is externally more stable than a year ago but still structurally dependent on diaspora transfers rather than a genuine export or investment-led recovery — a distinction CSS/PMS candidates should draw sharply in any essay on external-sector sustainability, since a remittance-financed current account is inherently more exposed to Gulf labour-market shocks than one financed by a diversified, competitive export base.

B. Key Arguments / Developments

- SBP held the policy rate at 11.5% for a third straight MPC meeting on Sept 14, 2026.
- August inflation rose to 11.1% y/y from July's 9.2%, driven partly by the Middle East conflict.
- MPC says medium-term inflation target remains 5-7%, with heightened geopolitical uncertainty.
- S&P; upgraded Pakistan's sovereign credit rating to 'B'.
- SBP's FX reserves have surpassed the end-June 2026 target of $18 billion.
- FY26 workers' remittances hit a record $41.6 billion, up 8.6% over FY25's $38.3 billion.
- Remittances ($41.6bn) exceeded net export earnings ($30.1bn) for the first time.
- Trade deficit of roughly $40 billion was substantially offset by remittance inflows.
- Saudi Arabia and UAE remain the two largest single-country remittance sources.
- Current account deficit for July stood at roughly $328 million.

C. Analytical Categories

Monetary

- Rate hold balances persistent inflation against the need to avoid choking a fragile recovery.
- Credit upgrade lowers Pakistan's future external borrowing costs at the margin.

External Sector

- Remittance dependence is a structural vulnerability tied to Gulf labour markets and exchange-rate policy.
- Export earnings growing more slowly than remittances signals unresolved competitiveness problems.

Fiscal

- Reserve accumulation strengthens Pakistan's negotiating position ahead of the IMF's fourth review.

D. Stakeholder Positions & Way Forward

Multi-Year Trend (annual workers' remittances)

2022: $31.2 billion → 2023: $27.0 billion → 2024: $31.9 billion → FY26: $41.6 billion (record)

Stakeholder Positions

- SBP: Held the policy rate steady, citing the twin cushion of remittance inflows and the credit upgrade.
- Rating agency (S&P;): Upgraded Pakistan's sovereign rating citing improved macroeconomic stability, a better external account position and stronger remittance inflows.
- Overseas Pakistani diaspora: The source of record inflows, drawn increasingly through formal banking channels rather than informal hawala/hundi networks.

Challenges Ahead

- High public debt and debt-servicing costs persist despite the improved external picture.
- Continued reliance on the IMF programme for macroeconomic stability.
- External risks from global oil prices and geopolitical tensions.
- Structural weaknesses in exports and industrial growth remain unresolved.

Way Forward

- Sustain remittance inflows through continued diaspora engagement.
- Implement structural reforms to boost exports rather than relying on remittances alone.
- Broaden the tax base and improve domestic revenue collection.
- Reduce dependence on short-term external financing.
- Invest in productivity and value-added sectors to build a durable external-sector cushion.

E. Statistical Digest

▸ 11.5% — SBP policy rate, held unchanged for a third consecutive MPC meeting	▸ 11.1% — year-on-year headline inflation in August 2026 (up from 9.2% in July)
▸ $41.6 billion — record workers' remittances for FY26 (July 2025-June 2026)	▸ 8.6% — year-on-year growth in FY26 remittances over FY25's $38.3 billion
▸ $30.1 billion — Pakistan's net export earnings for FY26	▸ ~$40 billion — approximate FY26 trade deficit
▸ $18 billion — end-June 2026 SBP FX reserves target, since surpassed	▸ 'B' — Pakistan's upgraded S&P; sovereign credit rating
▸ $328 million — current account deficit recorded for July 2026	▸ 5-7% — SBP's medium-term inflation target range

F. Quotes & Essay-Relevant Vocabulary

"said the current monetary stance remains appropriate given elevated but moderating inflation." — SBP Governor Jameel Ahmed

"called the remittance figure Pakistan's highest-ever annual total in history." — Adviser to the Finance Minister Khurram Schehzad

monetary policy committee | policy rate | sovereign credit rating | current account deficit | trade deficit | external sector | foreign exchange reserves | remittance inflows | diaspora | headline inflation | core inflation | medium-term target

G. Further In-Depth Study

- ARY News — 'Monetary policy: SBP retains interest rate 11.5 percent' (Sept 14, 2026)
- Outlook Business — 'Pak Receives Record $41.6 Billion in Remittances, Surpassing Total Exports'
- SBP official site (sbp.org.pk) — Monetary Policy Statement, Sept 14, 2026
- ProPakistani — 'Pakistan Records Highest-Ever Remittances of $41.6 Billion in FY26'

NATIONAL AFFAIRS | N-07

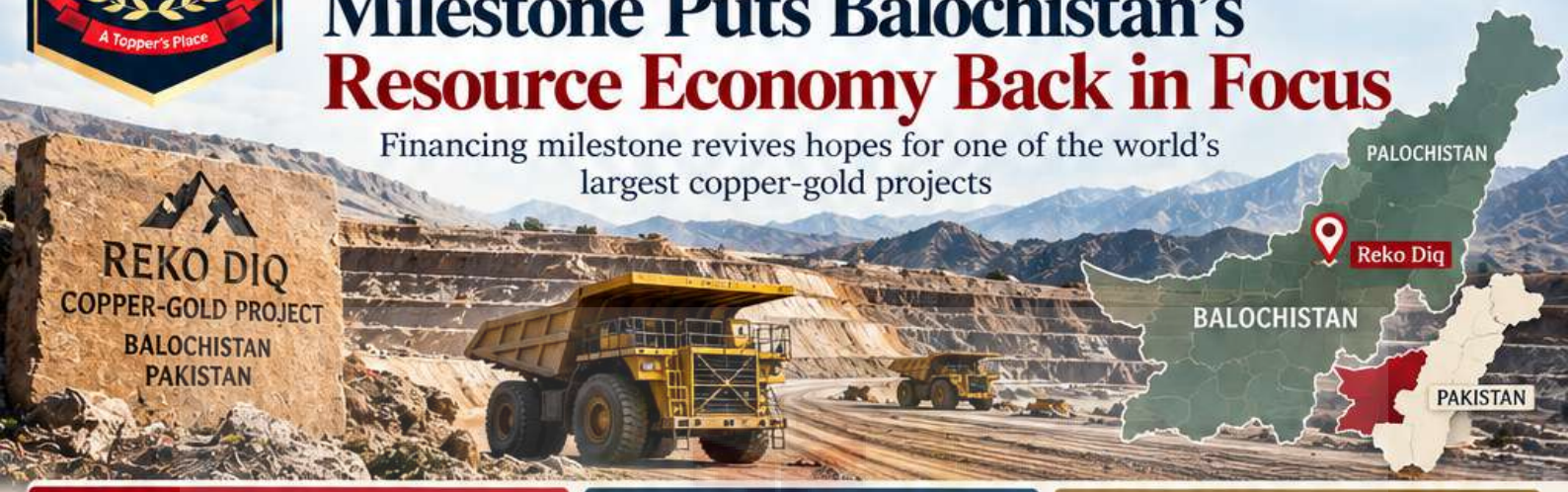
ICEP's CSS Weekly

Issue 19

September 20 – September 26, 2026

Reko Diq's Financing Milestone Puts Balochistan's Resource Economy Back in Focus

Financing milestone revives hopes for one of the world's largest copper-gold projects



WHAT HAPPENED?

- A key financing milestone was achieved for the Reko Diq copper-gold project.
- International lenders and partners moved forward on the project's financing plan.
- The development has reignited attention on Balochistan's untapped mineral potential.
- Seen as a major step towards turning the long-delayed project into a reality.

PROJECT SNAPSHOT

Location
Chagai District, Balochistan

Key Minerals
Copper & Gold (also significant silver)

Estimated Scale
One of the world's largest undeveloped copper-gold deposits

Project Partners
Government of Pakistan
Barrick Gold (majority stakeholder)
Other international partners

Status
Financing milestone achieved; project moving towards full-scale development.

STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE

- Transformational potential for Pakistan's economy.
- Can significantly increase exports and foreign exchange earnings.
- May create thousands of direct and indirect jobs, especially in Balochistan.
- Strengthens Pakistan's position in the global critical minerals supply chain.
- Can contribute to regional development and integration of Balochistan into the national economy.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES

- Boost in exports and foreign exchange reserves.
- Employment and skills development for local population.
- Infrastructure development in a backward region.
- Linkages with downstream industries (smelting, refining, manufacturing).
- Contribution to green transition due to global demand for copper and critical minerals.

CHALLENGES AHEAD

- Security risks in Balochistan.
- Ensuring fair benefit-sharing with local communities.
- Environmental concerns and sustainable mining practices.
- Regulatory, legal and political challenges.
- Managing external pressures and great power competition over critical minerals.

STAKEHOLDER REACTIONS

Government
Described the milestone as a major step towards economic revival.

Barrick Gold
Reaffirmed its commitment to the project.

Local Communities
Hope for jobs and development, but demand transparency and a fair share of benefits.

Experts
Emphasize the need for good governance, security and environmental safeguards.

WAY FORWARD

- Ensure transparent and inclusive governance.
- Strengthen security and rule of law.
- Address environmental and social concerns.
- Develop infrastructure and local human capital.
- Maximize value addition and linkages with domestic industries.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Reko Diq's financing milestone offers a historic opportunity to transform Balochistan's resource wealth into inclusive and sustainable economic development, provided security, governance and equitable benefit-sharing challenges are effectively addressed.

ESSAY TOPIC

"How can Pakistan leverage its mineral resources, particularly Reko Diq, for sustainable and inclusive development?"

PAST PAPER ECHO

CSS 2023 Pakistan Affairs:
"Discuss the potential of mineral resources in Pakistan for economic development and the challenges in their utilization."

ICEP CSS PMS PREPARATION

NATIONAL AFFAIRS · N-07

Reko Diq's Financing Milestone Puts Balochistan's Resource Economy Back in Focus

MEDIUM Continuity: New thread; durable exam-value mining/CPEC-adjacent story rather than a one-day news item.

Essay Topic: Mineral Wealth and Provincial Grievance: The Political Economy of Reko Diq

Past Paper Echo: CSS 2018 Current Affairs: 'Balochistan's resources and the question of provincial ownership.'

A. Executive Summary

Away from the week's security and diplomatic headlines, the Reko Diq copper-gold project in Balochistan's Chagai district continues to move from paper agreement toward physical construction, and it remains one of the clearest test cases in Pakistan's mining and federalism debates. Jointly owned by Canada's Barrick Gold (50 percent), the federal government (25 percent) and the Government of Balochistan (25 percent), with Saudi Arabia's Manara Minerals fund set to acquire a further 10-20 percent stake, the project reached financial close earlier this year on roughly $3.5 billion in project financing, with machinery already deployed at the site ahead of formal completion of documentation. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has directed authorities to upgrade the roughly 103-kilometre Nokandi-Mashkhel road link connecting the mine to Gwadar port — now reported over half complete — and to study a rail line to move an estimated 6,000 containers of concentrate a month via what would be one of the world's longest slurry pipelines. Barrick projects first production by the end of 2028, with the mine's full 37-year life expected to generate as much as $74 billion in free cash flow, split on a formula that has itself been politically contentious in a province that has long argued it receives too small a share of resources extracted from its own soil. For CSS/PMS candidates, Reko Diq is best treated less as a single news event and more as a running case study connecting several syllabus themes at once: the 18th Amendment's provincial ownership of mineral resources, foreign direct investment and sovereign-risk perception (the project's earlier decade lost to an $11 billion international arbitration award against Pakistan), CPEC-adjacent connectivity planning via Gwadar, and the security burden of protecting foreign workers and logistics corridors in an active insurgency-affected province.

B. Key Arguments / Developments

- Reko Diq is jointly owned by Barrick Gold (50%), federal govt (25%) and Balochistan govt (25%).
- Saudi Arabia's Manara Minerals fund is set to acquire a further 10-20% stake.
- Project reached financial close on roughly $3.5 billion in project financing.
- Machinery already deployed at site even before financial-close documentation was finalised.
- PM has ordered the Nokandi-Mashkhel road (103km) linking the mine to Gwadar be completed faster.
- That road link was reported over half complete as of the most recent briefing.
- Government is also studying a feasibility report for a rail link from Reko Diq to Gwadar.
- Plan envisions roughly 6,000 containers of concentrate transported to Gwadar monthly.
- First production targeted for the end of 2028; mine life estimated at 37 years.
- Barrick estimates the project could generate up to $74 billion in free cash flow over its life.
- Project follows an earlier decade lost to an $11 billion international arbitration award against Pakistan.

C. Analytical Categories

Economic

- Reko Diq is framed as a flagship test of Pakistan's ability to attract and retain FDI in mining.
- Revenue-sharing formula between federal and provincial governments remains a point of political sensitivity.

Constitutional/Federal

- 18th Amendment vests mineral ownership in provinces, shaping Balochistan's 25% equity stake.

Security

- Protecting the mine-to-Gwadar logistics corridor is a live counter-insurgency and force-protection challenge.

Strategic

- Project sits alongside CPEC-linked Gwadar development as part of China- and Gulf-adjacent connectivity plans.

D. Stakeholder Positions & Way Forward

Stakeholder Positions

- Government: Described the financing milestone as a major step towards economic revival for Balochistan.
- Barrick Gold: Reaffirmed its commitment to the project as majority operator and largest single stakeholder.
- Local communities: Hope for jobs and development, but demand transparency and a fair share of benefits.
- Independent experts: Emphasise the need for good governance, security and environmental safeguards alongside the investment.

Challenges Ahead

- Security risks in Balochistan along the project's transport corridor.
- Ensuring fair benefit-sharing with local communities historically distrustful of federal mining projects.
- Environmental concerns tied to large-scale open-pit copper-gold extraction.
- Regulatory, legal and political challenges around foreign equity and resource ownership.
- Managing external pressures and great-power competition over critical minerals.

Way Forward

- Ensure transparent and inclusive governance of project revenues and benefit-sharing.
- Strengthen security and rule of law along the mine-to-Gwadar logistics corridor.
- Address environmental concerns and sustainable mining practices from the outset.
- Develop local infrastructure and human capital rather than relying solely on imported expertise.
- Maximise value addition and linkages with domestic downstream industries (smelting, refining, manufacturing).

E. Statistical Digest

▸ 50% / 25% / 25% — Barrick Gold / federal government / Balochistan government ownership split	▸ 10-20% — stake Saudi Arabia's Manara Minerals is expected to acquire from the federal share
▸ $3.5 billion — approximate project financing secured at financial close	▸ 103 km — length of the Nokandi-Mashkhel road link to Gwadar port
▸ 6,000 — containers of mineral concentrate projected to move to Gwadar monthly	▸ 37 years — estimated life of mine
▸ $74 billion — Barrick's estimate of potential free cash flow over the mine's life	▸ 2028 — target year for first production
▸ $11 billion — prior international arbitration award against Pakistan in the earlier Reko Diq dispute	

F. Quotes & Essay-Relevant Vocabulary

“called the Reko Diq project 'revolutionary' for Balochistan's economy.” — Barrick Gold CEO Mark Bristow

“directed that upgradation of the road network to Gwadar be expedited without delay.” — PM Shehbaz Sharif

mineral rights | equity stake | financial close | concentrate | slurry pipeline | sovereign risk | international arbitration | foreign direct investment | resource nationalism | connectivity corridor | force protection | 18th Amendment devolution

G. Further In-Depth Study

- Arab News — 'PM Sharif orders upgradation of road network to link Reko Diq with Gwadar'
- Zameen.com News — 'Reko Diq machinery deployed at project site'
- Mining Technology — 'Reko Diq breaking down barriers in Pakistan's mining industry'
- Dawn — Reko Diq security and logistics coverage

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INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS | I - 01

ICEP's CSS Weekly

Issue 19

September 20 – September 26, 2026

Trump and Xi Meet at the White House

Managed Trade, Unmanaged Taiwan

Talks deliver a tentative trade truce and select cooperation, but deep strategic rivalries — especially over Taiwan — remain unresolved.



WHY DID THEY MEET?

- First in-person meeting since Trump's return to the White House.
- To stabilise strained US-China relations and manage economic competition.
- Focus on trade disputes, export controls and regional security flashpoints.
- Both sides aimed to prevent further escalation and maintain global stability.

KEY AGENDA ITEMS

- **Trade & Tariffs** — Review of tariffs, market access and supply chain resilience.
- **Technology & Export Controls** — Semiconductors, AI and high-tech restrictions.
- **Climate Cooperation** — Renewed commitment to work together on climate issues.
- **Regional Security** — Taiwan, South China Sea, North Korea and global conflicts.

MAIN OUTCOMES

- Agreement to stabilise trade relations and avoid further tariff escalation.
- Commitment to resume economic and people-to-people dialogue.
- Limited progress on climate cooperation.
- No breakthrough on Taiwan or core strategic differences.
- Both sides agreed to keep communication channels open to manage future crises.

TAIWAN: THE UNRESOLVED ISSUE



- US reaffirmed support for a "free and open Indo-Pacific."
- China reiterated its "one-China principle" and opposed any steps towards Taiwan's independence.
- Tensions remain high despite attempts to manage the issue.
- Risk of miscalculation continues to pose a serious threat to regional and global stability.

BROADER IMPLICATIONS

- Helps prevent a sharp deterioration in US-China relations.
- Provides temporary stability to the global economy and supply chains.
- Signals continued competition with selective cooperation.
- Unresolved Taiwan issue keeps the risk of conflict alive.
- Outcomes will shape the global balance of power and the future international order.

REACTIONS FROM KEY ACTORS

- **United States** — Described the meeting as "constructive" and a step towards stability.
- **China** — Called for mutual respect and warned against "interference" in Taiwan.
- **International Community** — Welcomed reduced tensions but urged concrete steps on trade, security and global issues.
- **Regional Allies** — Closely watching US-China dynamics, especially on Taiwan and Indo-Pacific security.

WAY FORWARD

- Maintain dialogue and crisis management mechanisms.
- Work towards a more predictable trade framework.
- Expand cooperation in climate, health and global economic stability.
- Reduce risks of military escalation in the Taiwan Strait.
- Address underlying structural rivalries through sustained diplomacy.

KEY TAKEAWAY

The Trump-Xi meeting reflects a pragmatic effort to manage competition and avoid open confrontation. While it offers temporary stability in trade and economic relations, the absence of progress on Taiwan underscores the enduring strategic rivalry between the two powers.

ESSAY TOPIC

"US-China Relations in the 21st Century: Managed Competition or a Path to Inevitable Conflict?"

PAST PAPER ECHO

CSS 2023 (International Affairs): "Assess the implications of great power competition for regional and global stability."

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS · I-01

Trump and Xi Meet at the White House: Managed Trade, Unmanaged Taiwan

HIGH Continuity: New thread; the long-scheduled summit fell within this issue's coverage week.

Essay Topic: US-China Relations: From Trade War to Managed Competition

Past Paper Echo: No direct past-paper precedent yet; connects to recurring CSS themes on US-China strategic competition.

A. Executive Summary

Chinese President Xi Jinping's first visit to Washington in more than a decade produced exactly the mixture of symbolism and modest substance analysts had predicted. Meeting Donald Trump at the White House on 24 September for a state visit that began with an arrival ceremony on the South Lawn, the two leaders agreed to extend their existing trade truce by two months, until 10 January, averting a snap-back of tariffs that had briefly touched triple-digit levels in 2025. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, who met Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng the day before, confirmed the extension but officials on both sides indicated no comprehensive deal on tariff schedules, rare-earth export controls or soybean purchases was reached at the leaders' level itself. The most consequential exchange concerned Taiwan: Xi pressed Trump in their private meeting to oppose Taiwanese independence and handle the issue 'prudently,' according to China's Xinhua news agency, adding pressure to a roughly $14 billion Taiwan arms package that Congress has approved but that the administration has held under review, officially to conserve munitions for the ongoing Iran war. Artificial intelligence and drug-precursor cooperation also featured, with Xi reportedly striking a cautious tone on AI safeguards. Foreign Policy magazine's assessment — 'lots of pomp, little progress' — captures the summit's essential character: both governments needed a stable-relations narrative for domestic and international audiences, but neither the trade architecture nor the Taiwan question was meaningfully resolved. For CSS/PMS candidates, the summit is a useful illustration of 'managed competition' as an analytical framework — a relationship neither side wants to rupture but neither is prepared to genuinely settle, with each incremental truce extension functioning as a way of deferring, rather than resolving, the underlying structural rivalry over trade, technology and the Indo-Pacific balance of power.

B. Key Arguments / Developments

- Xi's Sept 22-24 Washington visit was his first trip to the US capital in more than a decade.
- Trump and Xi held their formal White House meeting on Thursday, Sept 24, 2026.
- Bessent-He Lifeng talks the day before yielded a two-month trade-truce extension to Jan 10, 2027.
- No comprehensive deal was reached on tariffs, rare earths or soybean purchases at leaders' level.
- Xi urged Trump in private talks to oppose Taiwan independence and handle the issue prudently.
- A $14 billion Congressionally-approved Taiwan arms package remains under administration review.
- Administration says the Taiwan-arms hold is officially to conserve munitions for the Iran war.
- AI safeguards and drug-precursor (fentanyl) cooperation were also discussed.
- This was Xi's first visit to Washington and the first Trump-Xi meeting held on US soil, though the two leaders had already met twice in 2026 at Beijing and Busan.
- Analysts broadly assessed the summit as heavy on symbolism, light on concrete deliverables.

C. Analytical Categories

Strategic

- Extension-not-resolution pattern reflects 'managed competition' rather than genuine rapprochement.
- Taiwan arms-sale ambiguity functions as an active bargaining chip tied to the Iran-war theatre.

Economic

- Truce extension avoids near-term market shock but leaves core tariff/rare-earth disputes unresolved.

Diplomatic

- State-visit symbolism (arrival ceremony, planned Archives visit) signals both sides' interest in stability optics.

Regional

- Asian allies concerned Washington may trade away Taiwan support for economic wins with Beijing.

D. Stakeholder Positions & Way Forward

Stakeholder Positions

- United States: Described the meeting as constructive and a step towards stability.
- China: Called for mutual respect and warned against what it termed interference in Taiwan.
- International community: Welcomed reduced tensions but urged concrete follow-through on trade, security and global issues.
- Regional allies (Indo-Pacific): Watching the US-China dynamic closely, particularly on Taiwan and regional security.

Main Outcomes

- Agreement to stabilise trade relations and avoid further tariff escalation.
- Commitment to resume economic and people-to-people dialogue.
- Limited progress on climate cooperation.
- No breakthrough on Taiwan or the two sides' core strategic differences.
- Both sides agreed to keep communication channels open to manage future crises.

Way Forward

- Maintain dialogue and crisis-management mechanisms between Washington and Beijing.
- Work towards a more predictable, rules-based trade framework rather than truce-by-truce management.
- Expand cooperation in climate, health and global economic stability where interests align.
- Reduce risks of military escalation in the Taiwan Strait through sustained communication.

E. Statistical Digest

▸ Sept 24, 2026 — date of the formal Trump-Xi White House meeting	▸ 2 months — length of the trade-truce extension (to Jan 10, 2027)
▸ $14 billion — value of the Taiwan arms package currently under administration review	▸ 3 days — length of Xi's official visit to Washington
▸ 10+ years — time since Xi's last visit to Washington, D.C.	▸ 2025 — year mutual tariffs briefly exceeded 100% before the original truce

F. Quotes & Essay-Relevant Vocabulary

“described the meeting as 'a great meeting.'” — President Trump

“reported Xi urged Trump to handle the Taiwan question prudently.” — Xinhua News Agency (on Xi's remarks)

managed competition | trade truce | tariff snap-back | rare-earth export controls | state visit | arms package | strategic rivalry | Indo-Pacific balance | de-escalation | bargaining chip | bilateral summit | critical minerals

G. Further In-Depth Study

- Al Jazeera — 'Trump-Xi summit: Four key takeaways from the Washington, DC, meeting'
- Foreign Policy — 'Trump and Xi Talked a Lot but Accomplished Little' (Sept 24, 2026)
- MarketScreener/Reuters — 'Trump and Xi discuss trade, AI, Taiwan in Washington'
- Detroit News/Reuters — 'Trump welcomes Xi to Washington looking for a trade win'

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS | I - 02

ICEP's CSS Weekly

Issue 19

September 20 – September 26, 2026

Gaza's Stabilisation Force Remains Stuck Between Mandate and Deployment

Indonesia emerges as first likely troop contributor for Phase II, but key questions over mandate, governance and political consent persist.



WHAT IS THE ISSUE?

- A UN-authorised International Stabilisation Force (ISF) is planned for Gaza after the ceasefire framework.
- Implementation remains stuck due to differences over mandate, composition and political consent.
- Humanitarian crisis and security vacuum continue, raising urgency for deployment.
- Indonesia has emerged as the first likely troop contributor for Phase II.

KEY DEVELOPMENTS

- **UNSC Resolution 2803** authorised the ISF (Nov 2025, 13-0-2).
- **Indonesia** signals willingness to contribute troops in Phase II.
- Discussions ongoing over troop composition, rules of engagement and mandate.
- Continued Israeli operations and security concerns complicate deployment.
- Humanitarian needs in Gaza remain massive, with millions displaced.

MANDATE AND CORE TASKS

- Maintain ceasefire and prevent a return to large-scale violence.
- Provide security for civilians and humanitarian aid operations.
- Support demining and clearance of unexploded ordnance.
- Assist in rebuilding civil administration and essential services.
- Facilitate a political transition towards long-term stability in Gaza.

KEY STAKEHOLDERS

- **United Nations** — Authorised the ISF and continues consultations.
- **Indonesia** — First likely troop contributor for Phase II.
- **Israel** — Demands disarmament of Hamas and strong security guarantees.
- **Hamas** — Skeptical of foreign troops; insists on political process.
- **United States** — Supports the ISF but pushes for a clear mandate and reforms.
- **Regional/Arab States** — Call for credible political roadmap and Palestinian representation.

CHALLENGES AHEAD

- Lack of consensus on mandate and rules of engagement.
- Political resistance from key local actors.
- Coordination among multiple international and regional stakeholders.
- Huge financial and logistical requirements.
- Risk of renewed violence if deployment is delayed or inadequate.
- Need for a broader political process alongside security measures.

HUMANITARIAN IMPACT

- **2+ million** people affected in Gaza.
- **Severe shortages** of food, clean water, medicine and shelter.
- **Hospitals** operating under extreme pressure.
- Women and children among the highest casualties.
- Continued displacement and destruction of critical infrastructure.



WAY FORWARD

- Finalise a clear and realistic mandate for the ISF.
- Ensure inclusive international and regional participation.
- Link security efforts with a political roadmap for Gaza's future.
- Mobilise resources for humanitarian relief and reconstruction.
- Prevent spoilers from derailing the ceasefire process.

KEY TAKEAWAY

The ISF represents a crucial step towards stabilising Gaza, but lasting peace requires a clear mandate, genuine political commitment and a parallel process for inclusive governance and reconstruction.

ESSAY TOPIC

"The Role and Challenges of International Stabilisation Forces in Post-Conflict Reconstruction: Lessons for Gaza and Beyond."

PAST PAPER ECHO

CSS 2023 (International Affairs): "Discuss the challenges of conflict resolution in the Middle East and suggest a pathway to sustainable peace."

ICEP CSS PMS PREPARATION

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS · I-02

Gaza's Stabilisation Force Remains Stuck Between Mandate and Deployment

HIGH Continuity: Continues Issue 18's Gaza disarmament/ISF thread with this week's implementation-stage developments.

Essay Topic: Peacekeeping by Committee: The Politics of Multinational Stabilisation Forces

Past Paper Echo: CSS 2024 Current Affairs: 'Evaluate the prospects and limits of UN peacekeeping in protracted conflicts.'

A. Executive Summary

Ten months after UN Security Council Resolution 2803 authorised an International Stabilisation Force (ISF) for Gaza on a 13-0 vote, with Russia and China abstaining, the gap between mandate and deployment remains the defining feature of the Gaza file. The resolution's architecture is now familiar: a transitional 'Board of Peace' chaired by Donald Trump overseeing governance until the end of 2027, a Palestinian technocratic National Committee for the Administration of Gaza (NCAG) meant eventually to run civil administration, and the ISF itself — reportedly envisioned at around 5,000 personnel under an American general — tasked with demilitarising the strip, decommissioning Hamas's tunnel network, and training a new Palestinian police force. Indonesia has emerged as the first country expected to contribute troops for the force's Phase II deployment, a milestone diplomats view as important both practically and symbolically given the diplomatic weight of a Muslim-majority state's participation. Hamas, for its part, continues to resist full disarmament ahead of a complete Israeli withdrawal, with senior official Khaled Mashaal telling an Al Jazeera forum that surrendering weapons while Gazans remain 'under occupation' would make them 'easy victims to be eliminated.' Israel, meanwhile, continues limited strikes against what it says are residual militant cells even as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu asserts the broader goal of neutralising Gaza as a threat has 'largely been achieved.' For CSS/PMS candidates, the case illustrates a structural weakness common to multinational stabilisation mandates: Security Council authorisation is a necessary but insufficient condition for actual deployment, which depends on troop-contributing countries' domestic political appetite, on the sequencing dispute between disarmament and withdrawal, and on whether a nominally technocratic transitional authority can secure legitimacy among the population it is meant to govern.

B. Key Arguments / Developments

- UNSC Resolution 2803 (Nov 2025) authorised the ISF on a 13-0 vote, Russia and China abstaining.
- 'Board of Peace,' chaired by Trump, is mandated to oversee Gaza governance until end-2027.
- National Committee for the Administration of Gaza (NCAG) is the planned technocratic Palestinian body.
- ISF is reportedly envisioned at roughly 5,000 personnel under an American general.
- Indonesia is expected to be the first troop-contributing country for ISF's Phase II deployment.
- Hamas has stated it will not fully disarm before a complete Israeli withdrawal.
- Hamas political leader Khaled Mashaal argues disarmament without withdrawal makes Gazans vulnerable.
- Israel continues limited strikes on residual militant cells despite the broader ceasefire framework.
- Netanyahu says the goal of neutralising Gaza as a threat to Israel has 'largely been achieved.'
- Disarmament process, including tunnel mapping, was projected to take 200-300 days once begun.

C. Analytical Categories

Institutional

- Security Council authorisation does not guarantee actual force generation or timely deployment.
- Sequencing dispute (disarm-then-withdraw vs. withdraw-then-disarm) remains the core unresolved issue.

Political

- Muslim-majority troop contributors' participation carries outsized legitimacy value for the mission.

Humanitarian

- Reconstruction and governance depend on a functioning, legitimate transitional Palestinian authority.

Strategic

- US chairmanship of the Board of Peace ties Gaza's post-war order closely to broader US Middle East strategy.

D. Stakeholder Positions & Way Forward

Stakeholder Positions

- United Nations: Authorised the ISF via Resolution 2803 and continues consultations on troop generation.
- Indonesia: First likely troop contributor for Phase II deployment.
- Israel: Demands full disarmament of Hamas and strong security guarantees before further withdrawal.
- Hamas: Skeptical of foreign troops; insists disarmament follow, not precede, a political process and full withdrawal.
- United States: Supports the ISF but pushes for a clearer mandate and governance reforms.
- Regional/Arab states: Call for a credible political roadmap and genuine Palestinian representation in transitional governance.

Humanitarian Impact

- 2+ million people affected across Gaza.
- Severe shortages of food, clean water, medicine and shelter.
- Hospitals operating under extreme pressure.
- Women and children among the highest casualties.
- Continued displacement and destruction of critical infrastructure.

Way Forward

- Finalise a clear and realistic mandate for the ISF, including rules of engagement.
- Ensure inclusive international and regional participation in force generation.
- Link security deployment to a parallel political roadmap for Gaza's governance.
- Mobilise resources for humanitarian relief and reconstruction alongside stabilisation.
- Guard against spoilers seeking to derail the fragile ceasefire process.

E. Statistical Digest

▸ 13-0-2 — UNSC vote on Resolution 2803 (Russia, China abstained)	▸ ~5,000 — reported planned personnel strength of the International Stabilisation Force
▸ End of 2027 — expiry date for the Board of Peace and ISF mandate under the resolution	▸ 200-300 days — projected duration for Hamas's disarmament process once launched
▸ Nov 17, 2025 — date of the UN Security Council vote authorising the ISF	

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F. Quotes & Essay-Relevant Vocabulary

“warned disarmament under continued occupation would leave Gazans 'easy victims.'” — Hamas political leader Khaled Mashaal

“said Gaza would 'no longer pose a threat to Israel,' calling the goal largely achieved.” — Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu

stabilisation force | disarmament sequencing | technocratic authority | troop-contributing country | transitional governance | demilitarisation | peacekeeping mandate | board of peace | force generation | ceasefire architecture | civil administration | abstention (UNSC)

G. Further In-Depth Study

- SCMP/AP — 'UN approves US plan authorising international stabilisation force in Gaza'
- JNS — 'US general to oversee transfer of Hamas weapons to Gaza gov't, ISF under Israel-US deal'
- Al Jazeera Forum coverage — Khaled Mashaal remarks on disarmament
- INSS (Udi Dekel) — 'Hamas Disarmament Agreement: Motives, Core Elements, and Obstacles'

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INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS | I - 03

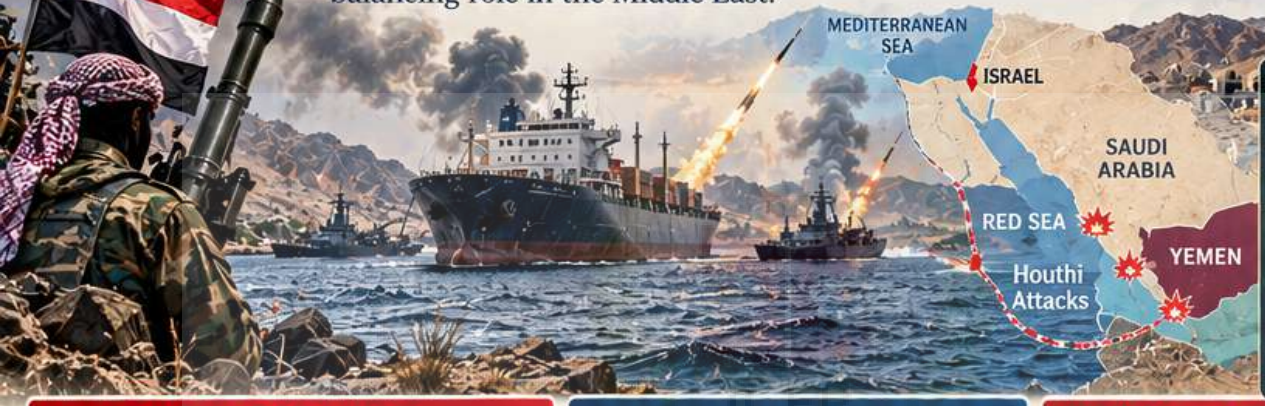
ICEP's CSS Weekly

Issue 19

September 20 – September 26, 2026

The Makkah Pact Faces Its First Real Stress Test as Houthi Strikes Widen

Escalating Houthi attacks in the Red Sea and on regional targets challenge the effectiveness of the Makkah Pact and test Pakistan's balancing role in the Middle East.



THE MAKKAH PACT

A regional understanding aimed at de-escalation, regional security and dialogue, with Pakistan playing a supportive and facilitative role.

WHAT IS HAPPENING?

- Houthi forces have intensified attacks on commercial ships in the Red Sea and launched strikes on regional targets.
- The escalation threatens freedom of navigation, regional stability and global trade routes.
- The Makkah Pact, seen as a platform for regional de-escalation, is facing its first major test.
- Tensions have raised fears of a wider regional conflict involving Iran, Saudi Arabia and Western powers.

RECENT HOUTHI ACTIONS

- Missile and drone attacks on commercial vessels in the Red Sea.
- Strikes on ships linked to Israel and its allies.
- Attacks on regional targets, deepening security concerns.
- Continued declaration of support for Gaza and resistance against Israel.
- Growing military capacity with the support of Iran.

REGIONAL AND GLOBAL REACTIONS

Saudi Arabia
Urges restraint and calls for the revival of dialogue under the Makkah Pact.

Iran
Reiterates political and material support to the Houthis.

United States
Increases naval presence in the Red Sea and warns against further escalation.

Israel
Faces continued Houthi attacks and calls for a stronger regional response.

Pakistan
Supports de-escalation, emphasises dialogue and highlights the importance of the Makkah Pact for regional peace.

International Community
Calls for protection of maritime trade routes and a renewed commitment to regional stability.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MAKKAH PACT

- Provides a platform for dialogue among key regional players (Saudi Arabia, Iran and others).
- Aims to reduce sectarian tensions and promote collective security.
- Seen as a confidence-building measure in an increasingly fragile Middle East.
- Its credibility is now under question due to the latest escalations.

CHALLENGES AHEAD

- Continued Houthi attacks despite diplomatic efforts.
- Lack of consensus among regional powers.
- Threats to global trade and energy supplies.
- Risk of a wider regional conflict involving Iran, Israel and Western powers.
- Need for a stronger and more effective implementation mechanism for the Makkah Pact.

POTENTIAL WAY FORWARD

- Revive and strengthen the Makkah Pact through sustained diplomacy.
- Enhance maritime security and protection of global trade routes.
- Engage Iran and regional stakeholders in a structured dialogue process.
- Address the underlying causes of the Yemen conflict, including political exclusion and humanitarian crisis.
- Pakistan can continue to play a constructive role as a neutral facilitator for regional peace.

KEY TAKEAWAY

The Makkah Pact's first major stress test highlights the urgent need for sustained dialogue, confidence-building measures and a comprehensive approach to regional security, as the Houthi escalation threatens to widen into a broader Middle East conflict.

ESSAY PERSPECTIVE

"The Makkah Pact and the Future of Regional Security in the Middle East: Can Dialogue Prevail Over Escalation?"

PAST PAPER ECHO

CSS 2023 (International Affairs):
"Discuss the causes and consequences of the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East and suggest measures for lasting peace in the region."

ICEP CSS PMS PREPARATION

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS · I-03

The Makkah Pact Faces Its First Real Stress Test as Houthi Strikes Widen

HIGH Continuity: Continues Issue 18's Hormuz/Makkah pact coverage as the crisis deepens without pact activation.

Essay Topic: Collective Defence Pacts in the Middle East: The Makkah Agreement Under Pressure

Past Paper Echo: CSS 2023 Current Affairs: 'Pakistan's foreign policy options amid Gulf security realignment.'

A. Executive Summary

The trilateral Makkah Joint Defence Agreement signed by Saudi Arabia, Turkiye and Pakistan on 7 August 2026 — which commits each signatory to treat an armed attack on any one of them as an attack on all — remains formally intact but practically untested as Houthi attacks on Saudi territory have intensified rather than abated. A fresh wave of missile and drone strikes on the Khamis Mushait airbase in southern Saudi Arabia, and the Houthis' capture of Perim Island at the mouth of the Red Sea, followed an attack on Saudi Arabia's 1,200-kilometre East-West pipeline that Riyadh blames on Iran-backed militias in Iraq — a strike serious enough that traders estimate a prolonged shutdown could remove as much as 4 percent of global oil supply given the Strait of Hormuz's continued blockade. Gulf Arab states postponed planned talks with Iran over Hormuz navigation arrangements amid the escalation, while the British maritime-security agency UKMTO confirmed a vessel was struck by a projectile inside the strait itself. Pakistan's own position has been carefully calibrated: Defence Minister Khawaja Asif said in early September that the pact 'will become operational' if the Houthi conflict spills further into Saudi territory, but the Foreign Office has since said 'more time is needed' to implement the agreement's practical mechanisms, confirming only that Pakistani forces are currently present in the Kingdom for training and logistical purposes rather than combat. For CSS/PMS candidates, the gap between Asif's conditional rhetoric and the Foreign Office's more cautious posture illustrates the classic dilemma of any mutual-defence pact: the ambiguity of when, exactly, a 'spillover' threshold has been crossed gives signatories room to avoid automatic entanglement even as it raises questions about the pact's credibility as a deterrent.

B. Key Arguments / Developments

- Makkah Joint Defence Agreement signed Aug 7, 2026 by Saudi Arabia, Turkiye and Pakistan.
- Pact commits signatories to treat an attack on one as an attack on all three.
- Houthis struck Khamis Mushait airbase with dozens of missiles/drones in mid-September.
- Houthis captured Perim Island at the mouth of the Red Sea, tightening pressure on shipping.
- Saudi Arabia's 1,200km East-West pipeline was knocked offline; Riyadh blames Iraq-based Iran-backed militias.
- A prolonged pipeline shutdown could remove up to ~4% of global oil supply, traders estimate.
- Gulf states postponed Hormuz-related talks with Iran amid the escalation.
- UKMTO confirmed a vessel was struck by a projectile inside the Strait of Hormuz.
- Defence Minister Khawaja Asif said the pact would become operational if conflict spills into Saudi territory.
- Pakistan's Foreign Office has since said 'more time is needed' to implement the pact's mechanisms.
- Pakistani forces are currently in Saudi Arabia for training/logistics, not combat deployment.

C. Analytical Categories

Strategic

- Ambiguity over the 'spillover' trigger preserves signatories' flexibility but weakens deterrent credibility.
- Pact brings together the Muslim world's largest nuclear-armed state, a major NATO army, and the Gulf's largest economy.

Economic

- Continued Hormuz blockade and pipeline disruption threaten a fresh global oil-price shock.

Diplomatic

- Postponed Gulf-Iran Hormuz talks signal wider regional diplomacy is also being destabilised.

D. Stakeholder Positions & Way Forward

Stakeholder Positions

- Saudi Arabia: Urges restraint and calls for revival of dialogue under the Makkah Pact framework.
- Iran: Reiterates political and material support to the Houthis, complicating de-escalation.
- United States: Increased naval presence in the Red Sea and warns against further escalation.
- Israel: Faces continued Houthi attacks and calls for a stronger regional response.
- Pakistan: Supports de-escalation, emphasises dialogue, and highlights the Pact's importance for regional peace.
- International community: Calls for protection of maritime trade routes and renewed commitment to regional stability.

Recent Developments

- Missile and drone attacks on commercial vessels in the Red Sea.
- Strikes on ships linked to Israel and its allies.
- Attacks on regional targets deepening security concerns.
- Continued Houthi declarations of support for Gaza and resistance against Israel.
- Growing Houthi military capacity attributed to Iranian support.

Way Forward

- Revive and strengthen the Makkah Pact through sustained, structured diplomacy.
- Enhance maritime security and protection of global trade routes through the Bab al-Mandeb.
- Engage Iran and regional stakeholders in a structured dialogue process rather than isolation alone.
- Address the underlying causes of the Yemen conflict, including political exclusion and humanitarian crisis.
- Pakistan can continue to play a constructive role as a neutral facilitator between Riyadh and Tehran.

E. Statistical Digest

▸ Aug 7, 2026 — date the Makkah Joint Defence Agreement was signed	▸ 73 — civilians injured in one wave of Houthi attacks on Saudi cities (per coalition figures)
▸ 1,200 km — length of Saudi Arabia's East-West oil pipeline, built to bypass the Strait of Hormuz	▸ ~4% — share of global oil supply at risk from a prolonged pipeline shutdown
▸ 3 — countries party to the Makkah pact (Saudi Arabia, Turkiye, Pakistan)	▸ ~170 — estimated Pakistani nuclear warheads, cited in analyses of the pact's strategic weight

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F. Quotes & Essay-Relevant Vocabulary

“said there is 'no ambiguity' that spillover into Saudi Arabia would activate the pact.” — Defence Minister Khawaja Asif

“said 'more time is needed' to implement the Makkah Defence Pact.” — Pakistan Foreign Office spokesperson

mutual defence pact | collective deterrence | spillover threshold | strait blockade | proxy conflict | pipeline sabotage | maritime security | coalition warfare | strategic ambiguity | force posture | energy security | trilateral agreement

G. Further In-Depth Study

- Middle East Forum — 'Saudi Arabia Faces Its First Mecca Defense Pact Test'
- The Star (Reuters) — 'Houthis strike Saudi targets anew as talks over Strait of Hormuz stall'
- UNI India — 'Pakistan Foreign Office says more time is needed to implement Makkah Defence Pact'
- GlobalSecurity.org — 'Makkah Joint Defence Agreement' background

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EXTENDED MODEL ANSWER II — THE MAKKAH PACT & REGIONAL SECURITY

Current Affairs — CSS 20 Marks

Question: "The Makkah Pact is facing its first major test as Houthi attacks intensify and instability threatens the security of critical maritime routes." Critically evaluate the effectiveness of Pakistan's diplomatic and security role under the Pact in promoting regional de-escalation, and identify the challenges to collective regional security in the Middle East.

Introduction

The Makkah Joint Defence Agreement, signed by Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Turkiye on 7 August 2026, has emerged at a particularly difficult moment for Middle Eastern security. The agreement provides that an armed attack against one member is to be regarded as an attack against all, while officially defining itself as defensive and consistent with Article 51 of the UN Charter. Its first serious test has emerged with intensified Houthi attacks on Saudi territory and threats to Red Sea navigation and the Bab al-Mandeb. Pakistan has responded through condemnation, diplomatic engagement, support for Saudi sovereignty and advocacy of dialogue, while simultaneously developing the Pact's institutional and defence mechanisms. Its effectiveness, however, should presently be judged as partial: Pakistan has demonstrated considerable diplomatic utility and political solidarity, but the Pact's collective-security mechanism remains in an early stage of operationalization.

1. The strategic significance of the Makkah Pact

The Pact represents an attempt by three important Muslim states to develop a framework for collective deterrence and cooperative security. Its significance rests on four pillars: collective defence, strategic deterrence, defence cooperation and regional stability. The agreement treats an armed attack on one member as an attack on all, provides for enhanced defence cooperation, seeks greater coordination among the three militaries, is officially described as defensive rather than directed against another state, and invokes the right of collective self-defence under Article 51 of the UN Charter. Therefore, its immediate value is not simply military. A credible collective-defence arrangement can potentially raise the cost of escalation and create diplomatic space for de-escalation.

2. Why the Houthi crisis constitutes the Pact's first major test

The current Yemen crisis has transformed the Pact from a newly signed agreement into a practical security question. Houthi attacks have extended beyond the Yemeni theatre to Saudi cities and economic infrastructure, while threats to Red Sea shipping have raised concerns over freedom of navigation and global commerce; Pakistan itself has formally condemned Houthi threats against commercial shipping in the Red Sea. The strategic importance of the crisis derives from the Bab al-Mandeb, a critical maritime chokepoint connecting the Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden. Its destabilization can generate a chain reaction: Houthi attacks lead to shipping insecurity, higher insurance and freight costs, disruption of energy flows, regional economic pressure, and wider geopolitical escalation. Recent reporting has also highlighted Houthi advances around strategically important parts of Yemen and growing pressure on regional maritime routes. Consequently, the crisis tests not merely whether the Pact can defend Saudi Arabia, but whether it can contribute to regional de-escalation without producing a wider military confrontation.

3. Pakistan's diplomatic role: the strongest dimension of its response

Pakistan has so far emphasised diplomacy alongside deterrence, rather than immediately converting the Pact into a military intervention in Yemen. Pakistan's relations with both Saudi Arabia and Iran give Islamabad a potentially useful diplomatic channel: it has repeatedly emphasised dialogue while maintaining its support for Saudi sovereignty, and its leadership has also engaged Iranian officials regarding the wider regional crisis. This produces an important diplomatic balance — security partnership with Saudi Arabia combined with communication with Iran and a preference for negotiated de-escalation — which can help prevent the Makkah Pact from being interpreted solely as an anti-Iran military bloc. This

is significant because collective security does not necessarily mean collective war: at the first Strategic Political and Defence Committee meeting in Istanbul on 31 August 2026, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Turkiye reaffirmed their commitment to regional peace, restraint, de-escalation and peaceful resolution of crises, and agreed to institutionalise cooperation under the Pact. Pakistan has since broadened diplomatic coordination further: Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Turkiye and Egypt met in New York on 21 September 2026, emphasising consultation, diplomacy, regional stability and opposition to attacks against Saudi Arabia — indicating an emerging preference for a wider regional diplomatic framework rather than relying exclusively on the three-member Pact.

4. Pakistan's security role: deterrence without immediate intervention

Pakistan's security contribution has so far operated at several levels. On defence cooperation, the Pact envisages training, capacity building, exchange of best practices, defence technology cooperation, research cooperation and stronger military cohesion, as Pakistan's Foreign Office has explicitly described. On institutionalisation, the first committee meeting agreed to establish a Secretariat in Saudi Arabia, initially headed by a Pakistani Secretary-General for three years, giving Pakistan an institutional role rather than merely a symbolic one. And on the existing bilateral defence relationship, Pakistan already maintains defence cooperation with Saudi Arabia, including personnel involved in training and logistical functions — the Makkah Pact therefore builds upon, rather than completely replaces, an existing security relationship.

5. Pakistan's restraint is itself a form of strategic effectiveness

A major analytical point is that non-intervention should not automatically be equated with failure. When Houthi attacks intensified, Pakistan initially did not announce direct military action under the Makkah Pact; Reuters reported on 10 September that no military response under the Pact had been discussed at that stage. This restraint has strategic advantages: it avoids immediate expansion of the Yemen war, reduces the risk of direct Pakistan-Iran confrontation, prevents the Pact from becoming an explicitly anti-Iran alliance, preserves Pakistan's diplomatic channels, and keeps escalation management possible. Thus Pakistan faces a difficult equation — credible deterrence without unnecessary escalation — that is central to evaluating its role.

6. But Pakistan's security role faces an operational credibility problem

The greatest limitation is the gap between legal commitment and operational readiness. The Pact says an armed attack on one member constitutes an attack on all, yet at the time of the Houthi escalation its institutional machinery was still being developed. Pakistan's Foreign Office itself described the Pact's operationalisation as being at an early stage and stated that subsequent mechanisms had to be established. Deterrence requires not only a treaty commitment but also clearly established command, intelligence, logistics, rules of engagement and force-generation mechanisms; until these become operational, the Pact's deterrent value remains partly prospective. The latest development nevertheless shows movement in this direction: on 25 September, the three foreign ministers discussed convening an urgent meeting of their chiefs of staff to explore ways to assist Saudi Arabia under the Pact.

7. The maritime-security dimension makes the crisis larger than Yemen

The security of the Red Sea and Bab al-Mandeb has consequences extending far beyond Saudi Arabia, connecting to global energy transportation, Asia-Europe trade, food supply chains, international shipping, insurance markets and regional economic stability. Pakistan has explicitly stated that threats to commercial shipping endanger freedom of navigation and global commerce. For Pakistan, maritime insecurity has an additional dimension because Pakistani-flagged vessels and national maritime interests could become directly exposed. Therefore, Islamabad's interest is simultaneously Saudi security, maritime security, international trade and Pakistan's own national security.

8. Major challenges to collective regional security

Several structural challenges limit what any pact of this kind can achieve. Proxy conflicts and competing geopolitical alignments mean the Yemen conflict intersects with wider competition involving Iran, Saudi Arabia, Israel, the United States, Turkiye, Gulf states and non-state armed groups, so different states

perceive the same threat differently. The Iran-Saudi security dilemma is particularly acute for Pakistan, which must manage alliance obligations to Riyadh without converting strategic competition with Tehran into permanent confrontation. Non-state actors complicate conventional collective defence, since the Houthis are a non-state armed actor and the Pact's language on an 'armed attack' does not automatically resolve every operational question involving proxy warfare, attribution and proportionality. The region's fragmented security architecture — overlapping bilateral agreements, Gulf institutions, Western military partnerships, ad hoc coalitions and emerging arrangements like the Makkah Pact — produces institutional fragmentation rather than a single accepted system. There is also a risk that militarising maritime routes further could increase the probability of miscalculation even as it raises deterrence, meaning maritime security requires communication channels, rules of engagement and deconfliction mechanisms alongside naval capability. Finally, the Houthi crisis cannot be separated completely from the broader Middle Eastern instability involving Iran, Israel, Gaza and Gulf security, so a Yemen-only military solution is unlikely to create a comprehensive regional security order.

9. How can the Makkah Pact become more effective?

Several steps could strengthen the Pact's practical effectiveness. First, operationalise collective defence by establishing clear procedures running from threat assessment through consultation, attribution, decision-making and proportional response. Second, build a joint maritime-security mechanism combining coordinated surveillance, intelligence sharing, early-warning systems, protection for commercial shipping, and search-and-rescue capability. Third, maintain diplomatic channels with Iran so that collective defence does not become synonymous with regional bloc politics. Fourth, integrate diplomacy with deterrence as the most sustainable formula: deterrence to prevent aggression, combined with diplomacy to prevent escalation. Fifth, broaden regional consultation, since the emerging four-country coordination involving Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Turkiye and Egypt could complement the three-member Pact. Sixth, keep maritime security anchored in international law, with freedom of navigation and protection of civilian shipping as central principles rather than another arena of great-power confrontation. Seventh, address the Yemen conflict politically, since long-term stability requires an inclusive Yemeni political settlement rather than reliance on military deterrence alone.

Conclusion

The Houthi escalation has indeed provided the first substantial practical test of the Makkah Joint Defence Agreement. Pakistan's response demonstrates a deliberate combination of strategic solidarity, diplomatic engagement, deterrence-building and restraint. Its contribution has been particularly visible in the institutionalisation of the Pact, support for Saudi security, advocacy of freedom of navigation and continued emphasis on dialogue and de-escalation. Yet its effectiveness cannot presently be measured by military outcomes alone. The Pact is still developing its operational architecture, while the Yemen conflict involves non-state actors, proxy dynamics and wider Iran-Saudi and regional rivalries. The latest decision to explore assistance to Saudi Arabia through an urgent chiefs-of-staff meeting indicates movement from political commitment towards practical implementation, but the precise scope of that assistance remains to be determined. Ultimately, Pakistan's strategic challenge is to make the Makkah Pact a mechanism of collective deterrence without allowing it to become another instrument of regional polarization. Its greatest contribution to Middle Eastern security would therefore lie in combining credible defence with sustained diplomacy: deterrence against aggression, protection of maritime commerce, and negotiation before confrontation becomes irreversible.

Why This Answer Is Examiner-Oriented

The answer should be remembered through this analytical chain: Makkah Pact → collective deterrence → Houthi test → Pakistan's diplomacy → limited operationalization → maritime-security threat → Iran-Saudi dilemma → proxy warfare → fragmented regional order → deterrence + diplomacy as the sustainable framework. This is the distinction between a Current Affairs answer that merely narrates events and a CSS answer that uses current events to analyse Pakistan's strategic choices and their regional implications.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS | I - 04

ICEP's CSS Weekly

Issue 19

September 20 – September 26, 2026

India and Pakistan Trade Protests After a Rare Naval Collision

A rare maritime incident in disputed waters sparks diplomatic protests, raises naval safety concerns and adds to regional tensions.





WHAT HAPPENED?

A rare collision occurred between Indian and Pakistani naval vessels in a disputed maritime area.

Both sides exchanged diplomatic protests, blaming each other for the incident.

Neither side reported significant casualties, but the incident raised serious concerns.

The incident has added to existing tensions between the two nuclear-armed neighbours.

KEY FACTS AT A GLANCE

Incident Type
Naval collision (rare incident)

Location
Disputed maritime area (Arabian Sea)

Involved
Indian and Pakistani naval vessels

Casualties
No major casualties reported

Aftermath
Mutual diplomatic protests and ongoing investigations

Current Status
Tensions persist; risk of further incidents remains

POSSIBLE CAUSES

Close naval manoeuvres in a disputed area.

Lack of clear communication between the two navies.

Differing interpretations of maritime boundaries.

Heightened military vigilance amid broader regional tensions.

Operational or navigational error cannot be ruled out.

REACTIONS FROM KEY ACTORS

Pakistan
Condemned Indian actions and lodged a formal protest.

India
Accused Pakistan of reckless manoeuvring and issued a strong protest.

International Community
Urged restraint, dialogue and adherence to international maritime law.

Maritime Experts
Called for an impartial investigation and improved naval safety mechanisms.

REGIONAL CONTEXT

Long-standing maritime dispute between India and Pakistan, including overlapping claims in the Arabian Sea.

Increasing naval deployments and military exercises in the region.

Growing strategic competition in the broader Indo-Pacific.

Importance of the Arabian Sea for global trade and energy supplies.

Need for effective crisis management to prevent miscalculation.

STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE

Highlights the risks of escalation in the maritime domain.

Underscores the need for confidence-building measures and naval communication protocols.

Has implications for regional stability, freedom of navigation and the security of Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOCs).

WAY FORWARD

Establish direct naval communication channels.

Strengthen maritime confidence-building measures.

Adhere to international maritime law (UNCLOS).

Promote dialogue to manage bilateral tensions.

Ensure freedom of navigation and the safety of maritime routes.

KEY TAKEAWAY

The rare naval collision highlights the need for effective communication, confidence-building measures and adherence to international maritime law to prevent escalation and ensure stability in the region.

ESSAY TOPIC

"Maritime Security in South Asia: Challenges, Confidence-Building Measures and the Way Forward in the Context of India-Pakistan Relations."

PAST PAPER ECHO

CSS 2023 (International Affairs):
"Discuss the significance of the Indian Ocean for regional and global politics and the challenges to its security."

India and Pakistan Trade Protests After a Rare Naval Collision

MEDIUM Continuity: New thread; concrete, verifiable incident distinct from broader India-Pakistan security themes covered in prior issues.

Essay Topic: Incidents at Sea: Confidence-Building Measures and Their Limits in South Asia

Past Paper Echo: CSS 2020 Current Affairs: 'Confidence-building measures between India and Pakistan: an assessment.'

A. Executive Summary

A high-speed naval encounter roughly 220 kilometres east of Oman has revived a rare category of India-Pakistan friction: an actual physical collision between the two navies. On the evening of 15 September, the Pakistan Navy's recently commissioned Yarmook-class corvette PNS Hunain, participating in Pakistan's SEASPARK-26 fleet exercise that began off Karachi on 1 September, collided with the Indian Navy's Kolkata-class guided-missile destroyer INS Kolkata, which was on what New Delhi describes as a routine surveillance mission. India's account holds that the Pakistani vessel approached at high speed and executed an unsafe, unprofessional overtaking manoeuvre; Pakistan's account, delivered through a Foreign Office protest of its own, holds that the Indian warship carried out a provocative manoeuvre inside Pakistan's Exclusive Economic Zone during Pakistan's own declared exercise. PNS Hunain suffered heavy damage and returned to harbour; INS Kolkata continued its mission largely undamaged. Both capitals summoned the other's charge d'affaires within 24 hours of each other — India first, citing a violation of the 1991 bilateral agreement on advance notification of naval exercises and movements, and Pakistan in response, framing the incident as an EEZ incursion. Commentators have drawn a direct parallel to the 2011 INS Godavari-PNS Babur standoff, though this incident involved actual contact between vessels rather than a tense but non-contact face-off. Neither government has signalled any military response, with both instead relying on the diplomatic-protest channel — itself a modest reassurance given that the encounter occurred barely more than a year after the two countries' most serious military confrontation in decades. For CSS/PMS candidates, the episode is a compact case study in maritime confidence-building measures, their partial success (no shooting, only protests) and their limits (a physical collision occurring at all, on the anniversary window of heightened bilateral tension).

B. Key Arguments / Developments

- Collision occurred Sept 15, 2026, roughly 220km east of Oman in the North Arabian Sea.
- Involved PNS Hunain (Pakistan) and INS Kolkata (India), a guided-missile destroyer.
- PNS Hunain was participating in Pakistan's SEASPARK-26 exercise, launched Sept 1 off Karachi.
- India says the Pakistani vessel executed an unsafe high-speed overtaking manoeuvre.
- Pakistan says the Indian warship conducted a provocative manoeuvre inside its EEZ.
- PNS Hunain suffered heavy damage and returned to harbour; INS Kolkata was largely undamaged.
- India summoned Pakistan's charge d'affaires first, citing the 1991 bilateral naval-notification agreement.
- Pakistan reciprocated by summoning India's charge d'affaires over the alleged EEZ incursion.
- Neither government has signalled any military response; both relied on diplomatic protest.
- Commentators compare the incident to the 2011 INS Godavari-PNS Babur standoff.
- Incident comes roughly a year after the two countries' most serious recent military confrontation.

C. Analytical Categories

Diplomatic

- Reciprocal, near-simultaneous protests suggest both sides deliberately kept the incident within diplomatic bounds.

Legal

- Dispute centres on competing interpretations of the 1991 agreement and international collision-avoidance rules.

Strategic

- Incident underscores the risk of miscalculation from routine naval activity in contested waters.

Regional

- Occurs against the backdrop of still-fragile post-conflict crisis-management arrangements between the two states.

D. Stakeholder Positions & Way Forward

Stakeholder Positions

- Pakistan: Condemned Indian actions and lodged a formal diplomatic protest.
- India: Accused Pakistan of reckless manoeuvring and issued its own strong protest.
- International community: Urged restraint, dialogue and adherence to international maritime law.
- Maritime security experts: Called for an impartial investigation and improved naval safety/communication mechanisms.

Possible Causes

- Close naval manoeuvres conducted in a disputed maritime area.
- Lack of clear real-time communication between the two navies.
- Differing interpretations of maritime boundary claims.
- Heightened military vigilance amid broader regional tensions.
- Operational or navigational error cannot be ruled out pending investigation.

Way Forward

- Establish direct naval communication channels between the two navies.
- Strengthen maritime confidence-building measures beyond the 1991 notification agreement.
- Adhere strictly to international maritime law (UNCLOS) in disputed-area operations.
- Promote dialogue to manage bilateral tensions arising from the incident.
- Ensure freedom of navigation and the safety of maritime routes in the Arabian Sea.

E. Statistical Digest

▸ Sept 15, 2026 — date of the naval collision	▸ 220 km — approximate distance east of Oman where the incident occurred
▸ 1991 — year of the bilateral India-Pakistan naval notification/incidents-prevention agreement	▸ Sept 1, 2026 — start date of Pakistan's SEASPARK-26 naval exercise
▸ 2011 — year of the comparable INS Godavari-PNS Babur naval standoff	

ICEP CSS-PMS PREPARATION

F. Quotes & Essay-Relevant Vocabulary

“described the Pakistani vessel's conduct as 'unacceptable and unprofessional.'” — Indian MEA sources

“called the Indian vessel's action a 'provocative and unacceptable' manoeuvre inside its EEZ.” — Pakistan's Foreign Office

Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) | guided-missile destroyer | corvette | naval notification agreement | confidence-building measure | charge d'affaires | collision-avoidance rules | fleet exercise | maritime incident | crisis management | diplomatic protest | reciprocal summons

G. Further In-Depth Study

- The Express Tribune — 'Pakistan protests Indian navy vessel's EEZ incursion' (Sept 17, 2026)
- The Print/PTI — 'Pakistan summons Indian diplomat over naval collision in Arabian Sea'
- Marine Insight — 'Pakistan Navy ship collides with Indian warship in Arabian Sea'
- Free Press Journal — 'India-Pakistan Naval Face-Off: Why 2026 Incident Reminds Of 2011 Standoff'

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PREPARATION

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS | I - 05

ICEP's CSS Weekly

Issue 19

September 20 – September 26, 2026

Congress Passes the Graham Sanctions Act, Raising the Stakes for Russia

New US legislation targets Russia's energy exports and third-country facilitators, signalling a tougher phase in the Ukraine war and global energy geopolitics.



WHAT IS THE GRAHAM SANCTIONS ACT?

- US legislation passed by Congress to impose tougher sanctions on Russia.
- Targets Russia's energy exports, including oil, gas and related services.
- Introduces secondary sanctions on third countries that help Russia evade existing sanctions.
- Aims to increase economic pressure on Russia and curtail its war-fighting capacity.

KEY PROVISIONS

- Higher tariffs and sanctions on Russian energy exports.
- Secondary sanctions on countries, banks and firms dealing in Russian oil, gas and related products.
- Restrictions on financial transactions and access to the US market.
- Presidential discretion to expand the list of sanctioned entities.
- Support measures for Ukraine, including security and economic assistance.

TARGETS AND SCOPE

- Russian oil, gas and petroleum products.
- Energy companies, traders and shipping firms.
- Third countries facilitating sanctions evasion (e.g. via re-exports, shadow fleets, front companies).
- Financial institutions providing services to sanctioned entities.
- Sectors linked to Russia's military-industrial complex.

REACTIONS FROM KEY ACTORS

United States
Bipartisan support in Congress; portrayed as a stronger stance against Russian aggression.

Russia
Condemned the act as "illegal and hostile", vowed counter-measures.

European Union
Welcomed the move and called for closer transatlantic coordination.

Ukraine
Hailed the legislation as a significant step to weaken Russia's war capacity.

China
Urged restraint, warning against unilateral sanctions with extraterritorial effects.

POTENTIAL IMPACTS

- Further strain on Russia's economy and energy revenues.
- Increased global energy price volatility.
- Pressure on third countries to reduce trade with Russia.
- Greater alignment among US and European allies.
- Possible Russian retaliation, including disruption of energy supplies or escalation in Ukraine.

CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

- Effective implementation depends on international cooperation.
- Risk of pushing Russia closer to alternative partners (e.g. China, Iran).
- Potential negative impact on global energy markets and importing countries.
- Sanctions evasion through complex networks may continue.
- Sustained unity among allies remains uncertain.

WAY FORWARD

- Ensure coordinated implementation with allies.
- Strengthen monitoring of sanctions evasion networks.
- Support global energy market stability.
- Maintain diplomatic channels to manage escalation risks.
- Continue support for Ukraine's defence and reconstruction.

KEY TAKEAWAY

The Graham Sanctions Act marks a significant escalation in the West's economic offensive against Russia, but its success will depend on effective implementation, allied unity and management of global energy risks.

ESSAY PERSPECTIVE

"Assess the effectiveness of economic sanctions as a tool in contemporary conflicts with reference to the Russia-Ukraine war."

PAST PAPER ECHO

CSS 2023 (International Affairs):
"Critically evaluate the impact of economic sanctions on state behaviour in the 21st century."

ICEP CSS PMS PREPARATION

Congress Passes the Graham Sanctions Act, Raising the Stakes for Russia

HIGH Continuity: Continues Issue 18's Graham Act/Ukraine coverage, now updated with the bill's signature into law.

Essay Topic: Secondary Sanctions and Energy Diplomacy: Assessing the Graham Act's Likely Impact

Past Paper Echo: CSS 2022 Current Affairs: 'Economic sanctions as instruments of coercive diplomacy.'

A. Executive Summary

The Lindsey O. Graham Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act of 2026 completed its long legislative journey this month, clearing the Senate 86-11 on 7 August, passing the House 262-159 on 16 September, and being signed into law by President Trump on 18 September — a measure its lead sponsors frame as a tribute to the late Senator Graham, who died shortly before the bill's final passage. The Act gives the president discretionary authority to impose tariffs of up to 100 percent on countries that purchase Russian energy or otherwise help Russia evade existing sanctions, alongside new sanctions targeting Russian officials, banks, and the so-called 'shadow fleet' of tankers used to move sanctioned oil, while also extending existing measures against Iran. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called the legislation 'an extremely powerful tool' capable of forcing Russia toward peace, while the Kremlin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov warned the bill would 'complicate' rather than assist any peace settlement, framing new sanctions as an 'unfriendly action.' Because the law's core mechanism is secondary — targeting third countries that buy Russian energy rather than Russia directly — its practical bite depends heavily on how aggressively the White House chooses to use its new discretionary tariff authority against major purchasers such as India and China, both of which have substantially increased imports of discounted Russian crude since 2022. For CSS/PMS candidates, the Graham Act is best analysed through the lens of secondary-sanctions theory: such measures can meaningfully raise the cost of evasion for a targeted state, but only if the sanctioning power is willing to accept friction with its own trading partners and allies who continue dealing with the target — a willingness that, for now, remains untested since the Act grants authority rather than mandating its immediate use.

B. Key Arguments / Developments

- Senate passed the bill 86-11 on Aug 7, 2026; House passed it 262-159 on Sept 16, 2026.
- President Trump signed the Act into law on Sept 18, 2026.
- Bill authorises tariffs of up to 100% on purchasers of Russian energy or sanctions-evasion enablers.
- New sanctions target Russian officials, banks, and the 'shadow fleet' of tankers.
- The Act also extends existing US sanctions measures against Iran.
- Legislation is named for the late Senator Lindsey Graham, a lead architect of the bill.
- Zelenskyy called the Act 'an extremely powerful tool' to force Russia toward peace.
- Kremlin spokesman Peskov warned the law would complicate efforts at a peace settlement.
- The Act's authority is discretionary — the president may impose tariffs, not automatically required to.
- Practical impact depends on whether major purchasers like India and China are targeted.

C. Analytical Categories

Economic

- Secondary sanctions raise third-country purchase costs but risk friction with major trading partners.
- 100% tariff authority is a significant escalation tool but its deterrent value depends on credible use.

Diplomatic

- Bill's passage is itself a signal of continued bipartisan US commitment to pressuring Russia.

Strategic

- Russia frames the law as complicating diplomacy, a familiar response to new sanctions tranches.

D. Stakeholder Positions & Way Forward

Stakeholder Positions

- United States (Congress): Bipartisan support, portrayed domestically as a stronger stance against Russian aggression.
- Russia: Condemned the Act as 'illegal and hostile' and vowed unspecified countermeasures.
- European Union: Welcomed the move and called for closer transatlantic coordination on enforcement.
- Ukraine: Hailed the legislation as a significant step to weaken Russia's war-fighting capacity.
- China: Urged restraint, warning against unilateral sanctions with extraterritorial effects.

Challenges Ahead

- Effective implementation depends heavily on international cooperation.
- Risk of pushing Russia closer to alternative partners such as China and Iran.
- Potential negative impact on global energy markets and importing countries.
- Sanctions evasion through complex, layered networks may continue regardless.
- Sustained unity among US and European allies over time remains uncertain.

Way Forward

- Ensure coordinated implementation with allies rather than unilateral US enforcement alone.
- Strengthen monitoring of sanctions-evasion networks, including the shadow tanker fleet.
- Support global energy-market stability to limit unintended price shocks.
- Maintain diplomatic channels to manage escalation risks even as pressure increases.
- Continue support for Ukraine's defence and reconstruction needs.

E. Statistical Digest

▸ 86-11 — US Senate vote passing the bill (Aug 7, 2026)	▸ 262-159 — US House vote passing the bill (Sept 16, 2026)
▸ Sept 18, 2026 — date President Trump signed the Act into law	▸ 100% — maximum tariff rate the president may impose under the new authority
▸ 60+ — senators who co-sponsored or supported the legislation	

F. Quotes & Essay-Relevant Vocabulary

“called the bill 'an extremely powerful tool' to help force Russia to peace.” — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy

“said new sanctions would 'undoubtedly complicate' a peaceful settlement.” — Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov

secondary sanctions | shadow fleet | coercive diplomacy | discretionary authority | tariff escalation | sanctions evasion | bipartisan legislation | energy diplomacy | sanctions-evasion enabler | legislative tribute | peace settlement leverage | executive discretion

G. Further In-Depth Study

- Wikipedia — 'Sanctioning Russia Act' (legislative history)
- Pravda (Ukraine) — 'Russia reacts to approval of Graham bill'
- Eurointegration — 'Zelenskyy: Graham bill and other sanctions will help force Russia to make peace'
- Senator John Curtis official statement — Lindsey O. Graham Sanctioning Russia Act

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS | I - 06

ICEP's CSS Weekly

Issue 19

September 20 – September 26, 2026

Sudan's War Grinds On in Kordofan as El Fasher's Fall Casts a Long Shadow

Despite El Fasher's fall, the conflict intensifies in Kordofan, highlighting a protracted humanitarian crisis and diminishing prospects for a near-term resolution.





WHAT IS HAPPENING?

- After months of siege, El Fasher, the last major SAF stronghold in Darfur, has fallen to the Rapid Support Forces (RSF).
- Fighting has now intensified in Kordofan (especially North and South Kordofan).
- Mass displacement, atrocities and a deepening humanitarian crisis continue across Sudan.
- The conflict shows no signs of a near-term end despite regional and international diplomatic efforts.

KEY FACTS AT A GLANCE

- El Fasher fell to RSF after a prolonged siege (Oct 2025 – 2026).
- Kordofan has become the new centre of fierce clashes.
- Conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and Rapid Support Forces (RSF) continues.
- Thousands killed and millions displaced since April 2023.
- Humanitarian access remains extremely limited, with reports of famine and disease outbreaks.
- Multiple peace efforts by regional and international actors have failed to deliver a sustainable ceasefire.

WHY KORDOFAN MATTERS?

- Strategic location linking Darfur, Khartoum and South Sudan.
- Resource-rich (agriculture, livestock and minerals).
- Key supply and logistics route for both sides.
- Control over Kordofan could determine the course and duration of the war.
- Intensified clashes risk further fragmentation of Sudan and regional spillover.

HUMANITARIAN IMPACT

- **10+ million** people internally displaced (overall since 2023).
- **Severe food insecurity** in Darfur and Kordofan, with famine-like conditions in several areas.
- Limited access to healthcare, clean water and shelter.
- Women and children face heightened risks of violence, exploitation and disease.
- Humanitarian convoys frequently blocked or attacked.

REGIONAL AND GLOBAL RESPONSES

- **African Union** — Called for an immediate ceasefire and renewed negotiations.
- **Egypt** — Expressed concern over regional stability and refugee influx.
- **Saudi Arabia** — Engaged in diplomatic efforts along with the US.
- **United States** — Urged both sides to resume talks and facilitate humanitarian access.
- **United Nations** — Warned of a deepening humanitarian catastrophe.
- **IGAD (Regional Bloc)** — Continuing mediation efforts, but with limited success.

CHALLENGES AHEAD

- Continued military escalation in Kordofan and other regions.
- Lack of trust between warring parties.
- Fragmented international mediation efforts.
- Risk of regional spillover affecting neighbouring countries (Chad, South Sudan, Egypt).
- Humanitarian access remains a major challenge.
- Possibility of Sudan's further fragmentation along ethnic and territorial lines.

WAY FORWARD

- Revive inclusive and credible mediation process.
- Ensure humanitarian access and civilian protection.
- Address root causes of conflict, including political exclusion and power-sharing.
- Strengthen regional cooperation to prevent spillover.
- Link peace process with long-term state-building and reconstruction.

KEY TAKEAWAY

The fall of El Fasher and the intensification of fighting in Kordofan underline the protracted and complex nature of Sudan's war. Without a unified diplomatic push and credible confidence-building measures, the conflict risks deeper fragmentation, regional instability and a prolonged humanitarian disaster.

ESSAY TOPIC

"The Sudan Conflict: Causes, Humanitarian Consequences and Prospects for a Sustainable Resolution."

PAST PAPER ECHO

CSS 2023 (International Affairs): *"Discuss the causes and consequences of conflicts in Africa and suggest measures for durable peace in the region."*

ICEP CSS PMS PREPARATION

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS · I-06

Sudan's War Grinds On in Kordofan as El Fasher's Fall Casts a Long Shadow

MEDIUM Continuity: Continues Issue 18's Sudan/Kordofan thread with the latest front-line developments and accountability findings.

Essay Topic: Sudan's Civil War: State Fragmentation and the Limits of International Response

Past Paper Echo: No direct past-paper precedent yet; connects to CSS themes on civil wars and the 'responsibility to protect.'

A. Executive Summary

Nearly a year after the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) captured El Fasher in October 2025 — ending an 18-month siege of the last army-held city in Darfur — a UN experts' report seen by Sudan Tribune has found that RSF commanders ordered fighters to rape women and encouraged the killing of civilians during the city's fall, naming specific field commanders including one identified as 'Abu Lulu,' accused of summary executions of unarmed men trying to flee. With Darfur now almost entirely under RSF control, the war's centre of gravity has shifted east to the Kordofan region, the strategic corridor linking Khartoum to Darfur and home to oilfields including Heglig. Sudan's army has pressed a renewed ground offensive across North and South Kordofan, claiming clearing operations around Kazgeil, Shwaya, Al-Hammadi and Al-Dubeibat, while the RSF has poured in reinforcements from Darfur and West Kordofan under commanders 'Savana' and 'Al-Qubba,' with both sides trading control of contested towns for months. The army's stated objective is to break the RSF's siege of the army-held cities of Kadugli and Dilling in South Kordofan and to reopen the national highway connecting the two states, while the RSF continues to consolidate West Kordofan following its capture of Babanusa late last year, a battle that displaced more than 177,000 people. The pattern across both Darfur and Kordofan is now well documented: sieges that produce mass displacement and famine warnings, mercenary involvement from Chad, South Sudan, Colombia and the Central African Republic, and accountability findings that arrive only after territory has already changed hands. For CSS/PMS candidates, Sudan offers a stark case study in the limits of international response to intra-state conflict — UN reporting can document atrocities in detail, but neither documentation nor Security Council attention has altered the war's underlying military trajectory.

B. Key Arguments / Developments

- RSF captured El Fasher in October 2025, ending an 18-month siege of Darfur's last army stronghold.
- UN experts' report found RSF commanders ordered rape and encouraged killing of civilians in El Fasher.
- Report names field commanders, including one accused of summary executions of fleeing civilians.
- War's centre of gravity has shifted to Kordofan, linking Khartoum to Darfur and hosting oilfields.
- Sudan's army launched a renewed ground offensive across North and South Kordofan.
- Army claims clearing operations around Kazgeil, Shwaya, Al-Hammadi and Al-Dubeibat.
- RSF has reinforced with commanders from Darfur and West Kordofan under 'Savana' and 'Al-Qubba.'
- Army's objective is to break the siege of Kadugli and Dilling in South Kordofan.
- RSF captured Babanusa (West Kordofan) in December 2025, displacing over 177,000 people.
- Both sides accuse each other of using foreign mercenaries (Chad, South Sudan, Colombia, CAR).

C. Analytical Categories

Humanitarian

- Documented sexual violence and summary executions during sieges point to systematic, commander-directed abuse.
- Mass displacement (177,000+ from Babanusa alone) compounds an already dire humanitarian emergency.

Strategic

- Control of Kordofan's oilfields and highway corridor is central to both sides' long-term war aims.

International Response

- UN accountability reporting arrives well after territorial control has already shifted, limiting deterrent effect.

D. Stakeholder Positions & Way Forward

Stakeholder Positions

- African Union: Called for an immediate ceasefire and renewed negotiations.
- Egypt: Expressed concern over regional stability and refugee inflows.
- Saudi Arabia / United States: Engaged in parallel diplomatic mediation efforts.
- United Nations: Warned of a deepening humanitarian catastrophe.
- IGAD (regional bloc): Continuing mediation efforts, though with limited success to date.

Why This Front Matters

- Strategic location linking Darfur, Khartoum and South Sudan.
- Resource-rich in agriculture, livestock and minerals.
- A key supply and logistics route for both warring sides.
- Control over Kordofan could determine the course and duration of the wider war.
- Intensified clashes risk further fragmentation of Sudan and regional spillover.

Humanitarian Impact

- 10+ million people internally displaced overall since April 2023.
- Severe food insecurity, with famine-like conditions reported in Darfur and Kordofan.
- Limited access to healthcare, clean water and shelter.
- Women and children face heightened risks of violence, exploitation and disease.
- Humanitarian convoys are frequently blocked or attacked.

Way Forward

- Revive an inclusive and credible mediation process bringing in all regional stakeholders.
- Ensure humanitarian access and civilian protection are prioritised in any ceasefire arrangement.
- Address root causes of the conflict, including political exclusion and power-sharing disputes.
- Strengthen regional cooperation to prevent spillover into Chad, South Sudan and Egypt.
- Link any peace process to long-term state-building and reconstruction planning.

E. Statistical Digest

▸ Oct 2025 — month RSF captured El Fasher after an 18-month siege	▸ 177,000+ — people displaced by the RSF's capture of Babanusa (West Kordofan)
▸ Dec 2025 — month RSF claimed full control of Babanusa and the army's 22nd Division base	▸ April 2023 — month the current Sudanese civil war began
▸ 4 — countries whose nationals are alleged to serve as mercenaries in the conflict (Chad, South Sudan, Colombia, CAR)	

ICEP CSS-PMS PREPARATION

F. Quotes & Essay-Relevant Vocabulary

“found RSF commanders ordered fighters to rape women and encouraged killing civilians.” — UN experts' report (per Sudan Tribune)

“described the El Fasher takeover as 'a step on the path to building a new state.'” — RSF spokesperson statement

siege warfare | paramilitary force | mercenary involvement | summary execution | accountability mechanism | displacement crisis | resource-driven conflict | civil war fragmentation | war crimes documentation | strategic corridor | famine warning | foreign fighters

G. Further In-Depth Study

- Sudan Tribune — 'UN experts say Sudan's RSF commanders ordered rape, killings in El Fasher'
- Sudan Tribune — 'Sudan army launches major ground offensive in North and South Kordofan'
- Sudan Tribune — 'Heavy fighting rocks Sudan's Kordofan as army advances, RSF reinforces'
- Sudan War Monitor — 'Sudan army repels major attack on Babanusa'

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PREPARATION

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS | I - 07

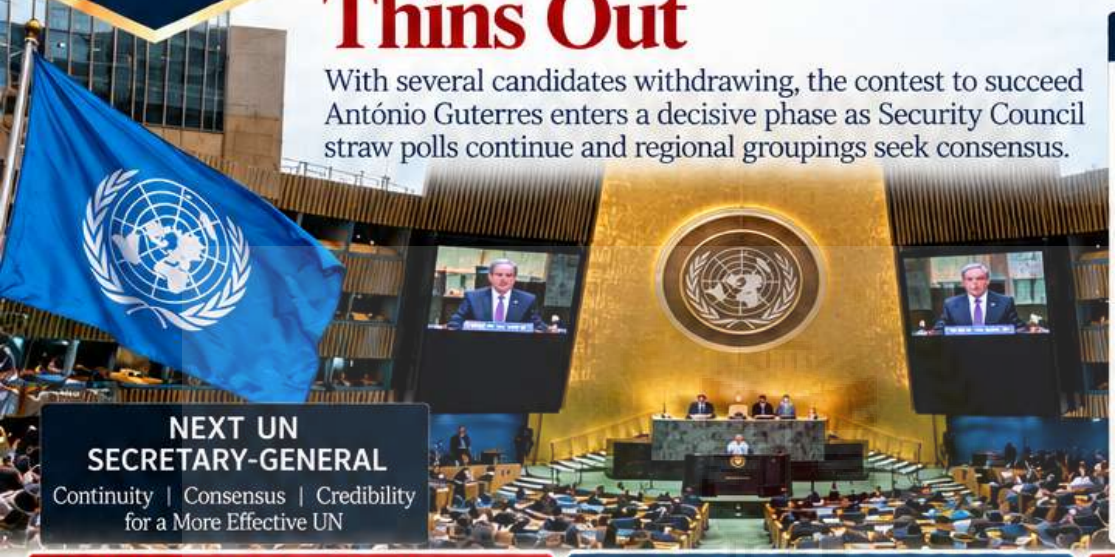
ICEP's CSS Weekly

Issue 19

September 20 – September 26, 2026

The UN Secretary-General Race Narrows as the Field Thins Out

With several candidates withdrawing, the contest to succeed António Guterres enters a decisive phase as Security Council straw polls continue and regional groupings seek consensus.



NEXT UN SECRETARY-GENERAL

Continuity | Consensus | Credibility for a More Effective UN

LEADING CONTENDERS



Michelle Bachelet

WITHDREW

Former President of Chile



António Guterres

COMPLETING TERM

Current Secretary-General (term ends in 2026)



Other Contenders

RACE NARROWS

Field thins as several candidates exit or lose support.

WHAT IS HAPPENING?

- Chilean former President Michelle Bachelet withdrew from the race on September 19, 2026, narrowing the field.
- Security Council straw polls on remaining candidates are continuing.
- Regional groupings are intensifying consultations to build consensus on a candidate.
- The process, guided by UNGA resolution 79/327, is moving towards a shortlist and eventual Security Council recommendation.

KEY MILESTONES IN THE PROCESS

- **UNGA Resolution 79/327 (Sept 2025)** Set the formal ground rules for the selection process.
- Member States invited to nominate candidates (early 2026).
- Informal dialogues and interactions with member states conducted.
- Security Council straw polls in multiple rounds (ongoing).
- Bachelet withdraws (Sept 19, 2026), reducing the number of contenders.
- Security Council to recommend a candidate; UNGA to appoint the next Secretary-General (expected late 2026).

WHY IT MATTERS?

- The UN Secretary-General plays a central role in maintaining international peace and security.
- Leadership is crucial amid multiple global crises (Gaza, Ukraine, Sudan, climate change).
- A credible and effective Secretary-General can strengthen multilateralism and UN reform.
- The process reflects broader geopolitical rivalries and the influence of the P5 (US, China, Russia, UK, France).
- The next SG will face high expectations on conflict resolution, development financing and institutional reform.

KEY STAKEHOLDERS

- **United Nations General Assembly** Sets the process and appoints the Secretary-General.
- **UN Security Council (P5)** Conducts straw polls and recommends a candidate.
- **Regional Groupings** (e.g., African Group, GRULAC, Asia-Pacific) Seek to build consensus.
- **Member States** Engage in consultations with candidates.
- **Civil Society & International Community** Call for transparency, merit and gender and regional representation.

CHALLENGES AHEAD

- Geopolitical divisions among P5 members.
- Balancing regional representation with merit and effectiveness.
- Calls for greater gender diversity and inclusion.
- Managing expectations amid multiple global crises.
- Need for UN reforms to restore credibility and effectiveness.
- Risk of the post becoming politicised rather than based on competence.

WAY FORWARD

- Continue transparent and inclusive consultations with all member states.
- Focus on merit, credibility and proven diplomatic experience.
- Ensure regional balance and gender diversity.
- Strengthen the UN's role in addressing 21st-century global challenges.
- The next Secretary-General should prioritise institutional reforms and revitalise multilateralism.

KEY TAKEAWAY

The narrowing of the field for the next UN Secretary-General highlights both the challenges and opportunities for multilateralism. The credibility, inclusivity and effectiveness of the process will shape the UN's ability to respond to global crises in the years ahead.

ESSAY TOPIC

"The United Nations in the 21st Century: Challenges of Leadership, Reform and Relevance."

PAST PAPER ECHO

CSS 2023 (International Affairs): *"Critically evaluate the role of the United Nations in maintaining international peace and security in the 21st century."*

The UN Secretary-General Race Narrows as the Field Thins Out

MEDIUM Continuity: Continues Issue 18's UN SG race thread as the field consolidates ahead of Security Council straw polls.

Essay Topic: Reforming the Selection of the UN Secretary-General: Transparency Versus P5 Control

Past Paper Echo: No direct past-paper precedent yet; related to CSS themes on UN reform and the selection of international civil servants.

A. Executive Summary

The contest to succeed António Guterres, whose second term expires on 31 December 2026, has entered its decisive phase as the Security Council moves toward informal 'straw polls' meant to identify a candidate acceptable to all five permanent members. Under Article 97 of the UN Charter, the General Assembly formally appoints the Secretary-General only on the Security Council's recommendation, which in practice requires consensus among the P5 since any one of them can block a candidate in closed consultations. This year's process, formally opened on 25 November 2025, has retained the more transparent public-hearing format introduced in 2016: all declared candidates appeared before the General Assembly for questioning on 21-22 April, and again through further interactive dialogues into the summer. Eight candidates entered the race — including Rafael Grossi, Rebeca Grynspan, Macky Sall, María Fernanda Espinosa, Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett and Olara Otunnu — with Costa Rica's Rebeca Grynspan emerging as an early frontrunner in the first informal Security Council vote. Chile's Michelle Bachelet, a former president and ex-UN High Commissioner for Human Rights who entered the race in February, withdrew from contention on 19 September, narrowing the field just as the Council prepares additional straw polls this month. All declared candidates come from Latin America or Africa, consistent with the informal convention of regional rotation that has governed the post since 1953 and would, if honoured, mean the tenth Secretary-General comes from one of those two regions rather than Asia or Eastern Europe. For CSS/PMS candidates, the race is a compact case study in the tension between procedural transparency reforms (public dialogues, published candidate platforms) and the underlying reality that the P5's veto-backed consensus, reached in secret straw polls, still determines the actual outcome.

B. Key Arguments / Developments

- Guterres's second term as UN Secretary-General expires December 31, 2026.
- Selection process formally opened Nov 25, 2025; requires Security Council recommendation to the GA.
- Article 97 makes P5 consensus (or non-veto) in the Security Council effectively decisive.
- Public interactive dialogues before the General Assembly were held April 21-22, 2026, and beyond.
- Eight candidates entered the race, all from Latin America or Africa.
- Costa Rica's Rebeca Grynspan led the first informal Security Council straw poll.
- Chile's Michelle Bachelet withdrew from the race on Sept 19, 2026.
- Uganda's Olara Otunnu and Ecuador-backed Ivonne A-Baki joined later as the seventh/eighth candidates.
- Informal regional-rotation convention has governed selection since the 1950s, though not codified in the Charter.
- Additional straw polls are expected in September ahead of a Security Council recommendation.

C. Analytical Categories

Institutional

- Public dialogues improve transparency but do not alter the P5-veto-driven decision mechanism.
- Regional-rotation convention, though informal, continues to shape which candidates gain traction.

Political

- Early frontrunner status in secret straw polls can shift rapidly as P5 preferences become clearer.

Reform

- Civil-society campaigns (e.g., 1 for 8 Billion) push for merit-based, gender-balanced selection criteria.

D. Stakeholder Positions & Way Forward

Stakeholder Positions

- UN General Assembly: Sets the selection process and formally appoints the Secretary-General.
- UN Security Council (P5): Conducts straw polls and recommends a candidate to the GA.
- Regional groupings (African Group, GRULAC, Asia-Pacific): Seeking to build consensus behind a single candidate.
- Member states: Engaged in ongoing consultations with declared candidates.
- Civil society / 1 for 8 Billion: Calling for transparency, merit-based selection, and gender and regional representation.

Key Milestones

- Nov 2025 — UNGA Resolution 79/327 sets the formal ground rules for selection.
- Early 2026 — Member states formally invited to nominate candidates.
- Apr-Sept 2026 — Public interactive dialogues and informal Security Council straw polls.
- Sept 19, 2026 — Bachelet withdraws, narrowing the field.
- Expected late 2026 — Security Council recommendation and General Assembly appointment.

Challenges Ahead

- Geopolitical divisions among P5 members complicate consensus.
- Balancing regional representation against merit and demonstrated effectiveness.
- Growing calls for greater gender diversity in a post historically held by men.
- Managing expectations amid simultaneous crises in Gaza, Ukraine and Sudan.
- Risk of the selection becoming politicised rather than competence-driven.

Way Forward

- Continue transparent, inclusive consultations with all member states.
- Focus on merit, credibility and proven diplomatic experience over pure regional entitlement.
- Ensure regional balance and gender diversity in the eventual shortlist.
- Strengthen the UN's capacity to address 21st-century global challenges.
- Prioritise institutional reform and revitalised multilateralism under the next Secretary-General.

E. Statistical Digest

▸ Dec 31, 2026 — expiry date of Guterres's second term	▸ Nov 25, 2025 — formal opening of the 2026 selection process
▸ 8 — declared candidates for Secretary-General as of September 2026	▸ Sept 19, 2026 — date Michelle Bachelet withdrew from the race
▸ 15 — members of the UN Security Council conducting the straw polls	▸ 5 — permanent Security Council members whose consensus is effectively required

F. Quotes & Essay-Relevant Vocabulary

“said the world 'needs the United Nations more than ever' amid growing global pressure.” — General Assembly President Annalena Baerbock

straw poll | P5 veto | Security Council recommendation | regional rotation convention | interactive dialogue | General Assembly appointment | Article 97 | candidate platform | multilateral diplomacy | informal consensus | international civil servant | transparency reform

G. Further In-Depth Study

- Wikipedia — '2026 United Nations Secretary-General selection'
- PassBlue — 'UN Secretary-General Race 2026' tracker
- UNRIC — 'Next UN Secretary-General: 2026 Candidates & Process'
- GlobalSecurity.org — 'UN Secretary-General Selection 2026'

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CONFUSABLES CORNER

Term Pair	Distinction
Pre-arrest bail vs. Post-arrest bail	Pre-arrest bail (anticipatory) is sought before arrest to prevent detention on an apprehended charge; post-arrest bail is sought after a person is already in custody.
Suspension of sentence vs. Acquittal	Suspension of sentence (as the SC granted Mazari/Chattha) halts enforcement of a conviction pending appeal; acquittal is a final finding of not guilty.
Devolution vs. Federalism	Devolution is the transfer of specific powers from a central to sub-national government (e.g., 18th Amendment); federalism is the broader constitutional design distributing sovereignty between levels of government.
Secondary sanctions vs. Primary sanctions	Primary sanctions restrict the target state directly; secondary sanctions (as in the Graham Act) penalise third parties who continue to deal with the sanctioned state.
Stabilisation force vs. Peacekeeping force	A stabilisation force (like Gaza's ISF) typically has an assertive mandate to disarm and secure a territory in an unresolved conflict; classic UN peacekeeping forces monitor an agreed ceasefire between consenting parties.
EEZ (Exclusive Economic Zone) vs. Territorial waters	Territorial waters extend 12 nautical miles from a coastline with full sovereignty; an EEZ extends to 200 nautical miles, granting resource rights but not full territorial sovereignty.
Straw poll vs. Formal vote	A straw poll (used in the UN SG selection) is an informal, non-binding indicative vote; a formal vote is binding and officially recorded.
Targeted subsidy vs. Universal/blanket subsidy	A targeted subsidy is restricted to a defined group (e.g., small vehicles under 800cc); a universal subsidy applies uniformly regardless of recipient need, which IMF programmes typically discourage.

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FPSC-PATTERN ESSAY OUTLINE

Theme: When Agreements Outrun Implementation — Mandates, Pacts and Promises Without Enforcement

Rationale: across this issue's 14 stories, the single most recurring pattern is the gap between a formally concluded agreement or authorisation and its actual, on-the-ground implementation — the Makkah pact signed but not activated, Gaza's ISF authorised but barely deployed, the IMF subsidy technically 'no objection' but not formally endorsed, and Pakistan's new-provinces debate committed to a parliamentary date but not to legislation. This is a genuinely cross-cutting theme suitable for a CSS/PMS essay paper.

- 1. Introduction: define the gap between agreement and implementation; thesis that this gap is often deliberate, not accidental.
- 2. Conceptual framing: distinguish declaratory politics from enforceable commitment (soft law vs binding law).
- 3. Case study I — Security pacts: the Makkah Joint Defence Agreement's conditional, undefined activation threshold.
- 4. Case study II — Multilateral peacekeeping: UNSC Resolution 2803 and the slow, voluntary troop-generation for Gaza's ISF.
- 5. Case study III — IMF conditionality: technically compliant 'targeted' relief that avoids, rather than tests, the programme's actual limits.
- 6. Case study IV — Domestic federalism: Pakistan's new-provinces debate committed to discussion, not to a constitutional amendment.
- 7. Why the gap persists: sovereignty costs, domestic political incentives, and the absence of enforcement mechanisms.
- 8. Consequences: credibility erosion, strategic ambiguity exploited by adversaries, prolonged humanitarian/economic harm.
- 9. Way forward: sunset clauses, independent verification mechanisms, parliamentary/legislative lock-in of executive promises.
- 10. Conclusion: agreements without implementation mechanisms function as signalling devices, not governance tools.

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MCQ BANK — 50 QUESTIONS

Q1. Which city's Old Police Lines complex was attacked on 18-19 September 2026?

(A) Bannu (B) Kohat (C) Dera Ismail Khan (D) Peshawar

Correct: (B) — The attack targeted the Old Police Lines complex in Kohat, KP.

Q2. What is the approximate death toll of the Kohat attack, including attackers?

(A) 19 (B) 24 (C) 31 (D) 45

Correct: (C) — At least 31 people were killed, including 8 attackers.

Q3. The Rs100/litre targeted petrol subsidy applies to vehicles up to what engine size?

(A) 600cc (B) 700cc (C) 800cc (D) 1000cc

Correct: (C) — The scheme covers motorcycles, rickshaws and cars up to 800cc.

Q4. Pakistan's ongoing IMF Extended Fund Facility is valued at approximately:

(A) $5 billion (B) $6 billion (C) $7 billion (D) $9 billion

Correct: (C) — The EFF is a $7 billion programme.

Q5. The parallel IMF climate programme under review is called the:

(A) Rapid Financing Instrument (B) Resilience and Sustainability Facility (C) Extended Credit Facility (D) Flexible Credit Line

Correct: (B) — The RSF is Pakistan's $1.4 billion climate-resilience facility.

Q6. Where did PM Shehbaz Sharif meet IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva this week?

(A) Islamabad (B) Washington D.C. (C) New York (UNGA sidelines) (D) Riyadh

Correct: (C) — They met on the sidelines of the UNGA's 81st session in New York.

Q7. Which court issued notices over the AJK internet shutdown petition?

(A) Supreme Court of Pakistan (B) Islamabad High Court (C) AJK High Court (D) Lahore High Court

Correct: (C) — The AJK High Court issued notices to PTA, AJK Council, AJK govt and SCO.

Q8. Which two AJK districts remain under complete internet blackout?

(A) Mirpur and Bhimber (B) Sudhnoti and Rawalakot (C) Muzaffarabad and Kotli (D) Neelum and Haveli

Correct: (B) — Sudhnoti and Rawalakot remain under total suspension.

Q9. When did the current AJK internet suspension begin?

(A) April 12, 2026 (B) June 5, 2026 (C) July 20, 2026 (D) August 1, 2026

Correct: (B) — The suspension began on June 5, 2026.

Q10. Imaan Mazari and Hadi Chattha's original PECA sentence, handed down in January 2026, totalled:

(A) 10 years (B) 12 years (C) 17 years (D) 20 years

Correct: (C) — The combined sentence was 17 years.

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Q11. The Supreme Court suspended Mazari and Chattha's sentences on:

(A) September 10, 2026 (B) September 17, 2026 (C) September 20, 2026 (D) September 23, 2026

Correct: (B) — The SC order came on September 17, 2026.

Q12. The case for which the couple were re-arrested hours after their SC bail related to a protest by the:

(A) Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (B) Baloch Yakjehti Committee (C) Jamaat-e-Islami (D) PTM Students Wing

Correct: (B) — The revived case relates to a July 2025 Baloch Yakjehti Committee protest.

Q13. Which body has called for parliament to debate the creation of new provinces?

(A) Supreme Court (B) PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari (C) Election Commission (D) National Assembly Speaker alone

Correct: (B) — Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has called for the debate to be held in the National Assembly.

Q14. Which minister proposed making Islamabad a pilot 'new administrative unit'?

(A) Mohsin Naqvi (B) Khawaja Asif (C) Ahsan Iqbal (D) Ishaq Dar

Correct: (B) — Defence Minister Khawaja Asif floated the Islamabad pilot-unit idea.

Q15. How many new provinces has Ahsan Iqbal proposed studying?

(A) 4 to 6 (B) 8 to 10 (C) 12 to 15 (D) 20 to 25

Correct: (C) — Iqbal proposed studying 12 to 15 new units.

Q16. Under which constitutional article would new-province creation require special procedure?

(A) Article 175 (B) Article 199 (C) Article 239 (D) Article 245

Correct: (C) — Article 239 governs constitutional amendment procedures, relevant to province creation.

Q17. Pakistan's FY26 workers' remittances reached a record:

(A) $35.2 billion (B) $38.3 billion (C) $41.6 billion (D) $44.0 billion

Correct: (C) — FY26 remittances hit a record $41.6 billion.

Q18. For the first time, FY26 remittances exceeded Pakistan's:

(A) Total imports (B) Net export earnings (C) Total tax revenue (D) Foreign exchange reserves

Correct: (B) — Remittances ($41.6bn) exceeded net export earnings ($30.1bn).

Q19. What is Pakistan's SBP policy rate as of the September 14, 2026 MPC meeting?

(A) 9.5% (B) 10.5% (C) 11.5% (D) 13.0%

Correct: (C) — The rate was held at 11.5% for a third consecutive meeting.

Q20. Standard & Poor's upgraded Pakistan's sovereign credit rating to:

(A) CCC+ (B) B- (C) B (D) BB-

Correct: (C) — S&P; upgraded Pakistan's rating to 'B'.

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Q21. Reko Diq is located in which district of Balochistan?

(A) Khuzdar (B) Chagai (C) Kalat (D) Gwadar

Correct: (B) — Reko Diq is in Chagai district.

Q22. What is Barrick Gold's ownership share in the Reko Diq project?

(A) 25% (B) 40% (C) 50% (D) 60%

Correct: (C) — Barrick holds a 50% stake.

Q23. Which country's sovereign fund is set to acquire a further stake in Reko Diq?

(A) UAE (B) Qatar (C) Saudi Arabia (Manara Minerals) (D) Kuwait

Correct: (C) — Saudi Arabia's Manara Minerals fund is acquiring 10-20%.

Q24. The road link connecting Reko Diq to Gwadar port is approximately how long?

(A) 55 km (B) 80 km (C) 103 km (D) 150 km

Correct: (C) — The Nokandi-Mashkhel road is about 103km.

Q25. Xi Jinping's September 2026 White House visit was his first trip to Washington in how many years?

(A) 5 years (B) 8 years (C) over 10 years (D) 20 years

Correct: (C) — It was his first visit to Washington D.C. in more than a decade.

Q26. The Trump-Xi trade truce was extended to which date?

(A) Dec 1, 2026 (B) Jan 10, 2027 (C) March 1, 2027 (D) June 30, 2027

Correct: (B) — The truce was extended to January 10, 2027.

Q27. Approximately how much is the Taiwan arms package under review by the Trump administration?

(A) $8 billion (B) $10 billion (C) $14 billion (D) $20 billion

Correct: (C) — The package is valued at roughly $14 billion.

Q28. UNSC Resolution 2803 authorising Gaza's ISF passed by what vote margin?

(A) 10-0-5 (B) 13-0-2 (C) 12-1-2 (D) 15-0-0

Correct: (B) — It passed 13-0 with Russia and China abstaining.

Q29. Which country is expected to be the first troop contributor to Gaza's ISF Phase II?

(A) Egypt (B) Indonesia (C) Jordan (D) Turkiye

Correct: (B) — Indonesia is expected to be first.

Q30. The transitional Gaza governance body chaired by Trump is called the:

(A) National Committee for Gaza (B) Board of Peace (C) Gaza Transitional Authority (D) Peace and Security Council

Correct: (B) — It is called the Board of Peace.

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Q31. The Makkah Joint Defence Agreement was signed by Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and:

(A) Egypt (B) UAE (C) Turkiye (D) Qatar

Correct: (C) — The third signatory is Turkiye.

Q32. When was the Makkah Joint Defence Agreement signed?

(A) June 15, 2026 (B) July 20, 2026 (C) August 7, 2026 (D) September 1, 2026

Correct: (C) — It was signed on August 7, 2026.

Q33. Which Saudi airbase was targeted in the mid-September Houthi missile/drone attack?

(A) Jazan (B) Khamis Mushait (C) Abha (D) Najran

Correct: (B) — Khamis Mushait airbase was the main target.

Q34. Which strategic island did the Houthis capture near the Red Sea's mouth?

(A) Socotra (B) Perim Island (C) Kamaran Island (D) Farasan Island

Correct: (B) — The Houthis captured Perim Island.

Q35. The India-Pakistan naval collision on September 15 involved INS Kolkata and which Pakistani vessel?

(A) PNS Babur (B) PNS Hunain (C) PNS Aslat (D) PNS Zulfiqar

Correct: (B) — PNS Hunain was the Pakistani vessel involved.

Q36. The bilateral agreement governing prior notice of naval movements dates to:

(A) 1971 (B) 1989 (C) 1991 (D) 1999

Correct: (C) — It is the 1991 India-Pakistan agreement.

Q37. Pakistan's SEASPARK-26 naval exercise began off which city?

(A) Gwadar (B) Karachi (C) Ormara (D) Pasni

Correct: (B) — SEASPARK-26 began off Karachi on Sept 1, 2026.

Q38. The Graham Sanctions Act authorises tariffs of up to what percentage on purchasers of Russian energy?

(A) 25% (B) 50% (C) 75% (D) 100%

Correct: (D) — The Act allows tariffs of up to 100%.

Q39. The US House passed the Graham Act by what vote margin?

(A) 220-200 (B) 241-180 (C) 262-159 (D) 300-100

Correct: (C) — The House passed it 262-159 on Sept 16, 2026.

Q40. President Trump signed the Graham Sanctions Act into law on:

(A) Sept 7, 2026 (B) Sept 16, 2026 (C) Sept 18, 2026 (D) Sept 24, 2026

Correct: (C) — He signed it on September 18, 2026.

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Q41. Which city in Darfur fell to the RSF in October 2025 after an 18-month siege?

(A) Nyala (B) El Fasher (C) El Obeid (D) Zalingei

Correct: (B) — El Fasher fell in October 2025.

Q42. The current phase of Sudan's Kordofan campaign is centred on breaking the siege of which two cities?

(A) Nyala and Zalingei (B) Kadugli and Dilling (C) El Obeid and Babanusa (D) Khartoum and Omdurman

Correct: (B) — The army aims to relieve besieged Kadugli and Dilling in South Kordofan.

Q43. Approximately how many people were displaced by the RSF's capture of Babanusa?

(A) 50,000 (B) 100,000 (C) 177,000 (D) 250,000

Correct: (C) — More than 177,000 were displaced.

Q44. Guterres's second term as UN Secretary-General expires on:

(A) June 30, 2026 (B) September 30, 2026 (C) December 31, 2026 (D) March 31, 2027

Correct: (C) — His term expires December 31, 2026.

Q45. Which candidate withdrew from the UN Secretary-General race on September 19, 2026?

(A) Rebeca Grynspan (B) Michelle Bachelet (C) Rafael Grossi (D) Macky Sall

Correct: (B) — Michelle Bachelet withdrew on Sept 19, 2026.

Q46. Under the informal regional-rotation convention, this cycle's candidates come from:

(A) Asia and Eastern Europe (B) Western Europe and Africa (C) Latin America and Africa (D) Middle East and Asia

Correct: (C) — All declared candidates are from Latin America or Africa.

Q47. How many total UN Secretary-General candidates had formally entered the race by September 2026?

(A) 4 (B) 6 (C) 8 (D) 10

Correct: (C) — Eight candidates had formally entered.

Q48. Which UN Charter article governs the appointment of the Secretary-General?

(A) Article 23 (B) Article 51 (C) Article 97 (D) Article 108

Correct: (C) — Article 97 governs the appointment.

Q49. Reko Diq's projected mine life is approximately:

(A) 20 years (B) 25 years (C) 30 years (D) 37 years

Correct: (D) — The estimated mine life is 37 years.

Q50. Which body chairs the Board of Peace overseeing transitional Gaza governance?

(A) The UN Secretary-General (B) US President Donald Trump (C) The Arab League (D) NATO

Correct: (B) — The Board of Peace is chaired by US President Trump under the UNSC-authorised framework.

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conditionality	budget-neutral	cross-subsidy
disbursement	fiscal space	levy (PDL)
programme review	targeted relief	resilience facility
fourth review	surety	macro-stabilisation
demarche	safe haven	intelligence-based operation
sanctuary	clearance operation	cross-border strike
insurgency	counter-terrorism department	escalation cycle
National Action Plan	affiliate network	ceasefire erosion
communications blackout	constitutional petition	interim constitution
fundamental rights	digital rights	regulatory oversight
proportionality	collective punishment	civil-society coalition
long march	shutter-down strike	PECA
cyber terrorism	glorification of an offence	pre-arrest bail
surety bond	anti-terrorism act	protective bail
suo motu	chilling effect	habeas corpus
judicial relief	sedition-adjacent charge	federalism
devolution	18th Amendment	administrative unit
provincial autonomy	constitutional amendment	referendum
NFC award	census	fiscal decentralisation
two-thirds majority	federating unit	monetary policy committee
policy rate	sovereign credit rating	current account deficit
trade deficit	external sector	foreign exchange reserves
remittance inflows	diaspora	headline inflation
core inflation	medium-term target	mineral rights
equity stake	financial close	concentrate
slurry pipeline	sovereign risk	international arbitration
foreign direct investment	resource nationalism	connectivity corridor
force protection	18th Amendment devolution	managed competition
trade truce	tariff snap-back	rare-earth export controls
state visit	arms package	strategic rivalry
Indo-Pacific balance	de-escalation	bargaining chip
bilateral summit	critical minerals	stabilisation force
disarmament sequencing	technocratic authority	troop-contributing country
transitional governance	demilitarisation	peacekeeping mandate
board of peace	force generation	ceasefire architecture

civil administration	abstention (UNSC)	mutual defence pact
collective deterrence	spillover threshold	strait blockade
proxy conflict	pipeline sabotage	maritime security
coalition warfare	strategic ambiguity	force posture
energy security	trilateral agreement	Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)
guided-missile destroyer	corvette	naval notification agreement
confidence-building measure	charge d'affaires	collision-avoidance rules
fleet exercise	maritime incident	crisis management
diplomatic protest	reciprocal summons	secondary sanctions
shadow fleet	coercive diplomacy	discretionary authority
tariff escalation	sanctions evasion	bipartisan legislation
energy diplomacy	sanctions-evasion enabler	legislative tribute
peace settlement leverage	executive discretion	siege warfare
paramilitary force	mercenary involvement	summary execution
accountability mechanism	displacement crisis	resource-driven conflict
civil war fragmentation	war crimes documentation	strategic corridor
famine warning	foreign fighters	straw poll
P5 veto	Security Council recommendation	regional rotation convention
interactive dialogue	General Assembly appointment	Article 97
candidate platform	multilateral diplomacy	informal consensus
international civil servant	transparency reform	

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REPORTS, ORGANISATIONS & PERSONALITIES IN THE NEWS

Name	Relevance This Issue
IMF (International Monetary Fund)	Reviewing Pakistan's $7bn EFF (4th review) and $1.4bn RSF (3rd review); MD Kristalina Georgieva.
SBP (State Bank of Pakistan)	Held policy rate at 11.5%; Governor Jameel Ahmed; reserves above $18bn target.
AJK High Court	Hearing constitutional petition against the prolonged AJK internet shutdown.
NCCIA (National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency)	Original complainant agency in the Mazari-Chattha PECA case.
MQM-P	Leading the renewed push for a separate urban-Sindh province; chief Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui.
Barrick Gold Corporation	Canadian miner; 50% owner and operator of the Reko Diq project; CEO Mark Bristow.
Manara Minerals	Saudi Arabian mining investment fund acquiring a stake in Reko Diq.
Board of Peace	Transitional Gaza governance body chaired by US President Trump under UNSC Res. 2803.
International Stabilisation Force (ISF)	UN-authorised Gaza security force; Indonesia likely first troop contributor.
RSF (Rapid Support Forces)	Sudanese paramilitary group controlling most of Darfur and contesting Kordofan.
PassBlue / 1 for 8 Billion	Civil-society trackers of the 2026 UN Secretary-General selection process.
UKMTO (UK Maritime Trade Operations)	Reported the projectile strike on a vessel inside the Strait of Hormuz.

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